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The Dynamics of Malay Culture in West Kalimantan in the 20th Century

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Abstract

There are various Malay communities in West Kalimantan, which can be divided into two broad categories: (1) Malay migrants from outside Kalimantan (West Kalimantan) or contemporary Malays and (2) local Malays or native Malays who are considered as indigenous Malays. Contemporary Malays are Malay people who came from various areas in Sumatra, Riau Islands, Malay peninsula, East Malaysia (Sarawak and Sabah States), and Brunei Darussalam. Considered as the earliest settlers of the island, native Malays in West Kalimantan are strongly tied to the Dayak people. Such ties can be defined in terms of horizontal relationships based on kinship and vertical relationships through intermarriage and reproduction. In this perspective, the Malays and the Dayaknese can be considered as close relatives because the native Malays are originally members of Dayak tribe who converted to Islam and regarded themselves as Malays. Malay people are well-known for their strong Islamic identity, as evident in the existence of numerous Malay cultural centers spread across the sultanates in West Kalimantan. The Malays and their culture are still thriving and flourishing amidst the challenges posed by the rapid growth of other cultures residing in their domains. Taking globalization as a prevalent context, it is interesting to examine how the Malays manage to maintain their culture vis-à-vis the dynamics of other people (such as the Dayak people, the Madura people, and other ethnic groups) and to investigate how Malay culture influences other societies and cultures. This paper aims to reconstruct the dynamics of Malay culture in West Kalimantan. This historiographical project is undertaken by applying historical method which consists of several main steps: searching for relevant sources, selecting the sources, interpreting the sources, and reconstructing events as relevant to the main topic. Bibliography consists of local sources, documents, and works of foreign scholars which are relevant to the topic.

Keywords: Dayak, historical method, Malay culture, various Malay communities, West Kalimantan

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Introduction

Background Information

The concept of dynamics originated from a branch of physics which investigates moving objects and forces which generate such movements. In social science, dynamics is defined as the continuous movement of the human society which results in changes in its members' pattern of living.¹ Besides that, this paper also applies the two Indonesian concepts of *budaya* and *kebudayaan* interchangeably.² The word *kebudayaan*, generally translated as 'culture' in English, is derived from the Sanskrit word *buddhayah*, the plural form of *buddhi* which means 'intelligence' or 'reason'. Hence, *kebudaya-an* can be defined as 'things related to intelligence or reason'. However, there is another opinion which regards the word *budaya* as a development of an Indonesian compound word *budi daya*, which means 'the power of reason'.³ This alternative explanation leads to the semantic distinction between *budaya* and *kebudayaan*, with *budaya* taking the role of the 'force of reason' in its triple manifestations of *cipta* (creative mind), *rasa* (sense of taste), and *karsa* (action). However, cultural anthropology does not acknowledge such distinction.⁴ In addition to that, this paper also employs the term 'Malay' to refer to an ethnic group and language native to Sumatra, Malay peninsula, and various areas throughout Southeast Asia.⁵

It is generally agreed that a culture is strongly dependent on its supporting society, so it is also obvious that the Malay society in West Kalimantan owes its existence to the Malay people.⁶ The Malays are considered as an example of civilized society with keen observance of local customs and traditions. Such attitude develops because the Malays consider their culture as part of the totality of their lives, while the culture itself is highly regarded as a manifestation of their creative minds as human beings. The results of such creativity will always be preserved as long as their inventors remain, and they will gradually grow in line with the dynamics of their supporting society. Therefore, as any other world cultures, the Malay culture in West Kalimantan can be examined in terms of seven universal elements of culture, which consist of (1) language, (2) knowledge system, (3) social organization, (4) life-supporting system and technology, (5) economic system, (6) religious system, and (7) arts.⁷

West Kalimantan is one of Indonesian provinces located in Kalimantan Island and has as its capital city Pontianak. Being located precisely at the equator line or the 0° latitude, this city is also nicknamed *Kota Khatulistiwa* or 'the Equator City'. This province is home for various ethnic groups such as the Malays and Dayaknese who are regarded as the earliest settlers of the island. In addition to those two ethnic groups, there are also new settlers such as the Buginese, Javanese, Madurese, Minangkabaus, Sundanese, Bataknese, Chinese,⁸ and others (less than one percent in total). According to the 2000 census, the population in West Kalimantan Province was 4,073,430, which consisted of Dayak people (35%), Malay people (13%), Sambas people (12%), Chinese (9%), Javanese (9%), Kendayans (8%), and others.⁹

The timeframe for this research is limited to the 20th century, during which the Malay culture is most challenged by the influences of diverse other cultures, both the indigenous people of West Kalimantan and new migrants from various regions in Indonesia.

Research Questions

Malay people are well-known for their strong Islamic identity, as evident in the existence of numerous Malay cultural centers spread across the sultanates in West Kalimantan. The Malays and their culture are still thriving and flourishing amidst the challenges posed by the rapid growth of other cultures residing in their domains. This research is conducted to find out whether the Malays are able to preserve their culture vis-à-vis the dynamics of others, such as the Dayaknese, the Madurese, and people from other ethnic groups. It also examines the influences of Malay culture over other societies and cultures throughout the 20th century.

Method

In order to understand the dynamics and influences of the Malay culture in West Kalimantan, this research applies a methodology which is directed towards historiography. First, it involves a bibliographical study by examining and analyzing books, articles, and other works which are relevant to the research. Second, it utilizes local sources, documents, and works of foreign scholars which are related to the research topic. Third, all of the gathered data are further analyzed using the qualitative approach. These steps correspond with historical method which consists of source collection, source selection, interpretation, and reconstruction of event. Its final aim is to reconstruct the dynamics and influences of the Malay culture in West Kalimantan.

The Foundation of the Malay Society

The Migration of Malay People to West Kalimantan

Migration is one of the three basic factors which influence population growth, besides natality and mortality. Regional reviews on migration patterns deserve specific attention because of several reasons: (1) the ever-expanding decentralization (which contributes to greater population density) and unequal distribution of people, (2) the increasing number of factors leading to migration, and (3) the growing trend towards decentralization of development. This phenomenon is greatly enforced by rapid advances in communication and transportation.¹⁰

The oldest evidence of human existence in Kalimantan Island is a *Homo sapiens* skull found in Ambang Barat Gua Besar, Niah, Serawak (East Malaysia). It has been generally accepted that the skull has an absolute age of more than 35,000 years, even though there are still controversies over its actual age. Niah remains a very important prehistoric site because it preserves the longest record of human occupation in Southeast Asia. Originating from the Upper Pleistocene period, the Niah Cave reveals much about the life and culture of Paleolithic humans who managed to develop certain tools to support their daily activities.¹¹

Based on those facts, various researchers have examined the origins of the indigenous people of Kalimantan and the Malay settlers. Some historians such as Van Lijnden, Schwaner, Eari, and van Eerde believe that the indigenous people of Kalimantan actually descended from the Negritos (small Neger people with curly hair) who came from the Philippine archipelago and Sulu Islands. During prehistoric times, the Negritos came to and were wandering the Indonesian archipelago through the Philippines and Sulu before they eventually arrived at an uninhabited island (that is, Kalimantan) and established themselves as the indigenous people of Kalimantan or the Dayak people. Another opinion is offered by Logan, the writer of *Ethnology of Land Archipel*, who states that the indigenous people of Kalimantan are actually the Lao people who came from South Asia (that is, the Indian subcontinent) and Cambodia. Following them were the Annam people, the Hindus, and the Chinese who then settled together in the uninhabited island of Kalimantan. A third opinion comes from Jullus Kögel and du Courret who claim that the indigenous people of Kalimantan are the long-tailed Pari-Ot people. A Chinese historical record from early 7th century (Kao-Tsoe era of the T'ang dynasty) suggested yet another opinion that the Dayaknese actually came from the Chinese.¹²

As an ethnic group, the Malay people are considered as a branch of the Austronesian race. This is a much broader definition compared to the usual conception of the Malays as the native people of Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei Darussalam, and Singapore. The Malay people reside in a big portion of Malaysia, east coast of Sumatra, along the coastal areas of Kalimantan, southern Thailand, Mindanao Island, southern Myanmar, and many small islands which stretch along the Malacca Strait and Karimata Strait. In Indonesia, the Malays dominate the provinces of North Sumatra, Riau, Riau Islands, Jambi, South Sumatra, Bangka-Belitung, and West Kalimantan. Malays are also found in Sri Lanka, Cocos (Keeling) Islands, and South Africa (Cape Malay).

The Malays, who are adherents of Islam, came from Sumatra and the Malay peninsula and then permanently settled in Kalimantan Island; in this way, they pushed the Dayak people, as the island's earlier settlers, to move further inland.¹³ According to Ahmad Jelani Halimi in his book *Sejarah dan Tamadun Bangsa Melayu*, the word Malay does not only refer to the Malay ethnic group, but it also covers a broader range of people, which are known collectively as the Malay race. The Malay race, in a more generic sense, covers all ethnic groups which belong to the Malayo-Polynesian race, especially those who live in Southeast Asia, such as the Buginese from Makassar, Javanese, Sundanese, Ambonese, Balinese, Batakese, Lampungnese, Cambodians,¹⁴ and the Malays themselves.¹⁵

On the other hand, the word *Malayu* (that is, Malay) came to be used as the name of a specific ethnic group and is mostly attached as a predicate to various commodities such as textiles and handicrafts. In terms of trade, there were three Malayan kingdoms which became the centers of maritime trade, which were Patani, Malaka, and Marangkabo (Minangkabau).¹⁶ The Minangkabaus have been often identified as sea traders who eventually came to Sulawesi (or moved from Sumatra), but this stand is controversial since the people from Sumatran highlands who moved to other islands almost invariably assumed the role of merchants and are never known as seafarers. These Malays from Minangkabau were actually merchants from the Melayu Kingdom which flourished in the 14th century. Having Muara Jambi as its capital city and main harbor, this kingdom had overtaken the prominent role of Sriwijaya Kingdom by 1082 and dominated many of the ancient kingdom's trade routes.¹⁷ The mouth of Melayu's commercial route is on the east coast of Sumatra, thus establishing the kingdom's jurisdiction from the mouth (east) to the head (west) of the main river and along the highlands of West Sumatra, with their rich deposits of minerals and gold ore. It was the location in which King Adityawarman founded his new capital in 1347 C.E. Therefore, historically speaking, the name

Marangkabo/Minangkabau does not only refer to the highland people, as it normally does now, but also to the whole citizens of the ancient Melayu Kingdom. In 1377 King Adityawarman was attacked by the great Majapahit Kingdom because he dared to directly send emissaries to the Chinese Emperor without consulting Majapahit as its titular overlord. It is also said that clove was one of the commodities offered to the Emperor, which strongly suggests a trade relationship between Melayu and the Moluccas, most likely via a trade route which passed through South Sulawesi.¹⁸

As a racial group, the Malays can be identified by certain physical characteristics, such as skin color, hair type and color, skull form, cheekbone, and others. This physical-anthropological perspective is used by UNESCO to define the Malays as a broad racial group inhabiting the whole region of Southeast Asia and parts of South Africa, which includes those who are not adherents of Islam. Another conception of Malay as a nation or a cultural nest is called *Melayu Inti* (Nuclear Malays); such conception has been adopted by the Malaysian Association which declares as part of national identity three compulsory characteristics that 'true' Malays must have: (1) speaking Malay as their main language, (2) adhering to Islamic teachings, and (3) observing Malay customs and traditions. As an ethnic group, the word Malay refers to the Malayan people who reside on the east coast of Sumatra, from Riau to Singapore and the State of Johor.¹⁹

The Origin of the Malays

One theory of the origin of the Malays²⁰ maintains that a large group of humans migrated eastwards from mainland Asia through the land of China. When they reached the vast plain of central China, they were divided into two groups. The first group followed the course of rivers flowing northwards from Yalu River and found their way to northern Asia before eventually heading further eastwards and crossing the Bering Strait to North America. This group is believed as the first humans ever setting foot on the American continent which are now collectively known as the American Indians.

The second large Asian group followed the course of rivers which flowed southwards and ended in the South China Sea. From here, they moved further southwards and eventually entered the Indonesian archipelago. Of course this migration was not conducted in only one single journey but rather in smaller and separated journeys broadly classified into two waves. The people who joined the first wave of the second group travelled straight to the archipelago, some of whom eventually arrived at Kalimantan Island around 5000—4000 B.C.E. These first migrants are called the Proto-Malays or Austronesians with Mongoloid traits.²¹ They lived in various coastal areas, straits, rivers, streams, and lakes. Not all of these first-wave migrants went straight to or arrived at Kalimantan; instead, some temporarily stayed or concluded their journey at various places along the great path, such as Vietnam, Cambodia, Myanmar, Thailand, the Philippines, Malaysia, and Sumatra.

The second-wave migrants from Asia were of mixed origin between (a) those who went straight to Kalimantan from mainland Asia between 5000—4000 B.C.E. and (b) those who continued their journey to the final destination, i.e. Kalimantan, from their temporary settlement at the end of the first journey. This took place hundreds and thousands of years after the first wave mentioned earlier. These two mixed strains of the second wave migrants are collectively called the Deutero-Malays, who came to be known as part of the aboriginal population of Kalimantan.

According to the theory of human migration in Asia from Yunnan, Southern China, to Southeast Asia pointed out by Sarasins, several observers of the Kalimantan society categorize the Dayaknese as part of Proto-Malays and the Malays themselves as part of Deutero-Malays. The Proto-Malays migrated to Southeast Asia around 2500—1500 B.C.E. whilst still a megalithic culture, whereas the Deutero-Malays migrated around 1500—300 B.C.E. and had adopted bronze and iron culture, as evident from their living tools which contain both metals.²²

Human migration to and from West Kalimantan proves to be always dynamic, especially if the phenomenon is viewed in relation to the history of West Kalimantan. As any other places throughout Indonesia, West Kalimantan has gone through a long history, which cannot be separated from the general history of the island as a whole. The history of Kalimantan is broadly divided into several eras, based on the most prominent historical event taking place in a particular era, which are (1) the prehistoric era, (2) the Indian influence era (Hindu and Buddhist civilizations), (3) the Islamic era (sultanates), (4) the VOC era, (5) the East-Indies government era, (6) the Japanese occupation era, (7) the National Awakening era, (8) the Revolution era, (9) the Independence era, (10) the National Development era, (11) and the Reform era.²³ Throughout those eras, a huge number of people have migrated to Kalimantan for numerous aspirations: to become permanent settlers or migrant residents, to form colonies, to visit Kalimantan on occasions, and to meet various other purposes.

The Development and Influence of Malay Culture in West Kalimantan

The Malay people in Indonesia and throughout Southeast Asia are deeply affected by the Indian culture in terms of politics, economy, social, and culture. One of the most obvious Indian influences is in politics, which gave rise to great hegemonies in Sumatra (the Buddhist Kingdom of Sriwijaya) and Java (the Hindu Kingdom of Majapahit). According to D. G. E. Hall, before the arrival of Indian culture (in the forms of Hinduism and Buddhism) Indonesia had already developed numerous forms of oral traditions, folk stories, traditional myths, and local legends.²⁴ This fact suggests that the archipelagic (Indonesian and Southeast Asian) people had established their own distinct culture. C. A. Coedes maintains that, when Indonesia (Southeast Asia) encountered the Indian culture, the whole region had already developed its own characteristics in three aspects: material, social, and religious. The material aspect includes (1) rice farming or cultivation with irrigation system, (2) cattle farms, (3) metals tools usage in daily activities, and (4) expertise and skills in navigation. The social aspect includes (1) the prominence of females and matriarchy and (2) local organizations to support the irrigated farming society. The religious aspect includes (1) animism, (2) ancestral worship and the Earth God/Goddess, (3) sacred high places, (4) burial place inside earth jugs or vessels or inside a dolmen, and (5) a mythological system which employs the dualism cosmology and involves natural oppositions: mountain versus ocean, winged creatures versus marine creatures, and highlanders versus lowlanders. In addition to those three aspects, languages also mixed with each other and produced a rich variety of cultures, especially those who settled in coastal areas and along river valleys. Different geographical distribution also created linguistic distinction between inland, highland, and coastal people and generated a complex system of language levels.²⁵

In a similar vein, Krom also accepts the idea of a primordial local culture which had been established far before the arrival of Indian influences. Such hypothesis came as a result of his study of Javanese civilization, which had existed before the Indian influence era. In his study, he adds more items to the list of local cultures already proposed by C. A. Coedes, which are (1) *gamelan* orchestra, (2) *wayang* or shadow puppet performance, and (3) *batik* cloth. These three items were found across vast regions with different cultural patterns. No less important is the fact that the ancient Chinese apparently acknowledged the cultural unity of that region by referring to it as K'un-Lun, a term with ambiguous ethnic boundaries.²⁶ Ancient Chinese manuscripts generally adopts an overgeneralized phrase of 'K'un-Lun people' to refer to all pre-Indian maritime societies in Southeast Asia. These societies had been reported to have a strong maritime association (and certainly more powerful marine navigation techniques²⁷), even before the Chinese of the Yellow River set their first naval voyage.

With regard to the Malays, Bernard Nathofer studied the ancient Malay language in Kalimantan. After examining various lexical shifts and observing the high diversity of Malay languages in the western part of Borneo Island (now Kalimantan), he concluded that Western Borneo is the original place from which ancient Malay languages are spread to Bangka Island, Sumatra Island, Malayan peninsula, Formosa Island (Taiwan), Batavia (Betawi), and all over the Malay world (Nathofer 1996). Nathofer's theory is supported by James T. Collins (1995) who further claims that, prior to the first migration of the Proto- and Deutero-Malays, there had been people in Kalimantan Island who spoke ancient Malay languages.²⁸

Most of the Dayak people who have embraced Islam no longer consider themselves as Dayaknese; instead, they prefer to be called Malays²⁹, Pontianaks, Banjarese, Kutainese, and so on. Meanwhile, the Dayaknese who refused being converted to Islam moved further inwards by following the course of rivers, most of whom found residence in Central Kalimantan, in areas such as Kayu Tangi, Amuntai, Margasari, Watang Amandit, Labuan Amas, and Watang Balangan, while some others were forced to enter the forests. Most of Moslem Dayaknese live in South Kalimantan and parts of Kotawaringin, Kutai, Pontianak, and other cities.³⁰

According to a West Kalimantan folk tale, the primordial people first founded their settlements near the sea or near the Kapuas River, but new immigrants then overcame them and, due to various factors, the indigenous people were then forced to move upstream. This migration gave rise to the phrase *Orang Dayak* which means the 'Upstream People' in their own language. The word Dayak was initially coined to distinguish themselves from the 'outsiders', who characteristically associated themselves with their own places of origin: the Malay people, the Bugis people, the Java people, the Madura people, the Chinese people, and so on. These new settlers in turn called the indigenous people *Daya* or *Dayak*, thus increasing the term's popularity. When the Europeans came, they used the term in their manuscripts, resulting in phrases such as *Dayak tribe* or *Dayak languages*. Likewise, the Dayak people call all new settlers as *Orang Laut* (Sea People).³¹

The second largest ethnic group in Kalimantan after the Dayaknese is the Malays, who generally live separately from the Dayaknese due to differences in religion, social customs, and general way of life. The Malay ethnic group is basically comprised of those who came from the Malayan

peninsula and established settlements in coastal areas and near great rivers previously inhabited by the indigenous Dayaknese.

The arrival of foreign people from the Malayan peninsula inevitably forced indigenous people to gradually move to the interior. Then the new ethnic groups, including the Malays, established themselves as permanent settlers of regions left by the Dayaknese. Adherents of Islam, they are determined to live by their own customs, culture, and religion carried from their native land, with no desire to adopt native ways of life. They even moved further to build several small settlements on the heads of great rivers. The indigenous people now gradually became absorbed in the new ways of life brought by the new settlers; some of them even converted to Islam, a process which is termed *masuk melayu* (entering the Malay) or *turun melayu* (down to the Malay). When asked about their ancestry, they would generally dissociate themselves from the Dayaknese and declare themselves as 'True Malays' instead. This shift is partly attributed to an assumption that becoming Malay is identical to social advancement. Salato in his book *Hornbill and Dragon* reports that almost 90% of Malay people in Kalimantan are actually Dayak converts.³²

The new settlers, especially the Malays, are not only concentrated in one place, but rather in almost all coastal regions around Kalimantan. They appear to be great in number, but their population are actually less than that of the Dayaknese. There are several ways to distinguish between the Dayaknese and the Malays, one of which is by observing their ways of clothing. Malay females tend to wear *sarong* and *kebaya* shirt and live in raised large family houses. In some places, especially on riversides, the Malays usually live in floating houses called *rumah lanting*. The Malays generally live in coastal or urban areas such as Sambas, Mempawah, Pontianak, Ngabang, and Sanggau. Their houses usually reveal that *they work as fishermen or merchants*.

It is important to note that the arrival of the Malays also initiated the infusion of Islam into Kalimantan, which was marked by the establishment of Islamic kingdoms (sultanates) throughout Kalimantan such as the Kingdoms of Banjarmasin, Kotawaringin, Pontianak, Kutai, and so on. The sultans invariably accumulate wealth from trades, in addition to other businesses. Evidence of Moslem kingdoms in Kalimantan can be found in numerous forms of heritage, such as palaces, mosques, and sultans' burial places which are still preserved until this present time.

In addition to the Malays, there are also the Buginese and the Makassarese who settle on the East and West coasts of Kalimantan and the Javanese who have migrated there ever since the Majapahit era. The Chinese soon established their communities in the western part of Kalimantan. It is also interesting to note that some of the Malays living on Kalimantan coasts are actually the descendants of Hindu-Javanese migrants from Majapahit, while the 'true' Malays are those who came from Riau and the Malayan peninsula in a much later period.³³

The arrival of Dutch and British people has also contributed to a gradual but significant shift in the roles of Malay sultanates in Kalimantan, such as Sambas, Mempawah, Landak, Pontianak, Kubu, Sukadana, Simpang, Matan, Tayan, Meliau, Sanggau, Sekadau, Sintang, Silat, Selimbau, and Bunut. Several of those Malay kingdoms became centers of Islamic preaching and encouraged the growth of Malay culture within their respective regions. The Dutch, in addition to deploying the 'divide et impera' tactic to break those states, also sent their high officials from Batavia to demand the Malay kings in West Borneo to sign a political treaty entitled "Overlordship Acknowledgment Contract" or *Contract tot erkenning van heerschappi* as written on its original manuscript. The political treaty required the Malay kings throughout West Kalimantan to adjust their kingdoms' government and administration systems to those dictated by the Governor General of East Indies in Batavia. The treaty also included obligations to raise the Dutch Royal Standard atop all palaces and to accept Dutch colonial government's high officials as advisors to the Malay kings in governmental affairs. Political bond with the Dutch colonial government was then augmented by the *Korte verklaring* treaty, in which the Dutch government recognized the existence of any Malay kingdom only after the king had signed a preliminary treaty declaring his dominion as part of the administrative region of the Dutch colonial government centered in Batavia.

In terms of culture, the Malay people in West Kalimantan can be divided into two large communities: coastal community and inland community. The Malay coastal community consists of Sambas, Mempawah, Landak, Pontianak, Sukadana, and Matan/Ketapang Malays; whereas the Malay inland community consists of Sanggau, Sekadau, Sintang, Melawi, and Kapuas Hulu/Ulu Kapuas Malays. Various Malay communities in Kalimantan can be distinguished by various characteristics: local dialects, oral folk tales, customs, marriage ceremony, healing ceremony, shamanism practices, forms of address, names of spirits, and traditional government and leadership system.

Some studies examining the development of Malay culture in West Kalimantan tend to make no distinction between cultural shifts which occur in the coastal community and those which occur in the inland community. Such overgeneralization clearly does not do justice to the complexity of cultural

transformations taking place among Malay people in both communities. Those living in coastal areas are more open to contacts with the outside world and to accept modern influences and technological advances than those living in the hinterland, who lead a relatively less sophisticated life. Consequently, cultural transformations in the inland community occur more slowly than those occurring in the coastal areas.

Careful observation of Malay culture in West Kalimantan shows that, despite the incorporation of many aspects of modern culture into Malay life, some ancient cultural elements which do not conflict with newer cultural elements are still preserved, resulting in unique acculturation. It is also interesting to note that, even though the Malay communities in West Kalimantan have adopted Islamic teachings as their basic cultural identity since 15th century, evidence suggests that some mixture between the Malay culture proper and some ancient elements of Hinduism and animism is still prevalent.

Conclusion

There are various Malay people living in West Kalimantan, who can be divided into two broad categories: (1) new Malay settlers from outside Kalimantan (West Kalimantan) or contemporary Malays and (2) native Malays or true Malays or indigenous Malays, as they are more commonly called. Contemporary Malays are those who came from Malay regions in Sumatra, Riau Islands, Malay peninsula, East Malaysia (Sarawak and Sabah), and Brunei Darussalam. The native Malays in Kalimantan (West Kalimantan), who are part of the earliest settlers of the island, are closely tied to the Dayaknese. Such ties are mostly defined as horizontal relationships based on kinship and vertical relationships through intermarriage and reproduction. In this perspective, the Malays and the Dayaknese can be considered as close relatives because the native Malays are simply members of Dayak tribe who converted to Islam

.Following their establishment in the 16th through the 17th centuries, Malay sultanates in West Kalimantan quickly became centers of Islamic preaching, which helped establish an image of Malay people as an Islamic society. Throughout the 20th century, the Malays and their culture are thriving and growing amidst the influences of other cultures surrounding them. Faced with this new development, the Malays are relatively open to absorbing new cultural elements, while maintaining ancient customs which do not run counter to the newer ones, resulting in acculturation. Even though Islamic elements have become an inseparable part of the Malay culture, evidence suggests that some mixture between the Malay culture proper and some ancient elements of Hinduism and animism is still prevalent.

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