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## SEAFARERS AND LANDDWELLERS: THEIR ROLES IN THE HISTORY AND CULTURE OF BANGKA BELITUNG IN THE 19TH–20TH CENTURIES

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### Abstract

This article examines the historical and cultural relationship between the Sea People and the Land People in the Bangka Belitung Islands during the 19th–20th centuries. As a maritime region with a long history of trade and migration, Bangka Belitung served as a meeting ground between coastal communities (Sea People) and agrarian communities (Land People). This study employs a historical and anthropological approach by examining colonial sources, local archives, and ethnographic records. The findings reveal that interactions between these two groups gave rise to processes of cultural acculturation, socioeconomic change, and the formation of a distinctive local identity. The roles of both groups in the region's historical trajectory also reveal the dynamics of adaptation to colonialism and modernity in the maritime regions of the Indonesian archipelago.

**Keywords:** *Sea People, Land People, Bangka Belitung, Maritime History, Local Culture.*

### INTRODUCTION

The Bangka Belitung Islands are a strategic region situated along the international trade routes of the Malacca Strait and the Natuna Sea. Historically, this region has served as a meeting point for various ethnic groups and cultures, from the era of Sriwijaya through the Dutch colonial period.<sup>1</sup> The local population is divided into two main sociocultural categories: the Sea People and the Land People.<sup>2</sup>

Numerous studies on *the Orang Laut* or *Sekak people* have been conducted by European researchers, particularly during the Dutch colonial period. Some of these are documented in colonial reports such as the works of Heidhues (1848), Thomas Horsfield

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<sup>1</sup> Reid, Anthony. *Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce, 1450–1680\**, Vol. II. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993.

<sup>2</sup> Abdullah, Taufik. *Local History in Indonesia*. Yogyakarta: Gadjah Mada University Press, 1996.

in *The Journal of The Indian Archipelago* (1848), Langa's *On Bangka* (1850), Crawford's *Great Dictionary* (1856), de Clercq's *Handwritten Malay Manuscript* (1895), and Teysmann's *Diaries* (1873), which explicitly mention the term "*Sekak people*." Meanwhile, van der Chijs (1862) in *Indische Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde*, Zelle (1891), and Hagen's *Translation of a Dutch Manuscript* (1908) also mention the existence of the *Lom* group, which is still related to *the Orang Laut*. Zondervan's report (1894) further corroborates the existence of *the Sekak people* in Bangka. The account depicts *the Orang Laut* as literally living on boats, with a belief system and cultural practices deeply rooted in a spiritual connection to the sea and the surrounding natural environment.

Studies on *the Orang Laut* or *the Sekak/Sekah* tribe in Bangka Belitung have so far generally focused on genealogical aspects or their ethnic origins. In *Tjarita Bangka* by Haji Idris (1878) and *Riwajat Poelau Bangka Berhoeboeng dengan Palembang* by Raden Achmad (1936), it is mentioned that *the Sekak people* are descendants of the remnants of Tuan Sarah's troops from the Sultanate of Johor. A report by the Dutch Commissioner for Belitung, J.L. van Sevenhoven (1803), also notes that this group inhabited the waters between Bangka and Belitung Islands and possessed expertise as skilled guides, divers, and fishermen.

However, research specifically examining the culture of *the Orang Laut* in Belitung, particularly during the 19th and 20th centuries, remains very limited. Yet, historical sources document the significant presence of this community in the Bangka-Belitung region. Therefore, a study employing historical, anthropological, and archaeological approaches is essential to comprehensively understand the cultural history of *the Orang Laut* through artifacts, written sources, and oral traditions that represent their culture.

The primary objective of this study is to provide a comprehensive overview of the culture of *the Orang Laut*, or *the Sekak people*, including cultural elements that have disappeared, undergone transformation, or persisted to the present day. This study is also expected to enrich the knowledge of current and future generations regarding this maritime cultural heritage.

The urgency of this research is heightened by the fact that several sources indicate the *Sekak people's* existence is now fading. Research conducted by Iwabuchi, a professor at the Tokyo University of Marine Science and Technology, shows that the population of *the Sekak people* and their descendants now numbers only about 900. Of this number, only a small fraction still possesses authentic lineage and is fluent in the *Sekak* language. The results of Iwabuchi's year-long research indicate that *Sekak* customs and culture have undergone significant shifts and are at risk of extinction. He also emphasizes that this community is increasingly losing its identity as "*People of the Sea*," particularly following a government policy in the 1980s that required them to settle on land.

This policy was based on the view that *the Sekak people* were an isolated community because they lived a nomadic life at sea without government support. As a result, they had to adapt to life on land and integrate with the general population, which

ultimately affected their way of life and cultural identity.

Thus, this paper aims to describe the culture of *the Orang Laut*, or *Sekak people*, in Bangka Belitung during the Dutch colonial period of the 19th–20th centuries and to analyze the cultural changes and continuities that occurred. The main argument underlying this study is that the encounter between *the Orang Laut* and *the Orang Darat* (Malay), as well as their interactions with colonial authorities, influenced the transformation of certain cultural elements in the lives of the *Orang Laut* communities of Bangka Belitung.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study employs a qualitative-descriptive approach using historical methods, including heuristics, source criticism, interpretation, and historiography.<sup>3</sup> Primary sources include Dutch colonial archives, reports by the Resident of Bangka, as well as 19th-century records by European missionaries and sailors. Among these is *\*Gedenkboek Billiton 1852–1927\**, Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague, 1927.<sup>4</sup> Secondary sources were obtained from anthropological studies and contemporary ethnographic literature.

During the heuristic phase—or source collection—this research was conducted using a geographical approach and several techniques, namely field observation, interviews, and document review. The data sources used include local writings, previous research findings, as well as archives and manuscripts obtained from the National Library and the National Archives of the Republic of Indonesia in Jakarta.

Research into the geographical distribution of *the Laut people* was conducted by examining the areas where these communities are located. First, on Belitung Island, data collection took place in Kampung Laut (Kampung Baru), Kampung Seberang (Tanjung Pandan), and Gantung (East Belitung). Second, on Bangka Island, the research focused on the Baskara Bakti area (Central Bangka) and Jebu Laut Kelabat (West Bangka). Third, observations were also made in Kumbang (Lepar Pongok Island), and fourth, at the Pongok Island Port.

The sources used in this study include oral sources obtained through interviews and field observations to trace the historical and cultural heritage of the *Suku Laut* community as a form of empirical evidence. Additionally, this study involved the examination of artifactual sources—that is, historical artifacts that were identified and inventoried as material evidence of their cultural existence.

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<sup>3</sup> Gottschalk, Louis. *\*Understanding History: A Primer of Historical Method\**. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1950.

<sup>4</sup> *"Gedenkboek Billiton 1852–1927,"* Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague, 1927.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 1. The Orang Laut: Mobility, Trade, and Maritime Identity

In general, the Orang Laut are a maritime community inhabiting the waters of Southeast Asia, particularly around the Riau Islands, the Strait of Malacca, and the eastern coast of Sumatra. They are known as nomadic seafarers who live a migratory life on boats, relying on the sea as their economic source, social space, and foundation of their cultural identity. Throughout the region's long history, the Orang Laut have played a central role in shaping the political and economic dynamics of maritime kingdoms such as Sriwijaya, Malacca, and Johor-Riau.<sup>5</sup> The Orang Laut community maintains a very close relationship with the coastal and marine environments of the Bangka Belitung Islands. From the 19th century through the early 20th century, they served as key actors in regional shipping and trade networks connecting Bangka Belitung with the Malacca Strait region, the Riau-Lingga Islands, West Kalimantan, and the eastern coast of Sumatra. Their high mobility facilitated the exchange of goods, information, and culture across these regions.

Historically, the Orang Laut were known as skilled sailors who mastered traditional sea routes. Their navigational abilities—derived from local knowledge of currents, winds, seasons, and water conditions—made them vital intermediaries in inter-island trade. In addition to trading marine products such as fish, sea cucumbers, and coastal forest products, they also served as freight carriers and navigation guides for Malay, Bugis, and Chinese merchants. The Orang Laut's maritime identity was shaped by a nomadic lifestyle that followed marine resources and economic activities. Life aboard boats or in coastal settlements created a social system distinct from that of inland communities. The sea is not only an economic space but also a cultural space that shapes their worldview, belief systems, and social structures. In this context, the sea is viewed as both a source of life and a space that connects various communities across the Indonesian archipelago.

However, by the late 19th and early 20th centuries, changes in colonial policy began to affect the Orang Laut's mobility. Efforts to monitor maritime territories, control trade, and establish administrative boundaries increasingly restricted their freedom of movement. As a result, some Orang Laut communities began to settle along the coast and adapt to a more sedentary lifestyle, although their maritime identity remained a vital element of their social life.

Mobility is a defining characteristic of the Orang Laut people. They explore the waters by following the direction of the wind and ocean currents, using small boats such as *kolek* or *long canoes*.<sup>6</sup> This mobility is not merely a form of physical movement but also part of an ecological strategy for survival in a fluid and highly uncertain environment. For them, the sea is not viewed as a boundary, but rather as a social and cultural space

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<sup>5</sup> Andaya, Leonard Y. *The Orang Laut: Sea Peoples and the Malay World in the Past and Present*. Singapore: NUS Press, 2008.

<sup>6</sup> Sopher, David E. *The Sea Nomads: A Study Based on the Literature of the Maritime Boat People of Southeast Asia*. Singapore: National Museum, 1977.

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that unites various communities.<sup>7</sup> Traditional navigational knowledge—the ability to read the stars, currents, and signs of nature—is passed down from generation to generation as part of their intangible cultural heritage.<sup>8</sup>



Caption: The Boats of the Sea People in 19th-Century Belitung.

Source : “*Gedenkboek Billiton 1852–1927*,” Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague, 1927.

The Orang Laut of Bangka Belitung have close ties to the maritime Malay groups in the Riau Islands and along the eastern coast of Sumatra.<sup>9</sup> They are known by the names Sekak, Sawang, and Mapur. Traditionally, they lived a nomadic life on boats (*kajang boats*), relying on the sea for their livelihood through fishing, gathering marine resources, and engaging in inter-island trade, mastering navigation and traditional maritime knowledge. Within the traditional economic system, they served as a link between the ports of Bangka and the regions of Sumatra and Kalimantan. The Orang Laut communities in Bangka Belitung, also known as the Sekak and Sawang tribes, are part of the Nusantara maritime community that has historically lived a highly mobile lifestyle along the coast and at sea. Their presence is inextricably linked to the tradition of “*sea nomads*,” who for centuries have served as inter-island connectors, guardians of shipping routes, and maritime traders. The Orang Laut are one of the oldest ethnic groups in the coastal regions of Bangka Belitung and share historical ties with Orang Laut communities in the Riau Islands, Kalimantan, and other maritime regions of Southeast Asia.<sup>10</sup>

The mobility of the Orang Laut has facilitated the formation of networks for the exchange of commodities between coastal and inland communities. Marine products such

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<sup>7</sup> Chou, Cynthia. *The Orang Suku Laut of Riau, Indonesia: The Inalienable Gift of Territory*. London: Routledge, 2003.

<sup>8</sup> Horridge, Adrian. *\*The Prahu: Traditional Sailing Boat of Indonesia\**. Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1981.

<sup>9</sup> Leonard Andaya, *\*The Sea People and the Malay World\** (Singapore: NUS Press, 2008), p. 89.

<sup>10</sup> Janawi. *Genealogy of the Bangka Belitung Sea People*. *Tawshiyah*, 13(2), 1–28. 2018.

as fish, sea cucumbers, shellfish, and other coastal resources are exchanged for agricultural and forest products from inland communities. In this context, the sea functions not only as an economic space but also as a social space that brings together various ethnic and cultural groups. The maritime identity of the Orang Laut is reflected in their settlement patterns, navigational knowledge systems, and sea-oriented cultural traditions. Knowledge of seasons, currents, and sea conditions is passed down from generation to generation as a vital resource in their lives. However, beginning in the 19th century, as Dutch colonial power strengthened in Bangka Belitung, this traditional mobility began to face restrictions through maritime surveillance and control of coastal areas. As a result, parts of the Orang Laut community gradually settled on the mainland and underwent a process of integration with the local Malay population. Nevertheless, various traditional rituals and maritime cultural identities persisted into the 20th century.

In the 19th century, the Dutch colonial authorities recognized their role as the rulers of local sea routes. Colonialism also led to marginalization due to forced resettlement policies and tin mining exploitation. Nevertheless, their identity as guardians of maritime traditions remained strong. Traditional ceremonies such as *murok jerami* and *menjunjung laut* are still practiced as symbols of loyalty to their ancestors and to the sea as the source of life

## **2. Land-Dwellers: Agrarian Economy and Colonial Integration**

In the pre-modern Southeast Asian trade system, the Sea People played a vital role as intermediaries between foreign traders and local centers of power. Since the era of Srivijaya (7th to 13th centuries CE), this group served as guides for merchant ships crossing the Malacca Strait while also safeguarding maritime routes from threats posed by pirates or political rivals.<sup>11</sup> They also supplied high-value marine commodities such as sea cucumbers, pearls, and resin, which were traded to China and the Middle East.<sup>12</sup> The relationship between the kingdoms and the Orang Laut was reciprocal: the kingdoms provided protection and political legitimacy, while the Orang Laut provided military support and control over strategic trade routes.<sup>13</sup> Their role in shaping the regional economic network demonstrates that Southeast Asia's maritime power relied not only on major ports but also on the mobility of flexible seafaring communities.

Unlike the Orang Laut, the Orang Darat focused on agriculture, pepper plantations, and tin mining. The Orang Darat community built its livelihood through agrarian activities and the utilization of terrestrial resources. Before the development of the modern mining industry, most of the inland communities of Bangka and Belitung depended on shifting cultivation, pepper plantations, the gathering of forest products, and other subsistence agricultural activities. Dutch colonialism introduced modern mining

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<sup>11</sup> Wolters, O. W. *Early Indonesian Commerce: A Study of the Origins of Srivijaya\**. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967.

<sup>12</sup> Manguin, Pierre-Yves. "The Role of the Orang Laut in the History of the Malay World." *\*Archipel\** 21 (1981): 195–213.

<sup>13</sup> Reid, Anthony. *Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce, 1450–1680*. Vol. I: The Lands below the Winds. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988.

systems and contract laborers from China. These communities continued to maintain traditional social structures such as *the bubung* and *adat berpantang*.

The Orang Darat communities also developed an agrarian way of life and utilized land-based resources. They inhabited the inland regions of Bangka and Belitung, with their primary livelihoods consisting of shifting cultivation, traditional farming, gathering forest products, and other subsistence economic activities. In the 19th century, the economic structure of inland communities underwent significant changes with the development of the tin mining industry managed by the colonial government. Bangka and Belitung became one of the most important centers of tin production in the Dutch East Indies, leading to the increasing integration of the inland regions into the colonial economic system. Road infrastructure, ports, and administrative centers were built to support the exploitation of these resources. Colonial integration brought about a transformation in the production patterns of inland communities. Some residents began to engage in mining activities, either as mine workers or as providers of logistical support. The presence of migrant workers, particularly from China, also expanded local economic networks and introduced various new forms of social interaction. Nevertheless, the agricultural sector remained a vital economic foundation for inland communities, serving as a buffer for food security.

In a social context, colonial policies further reinforced economic differentiation and social stratification. Groups with access to mining activities reaped greater economic benefits compared to communities that remained dependent on the traditional agricultural sector. These conditions demonstrate that colonialism not only transformed the economic system but also influenced the social structure of the Bangka Belitung community.

Thus, *the Orang Darat* of Bangka Belitung became part of the colonial economic system through mining and agricultural work overseen by the Dutch government. However, they also maintained traditional social structures such as *the bubung* (kinship groups) and *adat berpantang* (customary taboos).<sup>14</sup> In the early 20th century, more intense interactions emerged between *the Orang Darat* and *the Orang Laut* through trade and intermarriage, which enriched the local culture.

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<sup>14</sup> Mary Somers Heidhues, *\*Tin Mining and Social Change in Bangka Island, Indonesia\** (Singapore: ISEAS, 2003), pp. 23–28. Mary Somers Heidhues, *\*Tin Mining and Social Change in Bangka Island, Indonesia\** (Singapore: ISEAS, 2003), pp. 23–28.



Caption: Orang Darat participating in a wedding procession.

Source : “*Gedenkboek Billiton 1852–1927*,” Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague, 1927.

### **3. Cultural Interaction and Acculturation**

Interaction between the Orang Laut and the Orang Darat took place through various social and economic mechanisms that unfolded over centuries. Trade relations served as the primary medium bringing the two groups together. The Orang Laut provided marine products and inter-island transportation services, while the Orang Darat supplied agricultural produce, forest products, and other basic necessities. These economic ties evolved into broader social and cultural relationships. Intergroup marriages, migration, and the spread of Islam further accelerated the formation of a shared cultural identity. In the context of Bangka Belitung, Malay culture served as a cultural umbrella capable of integrating various ethnic groups, including the Orang Laut, the Orang Darat, and immigrant communities.

The relationship between the Orang Laut and the Orang Darat does not take place in separate spheres but rather through various forms of intensive interaction. The two groups come together through trade, the exchange of produce, kinship ties, and the shared practice of traditions and rituals. These interactions foster a process of cultural acculturation that has become a defining characteristic of Bangka Belitung society. Economic exchange is one of the primary factors driving the relationship between the two communities. The Orang Laut provide marine products and serve as intermediaries in inter-island trade, while the Orang Darat produce agricultural and forest products. This mutually dependent relationship forms a relatively stable and sustainable social network. From a cultural perspective, acculturation is evident in language use, belief systems, performing arts, and community traditions. Malay cultural influence serves as a unifying element that bridges the differences between coastal and inland communities. Islam also

plays a significant role in strengthening social integration through religious institutions, traditional education, and religious rituals that involve various community groups.

Furthermore, the presence of the Chinese community, which has grown rapidly since the 19th century, has enriched local cultural dynamics. Interactions among the Malay, Orang Laut, Orang Darat, and Chinese ethnic groups have produced various forms of hybrid culture evident in cuisine, architecture, religious traditions, and daily economic practices. Thus, the cultural identity of Bangka Belitung has been shaped through a long process of interaction involving diverse ethnic groups and local communities.

The identity of the Orang Laut has also been shaped by their close interaction with the sea and their nomadic way of life. They have a belief system that places the sea at the center of the cosmos and as the source of life.<sup>15</sup> However, with the advent of modernization and the nationalization of maritime territories in the 20th century, many Orang Laut groups were forced to settle on land. This process of sedentarization led to the loss of much of their local wisdom and a transformation of their identity. Nevertheless, elements of their maritime identity persist in oral traditions, language, and a worldview that regards the sea as a symbol of freedom and cultural continuity.<sup>16</sup>

The relationship between the Sea People and the Land People is complementary. The exchange of marine and agricultural products creates a local economic network. Intermarriage gave rise to the cultural identity of the Bangka Belitung Malays. Acculturation is evident in the Dambus art form and the Campak dance. Islamization served as an integrative element that strengthened social cohesion. Cultural acculturation also intensified with the arrival of the Chinese community, which was closely tied to the tin mining industry. From the 18th century through the early 20th century, the migration of Chinese workers from Guangdong and other regions in southern China resulted in a unique cultural blend. Many Chinese workers later settled and married local residents, giving rise to the Bangka Peranakan community. This phenomenon is evident in the use of the Bangka Malay language, which incorporates Hakka elements, as well as in culinary traditions, architecture, and religious practices that demonstrate a fusion of Malay and Chinese elements. Thus, the cultural identity of Bangka Belitung in the 19th–20th centuries was the result of ongoing interactions between maritime communities, agrarian communities, and migrant groups involved in colonial economic activities.<sup>17</sup>

#### **4. Colonialism and Social Transformation in the 19th–20th Centuries**

Colonialism was the most decisive factor in social change in Bangka Belitung during the 19th–20th centuries. The Dutch colonial government's control over tin resources led to major changes in the economic, demographic, and cultural structures of the local population. Increasing tin production required a large workforce, thereby driving

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<sup>15</sup> Chou, Cynthia. *Indigenous Peoples and the Sea: The Sea Nomads of Southeast Asia*. London: Routledge, 2006

<sup>16</sup> Andaya, Leonard Y. "Orang Laut and the Realm of the Malayu." *Indonesia and the Malay World* 27, no. 78 (1999): 81–102.

<sup>17</sup> Heidhues, M. S. *Bangka Tin and Mentok Pepper*. 1992.

migration from outside the region, particularly among the Chinese ethnic group.<sup>18</sup> For the Orang Laut, colonialism led to a decline in their traditional role within maritime trade networks. The colonial government's control over maritime territories restricted the freedom of movement that had previously been a defining feature of their way of life. Conversely, inland communities became increasingly integrated into the colonial-managed mining economy. Social transformation was also evident in settlement patterns. Mining areas developed into new economic centers that attracted migration and created multi-ethnic communities. Traditional power structures were gradually replaced by a more centralized colonial administrative system. Meanwhile, modern education and the colonial bureaucracy gave rise to a new elite class that played a role in social change in the early 20th century.

The 19th–20th centuries marked a period of profound social transformation in the history of Bangka Belitung. Dutch colonialism brought about fundamental changes in the local economy, politics, and social structure. Tin mining was the primary driver of these changes, as it established Bangka Belitung as a strategic region within the colonial economy. The development of the mining industry led to large-scale population migration, particularly of laborers from China. This migration altered the demographic composition of the population and expanded economic and cultural networks in the region. Mining towns developed into centers of trade and administration that connected local communities with regional and global markets. For the Orang Laut, colonialism resulted in a reduction of their autonomy in managing maritime spaces. Surveillance of shipping and control over traditional trade activities diminished their role as key intermediaries in maritime trade networks. Meanwhile, for the Orang Darat, integration into the colonial economy opened new economic opportunities but also created a dependency on the mining sector and colonial government policies.

Social transformation was also evident in changes to settlement patterns, the education system, and local power structures. The colonial administration introduced a more centralized system of governance, thereby diminishing the traditional roles of local leaders. At the same time, access to modern education began to expand, giving rise to a new social group with social and political orientations distinct from those of previous generations.

Despite undergoing various changes, the people of Bangka Belitung demonstrated a high capacity for adaptation. The Orang Laut and Orang Darat did not completely lose their socio-cultural identities but made various adjustments to the new conditions created by colonialism. Therefore, the social transformations of the 19th–20th centuries can be understood as a process of negotiation between local traditions, colonial economic dynamics, and the development of modern society— which has shaped the socio-cultural character of Bangka Belitung to this day.

Dutch colonial policies brought significant changes to the social structure.<sup>19</sup> Tin

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<sup>18</sup> Ibrahim, Ibrahim, Arief Hidayat, and Herza. "Adaptation of the Political Economy of the Grassroots Tionghoa Ethnic Group on Bangka Island." *Society, Culture, and Politics*, 35(4), 2022.

<sup>19</sup> Ivanoff, Jacques. "The Malay World and the Orang Laut: Ethnogenesis, Transformation, and

mining shifted the economic focus from the sea to the land. In the 20th century, modernization and formal education led to the Orang Laut's identity merging into that of the Orang Darat. Although colonialism brought profound changes, the people of Bangka Belitung did not lose their cultural identity. The Orang Laut, Orang Darat, Malay, and Chinese communities, in fact, formed patterns of adaptation that gave rise to the pluralistic, open, and cross-cultural character of Bangka Belitung society. The social transformations that occurred during the 19th and 20th centuries ultimately became the foundation for the formation of the modern socio-cultural identity of Bangka Belitung

## **CONCLUSION**

Based on the study titled *“The Sea People and the Land People: Their Roles in the Historical and Cultural Trajectory of Bangka Belitung in the 19th–20th Centuries,”* it can be concluded that both of these social groups made significant contributions to shaping the social, economic, and cultural dynamics of the Bangka Belitung region. The Orang Laut served as inter-island connectors through seafaring, trade, fishing, and their mastery of maritime knowledge, which formed the foundation of coastal life. Meanwhile, the Orang Darat contributed to the management of terrestrial resources, primarily through agriculture, plantation work, and involvement in the tin mining sector, which experienced rapid growth beginning in the 19th century.

The interaction between the Sea People and the Land People demonstrates a mutually complementary relationship in meeting the economic and social needs of the island communities. Although they have different lifestyles, spatial orientations, and cultural identities, both groups have been able to build networks of exchange that strengthen the integration of Bangka Belitung society. In the process, cultural acculturation has also occurred, reflected in the language, traditions, local knowledge systems, and social practices that have developed in the region.

During the 19th and 20th centuries, various political and economic changes—primarily resulting from colonial expansion, the development of the tin mining industry, and the modernization of transportation and trade—also influenced the position and role of both groups. The Orang Laut underwent a transformation from a relatively mobile community toward a more sedentary way of life, while the Orang Darat became increasingly integrated into the colonial and national economic systems. These changes did not erase their respective cultural identities but rather shaped a new social configuration that has become a defining characteristic of Bangka Belitung society.

Thus, the history of Bangka Belitung cannot be understood solely through a mainland or maritime perspective, but rather through the interconnection between the Orang Laut and the Orang Darat as two essential elements that together form the historical and cultural identity of this archipelago. This study underscores the importance of positioning both groups as central actors in the local historical narrative, as well as integral parts of a cultural heritage that must be preserved and developed within the

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Conservation.” *ASEAN Studies Review* 15 (2009): 41–63.

context of contemporary societal development in Bangka Belitung.

The interactions between the Sea People and the Land People in Bangka Belitung during the 19th and 20th centuries reflect the social and cultural dynamics of the archipelago's maritime societies. Both groups played a vital role in shaping a unique local identity in which the sea and the land function as two interconnected living spaces. Colonialism brought about significant changes to the economic and social structures, yet the cultural heritage of these two communities continues to shape the identity of the people of Bangka Belitung to this day.

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