

# ETHNIC MINORITIES IN BORNEO: THE KIMARAGANG PEOPLE

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## ABSTRACT

This article presents an overview of the Kimaragang ethnic group, where the Kimaragang ethnic group is one of the indigenous sub-ethnic groups of Sabah, with typical settlements in Kota Marudu and Pitas. This article discusses the origins of the Kimaragang ethnic group, their earliest habitation, their language, economy, and sociocultural. It is anticipated that the material in this article will assist researchers, educators, institutions, and organisations in continuing to impart the culture of the indigenous peoples of Sabah, both directly and indirectly, through diverse research, publications, and documentation.

**Keywords:** Kimaragang, North Borneo, ethnic groups, indigenous people.

## INTRODUCTION

### The Concept of Ethnic and Ethnicity

Shibutani and Kwan coined the term “ethnic” in 1965 to refer to a group of people who believe they are descended from a single ancestry (Rotheram & S. Phinney, 1987). Further defined, an ethnic group is a collection of individuals who share a common philosophy, religion, language or dialect, as well as a common history (Schermerhorn, 1996). Additionally, ethnicity can refer to a group of human beings who feel they share a common biology, history, culture, or ancestry (Scupin & R. Decorse, 2001; 2003). Based on this definition and meaning, we may deduce that the term ethnic refers to a group of people who share a common history, customs, culture, and genealogy.

This sharing of identity, history, culture, and biology has shaped the concept of ethnicity, which is formed indirectly through a sense of belonging (Abdul Rahman et al., 2009). The concept

of ethnicity or a sense of belonging can be observed in an ethnic group's social activity, for example, the Kimaragang ethnic group. Through the values of ethnicity and the spirit of belonging that exists in the Kimaragang ethnic group, a spirit of solidarity has been built and the Kimaragang ethnic group has been founded by practising culture, customs, and a strong social organisational structure. With a strong sense of belonging, the Kimaragang ethnic group has also strengthened as an ethnic group with its own culture, customs, and organisational structure which has developed into their proud identity.

### **Dusun Kimaragang**

As illustrated in Figure 1, the Dusun Kimaragang are indigenous people who inhabit the majority of the hills and valleys in the Kota Marudu and Pitas districts (Pangayan et al., 2017; R Kroeger, 2005). According to Jonan KK Gaul (informant), the entire Tandek area in Kota Marudu is fully dominated by the Kimaragang ethnic group, and areas in the Tandek area include Tingkalanon, Ulu Bangkoka, Samparita, Damai, Taritapan, Tondig, Togudon, Mosolog, Salimandut, Tinogu, and Tanjung Batu. Meanwhile, in the Pitas district, there are places like Dandun, Marasinsim, Konibungan, Salimpodon, and Korumoko. All of these localities have a population that is 99 per cent Kimaragang ethnic. As illustrated in Figure 1, the Dusun Kimaragang are indigenous people who inhabit the majority of the hills and valleys in the Kota Marudu and Pitas districts (Pangayan et al., 2017; R. Kroeger, 2005). According to Jonan KK Gaul (informant), the entire Tandek area is completely dominated by the Kimaragang ethnic group in the Kota Marudu area, including Tingkalanon, Ulu Bangkoka, Samparita, Damai, Taritapan, Tondig, Togudon, Mosolog, Salimandut, Tinogu, and Tanjung Batu. Meanwhile, areas like Dandun, Marasinsim, Konibungan, Salimpodon, and Korumoko are located in the Pitas region. All of these regions are 99 per cent Kimaragang. According to the Kadazandusun Cultural Association Sabah's (KDCA) membership list, the Kimaragang ethnic group is included among the Kadazandusun ethnic groupings (Topin, 1996). In general, the Kimaragang ethnic group shares commonalities with other Kadazandusun ethnic groups in terms of language, origins, and cultural traits. However, the Kimaragang ethnic community believes that they have their own identity and uniqueness.



Figure 1 Location map of Kota Marudu District (blue) and Pitas District (yellow)  
Source Pangayan (2014).

### Origins of Word Kimaragang

Several theories and assumptions have been advanced to explain the origin and meaning of the term “*Kimaragang*.” The word Kimaragang is derived from the Dusun word “*aragang*,” which means “red colour” when translated. The prefix ‘ki’ is defined as follows in the Kadazandusun Dictionary (1995: xxxii):

**Ki** - indicates existence or possession. It occurs with noun form, and represents a shortened form of the existential verb *kivaa* ‘to have or to be’. It is always word-initial and can occur with any noun form which can be possessed including those which have become nouns by their affixation.

The prefix ‘ki’ signifies ‘to have’ or ‘having’ in the Kimaragang ethnic language, like in the phrase *kibaju*, which means to have a shirt, *kisigar*, which means to have a *Sigar*, *kisinandang*, which means to carry, and many other words that utilise the prefix ‘ki’ have the same meaning.

According to Encik Jubin bin Umbang (informant), the term “Kimaragang” is derived from the former community title to the Kimaragang community who wore a red *pinakang* cloth (shirt made of wood bark) to attend a ritual, and the title still exists today. Shim (2007: 151) claims that the word Kimaragang is sourced from the name of the Kimaragang ethnic skin, which is red from sunbathing after bathing and resting on the branches of a giant fig tree. The following is an

excerpt from an oral account connected to the genesis of the Kimaragang call as a consequence of Low Kok On et al. (2013:40) fieldwork:

*“... pada suatu ketika dahulu berlakunya satu kemarau panjang di tempat tinggal nenek moyang mereka. Semua tanaman yang boleh dimakan telah musnah. Penduduk di sana tidak mempunyai makanan sehingga mereka terpaksa memanjat pokok dan makan daun pokok. Orang yang berlalu di sana berasa hairan kenapa terdapat pokok yang berwarna merah...mereka nampak kulit orang yang berada atas pokok berwarna kemerah-merahan lalu memanggil mereka sebagai orang aragang, yang bermaksud merah...”*

(Informan, Pangayan Wanian, 2013)

Shim (2007) and Low (2003) both give stories about the origin of the name Kimaragang that share the fact that the Kimaragang ethnics acquire their name from the colour of their skin, which is too lengthy to bask in the sun. This might be assumed that neighbouring communities at the time witnessed Kimaragang people bathing and sunbathing on the branches of fig trees and gave the Kimaragang community the name “Kimaragang.” Furthermore, the Kimaragang ethnic group’s usage of red *pinakang* clothing at the period prompted the term Kimaragang to linger in thoughts.

### **Nunuk Ragang Legend Conception**

The early history of the Kadazandusun settlement is identified in the tale of Nunuk Ragang (Banyan Red Fig Tree), which is believed to have been located near Sungai Liwogu (Sungai Kawananan) and Sungai Gelibang (Sungai Kogibangan), which is now known as Kampung Tonpios in Ranau District (IHN, 2007; Luping, 2009; Tangit, 2018). There are several theories regarding the migration of the Kadazandusun group from Nunuk Ragang to a new place, with a line of reasoning asserting that overcrowding, a lack of food source, and disease epidemics caused the Kadazandusun group to migrate in phases according to certain groups at the time, thereby indirectly causing the Kadazandusun ethnic disperse throughout Sabah (Shim, 2007). According to earlier researchers’ records, the Kimaragang Ethnic migrated from Nunuk Ragang in sequence with other ethnic groups such as the Tobilung Ethnic and Tindal, who were also the 11th and 12th generations to depart Nunuk Ragang (Low Kok On & Pugh-Kitingan, 2015; Pangayan, 2014; Shim, 2007). This group has adapted culturally to the surroundings and developed a new identity and culture in response to the new environment, resulting in the establishment of the present Kimaragang ethnic group.

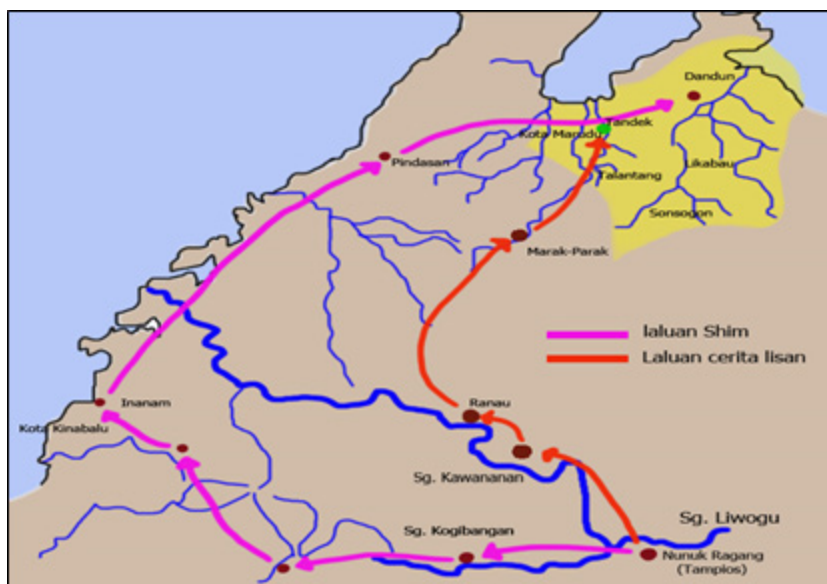
## Local Perception towards Kimaragang Inception

According to several informants with knowledge of Kimaragang ethnic customs, namely Jubin Uambang (63 years old), Pangayan Wanian (79 years old), and Gunsalam Unggus (77 years old), the Kimaragang ethnic group originated from a large village near the river basin of Sungai Kawananan and was attacked by “*Pangkot*” (evil spirit). *Pangkot*, according to Dulina Yansau (89), is one of the wicked spirits that feeds on the human spirit. *Pangkot* attacked at night and gathered the spirits of all longhouse inmates regardless of age, resulting in the death of the entire longhouse household before dawn. Only a few families were able to escape the longhouse using the technique known as “*modlisou*,” which entails stealthily leaving the house with a piece of cloth as soon as the sunset. The surviving family travelled north along the Kawananan River until they reached the place near Kota Marudu District.

## Early Migration of Kimaragang Ethnic

As per theories about the Kimaragang ethnic group’s origins, the two original places of the Kimaragang ethnic settlement are near the Nunuk Ragang early settlement area, specifically the Liwogu River. This strongly suggests that the Kimaragang ethnic group originated from the Nunuk Ragang clump, which established villages along the Liwogu River many years ago and gradually divided and migrated in phases (Shim, 2007). Migrating and transitioning from one location to another took a lengthy time in ancient times. According to a few theories, the study assumes that the Kimaragang ethnics who migrated from the Tompios River as the first Nunuk Ragang Clump Settlement followed the Kogibangan River (Figure 2), as Shim (2007) asserted, but even that, inherited oral stories passed down through generations were changed by the story’s narrator.

As a result, the study assumes that the original route, which followed the Kogibangan River, was altered to approach the Kawananan River due to the traditional beliefs. According to Pangayan Wanian (informant), the Kimaragang Ethnic’s knowledge and belief about the left (*Gibang*) are less positive and more prone to negative interpretation, but the right (*Wanan*) is frequently inferred positive way and with virtue. Due to the influential effect on the story’s aligned interpretations around the terms left (*Gibang*) and right (*Wanan*), the storey of the origins of the Kimaragang ethnic group has been altered and continues to be passed down hereditarily to this day.



**Figure 2** Kimaragang ethnic migration route based on two different sources.  
 Source Shim, 2007: 146 (Adapted).

### Kimaragang Language

The Kimaragang ethnic group is one of the speakers of the dusunik language which makes it under the Kadazandusun group (Lasimbang, 1996; Pugh-Kitingan, 2016; Sansalu, 2016). In general, the Dusunik language belongs to the Austronesian speakers including the Kimaragang ethnic language which is considered as one of the Dusunik spoken dialects (Low Kok On & Pugh-Kitingan, 2015; R. Kroeger, 2005). When compared to other Kadazandusun ethnic dialects, in general, the Kimaragang dialect does not have significant differences as in Table 1. This can be explained by the origin of all Kadazandusun ethnic groups originating from the same place which is Nunuk Ragang and speakers of the same language which is Dusunik language.

**Table 1** Differences in pronunciation of Kimaragang language with other Kadazandusun ethnic languages

Kadazan/ Dusun	Lotud	Kimaragang	English
<i>Diau</i>	<i>Ikau</i>	<i>Ikau</i>	You
<i>Sodop</i>	<i>Sodoi</i>	<i>Sodop</i>	Night
<i>Ngaran</i>	<i>Ngaran</i>	<i>Ngaran</i>	Name
<i>Apat</i>	<i>Apat</i>	<i>Apat</i>	Four
<i>Paray</i>	<i>Paray</i>	<i>Paray</i>	Paddy

Adapted from: R. Kroeger (1993)

However, if viewed in terms of the phonology of Kimaragang dialect speech is found to use the use of five (5) vowels /i/e/a/o/u/with a round pronouncing at the end pronunciation (R Kroeger, 2005). The Kimaragang dialect pronunciation style may differ from other Dusunik dialect speakers with non-circular and semi-circular intonation at the end of pronunciation (Pugh-Kitingan, 2012; R. Kroeger, 2009). This is clearly shown in Table 2 which shows the differences in the pronunciation of the count in the Dusunik language groups.

**Table 2** Counts in Kadazandusun Groups

English	Kimaragang	Rungus	Kadazan	Bundu
One	Iso	Aso	Iso	Iso
Two	Duwo	Duvo	Duvo	Duwo
Three	Tolu	Tolu	Tolu	Tolu
Four	Apat	Apat	Apart	Apat
Five	Limo	Limo	Himo	Limo
Six	Onom	Onom	Enom	Onom
Seven	Turu	Turu	Tooh	Turu
Eight	Walu	Valu	Vahu	Walu
Nine	Siyam	Sizam	Sizam	Siam
Ten	Opod	Hopod	Opod	Opod

Adapted from: (Sansalu, 2016)

### **Economy and Social Cultural of Kimaragang Ethnic**

As with other Kadazandusun ethnic groups, the Kimaragang ethnic group relies economically on hill paddy (*padi huma*) cultivation, gardening, and forest harvesting (Low Kok On & Pugh-Kitingan, 2015; Pangayan, 2014). Since ancient times, the principal pursuits of the Kimaragang ethnic group have been hill paddy agriculture and gardening. This is shown by the preservation of the *momiwulan*, a traditional ethnic calendar system (Pangayan et al., 2018). This traditional calendar, according to Bunging Turudang (informant), is a guide for the Kimaragang ethnic group in starting the process of planting 'huma' rice to generate a healthy crop and be able to support their daily lives throughout the year.

Since the British arrived in the district between 1881-1963, the Kimaragang ethnic group has gradually changed and developed socioeconomically, owing to the presence of a port that raised the Kota Marudu area to a prominent port at the time (Bee & Bala, 2007; Manshur, 2003). The existence of this port shows that the Kimaragang ethnic group was also involved in trade, as there was a small group of them who worked as port employees and dealers throughout this period

(Damilan, 2017). According to Pawai En (informant), the presence of the British in the Kota Marudu area expanded the Kimaragang ethnic group's economic resources from gardening and paddy fields to rubber plantation workers and mining with a wage system.

Changes in the Kimaragang ethnic economic system have also had an impact on the social system of those who live in *binattang* (longhouses), which have shifted from a pattern of organised village settlement to a pattern of scattered village settlement (Pangayan & Shafii, 2020). This is owing to the *binattang*'s rural location, which makes it difficult for them to commute to work due to the great distance. As a result, the majority of farm and mine employees constructed *sulap* (temporary residences) in neighbouring orchards to facilitate their work. However, according to Gunsalam Ungus (informant), when the children and wife live together for educational purposes, the *sulap* is frequently transformed into a permanent residence.

In general, SBBU influence does not alter the egalitarian nature of Kimaragang ethnic administration, which does not intentionally adopt the hierarchical system (Pangayan & Shafii, 2020). However, the governing SBBU implemented adjustments and enhancements to their administrative structure at the time. Among the revisions being implemented by the SBBU are the titles of *woyoon tagayo* and *woyo'on* being changed to Orang Tua (O.T), Ketua Anak Negeri (K.A.N), or Orang Kaya-kaya (O.K.K) (Pugh-Kitingan, 2012). Apart from that, this approach is not just employed at the village level but is currently being implemented more formally at the district level. Additionally, Gunsalam Unggus (informant) claimed that the SBBU has specified additional norms and laws that must be adhered to to ensure peace and security.

With the passing of time and the establishment of the North Borneo (Chartered) Company in 1881, the traditional social stratification practised by the Kadazandusun ethnic group, particularly the Kimaragang ethnic group, has transformed (Pugh-Kitingan, 2012). According to Jamaron Inawan (informant), since the establishment of the North Borneo (Chartered) Company, the tradition of *sangod* (beheading) has been gradually phased out, and the *randawi do royo'on* (heroes) have lost their primary purpose in the *Binattang* system. Additionally, the alteration in settlement patterns and population distribution impacted the *randawi do royo'on*'s ability to function as protectors and fighters against the *sangod*.



## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the Kimaragang ethnic group belongs to the Nunuk Ragang ethnic group and is one of the generations who migrated from the original Kadazandusun settlement, namely Nunuk Ragang. With their distinct traditional cultural identity, the Kimaragang ethnic group has dominated the Marudu and Pitas districts. The Kimaragang ethnic identity is represented remarkably well in their spoken language, social system, economics, and traditions. Their identities, nevertheless, share parallels with other Kadazandusun ethnic groups because they share cultural roots with the Nunuk Ragang clump.

Today, the Kimaragang ethnic group has undergone several changes in terms of social, economic, and political development since the arrival of the British. Among the Kimaragang ethnic group's accomplishments is being on the front lines of governing Sabah. This indicates that the scope of their thoughts and perspectives has broadened and that they are now directly and indirectly involved in the administration of villages, provinces, and countries. The uniqueness of the Kimaragang ethnic group adapting to new environments and perspectives while maintaining their identity and culture is a major strength to the Kimaragang ethnic group.

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### List of Informant

Name	Age	Area	Occupation	Interview
Pawai En	95	Kampung Tingkalanon	Bekas Ketua Kampung	2017
Gunsalam Ungguis	77	Kampung Korumoko	Pesara K.A.N	2017
Jamaron Inawan	68	Kampung Tondig	Penggiat Seni	2017
Bunginmg Turudang	68	Kampung Togudon	Penggiat Seni	2017
Jonan K.K Gaul	57	Kampung. Tanjung Batu	Ketua Daerah (semasa)	2012
Jubin bin Umbang (Meninggal pada: Jun 2015)	63	Kampung Togudon	Bekas Ketua Kampung	2012
Pangayan bin Wanian (Meninggal pada: Februari 2015)	79	Kampung Tondig	Petani	2012
Dulina Yansau (Meninggal pada: Julai 2016)	89	Kampung Liabas	<i>Bobolian</i>	2012

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