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***Performing Rice Farming Rituals by Penampang  
Kadazan of East Malaysia: Between Sacred Ritual  
and Secular Performance***

By:

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# PERFORMING RICE FARMING RITUALS BY PENAMPANG KADAZAN OF EAST MALAYSIA: BETWEEN SACRED RITUAL AND SECULAR PERFORMANCE<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

The rituals of rice farming amongst the Penampang Kadazan essentially affirm the continuance of abundant harvest, family and household security over evil vibes and evil wind, and the permanency of residential guardian spirit, *miontong*. For a protracted balance of all the forces within the *miontong* spatial domain, spiritual abodes contracted to the performance space are supplicated through the ritual cleansing and appeasement of musical instruments (drums and gongs) and performative aspect of female *shamans*, *bobohizan*, and her entourage. These are the sacred rituals of *monogit* or cooling down of the heightened temperament, the emblem of Kadazan people's sacred and cultural identities. It has survived through extant practices by the Penampang Kadazan on the grounds of sacredness and inviolability. However, performing sacredness becomes less efficacious when emblems of this rice farming rituals become the signifiers of cultural performativity in secular events, namely, Kaamatan or Harvest Festival. This paper looks into performative dichotomies and contestations of Penampang Kadazan's perceptions of performing the sacred in secular spaces through the discourses of cultural anthropology, theatre, and ethnography.

## Introduction

In general, rituals are routines used in religion or other ceremonial practices. Nevertheless, new practices which are carried out repeatedly but are not associated with any religious practices represent communal rights and are public in nature, are also considered as rituals. Both traditional and new rituals have communal rights and are public in nature as well as contain performance elements which are cultural entities. Because of this, they function as an instrument of mediation and create consistency among the values that symbolize the identity of a society or ethnic group. Ethnic identity is the existence of concepts and characteristics of conduct which are centered on shared ancestral heritage and which differ from one ethnic group to another. Thus, ancestral ritual practices can be interpreted as a social drama which encompasses inherited practices in the daily lives of a particular society.

This study examines the rice rituals and the identity of the Kadazan community of the Penampang Plains in Sabah. This study involves a multi-disciplinary approach. Prior to the colonization of Sabah, the cultivation of rice





was a main activity for the Kadazan community. Traditional methods of planting were used and farmers had to carry out particular rituals to ensure a good harvest and guarantee the well-being of their families. Rituals involved offerings to the spirits in the form of food, drinks, beating of drums and gongs, as well as performing the dance called *sumazau*. These elements strongly influenced Kadazan culture whereby all of them symbolize the Penampang Kadazan identity. However, the Kadazan tradition was greatly affected by colonization, which brought with it new influences such as beliefs, religion, secular education, modern technology, and a capitalist economic system. All these transformed the Penampang Kadazan community, where they adopted a new religion and instilled modern elements into their daily lives, while abandoning traditional practices. Rice rituals no longer took precedence and the identity of the Kadazan was also in danger of being lost.

Awareness of this situation was heightened during the rise of Kadazan nationalism in the 1950s and 1960s, which ignited the desire to revive the Penampang Kadazan and Kadazandusun identity as a whole by bringing back traditional rice culture among those for whom this was a new ritual. Performing the new ritual in this secular space is celebrated every year as a festival called the Harvest Festival or *Kaamatan*. Elements of rice rituals and other rituals related to the Kadazandusun traditions which have been agreed upon with the aim of promoting racial identity have been included in the festival program. Nonetheless, there is strong Kadazan influence exerted in the implementation of this program, which in turn gives rise to strife and crisis because it is politicized by those who have particular interests. Therefore, *Kaamatan*, a secular space used as a platform for the continuity of Kadazan and Kadazandusun identity as a whole, is still seeking for direction and purpose because the problem of subsuming the many different Kadazandusun and other indigenous communities under one identity has yet to be solved

### Kadazan Penampang of East Malaysia

The Kadazan community is one of the ethnic groups of the Kadazandusun living in Penampang who are often called Kadazan Penampang. The term Kadazan used here is still being debated until now. Many studies tried to trace the origin of the word Kadazan with several ways such as history, assumption, and theories connected with myths and legends. There were opinions that the Kadazan came from an ancient Dusunic group in Sabah. It was believed that their existence was even before any of the Brunei people came or the coming of the British in Sabah. This was seen from a mantra or *inait* used by the *bobohizan*<sup>2</sup> in Penampang. There are three kinds *inait* used around Penampang Potiang, Tangaah and Kadazan where Potiang in the highest, Tangaah in the middle and Kadazan in the lower areas particularly in Penampang. Although Kadazan Penampang is differentiated with Tangaah and Potiang with the term Dusun, but as a Dusun ethnic group, the Kadazan Penampang community shares the same ethnic background that was achieved to be a myth and practicing traditional belief what Herman Luping described below:

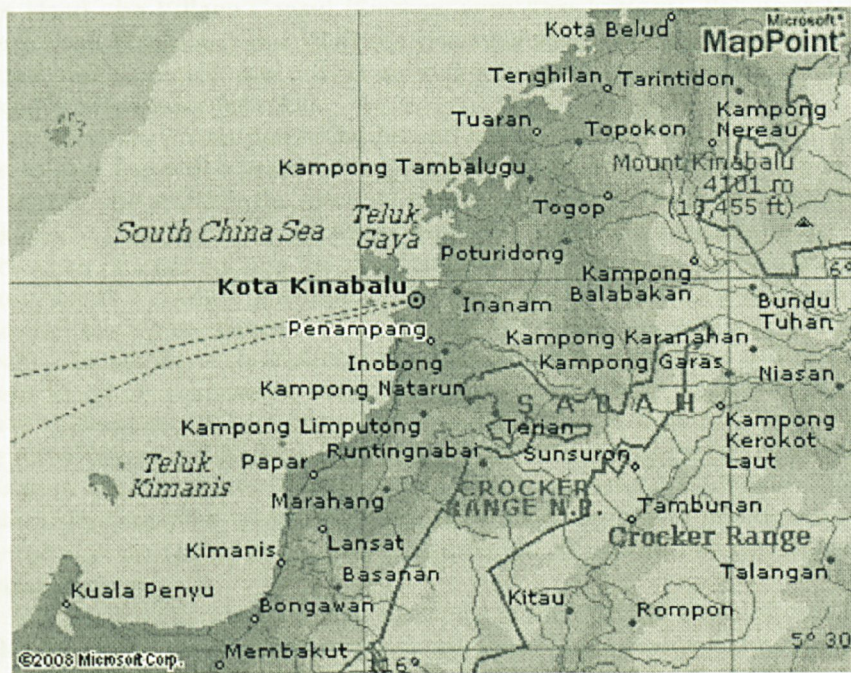
“The Kadazans have their own myths or legends regarding their origin. Briefly, the Kadazans believe that they are the descendants of



"Kinoingan" and "Suminundu" (both supernatural beings or gods) who once lived under a tree known as "Nunuk Ragang". "Nunuk Ragang" is in Tampias, between Telupid and Ranau. These two supreme beings, it was believed, begot children, the ancestors of various Kadazan tribes in Sabah. The legends about Kadazan origins vary from place to place, but the "Nunuk Ragang" connection is common. The various Kadazan tribes today share a common heritage."<sup>3</sup>

Based on the quotation above, the relationship among the Dusun community with *nunuk ragang*<sup>4</sup> is very strong. Even though it was believed that it came from myths and legends by the Kadazan Society, they believe that they came from the same origin, *nunuk ragang*.<sup>5</sup> Thinking that they were spread out in all of Sabah, especially in parts of West Coast as an ethnic group, they are known with same name up until now. In fact up until now, the Kadazans Kadazan<sup>6</sup> do not have a special name as an *orang asal* or a native of Sabah. They are referred to according to where they live such as Rungus (Kudat), Miragang (Ranau), Liwan (Tambunan), Kwuijau (Keningau), Idaan (Kota Belud and Lahat Datu), Orang Sungai (Kinabatangan), Lotud (Tuaran), Tangaah (Penampang and Papar) and Tatana (Kuala Penyu).

Map 1: Map of Penampang District



Source: <http://encarta.msn.com/encnet/features/mapcenter>



### Performing for Sacred: Rice Farming Ritual

Before independence, Kadazan is an egalitarian society planting rice and others for everyday living. The daily life also depended on the cosmological structure<sup>7</sup> and organization with each stage of the rice planting ritual done by the Kadazan ancestors is a basic activity that influenced the formation of ethnic identity. The ritual is done to fulfill a requirement because of the mythological belief that the world's existence has a connection with the presence of a rice spirit among other spirits. Thus, the ritual is an enactment of the myth<sup>8</sup> called *pampang*<sup>9</sup> brought down and passed on to a generation through a female shaman called *bobohizan*. The myth is taken as a source of Kadazan's animistic belief of Kinoingan,<sup>10</sup> his wife Suminundu<sup>11</sup> and their daughter Poninzuvung<sup>12</sup> as the spirits.<sup>13</sup>

This myth was said to be about the origin of the cosmos, the heavens, cosmology, and the beliefs of the Kadazan community. The story is about the sacrifice of Poninzuvung to become the source of food with all the parts of her body growing as food to please the spirits. The basic plant was rice from the flesh, thus her spirit was the rice spirit known as the respectable *Bambaazon*.<sup>14</sup> The myth influences the way of thinking, culture, and human nature clearing the connection or relationship with the spirit by manifesting in a ritual. The belief shows the existence of a supernatural force that influences their worldview particularly about the relationship of human with spirits, which is the connection between the seen and the unseen. The deed and value known from this belief became the society's guard implemented by the four basic institutions namely the *Huguan Pogun* or Village Head, the Village Consul (*Sinompu'uvan Komohoingan*), Religious advisers (*Sinompu'uvan Bobohizan*) and Warriors (*Sinompu'uvan Pangazou*). This myth was nurtured and invented since then as make-believe<sup>15</sup> practice and it has to be practiced continuously (*efficacy*).

The various rituals determine human nature to be united with the spiritual nature so that life will always be balanced. If the balance between nature is not taken care of, the spirit of the spiritual nature will disturb the human nature until it gets sick. Thus, the various rituals made by a *bobohizan* fulfills the required balance as an efficacy such as the rice planting ritual, home and family along with the universe as a cooling purpose.<sup>16</sup> The belief system created a Kadazan social system that has pious values retained by the institutions, as well as controlled by taboos.<sup>17</sup> The taboos in the traditional beliefs are tools to preserve and distinguish different kinds of creations in the spiritual world. Indirectly, the taboo is used to preserve customs to prevent undesirable incidents such as trouble. It can be related to the noble life of the Kadazan community of Penampang Plain in a close circle where they strictly follow the traditions and conventions established by their ancestors. The customs tying this community in an animistic practice made this community as being put in a capsule suppressed by worldview developed from the Pampang myth.

The relationship between man and spirit in the spiritual world should always be balanced taking into account every action taken in the real world because it will have an effect in the spiritual world. Hence, the rice planting activity is not actually to earn money but to enrich the spirit in the spiritual world. The relationship between the *Bambaazon* and the spirit must always be good or cold (*osogit*) otherwise the relationship is said to be hot (*ahasu*). Hence, each process in the ritual while planting rice is to give respects to *Bambaazon* and the other spirits particularly the



housekeeper spirit *Miontong*. The performed ritual will always ensure the balance and will protect the humans from various sickness and disasters as well as the rice plant will grow abundantly and will yield good crops.<sup>18</sup>

The *monogit* ritual is a ritual traditionally taking place during the rice planting season. It is usually done once in two or three years or when there is adversity or sickness in the community. The ritual must be done to make sure that the housekeeper spirit (*miontong*) is at peace to put things back the way it was. The ritual is done in four days and three nights conducted by female shamans known as *bobohizan* headed by the leader, *bohunkitas*.

The beating of the drum (*gandang*) led by a gong music called *sompogogungan* (comprised of 6 gongs) and the *sumazau* dance become a part of the ceremony. The *gandang* beating and the *sompogogungan* is believed to connect man with the spiritual world. It is done by a *bobohizan* while reciting an *inait* to assist the *bobohizan* to the spiritual world to meet, stir, and awake the bad spirits to ask them to return the trapped human spirits. A dish known as *pamanta* is prepared with the worship done stage by stage, following a pattern such as *pason* (order/call), *matang* (waking the spirit), *tumingak* (raising the spirit), *savak* (calling the spirit who left), *mihung* (calling the spirit to come near) and *sumonson* (invitation to enjoy the prepared dish).

Photo 1: Performing for sacred- *pa'atod hangod* sending prayer to the spirits of rice field



Source: researcher's collection

The *pamanta* offering is also done following a process and sequences while the *bobohizan* dances the *sumazau* in a special manner which is *magampa* (grouping of the sick), *mundang* (feast preparation), *pasasazau do miontong* (serving of the dish), *hoputan* (sending back of the spirit), and *monoinig* (grouping of the spirit that left). At that particular time, the *bobohizan* doing the *sumazau* would seem to be in a trance or is possessed (*nosuang*) by the *miontong* when her body movements become very



strong, full of energy and unusual. At this time all the good and bad spirits are believed to be being invited by the *miontong* which is the highlight of the ritual.

Hence, the beating of *gandang* from the *sompogogungan* and the *sumazau* dance that became important tools in the *monogit* ritual do not just combine the elements of the traditional Kadazan Penampang arts to its medical ritual but to strengthen performing arts as a ritual tool. The combination of the medical ritual such as *monogit* to the shaman fortune (*bobohizan* and *bohunkitas*), the dish (*pamanta*), the beating of *gandang*, the *sompogogungan* music, and the *sumazau* dance are very clear indications of traditional worship ritual and arts.

The rice planting ritual has become common and synonymous with the everyday life of the Kadazan community and it has become the symbol of their identity until now. It includes the ritual process and tools used as the *bobohizan's* communication tools to the spiritual world (ritual paraphernalia), dish (*pamanta*) to serve food, traditional drink, ornate clothing, musical instruments (gong and *gandang* ensemble) and the *sumazau* dance.<sup>19</sup> The tools used in the ritual became the Kadazan's tangible cultural heritage, while the *sompogogungan* music and the *sumazau* dance as the intangible cultural heritage that became the fundamental identity of the Kadazan Penampang.

Photo 2: performing *sumazau* dance-magampa as part of the healing process in the *monogit* rice farming ritual



Source: Researcher's collection

The society from time to time develops and changes its impression about the world from outside. New religion and education changed a lot of the society's perception about the concept of God. God as a creator (*Kinoingan*) is not that important to the Christian and Islamic societies. Rice planting activities no longer need to ask blessings from any spirits and once in a while it has experienced loss. Farmers no longer believe that the rice fields are looked after by the spirits. It has been taken over by the use of modern technology such as fertilizers and pesticides. Science and technology also brought changes as to how to work the rice fields. The



society no longer needs to work together (*mitatabang*) to prepare the rice fields which have been taken over by modern and sophisticated machines.

New innovations also changed the pattern of how the land is used and the Penampang Plain landscape is not an agricultural land anymore. Currently, the landscape became filled with infrastructures such as housing, schools, churches and mosques. Farming areas are now economic and commercial centers. Penampang is not an agricultural land anymore; it became a commercial center and its people are not rice producers, but consumers.

Children of the new generation receiving good education can further their studies more into a higher level. They become the source of energy by the government and private sectors. The traditional rice culture which was the core of life before is no longer important; the rice fields became idle and became housing sites. Thus, the rural areas have been neglected and the urban areas became the focal point of importance. The daily lifestyle also changed from being traditional rural to modern urban.

## Secular Performance for Rice Farming Rituals

### *Struggle by the Kadazans for Rice Farming Ritual Revival*

Lifestyle transformation ordinarily occurs in all human communities such as that of the Kadazan of Penampang Plain. Moreover, they form part of the ethnic community which is collectively known as the ethnic majority, surrounded by shared territory with various ethnic groups. This particular change exemplifies a dramatic episode which involves economic, social, and political aspects. The transformation and evolution are pressing them to search for genuine identity which forces them to undergo various hindrances thereby sparking their spirit of nationalism. All these processes of transformation and evolution are influenced by their exposure to and absorption of diffused culture brought by the Western colonial powers which eventually serve as the platform of their identity. This ascription of identity is considered as a social dramatic process which frequently undergoes change and chaos as well. Realizing this matter, much of this phenomenon occur in Penampang District which includes the community of Kadazan Penampang Plain adapting rice farming ritual elements through festivities or new rituals especially that of Kaamatan or Harvest Festival.

The struggle to re-establish the grandeur of the Kadazan identity is realized with the foundation of the Kadazan Society in 1953. The very reason of founding the society is to perpetuate the Kadazan language and culture in elevating their community's standard of living. This growing spirit of nationalism is spearheaded by the rich and the elite from various communities who are competing in the political arena. The Kadazan spirit of nationalism attracts their attention because of their prominence. It gained more prominence with the involvement of Tun Fuad Stephens who caused the aspiration and direction of the Kadazan more progressive. His involvement is timely in making a strong organization and bringing forward the Kadazan rights especially at Penampang Plain which made use of the newspaper Sabah Time in airing Kadazan issues from the social, economic, and political aspects. He was active and responsible for the transformation of this organization in promoting the agrarian issues, having the Kaamatan Harvest



Festival declared a public holiday among others. His strong determination resulted to success when the British colonial government agreed to grant the public holiday for the celebration of the Harvest Festival. His effort is made facile by the Kadazan community and awarded him the title *Huguan Siou* which literally means 'dauntless brave warrior'. Radio programs were broadcast as in Kadazan language which gave the Kadazan more exposure than the other ethnic groups. Broadcast programs include music, legends, and myths which encompass issues affecting the Kadazan community.

The struggle to establish the harvest festival was planned by OKK Sedomon from Keningau with the consideration of the fact that all Dusun ethnic groups which practicing rice ritual culture are to be programmed according to their own beliefs and practices. Basically, these rituals were managed separately among the various communities in the district even if the concepts related to beliefs are actually almost similar. The strong desire to celebrate thanksgiving festival for the rice harvest was influenced by the western culture which at this time was making various celebrations such as for those dignitaries among others. In relation thereto, the Dusun community started to introduce the festivity resembling thanksgiving and had it recognized as culturally the same. By voicing this right, the voice from the Kadazan community which became more prominent through the involvement of Tun Fuad Stephens directly revived the nationalist spirit and the realization of promoting their identity.

One aspect which was pressed was that of the uniting all Dusun ethnic groups with the Kadazan for the reason of uniformity in naming the ethnic groups as one respected nation. This opportunity made the prominence of the Penampang Kadazan thereby causing the polemics and conflict among other Kadazandusun communities which made them had a special assembly at Jesselton. It was led by Tun Fuad Stephens with the other Kadazandusun leaders from different districts in Sabah. They wanted to perpetuate the name Dusun even though the Kadazan community used the Kadazan identity as the reason of superiority as compared to the Dusun. Kadazan means Dusun community which resides at the plain areas next to the shops or them as shopkeepers. The existence of the developed and progressive Kadazans is the effect from the changes that happened in Penampang Plain thereby using their name Kadazan as separate from the Dusun community in terms of progress. They directly achieved development and progress since they were geographically located near the administrative, economic, and education center. Thus, all new matters introduced were readily accepted with ease. This event pushed the other Dusun community to establish Dusun-Lotud Association in 1960 which became the primary hindrance to the dreamt unity of the ethnic group as the Kadazan nation. The conflict which existed among them was likened to a social drama.

The Kadazan struggle through politics was deemed appropriate and suitable with the foundation of the well-regulated *United Nation Kadazan Organization* (UNKO). Its first president was Tun Fuad Stephens and most of the members were from Penampang District. It was of equal footing with the establishment of Malaysia in 1961 and their struggle as indigenous people which yearned for administrative rights as their own right was pertinent during that time. However, the political development in Sabah after entering the Federation of Malaysia was made clear as different from what was aspired by the Kadazan leaders. This was because of the competition from another party particularly the *United Sabah Nation Organization*



(USNO) which was led by Tun Mustapha. This situation caused the other members of the Kadazandusun community to stage their own struggle based on the individual ethnic group. The Dusun ethnic group was not satisfied with the foundation of UNKO which used the word Kadazan and demanded to use a new name by using the word "Pasok" which represented the Dusun community, that is, *United Pasok Momogun Kadazan Organisation (UPKO)*.

This situation checked and balanced the dominance of the Kadazan Penampang Plain and gave the space and chance towards the other Dusun communities. Furthermore, various strategies were done to ascertain the unity and uniformity of the party's ideology to be employed by all Kadazandusun ethnic communities. It was followed by the existence of Datuk Pairin Kitingan with the foundation of the Sabah United Party (PBS) in 1984. This party was established with various ethnic groups and struggled for the overall Kadazandusun spirit and affixed the name *Kadazandusun Cultural Association (KDCA)* and had himself as the *Huguan Siou*. Various programs were done among the Dusun people and the enthusiasm for unity under the PBS and KDCA parties was amplified. However, the struggle to unite was not successfully accomplished because the desire to make the Dusun ethnic group prominent was bluntly excessive. For example, Kesatuan Dusun (USDA) which was led by Datuk Mark Koding and Datuk Kalakau Untol was able to exit from KDCA because they were not satisfied with the PBS leadership. This dissatisfaction was made eminent with the failure of the PBS in the 1994 General Election. However, the situation changed when the failure of the PBS caused the entry of UMNO to the state of Sabah with its struggle much different from PBS and other Dusun political parties.

This conflict dragged like a drama episode which was always in print among local Sabah newspapers. This phenomenon portrays the fact that no association yet existed as theirs and this caused the frustration among Kadazan leaders to unite all ethnic groups. This social drama could be structured as comprising four matters like the one introduced by Victor Turner, that is, *breach, crisis, redressive actions and reintegration*. The conflict was characterized as internal effect from outside influence which caused the diffused culture to change their social lifestyle. As a result, the new social phenomenon existed with the rise of the educated elite which is different from the traditional community which was strong in the traditional beliefs and practices. This difference caused the early disintegration which ultimately resulted to continuous conflict and crisis which in return caused by defending each group's interpretation and ideology.

This situation caused anxiety among the Kadazandusun community leaders and their desire to unite was more intensified. Datuk Seri Pairin Kitingan again became the leader of the Kadazandusun who brought a new scenario in Sabah politics. The Kadazandusun status was elevated with the re-emergence of the PBS which was very adamant in pushing for their rights with the re-inspiring of the role of KDCA in the promulgation of Kaamatan and the promotion of the unity among the Kadazandusun ethnic groups. The unity was only achieved with the proposal of promoting rice cultural programs in one accord. This celebration painted a *liminal* atmosphere wherein they were seen as united in searching for resolution in solving the crisis with its mechanism which was the promotion of Kaamatan. The *liminal* concept can be equated with the concept of *communitas* which was the existence of a new communal cell resulting to the promotion of new ritual which was the Kaamatan. The *communitas* resembled a community which existed



from within the Kaamatan festival involving the communal cell which was imbued with the same passion in celebrating the festival even if there were different belief practices. This important matter which was applied served as an active catalyst to sentiments and desire to unite through the Kadazandusun identity.

The community of Kadazandusun Penampang Plain was forced to accept the fact that they should share space with other Kadazandusun communities to promote identity through Kaamatan which was jointly promulgated. The struggle was under the different environment and not only for the Kadazan Penampang only but for the entire Kadazandusun ethnic community. The aforementioned political development influenced the community's cultural practices wherein the political issues were always related to their ethnicity and identity. The involvement of the Kadazan leaders in Sabah politics was not easy to comprehend since the struggle was not perceived as promoting the Kadazan community. It was augmented by the demography of inhabitants which was made up of various ethnic groups having different social, cultural, and political background. All of the aforementioned challenges hindered the Kadazan leaders from uniting the Kadazandusun communities up to the present.

### *Performing the Rice Ritual in the Secular Space*

The Kaamatan Festival which was considered as a stagecraft underwent change when it was declared as official holiday under the British administration. At this very stage, the government got involved in the fiscal management of the festival in all levels. The celebration was done the whole month of May in the village, district, state, and lastly the national level using a different concept. The content of the program was changed following the period which was celebrated before by the farmers. However, at this time non-farming people were included thereby changing completely the setup of the festival. Within the new setup were sports, thanksgiving worship in the church, traditional Kadazan costume and the exhibition of the traditional drinks and food with the inclusion of the material culture. The aforementioned programs were done since the introduction of the harvest festival. It underwent further changes by the inclusion of competition and performance of traditional Kadazandusun music, song, and dance, traditional sports competition, exhibition of handicrafts, agricultural and factory products, traditional Kadazandusun houses, rice ritual plays, and the beauty contest (*Unduk Ngadau*).

This aforementioned program painted the commitment and the struggle of the Kadazandusun community to revive segments of traditional practices as a means of perpetuating their culture. Cultural segments which became a part of the revival program were chosen and carried out by the promoter involved in political parties such as UPKO and PBS, which at this time were opposition political parties. The local government's promulgation of Kaamatan at the beginning was organized by UPKO wherein the festival received big financial allocation from the government of Sabah which was managed by the government employees and politicians. The social drama happened when there was a conflict from the political turmoil at the leadership levels between leaders of PBS Datuk Seri Joseph Pairin Kitingan and with UPKO which took responsibility in organizing Kaamatan involving KDCA organizing another Kaamatan of its own. Even if it was celebrated separately, unity was still maintained while celebrating the festival and the gaiety as a traditional



Kadazandusun festival which became the symbol of Kadazandusun identity was still unwavering.

The wholeness of Kadazandusun's identity stood out when KDCA was given trust in organizing Kaamatan fully since Datuk Seri Joseph Pairin Kitingan became a member of the Barisan Nasional Government. Even if it was not made easy by some of the Kadazandusun politicians, they still attended the said ceremony within the spirit of goodwill to show unity. Different political ideologies were set aside to allow them to defend their identity. Even crisis and conflict occurred; it was clear that the community was reunited (reintegration) after the promotion and promulgation of Kaamatan. Proud moments during the celebration aided them in setting aside political and ideological differences in order to promote unity.

However, the development did not change the Kadazan identity as a progressive Dusun nation. They defended their brand of identity with so much gusto which resembled ignorance and therefore uneducated. With this, the characteristics as Dusun nation were perpetuated and became a symbol as truly Sabahan. The identity as a true Dusun was made a focal point by recognizing Kaamatan. It was celebrated in the village, district, state and federal levels. In this celebration, particular segments in rice ritual were chosen and staged for the entertainment of the general populace. In relation thereto, various aspects were introduced to make the celebration merrier. The Kaamatan became the center of the reintroduction of identity, which in its early stage included the Kadazan tradition which gave prominence to the different segments from the rice rituals such as *magavau* ritual, *sompogogungan* music, *sumazau* dance, and others. These elements which were in Kaamatan became icons of the Kadazan Penampang identity. This segment was given prominence outside Kaamatan for general audience representing Sabah identity and culture. Indirectly, the *magavau* ritual and the Penampang *sumazau* dance serve as the dominant identity and that Kaamatan itself became the platform to promote and strengthen Kadazan identity. This matter became the uniting factor for the different tribes in Sabah. For this reason, the rice was deemed to have power to unify the societies in Sabah under one celebration which was related to the rice. Its power which manifested the early rituals contributed to the formation of the Kadazan identity. It was not solely for food source but it has influence towards the Kadazan community from the social, economic, and political aspects.<sup>20</sup> In general the rice ritual was seen as having manifest function and latent function.

The struggle done by this community resembled its success in acquiring space for the performance of the ancestral and traditional practices which were artistic heritage inherited by the current generation. Although the practiced ritual resembled efficacy, nevertheless it gave forth precious artistic and cultural offshoots which awe-inspired not only them but also the tourists who visited Sabah. It was clear that this present generation is committed to focus on the rice tradition and consider it as traditional cultural heritage which resembled a sacred struggle anyone could be proud of. This struggle could make the future of this generation to imitate and remember their ancestors' traditional practices and customs. The prominence of various elements of traditional practices could carry out the precious Kadazan cultural icons. This traditional heritage was ascertained to continually exist and uphold by the society. Even if only certain parts from the traditional cultural practices were given prominence which resembled like an extraction from several rice rituals, however, it was already enough to give good meaning and value to



them and the whole Sabah society. The changes made towards the extraction from the cultural heritage were on par with the personal cultural values even if they were processed, again but the concept, idea, and function were similar to their culture. In fact, changes made towards original tradition only fulfilled the necessity and the current atmosphere, and it could not be avoided since culture itself is dynamic.

Photo 4: Symbolic of rice cutting



Photo 5: Harvest Festival Beauty Pageant (*Unduk Ngadau Kaamatan*)



Source: Researcher's collections



Change can be done with care so that it does not go against traditional customs, such as in the process of choosing *Unduk Ngadau* which resembles as new cultural creation in conjunction with the Kaamatan. The selection of *Unduk Ngadau* is considered as the selection of beautiful ladies as a symbol of sacrifice of female offspring of the Creator, *Poninzuvung*, which became the Rice Spirit or *Bambaazon*. *Bambaazon* traditionally is celebrated as a sign of thanksgiving in the form of ritual. On the other hand, *Unduk Ngadau* resembled beauty contest or search for Kaamatan Queen.

Even if there is an involvement of religious worship while staging Kaamatan, it is done in the church for the thanksgiving in relation to the concept of the Deity and not related anymore to the praise towards *Bambaazon*. This is syncretism within Christianity wherein the element of worshipping of *Bambaazon* is incorporated but diminished. With the syncretism and diffusion, the traditional element is perpetuated as symbol of the society. Among the traditions incorporated in the church worship include the striking of gong, traditional costumes and performance of dance.

Although changes were made in the program's activities since its inception, it was not disputed by the society within the villages, districts, state, and the national levels because it was adapted to the situation. Before, the traditional practices were made to take care of the balance of relationship between the humanity and the spirit world. With the current changes, the celebration is made only to symbolize harmony in the entire community because the new tradition which came from sacred rituals resembled public communal rights. Public exposure marks the fact that it is not far apart from the performance characteristics for general audience which is pressed by Clifford Geertz that rituals resemble cultural identity wherein culture itself is public.<sup>21</sup> Public ritual for Mary Douglas is for the uniformity of existing social values which become the medium of individual experiences within a given society.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, ritual seems a dynamic element which undergoes change from time to time based on the existing development in relation to time.

It is clear that ritual cannot avoid changes which according to Richard Schechner said that ritual does not resemble some matter which can be easily controlled and which will undergo change by connecting traditional elements and the new ones as what is stated below:

"... It is also clear that rituals are not safe deposit vaults of accepted ideas but in many cases dynamic performative systems generating new materials and recombining traditional actions in new ways."<sup>23</sup>

For him, ritual seems to be an activity which has relation with other matters such as games, contests, sports, dance arts, theater, and music, which is shared with the four elements such as time, object, rules, and performance space. In doing so, these four aspects repeated brings forth to the performance on stage a ritual which is characterized as public and performed continually in relation to time and the involvement of matters which have their own rules when shown on any space for performance thereof.<sup>24</sup>

Rice ritual such the one explained has manifest functions which manifest relationship between the humanity and the spirit in the form of food presentation, drink, musical art and dance. However, there is also the latent function towards



rice ritual which encourages societal unity and as symbol of identity. Kaamatan is celebrated with pomp involves unity among various Kadazandusun communities which clearly shows phenomenal unity. Kaamatan also becomes a stage for rice ritual which is accepted as symbol of identity more encompassing that is from Kadazan towards Kadazandusun. However, KadazandusunMurut concept which is enlarged later is not accepted fully by the community. This recognition is enlarged not only by the whole community in Malaysia but also in the international community. With this, rice ritual has a big role towards the creation of national culture which more dynamic and encompassing involving economic, social and political aspects. The recognition of the name of the celebration also by itself changes from Harvest Festival to Kaamatan Festival.

The course of Kaamatan is highly influenced by political development thereby making use of the festival as their strong identity marker. It is the same political influence which results to the expansion of the festival reaching the state and the national levels. It reached new heights when Kaamatan was celebrated by the members of the Kadazandusun community who are residents of Kuala Lumpur. It was promoted by KDCA of Klang Valley and was recognized as a regional festival just like in Sabah. During festive seasons, many Kadazandusun political leaders, either district or state level mix with the ordinary citizens of various ethnicities and religious backgrounds to celebrate the Kaamatan Festival. This phenomenon depicts the fact that various communities can be united setting aside their different political ideologies. It is considered as a new ritual which is repeated every year and is known among the Kadazandusun as *noikot no di vulan kohimo* or the fifth month (May) has come. Turner (1968) is of the opinion that this repetitive activity is a ritual which can be considered as a social drama. It is in this social drama wherein human daily lifestyle is always connected to each other (*breach*), that whenever conflict exists (*crisis*) along with pressure and then when realization thereof comes, then solution is sought with mutual concession (*redressive actions*) and by having mutual celebration of the festival (*reintegration*).

Moreover, Kaamatan Festival seems a of four matters mentioned which start with community realization to have the activity in relation to rice as an act of putting forward their identity. It is an effect from the relations towards the external world which changed the structure of the Kadazan community lifestyle leaving behind the traditional belief and practices. The progress changes the identity of the more progressive community as compared to the other community which results to a wider difference with other community. This state results to tension and conflict especially towards Kadazandusun polemics and if allowed to go on can cause division. When realization kicks in, the search for solution is similar to what Turner has stated as *redressive action* or re-unification with the consensual celebration within the Kadazandusun community. The concelebrated Kaamatan becomes the marker of the aforementioned solution and re-unification (*reintegration*). Programs are planned together to make the tradition successful and to build up the Kadazandusun community as the primary Bumiputera nation in Sabah. The rice tradition which becomes the community pride became an avenue for the unification along with the elevation of the Kaamatan festival to the state and national levels.

Sacred elements from the rituals of Kaamatan especially those which are shown either during official opening ceremonies or programs still show the passion for the traditional practices. The Kaamatan festival becomes the best element for unifying the community of various ethnicities and religious beliefs like a big family.



Such can be conceived as a big ritual. Ritual functions as a community unifying element and as a chance to renew passion and spirit to be united<sup>25</sup> and to cause a happy atmosphere in a singular community as a fulfillment for sacred claims which dissolves individualistic feeling. The Kaamatan festival which is joined by big community of various ethnicities and descendants inclusive of religion and also involves the government and the private sector becomes a platform for interaction and festivity. Being together in a large community which has similar objective and setting aside the differences to reach a common goal is termed by Victor Turner as *liminal*.<sup>26</sup> For him *liminal* elements are not clear (*neither here nor there*). It is somewhere in between a situation which is arranged or methodically ordered (*arrayed*) by the law, customs, meetings and rituals wherein such characteristics affect the modern society. Of which, to such community is revealed the existence of the similarity between art genres and entertainment which can be seen in a complex industrialized community. Along with what is shown are the rituals which were made from the time past. In his context, the difference is that this festival is hugely celebrated which involves so many people. The *liminal* phenomenon which happens in this big context can be called *communitas* as a phenomenon of being celebrated by so many people who are joined together by similar feelings and that they are following every program in the Kaamatan festival. The crowning glory of which is the announcement of the winner of the beauty pageant known as *Unduk Ngadau Kaamatan*.

It is very clear that the existence of Penampang Plain Kadazan Community in Sabah is very much felt. The traditional lifestyle of the ancestors gave birth to various processes of rituals which were made as composite elements of the Kaamatan. This festival is established to fortify the identity which started to abate social changes causing the social drama. The social change brightens up the national spirit and presses them to become progressive and to get themselves out from self-decline and from the traditional lifestyle. With this process exists the feeling to return to traditional way with an identity by uniting the various ethnic groups under the Kadazan affinity as an excellent endeavor. The process of unifying the ethnic communities by having the Kaamatan festival regenerates the identity to unfold smoothly and to develop dynamically, making the Kaamatan festival as the pride of the community. The Kaamatan festival which showcases again the rice traditions becomes the icon of the establishment of their new identity to perpetuate the heritage of the ancestry.

The Kadazan of Penampang Plain currently does not consider the Kaamatan as the dominant and special right to highlight their identity. They share with the other Dusunic community and so with the Murut community as well and with the Paitan group of community. The KDCA already recognized the Murut community as an ethnic group which celebrates and highlights their identity through Kaamatan. The informal union of the Kadazandusun and Murut (KDM) is already agreed upon and is officially recognized by the state government. The three communities of Kadazan, Dusun, and Murut can be identified by the spoken languages, dialects, traditional costumes, material society, and by their traditional dance and music. They celebrate together the Kaamatan every May with harmonious and unified atmosphere. Under the government's supervision, the Kadazandusun communities joined forces together to showcase their cultures separately.

Currently, the quest of the Kadazan community to claim their right and their special status within various aspects is on its onset of being forgotten and not



anymore appreciated by their community. The current generation deems the quest as a whole and encompassing communal activity by all communities and not anymore regionally divisive. This encompassing ethnic community relationship forms the majority voice in Sabah and that of a minority in the Malaysian context. The KDCA realizes that this matter unravels the structure and machinery of their union and gives them focus primarily towards social development and economy as well for the unification of all ethnic communities under the banner of Kadazandusun thereby ensuring the better perpetuity of cultural heritage and identity. However, there are still among them who are not satisfied with the KDCA leadership and this upsets the leadership of the united Kadazandusun.

## Conclusion

Among the various Kadazandusun ethnic communities in the state of Sabah, the Kadazan is the most dominant in the aspects of lifestyle. Affinity and cultural evolution which influence rituals and the management of old traditions and the building of identity through Kaamatan clearly show their dominance and effectiveness. This matter which makes the community proud results to the building of the KDCA which is in the Penampang district and becomes a benchmark for the Kadazandusun community's success and pride. Among its members are those of the Kadazan community of Penampang since there is someone among them who initiates the unification movement. With regards to other influences, the *sumazau* dance of Penampang is accepted and recognized as communal dance of the Kadazan community and is celebrated within the Kaamatan and other various big gatherings. The music influence and the Penampang *sumazau* dance also happened in relation to the making of popular Kadazandusun music and songs. Almost all of the popular songs which are composed by Kadazandusun composers and musicians follow the beat and rhythm of the Penampang *sumazau*. The Penampang Kadazan traditional costumes are accepted as one of the traditional costumes worn in the official functions and gatherings. It is clear that the introduction of their identity through the Kaamatan is very flexible and can change spontaneously according the place, situation, and comfort. Although the showcasing of the community's identity may change dynamically considering the various aspects what is sure is that the Kadazan community of the Penampang Plain has directly played their very important role and also dominant in upgrading the Kadazan as a community known and adulated not only in the state and national level but also in the international as well.

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> This paper was presented at **PSi #14 conference Interregnum**, Department of Arts and Cultural, Studies, University of Copenhagen Amager Campus, Copenhagen, Denmark, 20-24 August 2008.
- <sup>2</sup> Female shaman of Kadazan Penampang, Sabah.
- <sup>3</sup> Herman Luping, *Sabah's Dilemma: The Political History of Sabah, 1960-1994* (Kuala Lumpur: Percetakan Eshin), p. 3.



<sup>4</sup> According to Kadazandusun oral traditions, the origin myth of Kadazandusun in Sabah begin at Nunuk Ragang area which is close to Liwagu River and Gelibang River. These two rivers move to the East Ranau and Tambunan as main passage of migration of Kadazandusun people to Sabah. At one time, too many people reside near this tree and few of the warrior has to search for the new settlements, and they were followed by major migration from this area to the newly settlements.

<sup>5</sup> Some of the Dusunic community never agree with this statement and claimed that they belong to their own ancestors like Tagaas community.

<sup>6</sup> Owen Rutter, *The Pagans of North Borneo* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1929), p. 31

<sup>7</sup> See Hanafi Hussin, "Worldview and Practices: A Case Study of Kadazan of Penampang, Sabah," in *Borneo Research Journal*, Department of Southeast Asian Studies, University of Malaya, No. 1 (December 2007), pp. 5-25.

<sup>8</sup> Roy A Rappaport, *Ritual And Religion In The Making of Humanity* (United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 134.

<sup>9</sup> Pampang myth as a basic of traditional beliefs. By believing it, the ancestors created many rituals mainly for rice farming rituals as a marker of ethnic identity. Those ritual is a manifestation of belief practices to strengthening the relations of human being in the seen world and the spirits in the unseen world. *Pampang* myths tells the story of *Kinoingan* as a creator (*Minamangun*) accompanied by his wife, *Suminundu* and their daughter, *Poninzuvung* (*Izoton*) whom sacrificed by her mother as a replacement with food. *Poninzuvung* spirit became rice spirit, *Bambaazon*. She is highly respected by Kadazan community and perform number of rice farming rituals to commemerate her kindness. The rituals are also to stabilize the relationship between seen and unseen world and its resulted by human being and spirits living in balances. Therefore, rice and spirits are so sacred among Kadazan life and also the important tools of the formation of ethnic identity. Rice is very dominant in life and influencing the formation of traditional community social system, therefore power of rice among Kadazan is essential.

<sup>10</sup> It also called as *Kinopunan* for second name of *Kinoingan*.

<sup>11</sup> *Suminundu* also have second name, *Huminodun*. In the Penampang inait read by late Inai Jinggunis, one of Kadazan Bohungkitas (head shaman), *Huminodun* as second name for God's wife, *Kinoingan/Kinopunan*. Among contemporary Kadazandusun, *Huminodun* referred as the daughter of *Kinoingan* dan *Suminundu*.

<sup>12</sup> *Izoton* is the second name of *Poninzuvung*.

<sup>13</sup> It is believed that *Kinoingan* and *Suminundu* created human being and spirits. Human being living in the seen world and communicate among them. While, spirit living in the unseen world and always minggling around human being. They could be seen by certain people like *Bobohizan*. Human being and the spirits always communicating which human being always pay their respect to the spirits by offering the rituals which has been performed long time ago.

<sup>14</sup> It also called as *Bambarayon* mong the other Kadazandusun community.

<sup>15</sup> Richard Schechner, *The Future Of Ritual: Writings on Culture and Performance* (New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 124.

<sup>16</sup> Hanafi Hussin, "Bobohizan dan peranannya di Kalangan Masyarakat Kadazan di Daerah Penampang, Sabah", *Jati*, Journal of Department of Southeast Asian Studies, University of Malaya, No. 8 (2003), pp.15-40.



- <sup>17</sup> Mary Douglas, *Purity And Danger: An Analysis Of Concept Of Pollution And Taboo*, (New York: Routledge Classics, 1966), p.48.
- <sup>18</sup> Hanafi Hussin, "Ritual Padi Komuniti Kadazan Dataran Penampang, Sabah," *Jati*, Journal of Department of Southeast Asian Studies, University of Malaya, No. 10 (2005), pp.171-2003.
- <sup>19</sup> Lihat Hanafi Hussin, "Seni Persembahan Sebagai Perkakasan Ritual Pengubatan: Paluan Gandang dan Tari Sumazau Dalam Ritual Monogit oleh Kadazan Penampang di Sabah" *Jati*, Journal of Department of Southeast Asian Studies, University of Malaya, No. 11 (2006)
- <sup>20</sup> Hanafi Hussin & Judeth John Baptist, "Kuasa Padi dalam Budaya Kita," dalam *Karnival Kebudayaan* (Kota Kinabalu: Kementerian Belia dan Sukan Sabah, 27-1 Mei 2003), pp. 12-14.
- <sup>21</sup> Clifford Geertz, *Tafsir Kebudayaan*, Terjemahan daripada *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (London: Hutchinson & Co Publisher Ltd).
- <sup>22</sup> Mary Douglas, Op.Cit. p. 48.
- <sup>23</sup> Richard Schechner, *The Future Of Ritual: Writings on Culture and Performance* (New York: Routledge London and New York), p.228.
- <sup>24</sup> Richard Schechner, *Schechner: Performance Theory* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), pp. 1-25.
- <sup>25</sup> E. Evans-Pritchard, *Theories Of Primitive Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 620.
- <sup>26</sup> Victor Turner, *Schism and Continuity in an African Society* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1957), p. 99.