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**ANTHROPOLOGICAL STUDY OF *KETENE'* :  
THE KENYAH VERBAL ART**

**Juna Liau**

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# ANTHROPOLOGICAL STUDY OF *KETENE'* : THE KENYAH VERBAL ART

Juna Liau

Faculty of Social Sciences  
UNIVERSITI MALAYSIA SARAWAK

## Introduction

This paper is based on my research on the Kenyah<sup>1</sup>. My interest on *ketene'* (*lit. stories*) arises due to the beautiful nature of this verbal art. This art form uses a selection of words, phrases and other aesthetic elements of language such as metaphor and simile. The best part is not everybody can become a good story teller. Some story tellers learn the skill through listening and learning from the older story tellers and a few are gifted presenters with a naturally good voice.

I remember vividly in my childhood spending time at storytellers' houses or verandah listening to stories. At that time only a few families owned a radio and *ketene'* was one of the best entertainments for everybody in the village.

My interest also sprung from my fear that this heritage will be forgotten amongst the young generation. This is expressed by Benedict Sandin (1980) when he said "Today, only very few of these informants, who are well-versed in their own legends, genealogical trees and stories are still alive, and if 'The Living Legends: Borneans Telling Their Tales' is not to be published now, Malaysians of the present and the future generations will become ignorant of the glorious past".

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<sup>1</sup> The earlier stage of this research was conducted personally in December 2004 and April 2006. I was able to collect and record fifteen stories from Kenyah Uma Bakah communities. The following research on the stories was carried out in April 2007 with the collaboration between Faculty of Social Sciences, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS) and the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka (DBP) Sarawak Branch. Through this research about twenty-three stories and two songs (*parap*) from Kenyah Uma Bakah and Kenyah Badeng in Sungai Asap-Koyan were collected.

In this paper I will examine the verbal art called *ketene* of the Kenyah Uma Bakah community. This art form expresses Kenyah beliefs, customs and other social aspects such as social structure, social stratification, social values and social mores. Then, I will compare the cultural themes of the traditional and modern Kenyah. Through this comparison the notion of socio-cultural changes will be detailed and explored.

## **Brief History of Kenyah**

The Kenyahs traced their place of origin to Usun Apau and Apau Kayan in Kalimantan (Rousseau, 1989; Hong, 1987). The late Poi Bit Usat said that the Kenyah Uma Bakah moved out from Apau Kayan prior to 1940 (Juna Liau, 1997). They had moved to three major regions: Usun Apau, Apau Kayan and upper Balui in Belaga District (Juli Edo, 2006). According to Rousseau (1974), “the Lepo Baka and Lepo Kulit came from Apau Kayan in 1941 and 1945”. The time period indicated by Poi Bit Usat is consistent with that suggested by Rousseau.

Due to the Bakun Dam Project, the Kenyah Uma Bakah together with other communities moved out from their villages in 1998. One of the impacts of the resettlement exercise was that the Kenyah Uma Bakah in Long Bulan, Belaga Sarawak was divided into two groups. Group one, which was against the resettlement program shifted from Long Bulan to Seng Anau in Kapit Division. The group which was willing to be resettled presently lived in Uma Bakah, Sungai Asap-Koyan, Belaga. The latter group consists of more than 1000 Kenyah Uma Bakah people. The storytellers reside in this latter group.

## **Definition and Concept**

Folklore is commonly defined in terms of orally transmitted material. Whether folklore can be defined as ‘oral literature’ is much debated (Finnegan, 1989).

‘Verbal art’ was introduced by Bascom’s (in Finnegan, 1989) as “a convenient and appropriate term for folktales, myths, legends, proverbs, riddles, and other ‘literary forms’. A great deal of work has been carried out under this label, particularly by American folklorists and anthropologists. Nowadays it also includes songs and poems, together with processes such as naming and rhetoric or tongue twisters (Ibid, 1989).

In terms of Bascom's concept of verbal art, I would say that the Kenyah *ketene* and the systems of appellation fit the definition. Therefore, I prefer to use Bascom's concept for *ketene*. The example of Kenyah's systems of appellation is autonym, kinship, tekronym, necronym and gerontonym (Whittier, 1981). However, systems of appellation are not going to be elaborated in detail in this paper.

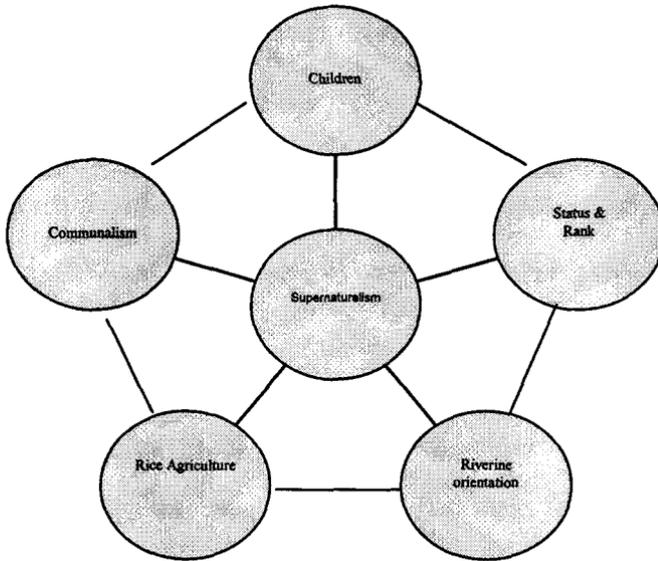
In his article entitled "Kenyah cultural themes and their relationships", Conley (1978) highlighted important Kenyah themes such as supernaturalism, communalism, social status, children, paddy planting and river orientation.

Details of the themes are as follows:

- i) Supernaturalism: The world is dominated by spirit beings who may help or hinder people, and who should be obeyed and appeased.
- ii) Communalism: It is good for people to live in close proximity in order to help and enjoy one another.
- iii) Status and Rank: Some people and classes are born with higher rank than others, and some people achieve higher rank during their life time. Others must acknowledge and respect this distinction in status and rank.
- iv) Children: It is a matter of extreme importance to have descendants who will take care of ageing parents and also provide family continuity within the tribe after the parents die.
- v) Rice Agriculture: The most important work for all people is cultivation of rice because this is an essential item of diet.
- vi) Riverine Orientation: Kenyah people should live in villages located on the edge of a river.

The most important or the central theme is supernaturalism, followed by communalism, status and rank, children, rice agriculture and riverine orientation. The interrelationship is shown in Figure 1.

**Figure 1: Kenyah Cultural Theme Interrelationships (Conley, 1978).**



### **Introduction to Kenyah Verbal Arts**

The Kenyah are very artistic by nature. Their art falls into two forms: material and non-material. Examples of their material art (art which can be seen or touched) are body adornment or tattoo, burial posts / houses, handicrafts such as baby carriers, sunhats, bead necklaces and handbags and costumes. The Kenyah verbal arts, which I classify as non-material since we can, only listen to them, are *ketene'*, *nidau*, *dayong*, *tiang*, *parap*, *ngeraben* and *ngelaong*. The purposes of these art forms are to entertain and to express feelings, talents and skills. These verbal arts forms can be spoken, sung or chanted in order to attract listeners' attention.

*Ketene* can be performed by a storyteller anytime except during a funeral and at any place. However, listening to the *ketene'* on the verandah or in the house at night is common among the Kenyah. During funerals, *nidau* will be heard

besides crying due to the lost of a loved one. I discover only the older generation is still well versed in *nidau*. The *dayong* is performed during healing rituals by a shaman or *dayong*. *Tiang* and *parap* are performed during feasts or to welcome guests to the longhouse. Meanwhile, *ngeraben* and *ngelaong* are performed at a farm or at one's own house at any time to express an individual's feeling.

The duration of *ketene* depends very much on various factors such the types of stories, the storytellers' creativity (the ways the stories are presented) and the audience. Children's stories like *Periyot and Her Friends* and *Melak Apong* take less than an hour. On the other hand, stories with an adventurous theme can lasts for hours. According to my informants, the late Poi Pemarking, a famous storyteller took half a day to complete certain stories.

However, the stories which I recorded during my fieldwork, took between 15 minutes to two hours. Due to the story tellers' health considerations, I requested the storytellers to skip the singing and chanting since these stages are very long and tiring.

### ***Ketene* - Ten Stories**

The following ten *ketene*' (stories) are my translation in English which were originally recorded in Kenyah Uma Bakah language.

#### **1) Bungan and the Giant Snake (*Bungan ngan Cong Ulai Bio*)**

Story teller: The late Madam Uyang Jalong @ Poi Puyang Jalong

Once a couple had a son. One day their son named Jalong was playing outside their longhouse with his friends. They saw a nest with big eggs under a big tree. His friends were scared to touch or to draw closer to the eggs. However due to his curiosity, Jalong played with the eggs. He was so impressed to see the big eggs. Unfortunately, he broke one of the eggs. He tried to clean his wet hands and face but a strange thing happened. Jalong's hands turned slowly to the skin of a snake and after a while, his body turned to snake skin too. All of his friends ran away when they saw this strange incident. The other villagers also decided to move out from the longhouse because they believed this was not a good omen.

Jalong cried and ran back home. At first, his parents were very scared to see him but soon recognized him from his voice and face. They were sad.

However due to their love of their only son they decided to stay in the longhouse even though the other villagers had fled to another place. After a few days, all Jalong skin turned to a snake's skin. He crawled like the snake and ate snake food too. They tried to heal Jalong with many traditional herbs but to no avail. They were very sad because they failed to heal their son. A few months later, the parents passed way due to prolonged sadness. His parents' death caused Jalong to feel very sad and he decided to move from their house and stay in the jungle far from their house. He chose a big tree to live at. He lived alone.

One day a married man by the named Kulleh went hunting in the jungle where Jalong lived. His wife Bungan was left at home. While hunting he heard a voice said, "I miss Bungan" a few times. Kulleh felt jealous and angry to hear the voice. He decided to check the source of the voice. He searched everywhere on the ground but to no avail. At last, he discovered the voice came from the top of the big tree. It was a very big snake. Kulleh went home and tried to forget the incident. However when he thought of the snake, he felt jealous. He cried silently because he loved his wife too much. One day his wife discovered tears rolling out from his eyes. She asked him why. He said, "I am crying because something got into my eyes". Bungan did not believe him but she remained silent.

Early one morning, Kulleh told his wife to prepare for a trip somewhere. He told Bungan not to ask about their destination because this was going to be a big surprise for her. Bungan packed their clothes and food for their long journey. After the preparation was completed, they walked to the jungle. On the way, Kulleh kept on crying but he insisted that he was all right and they continued with their journey. They stopped for a rest in the afternoon under the big tree. They spent romantic moments together and Kulleh asked Bungan to pluck his eyebrows' hair and to make his favourite *sireh*. After that, Kulleh said "Look at the big tree, we'll try to measure the size of the tree with our hands by hugging the tree". Bungan agreed. Kulleh hugged the tree first. When it came to Bungan's turn, Kulleh tied her quickly and Bungan begged to be freed. Kulleh refused to free her. He asked Bungan to look up the tree because that was the reason why he cried for many times and why Bungan had to stay in the jungle: to marry the giant snake.

Bungan looked up the tree and saw a big snake. She was very shocked and fainted. When she recovered, she found out that her husband Kulleh had gone.

She cried again and tried to free herself. The snake asked her to calm down and not to be scared.

The snake's tender voice calmed Bungan. The snake slowly moved down the tree and he licked the rattan used to tie Bungan. He asked Bungan to go back with him to his house because the night was getting closer. Bungan decided to follow the snake. She was too afraid to stay in the jungle. A night in the jungle was too dangerous for a young person like her. Bungan braved herself to walk together to the snake's house. After walking for a while, the snake asked Bungan to close her eyes for a moment and touch him. Bungan did what was instructed. When asked to open her eyes Bungan saw a big house. The snake asked Bungan to go into the house and to make herself comfortable. The house was neat and everything was arranged properly. Bungan did not know that the snake turned into a human being at night and became snake in the daytime.

Due to her tiredness, Bungan slept soundly that night after her meal. When she woke up in the morning she discovered an abundance of food had been put in the kitchen. There are fresh jungle fruits, vegetables and fresh river fishes. Bungan searched everywhere for the sign of people. She saw nothing. The only thing she saw was a big snake sleeping outside the house near the fireplace. The same thing happened the following night.

Bungan decided to investigate what was going on the third night. She went to bed early after the meal because she made herself busy during the daytime. After about an hour, she heard a sound outside the house. She walked slowly to take a peep through the door. She could not see anything. It was dark outside. She opened the door and stepped out slowly. She discovered the fishing net was gone. The snake was gone too. The only thing she found near the fireplace was the snakeskin. She walked to the river and was shocked to see a very handsome young man, casting the net in the river. All the surrounding area was brighten with the light from his body. She walked back slowly and peeped at what happened. After a few hours, she heard a sound and she saw the young man had returned home with fish on his left hand and the net in his right hand. He hung the net and put on the snakeskin. He turned back into the snake and slept near the fireplace. The next few days, Bungan pretended nothing had happened.

However, after a week **Bungan** decided to burn the snakeskin. She was falling in love with the handsome young **man**. With her action, **Bungan** broke the spell put on the snake. They got married and lived happily ever after.

## 2) **Suling and the Leopard (*Suling ngan Kulleh*)**

Story teller: The late Madam Uyang Jalong @ Poi Puyang Jalong

Kulleh was the son of an aristocrat man. He liked to hunt in the jungle with his blowpipe and he had killed many animals. Most of the animals killed were due to his hobby and personal gratification.

One day, he went for a hunting trip far away from their village. His target was a part of the jungle where only a few people had been. He walked in the jungle slowly and found a big **fruitful** tree called lunok. He saw there were many animals having a feast on the tree. He quickly took his blowpipe and targeted a hornbill. He met his target and badly injured the bird. The bird died and dropped from tree. The feathers were very beautiful. His next target was the family of a leopard. He successfully killed the cub. Next, he targeted the male leopard, which had the most striking skin colours. He injured the male leopard but was unable to kill it. He stood under the tree and was trying for the second blow. The leopard blood dropped on his hand right. He wiped the blood with his left hand. His skin turned to a leopard skin. Slowly all of his body turned to leopard skin. He also looked like the leopard. In the end, he was too scared to return home and decided to live in the jungle like other animals. Therefore, people in his village thought he had been killed by wild animals.

One day while resting on the tree, he heard the sound of barking dogs and humans. They had seen him. He tried to run away but a dart met his thigh. He ran as fast as he could to save himself. The poison from the dart caused him to be drowsy and he later fainted. When he woke up he found himself in a cage. He tried to escape but the cage was very solid. He heard the sound of people talking "Father, spare it life". He saw a beautiful woman with long hair and fair skin. She smiled at him. The father agreed not to kill the leopard. When the leopard was partially recovered, he stayed in the cage for safety reason.

One day, the man said to the daughter, "Suling, stay alone for a few nights and I will be back soon'. The young woman agreed. She was not scared to be alone because she was a hunter too. In fact, she had an idea. She planned to

free the leopard that night. She pitied the leopard kept the whole day and night in the cage.

After her father left, she free the leopard. The leopard thigh was treated with herbs. That night Suling left the leopard's cage open. She thought it would not go far because it was injured. When Suling woke up the next day, she saw the leopard sleeping soundly in the cage. However, to her surprise there was food on the table. She was curious because her father was yet to return from the hunting trip. She decided to peep the following night. She saw the leopard slowly remove the skin and he turned into a very handsome young man. He disappeared into the jungle and returned before dawn. Suling watched these events for a few nights and she fall in love with the young man. When her father returned, she told him not to keep it in the cage anymore because it had turned into a very tame animal. Her father agreed to her suggestion. The leopard did not show any sign of aggression.

The same events occurred for a few nights and Suling's father started to feel strange and curious too. He consulted Suling and discovered the mystery of the leopard. They decided to make a very important move, to burn the leopard skin the following night. When nightfall came they went to bed and listened carefully.

The leopard removed the skin, left it in the cage and disappeared into the dark night. Suling quickly grabbed the skin and burnt it. She and her father went to bed and waited to see what happened the next morning.

When Kulleh returned from his hunting with a barking deer, he was surprised to find that his leopard skin was missing. He searched everywhere but to no avail. Since he had no clothes, he covered himself with the bark of a tree and leaves. He sat silently waiting for the sun to arise.

When Suling and her father woke up, they greeted the young man and asked about his background. He told them the real story. His name was Kulleh and he had turned into a leopard for he had tried to kill a ghost leopard. The burning of the skin had broken the curse and he turned into human beings again. Kulleh married Suling and returned to her village to have a grand wedding.

The newly married couple returned to Kulleh's village a few months after the wedding to visit his father and the other villagers. They were very happy to see them and a feast was arranged for their return.

### **3) Merang Jalong Engan and Bulan Jalong Engan**

Story Teller: Madam Laai Lian @ Poi Pelai Lian

Merang and Bulan lived with their father and stepmother. Their mother Suling Lawai Belawan had passed away and their father had remarried again. His second wife was called Ucong Betate Ujan.

One day Merang invited Usong, Lawai and Asang to join him for a reciprocal work. Their friends agreed to his suggestion. His sister Bulan joined another group.

The first day they worked at Merang's farm. When they reached the farm site, they had their meal and sharpened the tools. Later they cut down the tree and undergrowth at the farm. When they were about to reach a hill Merang complained about not feeling well. His friends said, "Maybe you've got fever" and asked him to have a rest but he refused to listen to them and continued with his work. His fever gets worst and he went to the hut to rest. Usong was assigned to prepare the lunch. Usong discovered Merang's temperature was very high. He cooked porridge for Merang. After eating the porridge Merang laid down again. After lunch, Usong offered to send him home but he refused. Merang said, "I am able to go back on my own". His friends continued with their work until the evening while Merang went back alone.

Merang reached home and saw his stepmother making bead handicraft outside the house. She ignored him. Merang went into the house and lay down. He was sick, tired and hungry. When he woke up, he asked his mother to cook porridge for him. His mother ignored his request. Merang struggled to cook porridge for himself. He started the fire, washed the rice, put the water into the pot and cooked it. He fell asleep again and when he woke up, he discovered that the porridge was not cooked well. He forced himself to eat the porridge. He felt sad about the way his mother treated him.

In the evening, his sister Bulan returned from the farm. After taking a bath in a hurry she quickly cooked porridge for Merang. She prepared the dinner too. She said that she would not go to the farm the next day because Merang was

sick. Merang told her to go to the farm because their mother could take care of him. The same thing happened on that day. His stepmother ignored Merang and she did not cook porridge or any food for him. Merang lied to his sister about his mother's treatment of him. He told his sister that their mother was very caring and kind. He hoped his mother will be kind to him the next day. However, the same thing repeated for the next few days.

One fine morning after taking the porridge prepared by Bulan, Merang decided to run away from home because his mother was so mean. He said farewell to his bed and house because he wanted to wander off into the jungle. He hoped the ghost or any wild animal would kill him. His bed and house were very unwilling to let him go but they could not prevent him from going. Merang packed his belongings and left. He slipped out from the house through the window because he wanted to avoid his mother. The staircase also tried to prevent him but to no avail.

Merang met an old woman before leaving. The old woman was very sad but she was unable to stop Merang. The old woman hugged Merang and cried sadly.

Merang walked through the jungle and came to a hill. He rested for a while. He was too sick, tired and hungry. When he woke up he continued his journey again. He felt hungry but he refused to eat. He purposely wanted to kill himself. He became skinny and all his clothes became loose. His journey continued. He crossed rivers, climbed hills and walked with no direction in mind.

The first animal he met was a big wild boar. He asked the wild boar to eat him but the animal refused to eat him. To the wild animal it was taboo (*malan*) to eat a noble person. Merang was too tired to walk and he fell asleep. When he woke up, he saw *nyating* trees and decided to make a hut to lie down. After completing his hut he died.

The next day a man named Lawai Merang went to check his fish trap. He saw the hut but he decided to check his fish trap before proceeding to the hut. He caught only a few fish. He said, "The people in the hut may have taken my fish without permission". He walked to the hut and to his horror; a dead body was laid there. He summoned the other villagers to see the dead person. The

dead person was very good-looking. From his looks and appearance, they knew he came from a good social class.

Suling Lawai went to see the dead body too. She begged her father to resurrect the dead person. After the burial house and coffin were prepared, the dead person was put to rest in the coffin. Then the villagers returned to their longhouse. Before leaving Jurang Lawai went to the nearby pond. While washing his face he accidentally dropped his ring.

When Bulan discovered her brother had gone missing she decided to look for him. She found that the cause of the incident and she planned to run away too. She was very unhappy with her stepmother too. She prepared for her journey. She cooked dried meat and made wrapped glutinous rice. She ran away without the knowledge of her stepmother and the old woman who lived at the end of the longhouse. She followed Merang's tracks. She picked up Merang's clothes that she found along the path. She felt very sad and this made her more determined to find her brother. Bulan came across a big bear. The bear refused to eat her because she was an aristocrat person and bears do not eat people. Bulan was tired but very determined to continue her journey.

At a clearing, she found a hut. The hut told her what had happened and she found the grave. She was very sad. Through her communication with her dead brother, Bulan discovered the true story. All the while her stepmother did not play her role as a mother to them, especially towards Merang. Communication between Merang and his mother, Suling Belawan also took place. Merang even went to visit her mother. Suling Belawan pitied her children for what had happened to them.

Bulan stayed at the grave because she had nowhere to go. The spirit of her dead mother and brother protected her. She found a ring on the pond and put it on her finger. Soon after that, she got pregnant.

Bulan gave birth to a baby boy. Merang told their mother about the birth. The dead mother helped to care and cook porridge for Bulan. Bulan got well quickly. Merang named the baby Lechau Lawai. The grandmother made a beautiful baby carrier and a sunhat for her grandson.

After a couple of years, the baby boy grew big. Suling Belawan asked Bulan to look for edible ferns (such as *pau sulot* and *pau bala*) and to get exposed to

the sun. After she became warm and had enough sweating, Bulan took her bath at the stream nearby. She was a very beautiful woman, long hair, fair skin and smooth complexion. While bathing, a girl from the nearby village offered to take care of the baby.

The girl's grandmother named Kaye Buring said that the baby looked like Jurang Lawai. Jurang Lawai also took turn to care for the baby while his mother cooked porridge for the baby. They fed the baby too. Bulan felt uneasy with the man and his family.

Bulan Jalong was invited to have a meal before leaving. Bulan Jalong refused, but Jurang Lawai insisted. While having her food, baby Lechau was taken care of by Jurang Lawai. The baby was so lovely and everybody loved to care for him. Bulan Jalong did not tell them about their exact living place. After the meal, Bulan and her son took their leave. Jurang Lawai followed quietly from behind but at a certain point, the mother and the baby disappeared.

The next day Jurang Lawai invited his friend Sigau and Asang to look for the woman and her son. They were unable to find them. Merang Jalong had used his supernatural power to hide them.

The following day Bulan Jalong and the baby went for a walk again. After she felt warm, she took her bath. The young girl came again to look after the baby boy. The young girl brought the baby to the longhouse. Jurang Lawai was making a knife at that time. He stopped when he saw the baby.

Kaye Buring proposed to Jurang Lawai that he marry Bulan Jalong. Bulan Jalong responded that 'she would not get married if Merang Jalong was not alive'. Kaye Buring promised to resurrect the dead person. Jurang Lawai followed quietly again when Bulan Jalong and her baby left the house. At a certain point, they disappeared from his sight again. He hardly believed what he had just seen. He searched for them everywhere but he failed to trace their tracks. Therefore, he decided to investigate.

The next day Jurang Lawai saw a bright light at the grave. He went to investigate and to his surprise, the light came from Bulan Jalong's body. They had found Bulan Jalong's hiding place. Jurang Lawai pledged to help resurrect Merang Jalong. Jurang Lawai asked his parents help. They gave him the water of life (*telang penyelong*).

They went to the graveyard and Jurang Lawai took off the coffin cover. Merang Jalong's body was still in good shape. Jurang Lawai rubbed the water of life into Merang Jalong's body for the first time. The second rub caused a slight movement. The third time he rubbed the water of life and covered the coffin with cloth. For the fourth time he put the water of life on Merang's face and eyes. Merang became alive. He told them about his story and why he went to wander in the jungle.

Jurang Lawai invited Bulan Jalong and Merang Jalong to go to their longhouse. Jurang Lawai father performed the appeasing ceremony (*meliwa*) by killing a pig to appease the spirit. The blood of the pig was sprinkled at two places, first down the staircase then up the staircase. The next day they destroyed the grave.

The next day was the marriage celebration between two couples. Bulan Jalong married Jurang Lawai, while Merang Jalong married Suling Lawai. The climax of the night was the dance (*kacet* or *kanchet*) performance. The wedding couples performed the excellent dance.

When Jalong Engan returned from his long journey, he was very angry to discover his missing children. He was very mad and punished his wife for not being a good mother. His anger could be heard like the thunder. At the climax of his anger he divorced his wife Ucong Betate Ujan.

One fine day Merang, Bulan and their family members went to visit their father in a flying ship. He was very happy to see his children. With the help of Kaye Buring, Suling Belawan was resurrected too. They lived happily ever after in the country of Jurang Lawai.

#### **4) Usun the Daughter of Peacocks (*Usun Kuwai*)**

Story teller: Madam Laai Lian @ Poi Pelai Lian

Bungan and Jalong were happily married. During the fruit season, Bungan was in her late pregnancy and they were expecting their first child.

One morning Bungan heard of a trip by a few villagers to get the fruits from their old orchard. Bungan wanted to join the trip but her husband did not allow her to join because the journey was too far and tiring for her. She begged her

husband and at last, she was allowed to go. At the same time, Jalong prepared for a hunting trip with his friends. He worried about Bungan.

When Bungan and the villagers arrived at the destination, Bungan was so excited to see many ripe fruits. She asked Asang to put *langsap*, *rambutan* and *esau* fruits into her basket. She even put an *alim* fruit in too. When everybody was ready, they returned to the longhouse. Bungan walked slowly with her heavy fruits. The young people left her behind and she told the other people not to wait for her.

Suddenly Bungan felt a pain. She stopped and rested. However, the contractions were getting sharper and faster. She knew she was going to deliver the baby in the jungle. Soon she delivered a baby girl alone in the jungle under a *terap* tree. She cut the baby's umbilical cord.

Bungan decided to bring back the fruits in the basket and leave the baby in the jungle. She loved the fruits more than her baby. She put the baby on some *terap* leaves and covered it with some leaves too. Then she left for home.

When she arrived home people were surprised to see Bungan. She had delivered her baby. When asked about the baby Bungan replied, "The baby is dead and I have buried her in the jungle". People believed her story because they never expect her to do such a very mean thing.

When Jalong returned from the hunting trip, he asked Bungan about the baby too. She replied, "Our baby was born dead and I have buried her in the jungle". When asked to show him the grave, Bungan cried loudly and refused to go there for she knew that would make her even sadder.

The next day, a couple of peacocks (*kuwai*) were looking for food in the jungle. The female peacock heard a baby crying and asked the male peacock to look for it. They searched around. Finally they saw the naked crying baby under a tree. They draw closer and were surprised to see a beautiful baby girl. They decided to take care of her since there were no humans to be seen anywhere. They named her Usun Kuwai. The male peacock made a tent for them under a *lunok* tree.

Starting from that day until the day Usun was able to walk their life began to get busier. The task of looking for food was given to the male peacock while

the female peacock took care of the baby. Their basic food was worms, fruits and nuts. When Usun was able to walk, they decided to look for food together. Usun grew up quickly and was very healthy. She soon became a beautiful young woman.

One day, Lawai and Asang were hunting in the jungle when they saw a hut under the tree. They greeted the hut owner. They were very surprised to see two peacocks with a woman in the hut. They were welcomed to the house. Lawai asked the peacocks about the woman and was told she was found in the jungle as a baby. Therefore, Lawai and Asang assumed Urai Kuwai was Jalong and Bungan's daughter.

Then the peacocks asked Usun whether she wanted to marry Lawai and leave them. Since Usun loved Lawai, she agreed to her parents' proposal. They gave their consent for her to leave with the condition she would come and visit them whenever she was free.

Then they left the jungle. When they reached the longhouse, Lawai took Usun around. The villagers were amazed to see the beautiful woman. She looked much like Bungan and Jalong. When Bungan and Jalong returned from the farm, they were shocked to see the woman too. Finally, Lawai and Asang told them the real story and Lawai asked Usun to stay with her parents until they had their wedding celebration. Bungan confessed her mistake to the villagers.

To fill up her time, Usun tried to adapt to the new environment. Since she was new to the community, she preferred to work alone on the farm. While weeding alone in the hot afternoon she was very thirsty and she looked for water to drink. She found clear water on the leave and she thought it was pure water. She did know the water was Jalong's urine, which had been brought by an insect called Utan Pihet.

Usun was at home with Bungan one day and she was asked to dry paddy. After lunch, Bungan asked her to pluck her eyebrows. She noticed that Usun's nipple was black in colour and she accused Usun of having a baby out of wedlock. Usun was taken by surprise because she had never slept with any man. Her mother interrogated her and she told her mother about what she had gone through recently. Her mother was very angry with Usun for bringing shame to the family. Usun was aware of what happened to her. She was brokenhearted. She decided to leave her parents, hoping beasts would kill her.

Before leaving, Usun prepared for her journey. She prepared enough food such as dried meat and wrapped glutinous rice. She left early in the morning while the other people were still sleeping. Nobody knew her whereabouts. She arrived at their former farm but continued her journey without delay. She met a deer. She asked the deer to eat her but the deer refused to eat her. She continued her journey and she met a bear called Poi Buang. The bear refused to eat her because she was the daughter of aristocrats. Even the wild boar called Baleng Eyan refused too.

Then she continued her journey. She saw a huge heap of dry leaves that looked like a house. She stopped by and greeted the owner. She was very shocked to see a big black snake in the house. The snake told Usun how she got pregnant. The snake invited her to stay overnight because it was getting dark. She would continue her journey the next day to meet Jalong Belawan, the father of her child.

Usun had come to her late stage of her pregnancy and this slowed her journey. She would give birth anytime. Her journey was tough. She had to climb up a hill, crossed a stream, climbed up a hill again and finally she arrived at a clearing. The clearing was Jalong Belawan's former paddy field. She found a small hut and decided to rest there since she could not continue her journey any further. Her baby boy was born in the hut. She named him Lechau Jalong Belawan.

She was helpless. Nobody was around and no food to eat and no water to drink. She thought to herself that this would be the end of her life.

Suddenly she heard a commotion around her hut. She knew the sound came from a group of baboons. She begged the baboons to eat her and her baby but they refused to agree to her request. The baboon leader ordered his followers to look for food and to get everything ready. The water and firewood was collected, the hut repaired and the cooking utensils from Jalong Belawan's hut borrowed. The monkeys stayed with Usun and her baby for a couple of days. They cooked her food, especially porridge, and helped around the place.

When Usun was healthier, the baboons told her about their intention to leave. They needed to get on with their own lives. The next day the baboons accompanied Usun and her baby to go to Jalong Belawan's hut. They would

stay there to wait for Jalong to come to the farm. Before leaving, the baboons collected water for them. There was an abundance of food at Jalong's farm. Bananas, papayas, sugar canes, cucumber and much more. After taking some of the food, the baboons left. Usun found dried meat in the hut but she refused to eat it without permission.

One day Jalong and his mother, Urai Nyamok went to the farm. The farm was left unattended for a couple of days since they didn't have much thing to do on the farm. The paddy was becoming mature. The first person to arrive was Jalong's mother. She was curious to see the staircases being use by somebody. She walked quietly and peeped inside. She was shocked to see a beautiful woman and a baby in the hut. She greeted them and went inside. Usun introduced herself and the baby's name was mentioned but she refused to tell the name of the baby's father. When Jalong arrived later, he was fascinated to see the most beautiful woman with long hair and fair skin at the hut. He fell in-love with the woman.

Urai Nyamok was very fond of the baby. The baby looked like Jalong Belawan. They had lunch together and after that they left for Jalong's house. The other villagers were fascinated to see Usun and her baby.

The following night a feast was held to celebrate the wedding of Jalong and Usun. Usun performed the most stunning dance; everyone enjoyed themselves and cheered for the newly wedded couple, and they lived happily ever after.

## 5) Sigau Belawan

Story teller: Madam Laai Lian @ Poi Pelai Lian

Once there was a woman and her son. They lived down river far away from other people. The woman's husband had passed away. Their son Sigau spent his free time playing a musical instrument called a *sape*. He wanted to marry because he was lonely. His mother was upset to see him sad but she hopes one day her son would get married.

One afternoon after lunch, Sigau played the *sape* on the verandah. His lamentation was heard by a bird called Aceng. Aceng told Sigau not to worry because there were many girls available at the upper river. They always spent time bathing at the lake not far from Sigau's house.

Sigau listened attentively to Aceng's story. "There were five siblings; Pang, Urai, Ucong, Suling and Bungan. They lived in the upper-world. Every day they would take a bath in the lake in turn. The first to take a bath is Pang, followed by Urai, Ucong and Suling. The last to take bath was Bungan. Bungan was the most beautiful of them all. They dived in the water twice every time and they took their sweet time underwater. They cleaned their bodies twice too".

After listened to Aceng, Sigau decided to try his luck. He made his plans carefully. He asked his mother to prepare breakfast earlier than usual the next day because he would

be away. After getting ready, Sigau left the house. He hid behind the bushes near the lake and waited patiently and quietly.

During the late afternoon Sigau saw the first lady. She was Pang. She took off her clothes and put her magical sunhat on the ground. She dived and cleaned herself. She dived for the second time and cleaned herself again. After that she flew away. Next was Urai, followed by Ucong and Suling. Each of them dived and cleaned themselves twice. Sigau counted eagerly. He decided to tackle the last woman. He got ready and waited for her. Bungan flew down happily. She landed near the lake, took off her clothes and put her sunhat on the ground. Then she dived. Sigau quickly grabbed her clothes and sunhat and ran back home. He kept the items at a safe place. Then he pretended to pass the lake and called out for his dog.

Bungan was ready to fly away when she discovered her clothes and sunhat were gone. She looked for them everywhere but to no avail. She cried under the tree. She was naked. She was sad and angry. Then she heard a sound of a man passing by. She covered herself with some big leaves. Sigau pretended to look shocked to see her. He told her that he was looking for his hunting dog. They dog had gone to the lake barking for the prey. Bungan was horrified and ashamed. She cried even louder. Sigau helped to look for her clothes but failed to find it. He persuaded her to follow him back. She could borrow his mother's clothes. Bungan followed Sigau home reluctantly because she was scared to stay alone in the jungle at night. At Jalong's house, Bungan kept on crying and refused to eat. She cried everyday. After a while, she got tired and slowly

adapted herself to the new environment. Nevertheless, when she thought of her sisters and parents she would cry and she missed home dearly.

Sigau tried very hard to win Bungan's attention and love. He entertained her with his *sape* and treated her nicely. His mother tried to make Bungan feel at home too. Balan Kepau, Bungan's father ignored Bungan because he thought Bungan was happy with her new life. Bungan's love for Sigau developed slowly. Sigau was well mannered and handsome too. They got married. Then Bungan got pregnant and she safely delivered a baby boy. They named him Lechau. Sigau named changed to Tuweng Sigau or Amai Lechau<sup>2</sup>.

One day, Sigau wanted to hold a feast for his neighbours. Therefore, he would go for a hunting trip but he planned to stay overnight because the destination was far from home. While he was away, Sigau's mother left Bungan and her baby alone at home while she went looking for fresh ferns and other edible leaves. Bungan breastfed her child and she laid on the common room facing the ceiling. Suddenly she saw something. It was wrapped and placed nicely in the attics. She put her son down and took the thing. When the wrapped was open she was shocked to see her clothes and sunhat. Now she knew the secret kept for many years by Sigau. She put her son on the baby carrier and put on her clothes. They sat on the sunhat and flew up to the upper-world to Balan Kepau. They were welcomed happily. Though Bungan was happy to return home but her son Lechau missed his father very much. He cried all day and night, and refused to eat, sleep or to be entertained.

Sigau returned home happily and eagerly. He was shocked to find the silent atmosphere. His was mother sitting at the corner of the house crying. Sigau knew what had happened. He was upset with his mother for leaving them on their own. Sigau cried. He missed his son and wife very much. He decided to bring them back. He spent time at the verandah thinking of his plans and steps.

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<sup>2</sup> According to Arnold Van Gennep in his book entitled *The Rites of Passage*, "When a child is named, he is both individualized and incorporated in society" (1960). In the story entitled *Sigau Belawan*, the major character's name was changed after his son was born. His new appellation is Amai Lechau or Tuweng Sigau. His wife is called We Lechau. They named their son Lechau. In the other such stories *Jalong Kirieng*, *Usun Kuwai* and *Jalong Merang Engan*, the process of naming took place too.

Aceng appeared and he asked Sigau to make a basketful of darts. Sigau follows Aceng's instructions Sigau needed to shoot the sun with his blowpipe. Sigau prepared his journey and he borrowed his mother's special bronze container. He brought cooked food too.

Then Sigau shot at the sun. The darts turned into magical staircase. This staircase linked the earth and the upper-world. His mother stood outside watching her son until he disappeared from her sight. Sigau walked up steadily. He arrived at the kingdom of Balan Kepau. The first person he met was Poi Pedungau Jangin. He stayed with the old man and waited for the right time to see his son. Poi Pedungau Jangin went to fetch the baby. The baby was thin and his eyes were swollen for crying too long. When the baby saw his father, he stopped crying. His father fed him and bathed him. Then the baby slept soundly.

In the evening, the mother came to take her son. She was shocked to see her baby sleeping soundly. His husband presence even shocked her further. Sigau refused to go to Bungan's parents' house. Sigau expressed his intention to bring their son down to earth. Bungan told him she would go with them too. However, Sigau preferred to go alone with his son because she had left him without permission.

Bungan told her parents about what had happened. Bungan's father was angry and he decided to punish Sigau for marrying Bungan without their consent. Sigau had to stay for another night to complete the trials. If he successfully completed the trials, he would be allowed to bring his son and wife to earth without any obstacles.

The first trial was to cut a very long hard bamboo to pieces and then assembled them back to normal. The second test was to cut the bronze mortal into pieces and then assembled it back. Sigau successfully completed the tests. His supernatural power helped him to overcome all the obstacles.

The next day his family left the kingdom of Balan Kepau. They bid them good-bye and they walked down to earth through the bronze staircase. They reached earth safely. Their mother was very happy to welcome them home.

## 6) **Jalong Kirieng**

Story teller: Madam Laai Lian @ Poi Pelai Lian

Once there was a man named Jalong Kirieng. He loved to go hunting. One day he went hunting. He was unable to catch any prey. He returned home empty-handed. One the way home, he found a little girl crawling on the path alone. The baby was dirty and ugly. The girl cried. Jalong looked around for the baby's mother but to no avail. He pitied her and took her home and planned to raise her. He hoped to marry the girl when she had grown up.

Jalong's mother scolded him for bringing home a dirty and ugly baby. She said that "this baby might bring bad luck to them because they did not know her background". Jalong ignored her mother. He cleaned, fed and took care of the girl. He named her Suling Engan. She grew up to become an average looking woman.

One-day Jalong's mother wanted Jalong to marry a woman who lived at Upper River. The woman came from a good family. Jalong disagreed with her mother proposal but he remained silent. Preparation was made to take the woman for a wife (*ala leto*). Jalong's mother, relatives and friends accompanied him but Suling was left alone at home. They paddled upriver. Jalong was shocked to see a giant woman taking bath in the river. Her movements in the river produced waves. Everything about her was gigantic. Her named was Bungan Abai. She was his future wife.

Jalong refused to go into the longhouses. He told them that he was not feeling well and he preferred to stay in the boat. Actually his first impression made him disliked the big woman.

They returned home the next day. Jalong and his mother was very shock to see Suling Engan. She has turned from an average looking woman into a very beautiful woman. Her father Balan Kepau had put magic on her. Actually, she was purposely sent to earth to marry Jalong Kirieng. Jalong's mother felt ashamed of herself and apologized for her mistakes. She was forgiven by Suling.

Then, arrangements were made for Jalong to marry Suling. Balan Kepau's sent his people to join the celebration. During the dance presentation, Suling performed very well. Jalong performance was excellent too. Every body praised their performance.

## 7) Wang's Mother and Ingot's Mother (*We Wang ngan We Ingot*)

Story teller: Madam Laai Lian @ Poi Pelaai Lian

One morning Wang's mother invited Ingot's mother to catch fish in the river. She wanted to eat fish. Ingot's mother agreed to her suggestion. They left their children, Wang and Ingot at home. They used *uyot* to catch the fish. They caught many fish. Then they decided to go back. They saw a red thing floating on the river and they wanted to get it. It was a red fruit. They took turns to eat the fruit. The fruit was very sweet and juicy. While eating the fruit, Ingot's mother accidentally swallowed the fruit. Wang's mother was very angry and she hit Ingot's mother with the handle of the fishing equipment. Ingot's mother fainted. When she recovered, she found that she was covered with river stones. She was unable to move. Ingot's mother was very angry with Wang's mother but she was helpless.

Wang's mother had gone home and left Ingot's mother alone there. When Wang's mother reached home, she told Ingot that maybe her mother was dead. Ingot did not believe her. Wang's mother also did not share their catch with Ingot.

Suddenly, Ingot's mother saw a spider hunter. She asked the bird to remove the stones. The bird helped her. After that, Ingot's mother saw a young piglet swim downstream. She killed the piglet with stones and decided to bring it home. She carried the dead piglet at her back. When Ingot saw her mother she sang, "*Ute-ute dita pin we me nai ule*". Wang's mother did not believe what she heard. She thought Ingot's mother had died. She could not move the stones on her own. She asked Wang to check. Wang returned and told her mother that Ingot's mother was returning home.

Wang's mother offered Ingot's mother to use their stairs. She said, "My stairs is strong while yours is weak". Ingot's mother remained silent and ignored her. She used her own stairs instead. She had a grudge in her heart due to Wang's mother heartless action. She planned to take revenge one day.

Ingot was very happy to see her mother. They slaughtered the piglet and some portion was grilled. While enjoyed the meal, Wang called Ingot to play with her. Actually, this was Wang's mother plan. She was greedy and wanted to eat the meat too.

Ingot refused because they were in the midst of having their meal. Ingot's mother invited Wang to join them. Wang went in and enjoyed the meal together. However, Ingot's mother noticed that Wang ate very fast. Wang had dropped the meat through the hole for her mother. Ingot's mother glanced down through the floor and saw Wang's mother standing under one hole with her mouth open. She took a bone and dropped it. Wang's mother was in pain. Ingot's mother pretended she knew nothing and then poured hot water through the hole too. Wang's mother screamed in pain. Ingot's mother apologized.

The two children were refrained from seeing and playing with each other for a few days after the incident.

A few days later Ingot told her mother that she wanted to eat alligator eggs. Her mother brought her to see an alligator called Poi Kabok. They carried a big basket with them. The alligator asked them to say "*bala silong Pok Kabok*" when she started to lay eggs. Ingot's mother knew the trick. The alligator just wanted to test their intelligent only. They kept silent. When the basket was full they said "*bala silong Poi Kabok*" and the alligator stopped laying egg. They went home happily. They gave some eggs to Wang and her mother but they refused to accept it. She said, "They would ask from Poi Kabok the next day".

The next day Wang and her mother went to see Poi Kabok to get alligator's eggs. They were asked to do the same thing. When Poi Kabok started to lay eggs, they said "*bala silong Poi Kabok*" and immediately she stopped laying eggs. They got only three eggs due to their stupidity.

The following week Ingot told her mother that she wanted a shirt and a skirt. They went to see Lechau's mother called Bungan to make a shirt and a skirt for Ingot. Lechau's mother would make the clothes on condition they help to baby-sit her son. She instructed them to bath Lechau with hot water and to clean him after he passed his motion with leaves called *pai*. Ingot's mother knew that Lechau's mother just wanted to test her intelligent. They cared for the baby boy, bathed him with warm water and cleaned him with water too. After the clothes were almost completed, Lechau's mother asked them to dry them outside. She asked them to chase away a bird if the bird landed and walked on the clothes. They followed what was instructed but they did not chase away the bird. As a result of their patience and intelligent Ingot was able

to get a very beautiful designed shirt and skirt. They returned home happy and thanked Lechau's mother.

Wang was jealous to see Ingot beautiful clothes. They went to see Lechau's mother to make a shirt and skirt for Wang too. Bungan told them to care for his son Lechau and bathed him with hot water and *pai* leaves. They were very impatient when Lechau cried and unable to entertain him. They had forgotten to feed the baby. They even bathed him with hot water and this made Lechau cried even louder. They cleaned Lechau with *pai* leaves. These leaves made the skin itchy. Bungan completed the clothes in hurry because she could not stand her cranky son, being bathed in hot water and cleaned with itchy leave. She asked them to dry the clothes outside and told them to chase away any bird that walk on it. They followed her instructions. The result of their actions was simple designed clothes. Wang was unhappy to see the clothes.

### 8) A Mother Bird Called Melak Apong

Story teller: Madam Laai Lian @ Poi Pelai Lian

Melak Apong had a few chicks. One day they were looking for food near a tree. A fox came and asked them what they were doing. The fox played with the chicks by trying to catch them. The chicks' mother stopped him from playing with the chicks because some of them were not well.

The fox offered to perform healing rituals (*ngerayong*) to heal the sick chicks. He asked the chicks' mother to prepare *nyating* shoots, *long* leaves and rice. Then he performed the *dayong*. His *dayong* said, "*Tin-tin ula apong uban laa behulu ngabong, Tin ula ula uban laa behulu ngeta*". When Melak Apong heard the *dayong's* chants, she knew the fox's intention. After the ritual, the fox left. He promised to perform another healing ritual at night. The mother chicks decided to move her chicks to a safe place. She woke her chicks and asked them to leave quietly. The fox returned at night to look for the bird and her chicks. He failed to locate them. Actually, the mother and her chicks slept on the tree branches at night. The next day, they flew way to a safer place.

The fox was hungry. He met a peacock. He proposed to sleep with the peacock at night because he wanted company. The peacock knew his intention: to kill and to eat them. The peacocks rejected his offer politely. The fox friendliness is not genuine.

Another day the fox met a bear. The bear was looking for food at that moment. The fox befriended the bear and found out where the bear's lived. Then, the hungry fox attacked the bear at night. Unluckily, the bad fox was killed by the bear for disturbing his sleep.

## 9) Periyot and Her Friends

Story teller: Madam Laai Lian @ Poi Pelaa Lian

Once there was a bird called Periyot. She was hardworking. One day Periyot asked her friends crab, ant, *kisiu*, tadpole, worm and dragonfly<sup>3</sup> to join an organized working party to weed the grass.

They worked at Periyot farm on the first day. During that time, Periyot's corns were mature and can be cooked. They ate the corns and got ready for their work. Periyot's paddy grew healthily.

Periyot cooked the lunch. She cooked very delicious food. Everybody wanted to know the secret of her cooking. They persuaded Periyot to tell her secret. Periyot said, "I dipped my tail in the soup". The rest of her friends planned to do the same thing. They went home. Periyot asked her friends to take home some of the corns.

The next day, they worked in prawn's farm. Prawn's corns were not yet matured. After taking their breakfast they sharpened the tools and got ready to work. Prawn prepared the lunch for that day. Prawn tried to imitate Periyot's. She tried to dip her tail into the hot soup but she accidentally fell into the hot soup and died. Her friends waited for her call for lunch for very long. They were hungry.

Periyot asked *kisiu* to investigate. *Kisiu* climbed up the pot but her jaw stuck on the pot and she perished too. Periyot flew to the hut and saw her death friends. She screamed. Everybody ran back to the hut. They cried sadly.

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<sup>3</sup> Periyot's friends represent natural environment such as soil, water and air. Basically, crabs, *kisiu* and tadpole live in the water, while ants live on the ground or any suitable areas, worms live in the soil and dragonflies and birds on the trees. These animals are portrayed to live in harmony and interact with each other well.

The tadpole's mucus and tears was out of control. Her friends asked her to blow out her mucus. Tadpole died accidentally because she blew too hard. All her inner parts came out. The sad animals cried even louder. The ant fastened her belt and clothes. When she adjusted her belt, she died for she accidentally tied it too tight. They asked the crab to produce loud noises with her hands so that other people can hear them. However, the crab overdid it and she lost all her hands. Later she died. They asked worm to call for help but the worm died due to the hot sun. The last resort was to ask dragonfly to fly home. However, the dragonfly was unable to fly because her wings were broken by strong wind.

At the end of the day, only Periyot and dragonfly were alive. Periyot carried the dragonfly on her back home to tell the other villagers about the sad accident.

#### 10) Badang<sup>4</sup>Buet, Badang Dado & the Giant

Story teller: Madam Laai Lian @ Poi Pelaai Lian

Badang Buet and Badang Dado were friends. One day they started an organized working party to weed the grass. They started with Badang Buet's farm. Badang Buet's rice grew nicely. After having their breakfast, they took their *sireh*, sharpened the working tools and got ready for work.

They looked for edible plants and mushroom while weeding. They collected plants and mushrooms to cook as their special delicacy. Badang Buet suggested to Badang Dado to stay overnight in the farm. Badang Dado rejected the suggestion. Therefore, only Badang Buet stayed overnight. After dinner, Badang Buet heard sounds. He listened attentively. It was the sound of the giant. The giant said, "*Mek mek tai umen Badang Buet*". Badang Buet was scared and he hid in a fruit jar. The giant looked for Badang Buet but was unable to find Badang Buet. Out of desperation, the giant threw the fruit jar into the river. Badang Buet climbed out of the fruit jar and reached home safely. He kept the incident to himself.

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<sup>4</sup>*Badang* is a Kenyah woven jar which is normally made by good quality rattan. The purpose is to keep the paddy or rice. Sometimes this jar is made of other materials such as coconut or fruit shell.

The next morning the two friends worked at Badang Dado’s farm. They collected edible insects called *kamang*, mushrooms (*jaep & kulat*) for lunch. In the late afternoon, Badang Dado invited Badang Buet to stay overnight in the farm’s hut. Badang Buet refused to stay overnight because he was scared of the giant. After dinner, Badang Dado went to bed. He heard a sound. He was shocked and scared. He listened carefully and he heard, “*Mek mek ubek umen Badang Dado*”). Badang Dado hid in the big basket called *ingen*. The giant looked for Badang Dado everywhere in the hut but to no avail. He threw the *ingen* into the river. The big basket floated downstream and Badang Dado climbed out from the basket and reached home safely. After the incident, they never slept overnight in the farm again.

When their rice was about to ripe, they made a delicacy called *ubek*. They enjoyed the delicious food with their relatives and friends. After that was harvest season. The paddy harvesting ended with Harvest Festival called *pelepek uman*. This celebration was held to celebrate the good harvest and as thanksgiving.

**Table 1:** *Ketene* Summary

Story Title	Type of story	Main characters	Minor characters	Themes
Bungan & The Giant Snake <i>(Bungan ngan Cong Ulai Bio)</i>	Story about the aristocrats	Bungan, Jalong (or the snake)	Kulleh	Adventure & love
Suling & The Leopard <i>(Suling ngan Kulleh)</i>	Story about the aristocrats	Suling, Kulleh (or the leopard)	Suling’s father	Adventure & love
Merang Jalong Engan & Bulan Jalong Engan	Story about human beings & the death spirit	Merang, Bulan, Jurang	Ucong Betate Ujan, Kaye Buring, Suling	Adventure, love
Usun The Daughter of Peacocks <i>(Usun Kuwai)</i>	Story about the aristocrats	Usun, Jalong	Peacocks ( <i>kuwai</i> ), Lawai & Asang, Usun’s parents, Jalong’s mother	Adventure & love

Sigau Belawan	Story about humans being & Kenyah gods & goddess	Sigau, Bungan	Balan Kepau's ruler, Sigau's mother, Bungan's sisters	Adventure & love
Jalong Kirieng	Story about the aristocrats	Jalong, Balan Kepau's daughter	Jalong's mother, A bird called Cit Culit	Adventure & love
Wang's mother & Ingot's mother ( <i>We Wang &amp; We Ingot</i> )	Story about ordinary people	Wang's mother, Ingot's mother	Wang Ingot Bungan (Lechau's mother)	Daily chores & child rearing
Periyot & Her Friends ( <i>Periyot ngan Tuyang ya</i> )	Story about animals	Periyot	Prawn, dragonfly, <i>kisiu</i> , ant, worm, crab	Farming & co-operation
<i>A Bird Called Melak Apong</i>	Story about animals	A bird named Melak Apong	Fox, Melak Apong's chicks	Bravery & protective
<i>Badang Buet, Badang Dado &amp; The Giant</i>	Story about non-living things & the giant	Badang Buet, Badang Dado	The giant	Intelligence & survival

The comparison is made based on the following sources of information. The characters in the stories represent traditional Kenyah society, while the present Kenyah refers to modern Kenyah society. Five respondents from the older generation were interviewed to verify the collected data and information.

**Table 2: Comparison between traditional Kenyah society & modern Kenyah society through *ketene*'**

	Traditional Society	Modern Society
Social structure	Consists of three social classes: aristocrats, ordinary people, slaves)	Consists of two social classes: aristocrats and ordinary people.

Religion	Belief in spirits (i.e. plants, animals) Later, belief in <i>Bungan Malan Peselong Luan</i> <sup>5</sup>	Christianity (domination: Borneo Evangelical Mission)
Occupation	Farmers & hunters The spirit of <i>senguyun</i> <sup>6</sup> is practiced extensively	Farmers, government servants, private sector workers. The spirits of <i>senguyun</i> is very much alive too.
Marriage	Based on blood relations and social class	Based on love, mixed-marriages increasing
Forms of entertainment	Verbal art such as <i>ketene'</i> , <i>tiang</i> , <i>parap</i> , <i>ngeraben</i> and <i>ngelaong</i> . Other social gatherings.	Sometimes verbal art is performed. Television, radio and other modern entertainment. Other social gatherings
Leisure activities	Listening to verbal art presentations and making handicrafts.	Enjoying modern entertainment, and making handicrafts.

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<sup>5</sup>The religion is introduced by Jok Apui, a Kenyah Uma Jalan in Apo Kayan. He first met the Goddess Bungan Malan Peselong Luan in his dream.

<sup>6</sup>*Senguyun* comes in the form of reciprocal help or organized working parties. It is a social occasion, where the participants could gossip, and for men or women to work and enjoy each other's company, working together and teasing each other during their meal breaks. *Senguyun* is an opportunity for eligible males and females to find their life partners and for courtship. *Senguyun* is also viewed as an agent for socialization. However, the involvement of the economically well-off Kenyah in *senguyun* is becoming less because they can afford to pay for labour (Hong: 1978). *Senguyun* is still practiced in the Kenyah Uma Bakah community. This system is practiced for all kinds of work such as clearing the jungle, weeding, planting rice, making house construction materials and many more. After twenty-eight-years Hong's argument is still applicable today that well-off Kenyah do not participate in *senguyun* extensively.

## Symbolism

Symbols used in the stories include such things as snakeskin, leopard skin, sunhat, birds such as spider hunter and *aceng* and other animals such bears, snakes, baboons, and wild boars and others.

When the skin of Jalong (in Bungan and The Giant Snake) and of Kulleh (in Suling and The Leopard) changed to animal skin this process was a bad omen and a curse on the community. During this period, the victim was isolated from other people. In contrast, after the skin was burnt by fire, the beginning of a new life was able to take place. The victims regained their dignity and were able to get married and lead a normal life.

The loss of Bungan's (sunhat) and clothes in Sigau Belawan is a symbol of the carelessness and ignorance of a woman. Society viewed this situation as the loss of a woman's dignity and personal possession. She could restore or regain it with pain but it took time and courage. The lost possessions of Bungan forced her to stay on the earth and she only returned to the upper world after she had a child with Sigau.

Another symbol is a bird called Cit Culit. Cit Culit is a nickname for a type of bird called *esit* (Kenyah), *engkerasak* (Iban) and spider hunter (English). This bird is an omen bird under the religion Bungan Malan Peselong Luan. It a symbolic messenger from the Goddess Bungan Malan. *Esit* bird must be obeyed in to order to maintain peace, harmony or to get a good harvest. This bird is portrayed in the story such as We Wang & We Ingot. In short, the religion or the belief system of the society in this story is Bungan Malan Peselong Luan.

The slaughter of a pig in Merang Jalong Engan is the symbol of a cleansing ritual. The blood of the animal was sprinkled on the main staircases of the longhouses in order to appease the spirits and to protect the whole community.

## Themes and Relationships

In order to enhance the understanding of social structure, social relationship and other social aspects in this community I will elaborate on themes of the stories. The themes of the Kenyah *ketene'* are related to adventures,

supernaturalism, social status, love/family/children and paddy planting. Therefore, Conley's findings (1978) supported this discussion.

Six stories revolved around the adventures of the main characters. They traveled or wandered alone fearlessly. Good examples are Usun Kuwai, Merang and Bulan Jalong Engan. When faced with problems they showed courage and were prepared to risk their lives. They were not scared of ghost or beasts in the jungle. The wild animals greeted them nicely and did not harm them. Some of these beasts helped them too.

In addition, the adventure stories contained elements of the supernatural. Sigau Belawan traveled alone to the upper-world to meet his son and wife. Sigau Belawan possessed supernatural power. Through this power, he was able to endure the punishment imposed on him by the ruler of the upper-world. He was able to build the staircase linking the earth and the the kingdom of the upper-world by shooting the sun with his blowpipe. The supernatural power, for example the use of the water of life to resurrect dead people is another theme in these stories. An unmarried young woman also was able to get pregnant through supernatural power by wearing the ring belonging to a particular person or by incidentally drinking the urine (which was mistaken as spring water).

The next theme is social class. These stories revealed only two social classes such as aristocrats and ordinary people. Though slaves existed in traditional Kenyah society, they never appeared or were mentioned in any of these stories. Slaves were owned by the aristocrats. Their everyday work involved all types of jobs such as collecting firewood, feeding or rearing live-stocks, cleaning the house and performing difficult tasks. Slaves had to obey their owners and they had to accept any sanctions placed on them. In the Usun Kuwai story, the baboons played the role of slaves to help Usun who gave birth alone in the jungle.

Some stories revolved around the theme of love, family and children. The eternal love of parents for their children was portrayed in Bungan and The Giant Snake (or Jalong). Jalong's parents stayed with him until their death though the other villagers ran away because they thought Jalong brought bad luck. However, in Usun Kuwai story, Bungan's love for her newborn baby was not a pure love. She loved the fruits more than her newborn daughter and

she dumped her baby in the jungle. In modern society, heartless mothers are reported to dump their children too.

Family relationships are portrayed as either harmonious or conflicts. Merang and Bulan's stepmother was unkind and irresponsible. She ignored her stepchildren, especially Merang and spent more time on doing her own business such as making beaded handicraft. The children were portrayed as very obedient though to a certain extent they showed their rebellion as they have limits to their patience too.

The children of the aristocrats and the children of ordinary people were portrayed in the stories with different attitudes, appearance and talents. The aristocrats' children were gifted and talented. The male children were adventurous, skillful craftsmen and excellent dancers or musicians. These inborn talents contributed to their excellent dancing performance during their weddings or feasts. Female children were portrayed with talents too. They were gifted handicraft makers and possessed natural beauty (fair skin and long hair). Male and female appearances at night or early in the morning were described as beautiful/handsome, like the light. The surrounding will be brightened with their presence during this time. Their beauty hypnotized people. Their excellent personalities were admired by many.

On the contrary, the children of ordinary people such as Wang and Ingot learnt many things from their mothers. Ordinary people are the majority. In Kenyah society, ordinary people were portrayed to have both positive and negative attributes. Ordinary human beings have the capacity for both good and evil. An example of a good attribute is to think before they take action or speak; whereas jealousy, egoism and impatience are negative attributes.

Another theme related to Kenyah socio-cultural activities is paddy planting. Kenyah's lives revolved around paddy planting and therefore these activities were portrayed in four of the stories. They characters were involved in clearing the jungle as a preparation for paddy planting or weeding in the farm. A good example is Periyot and her friends. They were involved in a form of reciprocal help and they enjoyed each other's company.

## Themes and relationships to modern Kenyah

The following questions were at the back of my mind when I analyzed the cultural themes of Kenyah traditional society as portrayed in the stories. Are these themes still pertinent to modern day Kenyah? Are there any changes in the themes? Which is more important now? How have these themes impacted on the social-economic aspects of Kenyah society?

The symbol of Christianity is portrayed clearly in Picture 1. The community is Christian and their denomination is Borneo Evangelical Mission with a small number of Catholics, Protestants and Methodists, mostly due to inter-marriages.

**Picture 1:** Pintu gerbang (*terane*)



The most significant social change among the Kenyah is reflected in the use of the cross as a symbol on the top of the main entrance. My personal communications with the locals indicated that the use of the symbol is connected to many aspects of their lives.

Christianity has taken over the role of supernaturalism among the communities. They no longer believe in spirit beings to help them. A respondent by the name the Late Madam Puyang Jalong said “*Ngadet ngan ngelan bali taun kin ilu tia. Kado lan-lan jagan le taun seteng ti ya le ngelan amen. Adet Kristen cok ilu tia. Seteng le pejagan and ti inu-inu taun de ngeteng*”. Translation: “The belief in supernaturalism had hindered the community’s progress. Traditional activities were always being interrupted by

a bad omen. Christianity has given us freedom and we are able to be actively involved in work and to enjoy life to the fullest”.

According to Leach (in King 1993), the head man will always be a person of higher status and rank. The aristocrats are the house owning group. In addition, traditionally I (Juna Liau, 1997) found that the aristocrats are entitled to be headman (*pengabio lepo*), ritual specialists (*dayong*) and leaders of each longhouse within the same village (*pengabio uma*). The aristocrats were well-versed in customs and traditions of the Kenyah and are also responsible for uniting the villagers and taking care of their welfare and safety. They owned slaves and possessed more material wealth than anybody else in the village.

However, conversion to Christianity has eliminated the notion of ascribed status. In contrast the idea of achieved status has taken over the lives of the communities. For instance in 1995 Bilong Uda, a retired government servant became the first Kenyah Uma Bakah headman. He was elected by the majority to lead the village due to his administration experience and personal qualities (Juna Liau, 1997; Juli Edo, 2006).

Though supernaturalism, ascribed status and river orientation have been replaced, but the other three still remain with slight changes such as communalism, children and rice agriculture.

The modern Kenyah live in close proximity with each other and they enjoy the company of each other. They live in longhouses and social interaction among each other exists in many activities. For example through *senguyun* the spirit of co-operation and sharing during planting rice, making house materials and many more are instilled and manifested.

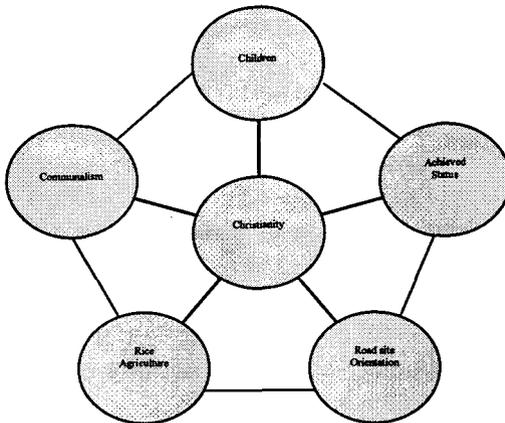
Though they still emphasize the importance of children, the number of children in modern Kenyah families has been reduced significantly. The following is an example from my own family; my parents had 10 children but my other siblings have three to five children. The same patterns are portrayed in other families. The majority of modern Kenyah parents said “*Ubek te ilu un anak kado ye, taun le macam belajar sekula dah, Kado ali-ali te sen le fepet bo le ubek fecok anak le sekula*”. Translation: “I want to have many children but I can’t afford the expenses for schooling. The expense of sending children to school is very high. Too much money is spent on them if we want them to excel academically”

Cultivation of rice is an important occupation of the modern Kenyah besides growing pepper. However, poor resettlement planning and implementation meant each family is given three acre of land and this small land size has had a significant impact to their economic activities. They farm far from the longhouses and this has brought hardship to the communities (Kua Kia Soong, 2001).

In addition, the notion of river orientation had been replaced by road side orientation. Kenyah Uma Bakah is located near a small stream called Sungai Mening (Clean and Clear River). The dissatisfaction is shown in the following conversation “*Maen lan-lan! Taun alot le kahi ne. Kado ali-ali belaja alot tane cin alot sungai (besai) tego le ke daya ading le. Penia alot tane ji ngenyeng ilu ta pasen ngan taban*”. Translation: “So difficult! I don’t have a vehicle. Expense by road is higher as compared to paddle boat when we lived upriver. The advantage of the road is that it brings us closer to the town and hospital”.

Figure 2 indicates changes in modern Kenyah themes based on Conley’s illustrations (1978). Changes portray in three cultural themes whereby Christianity replaces supernaturalism, achieved status replaces status and rank and road-site orientation replaces river orientation. The other three cultural theme such children, communalism and rice agriculture still remain important though there has been slight changes.

**Figure 2:** Cultural Theme Interrelationship of the modern Kenyah



## Conclusion and Suggestions

Many studies have been carried out among the Kenyah particularly by foreign researchers. This paper helps to reinforce the previous findings and gives a deeper understanding of the Kenyah, particularly the aspects of socio-cultural change.

In short, the *ketene* is a verbal art since it's embedded in other artistic elements such as music, dance, handicrafts and songs.

Though the basic function of the *ketene* is to entertain, I discovered it has other functions such as to reinforce social differentiation and social status in society. Further study is needed in this area. Though this form of entertainment is slowly dying, I believe it could be revived. These stories could be turned into more lively forms if probably it produced into books or turned to other profitable materials.

The unrecorded stories in this community need to be studied and recorded as soon as possible before it too late. I noted that only a few storytellers are still alive. Other forms of verbal arts in this community such *dayong*, *nidau*, *ngelaong ngeraben* and *parap* also need in-depth study. More studies are needed in understanding indigenous knowledge (on traditional medicine and agricultural activities), handicrafts and music.

**APPENDIX I**  
**Basic vocabulary related to the stories**

<u>English</u>	<u>Kenyah</u>
1. animal	<i>cen</i>
2. a kind of aquatic life forms	<i>kisiu</i>
3. appeasing ceremony	<i>meliwa</i>
4. aristocrat (noble person)	<i>paren / deta'u</i>
5. bad	<i>jaet</i>
6. bamboo (long & hard)	<i>bulo latong</i>
7. baby carrier	<i>beneng @ ba'</i>
8. bead necklace	<i>uleng ino</i>
9. big basket made of rattan	<i>ingen</i>
10. bright	<i>dema</i>
11. bronze container	<i>kiran jangin</i>
12. bronze mortal	<i>lu jangin</i>
13. bronze staircase	<i>can jangin</i>
14. burial post (house)	<i>salong</i>
15. cage	<i>ubong</i>
16. chant / sing	<i>nyilon @ ngeriyon</i>
17. dance	<i>kacet @ kanchet</i>
18. itchy leaves	<i>pai</i>
19. fireplace	<i>atang</i>
20. flying ship	<i>alot adang</i>
21. fruit jar	<i>buan urong</i>
22. ghost	<i>bali</i>

23. giant	<i>pengete'</i>
24. glutinous rice wrapped in <i>sang</i> leaves	<i>pito</i>
25. grave	<i>liang</i>
26. handbag made of beads	<i>beg ino</i>
27. headman	<i>pengabio lepo</i>
28. healing specialist	<i>dayong</i>
29. house, household	<i>lamin, amin</i>
30. a longhouse (block) leader	<i>pengabio uma</i>
31. knife	<i>bayeng</i>
32. lake	<i>bawang</i>
33. leopard	<i>kulleh</i>
34. omen	<i>amen</i>
35. ordinary people	<i>panyin</i>
36. peacock	<i>kuwai</i>
37. to pluck eyebrows' hair	<i>mesau cep</i>
38. pond	<i>sepan</i>
39. pre-nuptial arrangement	<i>ala leto</i>
40. to resurrect	<i>pudip</i>
41. shirt & skirt	<i>safai &amp; ta'a</i>
42. slave	<i>ule' @ ula'</i>
43. spider hunter	<i>esit</i>
44. to speak	<i>pisiu</i>
45. story, story teller	<i>ketene, kelunan de ngetene'</i>
46. sun, sunhat	<i>matatau, saong</i>
47. taboo	<i>malan</i>
48. tattoo	<i>betek</i>

49. types of fishing net	<i>uyot, kesale'</i>
50. the upper world	<i>balau kepau</i>
51. verandah	<i>use</i>
52. water of life	<i>telang penyelong</i>

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