

# *Jakok, Ayep and Gaheat*<sup>1</sup>: The Kayan Cultural Significance

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## Abstract

Smoking homemade tobacco and betel chewing are some parts of many *Kayan* significance traditions. This paper reviews three main aspects of the subject. First, it examines the purpose, meaning and symbolism attached to this traditional activity in their social practice based on the perspective of Kayan in Belaga. Secondly, it discusses on tobacco, betel pepper and betel nut as an important village economy and barter trade commodities of among the Orang Ulu communities in the past. Finally, the paper attempts to analyze the constituent paraphernalia related to this cultural practice and how these material objects change in the modern world.

*Keywords: Kayan tradition, tobacco containers, betel boxes, material culture, material significance*

## Introduction

Producing and smoking of homemade tobacco cigarette and chewing betel are part of the Kayan wealth tradition. As a well known cultural practice to many other native people throughout Southeast Asia regions, this tradition has been very much discussed among researchers in the past. However, specific focus and detailed analysis is still lacking in this matter as Ellen (1991) states that for all Southeast Asia, only one monographical essay by Conklin on the Hanunóo in 1958 stands out as a significant contribution to the subject for a particular group of people. After more than three decades, Ellen (1991) attempts to analyze betel chewing among the Naulu of Seram, by giving a specific focus on how chewing betel affects physiological effects.

In my analysis, I focus on both chewing betel and smoking homemade tobacco, realized that these accompaniments are equally essential in Kayan cultural practice. Although this tradition is constantly relate to its social use, particularly in initiating and promoting relationship (Ellen, 1991, Mashman and Nayoi, 2012), here I try to show some other meanings associated to betel

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<sup>1</sup> *Jakok, Ayep and Gaheat* are Kayanic terms for homemade tobacco, betel pepper and betel nut.