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## Material Culture Studies and Ethnocultural Identity

Bernard Sellato

**Abstract:** This chapter briefly exposes the changing focuses of material culture studies through the twentieth century. It then assesses the available corpus of studies in Borneo's material culture, proposing a rough periodisation of the types of publications and describing in broad categories the material productions examined in these publications. Finally, using some examples, it endeavours to shed light on the linkages between material culture, on the one hand, and social relations and ethnocultural identity, on the other.

**Keywords:** Borneo, Material culture, Ethnocultural identity, Social relations, Trade

### 1 Material Culture and Material Culture Studies

Material culture, a phrase that appeared in the social sciences in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, remained centred on the artefact per se up to the latter part of the twentieth century, and material culture studies were then primarily descriptive. Artefacts were (or had been) collected by explorers, colonial civil administrators or military personnel, geologists or missionaries, and stored in museums. Important studies were produced by museum curators, scholars working with museum collections and knowledgeable compilers, though often with only scant information available on the artefacts' precise geographic and ethnic origins, vernacular names, functions, or their meaning and cultural relevance among the people who produced them. While such collections and studies remain precious assets, they provide little insight into those peoples' social lives.

The concept of material culture today covers a much broader scope, concerned as it is with the forms, uses and meanings of objects, images and environments in everyday life. Material culture is the product of the interaction of people and their material world, and one means by which culture is stored and transmitted. An artefact, therefore, can no longer be reduced to the status of a 'thing'. It is, in an important way, a social rather than individual creation and, therefore, material culture as a whole reflects the conceptual context of a society. Artefacts intervene in the construction of society and of social identities (see *Journal of Material Culture*). Moreover, as fully fledged constitutive elements of social life they also have a social life of their own (Appadurai 1986), through the process of their creation and their use (Lemonnier 1992), hence the need to view objects as agents (Gell 1998). Material culture, therefore, must be examined with the purpose of procuring an understanding of the society that created it.

Material culture studies—now an interdisciplinary field including anthropology, sociology, archaeology, art history and museum studies—are concerned with the social, cultural, economic and symbolic context of artefacts, and thus with the linkage between these and social relations in general, and investigate the ways in which material objects participate in socialising people into culture. In short, the craftsperson 'weaves the world' in everything s/he does, and by doing so s/he

‘makes culture’ (see Ingold 2000).

Actually, such studies do encompass other fields, such as environmental studies (landscapes, fauna and flora), agronomy (land tenure systems, cultigens), technology (e.g. architecture, weaponry), cognition science (indigenous knowledge, transmission), health sciences (ethnomedicine, traditional pharmacopoeia), and religion and rituals (e.g. shamanism, headhunting). Despite their name, they are also found to cover such ‘immaterial’ aspects of culture as oral history, oral literature, dance and music performance, as per the broader concept of ‘cultural heritage’ (as defined by UNESCO’s 1972 World Heritage Convention; see also the concept of ‘cultural property’ as a basic tenet of people’s identity, as recalled in a 1976 UNESCO recommendation; on the ambiguity in the definition of the so-called ‘immaterial heritage’ see Bromberger 2014). Today, material culture studies are also, for a substantial part, focusing on contemporary ‘cultural change’ in the context of globalisation, as well as on the subject of ‘development’ (on Borneo see, for example, Cleary and Eaton 1992; on material culture change see Regis 1996).

In the course of time, scholars have used a variety of approaches to look at material culture—functionalism, structuralism, symbolism, gender studies, consumerism, etc. (see a review in Davy Ball 2009). In the closing decades of the twentieth century the focus in anthropology shifted towards technological processes and again, more recently, away from the object itself and towards social and cognitive processes.

Due to constraints I shall not try to assess the available corpus of studies in Borneo’s material culture in terms of theoretical approaches or disciplinary fields. Instead, I shall attempt, first, to establish a rough periodisation of the types of publications and describe in broad categories the local material productions examined in these publications; and, second, using examples, to shed light on the linkages between material culture, on the one hand, and social relations and ethnocultural identity, on the other.

## 2 Material Culture Studies in the Literature on Borneo

A number of early accounts of Borneo—for example, Marryat (1848), Schwaner (1853–54), Veth (1854–56), St John (1862), Perelaer (1870), Bock (1882), Whitehead (1893) or Beccari (1904)—do contain information on material culture, though they generally are framed in a narrative format.

Around the turn of the twentieth century Beccari (1904: 365, cited in Leibrick 1989) was already urging for ‘the comprehensive and detailed documentation of the minutiae of Sarawak’s indigenous material culture heritage’. Indeed, at that time substantial pieces of work began to appear. These were rather general, synthetic accounts by explorers (e.g. Nieuwenhuis 1904–7) or colonial administrators (e.g. Enthoven 1903; Hose and McDougall 1912), museum inventories and catalogues (e.g. van der Chijs 1885 in Batavia, Shelford 1904–5 at the Sarawak Museum, Juynboll 1910 in Leiden), or compilations produced back in the West (e.g. Hein 1890; Roth 1896), most of which remain invaluable sources to this day. In the same period, more focused, albeit sometimes notably shorter, studies were published, in which scholars investigated the uses and meanings of things: Dayak pictorial and

technical arts (Hein 1889), bamboo ornaments (Loebèr 1903), costume (Tromp 1890), tattoo patterns (Den Hamer 1885; Hose and Shelford 1906), swords (Tromp 1888; Shelford 1901), offering structures and funerary monuments (Grabowsky 1888, 1889), musical instruments (Grabowsky 1905) and decorative motifs (Haddon 1905).

The period between the two world wars saw a relatively limited output of important 'ethnographic' books—Elshout (1926) and Tillema (1938) on Apo Kayan, Evans (1922) and Rutter (1929) on Sabah, Lumholtz (1920) on the southern and central regions (some of which were reprinted in the 1980s and 1990s)—and a noteworthy development of generally shorter pieces covering, with a narrower focus, a broader scope of material productions. Apart from Bornean arts (Nieuwenhuis 1925–26), tattoos (Tillema 1930), decorated bamboo (Loebèr 1918–19), funerary monuments (Ten Cate 1922; Bertling 1927–28; Tillema 1931–32) and decorative motifs (Vroklage 1939), new attention was brought to masks (Rassers 1928–29; Tillema 1937; Schärer 1940–41), textiles (Haddon and Start 1936), ornamented shields (Münsterberger 1939), basketry (Woolley 1929; Tillema 1939), woodcarving (Banks 1941), bronze works (Huysen 1929; Tillmann 1939) and megalithic monuments (Banks 1937). Most such pieces appeared in scholarly journals, both Dutch and British, as well as in the Sarawak Museum Journal (from 1911 onwards), though some were released in wider audience journals or magazines in the Netherlands, thus contributing to the general public's interest in Borneo cultures.

In-depth professional anthropological work started in Sarawak in the early 1950s with social-economic surveys commissioned by the British colonial service (Leach 1950; Needham 1953; Morris 1953; Geddes 1954; Freeman 1955). In these studies, material culture does not feature prominently, as their authors, social anthropologists, seem to almost never have considered it *per se*, or described and studied it in an ethnographic way, but instead viewed it only as the physical provision for, or medium of, otherwise important social or economic activity.

This trend persisted during the second half of the century in British and American scholarly studies (e.g. PhD dissertations), with scholars often devoting only minor side papers to material culture topics. By the century's closing decade, the Borneo Research Council's (BRC) publications (Monograph Series, Proceedings Series, etc.), with few exceptions, had focused on gender, religion, shamanism, headhunting, land tenure, social control, health, language, development and the environment, and only a relatively small percentage of the articles published in the Borneo Research Bulletin were devoted to material culture. However, the BRC is now scheduling several books on material culture for publication.

During that period, a limited number of works dealt, in a more or less general way, with Borneo's material culture and art (Gill 1968; Brenan 1975; Avé 1982; Heppell 1988, 1994, 2005a; Mashman 1989; Kurui and Kaboy 1989; Sellato 1989, 1992; Tillotson 1994), handicrafts (Alman 1963, 1968; Zainie 1969; Morrison 1972, 1982; Munan 1989a, b; Piper 1992), decorative motifs, design, style and art history (von Heine-Geldern 1966; McBain 1981a; Anggat 1988). Few of these, however, are full-length books or academic productions.

To this day, PhD dissertations in the social sciences focusing, at least partly, on

material culture have usually only appeared fairly recently and are still uncommon (e.g. Dunkel 1975; Béguet 1993; Tillotson 1994; Gavin 1995; Thambiah 1995; Lindell 2000; Oley 2001; Westmacott 2002; Davy Ball 2009)—if we set aside a few studies concerned with imported ceramics (B. Harrisson 1984; Césard 2009).

While large exhibitions of Indonesian arts held in the Netherlands and the United States (e.g. see Chicago 1948; van Brakel et al. 1987; Taylor and Aragon 1991; Capistrano-Baker 1994; van Brakel et al. 1996) sometimes included a sizable section on Borneo, exhibitions specifically devoted to Borneo have been few and, likewise, their catalogues (e.g. Anonymous 1973; Avé and King 1986; Expedition 1988). In the last few years, however, Borneo has received more sustained attention: Maiullari and Arnel (2008), Maiullari (2011), Isler and von Wyss-Giacosa (2011), Dietrich and Pavalo (2013), and the 2013 joint Dutch-Bruneian exhibition in Bandar Seri Begawan should also be mentioned (see KIT 2013). Scholars in Western museums produced studies based on these museums' collections: e.g. Sørensen (1972, 1973) in Oslo, Hamilton (1996) in Washington (see also Boruchoff 1986), Remešová (2004) in Prague, Martin (2010) in Dresden. Several Borneo exhibitions in art galleries were complemented with catalogues (e.g. Goldman 1975; Heppell and Maxwell 1990; Heppell 1992; Johnson 2009).

In East Malaysia, the Sarawak Museum produced an important book (Chin 1980), as well as a number of thin booklets on various subjects, and the Sabah Museum later followed suit (e.g. Sabah 1991, 1992, 2007, n.d.). Likewise, the Brunei Museum has put out some publications on material culture (e.g. Harrisson 1973; Warisan 1996; Bantong 2001). Through their periodic journals, these three institutions have also contributed powerfully to expanding our knowledge of northern Borneo's cultures in general.

Other publications were released in Kuching by the Borneo Literature Bureau (e.g. Alman 1968; Zainie 1969) and the Sarawak Literary Society (e.g. Chong 1987; Bléhaut 1997) and, in Kuala Lumpur, by Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka (e.g. Anggat 1988) and the Museum Association of Malaysia (e.g. Mohd. Kassim 1983). In Sarawak, private publishers, the Tun Jugah Foundation and Society Atelier Sarawak, released several important titles that should be mentioned: Linggi (2001) and Sultive and Sutlive (2001), for the former, and Jabu (1991), Chin and Mashman (1991) and Ong (n.d.) for the latter.

In Indonesia nationwide programmes (proyek) implemented by the Ministry of Education and Culture in the 1980s and 1990s—variously named Proyek Media Kebudayaan, Proyek Inventarisasi dan Dokumentasi Kebudayaan Daerah, Proyek Inventarisasi dan Pembinaan Nilai-nilai Budaya or Proyek Pembinaan Permuseuman—underwrote the publication of series on the collections held by provincial museums (e.g. Album seni budaya, Sekelumit 1989–90; Syarifuddin and M. Saperi 1990–91; Magai 1991; Rasmin et al. 1992–93), traditional architecture (Soenarpo et al. 1986), and many more on various material culture topics (e.g. Anonymous 1982; Surya et al. 1985–86; Husna et al. 1990–91; Taihuttu 1995–96). Kalimantan's state museums also occasionally published thematic volumes on their collections (e.g. Sjarifuddin 1983–84; Bonoh 1984–85; Achmad 1986; Mulyati and Zularfi 1994; see also Kartiwa 1997). Unfortunately, these publications are poorly disseminated and quite difficult to procure, and keeping up to date with recent

releases proves a real challenge.

Finally, a few photographic books (e.g. Morrison 1962; Wong 1979; Hong 1987; Tiong 2001) have documented traditional life, thus providing much visual information on material culture.

Altogether, in the latter part of the twentieth century and up to this day a wealth of information has been produced. A review of these publications by broad thematic categories is presented below.

By far the most popular research and publication topic in material culture studies in the last three decades has been textiles, and especially Iban textiles. Initiated by Haddon and Start's (1936) book, work on Iban (and Kalimantan 'Ibanic') woven fabrics picked up again around 1980 (Fisher 1979; Maxwell 1980; Vogelsanger 1980), then went into full swing 10 years later (Drake 1991; Jabu 1991; Mashman 1992; Gavin 1995, 1996, 2003; Linggi 2001; Heppell 2005b, 2014; Amann 2013), albeit not always exempt of some debate regarding the ambiguous relationship of motif, name and meaning. Apart from the Iban-Ibanic set, we should mention some work on Sabah's traditional weaving and dyeing (Sabah 1991), Brunei textiles (Warisan 1996) and East Kalimantan's unusual ulap doyo textiles (Oley 2001, 2007).

The longhouse has also been a popular focus of study, although only some of the works discuss architecture and/or the longhouse as a physical structure (e.g. Lee 1962; Miles 1964; Schneeberger 1979; Kelbling 1983; Kampffmeyer 1991; Ong 1991; Winzeler 1996, 1998, 2004; Lindell 2000). Other works mainly examined the longhouse as a social institution, a ritual structure or a symbolic element of identity (Dove 1982; Guerreiro 1984, 2003; Sather 1993; Alexander 1993; Sellato 1998, 2015a; Metcalf 2010), in an 'anthropology of architecture' approach, as Waterson's (1990) book title stresses—or as a target for the ethnic tourism industry (Kruse 2003; also King 1994; Zeppel 1994).

Woodcarving, especially in hardwood, holds a special status in material culture, due to primitive art dealers' and collectors' sustained interest in Borneo's sculpture, starting with Vredembregt's booklet (1981). Large carved pieces were regarded as art, and museums and art galleries published book-sized catalogues on the subject (e.g. Sumnik-Dekovich 1985; Heppell and Maxwell 1990; Maiullari and Arnel 2008; Johnson 2009), while some isolated articles appeared in journals (Chong 1987; Mashman 1994; Kjellgren 1999; Sellato 2001; but see also Chin and Mashman 1991). Shorter studies focused on carved funerary monuments (e.g. Bataille 1974; Metcalf 1976; Rampai 1983; Schiller 1984; Guerreiro 2011). Related to the statuary, due to the primitive art market's interest, are masks, which were also the subject of several publications: Gill (1966, 1967), Revel-Macdonald (1978, 1981), Mohd. Kassim (1983), Heppell (1992, 2015) and Bantong 2001.

With pottery and basketry, we leave the world of 'primitive art' for that of 'folk crafts'. Both crafts have seen a trickle of mostly minor publications spanning half a century. For pottery: Freeman (1957), Alman (1960), Anonymous (1985), Chin and Mashman (1991), Sellato (1997), Teuteberg (1998), and Arifin and Sellato (1999). For basketry: Klausen (1957), Dunsmore (1983), Bléhaut (1997), Sellato (1997, 2012d), Lenjau (1999), Maiullari (2011) and Puri (2013).

Other, slightly less ‘popular’ categories must be mentioned: metalware (including swords) and metalworking (e.g. Morrison 1948; Harrisson 1973; Lim and Shariffuddin 1976; Christie and King 1988; Chin and Mashman 1991; Heppell 2011; Hollestelle forthcoming); megalithic monuments (e.g. Harrisson 1958; Whittier and Whittier 1974; Baier 1992; Arifin and Sellato 2003); tattoos (Dunkel 1975; Thomas 1968; McBain 1981b); decorated human skulls (Avé 1996; Winzeler 1999); wooden ‘calendars’ (Avé 1970; Hopes 1997); baby carriers (Whittier and Whittier 1988; Sellato 2012b); bark cloth (Kooijman 1963; Sellato 2006); to which we may add traditional ‘sports’ (e.g. Anonymous 1982; Dunsmore 1983; Chin 1984), penis pins (Harrisson 1964; Brown et al. 1988), bamboo tubes (Klokke 1993), longboat building (Nicolaisen and Damgaard-Sørensen 1991), hunting weapons and traps (Sloan 1975; Puri 2006), and even, once in a while, local traditional cuisine (Jamuh and Harrisson 1966–69; Dirung and Dirung 1993).

We could also include here works on music and dance (e.g. Seeler 1969; Maceda 1978; Matusky 1986, 1990, 1991; Gorkinsky 1988; Pugh-Kitingan 1988), as well as on crucial, though exogenous, elements of the Bornean material culture: glass beads (Dunsmore 1978; Munan-Oettli 1987; Munan 2005) and ceramic jars (Adhyatman and Abu Ridho 1977; B. Harrisson 1986; Rangkuti and Faizaliskandiar 1988; Wibisono 1990; Sabah 2007; Césard 2009).

Finally, I shall leave aside very recent works focusing on contemporary cultural change and dealing with topics outside of my sphere of expertise, although some should probably be listed in this chapter, such as Liana Chua’s studies.

### 3 Material Culture and Ethnocultural Identity

In a recent paper, Victor T. King (2012) examined ‘the interrelated concepts of culture and identity, and more especially identities in motion’. Artefacts, of course, often display visual evidence of ethnocultural affiliation.

As already noted, locally crafted objects, present everywhere in traditional societies to fulfil all sorts of practical, daily life functions, also pervade the social, economic, political and religious spheres. They are involved in sharing and exchange networks, feature prominently as symbols of social status and prestige, and perform primary roles in ritual activities, and thus they are constitutive elements of social life, and strongly contribute to building and upholding ethnocultural identity.

The discussion below, intentionally focusing on ‘traditional’ artefacts of local commercial, social or ritual significance—rather than on recently appropriated ‘modern’ objects—attempts to investigate, among the communities that produce them, their evolution into new icons of identity—or ‘icons of tradition’, as Taylor (1994) puts it—in a wide open and fast-changing world.

#### 3.1 The Bidayuh Red Basket

A good example of this evolution is presented by Mashman and Nayoi (2012) with the so-called ‘red basket’ of the Pinyawa’a subgroup of Bidayuh in western

Sarawak. Traditionally, this red basket (*juah bireh*) was used for sowing and harvesting, as well as in rituals of the paddy cult (*adat gawai*), particularly at harvest time, as a container for offerings to the rice spirits; it also features in traditional marriage exchanges (*ibid.*:89). However, '[i]n its most profound context', the authors write, the red basket is used for supernatural purposes during the healing ceremonies, with each household owning one; here called 'soul basket', it is a container for the soul of a sick person (*ibid.*:80, 91).

In the 1960s a Catholic mission and school were set up at a nearby bazaar, and most of the community have since converted (*ibid.*:81). The red basket is now put to mundane use—for carrying personal belongings around—but '[i]t is most publicly conspicuous at the weekly church service, when it serves for the collection' (*ibid.*:89). Interestingly, it is now used by both Catholics and practitioners of the paddy cult in shared rituals and celebrations: Catholic families partake in the paddy cult rituals, using their own red baskets and saying Catholic prayers, and non-Catholics also attend a thanksgiving ceremony held at the church, during which young women in ethnic costumes, carrying red baskets, 'dance around the altar to the beat of the gongs in a manner reminiscent of the priestesses who dance to entertain the spirits of the rice' (*ibid.*:91).

Later, in the 1970s, a strong movement within the Bidayuh community aimed at popularising ritual dances for public performances, and encouraged younger Catholic women to practise them (*ibid.*:92). The women's new ethnic costume, partly deriving from the priestess's dress, includes the red basket, along with the typical *raong* hat, which was worn to protect a baby's soul. This costume is worn for dancing contests, ceremonial occasions and special masses in church.

Both the hat and basket, now as an inseparable pair, have thus become key components in the Pinyawa'a community's ethnocultural identity (*ibid.*:80–81, 92). If 'the red basket provides a sense of cultural continuity as the belief systems change' from the traditional *adat gawai* to Christianity, as Mashman and Nayoi rightly noted (*ibid.*:89; see also Mashman 2000), the iconic value of the hat-and-basket pair, and of this Bidayuh ethnic costume as a whole, has now spread out to the social and political sphere beyond the community, and to Sarawak's cultural stage.

In a similar process, among the Lun Dayeh (or Lundaye) of North Kalimantan (the new Indonesian province of Kalimantan Utara) and the Lun Bawang and Kelabit of Sarawak (with some degree of variation between these groups), the ritual *raung basung* (or *rong*) hat and *tayen* (or *ra'ing*) basket were originally used for sowing and harvesting, and appeared in rice cycle rituals, as well as in traditional marriage exchanges. Nowadays, the hat-and-basket pair is mostly manufactured and sold for use in Christian wedding ceremonies, which still rally broad kinship networks, even in town (Mashman 2012: 180–181; see Davy Ball 2009: 365; Sellato 2012a).

Among the eastern Sarawak Lun Bawang, Mashman (2012: 181) concludes, these hats and baskets are now worn as part of the ethnic costume at weddings and formal occasions as a mark of identity. Likewise, Kalimantan Lun Dayeh women, dressed in a standard ethnic costume, perform group dances at events such as the



annual Birau festival at the district's capital and in the course of National Day celebrations, in which the raung and tayen are recognisable ethnic identity icons (Sellato fieldnotes).

### 3.2 The Kenyah Baby Carrier

Among Kenyah, Kayan and related groups, which display distinctive, named and operative social strata (including nobility, commoners and slaves), both in Sarawak and Kalimantan, social ascription and status used to be visually discernible through the exclusive use of certain types of objects and decorative patterns (see, e.g. Rousseau 1990: 186–187; also Whittier 1973; King 1985). The baby carrier, a trademark artefact of these groups, offers a clear example of this, as both the motifs decorating it and small objects attached to it are not only protective devices against spiritual danger (for the child carried in it) but also indicators of social status (for the family owning and using it).

‘Functionally analogous to the ... cloth slings used to carry infants by many people around the world’ (Whittier and Whittier 1988), the baby carrier is a simple structure built of a half-moon wooden board and raised rattan plaitwork, and is equipped with shoulder straps. Its decoration is what makes it spiritually and socially significant: a large beadwork panel, animal fangs, bronze bells, shells, etc. Baby carriers, particularly their decorative elements, are part of family heirlooms. They are used, associated with a broad, decorated sun hat, in name-giving ceremonies, as well as, among some groups, in weddings and other rituals (see Whittier and Whittier 1988; Sellato 2012b; Lenjau et al. 2012: 217).

Noble families have a strict monopoly on the creation and use of certain decorative motifs and objects to be displayed on a baby carrier (and other items), e.g. anthropomorphic motifs or tiger and leopard fangs (for recent sources, see Armstrong 1992: 203; Lenjau 1999: 174; Lenjau et al. 2012: 219–20, 223; Sellato 1997: 230, 2012b: 272). Among the Kenyah of the uppermost Bahau River, only women of the noble stratum may create the anthropomorphic kalung kelunan or kalung éla’ motifs, as only the souls of noble people are strong enough to be exposed to the power of the motif. Yet, the spiritual risk incurred calls for a ritual payment or a blood sacrifice to the spirit of the motif, and such a motif may only be used for children of the noble category (Sellato 1997: 230).

Supernatural sanctions are believed to befall any non-noble person who would be so bold as to make or use an object carrying such a powerful spirit. In the 1990s Lenjau (1999: 171–72) wrote that the Kenyah still carefully heeded this taboo (see also Armstrong 1992: 203). Baby carriers, along with the broad sun hats (sa’ung seling) also carrying anthropomorphic motifs and restricted to nobility (see Sellato 2012c), are usually displayed on house walls. Altogether, as the Whittiers (1988) conclude: ‘The ... baby carrier [is] a work of art, a device for protecting a child’s health, a display and confirmation of social rank, and a mechanism for creating and strengthening social relations’.

Sun hats have long been, and still are, often requested by and given away to visiting officials (Sellato 1997: 230), and this also holds, albeit less often nowadays, for baby carriers. Indeed, such officials were naturally viewed as foreign ‘nobility’,

so the taboo question was never raised. Moreover, since the hat or baby carrier would be owned or used away from the village, this would have no negative spiritual impact on the source community.

In recent years, however, baby carriers have been manufactured by urban Kenyah communities, in Samarinda and elsewhere, and even in certain Kenyah resettlement villages closer to urban centres. These Kenyah craftspeople, whether or not they belong to the nobility, but no longer worrying about spiritual risk, create attractive decorative beadwork panels displaying anthropomorphic motifs. Such baby carriers are now marketed, with no reference to their ritual or social meaning, to airport souvenir shops or 'antique' shops in town. Some Kenyah families in Samarinda, as early as the 1990s, were running a baby carrier cottage industry and flying their goods to Kuching, where they fetched much higher prices. I was told that part was sold to souvenir shops there, and part to well-to-do Sarawak Kenyah, who needed them for rituals or heirlooms.

This, of course, reflects the dissolution of traditional social organisation and the emerging dominance of individualistic values, especially in urban contexts. Yet, this process strongly contributes to promoting the baby carrier as an iconic craft of the Kenyah on the provincial and even the national scenes.

One traditionally typical Kenyah craft, the cloth patchwork sun hat, has spread widely to other ethnic groups and other regions of Borneo, to the extent that it is now viewed as a symbol of a generic 'Dayak' culture and a standard souvenir from Borneo—and no longer a specifically Kenyah icon.

In the upper Bahau region, a development project has set out recently (2013) to assist local Kenyah craftswomen in producing and marketing the sa'ung seling ritual sun hat in order to generate some revenue for these isolated villages. These women, highly concerned with the possible spiritual risk that might ensue, referred the project staff to the subdistrict's customary chief (kepala adat), who granted special permission for commoner women to manufacture sa'ung seling with anthropomorphic figures (Iris Hardy, personal communication). The sa'ung seling is now manufactured and marketed as a specific product of the Kenyah groups of the uppermost Bahau area, and in the process is becoming these groups' ethnic identity icon in broader regional official settings.

#### 4 Material Culture, Identity Icons and Trade

For the record, I should stress here the ritual significance, Borneo-wide, of the pair of artefacts comprising a 'container' (a basket or, here, a baby carrier) and a hat (as the container's cover; see several examples, among various groups, in Sellato 2012d). In the Kenyah case, the sun hat and baby carrier pair forms a 'total' protective device, as well as a sort of ritual enclosure, which in other ethnic contexts outside Borneo would often consist of a ritual textile. It should not be unexpected, somehow, that these artefacts, rather than others of lesser ritual value (e.g. the blowpipe), have been turned into icons of identity. The fact that they carry ethnically distinctive decoration is also quite relevant here.

The Bidayuh's red basket and raong hat and the Lun Dayeh's basket-and-hat

pair, whose ritual roles in farming or other traditional ceremonies have notably faded away, now feature in Christian ceremonies and, quite prominently, in public displays of ethnic identity, illustrating a general historical shift from a traditional religion to Christianity, another, related shift from the religious to a non-religious or mundane sphere, as well as yet another, from internal (intra-community) to external (inter-community) use.

The Kenyah baby carrier (and associated hat) offers an example of broadened practices transgressing the traditional social order. This clearly hints at the progressive crumbling of social stratification and of the nobility's power over its commoners, even in the most old-fashioned, isolated communities. At the same time, it signals the emergence of new, often urban or peri-urban ethnic communities now estranged from erstwhile ritual prohibitions, and displaying individualistic economic behaviours. It also emphasises the repositioning and marketing of these artefacts by their makers as trade goods of a high economic importance—and these goods also happen to carry ethnic identity value.

Therefore, the role of trade in the promotion of such icons of ethnic identity, if not in their original construction, should not be underestimated. The Lun Dayeh hats and baskets are made mainly for intra-community circulation and sale, although they are also marketed to souvenir shops, which probably also applies to the Bidayuh hat and basket. The Kenyah baby carrier, although it is to some extent circulated among Kenyah groups scattered in various parts of Borneo, appears to mainly target the tourist trade. And the sa'ung seling case illustrates an interesting, ongoing speedy swing from social status marker to trade good to identity icon—the acceleration of the process being a sign of the times.

As the discovery and confirmation of these objects' trade value outside the communities that use/d them—especially in the tourist trade networks—trigger an intensification of their production, they certainly also contribute to boosting their value as ethnic identity icons within these communities (for a discussion of the impact of trade on material culture change, see Sellato 2015b). The tourist trade, in turn, promotes these icons among other regional ethnic groups, as well as to the national scene and beyond.

With regards to trade, the role of external agents—running or supporting local economic development projects, e.g. non-governmental organisations or foundations, state agencies—in the creation and promotion of iconic artefacts is also of relevance and should be taken into account, as is the case for Penan communities' rattan baskets in Sarawak or for the sa'ung seling of the Kenyah in East Kalimantan. Indeed, the advent of iconic objects may not always be a spontaneous endogenous process.

Finally, the question of cultural property should be raised regarding iconic material culture items. The commercial takeover of one group's specific traditional artefacts by another group has become a familiar occurrence, even in Borneo (e.g. the 'tree of life' rattan mat of the Ngaju made by Banjarese, or fake Bahau statues sold by Bugis in Samarinda). And 'iconic takeover'—one group's specific traditional artefact being selected by another group as its own iconic object—is not unheard of (e.g. Sellato 2015b). More generally, the patenting of particular items of

material culture, as well as of decorative motifs, is now a pending problem in Borneo, as elsewhere. A recent controversy around the bidai mat of the Seluas people of West Kalimantan being claimed by (and patented in) Malaysia as an iconic product of Sarawak (Okezone 2013) is telling enough, as are earlier and ongoing ‘cultural’ debates between Indonesia and Malaysia about ‘ownership’ of batik and the shadow puppet theatre (Jakarta Post 2012).

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