



The Sarawak Museum Journal

Vol. 88 No. 109

December 2024



ISSN: 0375-3050

E-ISSN: 3036-0188

Citation: Peter Mulok Kedit. (2024). Papan Turai: Its Social, Communal and Spiritual Significance in Iban Society. The Sarawak Museum Journal, 88 (109): 73-80

PAPAN TURAI: ITS SOCIAL, COMMUNAL AND SPIRITUAL SIGNIFICANCE IN IBAN SOCIETY

Peter Mulok Kedit

Tun Jugah Foundation, Level 4, Tun Jugah,
18, Jalan Tunku Abdul Rahman, 93100 Kuching, Sarawak, Malaysia.
petermulokkedit@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This paper explores the social, community, and spiritual significance of the *Papan Turai Gawai Batu* within contemporary Iban society, as part of an application for UNESCO's Memory of the World Programme. *Papan Turai* is recognized as both a tangible and intangible cultural heritage, symbolizing Iban identity through its sacred inscriptions and ritualistic role in the *Gawai Batu* festival, which is integral to rice cultivation. Utilizing a conceptual framework, the study elucidates the interplay between social organization, community dynamics, and spiritual beliefs surrounding *Papan Turai*. It examines the *Papan Turai's* role in the Iban longhouse system, highlighting its influence on socio-economic activities and the leadership function of the *Lemambang*, who employs the board as a teaching tool for esoteric knowledge. The research demonstrates that despite shifts away from traditional practices, *Papan Turai* remains a vital emblem of Iban cultural heritage, fostering a sense of community and continuity among its people.

Keywords: *Gawai Batu*, Rice cultivation, Social organization, Community, Spiritual beliefs

PAPAN TURAI: ITS SOCIAL, COMMUNAL AND SPIRITUAL SIGNIFICANCE IN IBAN SOCIETY

Peter Mulok Kedit

Tun Jugah Foundation, Level 4, Tun Jugah,
18, Jalan Tunku Abdul Rahman, 93100 Kuching, Sarawak, Malaysia.
petermulokkedit@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This paper explores the social, community, and spiritual significance of the *Papan Turai Gawai Batu* within contemporary Iban society, as part of an application for UNESCO's Memory of the World Programme. *Papan Turai* is recognized as both a tangible and intangible cultural heritage, symbolizing Iban identity through its sacred inscriptions and ritualistic role in the *Gawai Batu* festival, which is integral to rice cultivation. Utilizing a conceptual framework, the study elucidates the interplay between social organization, community dynamics, and spiritual beliefs surrounding *Papan Turai*. It examines the *Papan Turai*'s role in the Iban longhouse system, highlighting its influence on socio-economic activities and the leadership function of the *Lemambang*, who employs the board as a teaching tool for esoteric knowledge. The research demonstrates that despite shifts away from traditional practices, *Papan Turai* remains a vital emblem of Iban cultural heritage, fostering a sense of community and continuity among its people.

Keywords: *Gawai Batu*, Rice cultivation, Social organization, Community, Spiritual beliefs

INTRODUCTION

This paper discusses the social, community, and spiritual significance of the *Papan Turai Gawai Batu* and its value to contemporary Iban society, as outlined by UNESCO's Memory of the World Programme. *Papan Turai* is a significant aspect of Iban cultural heritage, encompassing both tangible and intangible elements. Tangibly, it is a sacred wooden board, treasured as an heirloom. Intangibly, its inscribed symbolic writing (Figure 1) contains esoteric incantations for the *Gawai Batu* festival, which is vital for Iban rice (*padi*) cultivation.



Figure 1: Lemambang reading the *Papan Turai*. (Source: Sarawak (1957, Hedda Morrison, p. 237))

To understand the significance of *Papan Turai* in Iban society, one needs to be familiar with the community's basic social organisation that supports the interaction and activities of the Iban where the nominated document is concerned. Iban social organization is basically the longhouse living system. It is characteristic of a Borneo landscape that is found beside a river in the interior.

Structurally, a longhouse defines the allocation of space for functional uses (Figure 2). It has a uniform set of areas of different social and ritual functions, age groups and gender roles. Each family apartment replicates all others. In most longhouses, the 'inland' part facing away from the river bank, is the family apartment (*bilek*). This is the only section enclosed by four walls. It provides living quarters for family members and