

DEATH AND RITES AMONG THE KADAZAN PENAMPANG OF SABAH, BORNEO, MALAYSIA

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Abstract

The funeral is the third most important rite of passage in the life of the Kadazan of Penampang, Sabah. An integral part of the funerary rites is playing the traditional gong musical ensemble called *dunsai*, which is played during the funeral. The gongs were traditionally beaten according to this particular sombre rhythm to announce to the spirit world the death and the pending arrival of a new member, and to the secular world that death has occurred and due preparations had to be made. *Dunsai* music is especially significant as only six hanging gongs without the drum are used. These days the *Dunsai* is widely recognized as the funerary music of the Kadazan Penampang, and is played during the wake and on the sixth day after the burial. This paper documents the traditional observances of the funerary rites featuring the *Dunsai* music based on the ancestral animistic beliefs of the Kadazan of the Kg. Kituau, Penampang, Sabah. It also attempts to show these funerary rites as a continuing cultural symbol of the Kadazan Penampang identity that transcends the past and present beliefs since many members of the community now subscribe to other faiths.

Keywords: gong music, *dunsai*, rite of passage, death, Kadazandusun, Sabah

Kadazan of Penampang Worldview

The Kadazan Penampang, an indigenous category of the complex Kadazandusun ethnic group who are speakers of the Dusunic languages, is defined by their geographical location and traditional residence in the Penampang District. They are customarily subsistence agriculturalists, planting

wet paddy and other crops such as fruit trees and vegetables, and rear livestock such as buffaloes, pigs, and chickens. The Kadazan Penampang also further differentiate themselves according to the topographical landscape as *Potiang*, the highlanders, *Tangaah*, middle inhabitants, and the *Kadazan*, the lowlanders or people of the plains near the coast (personal communication with Late Inai Jinggunis, Februari 2004).



Map 1: Kadazan Penampang Locality, Penampang, Sabah
Source: Sabah Survey Department

Nevertheless, the origin of the term *Kadazan* itself continues to be debated. Numerous theories have been forwarded about the term but the most plausible one offered comes from the sacred texts called *inait* recited by the *bobohizan*, a

ritual specialist of Penampang. In the *inait* of the *Potiang*, *Tangaah* and the Kadazan (Hanafi Hussin, 2008, p. 174), the term Kadazan is derived from the text referring to *tulun/tuhun* or people of the plain. Despite minor disparities arising from their topographical distribution these differentiated groupings share many common traits, beliefs, myths as well as language.

There is also a Kadazandusun myth concerning the origins of the Kadazandusun. Herman J. Luping (2009, p. 31) says, this myth originated from Nunuk Ragang in Tampias, near Telupid. The Penampang version of the legend is like this: there was a huge rock underneath a nunuk tree (banyan tree). The nunuk tree was near the river bank in Tampias. It was red in colour when seen from afar. Hence the term Nunuk Ragang: ragang means red. The huge rock split open and two divine beings emerged. They were Kinoingan and Sumindu. In Kadazandusun parlance today. *Kinoingan* means God. Suminundu was also divine and osundu, possessing supernatural powers. Their first child was Huminodun. More children were born and are the ancestors of the Kadazandusun today. They multiplied and dispersed throughout the land. As they moved and inhabited river valleys of the land, they gradually became identified with the places of their habitat and decided to call themselves names identified with place names. Thus, the Kadazandusun of Penampang and papar districts called themselves Tangaah, meaning people of the middle or *middle earth*, but at same time, continued to refer themselves by the original name Kadazan.

As in many Sabah indigenous worldviews the traditional Kadazan also sees the world as a balance between the spiritual and physical dimensions (Pugh-Kitingan, Hanafi Hussin & John Baptist, 2011, p. 127). The Kadazan universe can be described as two worlds, the spiritual and the material world and comprising three realms. These are *hibabou* or *diwato*, the upper realm or heaven, *hiniba*, the earth, and *dahom tanah* the underworld or hell (Hanafi Hussin, 2007, pp. 7-29). The structure of the spiritual world (*pogun do hozob*) is perceived as very complex, with spirit beings and human beings living in separate parallel worlds, and both having families and off-springs. An important tenet of this belief is that any misconduct by the community will result in imbalances and disruption in the environment which would cause the earth to become 'hot' or '*ahasu*', a condition that is to be avoided. This heat is said to produce calamities such as sickness and other causes that will also make the land unproductive. When this happens the *bobohizan* is called for her ritual services to restore the balance and normality. Besides these remedial services the *bobohizan* also has an important role to help the community to fulfil its spiritual needs and adhere to its moral requirements.

Death and Mourning

Death or *kapatazon* is a very solemn occasion for the traditional Kadazan as it is one of the most important rites of passage during which many taboos have to be observed. When death occurs it also causes imbalance and disorder in the social life of the family of the deceased. Consequently, the family concerned need to fix the social disorder by performing various rituals and observing the required taboos. They have to prepare themselves, mentally and physically, to remove the impurities that affect their family. The living spouse of the deceased especially has to undergo a process of purification and observe a series of taboos, as at this stage he/she is said to be vulnerable to all sorts of ritual pollution which can also affect immediate members of the family.

When a person dies, the Kadazan believe the soul of the deceased will journey from the physical world to the land of the dead or *pogun do hozob* where they will live eternally with their ancestors. Thus, the transition which is the mourning phase or *modpuod* becomes a very important period in the traditional religious and social life cycle of the Kadazan. Invariably it is taken very seriously by the bereaved family, respectfully fulfilling the ritual traditions and obligations including observing the required taboos.

Most Kadazan of Penampang are Roman Catholic, due to the successful proselytising efforts of the mission which was established in Penampang in 1896. Although many Kadazan have declared themselves Christians for decades, however, a good number still observe their traditional rituals and practices associated with their ancestral beliefs in their funerary rites. Many have adopted the Christian burial practices and services but still maintain the traditional accompanying rituals and practices as part of cultural customs and traditions.

According to Luping, the funeral is the third important ceremony in the life of a Kadazan community (Luping, 2009, pp. 171-173). In the old days when a Tangaah Kadazan dies, the first ceremony of the funerary rites would be the covering of the body with a cloth called *bahu* which was a finely woven cloth about twelve feet by seven feet in size. The *bahu* was placed over the body in a way that resembles the shape of a mountain. 'Bahu', in *Tangaah Kadazan*, literally means a place of the dead. Thus, Kinabahu or Kinabalu, to the *Tangaah Kadazan*, means the mountain that has spirits and a place for the dead. The covering of the body with a *bahu* is no longer practised. Instead, an encoffining ceremony is now the norm with the deceased placed in the coffin almost soon after death. However, the lying-in-state and the vigil for three days and nights before burial, and the mourning for seven days and nights after the death are still observed.

It is customary for the body to be laid in a position facing the doorway, facing east or toward Mount Kinabalu, the customary destination and eternal abode of the spirits of the dead. For three days and nights family, relatives and friends will gather and keep a vigil throughout before the burial. For seven days after the death, the space occupied by the body is considered a sacred ritual space. Immediately after the body is removed from the house for burial, a special cleansing ritual will be performed in the vacated area. In this ritual space, the family, relatives and friends will offer prayers for the deceased individually or in groups, in particular among those who have embraced Christianity.

During the wake before burial some personal effects of the deceased will be placed next to the body. A candle is lit during the seven days of mourning. These items symbolise the journey the deceased will undertake in the afterlife to another world. Traditional practitioners of their ancestral religion will offer food and drink on a small table placed at the head of the deceased as offerings to the deceased. Professed Christians will place a picture of the deceased and crucifix on a small table at the head of the deceased. All photographs and pictures in the vicinity of the body are turned to face the wall to prevent malevolent spirits from identifying and harming the people in the pictures and photographs. Living individuals are vulnerable if exposed to menacing spirits as they believe that all malevolent and benevolent spirits are on the lookout for the deceased during this period.

Observances of funerary taboos depend on the rank of the family or household member that has died. If the father, head of the family or household dies, it is required for the spouse of the deceased to observe certain strict taboos. It was customary for the wife to sit and keep a vigil next to the deceased. She could neither leave the house nor visit anyone before the burial. However, some families have relaxed and dispensed with some of these taboos allowing for some freedom of movement for the spouse and family. Some prefer to adhere as closely as possible and maintain the traditional customs and practices handed down to them.

Nevertheless, most of these traditional practices have diminished, generally abandoned by Christian villagers some of whom, though, continue to maintain some taboos for cultural reasons. Christian teaching prohibits participation in rituals invoking the spirits, and those who have embraced Christianity have been discouraged from doing so. The gong beating before and during the Christian burial process, however, has been allowed to take place. Traditionalists, however, especially those living in the village may still adhere to syncretic practices which combine Christian beliefs and their ancestral traditions.

The Kadazan of Penampang has adopted certain Chinese funeral traditions such as the mourning cloth or arm bands. These reflect the frequent intermarriage for more than a century occurring between the Chinese and indigenous people and assimilation of Chinese customs into local Kadazan culture. A small piece of a cotton cloth in black, blue or other dark colours pinned to the arms called *tuaha* are still widely used during funerals among the Kadazan of Penampang. The colours of the *tuaha* worn show the relationship and rank of the mourners and family members to the deceased. The spouse and children of the deceased will wear the patch of black cloth pinned on the right-arm sleeve of the attire with grandchildren wearing dark blue and great grandchildren wearing yellow patches of cloth pinned on the left-arm sleeve. It is also customary for the family to wear black clothes throughout the bereavement before and during the burial.

Other Chinese influences that continue to this day are the gambling and drinking of alcohol during the wake. This was adopted as a cultural practice by the Kadazan to encourage people to stay awake and keep the vigil. The practice of gambling during the mourning and the wake has been recognised and acknowledged by the native court as an accepted part of the Kadazan customs and traditions. However, these practices are only confined to the Kadazan people who live in the Penampang and Papar districts.

Throughout the three days of mourning before the burial if the family are practising animists, the spouse, elder daughters and sons also sit next to the coffin. Those paying respect to the deceased also sit next to the deceased and recollect his or her past life. They relate about the accomplishments of the deceased while he/she was alive. There are also those who would wail and cry over the deceased calling his or her name and murmuring sentiments that sometimes make others also cry with them. While the body is still in the house, the family is required to provide food for mourners and visitors paying respect to the deceased. However, only certain types of food are cooked and served. Traditional practitioners would adhere strictly to the required food codes while the Christians would be more flexible in the offer of food. The Christians would usually conduct special nightly prayers for seven days from the time of death. The final prayers would end with a ceremony called *mogukas*. A lot of activities seen as a syncretic fusion of traditional beliefs and Christian ritual and practices take place. Special prayers are also held by Christians on the 40th day and sometime 100th day after the death.

The Burial

Funeral practices can be financially demanding among the Kadazandusun as it entails days of communal feeding and drinking among those who attend the wake and follow through until the interment. According to Luping (2009, p. 172),

Kadazandusun funerals are expensive as they involve providing food and drinks for the many people who participate in the wake. In many cases, the wake is attended by many peoples especially amongst closes relatives and friends sometimes exceeded between 100-200 peoples. Buffaloes, goats, chickens and pigs are normally slaughtered during the observance of funeral ceremonies. It is common for close relatives to come and show their grief when the body is lying in state and cry openly and loudly.

The wailing is still common especially amongst the elderly people who can routinely cry loudly and openly to show their grief and respect to the deceased. It said that such practices were adopted from the Chinese.

On the third day, the body is placed in the coffin. The family has to determine if it should be taken directly to the graveyard for burial or to the church. Although the family maybe Christian followers they may not necessarily bring the deceased to church for the funeral mass. They may decide to have a brief prayer at the house or the graveyard attended by a catechist, and perhaps a priest. Irrespective of the faith of the spouse - Christian or animist - he or she is prohibited from attending the graveside burial as this is considered a major taboo. The spouse must leave the house before the body is removed from the house, and must be accompanied by another widow or widower to a relative's or neighbouring house where a spouse had recently passed away. The widower must visit a house of a recently deceased female and vice versa for the widow. This practice is called *mamahakoi*, a visit to someone's house with a recent bereavement. The spouse can only return to the house after the body has been removed. The vacated space, where the body had lain, must be quickly purified. Using cloth and water by those who remained in house they would ritually remove the 'dirt' (referring to impurities that can be easily identified and discovered by malignant spirits which could cause illness and death). The space where the deceased lay is considered 'hot', implying a menace to the living. The recently widowed cannot be exposed to

such places, and thus, it is essential that the place be purified and cleansed before they can return to the house.

The burial rites vary from one family to another according to family requirements. For church funeral services for Christians the coffin remains open during the service. Before the final blessing by the priest, family, relatives and friends pay their respects and do the final viewing before the coffin is sealed. For animists the coffin is sealed after the family, friends and relatives pay their last respects before it is carried to the graveyard for burial. After the coffin is brought outside the house it was customary to burn some fire-crackers or sometimes fire a few gunshots in the air to signify the send-off and farewell. The procession going to the grave is accompanied by gong beating playing *dunsai* music.

A custom, which is still practised by the community in the funeral, is the payment of *sogit*. The term *monogit* means "to pay compensation" or "to atone for", "to neutralise" the disruption of the natural environment. It is derived from the word *sogit*, which means "atonement". With the epenthetic vowel, *sogit* comes from the word '*osogit*' means 'cold'. In general, *monogit* refers to a ritual or ceremony which is performed to "cool" the spiritual "heat" caused by illicit human actions and relationships. Actions which are deemed to be *ahasu* or "hot" and which anger the supernatural world are those that violate the *adat* or customary norms of human behaviour prescribed in the *inait*, such as adultery, fornication, and incest (which also includes marriage between distant cognates). Ignoring ceremonial requirements and violating ritual taboos in daily life, either inadvertently or deliberately, are also regarded as being *ahasu* (Pugh-Kitingan, Hanafi Hussin & John Baptist, 2011, pp. 126-127).

It is obligatory for the family to slaughter a buffalo as a form of "*sogit*" to pay respect to the dead. The meat is distributed to the villagers and visitors who come to pay respect to the deceased. It is also believed that those families who slaughter a buffalo are those who can afford to do so and are also highly respected by the community. It is also compulsory that the family of the deceased must utilise all the meat on the particular day either for cooking such as making soup, barbecue and frying without mixing with any green vegetable. In the old days after the buffalo is slaughtered the meat has to be cooked by barbecuing, and a piece of roasted meat is placed on a ceramic plate as an offering to the deceased and the spirits of family members who have died.

The buffalo is slaughtered before digging the grave. The grave diggers then bring cooked food with them to have their meal at the grave. A small portion of raw meat is also brought over for the grave diggers to barbecue. Part of the barbecued meat is offered to the spirits of the dead buried in the graveyard. The grave diggers are also expected to consume all the food that

they have brought with them to the cemetery. Otherwise, they might evoke and attract the spirits residing in the vicinity.

Upon arrival at the graveyard, the grave diggers receive the coffin and rest it on two wooden poles placed widthways on top of the grave, and lay the belongings of the deceased beside the coffin. If the deceased is a Christian, he or she is usually buried with the head pointing towards the sun. For traditional practitioners, the belongings are buried together with the deceased for use in the after world. Occasionally a Christian family may decide against bringing the deceased to the church for the funeral service, and instead request only the services of a catechist or a priest to conduct the funeral ceremony at the graveyard which is usually very brief. A common practice is the beating of gongs, which is usually done before and after the funerary services are performed by the priest or the catechist.

In a more traditional burial, the coffin is moved from its perch of wooden poles and lowered into the hole with long ropes held by family and friends. When it reaches the ground, close family members step on the coffin, and begin the ritual of throwing earth onto the coffin. This is followed by relatives and friends doing the same. This ritual symbolises the farewell and permanent separation from the physical world. Some of the accompanying personal effects are buried with the deceased, with the remainder placed on top of the grave. Before leaving the grave the gongs are beaten producing several music repertoires including *dunsai* as a form of a final respect and farewell to the deceased. Several lit candles are also placed on top of the grave. If the deceased is a Christian, a crucifix is placed on top as a grave marker. If the deceased is an animist, a stone or wooden pole is used as a grave marker. Sometimes a small hut is immediately built to cover the grave with the personal belongings of the deceased placed in the rafters to prevent their removal by animals as well as vandals. After the completion of the burial service, the family, relatives, and friends go home. However, as they leave the grave they are prohibited from turning and looking back as it is believed that the spirit of the deceased may try to return home with them.

Rituals of the Dead

In the Kadazan Penampang society, various funerary rites are commonly observed and performed. Among these burial-related ceremonies may include *momisok*, *papaakan*, *mogukas*, and *humontok*.

Momisok* and *Papaakan

Momisok is a ritual in which the entire house lights are switched off so that the house is plunged into darkness, and this takes place on the eve of the seventh day after the death. In this ritual the invitation called *papaakan* is offered as an inducement to recall the spirit of the deceased to eat or feast on the offering. The purpose of the *momisok* is to establish contact with the spirit of the deceased for the last time by invoking him or her to have the last meal at home, and bring all his/her belongings with him/her to the other world. During this ritual, the family gathers and prepares food for the final feast for the dead by offering the deceased's favourite food placed on a small table which functions as an altar. The offering on this table usually includes rice wine and a burning candle.

A ritual specialist or *bobohizan* is called to conduct the *momisok* ritual and also to usher the spirit of the deceased, showing the way to the spirit world to the land for the dead. She would perform a short ritual and chant the *inait*. For traditional practitioners, wood ash would be placed in a winnowing tray on the floor to see if the spirit of the deceased has returned and left footprints on the ash when the light is switched off. In darkness, everyone present are expected to maintain silence for a few minutes. This is said to be the last chance for the departed spirit to communicate with those left behind so that he or she will enter the spirit world in peace. In this ritual, the spirit is said to finally enter the spirit world, and therefore will not revisit and disturb the living family members. The lights in the house are also switched off for the few minutes, providing for darkness, to enable the spirit to enjoy the meal. The *momisok* ritual is normally performed twice between 6.00-6.30 p.m. and repeated at around midnight. For those who have embraced Christianity, they sometimes symbolically perform the *momisok* ritual without the offerings on the small table, but instead place a picture of deceased together with other religious items such as a crucifix, rosary and a burning candle. This observance appears to be a syncretic form of the old traditions of the ancestors and is a common practice among many Kadazan people today. It has not been opposed by the Catholic Church as it is usually performed as a cultural tradition which provides for a form of respect for the deceased without invoking the spirit.

Mogukas

The *Mogukas* ritual is carried out the next day after the *momisok*. This is a short ritual performed by *bobohizan* to cleanse and drive away all 'dirt' and all

'hotness' (malevolent spirits) that can cause sickness and calamities to the family, and spirits believed to still linger around the house. The priestesses first gather all the tools used during the burial for ritual cleansing and offer a special prayer for the spirit of the deceased on its journey. The Kadazan believe the seventh day is the final day for the spirit to remain on earth. A lunch feast is held as a symbolic farewell to the deceased to which close relatives and friends are invited. For the feast, the family of the deceased slaughters a goat which is cooked and eaten by those who attend the ceremonies. This is a customary practice. Both animals are slaughtered to serve as the deceased's companions to the other world: Part of this ritual involves the burning of the personal belongings of the deceased such as the mattress and old clothing to equip the deceased for him/her to bring them to use in the other world. Without the accompanying goods, it is believed that the spirit world will assume that the new member comes from a very poor family, and will thus be ridiculed by other inhabitant spirits of the dead. Thus, the animals – the buffalo slaughtered before the funeral and the goat during the *mogukas* ritual – symbolise the deceased's wealth, with the buffalo also serving as a vehicle to ride in the journey to the next world.

Humontok

Humontok is a ritual to send for the spirit of the deceased for the final farewell and communication with family member before leaving the material world and entering the spirit world. It is usually performed several weeks after the burial by those who still maintain their traditional belief system. But this performance would depend on the family and also the availability of ritual specialists to perform the *humontok* ceremony. In the old days, this was a compulsory ritual to communicate with the spirit of the dead for fear that it might be still wandering around on earth instead of residing in its final resting place for the dead. These days, this ritual is optional and rarely observed as most Kadazan have already embraced Christianity. Traditionally, two *bobohizan*, usually a senior priestess and an apprentice, would be required to conduct the ritual. Each priestess has a specific role to perform the recitation of *inait* and in the tasks of offering or cleansing of the household. For example, the *bobohizan* divides the ritual prayer into two parts. The senior priestess summons the spirit of the dead and the apprentice visits the graveyard and invokes the *hozob*, the evil spirit of death, to release all the spirits or souls of the people who attended the funeral services and restore them to their body. It is believed that there is a possibility that the people who attended the funeral would eventually fall ill if this ritual is omitted. During this ritual, all implements

used for the funeral service would be cleansed from the exposure to the 'dirt'. A special prayer is recited and the spirit of the deceased is summoned by the *bobohizan* as a medium and through whom the spirit of the dead would speak to the living. Through the medium the spirit would communicate with the family members, giving final words of advice or instructions. Sometimes family secrets are disclosed by the deceased, while reminding family members to carry out tasks which the deceased forgot or was unable to perform while he/she was alive. As practice contravenes Catholic Church teachings it is rarely observed and performed. Besides, the number of *bobohizan* who can perform this ritual has also diminished, with decreasingly few demands for such services.

Taboos during Bereavement

The death rituals continue to be observed till today as very solemn affairs by the Kadazan Penampang who pays special attention to the preparation, respecting and complying with the necessary customary taboos as well. These taboos must be observed as soon as death occurs in the family. During the mourning phase called *Mopuod* various rituals must be observed before and after burial. The spouse would be most deeply affected and so must observe the taboos more carefully. This mourning phase may last any time between 40 and 100 days and sometimes up to a year, depending on the family ancestral traditions. The spouse of the deceased has to maintain a vigil besides the deceased until burial and is expected to remain at home and is prohibited from performing certain tasks as well. During the bereavement period social gatherings such as weddings and merry making activities are suspended until a lapse of 100 days or more up to a year depending on the family tradition, and family consensus on how long they wish to observe the taboo. They believe that during this period family members are vulnerable to any calamities and can suffer misfortune. To avoid adversity they must observe the taboos. Members of the family in mourning are also expected to look serious and sorrowful. A serious offence and breach of the death taboos include speaking loudly and laughing by members of the family. The family, the spouse in particular, is also forbidden to hold the broom and visit the homes of others, outside the prescribed visits, during the first seven days of the mourning. The widowed spouse can only eat certain type of food and must abstain from eating food which is considered 'itchy'. These are regarded as 'hot' food that may cause the spouse to forget the deceased and promptly remarry while still in mourning. For example, taboo foods include bamboo shoots, yam and vegetables, seafood such as prawns and many others which are classified as

'itchy'. There is also no planting of paddy or visits to the paddy field or even trespassing paddy fields of neighbours. Should this occur they have to pay a *sogit*, the ritual compensation. Neither can the family cut or trim their hair nor are fingernails until the last cleansing ritual is performed to signify the end of the *mopuod*, which also means that the taboo period is over.

After the burial, family members of the deceased must return to the house immediately to bathe, and they have to wash their feet before entering the house. They are forbidden from visiting the houses of other people before doing this. Should there be a breach of this custom they are liable to pay '*sogit*' to the house owner. They believe that those in mourning are in ritual state of pollution and are considered 'hot' or '*ahasu*'. The 'dirt' they carry can cause imbalances in their social realm and cause all kinds of calamities to occur.

The *Dunsai* Music of the Kadazan Penampang

A continuing tradition of announcement and communication when death occurs in the village is the distinct beating of gongs. The particular sombre gong music played is known as *dunsai*, which means *tagung talaat*, which is when someone has just passed away it signifies that it is time for mourning the dead. *Dunsai* music plays an important role in the Kadazan Penampang funerary rites. The gongs are beaten playing the *dunsai* music repertoire to announce a death in the village to both the physical world and the spiritual world. The music serves as an instrument to convey the message and in its dual communication functions link the visible and the invisible worlds. For the traditional Kadazan, the gong is not only an important ritual implement but also an asset of wealth. Gongs provide the accompanying music required in religious ceremonies associated with different rites of passage from birth to death and other aspects of traditional social life. As cultural property they also symbolises the family social status and wealth. Aside from their use in communication in village life to announce important family, social and religious events gongs when played also become a conduit to communicate with the spiritual realms during rituals.

Dunsai gong music ensemble is played differently from the conventional way. Of particular significance is that no drum is used. The drum is usually considered as the head of the traditional gong music ensemble, but during mourning the drum is deliberately excluded in the gong music for *dunsai*. The traditional belief holds that each material object has its kindred spirit, which can easily drift away or be removed, if it has been unduly exposed or improperly handled. In announcing death, the *dunsai* is played incompletely to signify the gap caused by the death of the person. The

technique of beating the gong is also different. Instead of hanging the gongs on a stand each gong is hand-held by each player. Neither are the gongs arranged in sequence. Likewise, the gongs are beaten randomly starting with either gong No 1 or No 6, and beating of the other gongs following through.

Dunsai gong music also comprises different styles of beating which serve to inform the village community whether an elderly or a young person had died. If the gongs are beaten three times it indicates that the deceased is an adult, and if only twice then the deceased is either a young girl or boy. Upon hearing the beating of the gongs, the villagers in the vicinity know someone has died and start visiting the house of the deceased to enquire about the circumstances of the death. The news by word of mouth is quickly passed around and more people who would know the family will visit and pay their respects to the grieving family. The variation in the sequences of beating the gongs for *dunsai* music depends on the skills of the player during the wake while the deceased lays in-state in the house before burial. It is also played in the final stage of the funeral with continuous sequence of gong beating to inform people of the bereavement. At the same time the continuous beating informs the spiritual realm of the dead and the pending journey of the deceased after the burial to the spirit world and to remind them to prepare the welcome.

The beating of the *tagung talaat* or *momodunsai* music is played three times immediately after a person is pronounced dead and as soon as the dead body is laid on the mattress after completing the ritual bathing and cleansing. This repertoire is repetitively played at around 6 pm just before dusk, at or just before midnight, and again just before 6 am before sunrise the next morning. According to village elders, each time they beat the *tagung talaat* or *Dunsai* music the spiritual realms of the dead will carefully listen to the music. Once it is confirmed that *tagung talaat* is played they would rejoice and celebrate that another newcomer will soon be joining them. In the secular world *Dunsai* music means death and equated with sorrow and sadness. However, the opposite is said to occur in the spirit world where the spirits would dance and rejoice to the *Dunsai* music. They would celebrate a triumph in acquiring a new dead to enter their domain (personal communication with Bobohizan Inai Lovinis Tulus, 2 June 2012).

On the sixth night after the burial, on the eve of the conclusion of the 7-day mourning period the family of the deceased performs the *mogukas* cleansing ritual. The *tagung talaat* or *dunsai* music is once again played as the final tribute to the deceased and to indicate the closing of the death ritual. The spirit of the deceased is believed to be hovering on the periphery before entering its eternal abode or the 'nabahu'. After the beating of gongs for the

tagung talaat or *dunsai* music, a musical ensemble of the *tagung tavasi* or *sumazau* repertoire is played as a form of final respect and farewell to the spirit of the deceased on its journey to its eternal resting place.



Figure 1: *Dunsai* music played during funeral of Kadazan at Kituau Village Penampang
(Source: Fieldwork, 14 February 2008)

Dunsai Music Ensemble

The *tagung talaat* or *dunsai* gong ensemble consists of six (6) hanging gongs without the drum (*gandang*) and thus is considered incomplete. The six gongs are the same as in *Sompogogungan* ensemble, comprising of the *sasalakan* (No. 1), *nanangon* (No. 2), *hahambatan* (No. 3), *hohotukon* (No. 4), *kulimpoon* (No. 5) and *tatavag* (No. 6) (Hanafi Hussin, 2006, p. 10). For the Kadazan gongs are capital assets, with material and ritual functions and use. Older or antique gongs are treated with care and respect, especially when they are used in rituals imbued with taboos especially those connected with death. How the gongs are kept and placed are also important. In traditional beliefs each gong has its *sundwoan* or a kindred spirit and so must be treated with utmost respect. If treated carelessly the spirit may leave the gong, causing the gong to be tuneless or sound unpleasant when beaten. During the mourning period the gongs especially must be carefully handled. Rough handling may offend the spirits of the gongs.

After beating the gongs before burial the gongs are carefully placed face down near the deceased. These gongs will be strictly used for beating the

dunsai repertoires while the deceased is still at home. After burial at the cemetery only then would the gongs be used to play the other musical repertoire called *Tagung Tavasi* as additional to the *Tagung Talaat (dunsai)* as the final respect for the deceased at the cemetery. On the seventh day during the *mogukas* a special ritual is conducted by the *bobohizan* will be held to cleanse and recall the departed spirits of the gong ensemble and also all the tools and implements used during the burial. A very short ritual is usually conducted by a most ritual senior specialist outside the house over the assembled equipment. She would dip a bundle of seven species of ritual plants, collected for the purpose, into a pail of water and sprinkle the water on the tools and implements while simultaneously chanting short prayers.

The beating of gongs for *dunsai* involves particular patterns of playing. It usually begins with beating either the *sasalakan* (the gong Number 1) or *tatavag* (Number 6) depending on the leader of the gong beaters. If the music begins with *sasalakan* or Number 1, then it has to be followed by *tatavag* (Number 6), and vice-versa if number 6 begins it would be followed by *sasalakan* (Number 1), with the rest of the gongs, No two till five following. The beating of the gongs alternates between beating Number 1 and Number 6 leading the repertoire for three times. The gong beating session ends with the third round.

It is believed that once the *dunsai* gong music is played the soul of the deceased would leave the body as an unseen spirit hovering in the physical world. The spirit would watch and observe family, relatives and friends, sometimes attempting to communicate with them. The *tagung talaat* is played again when the body leaves the house in a procession to herald its departure for burial in the cemetery. During this phase, there is crying and with family members speaking loudly to convey their last respect and final words or *pason* to the deceased. Throughout the funeral procession to the graveyard or the church the *dunsai* gong music is continuously played until the body is buried in the cemetery, stopping only to allow the final blessing to take place. However, if the body is brought to Church the gong beating would cease during the service, and resume only during the funeral procession to the cemetery.

Other Bereavement Music Repertoires

Three specific repertoires of gong music are played during the period of mourning from the announcement of death to the burial in the cemetery. These musical repertoires are also said to be incomplete as they are played without the drum. Each music repertoire has a specific role and function in the funerary rites.

Dunsai or Tagung Talaat

The first repertoire is the *Dunsai* or *Tagung Talaat* which announces the death in the village to the physical and spiritual world. This gong ensemble is played only for mourning. To the villager the music is a sorrowful dirge, in contrast to the joyful anticipation of the arrival of a new member among the spirits of the after world. It is played to announce news of death, before sunset, sunrise and midnight, before burial while the body is still kept under vigil at the house. It is played during the encoffining of the deceased, payment of final respects for the deceased before burial, and throughout the funeral procession to the grave yard

Tagung Tavasi

The *tagung tavasi* (sumazau beat) (Tay, Hanafi Hussin, Khaw, Mohd. Anis Md Nor & Bulan, 2010, pp. 147-168) which means good sound is played after the burial at the cemetery as a form of tribute to the spirits of the dead to remind them of the sounds they used to listen, play and enjoy when they were alive. It is the sign of the final farewell to the deceased and marks the conclusion of the funerary and burial rites. However, the musical ensemble used is still incomplete as it is played without the drum. With this music the bridge between the living and the dead is removed. Once the grave is fully covered with soil, and the cross or stone grave marker placed on it family and friends would place bouquets or wreaths of flowers as a final farewell. Usually, *tagung tavasi* is played twice, but sometimes thrice or more depending on the mood of the players who would continue if they had a lot to drink.

During playing of the *tagung tavasi* at the grave, the mourners take the opportunity to say the final farewell. It is believed, however, that the music would provoke the spirits of the spirit world to remember their life in the physical world; the *sumazau* beat of the *tagung tavasi* would make them cry, evoking nostalgia. However, this may bring them back to the house to search and look for belongings they had left to family members (personal communication with Bobohizan Inai Lovinis Tulus, 2 June 2012). This music marks the last physical connection between the living and the dead. *Tagung tavasi* is livelier and cheerful with a variety of rhythms, and sounding like *sumazau* music, compared to the sombre beats of *tagung talaat*.

Botibas

This is a special music played to accompany a martial arts performance given as a tribute to the deceased as a respected warrior in the send-off to the spirit

world. It is believed that when the spirits listen to this music they would know that the deceased was a highly respected person in the physical world. This music also serves to remind the community of the great contribution of the deceased to the family and community when he was alive (personal communication with Bobohizan Inai Gusiti binti Lojikim, November 2012).

Conclusion

Over the years the Kadazan Penampang people have gone through a dramatic cultural transformation, adapting and adjusting to meet needs of a changing environmental landscape, and external challenges shaped by the economy, politics and other forces, generally outside their sway. The Penampang area is no longer the rural district it once was located adjacent to the state capital of Kota Kinabalu. It has become an urban satellite with paddy lands and ancestral grounds increasingly giving way to modern buildings and commercial development. Despite these physical changes the Kadazan of Penampang remain at heart a culturally conscious group of people who still adhere to certain aspects of their ancestral customs and traditions. Their traditional dance and music in particular have also made them a culturally identifiable people. Together with their traditional performing arts, their costume and their iconic agricultural practices and ancient religious traditions they have become an integral cultural symbol of diversity for Malaysia. This is enhanced in the annual official celebration of the *Kaamatan* which fundamentally honours these people and their kindred tribes.

Likewise, the *Dunsai* gong music has become part and parcel of Kadazan identity and cultural mosaic. Although it once was just traditional a ritual music to invoke the spirits in their ancestral beliefs it has now become culturally relevant with its contemporary meanings. The music is even played as a dirge in Church for funerals, and also in funeral parlours where it is often offered as part of the funeral package. Despite its spiritual origins and connotations *Dunsai* music has become a secular performance serving as an integral part of the continuing process to articulate their cultural identity. They also believe that as long as there are gongs in the community and there are players this musical tradition will continue.

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Fieldwork

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