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PANGPAGAQ: RELIGIOUS AND SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE OF A TRADITIONAL KENYAH MUSIC-DANCE FORM

V.K. Gorlinski

INTRODUCTION

Pangpagaq is a combination music/dance form traditionally performed among the Kenyah Umaq Jalan of East Kalimantan, Indonesia.¹ In the past, *pangpagaq* was performed at rice planting time (*nugan*), but today it is no longer practiced. The Umaq Jalan unhesitatingly associate the form with their traditional customs and religion prior to the adoption of Christianity, but most are unable to elucidate any symbolic or spiritual significance of the genre. Traditions such as *pangpagaq* are of great importance not only to our research of the religious and social history of the Kenyah, but also to our understanding of the contemporary Kenyah worldview. This paper seeks to elucidate some of the relationships between *pangpagaq* and the Kenyah Umaq Jalan adat of former decades. In the analysis, primary emphasis will be given to underlying linguistic significance of *pangpagaq* rhythms, symbolism of the physical performance, and aspects of performance practice which possibly underscored traditional social stratification. The results of the study will then be discussed briefly in light of modern-day cultural trends of the Kenyah Umaq Jalan.

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THE CULTURAL SETTING

The Kenyah represent one of the interior groups of Borneo, which, like the others on the island, speak an Austronesian language. They traditionally inhabited the mountainous highlands in the Kayan and Iwan headwater regions (the *Apau Kayan*), and in the upper reaches of the Bahau, Baram and Rejang Rivers (Whittier 1973: 13), all of which are near what is now the border between Sarawak, Malaysia and East Kalimantan, Indonesia. From the mid-1950's to the early 1970's, many of the Kenyah migrated out of the Apau Kayan to settle primarily in the upper Baram and Balui areas, and in the lower stretches of the Kayan and Mahakam basins.² In Kalimantan today, the Apau Kayan may still be considered the well-spring of Kenyah culture, but can no longer be viewed as the center of it.

A Kenyah village traditionally comprised a number of longhouses, each with its own headman. In Sarawak, and to an extent in the Apau Kayan, this is still the case. However, in the lower reaches of Kalimantan's

river basins, as well as in the Apau Kayan itself, longhouses are rapidly being abandoned (or dismantled) in favor of individual family dwellings. The longhouse is absent in most of the migrant villages.³

Today, as in the past, most Kenyah are engaged primarily in slash-and-burn agriculture, with rice as the predominant cultigen. Their diet is supplemented through hunting, fishing, and gathering an array of fruits and vegetables (domestic and wild). Collection of forest products such as rattan, honey, aromatic woods, gold, and snakeskins for sale or personal use is a secondary activity. Many Kenyah additionally grow pepper, coconuts, bananas, rubber, cocoa, and other products as cash crops.⁴

The majority of the Kalimantan Kenyah now adhere to various sects of Protestantism, but some are also Catholic.⁵ Christianity is the third of three locally acknowledged periods of Kenyah Umaq Jalan religious history. The first of these periods, which I will label "*adet keret*" ('impossibly contrary *adat*') in accordance with contemporary Kenyah Umaq Jalan perspective and terminology, extended (presumably) from Kenyah pre-history to about 1937–1940. This belief system entailed propitiation of sundry spirits, which communicated with the terrestrial world primarily through omen birds and other animals, dreams, and possession.⁶ In about 1937, Juk Apui, a Kenyah Umaq Jalan from Long Ampung, East Kalimantan, had a prophetic dream in which a spirit advised him that the Kenyah no longer needed to heed the omen birds or to propitiate spirits; rather, they needed simply to put their faith in Bungan Malan, one of the female deities from the *adet keret* pantheon. Within the next few years, this modified form of *adet keret*, known as *adet Bungan*, had spread throughout the Apau Kayan and into Sarawak. It is still practiced by a few groups in the latter region today. *Adet Bungan* was an ephemeral religion in Kalimantan, however, and had all but disappeared within two decades of its advent (Whittier and Whittier 1974: 14).⁷ Most of my Kenyah informants regard *adet Bungan* as a transitional stage between *adet keret* and Christianity.

Kenyah society was once stratified into the high nobility (*paren*), low nobility (*paren asa*), commoner (*panyen*), and slave (*salut* or *ulaq*) classes.⁸ Members of the two higher strata were the leaders of the community, and enjoyed certain exclusive rights and privileges.⁹ Although many of the visible symbols of *paren* descent (such as exclusive use of certain patterns in beadwork or painting, and ownership of tigers' teeth and certain valuable beads) are no longer meaningful, some have suggested that the traditional class system is still quite strong among the Kenyah (Sellato and Guerriero 1984: 23). Nonetheless, in my opinion, inherited social distinctions are fading rapidly in the face of achieved status, gained especially through formal education: It is not insignificant that Long Ampung, formerly one of the largest Kenyah villages in the Apau Kayan, is awaiting installation of their first village headman who is a descendant of a commoner.

KENYAH UMAQ JALAN TRADITIONAL INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC

Most genres of Kenyah (particularly Kenyah Umaq Jalan) traditional instrumental music can be classified into one of four major categories according to two criteria: 1) temporal restrictions on performance, and 2) audience to which the music is directed. The following few paragraphs provide a brief description of the characteristics of each of the categories, which I have labeled "Alarms", "Ritual Music", "Recreational Music", and