Leaving Without Exit: Absence, Return and the Conditions of Iban Longhouse Membership in Sarawak

Chih Siong Wong*, Chu Sheng Ding, Shi Yee Wong, Prescilla Anak Palis

Centre for Built Environment and Resourceful Societies (BERi), University of Technology Sarawak, Malaysia

***Corresponding Author**

DOI: https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2026.1016SCO0018

Received: 22 October 2026; Accepted: 27 October 2026; Published: 12 November 2026

ABSTRACT

Urban Iban who keep longhouse apartments, land rights, or obligations raise two questions: what keeps a household a member of a community it no longer lives in, and who decides when its membership ends? Freeman's principle that households were free to leave a longhouse recurs in later texts, yet none in the corpus reads his Baleh report against its own summaries and restatements. This critical review examines how the principle was stated and on what evidence. It distinguishes leaving (moving out), absence (living away while remaining a member), and exit (giving up membership). The corpus comprises 49 sources from a semi-systematic search of Scopus and Google Scholar, using longhouse, exit, absence, return and membership strings, with citation chaining and the authors' holdings. Three findings stand out. First, the report attaches ritual and governmental conditions to exit outside its summary sections but states the principle without them inside. Second, six of the eight later texts by other authors that state the principle attach no condition of exit in the paragraph that states it; read as whole texts, three give none anywhere. Four of the six repeat the report's wording without its government qualifier. Third, recorded rules of presence regulate return. Households could remain members through long absences by returning on schedule, as single recorded cases show; the household, headman, state, and courts, among others, set terms on leaving, absence, return and exit. Texts read count households living in town, but apart from one house reporting none, none count exits dated after the 1970s or report what absent members take to end membership, and one found no clear criterion for urban dwellers. Scholars who relay Freeman should cite the conditions with the principle. The open questions need research in Iban, led by Iban community researchers, on terms each community controls.

Keywords: Iban longhouse; rural-urban migration; customary law (*adat*); land rights; social closure

INTRODUCTION

The Iban longhouse, the *rumah panjai* of Sarawak, is a row of family apartments, each a *bilik*, built under one roof and joined by a covered gallery, the *ruai*. In Kapit District, almost two-thirds of the 82 heads of household one study interviewed had not "officially" branched out of their bilik-families, though living almost permanently in town (Abdullah, 2021, pp. 157, 160). The claim concerns persons, but their standing runs through the bilik-family, the unit that holds the apartment and so a household's place in the longhouse. What keeps a household a member of a community it no longer lives in, and who decides when its membership ends? Freeman's account answered: the longhouse community was "an open and not a closed group, for its component family groups are joined in free association from which withdrawal is always possible" (Freeman, 1958, p. 18), and a later typology held that "the Iban bilek can leave the longhouse at will" (Sellato, 1987/2002, p. 78).

Membership is taken here as a household's standing in the longhouse as a ritual and jural community, apart from the bilik-family that holds the estate, the territory, *menoa*, that several houses may share, and the community as the state registers it. Some sources speak of persons rather than households as members; their

statements are reported at the level the sources give. Leaving is a household's moving out of residence; absence is living away while keeping membership; exit is giving up membership, which the sources mark by the "throwing away of the hearth" (Sather, 1993/2006b, p. 75) or a removal recognised as *pindah*, migration (Cramb, 2007, p. 331), a term whose scope the sources set differently (see Presence, Return and Land). Freeman's freedom to leave is read as a freedom of exit. Between absence and exit stand rules of presence. The clearest is the hearth rule recorded in the Second Division: a household must warm its hearth, the *dapur* or cooking hearth of its apartment, at set intervals or owe compensation, or a fine if illness or death follows, and a cold hearth shows the apartment unoccupied (Heppell, 1975, p. 325, n. 12; Sather, 1993/2006b, p. 75; p. 114, n. 11). A condition of exit is a cost, a permission or a loss of rights attached to giving up membership. A statement of the freedom of exit that attaches none in the paragraph that states it is called bare; whether the same text gives conditions elsewhere is recorded separately. Conditions on joining, which here include requirements such as kin as well as a rite or a headman's permission, are also recorded separately.

Weber (1922/1947) called a relationship "'closed' against outsiders so far as, according to its subjective meaning and the binding rules of its order, participation of certain persons is excluded, limited, or subjected to conditions" (p. 139). Fortes (1958) separated "the domestic field … viewed from within as an internal system, and the politico-jural field, regarded as an external system" (p. 2), and treated residence as an index of the domestic group (p. 3). The longhouse community, with its headman and *adat*, customary law, lies in the politico-jural field; carrying his point from residence to rules of membership is this review's step, not his. Hirschman (1970) defined exit as members who "leave the organization" (p. 4); the Iban records allow a household to leave without exit.

No text in the corpus has read Freeman's report against its own summary and against the later texts that state the freedom of exit; those that compare other rivers with the Baleh set their own sites or one rule against it (Heppell, 1975, p. viii; Padoch, 1982, pp. 34, 48; Rousseau, 1980, p. 56). This critical review argues three things. First, the report (Freeman, 1955/1970b) attaches conditions to the freedom, ritual and governmental, outside its summary sections and states it bare within them, as his 1958 essay and his 1960 essay on the Iban of Western Borneo did (Freeman, 1958; 1960/1970a); it describes the quittance and the lapse of land elsewhere. Second, six of the eight later texts by other authors that state the principle state it bare on exit, four of them repeating the report's wording by two routes, neither of which carries its government qualifier; read as whole texts, three of the eight give no condition of exit anywhere. Third, the recorded rules of presence regulate return, and none sets a point at which failure to return ended membership; their terms differ by river and decade, with the state's hand in them. Normative records (rules recorded as custom or set by the state), recorded cases and members' own accounts are kept apart throughout, because they support different claims (see Normative Records, Recorded Cases and Members' Accounts).

METHODOLOGY

Review Design and Scope

The study is a critical review with a semi-systematic search. The scope is the Iban of Sarawak, whose state rules (Brooke orders and schedules of fines, codified *adat*, the appointment of headmen) are examined as the corpus reports them; Iban under Brunei or Indonesian rule are not compared. The review examines how the principle of free exit was stated and relayed, and what the records say about presence, return and exit. It does not estimate how often households left or how members experienced the rules.

Search

Scopus was searched with twelve strings and Google Scholar with 23 queries on the Iban, in English and Malay, and two comparative queries, on 25 July and 2 August 2026 (Table 1). Two lines of strings were used. The first joined longhouse terms to terms for the people and region (S1), with four strings adding terms for household and membership, transformation, communal space, and tourism and heritage (S2 to S5), one comparative string (S6) and nine Google Scholar queries (G1 to G9). The strings on communal space

and tourism served a wider study of the longhouse. The second line joined terms for the people and region to terms for exit, absence, return and membership, one string for each concept (S7 to S10) and one combining them (S11), with 14 Google Scholar queries (G10 to G23), two of them in Malay. The Scopus strings S7 to S11 do not require a longhouse term, which appears in the Exit block only within one proximity clause (Appendix A), so that texts on Iban migration, land and membership could be found where the title, abstract or keywords do not name the longhouse; twelve of the 14 Google Scholar queries G10 to G23 include one. The Iban terms of this line are those used in this review (*muai dapur*, *chelap dapur*, *pindah*, *bejalai*, *genselan*, *pemali rumah*). A twelfth string, S12, applied the second line's terms to the records of S1 as a check on their screening. Material in English, Malay, Indonesian, Chinese, French, German and Japanese was eligible, but no queries were run in Chinese, French, German or Japanese. Reference lists of texts read in full were chained, and texts held by the authors were screened against the same criteria.

Table 1: Search Strings and Records Exported

ID	Database	Search string	Records exported
S1	Scopus	TITLE-ABS-KEY ((longhouse OR "long house" OR "long-house" OR "rumah panjai" OR "rumah panjang") AND (iban OR "sea dayak" OR dayak OR sarawak OR borneo))	81
S2	Scopus	S1 AND TITLE-ABS-KEY (household OR bilik OR bilek OR "bilik-family" OR kinship OR "corporate group" OR "descent group" OR community OR solidarity OR membership OR affiliation OR egalitarian* OR adat OR "customary law" OR headman OR "tuai rumah" OR "social organis*" OR "social organiz*" OR governance OR "collective action")	44
S3	Scopus	S1 AND TITLE-ABS-KEY (migration OR mobility OR urbanis* OR urbaniz* OR resettle* OR relocation OR "social change" OR modernis* OR moderniz* OR transformation OR decline OR continuity OR persistence OR adaptation OR "rural-urban")	26
S4	Scopus	S1 AND TITLE-ABS-KEY (ruai OR tanju OR tempuan OR sadau OR "communal space" OR "common space" OR gallery OR veranda* OR "shared space")	1
S5	Scopus	S1 AND TITLE-ABS-KEY (tourism OR homestay OR "home stay" OR heritage OR commodif* OR authenticity OR "host community")	15
S6	Scopus	TITLE-ABS-KEY ((longhouse OR "long house" OR betang OR "rumah betang" OR lamin) AND (kalimantan OR dayak)) AND TITLE-ABS-KEY (household OR community OR "social organis*" OR "social organiz*" OR adat OR "communal space" OR "ruang bersama")	17
S7	Scopus	Population AND Exit	14
S8	Scopus	Population AND Absence	13
S9	Scopus	Population AND Return	7

S10	Scopus	Population AND Membership	55
S11	Scopus	Population AND (Exit OR Absence OR Return) AND Membership	8
S12	Scopus	S1 AND (Exit OR Absence OR Return OR Membership OR hearth* OR dapur); a check on the screening of S1 records, not counted in the totals	19 (all within S1)
		Scopus total, S1 to S11	281 (156 unique)
G1	Google Scholar	“iban” “longhouse” “bilik”|“bilek” household	499
G2	Google Scholar	“iban” longhouse community “social organisation”|“corporate group”	311
G3	Google Scholar	“iban” longhouse egalitarian|egalitarianism adat	287
G4	Google Scholar	“iban” longhouse migration urban sarawak	999
G5	Google Scholar	“iban” longhouse resettlement|relocation|“longhouse loan”	763
G6	Google Scholar	“ruai” iban longhouse communal space	253
G7	Google Scholar	“rumah panjai”|“rumah panjang” iban komuniti	253
G8	Google Scholar	iban longhouse homestay tourism host community	102
G9	Google Scholar	intitle:longhouse intitle:iban	50
G10	Google Scholar	“iban” sarawak “muai dapur”|“buai dapur”|“pemali rumah”|quittance	11
G11	Google Scholar	“iban” longhouse “left the longhouse”|“leave the longhouse”|“leaving the longhouse”|“moved out of the longhouse”	18
G12	Google Scholar	“iban” longhouse bilik|bilek exit|withdrawal|expelled|abandoned	11
G13	Google Scholar	“iban” longhouse pindah adat land	4
G14	Google Scholar	“iban” longhouse “chelap dapur”|“cold hearth”|genselan	3
G15	Google Scholar	“iban” longhouse absent|absentee|“non-resident”|“multi-local” members	24
G16	Google Scholar	“iban” longhouse “empty rooms”|“vacant rooms”|“empty bilik”|“vacant bilik” urban	2
G17	Google Scholar	“iban” longhouse “return migration”|“returned to the longhouse”|“return to the longhouse”|returnees	7
G18	Google Scholar	“iban” longhouse urban migrants return gawai bilik|bilek	3

G19	Google Scholar	"iban" longhouse membership bilik|bilek "land rights"|"customary rights"	10
G20	Google Scholar	"iban" "native customary rights" migrants|migration|absent|urban	10
G21	Google Scholar	"iban" "longhouse membership"|"member of the longhouse"|"members of the longhouse"	4
G22	Google Scholar	"iban" "rumah panjai"|"rumah panjang" keahlian|"ahli rumah panjang" pindah|keluar|berhijrah	6
G23	Google Scholar	"iban" "rumah panjang" "hak adat"|"tanah adat"|NCR penghijrahan|kembali|balik	11
GC1	Google Scholar	"rumah betang" dayak ruang bersama komunal	163
GC2	Google Scholar	iban "kalimantan barat" "rumah panjai"	36
		Google Scholar total, G1 to G23, GC1 and GC2	3,840 (2,350 after de-duplication)

Note. The Scopus strings searched the title, abstract and keywords; S2 to S5 add a second clause to S1. S7 to S11 combine the population block with the concept blocks given in Appendix A, and S11 returned exactly the records of (S7 OR S8 OR S9) AND S10. S12 is S1 combined with all the terms of S7 to S10 and with hearth* and dapur; its 19 records all fall within S1, and it is not counted in the totals. Google Scholar was searched via Publish or Perish, where "|" joins alternatives. S6, GC1 and GC2 served as a comparative set later dropped. The export of G4 was capped at 999 of about 1,220 results. Scopus was searched on 25 July (S1 to S6) and 2 August 2026 (S7 to S12), and Google Scholar on 25 July (G1 to G9, GC1, GC2) and 2 August 2026 (G10 to G23). A record found by more than one string is counted under each in the column and once in the unique and de-duplicated totals.

Selection

A record was retained at the first stage when it concerned an Iban longhouse community and addressed at least one of:

- household organisation, membership or inheritance;
- governance, *adat* or headmanship;
- migration, resettlement or change in longhouse composition;
- communal space;
- tourism where it bears on social relations among hosts.

Records on non-Iban groups or on Iban in Brunei and Kalimantan were assigned to a comparative set. Selection had two stages. At the first, each record was coded from its title and abstract as retained, uncertain, comparative or excluded; the records exported in July were coded by a single screener, apart from twelve noted below, and no check by a second screener is recorded. The Scopus codes were assigned after the corpus had been assembled. At the second stage, a source was retained when its full text presented or interpreted evidence about the longhouse as a social group.

Not every retained record reached the second stage. Which retained records were read was decided by judgement of their bearing on membership, household organisation and governance; no ranking was recorded. Table 2 sets out the counts. Scopus returned 156 unique records, of which 25 were retained or held as uncertain; 17 records (16 sources) entered the corpus, one of them coded for exclusion at the first stage but read from a full text held. The Google Scholar exports gave 3,840 records. De-duplication merged records whose titles matched once case and punctuation were removed (a truncated title matching its full form, and titles in Chinese or Japanese script compared in that script), then truncated or variant titles with the same first author, and pairs that the second stage showed to be one work, leaving 2,350. Twelve records from the July queries with titles wholly in Chinese or Japanese script were coded and checked by an author, which retained six. Of the 443 records from the Iban queries retained or held as uncertain, 39 entered the corpus, four were read and fell outside the scope, seven were sought and not obtained, and 393 were not read. In all, 13 texts sought were not obtained.

The strings on exit, absence, return and membership carried one more criterion: a record from them was also retained when it concerned a household or person leaving, being absent, returning, exiting, or keeping rights while away, and a record on Iban migration, land or *adat* in Sarawak was not excluded for lacking a longhouse term. These strings gave 177 unique records after de-duplication across both databases on DOI, then on title and year; 103 had been retrieved by other strings and were screened once. The other 74, exported on 2 August 2026, were coded and checked by an author: ten were retained, eight assigned to the comparative set and 56 excluded, most of them clinical, genetic, linguistic or ecological studies that name the Iban as a population. Seven of the ten were obtained and read in full, and three were not obtained. At the second stage, where decisions were again checked by an author, five entered the corpus; a review that summarises Freeman's chapter in a paragraph, with nothing on leaving, and an overview that reports no evidence of its own did not. S12 returned 19 records, all retrieved by S1. Six (five sources) were already in the corpus. Of the other 13, the July screening had retained one, which was not read, assigned five to the comparative set and excluded seven; re-examined and checked by an author, none of the seven concerns leaving, absence or membership.

Table 2: Records from Search to Corpus

Stage	**Scopus (S1 to S11)**	**Google Scholar (G1 to G23, GC1, GC2)**
Records exported	281	3,840
Unique after de-duplication	156	2,350
Retained or uncertain at the first stage	25	443 (Iban queries)
Full text sought	22[a]	50
Full text not obtained	6[a]	7
Read in full or searched for terms	16, and one record coded for exclusion, read from a full text held	43
Read and outside the scope	0[a]	4
Entered the corpus	17 records (16 sources)	39 records
Retained but not sought	3[a]	393
Sources assigned to the database	16	30

Note. The corpus of 49 adds two sources from citation chaining and one from the authors' holdings (16 + 30 + 2 + 1). A source found by more than one route is counted once, under Scopus where it had a Scopus record, and a record retrieved by more than one string within a database was screened once. Book-length texts other than Freeman's report were searched for terms rather than read in full (see Corpus and Analysis). [a] Includes, among the records of S1 to S6, four not obtained and three not sought (two with no full-text record, and one a different work from the one in the corpus). Three texts not obtained appear in both columns; the 13 texts not obtained in all also include one comparative text and two compilations of *adat* sought through citation chaining.

Corpus and Analysis

The corpus comprises 49 sources: 16 assigned to Scopus, 30 to Google Scholar, two to citation chaining and one to the authors' holdings, each source found by more than one route being counted once, under Scopus where it had a Scopus record; Sellato (1987/2002) entered from a record first assigned to the comparative set. Thirty-nine report fieldwork, from 1949–51 to 2022, the oral tradition Sandin recorded aside. Each source was entered in an evidence table. Shorter texts and Freeman's were read in full; the other book-length texts (Cramb, 2007; Heppell, 1975; Lavoie-Lemieux, 2025; Padoch, 1982; Sandin, 1994) and the volume containing Sellato (1987/2002) were searched for terms bearing on leaving, joining, absence, hearths and land, and the passages found were read in context. The compilations of *adat* by Richards (1963, as cited in Cramb, 2007) and Sandin (1980, as cited in Sather, 1993/2006b) were not obtained, and rules from them are reported only as cited. Malay, French and Japanese passages were translated using Claude. The coding of statements on leaving is set out in the Results section.

The paragraph that states the principle is the unit of coding, for two reasons. The review examines how the principle is stated and therefore how it is relayed, and what a later text quotes or paraphrases is a statement and what stands with it (see The Principle and Its Conditions). The same unit can also be applied to Freeman's summaries and to the later texts alike. Conditions a text describes elsewhere are recorded in separate columns of Table 4; because a reader of the whole text meets them too, each text that states the principle is also read as a whole, from those columns, and the Results report both counts. For book-length texts the whole-text reading rests on the passages the term searches found.

RESULTS

Where the Literature Comes From

The texts cited rest on fieldwork in three clusters of river and decade (Table 3). Of the 49 sources, 18 rest on primary data, eight derive their claims wholly from other texts and 23 combine the two. Sarawak was ruled by the Brooke family from 1841, became a British crown colony in 1946 and joined Malaysia in 1963, and under all three it was administered in numbered divisions (Cramb, 2007, p. 37). Freeman worked in the Baleh, a pioneer river, in 1949–51, with six weeks in the Saribas in 1951 (Freeman, 1981, p. 4). The long-settled rivers of the Second Division were studied mainly from the 1970s, when Padoch also worked on two pioneering rivers for comparison, and studies from 1990 to 2022 spread across the Baleh, the Rajang, the Second Division, the Kemena, the Baram and Kuching. Of the texts read, only Cramb (2007) counted the same houses again, two decades on.

Table 3: Rivers, Settlement History and Dated Fieldwork in the Texts Cited

River or area (division)	Settlement history as the sources state it	Texts, with fieldwork dates
Baleh, with the Sut and Mujong (Kapit District; Third)	Pioneer; resettled in 1922 "under general Governmental surveillance" (Freeman, 1955/1970b, p. 105)	Freeman, 1949–51, revisits 1957–58 and 1976; Hussaini et al., Sut houses, 1998–99; Hasegawa, 2007–09; Gapor et al., Kapit, fieldwork

		dates not stated
Batang Ai and Engkari, within the Batang Lupar basin (Second)	Long-settled; the Engkari "settled for 300 years" (Padoch, 1982, p. 34)	Heppell, 1972–74; Padoch, 1973–75; Hew and Kedit, 1985, and Ng, 1990, on the resettlement scheme
Saribas and its tributary the Paku (Second)	Long-settled (Sather, 1996/2006a, pp. 85, 88)	Freeman, Gansurai (Layar) and Plandok (Paku), 1951, revisited 1976; Sather (1993/2006b), 1976–79, 1981–84 and 1988; Sather (1996/2006a), not dated; Cramb, 1979–2001; Sandin, oral tradition recorded mostly 1952–73
Rest of the Batang Lupar basin: Skrang, Marup, Lemanak, Pantu, Sri Aman (Second) and Sebuyau (First)	Long-settled (Murray, 1982, pp. 30–31; Cramb & Sujang, 2013, p. 140); Sri Aman longhouses "with fairly long histories" (Ichikawa, 2008, p. 6)	Patterson and Chiswick, 1978; Murray, 1979; Cramb, Lemanak, 1980s (information from the Department of Agriculture); Ichikawa (2007, 2008), Sri Aman, 2005; Ngidang, 2008; Gapor et al., Sebuyau, fieldwork dates not stated
Middle Rajang and Kapit (Third)	Iban reached the southern tributaries early in the nineteenth century and the main river after about 1850 (Freeman, 1955/1970b, pp. 132–133)	Soda (2001), Kanowit, 1995–96, and Soda (1999), the same village, 1997–98; Hussaini et al., Enchermin, 1998–2001; Kelabu and Fadzil, Song, 2016; Abdullah, not dated
Kemena and the Bintulu outskirts (Fourth)	Pioneering (Padoch, 1982, p. 34)	Padoch, 1975; Morrison, 1990; Ichikawa (2019), settlement from the mid-1960s, interviews 2013–14
Baram: Bakong and Tinjar (Fourth)	Settled by migrants, the Bakong from the late nineteenth century (Ichikawa, 2008, p. 6), Sungai Bok on the Tinjar from the 1930s (Cramb & Sujang, 2013, p. 140)	Ichikawa (2007, 2008), Bakong, 2005; Cramb and Sujang, Tinjar, 2009
Ensebang (First)	Pioneering, at "a far earlier stage of settlement" than Bintulu (Padoch, 1982, p. 34)	Padoch, Sungai Pelai, 1975–76
Kuching (First)	City	Lavoie-Lemieux, 2022

Note. Each author is followed by the fieldwork date, not the year of publication (given only to separate two texts by one author); Gapor et al. (2023), Abdullah (2021) and Sather (1996/2006a) do not date their fieldwork. Andersen et al. (2016) worked in 2014 in an Iban village in western Sarawak given a pseudonym, which cannot be placed on a river. Divisions are the numbered divisions, later divided and renamed (Cramb, 2007, p. 73); Sebuyau, in the First Division, is now in Samarahan Division. Heppell's longhouse is a stated composite of houses in the Second Division, mainly in the Batang Ai (1975, p. viii). Padoch dates her study to 1973–75 (p. 34) but reports events of 1976 (pp. 22–23) without dating her departure from the field.

Iban authorship or fieldwork is stated for four texts. Of the authors whose Iban identity is stated, Sandin (1994), whose volume Sather edited, records rules of presence in oral tradition; Cramb and Sujang (2013)

state that one author originates from a longhouse studied; three of the four members of Hew and Kedit's (1987) field team were Iban; and the researcher of Kelabu and Fadzil (2019, p. 137) is Iban and grew up in a longhouse in the district studied.

Absent members' own accounts are rare. They are reported in two of the 49 sources, while Cramb (2007, p. 333) relays a third. He quotes Benedict Sandin (Sather, 1981, as cited in Cramb, 2007, p. 333), who kept his *bilik* at Kerangan Pinggai through a working life spent mostly in Kuching, "Kuching is not my home", and reports that "Many other educated Iban who have worked in urban employment all their lives … do not consider they have 'abandoned' their rights to land". The two are Abdullah's heads of household in Kapit District (see Introduction) and urban Iban in Kuching, who described returning for Gawai, the harvest festival, and *adat* fines for missing a longhouse funeral (Lavoie-Lemieux, 2025, p. 74); Abdullah asked how they negotiated membership (2021, p. 157) but reported no criteria. All three concern persons rather than whole households. None of the three reports what absent persons take to end their own or their household's membership of a longhouse; Cramb reports what they do not take to end their land rights.

The Principle and Its Conditions

Freeman's report attaches conditions to the freedom of exit outside its summary sections and states it bare within them, and six of the eight later texts by other authors that state the principle state it bare. Freeman's report on his Baleh fieldwork of 1949–51, printed in 1955, states the freedom of exit of a *bilik*-family (*bilek* in Freeman's spelling) as a principle five times; a sixth passage, in the history of Iban migration into the Rajang and the Baleh, describes the same freedom in the past tense, likewise "provided certain essential ritual formalities had been observed" (p. 77). Two statements stand outside the report's summary sections and attach a condition to exit. A family "can, at any time, move to another long-house", but "certain ritual observances … must always be made" before it is "free to go whither it chooses"; its choice of destination was "in reality, severely limited" by government boundaries set after the resettlement of the Baleh, a limit on where it could join (Freeman, 1955/1970b, pp. 101–102). In the opening paragraph of the section "The long-house community as a corporate group", the group is "open, and not a closed group, for bilek-families are entitled to leave and join at will (subject, of course, to Government regulations)" (p. 104).

The other three stand in summary sections and are bare. Under "Principles of long-house organization: summary" (from p. 102), families are "perfectly free to move from one long-house to another within any of the kindreds to which they belong" (p. 103); under "Summary and conclusion" (from p. 126), they can join other settlements where they have kin "should they so desire" (p. 127), and "the Iban long-house community is an open and not a closed group, for its component bilek-families are joined in free association, from which withdrawal is always permissible" (p. 128). The route through kin and the rite that incorporates a joining family stand in earlier paragraphs of that summary, not in the paragraph that states the principle, so on the same-paragraph rule applied to the later texts p. 128 is bare and attaches no condition on joining either; the summary attaches no payment, lapse of land or government regulation to withdrawal (pp. 126–129). The costs of exit are described elsewhere in the report: a bilik-family held its land "only for as long as the family remains a member of the long-house community in whose territory its holdings lie" (p. 148), and one that should "migrate to another district and take up permanent residence there" lost it (p. 105). *Adat* required a departing family to pay the augur, the *tuai burong*, a quittance (the "ritual observances" of p. 101) that grew once the farming cycle had begun, when departure was "an extremely rare event" (p. 124).

Freeman's own word for the community points elsewhere than this review's. He called it "a free and conditional association of corporate family groups", in that "being part of a long-house does not deprive a bilek-family of its essential autonomy" (p. 104), and took the break-up of whole houses as "striking evidence of the conditional nature of group formation" (p. 127). His "conditional" means contingent on each family's continuing choice. A condition of exit, in this review, is a cost, permission or loss of rights attached to exit; conditions on joining also include requirements such as kin.

Freeman's essays of 1958 and 1960 repeat the summary's sentence, almost word for word, with "possible" for "permissible" and, in 1958, "family groups" for "bilek-families" (Freeman, 1958, p. 18; 1960/1970a,

p. 191), the second keeping the route through kin in the next sentence. Where Freeman described exit, the payment returned: "any family leaving the long-house must present to its tuai burong a quittance payment (pemali rumah)" (Freeman, 1960/1961, p. 163). In 1981, describing Iban society before government chiefs and headmen were imposed (Freeman, 1981, p. 58, n. 40), he wrote that a family was free "after performing certain quittance rites … between harvests, to leave one long-house and join another" (p. 34), citing the report's p. 124. None of these later statements carries the government qualifier or the lapse of land, though the 1981 statement describes a time before government headmen. Freeman (1981, pp. 31–32), answering Rousseau (1980, p. 52), and Sather (1993/2006b, p. 109) restored adat and ritual obligation to the federated account, as obligations of membership rather than conditions of exit, but not the land or the government.

Twenty other texts in the corpus make a statement about a household moving out of a longhouse, joining another or abandoning its apartment (Table 4). Statements about persons, whole houses, households newly formed by partition, expulsion, and Iban outside Sarawak were left out, and an editor's restatement of his own text already in the table was not counted again. Morrison's "young households who have effectively left the longhouse" (1993, pp. 51–52) stay, because they are described as having left, while the new families of Gapor et al., formed by separating from parents (2023, pp. 71–72), do not. Each text was scored on whether it states the freedom of exit as a principle; which conditions it attaches to that principle in the same paragraph; and which conditions of exit, of joining, and of absence or return it describes elsewhere. A text that states the principle more than once is scored on the statement that attaches most conditions; the others are shown in Table 4. The coding records what a text states; the Baleh record shows kin as a regularity rather than a rule (see Entry, Exit and Closure).

Eight of the twenty state the principle, all between 1982 and 2007. Counting only conditions on exit, the rule this review applies to Freeman's statements, six of the eight state it bare (Table 4). Two attach a condition to exit: a ritual fine (Murray, 1982, pp. 30–31) and "significant jural and ritual constraints", with the abandonment of inherited farmland in long-settled areas (Sather, 1996/2006a, pp. 87–88). Counting conditions on joining as well, three of the eight (Sellato; Soda, 2001; Hussaini et al.) attach no condition of either kind, because Hew and Kedit, Sather (1993/2006b) and Cramb (pp. 52–53) make joining depend on kin. Cramb placed the ease of moving "in the past", though the option to move "remains" (p. 53). The other twelve texts state no principle. Ten describe costs of exit, conditions on joining or terms of absence; Morrison gives only an impression (pp. 51–52), and Kelabu and Fadzil only a count of households that had moved to town (2019, p. 140).

The six bare statements share two features: each states the freedom in passing, in a typology, a background section, a footnote or a summary of Freeman's view, and none states it where the text describes exit (Table 4). Read as whole texts (for book-length texts, on the passages the term searches found), they give more. Three describe a cost of exit elsewhere in the same text (Sather, 1993/2006b, p. 75; Soda, 2001, p. 110, n. 20; Cramb, 2007, pp. 54, 330–331), so on a whole-text reading they give a condition of exit, and the number giving none falls from six to three (Hew and Kedit, Sellato and Hussaini et al.). Sellato adds instead a hedge and a duty of ritual representation, that "all households must be represented and all play a part" (1987/2002, pp. 78, 85–86), and Hussaini et al. a rule of return (p. 8, n. 31); neither is a condition of exit. Hew and Kedit (1987) qualify it nowhere in the chapter, and if hedges and rules of return were counted as qualifications, theirs would be the only text left. Freeman's report is conditioned on either reading. What survives both readings is that six of the eight state the principle apart from any cost of exit they record, and that three give a reader no condition of exit at all.

The bare wording has two sources in Freeman. The summary's form, "withdrawal is always permissible" (1955/1970b, p. 128), is repeated, in either wording, by no later text by another author in the corpus; Sellato's "free association of households" (1987/2002, p. 78) comes nearest. From p. 104, the bare form travelled by two routes, both drawing in part on the summary sections (Table 4). One is "at will", which in Freeman's texts on exit occurs only in the qualified sentence of p. 104. Sellato (1987/2002, p. 78) wrote, citing no source, that the Iban household "can leave the longhouse at will", so his link to p. 104 rests on wording alone; Hew and Kedit (1987, p. 171), in a passage that closely follows the report's pp. 103–104 and cites it, with Jensen (1974, as cited in Hew & Kedit, 1987), only in a section note without a page, wrote that

"bilik families can leave or join at will". Murray (1982, p. 30) used the phrase, giving every Iban household "the right to move at will", but attached a ritual fine (p. 31). None carries the parenthesis. The other route is the federated account. Sather (1993/2006b, p. 109) states the bare form after quoting p. 104's description of the community, given above, and the summary's account of the house as a federation (pp. 128–129); Cramb (2007, pp. 52–53) states it after quoting p. 104. Sather (1996/2006a, p. 87) put "at will" in quotation marks and attributed it to "Freeman 1981:50". That page says that an Iban was free, "within adat law", "to live where he (or she) chose", and does not contain the phrase (Freeman, 1981, p. 50).

No text in the count attaches the government qualifier to the principle. The state appears only in descriptions, among them a *penghulu*, a government-appointed chief, warning emigrants, "probably on the urging of the District Officer", the government's administrator of the district, that they would lose their land (Padoch, 1982, p. 48); and the Brooke order of 1899 and the rulings that followed it (see Presence, Return and Land).

Table 4: Statements on a Household Moving Out of a Longhouse, Joining Another or Abandoning Its Apartment, in Freeman's Texts and Twenty Later Texts, 1955–2025

Text[a]	**Fieldwork and river**	**Principle (page): condition on exit; on joining**	**Conditions of exit (E) or joining (J) described**	**Conditions of absence or return described**	**Source given**
Freeman (1955/1970b)	Baleh, 1949–51	pp. 101–102: ritual; kin, with government boundaries limiting destination. p. 103: none; kin. p. 104: government; government. p. 127: none; kin. p. 128: none; none	E: quittance payment (p. 124); land held only while a member, lapsing on permanent removal (pp. 105, 148). J: ritual incorporation (p. 128)	Return after reaping customary; padi left in the farm hut "considered to have moved within the meaning of this section", 1940 (pp. 163–164; p. 164, n. 1)	Own fieldwork
Freeman (1958)	Baleh, 1949–51	p. 18: none; none	None	None	Own fieldwork
Freeman (1960/1970a)[b]	Baleh, 1949–51, 1957–58	p. 191: none; kin	J: ritual incorporation (p. 184)	None	Own fieldwork
Freeman (1960/1961, 1981)	Baleh, 1949–51, 1957–58; 1981 adds a 1976 revisit	1981, p. 34: quittance rites, between harvests	E: quittance payment (1960/1961, p. 163)	None	Own fieldwork; the report, with page
Rousseau (1980)	None (reanalysis)	None	E: compensation to the headman, Second Division (p. 56)	None	Howell
Murray	Marup (Second	pp. 30–31: ritual	E: land lapses "only some years	None	None

(1982)	Division), 1979; statement scoped to "approximately Freeman's ethnographic present, the 1950s" (p. 30)	fine	after" leaving (p. 31)		
Padoch (1982)	Engkari (Batang Ai), 1973–75	None	E: land forfeited beyond a returnable distance, disputed; a penghulu's warning (p. 48)	Land kept by those within reach (p. 48)	Own fieldwork; Freeman, with page
Hew & Kedit (1987)	Batang Ai resettlement scheme, 1985	p. 171: none; kin	None	None	Close paraphrase of Freeman, pp. 103–104; a section note (p. 218, n. 2) cites the report, and Jensen (1974, as cited in Hew & Kedit, 1987), without a page
Sellato (1987/2002)	None (comparative)	p. 72: none; none. p. 78: none; none. pp. 85–86: none (hedged: "seems free", "at least among some groups"); none	None	A duty of ritual representation: all households "must be represented" (p. 78)	p. 72: Freeman and LeBar, no page; p. 78: none; pp. 85–86: Freeman, no page
Morrison (1993)	Kemena (Bintulu), 1990	None	None (an impression of households that have "effectively left", pp. 51–52)	None	Own observation
Sather (1993/2006b)	Paku (Saribas), 1976–79,	p. 109: none; kin (reporting	E: *genselan*, adat fines and *muai*	Hearth used at least twice each lunar month; a	p. 109: Freeman, with page;

	1981–84 and 1988	Freeman)	*dapur* (p. 75)	cold hearth "signifies" withdrawal and incurs genselan; land in the *menoa* held through the hearth (p. 75)	p. 75: own fieldwork
Sather (1996/2006a)	Saribas, undated	pp. 87–88: jural and ritual constraints; inherited farmland abandoned in long-settled areas	E: *muai dapur* and ritual reparation before moving to another longhouse (p. 92)	None	pp. 87–88: "Freeman 1981:50", a page without the words; Sather (1993/2006 b); p. 92: Sather (1993/2006 b), for the hearth rules
Soda (1999)	Middle Rajang (Kemiding, Kanowit), 1997–98, with survey data from 1996	None	E: land reverts to open forest when its holder leaves the village or it is forgotten (p. 335)	None	p. 335: none
Soda (2001)	Middle Rajang (Kanowit), 1995–96	pp. 109–110, n. 7: none; none	E: rights forfeited "in principle" (p. 110, n. 20)	Urban owners "expected to return" keep rights (p. 110, n. 20)	pp. 109–110, n. 7: none; p. 110, n. 20: own fieldwork
Appell (2001)	None (review)	None	E: land lost or kept; order of 1899	Persons who moved away may activate rights in their natal families' land, "although this seldom happens"	Freeman; Padoch; relays Sutlive
Hussaini et al. (2006)	Enchermin (Rajang, Kapit), 1998–2001	p. 3: none; none	None	Membership kept on condition that the hearth was not used; the household head, a daughter of the former headman, to return every two to three weeks (p. 6; p. 8,	p. 3: Freeman, no page; p. 8, n. 31: own fieldwork

				n. 31)	
Ichikawa (2007)	Bakong (Baram) and Sri Aman, 2005	None	E: land left may be opened by others, the Baleh rule (pp. 149–150)	None	Freeman, with page
Cramb (2007)	Saribas, 1979–2001	pp. 52–53: none (hedged: "in the past"); kin. p. 71: none; none	E: cultivation rights "traditionally" contingent on membership (p. 54); a 1949 ruling upholding the order of 1899; rulings of 1954 and 1958 that short-range moves did not forfeit cultivation rights, which Cramb judged "at variance with adat"; 1961 penghulu agreement (pp. 330–331)	Empty rooms kept as "a symbol of their continuing rights to land" (pp. 332–333)	pp. 52–53: Freeman, with page (pp. 104, 103); p. 54: Appell; pp. 330–331: court records and Richards (1963, as cited in Cramb, 2007)
Ichikawa (2008)	Bakong (Baram) and Sri Aman, 2005	None	E: land left to relatives or the headman; sale before moving (p. 11)	None	Own fieldwork
Ngidang (2017)	Pantu (Batang Lupar), 2008	None	None	Rights kept between nearby houses (p. 389); land of absent households left with leaders or kin, who lay claim to it (pp. 394, 396–397, 399–400)	Own fieldwork
Hasegawa (2018)	Kapit and the Mujong (Baleh), 2007–09	None	None	Fee for reusing a hearth after more than a month away; use once a year (p. 203, n. 11)	Own fieldwork; relays Cramb and Heppell

Ichikawa (2019)	Bintulu outskirts, mid-1960s on (interviews, 2013–14)	None	J: headman's permission and a rite (p. 44)	None	Own fieldwork
Kelabu & Fadzil (2019)	Song District (Kapit), three longhouses, 2016	None	None (51 of 90 households had moved and settled in town, p. 140)	None stated; households in town return only for festivals such as Gawai and Christmas (p. 140)	Own fieldwork
Lavoie-Lemieux (2025)	Kuching, 2022	None	E: land held only while a member (p. 78); dismantling the hearth marked withdrawal, with loss of membership and rights in the territory (p. 124)	Obligations of members in town (pp. 74, 91)	p. 78: Freeman, with page; p. 124: none for the sentence

Note. [a] Texts excluded by the rule include Patterson and Chiswick (1981, p. 136) and Abdullah (2021), on persons; Heppell (1975), on persons and expulsion; Ng (1999) and Cramb and Sujang (2013), on whole houses; Sandin (1994), on whole houses, its editor's sentence on a family moving out (p. 41) restating Sather (1993/2006b); Gapor et al. (2023), on households newly formed; and Andersen et al. (2016), on villages split from a longhouse. The rule applies to the statement that qualifies a text; descriptions in the other columns may concern persons (Appell). The column on absence and return covers only the texts in the table; rules of presence in Heppell (1975) and Sandin (1994) are reported under Presence, Return and Land and in Table 6. Counts of households leaving or living away are given in Table 5 and the Discussion; this table records them only where a text describes no condition (Morrison, an impression; Kelabu & Fadzil, a count). [b] Pages of the 1970 reprint. Principle column: the page, then any condition on exit, then any on joining; hedges are shown in brackets. Source given: the source a text cites for the statement; "close paraphrase" is established by comparison of wording. *Genselan*, compensation for ritual damage; *muai dapur*, "throwing away of the hearth"; *menoa*, the territory of a longhouse, which several houses may share.

Presence, Return and Land

Rules of presence, in the records read, regulate return: they fix when absence must be compensated and at what price, and their terms differ by river and decade. The most detailed record of a rule of presence in use comes from Heppell's fieldwork of about fifteen months between 1972 and 1974, mainly in the Batang Ai (Heppell, 1975, p. viii; Freeman, 1981, p. 3), written up through a longhouse, "Ng Mas", that is a stated composite of "a number of people from different houses in the Second Division" (Heppell, 1975, p. viii). *Adat* "proscribes the staying away from a longhouse for more than three or four successive nights"; if someone falls ill or dies during a longer absence, "the person staying away is blamed for contributing to the illness and is fined", so "each bilek therefore has to warm its hearth once every three or four days" (p. 325, n. 12). The rule, *chelap dapur* ("cold hearth"; *chelpa dapur* in that note), fines not absence as such but absence followed by illness or death (p. 325, n. 12; pp. 289–290). In one dispute a man "and the rest of his family" stayed away eight days and another member's mother died. The go-betweens cited "three previous cases" and further "precedents … in all of which the man had been fined $4", in local currency, and one

traced how the fine "had risen from $2 at the time of the Second World War". The man paid (pp. 289–290). The precedents reach the record through the go-betweens, and the date through one of them.

Sather's account of the Paku, a tributary of the Saribas, from fieldwork at Kerangan Pinggai in 1976–79, 1981–84 and 1988, sets the hearth at the founding of the house, when each family takes its first fire from the headman's hearth. Rice must be cooked on each family's hearth "at least twice each lunar month", by a stand-in not more than once (Sather, 1993/2006b, p. 75). A cold hearth "signifies an unoccupied apartment, indicating, in turn, the family's withdrawal from the community", and the family elder "must pay adat genselan", compensation for ritual damage, "and make offerings"; a family that moves to another house pays genselan and adat fines and performs *muai dapur*, the "throwing away of the hearth", which "marks their formal withdrawal" (p. 75). "Only by maintaining a bilik hearth may a family exercise membership in the longhouse community and cultivate land within its menoa" (p. 75). Sather read the rules as guarding departure: their observance "prevents the permanent dispersal of longhouse families and so keeps them from leaving the community without first paying compensation for the ritual damage their departure causes" (p. 75). On that reading, a rule of presence also bears on exit: it fixes when absence must be compensated, and prices departure. The account is normative: Sather described no observed muai dapur and did not say how often families left.

The twice-monthly interval appears in the corpus only in Second Division sources: Sandin's oral tradition of the rules a spirit gave Jelian's people (Sandin, 1994, pp. 129–130), which Sather's introduction places in "more traditional longhouses in the Saribas" (Sandin, 1994, p. 41), and the Division's compiled adat (Richards, 1963, p. 57, as cited in Cramb, 2007, p. 349, n. 13). Heppell's three or four days, also from the Second Division, are traced to the same origin, since he attributes the rule to Jelian, "revealed to him in a dream" (1975, p. 269).

The Baleh report holds the logic of the rule without a hearth rule. Freeman's quittance "absolves the family from any responsibility should their departure concur with an outcrop of sickness" (Freeman, 1955/1970b, p. 124): the blame Heppell's Second Division rule attaches to absence, the Baleh payment discharges at departure. Farming from satellite farmhouses, the *dampa*, was "widely prevalent throughout the Baleh region", and in the farming season the main longhouse was "almost invariably deserted", with a general return after reaping (pp. 163–164).

The state set its own term of return. In a note on the regulation that "no house shall have fewer than 10 apartments", Freeman quoted the Third Division's schedule of fines of 1940: a Dayak "who does not within a reasonable time move all his padi from his farming hut to his house after harvest, shall be considered to have moved within the meaning of this section" (p. 164, n. 1). The section itself is not held. Freeman recorded no hearth rule, and an interval of days would have been hard to keep under the dampa system, though family members made "fairly regular visits to the long-house" (p. 163); whether one existed in principle, his record cannot settle. Sixty years later one Baleh longhouse had such a rule: in 2009 a longhouse on the Mujong charged residents away for more than a month M$30 when they returned and used the hearth again, and expected them to use it "at least once a year" (Hasegawa, 2018, p. 203, n. 11).

Read as a feature of long settlement, as against the pioneer Baleh (Padoch, 1982, p. 34; Sather, 1996/2006a, p. 110, n. 6), the hearth rules do not sort cleanly. The strictest interval, three or four nights in Heppell's Second Division composite of 1972–74, came a decade after the compiled adat gave twice a month. The most lenient terms are the latest, both from Kapit District: a month on the Mujong, in the Baleh, in 2009, and at Rumah (Rh.) Puso on the Enchermin, a tributary of the Rajang, about 2001, where the household of a daughter of the former headman, which had moved to Kapit, kept membership under a lenient reading of adat (whose first requirements at Puso were to grow hill rice and live in the longhouse) by her return every two to three weeks, on condition that its hearth was not used (Hussaini et al., 2006, p. 6; p. 8, nn. 2, 31). Of Saribas heirs in town who returned "only occasionally (typically during the annual Gawai Dayak festivities)", Cramb judged that "local adat" had "likely" been "modified to relax this restriction" (2007, p. 332; p. 349, n. 13). A fined hearth rule dated by Heppell's go-between to the 1940s favours the river reading for that decade, yet Heppell judged Freeman's account true for the Batang Ai of 1972 "apart from

some minor variations" (1975, p. viii). The records fit both settlement history and a relaxation over time, and cannot settle which.

In the texts read, households recorded as having left a house, rather than counted among its households while living away, were counted at six houses, from the Baleh of 1922–51 to a Lemanak count recorded in 1985 (Table 5); the texts describe no *muai dapur* or ruling of *pindah* for them, and they are read here as counts of exit. One exit was reversed by the next generation: a Rh. Jingga household that had fallen out with the new headman, Jebau, stayed out of the house he built in 1969, and in 1988 its grown children came back as five bilik-families to the house that became Rh. Puso (Hussaini et al., 2006, p. 6; p. 8, n. 23; p. 4 gives six). Other counts are of houses breaking up or migrating, wholly or in part (Freeman, 1955/1970b, pp. 103–104; Padoch, 1982, p. 23). Padoch named no payment on exit, and the passages read in Heppell (1975), mainly from the Batang Ai, report exits only of persons and by expulsion (pp. 119, 122). In the Saribas in 2001, eight of the 34 rooms at Batu Lintang stood empty, "in most cases" because the younger generation had "migrated permanently to urban centres" and the elderly parents had joined them (Cramb, 2007, p. 302); heirs kept such rooms as "a symbol of their continuing rights to land" (pp. 332–333).

Table 5: Households Recorded as Having Left a Longhouse, in the Texts Read

House (river)	**Period**	**Households recorded as having left**	**Source**
Rumah Nyala (Baleh)	Founded 1922; counted 1949–51	4 of the 14 founding families had left for other Baleh houses	Freeman, 1955/1970b, p. 84
Nanga Jela (Engkari, a tributary of the Batang Ai)	1968–76	5 households, 27 persons, left	Padoch, 1982, p. 22
A house neighbouring Nanga Jela (Engkari)	About four years before fieldwork in 1973–75	4 households had emigrated and still farmed its territory	Padoch, 1982, p. 48
Rh. Jingga, rebuilt as Rh. Jebau (Enchermin)	1969	8 of the 22 households moved out when the house was rebuilt	Hussaini et al., 2006, p. 4, Fig. 3
Nanga Tapih (Saribas)	Just before the Japanese occupation	1 household left, and none after, to about 1985	Cramb, 2007, p. 328
Sekandis (Lemanak)	Before 1985 (not dated)	The headman held land "taken over from three emigrant households"	Cramb, 2007, p. 170, n. 31

Land shows the cost applied, waived and contested. On the lower Engkari, "merely leaving a particular longhouse community would not be cause for extinction of land rights"; residents agreed that moving beyond "a distance from which one could reasonably return to farm one's land" forfeited it but not on the distance, and four households farmed the territory of a house they had left, a departure read here as exit (Padoch, 1982, p. 48). A Brooke order of 1899 forbade "any Dayak removing from a river or district" to "claim, sell or transfer any farming ground" there (Porter, 1967, as cited in Cramb, 2007, p. 330). A court in 1949 held it "declaratory of the customary law" (Lee, n.d., as cited in Cramb, 2007, p. 330). A land officer, Keith Kitto, writing in the *Sarawak Gazette* in 1952, pointed out, in Cramb's words, that it was "a directive from the state and not entirely consistent with traditional principles of land tenure" (Cramb, 2007, p. 331, citing the Gazette, p. 92). Courts later held that a household moving within the same penghulu's district (1954), or not beyond "a reasonable farming distance" (1958), kept its cultivation rights, rulings Cramb judged "at variance with adat" (Lee, n.d., as cited in Cramb, 2007, p. 331). The penghulu conference of 1961 agreed that "removal from one longhouse to another constituted pindah", after which rights could not be

resumed "without prior agreement of the Tuai Rumah", the headman (Richards, 1963, p. 8, as cited in Cramb, 2007, p. 331).

Later records divide: a Lemanak community in the 1980s took back emigrants' rubber land (Cramb, 2007, p. 332); at Rantau Kemiding, in the middle Rajang, in 1995–96 town-dwelling owners of vacant apartments "expected to return" kept "their rights as community members" (Soda, 2001, p. 110, n. 20), although Soda, in a study of the same village, states as Iban customary land law in general that land reverts to open forest when its holder leaves the village or it is forgotten (Soda, 1999, p. 335); and in Pantu in 2008 leaders laid claim to the land of absent households (Ngidang, 2017, pp. 396–397). In the Nor case of 2001, Cramb reported, Justice Chin argued that moving to town to work is not *pindah*, which involves shifting to a new territory with no intention to return (2007, p. 333); the Court of Appeal overturned the ruling in 2005 on the evidence while upholding its principle that customary land rights exist independently of the land statutes (Cramb, 2007, p. xvi; see also Bulan, 2019, pp. 12–13; Subramaniam, 2018, pp. 131–132).

Presence, in these records, was shown by a performance repeated over time and enforced through blame, a fine or a fee. The rules regulate return, and two records say what failure to return amounts to: the 1940 schedule deemed a Dayak who left his padi in the farm hut "to have moved within the meaning of this section" (Freeman, 1955/1970b, p. 164, n. 1), and in the Paku a cold hearth "signifies an unoccupied apartment, indicating, in turn, the family's withdrawal from the community" and incurs genselan (Sather, 1993/2006b, p. 75). Neither record sets a point at which membership then ended: the schedule's consequence lies in a section that is not held, and the cold hearth's is compensation, distinct from the formal withdrawal that *muai dapur* marks (Sather, 1993/2006b, p. 75). A third text relays the cold-hearth reading, citing Hasegawa (2018), whose only passage on the hearth (p. 203, n. 11) does not say so, and a text not held; it also states, without a citation, that dismantling the hearth once marked a family's withdrawal and the loss of its membership and its rights in the territory (Lavoie-Lemieux, 2025, p. 124). Neither statement is counted here as a record of a rule, though Table 4 records what the text states.

Apart from one house reporting none to about 1985 (Cramb, 2007, p. 328), no text in the corpus counts exits from membership dated after the 1970s, as distinct from absence; three emigrations recorded at Sekandis in 1985 are undated (p. 170, n. 31). Hasegawa, noting that "In the Baleh, many have moved to towns", judged it "rare … for people to completely abandon their room (buai dapur: abandon-hearth)" (2018, p. 203, n. 11); *buai dapur* is his spelling, read here as *muai dapur*. Soda found "no clear criterion to judge whether an urban dweller is still considered a long-house member or not", and recorded that persons who move to another longhouse on marriage are regarded as no longer members of their original community, "though in some cases they return to the original bilek with their spouse" (2001, p. 110, n. 20). No text in the corpus describes an admission rite or a muai dapur as witnessed by its author; Ichikawa reports rites of admission from interviews (2019, p. 44). Fortes made the point for residence in domestic groups: "Only numerical analysis can show what 'degree of freedom', if any, exists" (1958, p. 4).

DISCUSSION

Entry, Exit and Closure

Weber's closure turns on "the binding rules of its order" (1922/1947, p. 139), and he treated it as a matter of degree (pp. 141–142). The Baleh record shows a regularity rather than a rule of the order. Every family that joined Rumah Nyala after its founding in 1922 was related to someone already there, and each of the eleven families of a house that broke up in 1949 joined a house where one of its members had kin (Freeman, 1955/1970b, pp. 102–104); Freeman judged there was "little possibility" of a stranger family being accepted (p. 102) but recorded no refusal, and kin closed little, given "the remarkably wide area over which kindred ties ramify" (p. 104). Rules appear in later records. Ichikawa stated generally that an Iban moving in through relatives needs the longhouse head's approval first (2019, p. 41). On the Bintulu outskirts six households with very weak or no kin ties joined in the late 1960s only after the head's permission and a rite, partly to reach the number of apartments the state required for recognition; interviewees in several communities said that "after securing enough bilek and if space for constructing new bilek structures became limited, the LHC

[longhouse community] stopped accepting new families", and one had accepted none after the 1980s "because there was no more land to use to expand the bilek building" (pp. 44–45). A state floor on house size is recorded earlier, in another division, though not shown to be the same floor: the Third Division's schedule of fines of 1940 fined the person who "erects … the first post of a new house of less than 10 doors without special permission" (Freeman, 1955/1970b, p. 164, n. 1). Weber's terms fit the sequence. Members keep a relationship open while they expect "the admission of others will lead to an improvement of their situation" (p. 140), groups shift "from a phase of expansion to one of exclusiveness" (p. 141), and closure answers "the scarcity of advantages" (p. 143).

Weber's open and closed do not classify exit, and no text read makes exit depend on the community's consent, although Brooke passes and district officers restrained movement between districts (Padoch, 1982, pp. 21, 23); the point about consent rests on silence. What the records attach are costs to rights already held, Weber's "appropriated advantages" of members, and limits on alienating them (Weber, 1922/1947, pp. 140, 142–143), from the Baleh to the order of 1899 and the conference of 1961 (see Presence, Return and Land). Weber kept a group whose rights pass freely closed where a newcomer's "acquisition of membership" needs "the ratification of the other, prior members" (p. 143); the 1961 conference set its check on return rather than entry, and placed it with the headman.

Where Membership Sits

Whether the longhouse is corporate depends on the criterion. Appell's was "the right to enter into jural relations as an entity" (2001, Section 1), and on that test the records place corporate standing, or claims like it, at three levels, beside a fourth, administrative level that the test does not reach. The *bilik*-family holds an estate and is jurally "a power unto itself" (Freeman, 1955/1970b, p. 129); the longhouse is corporate "in jural, as well as in ritual matters" under the headman's jurisdiction (p. 128). Cramb (2007), after Appell, held that the longhouse community, its households with their *menoa* (p. 52), "is a corporate group ritually and jurally" (p. 54); where several houses share a menoa, the territory is a level of its own (Cramb & Sujang, 2013, p. 140; Ngidang, 2017, p. 389). The administrative level is a criterion of recognition rather than an entity: the state's count of apartments (Ichikawa, 2019, p. 44), a resettlement scheme's register of its original participants, which in 1990 did not count households formed later (Ng, 1999, p. 86), or registration under a headman, which in 2014 defined the villages that had split from one former longhouse (Andersen et al., 2016, p. 366).

The hearth joins these levels to Sather's ritual account, since each family takes its first fire from the headman's and may exercise its membership only by keeping its own warm (Sather, 1993/2006b, p. 75); a cold hearth incurs compensation, while formal withdrawal is marked by *muai dapur*. Under absence the levels come apart, in an apartment kept by return (Hussaini et al., 2006, p. 8, n. 31) and persons' membership of a bilik-family claimed from town (Abdullah, 2021, p. 160); after exit they can come apart too, in land farmed in the territory of a house left (Padoch, 1982, p. 48).

Baselines and the Direction of Change

A claim of change needs a baseline for the river concerned. In the pioneer Baleh of 1949–51, the longhouse's permanent occupation was "the fiction" kept up for visiting officers (Freeman, 1955/1970b, p. 164), and 17 to 24 per cent of men aged 16 and over were away on *bejalai*, travel for wages or forest produce (p. 225). In the texts read, the earliest dated counts of absence for the long-settled rivers are from the 1970s, and unlike the Baleh figure, which counts men away at the time, the first counts men who had ever gone: at Nanga Jela 92 per cent of men aged about eighteen and over had been on *bejalai* at some time (Padoch, 1982, pp. 95–96), and in Heppell's Second Division composite, mainly from the Batang Ai, in 1972–74 six of thirteen fathers of young children were away as migrant labourers (Heppell, 1975, p. 319, n. 3).

Later measures of absence do not form a series: about 15 per cent of "normally inhabited" apartments unoccupied on the Kemena in 1990 (Morrison, 1993, p. 61), 21 of 69 dwellings empty or held only by the elderly near Kanowit in 1995–96 (Soda, 2001, p. 107), 4.7 residents to 7.2 members per household on the

Tinjar in 2009 (Cramb & Sujang, 2013, p. 142) and 289 of 531 members of 82 households in Kapit District living away, 138 of them elsewhere in the district (Abdullah, 2021, p. 158, Table 1). In Song District in 2016, 51 of the 90 households of three longhouses had settled in town, returning only for festivals such as Gawai and Christmas (Kelabu & Fadzil, 2019, p. 140). In the one comparison over time in the texts read, Batu Lintang fell from 185 residents in 1980 to 116 in 2001, while Nanga Tapih, rebuilt with government support, held at 110 (Cramb, 2007, p. 302).

Against those baselines, the change differs by domain. Rules on presence are not shown to have loosened (see Presence, Return and Land). Set side by side, the records show a contrast between rivers that they cannot separate from change over time. In the pioneer Baleh the *dampa* household was away from the house but farming the territory, and on the long-settled Paku membership and the right to cultivate the *menoa* both ran through the hearth (see Presence, Return and Land); the urban households recorded since 1990 are away from both. Only for the Baleh do the texts read reach from a baseline of 1949–51 to the urban households, the later end in a note on Baleh people who "have moved to towns" (Hasegawa, 2018, p. 203, n. 11); for the Saribas they reach from 1980 to 2001 (Cramb, 2007, pp. 302, 332–333). The state runs through the record, from the order of 1899 and the fines of 1940 to compiled *adat*, recognition by count, an agency's register and a headman appointed "at the pleasure of the Government" (Beginda & Bala, 2022, p. 111). Whether emigrants' forfeiture of land was adat or state law remains disputed (see Presence, Return and Land): Appell, without reference to the land officer's view, argued that the order of 1899, though it may have appeared a change in adat, was "instead a return to a more traditional adat form", citing studies of the Kantu', "an Ibanic people of West Kalimantan who were never subjected to Sarawak law", and of other Iban outside Sarawak (2001, Section 3).

Normative Records, Recorded Cases and Members' Accounts

The records on presence and exit are of three kinds, and each supports different claims (Table 6). Normative records give rules: compiled *adat*, oral tradition, rules as ethnographers stated them and rules the state set. Compiled *adat* is itself a selection; the Adat Iban Order of 1993 excluded "variations among the riverine groups" (Bulan, 2019, p. 5). Recorded cases describe a dispute, a household or a house. Members' own accounts are reported in two sources and relayed in a third (see Where the Literature Comes From).

Most of what this review finds about presence rests on the first kind. That a family must cook on its hearth "at least twice each lunar month", or that a cold hearth "signifies" withdrawal (Sather, 1993/2006b, p. 75), states a rule; it does not show that households kept it, and no text in the corpus describes a *muai dapur* as witnessed by its author. Recorded cases show rules in use, one at a time: the man in Heppell's dispute paid the fine (1975, pp. 289–290), and the Rh. Puso household kept its membership by returning (Hussaini et al., 2006, p. 8, n. 31). Soda's work on one village holds both kinds: he states as Iban customary land law in general that land reverts when its holder leaves the village (1999, p. 335), and records owners in town at Rantau Kemiding who kept their rights as community members (2001, p. 110, n. 20). The finding that households could stay members through long absences therefore rests on rules and single cases, and is stated at that level. The third kind cannot carry general claims about absent members' experience: between them, the three accounts report not having branched out of the bilik-family, returning for Gawai, *adat* fines for a missed funeral and land rights not considered abandoned, but none says what would end membership.

Table 6: Three Kinds of Evidence on Presence, Return and Exit, and the Claims Each Can Support

Kind of evidence	Records in, or cited by, the corpus	What it can show	What it cannot show
Normative records (customary and state rules)	Compiled adat (Richards, 1963, as cited in Cramb, 2007; Sandin, 1980, as cited in Sather, 1993/2006b); oral tradition (Sandin, 1994, pp. 129–130); rules as ethnographers stated them (Freeman, 1955/1970b, pp. 101–105,	What the rules said, where and when they were recorded, and how the principle was stated	Whether or how often the rules were applied; how members experienced them

	124; Heppell, 1975, p. 325, n. 12; Sather, 1993/2006b, p. 75; Hasegawa, 2018, p. 203, n. 11; Soda, 1999, p. 335); state orders and agreements (the order of 1899 and the conference of 1961, as cited in Cramb, 2007, pp. 330–331; the schedule of 1940, in Freeman, 1955/1970b, p. 164, n. 1)		
Recorded cases and disputes	Heppell's hearth case and its precedents (1975, pp. 289–290); the Rh. Puso household (Hussaini et al., 2006, p. 6; p. 8, n. 31); households farming the territory of a house left (Padoch, 1982, p. 48); households recorded as having left six houses (Table 5); owners in town keeping rights (Soda, 2001, p. 110, n. 20); land taken back or claimed (Cramb, 2007, p. 332; Ngidang, 2017, pp. 396–397); court rulings and the Nor case (Cramb, 2007, pp. 330–333)	That a rule was applied, waived or contested at a named place and date	How common the outcome was, or whether it holds for other rivers or decades
Members' own accounts	Heads of household in Kapit District (Abdullah, 2021, pp. 157, 160); urban Iban in Kuching (Lavoie-Lemieux, 2025, p. 74); Benedict Sandin, relayed, with Cramb's report of other educated Iban in urban employment (Cramb, 2007, p. 333)	How some absent members describe their ties, obligations and land rights	What absent members take to end membership: none of the three reports it

Note. A text can supply more than one kind: Sather (1993/2006b) states rules, and Soda states a rule of Iban customary land law in general (1999, p. 335) and records a case in the village he studied (2001, p. 110, n. 20).

What the Case Shows

For a sociologist, the case separates absence from exit in Hirschman's (1970) sense: in the normative record a household could live away for long periods and remain a member by returning on schedule, paying a fee on return where one was charged and meeting the obligations of members, and single recorded cases show households doing so. In that record, exit was a jural act distinct from absence, marked by the throwing away of the hearth or a removal recognised as *pindah*, and priced in ritual payments and, where the rule held, in rights in the territory. Who decides when a household may leave and on what terms it may be absent is answered in the normative record and in recorded cases at several points rather than one: the household, by its own act of *muai dapur* (Sather, 1993/2006b, p. 75) or a removal recognised as pindah (Cramb, 2007, p. 331); go-betweens, who priced an absence followed by a death (Heppell, 1975, pp. 289–290); the headman, whose agreement the 1961 conference made a condition of resumption (Cramb, 2007, p. 331) and who received the fee on return on the Mujong (Hasegawa, 2018, p. 203, n. 11); the migrating group, since "Decisions to migrate are never made on a purely individual basis" (Sather, 1996/2006a, p. 87); the state, through the order of 1899 and the district administration's "very strong disapproval" that stopped a planned move by about half the households of Nanga Jela in 1976 (Padoch, 1982, p. 23); and the courts, on whether a removal was *pindah* for land (Cramb, 2007, pp. 330–331, 333). No record sets a point at which absence alone became exit, and for urban dwellers one text found "no clear criterion" (Soda, 2001, p. 110, n. 20). The case bears on two wider themes: urbanisation and migration, because the texts read record urban Iban

who keep apartments, rights to land or obligations in houses they do not live in (Soda, 2001, p. 110, n. 20; Cramb, 2007, pp. 332–333; Lavoie-Lemieux, 2025, pp. 74, 91); and legal systems and society, because state rules shaped the terms of exit and return (see Baselines and the Direction of Change). It also shows, on a small scale, how an account was simplified, in its author's own summaries and in six later statements (Table 4); a review that relies on an account relayed as often as this one should read it against both.

The findings matter to three groups of readers. Scholars who relay Freeman can cite the principle with the conditions the report attaches (Freeman, 1955/1970b, pp. 101–102, 104) and describes (pp. 105, 124, 148), dated to the Baleh of 1949–51. Researchers on customary land and membership can keep absence and exit apart, as some records do: the 1961 conference treated removal to another longhouse as *pindah*, after which rights needed the headman's agreement to resume (Cramb, 2007, p. 331), and in the Nor case the trial judge argued that moving to town to work is not pindah (p. 333). The review draws no legal conclusion from these records. For Iban communities, the records show several parties setting terms on leaving, absence, return and exit, and one text found no clear criterion for urban dwellers; how communities decide when absence becomes exit now is theirs to say.

LIMITATIONS

The strings on the longhouse were designed for the longhouse as a social group, and their migration terms target movement rather than membership. The strings on exit, absence, return and membership retrieved only three of the five cited sources with Scopus records found by the other strings, missing Morrison (1993) and Cramb and Sujang (2013), and three records retained from them were not obtained. Claims that the literature lacks something therefore hold only for the texts read.

Selection was open to bias at two points. The records exported in July were coded by a single screener, with no second-screener check recorded, and the Scopus codes were assigned after the corpus was assembled; eleven of the 33 Scopus records also found through Google Scholar were coded differently there. The 74 records first exported in August, and twelve July records with titles in Chinese or Japanese script, were coded and checked by an author. Reading was chosen by judgement, without a recorded ranking: 393 retained Google Scholar records were not read, among them records on household transfer, depopulation and dual residence, and the capped export left about 220 migration records unexported. Records retrieved by both lines of strings include further records of this kind, some concerning urban migrants' rights in their home villages.

The bias bears most on the findings that rest on what the texts read do not contain: that no text counts exits dated after the 1970s, that none reports what absent members take to end membership, and that none describes an admission rite or *muai dapur* as witnessed by its author. For book-length texts, which were searched for terms rather than read in full, these findings rest on the passages the searches found. An unread text could add a ninth statement of the principle, and could change the route traced for Sellato and for Hew and Kedit, who also cite texts that were not read. Because absent members' own accounts come from only three sources, the review makes no claim about their experience beyond what those three report. Excluding Iban under Brunei and Indonesian rule leaves the state's part untested by comparison; Appell's argument from the Kantu' and other Iban outside Sarawak (2001, Section 3) is reported but was not assessed. Iban-language material was not eligible, the compiled adat was read only as cited, and the Adat Iban Order of 1993 is cited only through Bulan (2019).

Priorities for Research with Iban Communities

The gaps set five priorities. First, exits from membership after the 1970s should be counted house by house, kept apart from absence. Second, absent members should be asked what keeps them members and what would end membership, the question none of the three accounts answers. Third, admission rites and *muai dapur* should be recorded as performed, where communities wish, since the corpus holds *muai dapur* only as a rule and admission rites only as rules or as interviewees reported them (Ichikawa, 2019, p. 44). Fourth, rules of presence and return should be compared across rivers at the same date, to separate river from time. Fifth, the land of absent households should be traced in community and court records on rivers already

studied, where earlier records give a baseline. Each calls for work in Iban, led by Iban community researchers. Each community should decide whether the work is done, what is recorded and how it is attributed, and who holds the record.

CONCLUSION

Freeman's report attaches conditions to the freedom of exit outside its summary sections and states it bare within them, describing the quittance and the lapse of land elsewhere. Six of the eight later texts by other authors that state the principle state it bare in the paragraph that states it, in passing and never where they describe exit; three of the six describe a cost of exit elsewhere, so that, read as whole texts (book-length texts as far as the term searches found), three of the eight give no condition of exit anywhere. Because the exit column of Table 4 records conditions only, every condition of exit it records is a cost, a permission or a loss of rights; rights are also recorded as kept, after exit by households that farmed the territory of a house they had left (Padoch, 1982, p. 48) and during absence by urban owners and heirs (Soda, 2001, p. 110, n. 20; Cramb, 2007, pp. 332–333).

In the corpus, the recorded rules of presence regulate return, and none sets a point at which failure to return ended membership. In the normative record, households could keep membership across long absences by returning on a schedule, and single recorded cases show households doing so; their land was kept, lost or contested on terms that differ between rivers and decades.

These are findings about rules and cases, not about how often households left or how members experienced the rules. Terms on leaving, absence, return and exit were set by several parties, from the household and the headman to the state and the courts; for urban dwellers, one text found no clear criterion of membership (Soda, 2001, p. 110, n. 20).

Apart from one house reporting none to about 1985 (Cramb, 2007, p. 328), no text in the corpus counts exits dated after the 1970s (three emigrations recorded at Sekandis in 1985 are undated, p. 170, n. 31; one text judged exits rare), and none reports what absent members take to end membership; one reports that educated Iban in lifelong urban employment did not consider they had "abandoned" their rights to land (Cramb, 2007, p. 333).

A later count of households settled in town (Kelabu & Fadzil, 2019, p. 140) is a count of leaving, not of exit. Counts of exits dated after the 1970s, and accounts of what absent members take to end membership, remain gaps in the texts read. That work, counting exits with a community and asking absent members, belongs in Iban, led by Iban community researchers, on terms each community controls.

Funding: This research was supported by the UTS Research Grant (UTS/RESEARCH/4/2023/14).

Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI): Claude assisted with translation (Malay, French, Japanese) and language editing. All output was reviewed by the authors, who bear full responsibility for the work.

Conflict of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

REFERENCES

1. Abdullah, R. G. (2021). Multi-local living and new rural household structures: An insight from Sarawak, Malaysia. International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences, 11(14), 154–163. https://doi.org/10.6007/IJARBSS/v11-i14/8558
2. Andersen, A. O., Bruun, T. B., Egay, K., Fenger, M., Klee, S., Pedersen, A. F., Pedersen, L. M. L., & Suárez Villanueva, V. (2016). Negotiating development narratives within large-scale oil palm projects on village lands in Sarawak, Malaysia. The Geographical Journal, 182(4), 364–374. https://doi.org/10.1111/geoj.12181
3. Appell, G. N. (2001). Iban studies: Their contributions to social theory and the ethnography of other Borneo societies. In V. H. Sutlive & J. Sutlive (Eds.), The encyclopaedia of Iban studies: Iban

history, society and culture (Vol. 3, pp. 741–785). Tun Jugah Foundation; Borneo Research Council. https://gnappell.org/articles/iban.htm

4. Beginda, P., & Bala, B. (2022). Kepimpinan tuai rumah dalam perubahan politik di Sarawak, 1963-2021 [Tuai rumah leadership in political change in Sarawak, 1963-2021]. Jurnal Borneo Akhailogia (Warisan, Arkeologi & Sejarah), 7(1), 102–114. https://doi.org/10.51200/jba.v7i1.4134
5. Bulan, R. (2019). The civil courts and determination of native customary land rights: Merely declaring or making laws? Borneo Research Journal, 13(1), 1–23. https://doi.org/10.22452/brj.vol13no1.1
6. Cramb, R. A. (2007). Land and longhouse: Agrarian transformation in the uplands of Sarawak. NIAS Press.
7. Cramb, R. A., & Sujang, P. S. (2013). The mouse deer and the crocodile: Oil palm smallholders and livelihood strategies in Sarawak, Malaysia. The Journal of Peasant Studies, 40(1), 129–154. https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2012.750241
8. Fortes, M. (1958). Introduction. In J. Goody (Ed.), The developmental cycle in domestic groups (pp. 1–14). Cambridge University Press.
9. Freeman, J. D. (1958). The family system of the Iban of Borneo. In J. Goody (Ed.), The developmental cycle in domestic groups (pp. 15–52). Cambridge University Press.
10. Freeman, J. D. (1961). Iban augury. Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde, 117(1), 141–167. https://doi.org/10.1163/22134379-90002199 (Original work published 1960)
11. Freeman, J. D. (1970a). The Iban of Western Borneo. In T. G. Harding & B. J. Wallace (Eds.), Cultures of the Pacific: Selected readings (pp. 180–200). Free Press. (Original work published 1960)
12. Freeman, J. D. (1970b). Report on the Iban (London School of Economics Monographs on Social Anthropology No. 41). Athlone Press. (Original work published 1955)
13. Freeman, J. D. (1981). Some reflections on the nature of Iban society. Department of Anthropology, Research School of Pacific Studies, Australian National University. https://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc1.31822037135498
14. Gapor, S. A., Silini, M. O. E., Echoh, D. U., & Rahman, H. F. A. (2023). Factors and effects of changes in the spatial layout of Iban dwelling in Sarawak. Geografia: Malaysian Journal of Society and Space, 19(2), 64–78. https://doi.org/10.17576/geo-2023-1902-05
15. Hasegawa, G. (2018). Iban gawai rituals in their twilight in Kapit, Malaysia. Indonesia and the Malay World, 46(135), 198–217. https://doi.org/10.1080/13639811.2018.1446420
16. Heppell, M. (1975). Iban social control: The infant and the adult [Doctoral dissertation, Australian National University]. ANU Open Research. https://openresearch-repository.anu.edu.au/handle/1885/116310
17. Hew, C. S., & Kedit, F. (1987). The Batang Ai Dam, resettlement and rural Iban women. In N. Heyzer (Ed.), Women farmers and rural change in Asia: Towards equal access and participation (pp. 163–219). Asian and Pacific Development Centre.
18. Hirschman, A. O. (1970). Exit, voice, and loyalty: Responses to decline in firms, organizations, and states. Harvard University Press.
19. Hussaini, M., Hirata, T., & Hata, S. (2006). ビリックの形成過程にみる世帯構成とロングハウスの共同性：サラワクのロングハウスにおける空間構成と住まい方に関する研究（その1）[Study on the composition of bilik family and the cooperation of longhouse's residences based on the formation progress of the bilik: Research on space configuration and living style concerning longhouse in Sarawak (Part 1)]. 日本建築学会計画系論文集 [Journal of Architecture and Planning (Transactions of AIJ)], 71(609), 1–8. https://doi.org/10.3130/aija.71.1_11
20. Ichikawa, M. (2007). Rules of inheritance and transfer of land by the Iban of Sarawak: Land as an intergenerational resource. Borneo Research Bulletin, 38, 148–158.
21. Ichikawa, M. (2008). Changes and diversity in rules of natural-resource tenure by the Iban of Sarawak, East Malaysia. Asian and African Area Studies, 8(1), 1–21. https://doi.org/10.14956/asafas.8.1
22. Ichikawa, M. (2019). Immigration and adaptation of the Iban from rural to urban outskirts in Sarawak, Malaysia. Tropics, 28(2), 39–48. https://doi.org/10.3759/tropics.MS18-14

23. Kelabu, M., & Fadzil, K. S. (2019). Realiti dan aspirasi pembangunan masyarakat Iban di pedalaman daerah Song, Kapit, Sarawak: Kajian kes di tiga buah rumah panjang [Reality and development aspiration among the Iban in the interior of Song, Kapit, Sarawak: A case study in three longhouses]. MANU: Jurnal Pusat Penataran Ilmu dan Bahasa, 30, 131–149. https://doi.org/10.51200/manu.v30i.1894
24. Lavoie-Lemieux, M. (2025). Iban en ville : reconjuguer identité et appartenance à Kuching (Sarawak, Malaisie insulaire) [Iban in the city: Reworking identity and belonging in Kuching (Sarawak, insular Malaysia)] [Master's thesis, Université Laval]. CorpusUL. https://corpus.ulaval.ca/entities/publication/371889c7-5056-4a44-bbc7-985d5b1d901a
25. Morrison, P. S. (1993). Transitions in rural Sarawak: Off-farm employment in the Kemena Basin. Pacific Viewpoint, 34(1), 45–68. https://doi.org/10.1111/apv.341003
26. Murray, T. (1982). People on top (orang ka-atas): The question of Iban egalitarianism. Cambridge Anthropology, 7(1), 28–46. https://www.jstor.org/stable/23816168
27. Ng, C. (1999). Positioning women in Malaysia: Class and gender in an industrializing state. Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-27420-8
28. Ngidang, D. (2017). From inclusion to social exclusion in resource stewardship among members of migrant bilik families in Pantu, Sri Aman. In V. T. King, Z. Ibrahim, & N. H. Hassan (Eds.), Borneo studies in history, society and culture (pp. 385–403). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-10-0672-2_18
29. Padoch, C. (1982). Migration and its alternatives among the Iban of Sarawak (Verhandelingen van het Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde No. 98). Martinus Nijhoff. https://doi.org/10.26530/OAPEN_613337
30. Patterson, A. H., & Chiswick, N. R. (1981). The role of the social and physical environment in privacy maintenance among the Iban of Borneo. Journal of Environmental Psychology, 1(2), 131–139. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0272-4944(81)80003-5
31. Rousseau, J. (1980). Iban inequality. Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde, 136(1), 52–63. https://www.jstor.org/stable/27863276
32. Sandin, B. (1994). Sources of Iban traditional history (C. Sather, Ed.) [Special monograph No. 7]. Sarawak Museum Journal, 46(67).
33. Sather, C. (2006a). "All threads are white": Iban egalitarianism reconsidered. In J. J. Fox & C. Sather (Eds.), Origins, ancestry and alliance: Explorations in Austronesian ethnography (pp. 73–112). ANU E Press. https://doi.org/10.22459/OAA.10.2006.05 (Original work published 1996)
34. Sather, C. (2006b). Posts, hearths and thresholds: The Iban longhouse as a ritual structure. In J. J. Fox (Ed.), Inside Austronesian houses: Perspectives on domestic designs for living (pp. 67–117). ANU E Press. https://doi.org/10.22459/IA.09.2006.04 (Original work published 1993)
35. Sellato, B. (2002). Social organization in Borneo: A general overview. In B. Sellato, Innermost Borneo: Studies in Dayak cultures (pp. 67–92). SevenOrients; Singapore University Press. (Original work published 1987)
36. Soda, R. (1999). サラワク・イバン人社会における私的土地所有観念の形成 [The evolving concept of land ownership among the Iban of Sarawak, Malaysia]. 人文地理 [Japanese Journal of Human Geography], 51(4), 329–351. https://doi.org/10.4200/jjhg1948.51.329
37. Soda, R. (2001). Rural-urban migration of the Iban of Sarawak and changes in long-house communities. Geographical Review of Japan, Series B, 74(1), 92–112. https://doi.org/10.4157/grj1984b.74.92
38. Subramaniam, Y. (2018). Legal pluralism in Malaysia: The case of Iban native customary rights in Sarawak. In A. Harding & D. A. H. Shah (Eds.), Law and society in Malaysia: Pluralism, religion, and ethnicity (pp. 123–144). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203710265-6
39. Weber, M. (1947). The theory of social and economic organization (A. M. Henderson & T. Parsons, Trans.). Free Press. (Original work published 1922)

APPENDIX A: SEARCH STRINGS S7 TO S12

Scopus strings S7 to S11 combine the population block with one or more concept blocks, each searched in the title, abstract and keywords (TITLE-ABS-KEY): S7 = Population AND Exit; S8 = Population AND Absence; S9 = Population AND Return; S10 = Population AND Membership; S11 = Population AND (Exit OR Absence OR Return) AND Membership. S12 = S1 AND (Exit OR Absence OR Return OR Membership OR hearth* OR dapur), without the exclusion clause. No year, language or document-type limits were set. The Google Scholar queries are given in full in Table 1.

Table A1: Population and Concept Blocks of Scopus Strings S7 to S12

Block	**Terms**
Population	TITLE-ABS-KEY ((iban OR “sea dayak” OR “sea dyak”) AND (sarawak OR borneo OR malaysia* OR dayak*)) AND NOT TITLE-ABS-KEY (“bank account*”)
Exit	exit* OR withdraw* OR abandon* OR emigra* OR outmigra* OR “out-migra*” OR expel* OR expuls* OR quittance OR pindah OR “muai dapur” OR “buai dapur” OR “pemali rumah” OR keluar OR berhijrah OR penghijrahan OR ((leav* OR left OR depart* OR “move* out” OR “moving out” OR relocat* OR resettl*) W/5 (longhouse* OR “long house*” OR “long-house*” OR “rumah panjai” OR “rumah panjang” OR bilik* OR bilek* OR household* OR communit* OR village*))
Absence	absen* OR “non-resident*” OR nonresident* OR “multi-local*” OR multilocal* OR “dual residen*” OR “circular migra*” OR “rural-urban migra*” OR “urban migra*” OR commut* OR bejalai OR “chelap dapur” OR “chelpa dapur” OR “cold hearth*” OR genselan OR vacan* OR unoccupied OR “empty room*” OR “empty apartment*” OR “left behind”
Return	return* OR “come back” OR “coming back” OR “came back” OR “went back” OR “go back” OR homecoming OR reintegrat* OR resum* OR revisit* OR “visit* home” OR “balik kampung” OR kembali OR pulang
Membership	member* OR belong* OR affiliat* OR “bilik-famil*” OR “bilek-famil*” OR “land right*” OR “customary right*” OR “native customary” OR “customary land*” OR “customary law*” OR adat OR inherit* OR heir* OR keahlian OR ahli OR “hak tanah” OR “tanah adat” OR “hak adat”