

## **COLLECTIVE MEMORIES AND NARRATIVES OF IBAN KUA'**

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### **Abstract**

Iban Kua' or formally known as the Sebuyau Dayak mostly settled in western Sarawak comprising few districts and sub-districts such as Samarahan, Asajaya, Sebuyau, Lundu and Kuching. The word 'Sebuyau' refers to a place where they are originally coming from. Little is known or written about the history of an Iban group that called themselves Iban Kua' in the Samarahan District of Sarawak. More often than not the Iban Kua' were mentioned in passing in Sarawak's oral and written history. But like other ethnic groups in Sarawak, Iban Kua' also has their own migrational histories. This article presents the narratives and collective memories regarding the origin and expansion of the Iban Kua' in Samarahan District, Sarawak. Their migration can be traced back to the sixteenth century to areas such as along Batang Ai, Batang Lupar, Batang Sadong and Sungai Kuap. Their ancestors then moved to the Samarahan District. The time span for the migration process lasted for a few generations before they finally settled at Samarahan District. Their ancestors then moved to the Samarahan District. Their presence was acknowledged by the Brooke's administration. Later they spread to other parts of Samarahan District. Today, there are a total of 14 Iban Kua' villages to be found in Samarahan District.

**Keywords:** Migrational histories, expansion, Iban Kua, Samarahan, Brooke.

### **Introduction**

Although Ibans generally speak a dialect which is mutually intelligible, they can be divided into different branches which are named after the geographical areas where they reside. Like other Iban in Sarawak, the Samarahan Iban Kua' is one of the sub-groups of the Sebuyau Iban that moved westward into Sarawak. However, there is lack of literature, focusing on the Iban Sebuyau and thus

many are not aware of their existence. They lived far west of the main Iban area settlement, including the Lundu-Sebuyau Ibans. After generations of contact with surrounding non-Iban societies, the Sebuyau Ibans have lost many of the features of their original culture, identity and regard themselves as a group apart. Samarahan district has the most growing population in Sarawak with an average annual population growth rate at 6.0% in the year of 2000 to 2010 (State Planning Unit, 2015). This partly resulted from the increase in rural-urban migration to Samarahan district and it affects the livelihood changes of the local Iban Kua' in Samarahan.

The term *Kua'* in this study is used, referring to the pronoun of the second person, 'you', purposely in order to highlight the identity of the Sebuyau Iban sub-group in Samarahan district. The Iban Kua' of Samarahan traced their origins through a succession of ancestral names. This succession is linked to their places of origin. This study also highlights the migrational histories of the Iban Kua' of Samarahan, chiefly, early in the nineteenth century prior to the arrival of James Brooke to Sarawak.

### ***Bejalai and Berumpang Menua (Opening up of New Areas)***

The Sebuyau Ibans were among the Iban groups that migrated into Sarawak in sixteenth and seventeenth century (Gomes, 2004). They were believed to have entered Borneo mainly via the Kapuas valley in Kalimantan.

In his study on *bejalai*, Kedit (1988) discusses the various terminologies that have been used to describe the custom of unique Iban migration. The author argues that the two terms, namely *bejalai* and *belelang* would have been sufficient to describe this Iban practice. *Bejalai* normally entails a shorter time period than does *belelang* and someone would return after a given time span. *Belelang* refers to the undertaking of a long and extended journey without indication of the possibility of returning home. It is usually assumed that one who undertakes this journey will not return. Thus, in this study, the term *belelang* can appropriately explain the migration of the Sebuyau Ibans during the old days. Pringle (2010), traces the early Iban large-scale migration and their allies with English sovereigns to fight against the Saribas rebellion and Iban piracy. They supported Brooke family. Most of the Sebuyaus settled along the lower reaches of the Lundu, Sadong, Samarahan and modern area of Kuching. It was only known as First Division when Sarawak later governed by James Brooke in 1841 (Gomes, 2004). In a study Sandin and Sather (1994) concludes that social ethnohistorical works on Iban found that the Sebuyau Ibans are the descendants of Gelungan and Sendi.

## Iban of Samarahan

The total number of local Iban Kua' in 14 villages in Samarahan District recorded about 7,100 people. Most of them live in the modern semi concrete houses. Unlike the other Iban in the upper Sarawak, who are mostly longhouse dwellers then Iban Kua' stay in village house and not longhouse. Before Samarahan was upgraded to a division, the former name of Kota Samarahan was Muara Tuang. It was a small settlement that situated approximately 38 kilometres from the modern Kuching town. Muara Tuang was only a sub-district of Kuching District and there was one Sarawak Administrative Officer stationed there. The sub-district was constructed in 1933 and during the Japanese Occupation in 1941, the office was used as the Japanese administrative office and a fortress. The majority of the population consists of the Malay. Muara Tuang was named after a village situated between two rivers, Sungai Tuang and Sungai Samarahan (Sulaiman, 2008). Today, Samarahan has the fastest growing population in Sarawak with an average annual population growth rate of 6.0% in the year of 2000 to 2010 (State Planning Unit, 2015).

This research was carried out in February until June 2018 at 14 villages surveyed at Samarahan district (see Table 2). Senior and knowledgeable members of the community, including each of the *Tuai kampung* and *Penghulu* (community leaders) of the 14 villages and some other villages outside Samarahan District such as Kampung Sampun Tebun, Kampung Sungai Lundu and Kampung Sungai Tapang were chosen as key informants to find out the chronology of events. Secondary data were also gathered through library research from some published journals and books that related to the migration and genealogy.

**Table 2** Name of villages, the name of headmen and households surveyed at Samarahan District, Sarawak as of February, 2017

Name of Villages	Name of Headmen/ Representative*	No. of Households
Kampung Entingan	David Jiku Nader	39
Kampung Nangka	Minggu anak Julang	20
Kampung Sebayor	Ruda anak Unong*	18
Kampung Mangka	Sup anak Bawong	4
Kampung Jegoi	Masa anak Pinki	4
Kampung Semawang	Handa anak Apau	13
Kampung Sungai Empit	Bas anak Kaus	3
Kampung Sungai Batu	Sudin anak Layan	2
Kampung Merdang Lumut	Edwin Takim Mageh	10
Kampung Merdang Gayam	Richard anak Lait	9

Kampung Merdang Limau	Francis Gandi anak Liong	5
Kampung Rembus	Reggie anak Timpon*	13
Kampung Melaban	Jemat anak Abak	11
Kampung Plaie	Sambas anak Rabi	14
<b>Total</b>		<b>165</b>

Source: Fieldwork, September 2018.

Figure 1 shows the area surveyed and migration routes to various villages of the Iban Kua' in Samarahan District. One need to travel from one point, Sungai Empit along the 14 villages for about 18 kilometers or approximately 25 minutes through tarred road and ferry to across Batang Samarahan until the end which is at Semawang.

### Migration to Samarahan

Those who moved to Batang Samarahan and Sarawak river are the present Iban Kua' who live in the 14 villages in Samarahan District. Some of them also moved and settled at Tabuan near to the modern town of Kuching (Pringle, 2010 and Ho, 1998). This study has found that the Sebuyau Ibans also moved to other districts near to Kuching town and not only that they share the same culture in term of linguistic but in some cases, they are related through family ties. As one respondent said, "there are many of our family of the Iban Kua' live in certain villages near to Kuching-Samarahan boundary such as at Sungai Tapang, Sungai Nada, Sungai Laru, Sungai Tanju, Stutong, and Stampin which shared the same culture and Iban Kua' language like us here" (Interview with Penghulu Belland anak Kantol on 13 March 2017). A study on Iban migration to various villages in Kuching was done by Chang Pat Foh.

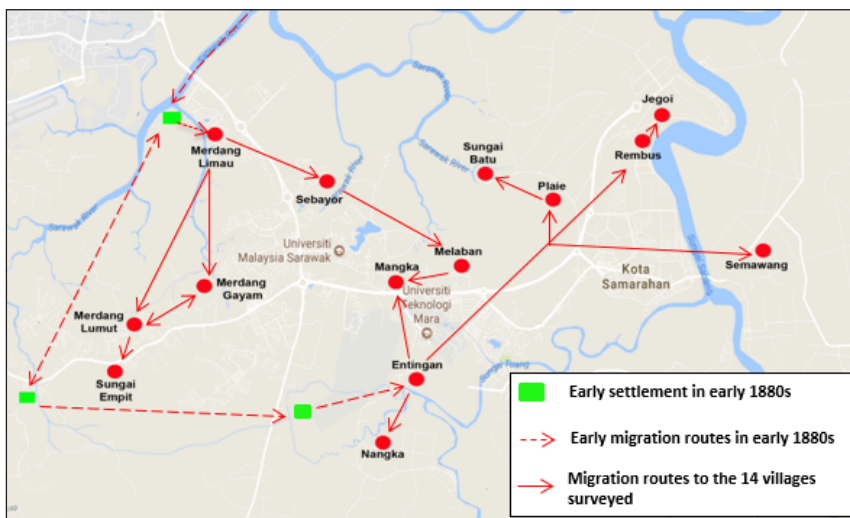
This study complements the above study by Chang by focusing on the migration to Samarahan District. The three main groups that migrated to Samarahan were Luyoh's group, Panglima Kala's group and Kelambung Api's group.

### Narrative 1: Luyoh and the Descendants of Gelungan

Based on this study, the earliest place where the Sebuyau Iban had stayed in Samarahan was at Munggu Sukong at the present Sungai Kuap, a tributary of the Sarawak river. It is the administrative border between Kuching Division and Samarahan Division. In Iban, *Munggu* means hill. The Iban often named a place associated with the environmental element or surrounding living things. Munggu Sokong was discovered by a man named Luyoh who migrated from Batang Sadong sometimes in 1819. It was also believed that one of his followers, Singka, discovered Sebayor in 1820.

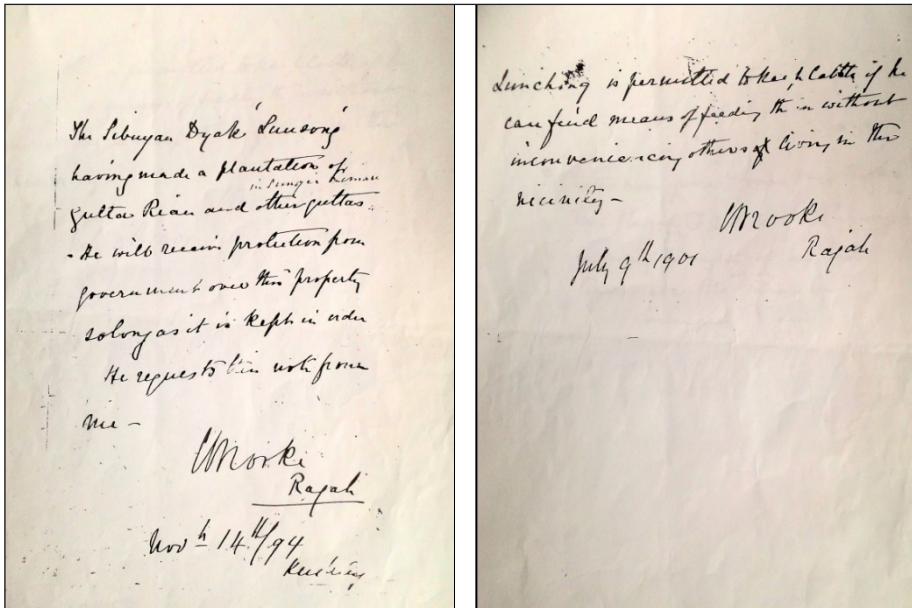
Luyoh migrated westward through Batang Sadong and then went through the sea paddled to Selabat (near the present Muara Tebas) at the mouth of Sarawak river. In 1819, Luyoh and his followers entered Sungai Kuap, the tributary of Sarawak river. Here, they discovered Munggu Sukong. It was the place where some of the ancestors of the Iban Kua' lived before they moved separately to different places around Kuching and Samarahan. It was about over two hundred of Iban Kua' among forty families who lived in a wooden longhouse. After a year of staying at Munggu Sokong, Singka and some of his followers migrated to Bukit Tayak, before they discovered Sebayor in 1820. Some decades later, under the leadership of Ahak anak Singka, the son of the pioneer of Kampung Sebayor, led his group from Kampung Sebayor to a new settlement where there were plenty of *Melaban* trees grown in that area. Finally, Ahak formed a new village known as Melaban. It was named accordingly to the name of the tree.

A few years after Singka left Munggu Sokong, another man named Lunsong also led his group from Munggu Sokong to a new place. Lunsong was one of Luyoh's followers. Lunsong, together with some people migrated through Sungai Kuap to a new place about a decade before the visits of James Brooke to Sarawak in 1839. Here, they saw abundant of *Medang* tree that grow naturally along the river bank, hence named the river as Sungai Medang. During those days, they were highly dependent on the natural resources for their livelihood. For instance, *Medang* tree itself was also being used to build their longhouse. They stayed along the river bank of Sungai Medang for several years until the Brooke family discovered their place.



**Figure 1** Area surveyed and migration routes to various villages of the Iban Kua' in Samarahan District

Medang and Merdang are actually the same place. The English men then, however, pronounced "Medang" as "Merdang". Until now, the term "Merdang" is still being used by the Iban Kua' in Samarahan. They moved to a nearby place not far from Sungai Medang, and named it Sungai Limau. Lunsong had his people cleared the land for their farms. The Sebuyaus were quite naturally aligned themselves with the Brooke family.



**Figure 2** A letter hand written by Sir Charles Brooke to the Sebuyaus in Samarahan

Source: Mr. Francis Gandi anak Liong (Headman of Kampung Merdang Limau)

Figure 2 shows the letters written by Charles Brooke to Lunsong. He was given a land not far from the area where they stayed. According to one respondent of Kampung Merdang Limau "this letter was written by Sir Charles Brooke of Sarawak to our first *Tuai Rumah*, Lunsong in 9<sup>th</sup> of July, 1901. Lunsong was granted a land for plantation purpose. This village was called Sungai Limau, as there were many *limau liar* (wild lime) grow naturally along the river bank where our ancestors had stayed. Due to the need for new land for rice cultivation and expansion of new families, some of our relatives decided to move separately and moved to two different areas" (Interview with *Tuai Kampung* Francis Gandi anak Liong, 27 March 2017).

After Lunsong was given the land in 1901, his followers moved separately to another two places not far from their longhouse where they had clear land for rice planting. One place was named Merdang Lumut as they found a lot of dead mossy trees in the river. In Iban words, *lumut* means mossy. While the other was named Merdang Gayam. The word *gayam* was derived from a type of fruit that grows naturally along the Medang river.

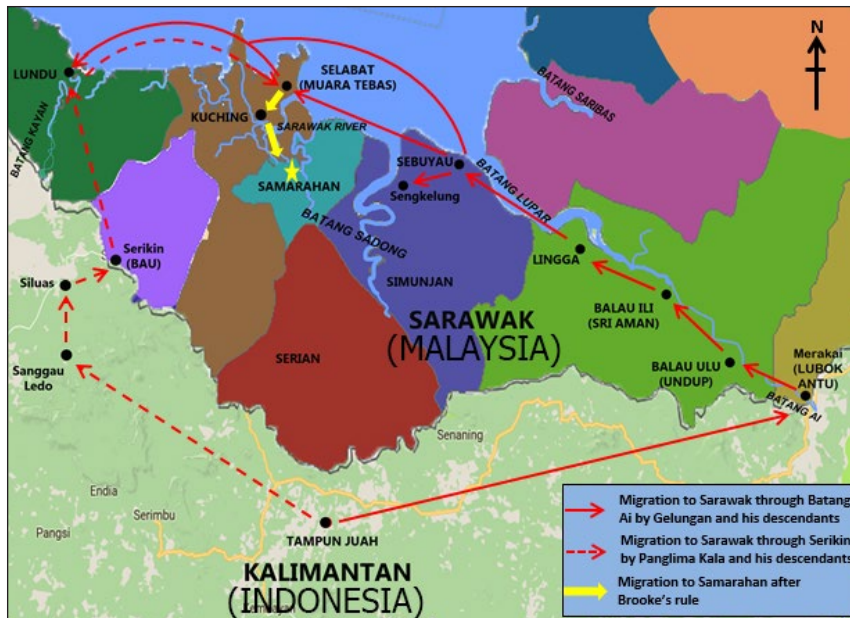
In the 1980's, due to expansion of families and the need for a new land for farming, some of the Iban from Merdang Lumut then formed a new village nearby. There were plenty of edible wild fruit known as *buah empit*. It tastes like almond. The fruit tree is medium-sized, growing along river banks where they stayed. Hence, they named their new settlement as Sungai Empit.

## **Narrative 2: Panglima Kala from Tampun Juah**

While Iban leaders such as Gelungan were leading their followers on migrations into Sarawak through Batang Ai and Undup tributary, another Iban Kua' subgroup led by Panglima Kala migrated to Sarawak in the early 1800's through Ketungau river tributary. It was his great-great grandson (fifth descendant), the late Edward Brandah anak Madi from Lorong Panglima Kala, Melaban, who shared his genealogies and provided the narrative before he died in April 2017.

According to him (Edward), Panglima Kala originally came from Tampun Juah (present-day of Kalimantan in Indonesia) which is situated in between Balai Karangan and Sanggau (near Melenggang). He was known as a *Panglima* (general warrior) because of his bravery in fighting their enemies. From Tampun Juah, he and his followers moved to a new settlement which is situated at Ngabang. Shortly after that, they settled temporarily at Sanggau Ledo. Panglima Kala and his followers moved to Siluas near to the present boundary of Kalimantan and Serikin, Sarawak. Here, they stayed for quite a long time and farmed their crops.





**Figure 3** Map showing migration routes of Sebuyau Iban from Tampun Juah to various parts in Sarawak in the olden days  
 Source: Edited from Google Map.

In their search for new territory to occupy, they decided to move separately in two groups. Panglima Kala led his follower to settle at Lundu, while the other group led by Panglima Kala’s cousin stayed at Siluas. Panglima Kala then paddled westward through Batang Kayan to Lundu. When they arrived at Lundu, they found that there was already a group of Iban who lived in a longhouse. This may support the findings written by Sandin and Sather (1994) that a group of Sebuyau Iban led by a chief named Nyambong who migrated from Batang Lupar and later settled at Stunggang, Lundu some decades before the first visit of James Brooke to Lundu. Then they migrated to Paser Puteh the present headwaters of Batu Kawa, Kuching, before the arrival of James Brooke. They had lived for years and continued fighting their enemies.

Eventually, because of the continuous attack, Panglima Kala decided to build a fortress for his people. Later he and some of his followers went downriver through Sarawak river. Before the Iban arrived, Kuching was already inhabited by a group of Seru, a sub-group of Dayak. Panglima Kala paddled to another place known as Munggu Pasu or later known as Bukit Mata Kuching where the present Hilton Hotel now stands. Why it was called Munggu Pasu? When they cleared the area for their new settlement Panglima Kala decided to stay overnight. That night they saw a strange thing on the hill. It was a big demon’s eye, as big as a nursery pot. Pot is called *pasu* in the Iban language. Since that incident the place was called Munggu Pasu. What he saw was a bad omen so



Panglima Kala cancelled his plan clear the area for their new settlement. Also, on the same night, one of his followers had a weird dream. He was told by a spirit to sacrifice one woman and one man among their slaves as an offering before they could clear the land at Munggu Pasu.

Panglima Kala and his followers decided to paddle back to Pasir Puteh again. He celebrated the Gawai festival and erected a tall *tiang sandung*. *Tiang sandung* is a tall wooden post or pillar that is erected for some festivals. One interpretation of the pillar is that it is meant to symbolize the *ijuk* palm (*Arenga pinnata*) or *isang*. *Sandung* must be shaped from productive trees, chiefly the durian tree that are fruit-bearing or that have other uses (Sutlive and Sutlive, 2001). During this ritual act, a man and a woman slaves were sacrificed to fulfil the request in the dream.

After the Gawai and with the ritual done they paddled back to Munggu Pasu and stayed for decades. Panglima Kala's son named Kaka was born here. Panglima Kala started to clear the land and built their longhouse. Years later his followers built their longhouses in the nearby areas. The Iban who stay in places around Kuching own area such as Padang Lumba Kuda, Tabuan Dayak, Simpang Tiga, Mendu, Kenyalang and Sekama are the descendants of the first settlers of Munggu Pasu. This occurred after James Brooke arrived at Sarawak (Kuching) in 1839. James Brooke banned headhunting resulted in less fighting.

His son, Kaka married a woman named Gersit. Soon after their marriage, Gersit was found *betuboh bisi* (pregnant). Unfortunately, Gersit lost her life after giving birth to her child. Gersit was buried not far from their longhouse, situated across the river about hundred metres from the Brooke's Fort Margherita. The place where Gersit was buried was later named as "Gersik". Today, the graveyard is surrounded by the Malays settlements. After Gersit's death, his father, Panglima Kala also returned to Kalimantan. Kaka succeeded him as a chief with honorific title Panglima Kaka anak Kala. Panglima Kaka was also the warlord who has helped the second White Rajah of Sarawak, Sir Charles Brooke in fighting against piracy and headhunting.

Panglima Kaka and some of his followers left Munggu Pasu and paddled downriver until they reached Bukit Riam near present Stigang (Sungai Kuap). The located not far from the place where Luyoh and Singka in the first group of Sebuyau Ibans who migrated downriver through Sungai Kuap to Munggu Sukong.

Panglima Kaka anak Kala and his followers were the first group of Iban Kua' that migrated from Munggu Pasu to settle at Munggu Riam in 1880. Munggu Riam was near the headwaters of the present Sungai Entingan. Kaka

planted a durian tree which is still growing on the spot to this day. It is "Rian Kaka". While living in this settlement, they were frequently attacked by a small group of Ibans from Munggu Sentah who were looking for someone's head through *kayau anak* which mean a type of attack made with a small number of followers or warriors. Natural disaster such as heavy rainfall and flood often flushed away their crops also occurred at Munggu Riam.

In 1889, Panglima Kaka anak Kala and his followers moved to Bukit Tapang which is situated at the headwaters of Sungai Entingan. With only less than 10 *bilek* (room or household in a longhouse) of families, so they invited some of other Iban to stay with them. The Iban from Tapah Ili, situated not far from Batu Belat and Batu Gong came to join them. Despite their hard work, they still could not get sufficient rice for food and the communities believed it was dogged by misfortunes. Strange things always happened. They often heard unknown voices near the river. They believed it was the spirits of the dead. There was an incident when the people who lived in Bukit Tapang suffered a severe pain called *muang ai* (cholera) caused by the contaminated water which they had consumed. Many were infected and resulting in many deaths.

According to *tusut* genealogies, Panglima Kaka died of old age at Bukit Tapang after they stayed there for 16 years. His followers led by his son Lenggai left Bukit Tapang to live temporarily at Lubok Basi at the present boundary between Entingan and Nangka. They migrated again through Sungai Entingan and arrived at Kampung Entingan in 1905. There was abundant fish in the river, including a number of *Jeringan* fish and the place name Entingan. Some said it was named after a man called Entingan. Lenggai anak Kaka was elected as the first head man of Kampung Entingan. A community hall called "Dewan Lenggai" and was named after him. He resigned as a headman and was succeeded by his brother Dana anak Kaka. They invited some of their family members and relatives at Munggu Pasu to stay with them at Entingan. As their numbers multiplied, years later, some of the villagers started to open up new areas such as Nangka, Rembus, Plaie and Semawang. This explains why some of the communities of Iban Kua' in all these places are all closely family-related.

### **Narrative 3: Kelambung Api and Other Pioneers**

Another group of Iban Kua' who have stayed at an area called Sampun of Asajaya District for six generations is near to lower Sadong river. It is located approximately 35 kilometres from Samarahan District and many of them have family-relationship with the Iban Kua' in Samarahan up to the west until Lundu. Sampun can be divided into five different villages such as Sampun Tebun, Sampun Jugu, Sampun Gerunggang, Sampun Kelili and Sampun Baru. The

narrative by Sawi anak Nyalat of Sampun Tebun, suggests that they are also the descendant of a chief named Jampang or Kelambung Api who migrated westward from Sebuyau to search for new place and to avoid enemy contact Brooke's arrival. They were attacked and forced to migrate to the present Asajaya District, Samarahan District, Lundu District and also to Selabat near Kuching District.

The people of Sampun area go to Selabat to visit their ancestral land that was given by their great grandparent. They took similar route taken by Luyoh (Gelungan's eighth descendant) who migrated to Selabat near the present Muara Tebas. Interestingly Iban Kua' of Sampun have a historical place called Tamoi. It is a place for some local, especially those who still practicing *adat miring* (offering) to seek for blessings and protection from the *petara* (god) few days before *Gawai* festival. There is also a *lumbong* (tomb) of Jampang who fought against their enemy when they first moved to Sampun. In Iban tradition, only the *bujang berani* (brave bachelor) is eligible to be buried in a *lumbong* rather than a normal *pendam* (graveyard). It was because of his spiritual ability to defend their territory by using his charm, the Iban Kua' of Sampun still live there for the past six generations.

There was a group of Iban searching for a new land for farming during the rule of Sir Charles Brooke (1868 to 1917), like those from Kampung Mangka. According to the headman of Kampung Mangka, Sup anak Bawong, they were originally a group of Ibans from nearby Kampung Sebayor and Kampung Melaban.

During the Japanese occupation that started in 1941, many Chinese traders came to Samarahan area and settled around the present day of Kampung Mangka. Chinese traders had occupied land for planting black pepper and *gambir* (*uncaria rhynchophylla*). It was a lucrative and popular agricultural product during that time. They lived together with the Ibans and Malays.

The establishment of Kampung Mangka started when a Chinese man named Kong See Namka paddled through a small river to sell his agricultural products in Kuching. He passed daily through two Iban longhouses located along the river bank. The residents decided to name the river and the land as Sungai Mangka and Kampung Mangka respectively according to his name (Namka). Until now, there are still local Chinese who had built their modern house in Kampung Mangka. Many of them had lived for years and also married to some Ibans in Kampung Mangka.

There was also an Iban village situated not far from Kampung Rembus near Batang Samarahan. Not much known about this village as there are a few of residents. Back then, they settled at Sungai Keruin close to Kampung Plaie. Their ancestors who first settled here were from Kampung Plaie, Kampung Rembus and also some descendant of Iban Kua' from Lundu who were searching for new land for rice cultivation. Many of them had stayed overnight in a small hut before they built a permanent settlement.

It was named Kampung Sungai Batu (Riverstone) in 1940 by the British. Earlier it was called Kampung Tapang Pugok. It happened when the British docked their small ship at the mouth of Batang Samarahan tributary due to a large stone that blocked their way. This occurred when the tide is low. Eventually, the British decided to wait until the water level is rising.

A few kilometres from Kampung Sungai Batu, there is also a new Iban village called Kampung Jegoi. This village was established in 1993 with only twelve families. They were originally from nearby village such as Rembus, Plaie, Sebayor and Sungai Tanju. Historically, Kampung Jegoi was only a place where peoples planted their paddy. Some of them stay overnight in a small hut as there were no systematic road networks connecting other villages. While people from Sungai Tanju had to travel by boat to get there. As their number multiplied every year, the farmers decided to establish a new village under the leadership of Masa anak Pinki and the village existed until today.

## **Conclusion**

The Sebuyau or Iban Kua' way of tracing their social origin is represented by a succession of ancestral names connected to the origin places. Names such as Gelungan and Sendi as the first ancestors of Sebuyau Iban are the most important form of level of hierarchy, which in order to trace down all the early ancestors and migrational histories. In addition, the riverine areas such as Batang Ai, Batang Lupar, Batang Sadong and Sarawak river plays an important role in the early migration of the Iban as the place for living and for transportation. As discussed in this article, the Iban Kua' settled in Samarahan area since early 1880's. They are descendants of Gelungan and Sendi that migrated through Merakai, Lubok Antu and the other one is Panglima Kala that migrated through Serikin, Bau. They occupied most part of modern Kuching such as Bukit Mata Kuching (Munggu Pasu) in the olden days. Besides, the colonial rule of the British also plays an important role in tracing down the migrational histories of the Iban Kua' in Samarahan. We have to accept the fact that the modern history Sarawak really began with the first landing of James Brooke in 1839. Therefore, it is very crucial for government agencies, historians and academicians to collect and record some more historical event in the Iban Kua' in Samarahan.

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