with the other denominations such as the Anglicans, Catholics and Methodists, and also with other religions particularly the Moslems.
Chapter 2
Social Relations In Sarawak

2.1. Introduction

The discussion in this chapter attempts to show that headhunting and warfare have affected social relations in Sarawak. It also seeks to analyse the distinctions made between different types of headhunting among the people of this region, particularly the Iban, before and during Brooke rule. Although the distinctions may not be entirely clear cut, the involvement of the Brooke rulers (1841-1941) in people's affairs in Sarawak to a certain extent changed the pattern of headhunting. As a result, it also influenced patterns of social relations in Sarawak.

2.2. Inter-group Relations in Sarawak

Before the great peace-making, held in 1924 at Kapit, mid-way up the Rajang River in the most central of Sarawak, which brought together native chiefs from all over the region, warfare and headhunting activities were recognised as central problems, not only amongst the people in Sarawak, but also by the Brooke rulers. In terms of headhunting and warfare, the Iban were generally described as the most notorious group in Borneo, particularly in Sarawak.

Headhunting and head-taking carried out by most societies in Sarawak was associated with the traditional belief system and practices. Several accounts reported that taking heads was associated with certain positive benefits that
accrued to the whole group, in terms of status improvement, better health, or release from mourning. In many headhunting societies, any head would do — and the most frequent victims were older people, pregnant women, and children because they provided easy prey (Freeman 1970, Rousseau, quoted from Hoskins 1996:12-13). However, a closer analysis reveals the alliance of Ibans with the Malays and the Brooke government in which they served as the fighting force resulted in raidings that were manipulated to suit certain needs of both the Malays and Brooke Government.

2.2.1. The Traditional Purposes of Headhunting

The most common reasons for head-taking, as surveyed by Maxwell (1992:52) in his study of the headhunting of 23 Borneo groups, were: to suspend mourning for important men; to impress a potential bride; to display one’s honour and prowess; to prevent sickness or famine; to promote better crops; and to even the score in feuding. Reasons which were less common were: to mark an initiation into manhood; to increase the fertility of village women; to gather slaves for the afterworld; and to make amends for adultery (quoted from Hoskins 1996:14). In many headhunting societies in Sarawak, the cult of the head has an intimate relationship with the promotion of human fertility, well-being and bountiful harvests (King 1993:236). For example, among the hierarchical groups such as the Kayan, Kenyah or Kelabit heads were regarded as a contribution to group welfare to ensure prosperity and fertility (Morgan 1994:151). The females would joyfully welcome their menfolk and the severed heads back to the village and receive them in ceremony and dancing. The successful Kayan and Kenyah headhunters might wear the carved casque of the helmeted hornbill on their headdresses (King 1993:239).
It should be noted that the hierarchical groups also took captives during the headhunting expeditions and made them slaves of the aristocrats. The slaves were sometimes killed in funeral rites for prominent aristocratic villagers, or at the commencement of the construction of new longhouses, when the first support-posts of the aristocratic chief’s compartment were erected (King 1993:240).

Unlike the more hierarchical groups, the Iban regarded heads as valuable personal property, and the aim of headhunting was always individual, whether a man went alone, or as part of an expedition. For individuals, the reasons for headhunting probably related to eligibility of marriage, or to be released from debt (Freeman 1970, quoted from Hoskins 1996:13). The success of headhunting and head-taking was marked by special motifs tattooed on the hands of the hunters (King 1993:239), and an ascending sequence of renown-building rituals for the greatest warriors (Hoskins 1996:5). Among the Ibans, the value of the head to its taker was elaborately made public in ritual festivals, the prestigious Gawai. Only a man who had taken a head in war would drink the most sacred wine or touch the offering of Gawai Burong or Gawai Antu. The honour of hosting a feast was also strictly based on personal merit (Sandin 1961:171, quoted from Morgan 1994:148).

On the other hand, it is worth noting, as King (1993:240) has mentioned, that in societies with a slave class, there appears to have been less head taking, since the various rituals of human sacrifice provided an alternative. Among the egalitarian Iban who were generally without slaves (despite reports that the
Iban also took prisoners\(^\text{17}\) Hoskins 1996:5), they were eagerly sought after\(^\text{18}\). It is hardly surprising, therefore, to find that the Iban were described as "the most famously predatory group in Southeast Asia" (Hoskins 1996:5), particularly in Sarawak. The Iban were most noted by observers; leading to a corresponding number of theories and analyses pertaining to headhunting and warfare among the Iban. For instance, Vayda (1969) has interpreted the frequent headhunting raids of the Iban as a form of predation motivated by the need for territorial expansion that emphasized the importance of ecological determination. According to Hoskins (1996:5), this "need" was constructed out of social and political circumstances that cannot be understood as purely "ecological". King (1976:319) has criticised both Wagner's (1972) and Vayda's purely ecological analysis, or the ecologically based explanation that emphasised the role of economic competition for basic resources in survival. King disputes Vayda's and Wagner's analyses for "not considering cultural values more fully". He (1976:319) notes that "one of the inevitable conclusions is that analyses of migration and warfare must give due recognition to the values and beliefs of the society in question". According to him the cultural values need to be given an equal weight alongside the ecological factors. For example, Hallpike's (1974) analysis draws attention to the significance of such things as the quest for prestige and power in human society, and presented his arguments in terms of the importance of human nature in aggression (Hallpike 1974:459, quoted from King 1976:319).

\(^{17}\) So far, in the literature only mentioned that the Iban took captives but it has not emphasised that the captives became slaves but the captives were ritually enfranchised and adopted into the household (see Freeman 1981:47).

In contrast, Morgan (1968) gives special attention to external factors, for example, the contact with Malays, and the peculiar tendency for northward migration of Bornean peoples. However, her general conclusion is that the expansion of the Iban varied over time and space. Yet, this too, has been criticised by Brown (1979:16) as being overly complex and undefined. Finally, Pringle (1970:35-6) argues that the dynamic character of the Iban resulted from their experience of moving into the “frontier” area. He asserts that the area they moved into, and the peoples they successfully opposed, were favourable to the development of hunting and the pioneering of vast tracts of virgin forest, which became suitable for shifting agriculture (quoted from Brown 1979:16).

Regardless of the assumptions and explanations that have been discussed above, observers have failed to distinguish headhunting during pre-Brooke’s rule, and Iban headhunting during the Brooke’s rule. I believe that headhunting among the Iban shaped inter-groups relation in Sarawak. Firstly, because the Iban took heads more than any other groups (the nomadic and the hierarchical groups) in Sarawak due to the absence of the slave class among the Iban. Secondly, because the Iban were perceived as an enemy by almost every other group in Sarawak.

2.2.2. Social Relations as a Result of Headhunting

Although Iban headhunting has been interpreted by observers as resulting in certain positive social interaction, for instance, ‘culture assimilation’ (McKinley 1978), or as resulting in civil interaction afterwards (King 1976), I contend that relations between the Ibans and other groups were based solely on
hostility. Any civil interaction between the Ibans and other groups was due solely to economic interest.

King (1976) has stressed ‘absorption’ and other more peaceful aspects of Iban contacts with non-Iban populations. He claims that the focus on warfare has led to a neglect of other aspects of inter-group relations such as alliances, inter-marriage, trade and processes of absorption (King 1976:320-321). He shows that the Iban who moved in to farm virgin forests along rivers already occupied by the Maloh people of Indonesia, who farm secondary forest or else irrigated fields, fostered a friendly relationship with their host. In fact, in the process of contact the Maloh adopted many Iban customs. King mentions that the Iban who lived in close proximity with the Maloh did not engage in raiding against them (King 1976:323). However, this does not mean that these Iban did not raid other groups. According to Sandin (1961), most Iban groups made sure they did have enemies because pioneering, individual status seeking led to expansion (Sandin 1961:171). Each individual’s drive to attain prestige involved the group in sharp conflict with other groups (Pringle 1970:37, quoted from Morgan 1968:149). This may support King’s (1976:323) comment on the distant Iban who raided the Maloh “for heads, and sometimes revenge, not for territorial conquest”.

The fact that Iban migration was associated with raiding and headhunting does not mean that relations with other peoples were characterised solely by hostility (King 1976:308). However, what proof exists of relations formed by the Iban other than raiding and headhunting? As King has commented, the early Iban migrations reveal little definitive information about their contact with the Maloh (King 1975a, 1975b, 1976:321). This provides the basis for the
supposition that the peaceful relations of the Iban-Maloh were based on economic interests. Given that the Iban were an aggressive and combative sort of people (see Pringle 1970:21), there must be specific reasons for the formation of a peaceful relationship with the Maloh. Even King emphasises earlier in his analysis of Iban-Maloh relations that “what should be borne in mind is that specific details of Iban-Maloh contact in this region may not necessarily have general applicability to Iban contact with other peoples (King 1976:308).

Apparently, in the past, the Maloh were widely known for their skills in working precious metals, including various gold, silver and copper adornments such as earrings, bracelets and belts for the Iban population (Harrisson 1965:237, King 1972:89, 98, 1973a:37-8, quoted from King 1976:321). In return for Maloh articles the Iban traded woven blankets, skirts and jackets. Metal-working skills meant that itinerant Maloh smiths were welcomed by the Iban, and the smiths usually established ties with certain longhouses. The smiths always returned there, and it has been reported that the smiths even married the Iban women. Thus, ties of friendship and kinship were sometimes formed through trade (King 1976:321). Moreover, I contend such alliances and intermarriages were designed to secure future trade relations. The Iban were likely to perceive the importance of maintaining trade relations with the Maloh smiths because they themselves consumed a great deal of silver. As King (1988:29) notes, of all the native non-Muslim groups of Borneo, it is probably the Iban who have been depicted as wearing adornments of silver. Furthermore, due to the close contact with the Iban through trade activities, the Maloh smiths became very familiar with Iban decorative motifs19 (King

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19 The Iban motif is different to that of the Kayans, Kenyahs and Kelabits. The Iban motifs tend to be blockier and heavier, with few sharp edges and details, while the Kayans, Kenyahs and Kelabits
1988:40), and this could be what attracted the Ibans to the Maloh smiths rather than the Chinese or Malays.

Apart from the example of the Iban-Maloh relations, in his analysis King also asserts that “culture contact” occurred as a result of Iban headhunting in and penetration to other regions, particularly between the Iban and the Bukitan. In King’s view, this is a positive result of warfare, and he notes that “if one takes Freeman’s discussion of Iban penetration of the Rejang then it is obvious that warfare was by no means the only expression of culture contact” (King 1976:321). According to King, Freeman’s description of the relationships between the Iban and the Bukitan was “symbiotic in character”. The Bukitan, whose ancestral territory was the Rejang, acted as guides and allies to the more technically numerous and more accomplished Iban warriors. Ultimately, the Bukitan lived in longhouses of their own making (Freeman 1970:134, quoted from King 1976:321).

I cannot give a definitive explanation as to why the culture contact only occurred as a result of warfare, and not through civil interaction. It seems that cultural attitudes led to hostility, whilst other factors sometimes brought about friendlier relations at a later date. In fact, the Bukitan formed a “nervous alliance with the Ibans” and used their expert familiarity with the lands they had owned, to help the Iban fight other nomadic groups, such as the Seru, Punan and to combat other hindrances to Iban migration. However, this “friendship” actually resulted in the ownership of Bukitan by the Iban chiefs, who traded them around like hunting dogs (Sandin 1967, quoted from Morgan 1968:150).

motifs is described as “graceful and well-proportioned with great attention given to the detail with common spiral and intertwining motifs (Zainie 1969:25, quoted from King 1988:40).
The Bukitan who were under the Iban's control did not have any other alternative than to adopt the religion and customs of the Iban. Probably, as it has been suggested by Pringle, some of the early spread of Iban ideology could be due to the conversion (by force) of various nomads who had in this manner come to “masok Iban” (my emphasis, quoted from Morgan 1968:151), meaning to become an Iban, which I would view as a result of warfare.

To a certain extent I contend that the nature of Iban relations with other groups during pre-Brooke rule was based on economics. But if there was no potential to form trade relations, interactions were largely confined to raiding. It seems that Iban had trade relations with a limited number of groups (probably only with the Malays, Chinese and Maloh). Moreover, it appears that there was no traditional Iban concept of tribal unity (King 1976:311). In Sandin's (1967:81-9) ethno-historical account, some evidence was provided to demonstrate that in one river warring factions did appear. Pringle (1970:51) sees Iban aggression largely in the context of prestige and status seeking. According to Pringle (1970:62), “foreign relations in the Iban country were largely a matter of raiding, including both indiscriminate raiding and retaliatory raiding between old, established enemies”. Undoubtedly, to raid other groups was an advantage to the Ibans because it increased their individual prestige. This affected relations not only with other ethnic groups but among the Iban groups as well.

The most constant or spectacular period of Iban expansion (and warfare) occurred when the Iban came into contact with coastal Malays, and later with the Brooke regime of Sarawak (Brown 1979:16). The Iban alliance with both the Malays and the Brooke regime does not correlate with any of the
explanations suggested earlier. Furthermore, as Pringle (1970:21) has noted, the question of why the Iban engaged in headhunting cannot yet be fully answered anyway. For this reason, it is important to scrutinise the involvement of the Malays, and later, the Brooke rulers with the Iban’s headhunting activities. I argue that the contact and the alliance of the Iban with the Malays and Brooke rulers influenced inter-group relations in the wider Sarawak context.

2.2.3. The Iban-Malay Alliance (Before the Brooke Rule).

The pre-Brooke relationship between the Iban and the Malays developed into something quite different after the new government came into power. As the Iban moved down towards the lower waters of the rivers in the mid-eighteenth century, they came into contact with the Malays. Thus, the Iban and Malays were intermingled in the lower reaches of all the rivers in the Iban country. The involvement of the Iban with the coastal Malays was also partly developed through the important exchange of Malay salted fish and salt for the Iban rice. Later, this trade gave rise to a political relationship between the Moslem Malays and the animist Iban. On each of the various rivers of the Iban country there was always at least one Moslem chief who conceived of himself as the ruler of the entire river (Pringle 1970:62). The Malays attempted to collect an annual rice tax from every Iban family, by acting in the name of the Sultan of Brunei (Pringle 1970:63). As salt was an important item among the Iban, they were willing to make “peace with one petty Malay chief for the

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20 Brookes later regarded this tax as traditional, and collected it throughout the Iban settlements themselves (Pringle 1970:63).
purpose of obtaining salt” (Pringle 1970:64). The Malays used this opportunity to exploit the salt trade for political ends.

In terms of political power, the Malay chief in the Iban country depended largely on his ability to rally the Iban to fight on his behalf (Pringle 1970:62). The Malay chiefs regarded themselves as both rulers and traders, but in the absence of all political security, trade was threatened. The chiefs condoned headhunting raids and did their uncertain best to manipulate the headhunters to their own advantage. According to Criswell (1994:9), at the time the Ibans came into close contact with the Malays in the mid-eighteenth century, the power of the Sultanate of Brunei was on the wane. A major factor was the disruption of the commercial economy of South East Asia caused by the intervention of European traders and their governments. To maintain their income, the Malay chiefs involved in piracy recruited the Ibans for the marauding trips to the northern Bornean coast. The raids were not a direct threat to the European commerce, but as the attacks on the coastal and riverine settlements of other native people were constant, the trade was retarded.

Apart from these attacks, the Iban of Skrang, in alliance with local Malays and with the Saribas people, had undertaken raids against the Land Dayak, Melanau, the Balau and Sebuyau Iban of Banting, and the First Division (Pringle 1970:92). For the Iban, the raids were a novel manifestation of their love of war, heads and travel; while to the Malays, raids substituted for their previous income (Pringle 1970, Criswell 1994). In this sense, it seems that the Iban and Malays depended upon each other. However, although the Malay chiefs and their Iban followers together raided other native groups, they actually formed an “uneasy alliance” (Criswell 1994:9). The Iban were too
independent to become the Malay chiefs’ serfs and could only be persuaded to do what pleased them (Pringle 1970:65, Criswell 1994:9). In fact, as Pringle reports (1970), the Iban were independent enough to raid other groups without the Malay.

Since the very beginning of contact between the Iban and Malay, economic motives obviously underlay their relationship. The Malays seem to have been rather more demanding than the Iban as their purpose also extended to using the Iban for their political interests. The Malays clearly conceived of themselves not only as traders, but as rulers and warrior chiefs as well (see Pringle 1970:65).

However, in a certain sense, the Iban were also taking advantage of their alliance with the Malay. Pringle comments that “it was the peculiar Iban bejalai which led the Iban into the habit of coastal raiding in the first place” (Pringle 1970:67), I suggest that the Iban also shared in whatever the Malay accumulated from the raiding. As Freeman (1955:74) describes it, the Iban bejalai was “for material profit and social prestige”. Prosperity, as Pringle (1970:24) reports, was always reckoned in terms of possession of heirlooms, either old ceramic jars of Chinese origin or Brunei brassware, the acquisition of which symbolised both wealth and good reputation. Accordingly, I assume that the Iban only agreed to cooperate with the Malay if the activities involved also resulted in material profit. Of course, it is probable that prior to the alliance with the Malays, the purpose of the Iban’s warfare was not simply head-takings, but also the accumulation of wealth. The Iban did not foster ‘friendly relationships’ with other groups, such as the Land Dayak, Kayan, Kenyah, and Melanau, nor with the nomadic groups, particularly the Bukitan,
Seru and Kanowit. Thus, the alliance with the Malays may have driven the Iban to undertake much more serious raids towards these groups, and led to a worsening of relations. However, this situation changed when the Brooke Government came into power.

2.2.4. Iban’s Alliance with Brooke Rulers: The impact on Inter-group Relations

Many reports have suggested headhunting, warfare, and feuding activities have been manipulated, that “the enmity between these widely separated people was certainly a result, not of traditional feuds but of Raja Charles policy of using Iban [sic] to kill Iban [sic] ” (Criswell 1994:52). To a certain extent, this statement is likely true, but Iban warfare with the Brooke alliance also united Iban groups who had previously experienced strained relations. Prior to the Brooke Government, the pattern of Iban warfare is undetermined. As Pringle (1970:62) has suggested, to the extent that there were any patterns to constant warfare, it was a pattern of conflict between different river systems or segments of river systems - not just only between different ethnic groups. Political loyalties were geographical, not cultural. For instance, the Malays and Iban of Banting fought together against the Malays and Iban of Saribas. According to Pringle, there is no evidence which suggests that a pagan warrior valued a head of a Moslem, or of a pagan who spoke a different language, any more than that of a man whose culture was very similar to his own (Pringle 1970:62).

Such aggressive behaviour inevitably brought the Iban into conflict with the Brooke rulers. The Iban unique addiction to warfare and migration made them
a cause of political concern from the moment that James Brooke\footnote{James Brooke was the first ‘White Rajah’. He declared himself as the Rajah in September 1841.} first set foot in the Kuching area in 1839 (Pringle 1970:321). James Brooke pioneered the use of Iban as allies, and especially of the Balaus and Sebuyaus Iban, who had long been at war with the stronger, ‘piratical’ Iban who were allied with the Malays of the Second Division. James Brooke established a fort at Skrang and placed an English officer there. This changed the pattern of warfare leadership among the Iban who used to raid with Malay leadership against the non-Iban of neighbouring coastal areas. The pattern of hostilities was also changed because under the Brooke ruler, the Skrang Iban began to attack upriver Iban (Pringle 1970:92). This was followed by the isolation of the ‘pirate’ Iban from Malay leadership who denied them access to the sea. In accomplishing this task, Charles Brooke, the next Rajah, rallied large numbers of down river Iban who had been the ‘pirates’ of the previous decade to oppose the upriver people.

The two most important river systems where the Rajah came into contact with large upriver Iban populations experienced quite different problems. At Batang Lupar, a long established tradition of hostility existed between the upriver Iban and various neighbours, including the Iban of the lower Batang Lupar, largely as a result of traditional headhunting. The Rajah was primarily concerned with ending inter-Iban hostilities, and preventing border disturbances that would upset the Dutch at Dutch Borneo (Kalimantan). At Upper Rajang, the Iban were migrating into a thinly settled region at the expense of less numerous and less aggressive tribes. Instead of fighting with each other as they tended to do in the Second Division, the Iban took both the heads and the land of the non-Iban. Hence, the Rajah wanted first and foremost to curb migration, both to
protect the non-Iban people and to keep the migrants from spreading beyond hope of control (Pringle 1970:237).

The tactics that the Rajah employed in times of trouble were the same in both areas. The Rajah sent the down river Iban to fight the upriver Ibans, as he had learnt to do this in his earlier years at Skrang Fort. The Rajah remained convinced that “Only Dayak [sic] can attack Dayak [sic] to make them feel in any way a punishment” (Pringle 1970:237). However, this resulted only in more aggressive inter-tribal warfare. The Iban of the Brooke fighting force took the opportunity to attack other people as well as their official targets.

Indeed, the use of the Iban irregular allies tended to create as many problems as it solved. The Brooke government could not control such forces, who were forever purposely attacking the wrong people in the wrong places. A prime example is the incident of the “Great Kayan Expedition” in 1863. The expedition was held because of the complaints of the Iban migrants from Batang Lumar at Katibas regarding Kayan raids. Actually, the expansion of the Ibans into this area had already brought the Iban into conflict with the upriver Rajang Melanau and Kayan. Due to the lack of knowledge about the Kayan, Charles Brooke was willing to believe the Iban’s stories of Kayan treachery and cruelty without considering whether the migrating Iban might not be the real aggressor. The expedition consisted of about 15,000 men, and the Iban of the Second and the Third Division made up the great majority of the warriors.

During the expedition, the Iban never came in contact with a genuine Kayan,

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22 Only after the “Great Kayan Expedition” the Kayans and Kenyals as they live at the same river system, were known to the Brooke government.
23 “The expedition penetrated over 200 miles upriver, above the Pelagus and Bakun Rapids, and Long Linau above Belaga, into an area which had been visited by only two Europeans previously; Robert Burns was the first European to visit the Rajang Kayans, in 1847; see his “The Kayans of the North-West of Borneo”. Henry Steele was apparently the second, in about 1852: Keppel, *Mesander, II* (Pringle 1970:131).
but they killed and caused destruction amongst the scattered upriver Melanau communities, proving quite uncontrollable (Pringle 1970:131). As a result, Charles soon regarded the Iban as enemies, because the Iban were willing enough to take heads under the command of the Brooke government, but unwilling to stop when told to do so. Thus, Charles Brooke felt obliged to send a series of expeditions into the Katibas after 1868 to punish the Iban.

From this, as well as other various example of events that involved the Iban, I believe that Iban warfare and feuds were the fundamental reasons for hostile relations between groups in Sarawak. Primarily, the Iban ‘addiction’ to warfare, and thus, their willingness to fight for the Brooke government, provided an opportunity for Iban to legitimately raid, plunder and headhunt indiscriminately against other groups. Secondly, based on the available literature, it seems that the Iban (and probably other tribes too) did not have any ethnic awareness until the Brooke rulers united both the “pirate” Iban, and the other Iban as the government fighting force. If the Iban had ethnic awareness before the Brooke rule, they would almost certainly not fought and become enemies. Furthermore, because of the absence of ethnic awareness, it appears that there was no traditional concept of tribal unity, (as King (1976) suggested, see also Sandin 1967) among the Iban. Therefore, it is quite impossible to assume that the Iban would ever have established civil relations with other non-Iban (excluding Iban-Malay and Iban-Maloh relations) because of the Iban headhunting ‘addiction’.

The strategy that Brooke rulers employed to end the warfare, particularly between Iban and other groups, can be viewed as successful. The peacemaking in 1924 at Kapit brought together the chiefs of all tribes in Sarawak. It was an
indication that hostile inter-group relations had more or less ended, although “hostile inter-relation” before the peacemaking referred only to raiding and headhunting. The peacemaking, therefore, did not end the mutual suspicion between groups.

The presence of the Brooke government brought immediate changes in the Malay-Iban relationship, particularly in the Second Division where they lived intermingled with each other, and formed alliances for raiding against other groups. The Malays gathered around the new forts, sometimes at the direct bidding of the government, and old style mixed settlements slowly vanished (Pringle 1970:285). Moreover, Brooke rulers created a new kind of inter-group relation between the Iban, Malays and other groups, particularly the migrant Chinese. From the beginning of his rule, the Rajah welcomed the Chinese to Sarawak, realising that a Chinese population was the surest key to economic self-sufficiency24 (Pringle 1970:105).

The Chinese were traders (even though some of them who arrived at the Second Division were predominantly farmers), and their arrival undermined the Malays’ role as traders among the native people. The traditional Malay traders could not easily survive in competition with the Chinese who maintained permanent shops, and who understood and used cash. Furthermore, the kind of trading which the Malays had traditionally carried on among the native people did not seem to the Rajah to be worth encouraging. The Malays conducted their business through barter and peddled up and down river to the

24 There was also a rebellion among the Chinese, particularly the Hakka gold-miners, concentrated around Bau on the upper Sarawak river. They maintained a close ties with the Chinese in Sambas at Kalimantan. The relation among both Chinese remained close even though the Dutch at Kalimantan defeated the Sambas Chinese in the ‘Kongsi Wars’ of 1853-4. The Chinese in Bau were the most reluctant to accept any directive from the Brooke government, thus there was a continual friction between them and James Brooke (Pringle 1970:105).
native settlements (Pringle 1970:286). Hence, the Iban and Melanau dealt with the Chinese traders, probably because the Chinese were more “sophisticated” and willing to give them credit. While the Malay trade waned slowly, it never entirely disappeared. Malay peddlers continued to serve as the middlemen between the bazaar Chinese and the people of the interior. For instance, the Malays of the Krian and Saribas still actively traded salt fish both into the interior and up and down the coast (Bailey 1897:4972). The Malay peddlers also remained an important source for the Iban to obtain old jars of Chinese origin, as well as magic charms. However, the charm selling was considered a criminal activity, and any Malay caught indulging in this kind of enterprise was automatically punished (Pringle 1970:288). The Chinese soon established a more effective trade relation with the Iban. In the Second Division, for instance, the Chinese conducted their trade in two ways: the Iban made periodic visits to the bazaars where the Chinese were located; while the Chinese traveled upriver in floating shops, stopping at longhouses.

The trade activities created a way to encourage inter-group relations in Sarawak. Although the Malay peddlers did not have well established businesses like the Chinese, they became important in the long distance relationship between the natives of the interior and the Chinese traders by acting as the middleman. The more the Chinese depended on jungle produce, the more anxious they were for a large and friendly native population.

The Chinese-Iban relationship was not entirely harmonious, apparently because the Chinese sometimes cheated their customers by using rigged scales to weigh jungle produce. Furthermore, the early outstation Chinese were often