

## **Spirits in the Modern World: Borneo Women's Ways of Knowing**

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Cross-cultural understanding is a necessity in the modern, globalized world. Behaviors upon which cross-cultural relationships are built are affected by—and interpreted according to—the beliefs of the individuals involved and their ways of knowing the world; yet, belief systems vary by culture and the way it experiences modernization. This study on the spiritual beliefs of working women in Borneo is part of an ongoing investigation in several regions of Southeast Asia seeking to uncover some of the beliefs that guide behavior by focusing on working women, who often find themselves bridging the gap between home and work. The lens of gender framed the study because it was theorized that women's "ways of knowing" might provide connections to spiritual belief systems and the issues that women face in juggling the spiritual traditions of home and culture with the pressures of a modern career in a global marketplace where western bias leads to more restrictive views of religion and spiritualism. The results of the first study in peninsular Malaysia, which revealed a *shared knowledge of and respect for the rules of the spirit world* as the most salient finding, will be discussed, as well as the possible contributing factors, such as differences between eastern and western modernities and the postulation that a recent perceived rise in spirituality might be a reaction to the region's drive to modernize. Finally, the challenges involved in conducting such research will be addressed.

**\*Dr Morrison is on her second sabbatical in this region. She has conducted previous studies here and has recently completed a Fulbright Specialist Project in Malaysia. Her research partner in this extended study is Associate Professor Dr Carol Hooi of Nottingham University, Malaysia.**