

Musical Studies on “Timang Tuah” Ritual by the Ibans in Sarawak

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Abstract: This paper seeks to explore the musical journey of a symbolic ritual among the Ibans in Sarawak Borneo Malaysia known as Timang Tuah as an effort to preserve and spread awareness to the global community of its existence. Adapting the qualitative approach in collecting and processing the data, this paper aims to describe the processes involved in the ritual and investigate the relevance of the ritual among the current Iban community in Sarawak. Semi structured interviews and passive observations were carried out to record the whole process of the ritual and additionally questionnaires were distributed to investigate its resonance among the audience. Findings have shown that the ritual is done according to specific purposes which includes appeasing spirits during harvest and ushering in luck. The melody of how the songs are carried out also depends on the range and the skills inherited by the lemambang. It was also revealed that the younger generation are not aware of this ritual thus signaling the needs of preservation efforts by the authority involved.

1 INTRODUCTION

Sarawak is a state consisting of multi ethnic society and hence the state is rich with abundant of cultural heritage. According to Jeniri Amir (2015), a Berita Harian columnist, Sarawak is home to twenty eight subethnic groups, whereby there exist six major ethnic groups namely the Ibans, Chinese, Malay, Bidayuh, Melanau and the Orang Ulu. With regards to musicality, the traditional instrument Sape of the Orang Ulu and the *Ngajat* dance of the Ibans are most widely known. As most previous studies are done on the language and cultural aspects of these groups. There are still a number of undocumented culture and art yet to be explored and told to the world. Hence this paper aims to investigate one of the traditional rituals of the Ibans, and to spreading the awareness of the ritual).

Along with modernity and the rapid pace of infrastructural development happening to the country and state per say, it is no question why the present society would only be interested to look beyond their vicinity and look up to the west where technology is undeniably changing humanity. Technology give them comfort and ease in reaching the unreachable, hence lullabying the present generation to the extend that the world is enough within the four walls. They

no longer see the need to experience culture and nature by practice and being out and about, when all can be reached at the tip of their fingers. The impact is direct when it comes to cultural heritage whereby rituals are slowly being forgotten and seen as irrelevant in the modern society. This become the foundation of this study. The main concern of this study is the dying interest of the younger generation especially living in the city or big towns who might or might not know of the existence of the subject matter being investigated in this study, known as *Timang Tuah*, a musical chanting ritual of the Ibans.

Masing (1981) stated that *Timang* is the highest level of Iban ritual as it is an act of special invitation to the Petara (the deity) symbolically carried out using songs performed by the singer known as *lemambang*. *Lemambang* refers to the person who is empowered and knowledgeable of the ritual text and is in charge of the role *matak jalai* (opening the path to the Petara).

There can be a number of two to four *lemambang*, followed by a *penyagu* (a person who echoes the singing sung by the *lemambang*) and two other *ngelembung* (a person who repeats the ending of the sentence sung by the *penyagu*). All the members of the *lemambang* must have in depth knowledge of the *Timang* ritual. The sole purpose of the *Timang* is to