



Social Transformation and Gender in Sarawak

By Dr Hew Cheng Sim, Faculty of Social Sciences

University Malaysia Sarawak

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Speaker's Profile



Dr. HEW Cheng Sim is a Professor at the Faculty of Social Sciences, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak. Her research interests include gender and development, urbanization, marriage, family and work with a focus on Sarawak. She has published widely in journals and her books include *Women Workers, Migration and Family in Sarawak*, published in London and New York by RoutledgeCurzon in 2003; *Village Mothers, City Daughters: Women experiencing urbanization in Sarawak* by the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS) in Singapore in 2007. Her book with Rokiah Talib, *Tra Zehnder: Iban woman patriot of Sarawak* was published by UNIMAS Press in 2011. Her edited book, *For Better or For Worse: Marriage and Family in Sarawak* will be published by Whiting and Birch in London later this year. Her fifth book, an edited volume with Kelvin Egay John and Sharifah Sophia Wan Ahmad, *Beyond Romance: Reflections on Research in Sarawak* is now under preparation.

Abstract

This paper examines social transformation and agrarian transition in the Malaysian state of Sarawak on the island of Borneo. Although rural change is not new on the island, the speed and penetration wrought by current processes of change is far-reaching. The consequences have been uneven for indigenous communities: some have benefited from infrastructure projects like roads and schools and from proximity to employment in urban centres, but others have lost their land and face a depleted natural resource base and increasing difficulties in making a living in the village. This paper argues that these processes are gendered in nature as men and women decide either to leave (whether singly or with their families) or stay put in the villages. Although there is not much research on the gender dimension of social transformation in Sarawak, this paper pieces together a picture of how women effect as well as are affected by these changes.