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Mover-oriented approach to understand rural-urban interaction: a case from Sarawak, Malaysia

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Abstract: This paper describes the entire picture of the mobility of indigenous people (the Iban) of Sarawak, Malaysia, between rural and urban areas, and tries to redefine the meaning of ‘rural’ and ‘urban’ for mobile people. While the Iban villages have been experiencing significant out-migration over the previous few decades, most of rural-to-urban migrants retain village ‘membership’ regardless of their current place of residence. Urban dwellers set up residential bases in both town and village, frequently moving between the two areas. This paper emphasizes that the Iban are stretching the notions of ‘household’ and ‘village member’ to secure and integrate multiple residences or multiple belonging. It can be said that individuals are endeavoring to integrate rural and urban lives by extending their living space across the two areas. Focusing on the movers who have embodied the integration of rural and urban space may aid in analyzing for clarifying rural-urban interactions. This mover-oriented focus would suggest a possible approach to reconsider the discontinuity between rural and urban studies.

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1. Introduction

I have been conducting research into the mobility of the indigenous people of Sarawak, Malaysia, between rural and urban areas (Soda 2000, 2001, 2003). While I initially focused on either the rural or urban perspective, I later also focused on people doing the moving, as they are key actors in rural-urban interactions (Soda 2003). As Dixon (1987) and Unwin (1989) argued, it is not urban and rural *areas*, or rural and urban *classes*, which interact, but it is *people* who exploit and are exploited in the process of rural-urban interactions.

In this paper, I describe the entire picture of the mobility of indigenous people between rural and urban areas, redefining the meaning of ‘rural’ and ‘urban’ for mobile people. I show that focusing on the movers may aid in analyzing rural-urban interactions in the socio-economic and political senses.

It has become increasingly obvious that what is important for rural people’s livelihoods in the developing world is whether they have access to the non-farm employment market (e.g., Takada 1991; Adams 2002; Rigg 1998, 2005). Takada (1991) and Adams (2002), for instance,

criticized previous studies that regarded the rural economy of developing countries as being synonymous with agriculture and pointed out that the significance of non-farm income for rural households continues to grow. Given the increase in non-farm employment outside the village and its effect on rural households, labor allocation and income earning strategies within households might blur the rural/urban divide of the household economy. In this sense, employment migration between rural and urban areas has become a critical theme for studies on rural livelihood in developing countries.

Rural-to-urban migration in developing countries has had a great impact on both rural agrarian transformation and urban settlement patterns. Many researchers have dealt with its impact from various perspectives.

From the rural perspective, there has been much anxiety that out-migration from rural areas leads to the decrease in working population and impoverishes rural communities (see Skeldon 2005). On the other hand, economic activities outside the village have been recognized as making an essential contribution to the diversification of rural livelihoods. Jonathan Rigg further developed Bryceson's notion of 'deagrarianization' (Bryceson 1996, 1997, 2000) and pointed out that inequalities in rural incomes in developing countries are not so much an outcome of the 'agrarian revolution' but rather a product of differential access to non-farm earnings (Rigg 1998, 2001; Rigg and Nattapoolwat 2001). Elmhirst (2002) used previous case studies (e.g., Rodenburg 1995, Leinbach and Watkins 1998, Silvey 2000) to show that livelihoods in rural Indonesia are characterized by participation in non-farm work, often at a great distance from home. This is true even in 'transmigration areas,' where the economic success of resettled farmers is closely related to their pursuit of non-farm income possibilities. Blaikie et al. (2002), using data obtained from a case study in Nepal, clarified the role of individual migration in the improvement of livelihoods. "The nature of rural household itself (and possibly even 'the village') has been transformed, if not fragmented, by the rise in individual migration." (Blaikie et al. 2002: 1268).

From the urban perspective, when rural-to-urban migrants were observed within the framework of urban studies, they were often regarded as marginalized people in the cities and the source of social problems such as an increase in unemployment, the emergence of squatter settlements, and 'overpopulation' in urban centers. Many researchers based their views on the Chicago school and the urban/rural dichotomy and judged the adaptability of the migrants to urban life using such notions as 'urban villagers' and 'peasants in cities' (e.g., Gans 1967, Mangin 1970, Papanek 1975). In contrast, somewhat paradoxical but interesting concepts, such as 're-tribalization' and 're-creation of folk,' have been presented (see Cohen 1969, Epstein 1981, Matsuda 1998) that place high valuations on migrants' initiatives to create a new 'urban ethnicity' that struggles against the urban majority and macro-society. Attention has been drawn to the mutual-aid function of locality-based and ethnicity-based associations in cities by an interest in migrants' strategies for living in cities and their ties with their original rural communities.

Thus, while labor allocation strategies within rural households and economic activities outside villages were mainly discussed from the viewpoint of rural studies, urban studies emphasized that communities of rural-to-urban migrants maintain various kinds of ties with their home villages to help them cope with the day-to-day challenges of urban life. However, migrants' commitments to village issues have been rarely discussed, except for remitting behavior and its

impact on rural development (e.g., Stark and Lucas 1988; Hoddinott 1994; Brown 1994, 1997; Adams 1998; Ahlburg and Brown 1998). Therefore, as has often been noted, there is still a great divide between rural and urban studies; that is, there is a discontinuity between studies on rural households and those on rural-to-urban migrants. However, as we will observe in the subsequent sections, rural-urban relationships and human mobility between the two regions are becoming more complicated and substantial and should thus be crucial points of discussion.

One of the major problems with previous studies is that the flow of migrants was conceptualized primarily as labor migration from rural to urban areas. The counter flow and its socio-political effects have been little investigated. As Kevin E. McHugh pointed out, regarding “migration and migrant adjustment as a one-way journey is inadequate, as many individuals and groups forge connections and social fields across expanses of space and time” (McHugh 2000: 71). While employment migration from rural to urban areas has garnered greater academic interest, and remains the dominant flow, the backward flow also demands attention because it undoubtedly provides the key to understanding rural-urban relations. In many parts of Southeast Asia, for example, there is retirement migration to home locations as well employment migration from rural to urban areas. Skeldon (2005) says, “...it had been assumed that most migration was made up of permanent moves from A to B whereas, in reality, migration is a complex system of various types of movement, perhaps better termed ‘mobility’, in which non-permanent forms are as important.” In Southeast Asia, the extremely high mobility makes it difficult to assign discrete spatial addresses to movers, and livelihoods cannot be simply divided into rural/urban or agriculture/industry (Rigg 1998). In other words, the increased mobility of people and the spatial expansion of households are blurring rural/urban distinction (Champion and Hugo 2001). More intensive investigation of the effect these movers have on rural agrarian society and urban settlement patterns should help illuminate rural-urban interactions.

As Rigg (2005) remarks, individuals are quite able to embrace multiple spatial and occupational identities simultaneously, and those who have apparently cut themselves off from the village may nonetheless remain important components in understanding trajectories of agrarian transition. As mentioned above, economic activities outside the village have contributed to the diversification of rural livelihoods, which means that delocalization of livelihoods is in progress. Livelihoods are no longer localized to either rural or urban areas but rather straddle the two (Kelly 1998; Bounthong et al. 2004; Rigg 2005). The diversified activities of spatially expanded households are sometimes conceptualized as ‘multi-active households’ (Krokfors 1995; de Haan 1999) or ‘pluriactive households’ (Bounthong et al. 2004).

In Southeast Asia, the spatial and sectoral diversification of rural livelihoods and the household economy is closely related to the high mobility of the people. This mobility is crucially important to interpreting both agrarian transformation and the changes in urban settlement patterns. In this sense, the conventional rural-urban migration studies that have been based on the so-called ‘sedentary bias’ are no longer adequate—a new perspective of human mobility is needed. This ‘sedentary bias,’ or ‘sedentaristic assumption,’ was criticized by de Haan (1999), Mosse et al. (2002), and de Haan and Rogaly (2002) in that studies and policies tend to assume immobile populations and to regard migration as a disjunction and thus undesirable. Whereas the challenge to the assumption of ‘sedentarism’ was offered in the context of develop-

ment studies in the developing world, this criticism seems to share the perspective of the spatial fragmentation of lives and the delocalization of livelihoods presented by Rigg (2005).

These studies evoked a distrust of locality-based or place-based concepts such as rural household, rural economy, village, and villager. In other words, these concepts have been exposed as problematic and unsatisfactory analytical categories for describing the changing migration patterns and the spatial expansion of livelihoods. This encourages us to focus on the perspectives of the migrants themselves, which should undermine the dichotomy of rural/urban migration studies. As de Haan and Rogaly (2002) observed, to understand the perspectives of people on the move, migration and human mobility need to be seen as a social as well as economic process. In this paper, I try to describe not only the social and economic aspects of rural-urban migration but also the political factors behind the mobility of indigenous people in Sarawak, Malaysia. I focus, from social and economic perspectives, on the rural-to-urban migration of indigenous people and its effect on intra- and inter-household relationships. From a political perspective, I examine the role of election campaigns in rural development and the extension of village leadership beyond rural areas.

The case study described in this paper deals with the Iban people, the largest ethnic group in the state of Sarawak, Malaysia. Although the Iban have traditionally lived in the forests and practiced shifting cultivation, the number of Iban residing in cities has increased rapidly in recent years. I focus on their frequent moves between rural and urban areas and emphasize the significance of using such movers as instruments of analysis for clarifying rural-urban interactions.

I conducted research both in a rural Iban village in the middle basin of the Rajang River (the Kanowit District) and in a migrant settlement in Sibu. Sibu, a town of about 126,000 people at the time of this research, is located in the lower basin of the Rajang River and functions as the regional center. The village is about 43 kilometers southeast of Sibu and had been experiencing significant out-migration over the previous few decades. The research in Kanowit was mainly undertaken between 1996 and 1998, and that in Sibu in 1999 and 2000. Supplementary research in both areas was done in 2003.

2. Deagrarianization and expansion of rural household economy

Although the Iban has been known as shifting cultivators, many Iban villages are experiencing a decline in agricultural activities and a degradation in social structure because of increasing out-migration of the younger generation (Morrison 1993, Soda 2001). In the case village in Kanowit, which was comprised of 59 households with a population of 245, only 47% of the villagers in the workforce were full-time farmers, and 56% of them were over 50 years old in 1996 (Soda 2001).

The aging of the village workforce and the introduction of new agricultural techniques such as fertilizer, agricultural chemicals, and an irrigation system caused changes in their agricultural practices, particularly a shift from dry paddy to wet paddy cultivation. As hillside cultivation requires more time and labor than wet paddy cultivation, older farmers prefer planting wet paddy on flat land. In 1996, 65.6 acres (38 households) in the village were under wet paddy cultivation, while only 22.8 acres (20 households) were under dry paddy cultivation.

Paddy planting by the Iban community has traditionally depended on shifting cultivation with a considerably long fallow period, whether on dry or swampy land (Pringle 1970: 26). In recent years, however, the fallow period has become shorter, and there is even some continuous cropping. Moreover, the acreage planted per household has been declining. The average per household in 1996 was only 2.1 acres, including wet and dry land, considerably less than the four to five acres per household estimated by Freeman (1955) for the Upper Rajang area in the 1950s.

Cash crops, such as pepper and cocoa, had been widely grown by the Iban, but, by the time of this research, only a few households planted such crops, and then on only small plots. Although rubber trees, which had been the most important cash crop for the Iban, still covered a large swath of hilly land in the village, very few households still made a livelihood mainly by rubber tapping. The total rubber garden holdings in the village in 1998 amounted to 1,526 acres, an extraordinarily large area considering the population of the village. In fact, many rubber gardens had never produced latex, having been left untapped and uncut over the previous few decades. This is because the villagers saw the rubber trees as the best way to mark the boundaries between properties, which avoids land disputes. Thus, deagrarianization among the Iban led to a break in the traditional land use cycle: paddy cultivation changed, fields shrunk, and rubber gardens went unused.

These changes in agricultural practices are closely correlated with the increase in out-migration of the younger generation (especially that of females) and the decline in the agricultural workforce. The Iban began to migrate out of villages in significant numbers in the 1960s, when the lumber and oil industries were experiencing rapid growth. During this period, the first waves of Iban men left their homes to look for wage-earning jobs in these sectors (see, for example, Sutlive 1992; Kedit 1993; Morrison 1993), and a considerable portion of the migrants began to stay in the cities. However, this migration trend did not affect agrarian change significantly, because the Iban agriculture had traditionally been managed by females. The 1980s saw a major change in these labor migration trends: single men continued to leave, but a growing number began taking their families; that is, men started taking their wives and children with them. This change in migration patterns accelerated the aging of the rural community (Soda 2001). However, a decrease in the number of 'current village residents' does not necessarily correspond to a decrease in the number of 'village members' in that the older people remaining in the village continue to count married children living in the cities as household members and as part of the village population (Soda 2005).

In the Iban language, leaving home and moving to the spouse's home upon marriage is called *ngugi* or *nguai*. When adult children leave home to get married and set up a home of their own, they are considered to be independent (*kediri*). When this occurs, the person marrying out ceases to be a member of the original household. However, it is often unclear whether married couples in the cities are now affiliated to, or independent of, their parents' households. From the parents' viewpoint, new homes set up by their children in the cities can be considered part of the parents' household. Furthermore, married couples in the cities are considered to retain the right to inherit the parents' household on either the husband's or wife's side. This is a broad interpretation of their traditional custom. In other words, rural households are expanding both socially and spatially.

3. ‘Double belonging’ of urban dwellers

The major destination of Iban out-migrants in the Rajang Basin has been Sibu (Sarawak 1997). According to the 1991 census, the population of Sibu was 126,381: Chinese (66.7%), Iban (13.4%), Malay (10.5%), Melanau (7.1%), Bidayuh (0.7%), and others (1.6%). Although the Iban are the largest ethnic group in Sarawak, they are still a minority in urban areas. For the Iban in the Rajang Basin, Sibu is the place where they look for wage-earning jobs and, at the same time, directly interact with other ethnic groups such as the Chinese, Malay, and Melanau. They also find opportunities to interact with the macro-society in that Sibu has various administrative functions, government agencies, and political party branches. The Iban call Sibu *negeri* or *negeri*, which has multiple meanings (country, state, city, large town, etc.). Sibu is thus recognized as having ‘urbanness,’ a place different from home.

In 1999 and 2000, I conducted field research in Kampung Sentosa resettlement area (hereafter Kg. Sentosa), which is located in a suburb of Sibu. I focused on how the urban Iban maintained ties with their home communities. The Iban living in Kg. Sentosa mostly migrated to Sibu in the 1980s from neighboring districts and divisions and squatted on a riverbank until they obtained legal residential lots in the resettlement area. Interviews with 132 household heads in Kg. Sentosa revealed that the male workforce among the members of these households numbered 227 and that 88% of them had relatively stable jobs (49% of the employed men worked in the government sector). While these figures give the impression that the Iban had adapted to urban life, they in fact continued to move back and forth between urban and rural areas, and many of them planned to return to their home village at some point in the future.

The interviews revealed that 55.3% of the Iban planned to shift their main living base to their home village after retirement and that 14.4% of them intended to maintain ‘double residence,’ with a base in Sibu and one in their village. They continued to take an interest in various events and affairs in their villages. For instance, they often returned to their village home temporarily to participate in group agricultural work, annual festivals, ceremonies, and village meetings. Most of those with at least one parent living in their village made periodic remittances or sent an occasional cash payment to the parent. Conversely, relatives and friends from the village often came to Sibu for such events as funerals, weddings, and religious festivals.

Of particular interest is the finding that more than 100 of the 132 interviewees retain their memberships of their home village although they had lived in Sibu for a considerably long time, belonged to the neighborhood association in Kg. Sentosa, and had secured their livelihood in town with legal residence, formal jobs, and stable income. Iban custom allows one to ‘belong to a village’ even if he/she actually resides a long way from the village. One can remain a member of his/her original community regardless of present residence as long as specific conditions are met. For urban dwellers to retain their village membership, they are expected to follow Iban customs under the control of the village head. For example, if all members of a household reside in the city, at least one of them must return to the village at least once a month and light a fire in the kitchen of their village home. If they are negligent in this, they have to pay a penalty—usually some fowls or a small amount of money—to the village head. In other words, even if the whole household lives in the city and their village home remains vacant for an extended period

of time, they can continue to be members of their village community.

Thus, many urban dwellers keep residential bases both in the village and in Sibu, belonging to the village committee and to the town neighborhood association. This can be called ‘double residence’ or ‘double belonging.’¹ By examining their concerns regarding rural development, we can comprehend their sense of double belonging, as we will see in the following section.

4. Urban dwellers’ concerns regarding rural development

The urban Iban are greatly concerned regarding both their present urban life and their future village life, as clearly reflected in their voting behavior (Soda 2003). This is because the Iban attach great importance to the improvement in living conditions that is often the result of government-led development programs. In Sarawak, the distribution of government subsidies is largely affected by the voting results.

In general elections in Sarawak, citizens aged 21 and over are qualified to vote and can choose their polling place regardless of their current residence. Table 1 shows the registered polling places of Kg. Sentosa residents in 1999. Those who intended to return to their village mostly registered at the polling place in their village, not in Sibu. This is closely related to development politics in Sarawak.

Although the Government budget for rural development had been steadily increasing over the last few decades, it had not necessarily been distributed fairly among the constituencies. This is evidenced by the fact that development funds were not allocated to constituencies in which an opposition candidate had been elected in previous elections (Mason 1995). This punitive government policy was common knowledge among the Iban.

They were therefore well aware that supporting government parties would ensure that they received government subsidies or rural development projects. Moreover, since the 1987 election for the State Assembly, the Sarawak Government had been using a ballot-counting system that provides detailed results for each village (Mason 1995). It is no surprise then that village communities strongly supported the government parties and that many of the Iban in Kg. Sentosa voted in their village. Nevertheless, they still desired improved amenities and infrastructures in their urban environment. It was therefore important for them to show a pro-

Table 1 Distribution of registered polling places among each household

Plan for the future	Voting distribution				Total
	Whole membership of household vote at village	Some household members vote at village and others in Sibu	Whole membership of household vote in Sibu	Others/Unknown	
Return to village after retirement	38	16	14	5	73
Double residence'	6	12	1	0	19
Stay in town	0	0	23	0	23
Undecided/Unknown	0	3	9	5	17
Total	44	31	47	10	132

Source: Soda (2000)

Government attitude even in the urban area. Those who attached importance to the improvement of their urban lives thought it necessary to also vote as part of the urban constituency. About a quarter of the households thus had a strategy to have both urban and rural voting places, with the husband and wife or parents and adult children registering in different locations. Thus, the sense of double belonging among the urban Iban was clearly reflected in their voting activities.

There is considerable evidence that the urban Iban from the case village in Kanowit had been greatly concerned about rural development. When the Sarawak Government proposed building a large oil-palm plantation near the village in 1996, movement of the Iban between the town and the village greatly accelerated because many of the urban Iban returned to the village to participate in discussions of the proposal. In 1998, when questionnaires regarding the disposition of land were distributed to village households and again when village residents were considering whether to sign contracts permitting development of their land for the oil-palm plantation, many urban dwellers were summoned home and asked to give their advice.

Although the abundance of land in rural areas still supported paddy planting, the primary and secondary forests had almost vanished because of the rubber-planting boom in the middle of the 20th Century. The rural hilly areas were almost completely covered by unused rubber trees and had been increasing in value due to development policies. Therefore, even those urban Iban who had not directly participated in agricultural activities in the village began to take considerable interest in the village land as its value rose. However, the landowners were sometimes not clearly specified because the land is regarded as possessed by parents, forefathers, or the household. This ambiguous land ownership, which has been a tradition of the Iban, led to tensions and conflicts among household members and between households as well.

5. Opinion leaders moving between urban and rural areas

Rural development projects, especially large-scale projects, often bring about tensions and conflicts among village residents due to concerns about the distribution of resource, funds, and profit. When land issues surfaced, there was an increase in the temporal return of urban dwellers to their villages. This means that urban dwellers had a significant effect on the management and development of rural resources.

During my stay in the case village, I observed events concerning land and development issues, including a court trial over land possession, an election for the state assembly, and an animated village meeting about the oil-palm plantation scheme. When these events occurred, there was increased movement between urban and rural areas — urban dwellers participated in the court trial, political campaign, and village meeting, leading and provoking lively discussions.

In other words, by examining the amount and patterns of the movements of people between urban and rural areas, we can better understand the changes in their perception of land management and the social structure in the villages. That is, it is difficult to fully comprehend rural changes without observing the urban dwellers who return to their home village occasionally and are involved in rural development issues. However, the influence of these people in rural communities extends beyond occasional events such as court trials and elections. Their influence is underscored by the fact that some village heads actually reside not in the village but in a nearby

city.

My interviews with the 132 household heads in Kg. Sentosa revealed the presence of six incumbent village heads and two *ex-penghulus* (chief of a certain domain). They made frequent trips back and forth between Sibu and their village. During their absences from the village, their duties were handled by a deputy (*mandal*), such as an official in the local branch of the government party, a local schoolteacher², a district councilor, or by an *ex-penghulu*. This reliance on people in the public sector is partly because, in rural areas, even capable people or those with good educations have little access to job opportunities in the private sector. From the village standpoint, these ‘deputies’ are channels of access to the government, or at least to the local branch of the ruling party. These locally influential people also move regularly between town and country, in much the same way as the village heads. Thus, the interactions between urban and rural residents are nothing out of the ordinary.

Having village leaders that are not residents is not a particular problem because the key qualities of such leaders are not only the ability to maintain harmony within the community but also the ability to develop close connections to the outside world, especially to the parties in power³. Thus, village communities do not necessarily place much importance on place of residence when choosing a leader. More importance is placed on accessibility to the centers of power in the macro-society and the ability to negotiate with its leaders. Village communities tend to choose as a leader an urban sojourner, someone who can link the rural to the urban, the village community to the local assembly.

What is important here is that members of a village community are not necessarily passive observers of the decisions made about the allocation of development funds. They take an active interest, often choosing as a leader someone who lives in an urban area. In this sense, rural people are proactive in involving themselves in the macro-society.

6. Discussion and conclusion

Although the Iban are the largest ethnic group in Sarawak, Malaysia, their socio-economic status remains relatively low. Many Iban consider urban centers, such as Sibu, the bailiwick of Chinese merchants and the local focal point of the state’s administrative and political power, under the control of the Muslims (the Malay and Melanau). The Iban regard themselves as being in a marginalized position in the socio-economic and political contexts in urban society, the state of Sarawak, and the whole of Malaysia. Many Iban are thus insecure about their urban lives, leading them to maintain a residential base in the town and in their village. Moreover, the urban Iban are moving back and forth between the town and village much more frequently than before, and their participation in rural development issues is becoming even more active and direct. The patterns of their movements are largely affected by rural land and development issues. From the perspective of the movers themselves, however, the changing patterns of their moves represents the process by which they are trying to expand their living space between and around the two areas.

In the past, studies and policies regarded the rural economies of developing countries as being synonymous with agriculture and neglected non-agricultural work and other socio-economic activities that often extended beyond the village boundary (Takada 1991; Adams 2002). While

policy makers have tried in vain to restrain rural-to-urban migration by promoting rural development (de Haan 1999; Mosse et al. 2002), the growing market economy has brought about the delocalization of livelihoods, especially in rural areas (Bounthong et al. 2004). In other words, non-farm and often off-village economic activities have become more and more important for the ‘rural household.’ In addition, it is already obvious that the influence of urban dwellers on rural communities is growing not only in economic but also social and political senses.

The simplistic narrative that the market economy has infiltrated rural areas is not sufficient for interpreting the rural changes. It must be extended to cover the fact that people on the move play considerably important roles to connect or articulate the rural with urban. This is reinforced by de Haan and Rogaly’s (2002) assertion that migration should not be regarded as exceptional and a disjuncture. In this sense, it is important to focus on the movers themselves.

De Haan et al. (2002) emphasized the importance of social networks of migrants and noted that such networks between the origin and destination enable a migrant to see the two areas as a single, integrated economic and social space. In the case of the Iban in Sarawak, while their social networks are indeed important, they themselves frequently move between the two areas, stretching the notion of ‘household,’ and also securing and integrating multiple residences. It can be said that individuals are endeavoring to integrate rural and urban lives by extending their living space across the two regions. In other words, the Iban have embodied the integration of rural and urban space at the individual’s level. As Rigg (1998) pointed out, their high mobility makes it difficult to assign discrete spatial addresses to the movers and also blurs the rural/urban distinction. Therefore, to comprehensively examine their holistic living space, it is important to set the research area on a middle scale that includes a regional center and a hinterland village, such as Sibu and Kanowit. This ‘middle-scale society’ (Yamashita 1986) can be a spatial unit for analysis and, at the same time, a conceptual research framework within which migrants lead integrated rural/urban lives.

Although the Iban are still an urban minority in Sarawak, the range of their socio-economic and political activities is expanding. In the same way, at the present time, urban centers in Southeast Asia are experiencing an inflow of rural, indigenous peoples, and we can no longer neglect their presence in urban society. Moreover, their influence on the changes in their home communities is also becoming stronger. Therefore, those who move between rural and urban areas and incorporate the two areas within their living space are vital actors who must be taken into account to understand the changes in both rural communities and urban societies.

Over the last few decades, the integration of rural and urban studies, as well as the articulation of studies on micro- and macro-societies, have become a critical theme in multiple disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, and geography. Field researchers must now describe the interactions between rural and urban societies. The framework of a middle-scale society with a mover-oriented focus, as described above, suggests a possible approach to this challenge.

Notes

1 Not a few urban dwellers are loosely connected to both the husband’s and wife’s villages. This is termed ‘multiple belonging.’

- 2 Since primary schools are found even in the remotest parts of the country, one cannot overlook the political influence of schoolteachers in rural communities.
- 3 An application by rural people for a development project is viewed in a more favorable light if it bears the signatures of persons with strong connections to the government. In short, what is important is how to develop and maintain close ties with *penghulus*, councilors, high administrative officials, and so on.

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