

***Ba'*: The Shifting Role of Baby Carrier among the Stratification Society in Central Borneo**

**Faridah Sahari
Institute of Borneo Studies
University of Malaysia Sarawak
94300 Kota Samarahan, SARAWAK
sfaridah@faca.unimas.my**

Abstract

This article focuses on one of the most significant heritage of Orang Ulu, the *ba'*. The *ba'* has twofold roles: utilitarian and symbolism of the baby carrier used and made by among the Orang Ulu society who practice stratification in their social organization. As a utilitarian object, *ba'* is used to carry a baby at the back or in front of the bearer. The *ba'* features heirloom beads and beadwork with the motif of a human figurine to symbolize the wealth and status of the baby and the *ba'* maker. However, as time changed, Orang Ulu also gone through changes in lifestyle and religion which caused the practicality of the traditional objects. With the abundant availability of commercialized baby carriers in the market also affect people's choice for this traditional carrier, will *ba'* still relevant in modern lifestyle? Is it still significant to symbolize status and wealth through *ba'*? An ethnographic study in Sg. Asap Resettlement Scheme in Belaga, Sarawak investigates the usage, production and the role of *ba'* among the Kayan and Kenyah communities. The study showed that *ba'* is found in variation of design. *Ba'* also has gone through several transformations in its production, construction material, usage and purpose. Although *ba'* is not perceived as it was before, to symbolize wealth and status, nonetheless the effort that these stratified communities, the Kayan and Kenyah, to manifest the *ba'* design as a universal heritage to sustain its existence is worthier.

Keywords: *ba'*, baby carrier, material culture, Orang Ulu, changing role, universal heritage