

## The Uses of *Balau* Among the Melanau Community Especially in The Traditional Healing Rituals

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### ABSTRACT

Indigenous Knowledge is defined by UNESCO as the understandings, skills and philosophies that is formed by communities through a continuous interaction between the natural surroundings with its people. The traditions and customs of indigenous knowledge particularly traditional healing rituals within the Melanau community are being forgotten as they are less practice nowadays. *Balau* or scientifically known as *mextroxylon sagu* is a plant that is closely related to the traditional healing practice and the way of life of the Melanau community. The objectives of the paper are: to identify the uses of *balau* among the Melanau community and to analyse the types and practices of Melanau traditional healing rituals. This paper uses a qualitative approach which includes in-depth interview and observation to gather all the data. The findings of this paper are: there are many functions of *balau* in the daily use of the Melanau community as a source of food, income and healing; and there are several types of traditional healing rituals that already not practice by the Melanau community due to the availability of modern medicine and religious conversion. To preserve the practices of indigenous knowledge mainly traditional healing rituals are challenging due to the rapid modernization.

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**Contribution/Originality:** This paper documents the Melanau traditional healing rituals that still practicing although some of the rituals had no longer practice nowadays. This paper is an effort to preserve the indigenous knowledge of Melanau traditional healing rituals from disappear. Equally important, the paper highlights the main usage of *balau* (or known as sago palm) in the traditional healing rituals despite as main source of food and income.

## 1. Introduction

The rapid modernization that is occurring in Mukah Division, Sarawak now has a significant impact on Melanau community customs and traditions, such as traditional healing rituals, that have been practiced by the elder generation. Education is one of modernization impacts, as information from Mukah District Education Office there is now a total of 32 schools (primary and secondary) in Mukah. With more options and a sufficient number of schools than the previous generation, formal education is now easier to be accessed by the younger generation of Melanau. The informal education that they get from the old generation is less interesting for them to learn nowadays. According to [Jawol et al. \(2018\)](#), when the younger generation spends most of their time at school rather than trying to adapt and gain such indigenous knowledge (IK) from the elders, formal education is one of the primary factors that contributes to this knowledge gap. The impact from this formal education is that the younger generation will have greater belief in scientifically proven things than what the older generation has practiced.

According to [Zarina et al. \(2014\)](#), the common belief among the older generation of the Melanau community is that if a medicine cannot cure a disease, then the disease is caused by a subtle being or supernatural power. With greater belief in scientifically proven thing rather than common belief among the older generation the traditional healing rituals is considered outdated in today's modern world. Currently, there are three hospitals available at Mukah Division (Mukah, Dalat and Daro). It will be easier for a community to seek care for health concerns if health facilities such as hospitals and clinics are available. According to [Jawol et al. \(2018\)](#), the existence of basic facilities such as clinics and hospitals provided by the government and the private sector enables them to seek modern treatment. With the availability of modern medical facility, this will have an impact on traditional Melanau medicine. The reason is that the Melanau traditional healing rituals will likely be less practiced by the Melanau community, and it may lead to extinction.

It is also important to note that Malaysia is the world's third largest *balau* (sago) producer, after Indonesia and Papua New Guinea, which accounted for 94.6 percent of global sago production ([Naim, Yaakub & Hamdan, 2016](#)). The Mukah Division in Sarawak is the largest producer of *balau* in Malaysia. Therefore, this will have various effects on the Melanau *balau* cultivators especially in Mukah and Dalat. Among the effects on *balau* cultivators is increased income, wider market, and high market demand from domestic and international community. Sago starch has become an ingredient in other meals such as fish crackers (*keropok*), baked goods, and puddings, as well as a starch utilized in the manufacturing of other culinary products ([Jeffrey, Yoke, & Andiappan, 2018](#)). Indeed, there are many uses of *balau* that the Melanau community needs to explore with the help of research and development by relevant agencies.

### 1.1. Objective

- i. To identify the uses of *balau* among the Melanau community
- ii. To analyze the types and practices of Melanau traditional healing rituals

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Melanau Community and *Balau*

The Melanau people are Sarawak's river people and one of the state's ethnic indigenous groups. After the Iban, Malays, and Bidayuh, Melanau is Sarawak's fourth largest ethnic community (Amir, 2015). They have not traditionally used the term Melanau to refer to themselves, instead referring about themselves as *a-likow* (Amir, 2015). *A-likow* means indigenous or original people, although the term *a-likow* also refers to Melanau people who have not yet practiced Islam or Christianity. According to Rafee et al. (2017), there were between 6,000 and 7,000 Melanau people living in 17 separate Melanau settlements along the Oya River. Melanau people accounted for 44,000 individuals across Sarawak. Only 10,000 people were identified as Pagan Melanau during the registration process. Muslims make up the majority of Melanau's population, with only a minor number of Roman Catholics. Therefore, at this time according to Department of Statistic Malaysia (2020) the total Population in Mukah Division is up to 134 900 people, which 52300 people in Mukah, 23300 people in Dalat, 21400 people in Matu, and 37900 people in Daro.

Puji et al. (2014) stated that, there are six Melanau dialect groups and they include small groups such as Bliun, Kanowit, Balingian, Miriek, Seduan, Segalang, Rajang, Paloh, Igan, Matu (Matu Daro), Tatau, Seguran/ Preban, Segan (Bintulu), Siuteng (Mukah), Oya and Dalat. The core of the Melanau traditional belief system, according to Amir (1998), as cited in Mugok (2015), is their belief in invisible and supernatural forces that influence their daily lives. Forests and water surround Melanau cosmology (rivers and seas). Forests, rivers, and oceans are other sources of income, allowing them to work as seafarers, fishers, and sago growers. Their reliance on the forest, river, and sea molded their culture and beliefs, as well as shaped their cosmology.

Sago palm in Melanau language is called *balau* and in Bahasa Melayu it is called *rumbia* or scientifically known as *Mextroxylon sagu* is a plant that is closely related to the traditional healing practice and the way of life of the Melanau community. The sago palm is an underutilized crop with the potential to become a staple food for humans, especially in Asia (Jeffrey, Yoke, & Andiappan, 2018). The sago palm is native to Malaysia and has long been an important source of carbohydrate specifically for the Melanau community only and other community not so important. The sago smallholder family's members which consist of parents, grandparents and children have involved in the small-scale sago cultivation and food production (Ishak et al., 2021). With regards of work division, men involve in the cultivation and women participate in producing sago for food (Ishak, Taibi & Yaakub, 2017). According to Amir (2015) in the past, the Melanau people's main meal was sago balls, which were eventually supplanted by rice. He also mentions that because all parts of the tree can be used like coconut tree, *balau* is the lifeblood of the Melanau community.

Sago has many functions, despite being important as a staple food it also has unique function which is can be used in traditional healing ritual. the uses of sago in traditional healing ritual among Melanau Community are known as *dakan* in Mukah and *bilum* in Dalat. According to Rafee et al. (2017), in the Melanau society, *dakan* or *bilum* refers to the sculpting of sick images or idols out of sago pith or soft wood. The woodcarver's beautifully carved pieces are employed as a kind of medium to cure the ill. The *dakan* or *bilum* is made from sago pith provided to the carver by the individual who has requested the carving.

In addition, sago palm also been planted and used in other countries such as Thailand and Indonesia. According Konuma (2014), simple starch extraction techniques are

employed at the farm household level in southern Thailand, but Indonesia and Malaysia often use bigger industrial scale extraction techniques. He also stated that in Thailand, sago starch is used as a raw material to create food that generates income at the local level. There are many functions of sago in Thailand such as, it can be used as starch production for human consumption, income generation, processing and industrial use, community based traditional ecosystem and natural resource conservation.

Meanwhile, in Indonesia according to [Metaragakusuma, Katsuya and Bai \(2015\)](#) there are six categories for the traditional sago uses in the food industry: (1) Sago noodle, (2) roasted sago, such as *Sagu lempeng*, *Dange*, or *Sagu rangi*, (3) numerous snacks, (4) sago pearls, (5) dried refined sago starch, and (6) sticky dough that is thought to be nasi (cooked rice). They also mentioned that sago-based food products, which are available in 63 different varieties and are distributed across 21 of Indonesia's 33 provinces, have so many advantages and are definitely well suited to further development for purposes of wider acceptance, particularly in processing efforts in the food industry sector. Other than that sago which is a staple food in traditional society, also plays a significant role in myth and ritual and has been connected symbolically to the dual notions of plant germination and human generation.

## 2.2. Traditional Healing Rituals

Indigenous knowledge is a type of knowledge that can be passed down from generation to generation. For example, the vast amount of indigenous knowledge has not been documented ([Mundy & Compton, 1991](#)). It is engraved in people's minds and has been passed down through the generations via word of mouth. [Senanayake \(2006\)](#), [Bruchac \(2014\)](#), and [Grenier \(1998\)](#) agree that indigenous knowledge, such as cultural ceremonies, oral history, and legends, songs, mythology, proverbs, dances, myths, community rules, local language, and taxonomy, is passed down from generation to generation, typically by word of mouth, in a similar way to [Mundy and Compton's \(1991\)](#) ideas.

Traditional healing, traditional medicine, and traditional healers are all components of the indigenous people's indigenous knowledge system ([Haque, Chowdhury, Shahjahan & Harun, 2018](#)). Indigenous knowledge is typically passed down through the generations through words and cultural ceremonies. Traditional healing is characterized as the use of herbs to treat diseases or ailments, as well as spiritual treatment. Spiritual and empirical healing are the two types of traditional healing ([Zakaria & Mohd, 2010](#)). Traditional healing's empirical features are obtained from medicinal plants that may be demonstrated using scientific methods. This involves treating illnesses and ailments with natural resources obtained from plants, animals, and minerals. According to [Benzie and Galor \(2011\)](#), plants, herbs, and ethnobotanicals have been utilized for health promotion and disease treatment since the beginning of humankind and are still used today in many parts of the world. They also mentioned that the basis of modern medicine today is made up of about 25% plants and other natural sources, which also make up a significant portion of the commercial medication compositions produced today.

The spiritual aspects include areas such as dealing with spiritual creatures from other dimensions by a traditional healer ([Zakaria & Mohd, 2010](#)). According to [Amir \(2015\)](#), the Melanau community has a general belief that if a medicine cannot cure an illness, then the illness is believed to be caused by spirits or supernatural forces. In Melanau community traditional healer is known as shaman, *a-bayoh* in Melanau language and

*bomoh* or *dukun* in Bahasa Melayu. Melanau community belief a Melanau shaman is gifted with the expertise and knowledge to cure diseases through dreams or is gifted by supernatural powers. Amir (2015), also stated that every illness especially illness that cannot treated with modern medicine and even any accidents that occur, are believed caused by supernatural forces. This show that shaman is important in Melanau community. Shaman's expertise is very necessary to cure diseases that cannot be treated by modern medicine. This is because the shaman is an intermediary between the world of reality and the supernatural world.

Amir (2015) mentioned that, in the Melanau community, there are seven forms of healing rituals: *Memaku*, *Pengasapan*, *Tega'*, *Baguda*, *Dakan*, *Bebayuh*, and *Payun*. Each type necessitates unique equipment and preparations. Each stage and type also cure a variety of diseases and ailments, ranging from minor to severe. It can be inferred that not every sick patient will experience all the stages accessible. It will be up to the *a-bayoh* or healer to advise that the patient participate in the right forms of healing rituals.

### 3. Methodology

This paper uses a qualitative approach which includes in-depth interview and participant observation to gather all the data. The research took place in the Melanau community at Mukah and Dalat Districts in the Mukah Division. Between November 2021 to March 2022, this study was done by conducting 4 fieldwork visits in two villages: Kampung Tellian, Mukah, and Kampung Sg. Ud, Dalat.

In-depth interview were conducted with 6 people that consist of traditional healers, Melanau cultural expert, elderly, and sago related authorities. Participant observations were made to see how the traditional healers performed traditional healing rituals. Thematic analysis is used to analyse the data obtained from in-depth interview. This analysis will discover the uses of *balau* among the Melanau community and the types of Melanau traditional healing rituals that are still practice and not practice today.

### 4. Finding and Discussion

The finding of this paper is there are many functions of *balau* in the daily use of the Melanau community as a source of food, income, and healing; and there are several types of traditional healing ritual that already not practice by the Melanau community due to the availability of modern medicine and religious conversion. There also several challenges and solution in preserving the traditional healing rituals for future generation. Table 1 shows all the informant information from various background that are participated in this study.

Table 1: Informant Demographic Background

No.	Name	Age	Gender	Religion	Position
1	Ya bin Galau (Pak Ya)	74	Male	Islam	Traditional Healer
2	Saiful bin Abdullah (Wak Saiful)	62	Male	Islam	Traditional Healer
3	Madlin binti Martin Joseph	46	Female	Christian	Former Traditional Healer

4	Edmund Salman Tuna	62	Male	Christian	<i>Bapa kaul</i> and Melanau Icons
5	Tommy Black Mark Lang	54	Male	Christian	Owner of Sapan Puloh Melanau Museum
6	Iswandi Jamil	45	Male	Islam	CRAUN Station Manager

There is six informant that has been interviewed to answer this paper objective (Table 1). There is two remaining Melanau traditional healer that still alive and actively offer their services which is Pak Ya and Wak Saiful. While there is also one informant who a former Melanau traditional healer namely Madlin. There is also two informant who are expert in Melanau culture which is Mr. Edmund and Mr. Tommy that has been interviewed. And the last informant is Mr. Iswandi, Station Manager at Crop Research and Application Unit (CRAUN), is expert in sago research.

#### 4.1. Functions of balau in the daily use of the Melanau community

##### 4.1.1. Balau as source of food

The main finding of the uses *balau* is as a staple food for Melanau community. According from one of our informants,

*“Because this Melanau Medong sago, sago ball, is a staple food for them even if they eat with rice, fish and so on. So, it's still Melanau culture, not the culture of other nations. but linut itself, if you eat linut with sambal, you'll feel full. So, I don't know linut can be another culture for other races, it can be” (Interview with Mr. Iswandi Jamil, CRAUN Station Manager).*

This statement really shows that sago not just as a staple food for Melanau community, but it also considered a cultured to them. Flach (1977) as cited in Konuma (2014) stated that, there are different starch extraction methods in different countries. One of the common traditional methods of preparation of sago starch in southern Thailand for human consumption is to pour hot water over the wet starch and stir it with a stick or a spoon. The resulting glue-liked mass is eaten with some fish or other associated foods. It is also common to bake sago starch, occasionally mixed with other foods such as ground peanuts. The Melanau community is also share the same type of food consumption made from sago known as *linut* with the community form the southern Thailand.

The next food from *balau* is *ulat mulong* (sago worm) is also one of the famous foods among the Melanau community. According to our informant Mr. Iswandi Jamil, *ulat mulong* (sago worm) or locally known as *si'et* is a friendly sago worm that Melanau community eat. In Thailand, sago starch is occasionally used as a raw material for making breads, noodles, pasta, etc. (Klanalong, 1999 cited in Konuma, 2014). While in Indonesia There are six categories for the traditional sago uses in the food industry: (1) Sago noodle, (2) roasted sago, such as *Sagu lempeng*, *Dange*, or *Sagu rangi*, (3) numerous snacks, (4) sago pearls, (5) dried refined sago starch, and (6) sticky dough that is thought to be cooked rice (Metaragakusuma, Katsuya & Bai, 2015). Meanwhile in Sarawak specifically in Mukah district of Sarawak, CRAUN research already invented several

upstream product form *balau* such as *mi kuning* (sago noodles), *keropok lekor*, energy bar, CRAUN ERA cookies which is a gluten free cookie, sago pearl, marshmallow, and chocolate bar (Interview with Mr. Iswandi Jamil, CRAUN Station Manager).

#### 4.1.2. *Balau as source of income*

Other than uses as food consumption *balau* also one of source of income for Melanau community. According to our informant,

*“There is increment in term of sago price for sago export in 2017 as you can see in Sarawak, basically the sago for sago flour expected about 80 million per year income is the third commodity behind palm oil and pepper sometime become fourth commodity for Sarawak” (Interview with Mr. Iswandi Jamil, CRAUN Station Manager).*

One of reason that the price of *balau* is increasing due to high demand in the global market and this will give a worthwhile income for sago grower among Melanau community.

According to [Konuma \(2014\)](#), In Thailand sago starch is used as a raw material to create food that generates income at the local level, the traditional sweets, cookies, and snacks produced from sago starch are the important extra income of farm families. Sago leaves are widely used to make mats for roofing or partitioning ([Flach, 1977](#) cited in [Konuma, 2014](#)). The sago roofing mats are strong and last longer than those made from other palms and are the important source of income of sago growers. According to Mr. Iswandi,

*“Other than that, they can convert the sago to something else for example, for now they process sago logs into sago flour but, nowadays people especially in Betong they have one sago mill there but they do not sell to the sago mill, but they guide themselves to produce food from sago to feed the pigs and animals there. In Betong they dry it and sell it to the local people who are also pig farmers to gain their income” (Interview with Mr. Iswandi Jamil, CRAUN Station Manager).*

Basically, sago is not just to produce flour completely it also can be turn to anything else to add on income to the sago farmer. According to [Flach \(1977\)](#) as cited in [Konuma \(2014\)](#), mentioned that the ground pith of sago palm is sometimes used as an animal feed, especially for pigs and when dried, it is also used for horses and chickens. While [Klanalong \(1999\)](#) as cited in [Konuma \(2014\)](#), mentioned that the lower part of trunk is also used for sago worm farming in Southern Thailand which generates additional income for farmers.

#### 4.1.3. *Balau in healing rituals*

Rather than functioning as the source of food and income *balau* also play the important role in Melanau traditional healing ritual. This is because *balau* is use by Melanau traditional healer is their healing ritual to treat patient.

*"In terms of Melanau this traditional healing ritual is called as Dakan, sago pith will be carved into small statues where the statues will be used in rituals to cure diseases (Interview with Madlin, former Melanau traditional healer)."*

According to [Metaragakusuma, Katsuya and Bai \(2015\)](#), Sago which is a staple food in traditional society, also plays a significant role in myth and ritual and has been connected symbolically to the dual notions of plant germination and human generation. Madlin also mentions that *da'an balau* (sago pith) will be carved to resemble humans where the types of *dakan* that are carved are according to the type of illness suffered by the patient. The *Dakan* carved from *da'an balau* (sago pith) plays an important role as a storage medium for the disease from the patient. After the *dakan* has been 'filled' by the disease from the patient, the *dakan* will be thrown into the river. The symbolism of drifting in the river indicates that the disease suffered by the patient has also been swept away allowing the patient to recover.

#### 4.1.4. Other usage of balau

*Balau* which is the most important plant for Melanau community. This is because rather than source of food, income, and healing *balau* also have many other functions that has been used by the Melanau community. Madlin mention that there are many other usages of *balau* as below,

*"The other usage of balau in terms of handicrafts is tripe, upak, tebusong, linut batik, in terms of construction, ungun (sago bark) is used for the floor and walls of the house, sapaw lebok (roof of the house), leaf sweeper from sago leaves, bubu and skewer broom from sago skewers, tripe for drying dried fish – kulit da'an rumbia (sago bark) and the last is firewood for cooking – sago bark (ungun)" (Interview with Madlin, Former Melanau traditional healer).*

In Sarawak there is one of research center that are focusing on nipa palm and sago palm (*balau*) which is CRAUN research (Crop Research and Application Unit). Mr. Iswandi Jamil, also mentioned that there is other usage of sago for example:

*"For sago water waste, we already have biogas in the rehab of our biogas plant in Kampung Teh, we already have sago water tackle. The sago baggage which is garbage we handle with our ruminant feed mill, so we dry all this baggage and then we put the formulation and then we give it to cows and goats. Sago barks it can turn to be sago biochar now there are two sago mills that are commercially turning this sago bark into biochar charcoal" (Interview with Mr. Iswandi Jamil, CRAUN Station Manager).*

[Konuma \(2014\)](#) mentioned that in recent years, sago starch is given a special attention on as a potential source of ethanol production for bio-fuel due to global concern over the climatic changes and future energy crisis. Mr. Iswandi also mentioned that,

*"Another usage of sago starch is that it can also be used in pharmaceuticals for example for hard and soft capsules, hard and soft capsules are very expensive now even 1 gram about 50-ringgit to produce the capsule, so it is a good value-added field". "The whole*

*palm can be consumed utilize as a waste concept in the shown area just like a coconut from A to Z everything can be used” (Interview with Mr. Iswandi Jamil, CRAUN Station Manager).*

With all this usage will make sure that is *balau* (sago) is fully utilized to avoid losses to the sago farmer.

## **4.2. Types of traditional healing ritual and some practices that are no longer uses by the Melanau community**

### *4.2.1. Traditional healing ritual that still practice is Bilum/Dakan*

The results from in-depth interview with traditional healer found that only traditional healing rituals using *bilum/dakan* are still practiced by the Melanau community According to [Amir, Sandal & Khalik \(2007\)](#) as cited in [Zarina et al. \(2014\)](#) this method of medicine uses certain *tow* (spirit) statues. *Bilum/Dakan*, is a statue carved from a sago tree branch by an expert in this field. People who practice this way are not necessarily *a-bayoh* or shaman. The ability to carve *bilum/dakan* and know the disease that can be cured will be magically revealed through dreams. They can find out the disease caused by *tow-tow* and determine the appropriate type of medicine to use to cure it. The Melanau traditional healing ritual using *bilum/dakan*:

*“First, we carve the bilum according to the type of disease, after that we spray it with betel nut, areca nut, lime while reciting the spell, say the bilum name, after that we are ready to bring the patient's clothes and put them on top of the bilum. If the patient can't come, he sends a representative to bring the patient's shirt, after the spell is ready, this shirt is brought back for the patient to wear, placed on the chest to the body. It used to be that the patient was bathed with this on top of the patient's head” (Interview with Pak Ya, Melanau traditional healer)*

There are 244 types of *dakan/bilum* statue that Pak Ya know to carve and while Wak Saiful only know 200 types only. *Dakan/Bilum* that carve by Pak ya and Wak Saiful has different name and design. Each of the *dakan/bilum* represent certain type of spirit that causes illness to patient. Only Pak Ya and Wak Saiful will know which *dakan/bilum* that will use in treating patient. [Figure 1](#) shows an example of *dakan/bilum* statue that carved by Pak Ya during fieldwork at his place.

Figure 1: Example of *Dakan/Bilum* Statue



After this healing rituals, there is certain taboos that need to follow by the patient. The first taboo that need to follow is the *dakan/bilum* need to dispose in certain area as suggested by Pak Ya or Wak Saiful and the *dakan/bilum* should be face down at that dispose area. Next, patient also need to follow three days of taboos cannot eat food such as *belacan*, chili, shrimp, and cooked food should not be heated a second time.

#### 4.2.2. Traditional healing ritual that already not practice

The results from in-depth interview with traditional healer found that only traditional healing rituals using *bilum/dakan* are still practiced by the Melanau community. While other traditional healing rituals such as *Memaku*, *Pengasapan*, *Baguda*, *Bebayuh*, *Pesagam*, *Pejijik* and *Payun* are no longer practiced.

i. *Memaku*

“*Memaku* is the simplest method of treatment because it simply requires the use of nails. This procedure is used to cure diseases like toothaches, which can be quite painful. Three times with a nail, the painful tooth will be touched, followed by a ritual of worship. After that, the nail would be hammered into a pole, and the pain would supposedly disappear” (Zarina et al. 2014)

ii. *Pengasapan*

“This method is particularly effective for kids who cry nonstop for long periods of time. Coconut fibre, charcoal, and incense are used in the medicine, which is burnt in a container and blown until it is quite smoky. The shaman will carry the smoky container around the child's bed while reciting particular charms to chase away the ghosts that bother the child. The lit goods were then thrown out the window” (Zarina et al. 2014)

iii. *Baguda*

“*A-bayoh* employ this strategy to repel tow-tow because they can use the language of measure to do so. By utilising a candle called *pesilok*, *a-bayoh* will inspect the patient. The incense will then be lighted, and the smoke will be applied to the patient's body by the *a-bayoh*. If the *a-bayoh* divination is true, and the patient shivers when the incense smoke is rubbed on his body, it implies the *a-bayoh* worship is successful on the patient, and the incense is rubbed on the patient's body until the patient no longer shivers” (Zarina et al. 2014). *Pesilok* will use a candle and casts a spell, from the candle he gets sea ghosts, land ghosts depending on the disease and if possible, the disease is cured and suitable for the disease (Interview with Mr. Edmund, Bapa kaul and Melanau Icons).

iv. *Berbayuh*

“*Berbayuh* will using drum and dreams that summons the spirits that are conjured in the form of *timbangan* what kind of drumming after that he asks for help from other creatures to cure the patient” (Interview with Mr. Edmund, Bapa kaul and Melanau Icons).

v. *Pesagam*

“*Pesagam* means I touch him oh I already know it's full, my hand already knows oh this has to be beamed we have to make a statue, what kind of statue can cure the patient” (Interview with Mr. Edmund, Bapa kaul and Melanau Icons).

vi. *Pejijik*

*“Pejijik, will uses traditional methods to make the patient and various processes depend on the expertise of the doctor who treats the patient, the shaman is the doctor. He uses various mayang, gencil leaves, tuba leaves to remove the disease so that it can be cured” (Interview with Mr. Edmund, Bapa kaul and Melanau Icons).*

vii. *Payun*

*“Payun is the most expensive way to treat diseases and takes a long time. Payun can be considered as the last traditional healing ceremony after other ceremonies cannot cure a person's illness. Before treating the payun method, other methods of treatment that can be used are pesilok, petawar, bejijik, pebayoh, and beguda. This ceremony is known as payun because the patient has to be swung on a sega rattan swing that is hung from the ceiling pole of the room” (Amir, 2015).*

All the Melanau traditional healing rituals (*memaku, pengasapan, baguda, berbayuh, pesagam, pejijik, and payun*) is already extinct because it already not practiced today. All the seven types of the Melanau traditional healing rituals have very special rituals and unique healing method to cure every illness.

#### 4.2.3. Challenges and solution in preserving the traditional healing rituals for future generation

There are various issues in indigenous knowledge especially the challenge in maintaining such knowledge among the Melanau communities nowadays. One of the challenges is the extinction of the Melanau traditional healer itself. From the participant observation there is only two Melanau traditional healer left in Mukah division of Sarawak, which is Pak Ya and Wak Saiful. This two Melanau traditional healer was specialized in *bilum/dakan* healing ritual.

*“My son is there, but he studies incompletely, not like me, if I'm dead there is no heirs. My son is not very interested” (Interview with Pak Ya, Melanau traditional healer).*

*“Until now there is, I don't want anymore. But if I don't do it, I'm afraid this tradition will disappear. Later people will ask the Melanau people, then all the Melanau people will not know that later. I just want to defend, not to be a god, don't get me wrong, we just want to defend. Now I do look, but people don't want. I really want to teach everyone, but no one wants to learn. They do not want because it is difficult to make him. This is natural too, if we do something wrong, he will interact with us” (Interview with Wak Saiful, Melanau traditional healer).*

From both traditional healer statement, it's clear that this traditional healing rituals will be extinct in future because they don't have any heir that want to continue these practices. This Unique Melanau culture and tradition in traditional healing will disappear if there no one that continue these practices in future. This is because both of Melanau traditional healer that still alive which is Pak Ya and Wak Saiful already old.

The next challenges are religious practices. This Melanau traditional healing ritual is extinction because less practitioner due to opposite with religious practices.

*“There is none because we have embraced religion. So use what is in the religion, if the pagans use the traditional way. Most of Melanau traditional healing ritual are now extinct. Only people who know like us can be said to be experts referring to our eyes who can see how they do in medicine. This is because our factor has embraced religions such as Christianity, Islam and shamans who can be said to be experts are no longer there because there is no generation to inherit their knowledge. Now that we have embraced religion, it is extinct because we already have religion. If they are like pagans, they practice traditional ways for them to save them in terms of medicine, their knowledge, experience and depending on their expertise” (Interview with Mr. Edmund, Bapa kaul and Melanau Icons).*

From the statement from Mr. Edmund religion also one of factor that lead to the extinction of this Melanau traditional healing rituals. This is because Melanau traditional healing rituals is actually practice by pagan Melanau in the past until now. Today, most of the Melanau community in Mukah have their own religion, but only few that are still pagan. Melanau traditional healing rituals such as using *bilum/dakan* is against religion, because it involve with certain evil spirit.

To overcome this challenges and to maintain this Melanau traditional healing ritual for future generation there are several thing that has been done by the Melanau community itself.

*“For future generations to defend traditional culture so I have made it in the form of dance. This dance is how the pioneers, berbayuh and various other things because we can't make it but for the knowledge of future generations, we make it in the form of a dance. Because for the knowledge of all my brothers and sisters, I make and think for the future generations so that our culture does not continue to die out swallowed up by time even if the matter is no longer there for the knowledge of the future generations, so I wish and think to make the matter depending on the synopsis of how they. In terms of the way they do the traditional way of medicine, so I think it's good that we do it in the form of a dance for the next generation, that's my desire and purpose as a Melanau child and represent the Melanau nation with the desire that I have created 14 dances guided by the work and life of the Melanau people in terms of medicine, the cultures of the Melanau people, the 14 dances that I, as the first person of Melanau children, I as an expert refer to for them to understand and know and give specific or practical to them as has happened in the past” (Interview with Mr. Edmund, Bapa kaul and Melanau Icons).*

All of the Melanau way of life is has been documented in term of dance for Melanau future generation and to sustain the Melanau culture form extinction. This kind of effort is one of the step that can help to sustain and preserved certain Melanau culture or practiced of traditional knowledge from extinction.

## 5. Conclusion

The indigenous community's culture and customs have been transformed because of the modernization process. As a result, the Melanau community as one of indigenous communities in Sarawak must adjust their lifestyle in the new environment to continue to survive. The changes that happen leave effect on traditions and customs of indigenous knowledge particularly traditional healing rituals within the Melanau community because it being forgotten as they are less practice nowadays. There are seven types of Melanau traditional healing rituals that has been no longer practiced due to availability of modern medicine and religious conversion. Only *dakan/bilum* healing rituals that still practiced until today but, this type of healing rituals also facing extinction due to no heir of traditional healer to continue to learn this healing knowledge. This Melanau traditional healing rituals should be preserved as an important heritage and indigenous knowledge of the Melanau in future.

## Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate

The researchers followed the research ethics guidelines provided by the Research Ethics Committee of Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS). All procedures performed in this study involving human participant were first presented to the Research Ethics Committee and only carried out after obtaining approval. Permission and consent to participate in the study was also obtained from all informants.

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## Conflict of Interest

The authors reported no conflicts of interest for this work and declare that there is no potential conflict of interest with respect to the research, authorship, or publication of this article.

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