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IN BETWEEN ASSIMILATION AND PLURALISM: THE LIFE OF THE BANJARESE ETHNIC GROUP IN MALAYSIA

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ABSTRACT

The presence of the Banjarese ethnic group in Malaysia dates back to the late 19th and early 20th centuries when mass migration from South Kalimantan began. As one of the ethnic minorities in Malaysia, the Banjarese have had to adapt their way of life and coexist with various other ethnicities. When examining the coexistence of diverse races and ethnic groups, two crucial concepts, "assimilation" and "pluralism", often come to mind. However, these concepts do not adequately capture the complexity of Malaysian society. Rather, a new concept known as "community of communities", is proposed, which emphasises the acceptance of legitimacy by communities and their loyalty and commitment to the national community while preserving their distinct ethnic and local identities. This study aims to assess whether this newly proposed concept accurately describes the Banjarese community. Forty respondents were interviewed and observed in four areas predominantly inhabited by the Banjarese people, and the analysis was conducted using Gordon's theory of assimilation. The study found that the Banjarese have placed their loyalty and commitment in the national community while preserving their unique ethnic and local identities. This finding aligns with the core principles of the "community of communities" concept, underscoring its relevance in depicting the social dynamics of the Banjarese community.

Keywords: Banjarese people, Malaysia, assimilation, pluralism, community of communities

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INTRODUCTION

The Banjarese refer to the indigenous population of parts of South Kalimantan. Selvia and Sunarso (2020) state that this community shares ancestors with the Dayak, but their ways of life have differentiated the two communities. The Dayak prefer to live in the interior and reject outside influences and developments. However, some chose to accept Islamic influences, thereby forming a new community known as the Banjarese. Figure 1 indicates the original settlement of the Banjarese community.

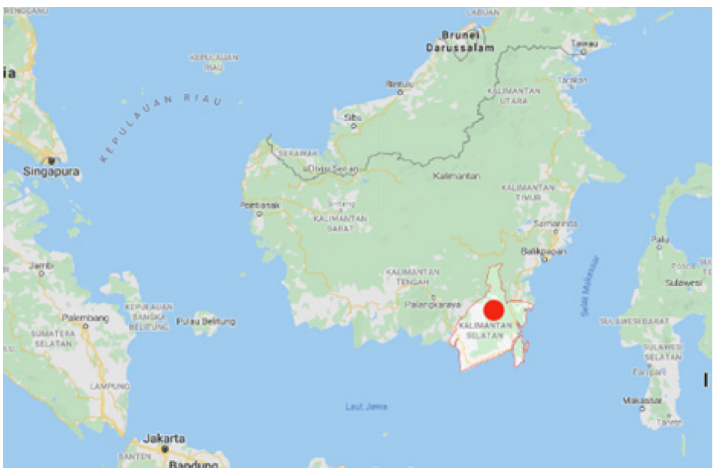


Figure 1: Original settlement of the Banjarese community.

Although South Kalimantan was the community's original settlement, Banjarese people can now be found in various places, both in Indonesia and Malaysia. The Banjarese diaspora throughout the Malay Archipelago was shaped by mass migration in the past. The Malaysian population comprises three major ethnic groups: the *bumiputera* (Malays and indigenous peoples), Chinese and Indian. Within the *bumiputera* group, Malays are the predominant group and are mostly found in Peninsular Malaysia (Khalidah 2022). When two or more communities live side by side, the minority tends to adopt the characteristics of the dominant group through a process known as assimilation. In this study, we will determine whether the Banjarese people in Peninsular Malaysia have undergone this process and should be considered part of the Malay community. If both ethnics are considered to be different, to what extent can the Banjarese and Malay people be distinguished? To answer this question, we first need to examine the concepts of assimilation and pluralism, and how these concepts lead to models such as plural society and community of communities.

Assimilation and Pluralism

Malaysia is a typical multi-racial and multi-religious country (Razaleigh and Abdul Ghafar 2016). This is typical, as many other countries are composed of multiple racial and religious groups. However, diversity in Malaysia has attracted particular attention among scholars, making it a prime example of a multi-racial society. The existence of many races and ethnicities tends to trigger a process known as assimilation. Assimilation refers to the processes by which a subordinate individual or group takes on the characteristics of the dominant group and is eventually accepted as part of that group. As a society undergoes assimilation, disparities among groups decrease. This process is associated with unity, as it involves and supports the blending of various elements into the overall national culture (Gleason 1984). Assimilation is viewed differently by various groups, with some regarding it as beneficial and others viewing it less favourably. To reduce the likelihood of adverse effects, Razakova (2024) suggested that it is necessary to implement a balanced approach to prevent both excessive unification and cultural isolation.

The opposite concept of assimilation is pluralism. Pluralism exists when groups maintain their individual identities. In a pluralistic society, groups remain distinct, and their cultural and social differences persist over time. A culturally pluralistic society is characterised by greater tolerance for groups that differ from the dominant society, resulting in less prejudice and discrimination towards minorities (Habib 2017). According to Berbrier (2004), sociological discussions of assimilation and pluralism have held a central place in studies of race, ethnicity, and minority groups for more than a century. In fact, debates over these two concepts persist across various communities.

As noted earlier, multi-racial countries are widely regarded as a common phenomenon; nevertheless, they all encounter similar dilemmas. Chin (1965), in his research on Chinese-Americans in San Francisco, concludes that ethnic visibility among Chinese-Americans creates assimilation problems different from those faced by European immigrants. It seems that, despite confronting a common dilemma, the severity of its impact may differ across ethnic groups. Other factors can also contribute to either assimilation or pluralism. According to Subervi-Velez (1986), communication patterns in writings between Hispanic and other ethnic groups can indicate assimilation and pluralism. Assimilation and pluralism can also be influenced by a country's policies. This is evident in the embodiment of Chinese ethnic culture in Indonesia (Wasino et al. 2019). At one point, this ethnic group was forced to assimilate into the dominant group. Today, this ethnic group is free to practice its culture. Some scholars argue that these two concepts are problematic. Berry (2005) noted that assimilation often leads to "the marginalisation of minority cultures", as individuals are pressured to conform to the dominant cultural norms, often at the expense of

their original cultural values. On the other hand, Brudhiprabha (1985) argued that pluralism could also be problematic and suggested that education could help, as schools are a testing ground for cementing social ties and promoting cooperation among students from different backgrounds.

As mentioned above, Malaysia is home to multiple racial groups with different cultural backgrounds living alongside one another. However, as a multi-racial country, one question arises: Is Malaysian society considered a "melting pot", a metaphor for the assimilation process, or is it still a "plural society"? According to Abdul Rahman (2002), neither of these concepts fits the social reality of Malaysia today. It is not a melting pot because this model assumes that the boundaries of diverse cultures and civilisations in the same society tend to give way or "melt" through assimilation into the dominant group (Abdul Rahman 2002).

It is also not a plural society because this model refers to diverse groups existing side by side without converging or combining, and without shared values or the absorption of aspects of the other. Abdul Rahman (2002) has suggested a model known as the community of communities to portray the reality of Malaysian society. Malaysia is characterised by various communities with their own identities and shared historical and cultural memories. Nevertheless, these communities exist and interact within the broader framework of the Malaysian national community, whose fundamental principles, or ground rules, the various communities generally accept. In other words, the communities accept the legitimacy of the national community and place their loyalty and commitment in it, while maintaining their distinct ethnic and local identities. However, is it fair to say that every ethnic group in this country accepts this model? Is the community of communities model suitable enough to depict the real life of every minority ethnic group in Malaysia? In this article, we will determine whether the Banjarese fit this model.

The Presence of Banjarese Ethnic Group in Malaysia

Madam ka banua urang is a phrase used to describe the Banjarese people, referring to their tendency to migrate or wander to other places to find sustenance and create a better life for themselves. Wandering is part of the culture of people who live along riverbanks or near the seas, and it is a tradition practised by various ethnic groups in Indonesia, such as the Minang, Acehnese, Buginese, Javanese, and Banjarese, who are also known as sailors, traders, and nomads. According to Mohamed Salleh (2016), the mass migration of Banjarese from South Kalimantan to Malaysia (or Tanah Melayu) took place at the end of the 19th and the start of the 20th century. Several factors drove Banjarese migration from their land of origin to other places, especially Tanah Melayu

(now known as Malaysia). One of these factors was poverty. The infertile land, flood disasters and limited agricultural technologies, especially in the Delta Barito and Hulu Sungai areas, as well as insufficient marine resources to support a huge number of people, motivated this community to "wander to other places".

Mohamed Salleh (2016) puts forward two theories of how the migration of Banjarese to Tanah Melayu originally took place. The first theory states that these people migrated to the island of Sumatra first, specifically to Tungkal (Jambi) and Tembilahan (Inderagiri Hilir). After settling in this area for some time, they decided to migrate to Tanah Melayu. The second theory says the Banjarese migrated directly to Malaya, as happened in the early 20th century. They generally boarded merchant ships and landed in Singapore, and some even settled in Johor. Another large group of Banjarese continued their voyage and landed in Penang. From there, they moved to other states such as Perak and Selangor. They began to thrive in this new environment and started to build their own community there.

According to Wahyudin (2014), the mass settlement of the Banjarese in Peninsular Malaysia can be found in the states of Perak, Selangor, and Johor. Like migration, the Banjarese settlement trend was also influenced by several factors. One factor was seizing the economic opportunities available in Malaysia at the time, particularly in land clearing. In line with British colonial policy, obtaining and clearing land was easy, as it required only permission from the village head and a small payment to the Land Office (Mohamed Salleh 2010). The new settlements provided fertile land suitable for paddy planting, which has remained the community's main source of income to this day. Aside from rice cultivation, fishing is another source of income for this community. Banjarese culture is also inseparable from water, and they are capable of adapting to environmental conditions with many swamps and rivers. As a result, the Banjarese community has formed a distinctive river culture. Even after the mass migration, this community prefers to stay near large bodies of water, forming a distinctive river culture. These factors explain why most of the Banjarese community is found in Perak, Selangor and Johor, as these states have large, fertile lands and are also located near the Malacca Strait.

Nowadays, the Banjarese community in Malaysia has experienced rapid changes alongside the country's development. This assimilation is significant and driven by the fact that they no longer live together in their original community. As part of adapting to this new environment, this community has to assimilate to a certain degree into the local culture. But to what extent does this assimilation process occur? Before we delve further into assimilation in the Banjarese community, let us first explore cultural assimilation across Malaysia.

Cultural Assimilation in Malaysia

When discussing cultural assimilation, it is essential first to identify the ethnic groups considered the majority in Malaysia. According to Department of Statistics Malaysia (2024), the country's population in 2024 by ethnic group can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1: Malaysian population by ethnic groups

Ethnic group	Population ('000)	Population (%)
Malay	17808.4	52.29
Chinese	6857.6	20.14
Others (*bumiputera*)	3760.4	11.04
Others (non-citizen)	3396.1	9.96
Indian	2005.5	5.89
Other (citizen)	230.7	0.68
Total	34058.0	100.00

Table 1 shows that Malay, Chinese and Indian are the major ethnic groups in Malaysia. While the Indian population is smaller than the *bumiputera* and non-citizen populations, both groups include individuals from a variety of ethnic and cultural backgrounds. In addition, the Indian community has distinct cultures, which makes it one of the major ethnic groups, especially in Peninsular Malaysia. There are challenges when it comes to identifying minority groups in this country. Malaysia is known to be a multicultural nation with a diverse population, yet only the Malay, Chinese, and Indian are recognised as separate ethnic groups, while others are compiled into one category, the *bumiputera*. Even the three major ethnic groups can be divided into several minor ethnic groups. One way to measure ethnicity is through self-identification. However, according to Nagaraj et al. (2009), this approach makes it difficult to measure certain groups in the population. This is because some people may identify as part of certain ethnic groups, but due to government policy, these groups may not be formally recognised.

Consider the Banjarese, for instance. Although they are known as Banjarese, they are still being recognised as part of the Malay people despite having distinguishable languages and cultures. The same situation occurs with the Kelantan Chinese Peranakan. According to Hun and Kaur (2014), this ethnic minority group is often mistakenly identified as Malay. Neither assimilation nor pluralism is a static concept; each has many levels and stages that individuals or groups may experience (Abramson 1980). In some cases, assimilation was not strong enough for some ethnic groups to sustain their identity and culture.

In Kelantan, the Chinese community has a unique and strong relationship with the Malay Muslims. However, according to Muhammad Faris and Muhamad Faisal (2020), this assimilation did not lead them to convert to Islam, and they still tend to practice their own religion and beliefs. It should be noted that this Chinese community is distinct from the Kelantan Chinese Peranakan examined previously.

However, for some ethnic groups, the assimilation process was so strong that they have now become part of the majority group. There could also be confusion when religion comes into play, particularly in respect of who is a Malay. Some ethnic groups from Indonesia were classified as Malay because they share a common religion. Saw (1968) argues that most immigrants from the Indonesian Archipelago have now been absorbed into the Malay community. Another example can be seen with the Malabari community, a Muslim minority group in Malaysia. According to Ong and Moiden (2019), the Malabar Muslim community is rapidly losing their identity as it began to assimilate Malay culture into its daily life.

For those of Bugis descent, their Buginese identity became less essential, as it became an ever-transforming identity shaped by growing history, culture, and authority (Sunarti, Haghia and Lastika Sari 2022). In Malacca, the Chitty community (formed through intermarriage between Indians and locals) was culturally dominated by the other ethnic groups they lived alongside (Paramasivam and Che Ibrahim 2016). Intermarriage can sometimes reduce the degree of ethnic identification, especially when the person comes from a minority ethnic group. The same pattern can be seen among Acehnese descendants in Malaysia. According to Khairulyadi and Khairun Nisa (2018), marital assimilation played a pivotal role in reducing ethnic identification among this group.

The presence of the Banjarese ethnic group here in Malaysia seems, to some extent, to have influenced their culture and way of life. However, research on this ethnic group, and especially its culture, remains limited. The Banjarese community's cultural assimilation into the local community has, to some extent, changed their way of life. This is shown in a study by Ridha, Zahirman and Hambali (2005) on the cultural assimilation process of this ethnic group in Tembilahan district, Inderagiri Hilir regency. The study found several factors that influence this assimilation process, such as tolerance, equal opportunity in the economic field, respect for other people and their cultures, an open-minded ruling class, similarities in cultural elements, mixed marriages, and shared enemies. In Malaysia, recent studies on the Banjarese ethnicity have mostly focused on linguistic aspects. Although language studies are crucial to preserving identity, it is also important to understand the current situation of this ethnic group. By understanding the degree of assimilation among

the Banjarese community, we can determine whether this ethnic group has absorbed the local identity or managed to retain its own identity, and support the concept of community of communities coined by Abdul Rahman (2002).

METHODOLOGY

A series of fieldwork projects was conducted in four different areas of Peninsular Malaysia. Fieldwork is a method of preparing research information regarding a phenomenon that can be studied through objective research. The areas involved in this study include Kuala Kurau and Bagan Serai in Perak, Batu Pahat in Johor and Sabak Bernam in Selangor. These areas were chosen because most inhabitants are of Banjarese descent. Figure 2 indicates the distribution of these three areas.

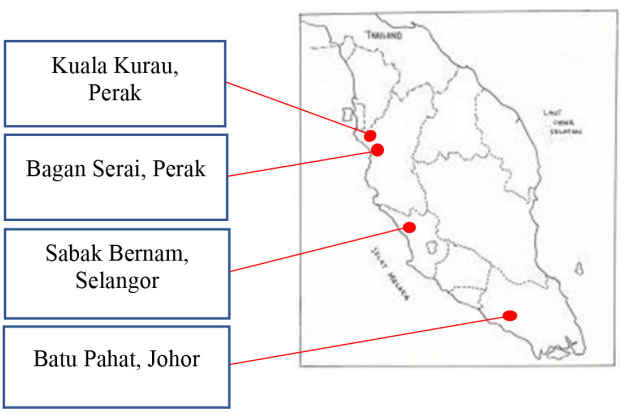


Figure 2: Distribution of the studied area.

This study used three data collection methods: unstructured interviews, participant observation, and secondary data. The target population for this study is the Banjarese residing in Malaysia. However, it is difficult to determine the exact population of this ethnic group because the government recognises them as part of the Malay ethnic group. A non-probability sampling was used to extract the sample from the target population. This type of sampling is often associated with case study research design and qualitative research (Yin 2003). With regard to the latter, case studies tend to focus on small samples and are intended to examine a real-life phenomenon, not to make statistical inferences in relation to the wider population. Samples were collected through a sampling technique known as convenience sampling, where data are collected from a research population that is easily accessible.

A series of unstructured interviews were conducted with 40 Banjarese individuals from various backgrounds. There is no set answer to the questions asked, and the interview is based on the responses from the interviewees (Moyle 2002). Respondents were asked to share their knowledge of Banjarese culture and their daily practices during the interview. According to Best and Kahn (1995), an interview is, in a sense, an oral questionnaire in which, instead of writing responses, the subject or interviewee provides the needed information orally and face-to-face. The interview topics included, but were not limited to, daily life activities, marriage customs, folklore, and language.

Patton's (2002) defines unstructured interviews as a natural extension of participant observation because they often occur as part of ongoing participant observation fieldwork. The questions are generated naturally as the observation is conducted. This definition indicates a strong relationship between unstructured interviews and participant observation, as both need to be conducted simultaneously. Therefore, this study also collected data through participant observation. This study used passive membership, where observers maintained no membership in the setting, served as bystanders, and did not interact with participants. This study also used secondary data. Secondary data are data that have been collected and are being considered for reuse to answer new questions not originally addressed in the original study. Prior to examining the results of this study, it is important to review the definition of cultural assimilation and the associated theories.

Theoretical View of Cultural Assimilation

The term assimilation has received various definitions from scholars all around the world. Simon (1901) defines assimilation as a process of adjustment or accommodation that occurs between members of two different races. American sociologists have developed a rich body of theories and concepts based on the assimilation experiences of European immigrants from the 1820s to the 1920s (Healey and Stepnick 2022). In this article, we will be looking at some of the theories and concepts proposed by these scholars. Several assimilation theories trace their roots to the contributions of Robert Park, a key figure among a cohort of scholars who helped shape sociology as an established discipline in the United States during the 1920s and 1930s.

Park stated that intergroup relations go through a predictable set of phases known as a race relations cycle. When groups first come into contact (through immigration, conquest, etc.), relations are conflictual and competitive. Eventually, however, the process, or cycle, moves towards assimilation, or the 'interpenetration and fusion' of groups (Park and Burgess 1924). Park contended that assimilation is unavoidable in a democratic and industrialised society. In a

political system based on democracy, fairness, and impartial justice, all groups will eventually secure equal treatment under the law. On the other hand, in an industrial economy, people tend to be judged on rational grounds based on their abilities and talents, not on ethnicity or race.

The next theory discussed was proposed by Gordon in 1964. According to Healey and Stepnick (2022), the works of sociologist Milton Gordon have clarified some of the issues left unresolved by Park through his book *Assimilation in American Life* (1964). Assimilation is broken down into seven subprocesses: cultural, structural, marital, identification, attitude reception, behavior reception, and civic. He makes a clear distinction between the cultural and structural components of society. Culture encompasses all aspects of the way of life associated with a group of people, including language, religious beliefs, customs and rules of etiquette, and the values and ideas people use to organise their lives and interpret their existence (Healey and Stepnick 2022). Social structure, or the structural components of a society, includes networks of social relationships, groups, organisations, stratification systems, communities, and families.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A total of 40 respondents from the four areas participated in this study. Table 2 shows the demographics of the respondents for this study.

Table 2: Respondent demographics

Demogaphic	Kuala Kurau, Perak	Bagan Serai, Perak	Batu Pahat, Johor	Sabak Bernam, Selangor
Gender				
Male	2	19	5	4
Female	0	5	2	3
Total	2	24	7	7
Age				
25 and below	–	4	–	–
26 to 55	1	11	–	5
56 and above	1	9	7	2

(*continued on next page*)

Table 2 (*continued*)

Demogaphic	Kuala Kurau, Perak	Bagan Serai, Perak	Batu Pahat, Johor	Sabak Bernam, Selangor
Level of education				
Primary School			2	1
High School	2	16	5	5
STPM		3		
Diploma		4		
Bachelor Degree				1
Master Degree		1		
Occupation				
Student		3		
Self-employment	2	13	3	6
Wage earner		5	2	1
Retired		3	2	

Key points derived from the respondents' interviews have been synthesised and will be presented for further discussion. In this analysis, we will examine the three stages of assimilation as stated by Gordon (1964): cultural assimilation, structural assimilation, and marital assimilation. By applying this theory, we will discuss the most appropriate term to describe the Banjarese community in Malaysia.

Cultural Assimilation

Cultural or behavioural assimilation is defined as a "change of cultural patterns to those of the host society" (Gordon 1978). At this stage, the minority group will learn the culture of the dominant group, including language and values. In the United States, for example, groups that immigrate to the country undergo acculturation to the dominant Anglo-American culture (as necessary), such as learning English, changing eating habits, adopting new value systems, and altering the spelling of the family surname (Healey and Stepnick 2022). We will discuss language assimilation currently happening in the Banjarese community.

Banjarese is not formally taught in this country; it is only passed down from generation to generation and taught informally. It is the parents' responsibility to introduce the language to their children, as stated by one of the respondents: "We learned it from our parents, and we try to pass it on to our children."

The presence of the Banjarese community in this country has caused a phenomenon known as language shift. Language shift can be defined as the change from the habitual use of one language to that of another. Most of the older generations of the Banjarese community in Malaysia speak the language, yet only a few individuals from the younger generation can speak it. One of the respondents confirmed this, stating that: "The younger generations nowadays rarely speak the language. They prefer to use the Northern dialect in their daily communication."

Saadiah Ma'alip (2014) states that the change and speed of the language shift process in a society, especially in those which are dual or multi-lingual, are influenced by social, historical, demographic, linguistic and other factors. The presence of different ethnic groups in an area leads the community to choose a language that is generally understood for communication. Thus, the Malay language (as well as its dialects) has become the Banjarese community's choice and is used to communicate with other ethnic groups. This is clear in Bagan Serai's downtown, a hotspot for the community's trading activities. Despite being able to speak Banjarese, traders and visitors in this area prefer to speak Malay with each other. This is because using Malay makes it easier for them to deal with people from different ethnic groups.

This situation is completely different in the village areas in Bagan Serai, where the great majority of residents are Banjarese. In this environment, the Banjarese community, especially older people, prefer to use their native language when communicating with each other. Their high level of proficiency in Banjarese allows them to speak it without hesitation. As stated by one of the respondents: "There are many Banjarese around here, and we, the elderly, prefer to speak Banjarese with each other."

The younger generation speaks Banjarese less due to the influence of Malay, which is more dominant nowadays. However, we found that some young people can still understand and speak Banjarese, even if they are not as fluent as their elders. Malay is considered a dominant language in Malaysia, and Banjarese speakers may come into contact with it in their everyday lives, which constitutes language contact. Brown and Miller (2013) define language contact as a situation in which speakers of different languages are in close contact in their everyday lives. Different communities of speakers may borrow vocabulary, phonetic features, and grammatical constructions from each other's languages, but if one community is dominant, its language will survive and the non-dominant community's language may become extinct (Brown and Miller 2013). As one of the ethnic minorities in Malaysia, the Banjarese tend to use lexical items from Malay and English as a result of assimilation. Assimilation is defined as making a sound more like another in the same or next word in a continuous utterance.

Table 3 shows some of the loanwords that have been adapted to the Banjarese phonological system.

Table 3: Words adapted into Banjarese

Input	Original transcription	Banjarese transcription	Source language
television	tɛ.lə.vɪ.ʒən	ta.li.bi.sen	English
taxi	tæk.si	tik.si	English
motor car	moʊ.tər.kɑr	man.tu.kar	English
rezeki (sustenance)	rə.zə.ki	ra.dʒa.ki?	Malay
masjid (mosque)	mas.dʒet	ma.si.git	Malay
beli (to buy)	bə.li	ma.li	Malay

Cultural assimilation occurs in the Banjarese community in Malaysia, as the younger generation now prefers Malay over their mother tongue. This assimilation is also evident in the incorporation of Malay language elements into the Banjarese language. Despite this, this language continues to be passed down to new generations. Some individuals can even speak this language fluently, although they are not numerous. The area also influences language use, with people in village areas having higher proficiency in Banjarese than those who live downtown. To survive, the Banjarese need to communicate with locals using the common language, Malay. However, Banjarese is still used as a medium of communication whenever they are with each other.

The assimilation process, especially the language, does happen in this minority group; however, they are still capable of preserving some aspects of their identity by passing it on to the next generation. Preservation of the Banjarese language may not be complete, as only some degree of the language has been preserved. However, some efforts are underway to support this preservation process, including maintaining contact with their ancestral homeland in South Kalimantan. The Banjarese language is widely used in South Kalimantan, and many literary works have been produced over the years. These works were brought back to Malaysia and shared with the community here. This community has also received a lot of attention from scholars across the country who want to learn more about their culture. In fact, the Banjarese community is so eager to assist scholars with their research that they have even assigned some individuals for this task. One of the respondents mentioned that: "Many scholars have come to meet me to learn more about Banjarese culture. I have assisted many of them, and I even keep some Banjarese cultural items to show them."

These individuals introduce Banjarese culture and connect scholars with the right person for their research. The Banjarese language might not be preserved formally, as we have done with Malay and some other languages. However, with the studies being conducted and dozens of articles being written about this community, this has contributed to the preservation process.

Structural Assimilation

Structural assimilation occurs when a minority community becomes part of the broader social framework. Initially, integration starts in the secondary sector and gradually extends to the primary sector. In other words, before individuals can establish friendships with members of different groups (primary sector), they first need to become familiar with each other. Often, the first interactions between these groups occur in public institutions like schools and workplaces (secondary sector). The more integrated the minority group becomes in the secondary sector, the closer they get to the dominant group in terms of income, education, and occupational status. According to Gordon (1978), once a group enters the institutions and public sectors of the larger society, integration into the primary sector and the other stages of assimilation will inevitably follow.

Most Banjarese are involved in the agricultural sector, mainly in rice cultivation. This is due to the fact that the land where they live is very suitable for rice cultivation. Banjarese play an important role in this country, as rice is considered one of the staple foods of Malaysian society. The rice cultivation sector also involves cooperation from other ethnics. Azhari Mat Salleh and Rohani Abd Ghani (2021) examine how land-rich and rice-rich individuals from various ethnicities become creditors to other cultivators. This indicates that other ethnic groups are actively involved in this sector, and they need mutual understanding for things to run smoothly. The Banjarese are also involved in other sectors, as Nurussobah et al. (2017) note that they have undergone modernisation, with more and more becoming involved in business and politics. Some even hold important positions in these sectors, such as becoming a head villager or becoming formally involved in the state or national legislature, indicating advancement from a social point of view. From being peasants to holding crucial roles in administration, this ethnic group has shown that minority people can also achieve success in life.

The Banjarese community also has its own organisation, a body established to preserve the identity of this people, known as Pertubuhan Banjar Malaysia (PBM). Figure 3 shows the logo of this organisation. The PBM carries out various activities to introduce Banjarese culture to local communities and further strengthen the identity of the Banjarese community in Malaysia. At the same time, the association also maintains contact with the community

in South Kalimantan, the ancestral homeland of the Banjarese people. Every year, delegations will visit Malaysia from South Kalimantan and vice versa. The purpose of this relationship is to ensure the continued health and influence of the Banjar culture, even though the community is far from its original lands. According to one respondent, who is also the leader of this association: "Every year, we hold a trip to South Kalimantan to meet and discuss matters related to our people. At the same time, the other group does the same by visiting us here in Malaysia."



Figure 3: The Logo of the Malaysian Banjarese Association.

Among the activities carried out to preserve the Banjarese culture is holding a large-scale feast known as *aruh ganal* among the Banjarese community. *Aruh ganal* is a traditional custom among the Banjarese people, and it is still practised in Malaysia. *Aruh ganal*, which literally means big feast, is held on a large scale by all the villagers and is also attended by people from other villages. The Banjarese community in Bagan Serai, Perak, has continued this tradition, bringing families from across the country together for one ceremony. The community also serves traditional Banjarese dishes at this feast, such as gayam, rimpi, wadai kiping, pais, and *balungan hayam*. According to a respondent: "It is in this kind of ceremony that we can present our food to others. At the same time, we also have a chance to practice cooking it."

The cultures and heritages of the Banjarese have been well preserved and practised here in Malaysia. However, some respondents also stated that they no longer practice Banjarese traditions. Traditions such as *bapukung*, a way of putting a baby to sleep, are no longer being practised by them or their family. This may be because times are changing and new technologies are emerging. Here we can see how advances in technology can have a detrimental effect on a culture. But technology also helps this Banjarese community preserve

its culture by sharing it with the world through online media. The Malaysian Banjarese Association uses social media sites such as Facebook to communicate within the Banjarese community and introduce its culture to others.

Marital Assimilation

According to Healey and Stepnick (2022), when integration into the primary sector becomes substantial, the basis for Gordon's third stage of assimilation is established. People are most likely to select spouses from among their primary relations, and thus, in Gordon's view, primary structural integration typically precedes intermarriage. Mixed marriage, or intermarriage, generally occurs because of emotional factors, but the feelings between the two members of a couple are also influenced by other factors such as demographics, interactions, government policies, culture, religion, and tolerance (Budi Anto and Saidatul Nornis 2020). Intermarriage is often used as one of the indicators of whether the relationship between groups in a society or country is good or otherwise. A society is seen as having high tolerance when intermarriage becomes common. Nowadays, intermarriage between the Banjarese and other communities has been normalised. According to one of the respondents: "I married into a family that speaks standard Malay. When raising our children, we mostly use the standard language, though I sometimes teach them some Banjarese words."

However, there are certain rules which have to be followed. Islam is known to be the most widely practised religion in this community. Although they may be from different ethnics, marriages between Muslims (adherents of Islam) do happen. In contrast, marriages between people of different religions are rare in the Banjarese community in Malaysia. According to Abdurrahman and Abduh (2020), Islam is of fundamental importance to the Banjarese people, and it has a key role in determining parts of the daily lives of Banjarese people, with everything regulated according to the rules of religious behaviour. The Islamic lifestyle remains central to this community. In fact, Islam's role in the Banjarese community today is considered more important than in the past. In the past, ritual practises and mystical beliefs were part of community life, and mystical rituals were used for medicinal purposes or to protect property. Nowadays, however, these rituals are not practised. The Banjarese community now adheres more to Islamic *shariah* and is increasingly abandoning its ancient beliefs.

Despite being exposed to various cultural influences, this community has still managed to maintain its own culture and traditions. One example is seen in the customs practised during marriage. According to the respondents, the tie between a man and a woman begins with a process known as *badatang* or getting to know. The man's family comes to the woman's family home to ask

questions, get to know each other, and "investigate" as much as possible about the girl who will soon be their daughter-in-law. As in Malay culture, elders often lead this process and take part in a discussion between the two sides.

In Malay tradition, there is a custom known as *bertunang* or getting engaged. In Banjarese tradition, however, this process is known as *maatar jujuran*, and requires the man's side to send gifts to his soon-to-be bride. If all the gifts are accepted by the woman, then it means that they are officially engaged. After that, the marriage ceremony will be held. In line with this community's Islamic values, the marriage ceremony usually takes place in a mosque or at the bride's home. Usually, both sides of the couple (the groom and the bride) hold a feast as a sign of gratitude. During this feast, the community can showcase their culture by serving traditional dishes and working together to ensure the event's success. By preparing for this ceremony, the Banjarese community can greet each other and, in turn, strengthen their relationships. Another unique aspect of this feast is that it becomes a platform for the older generation to pass down traditional recipes to the new generation by directly teaching them how to prepare the dishes. Another marriage custom practised by this community is known as *bapigit*. The bride and groom are prohibited from leaving their homes for several days before the marriage ceremony. This is to prevent unpleasant things from happening if they leave the house.

The process of assimilation is psychological rather than biological in nature, and refers to growing alike in character, thoughts and institutions rather than the blood-mingling brought about by intermarriage (Simons 1901). Intermarriage has resulted in the existence of a group of individuals with dual identities, one of which is Banjarese. Usually, parents will choose which identity they want their children to have and learn. Most of the time, they prefer the identity of more dominant ethnic groups. For example, when a Banjarese is married to a Malay person, their children more often than not take Malay identity rather than Banjarese. This is because the Malay community is far more dominant than the Banjarese in Malaysia. In order to ensure that the children are able to adapt to this, their Malay identity has been nurtured since childhood. However, some parents feel that they have a responsibility to teach their children about Banjarese culture at home. This is how Banjarese identity is maintained from generation to generation. Banjarese culture will face extinction if no one takes responsibility for teaching the younger generation about it.

CONCLUSION

This paper examined Gordon's three stages of assimilation and their manifestation within the Banjarese ethnic group. Now, let's address the main question: Is the concept of a community of communities suitable enough for

depicting the real situation of this ethnic group? In the first stage, we observe the adaptation of certain Malay elements in the Banjarese language, with the younger generation preferring Malay over their native language. Nevertheless, the Banjarese language still exists and is used in specific parts of the country. In the second stage, it is evident that the Banjarese have become integrated into the broader social framework by collaborating with individuals from other ethnic groups. However, this group also maintains its own organisation, dedicated to preserving Banjarese identity and culture. Moving on to the third stage, intermarriage has been normalised in Banjarese culture, resulting in individuals with dual identities, one of which is Banjarese. All three stages indicate that assimilation occurs within this group. Consequently, Banjarese cannot be considered a purely pluralistic ethnic group. As noted by Abramson (1980), neither assimilation nor pluralism is a static concept; each has many levels and stages that individuals or groups may experience. Assimilation in this group is less severe, as the Banjarese retain some of their cultural practices. In summary, the Banjarese have demonstrated loyalty and commitment to the national community while simultaneously preserving their unique ethnic and local identities. This aligns with the core principles of the community of communities concept, underscoring its relevance in depicting the social dynamics of the Banjarese ethnic group.

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