SUKĒT: PENAN FOLK STORIES

SUKĒT PENAN

Compiled by
Jayl Langub

UNIVERSITI MALAYSIA SARAWAK
The Institute of East Asian Studies
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JAYL LANGUB

UNIVERSITI MALAYSIA SARAWAK • DAYAK STUDIES
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PREFACE

Since the formation of the Majlis Adat Istiadat in 1974, staff members of its research section have collected amongst others, a large number of folk stories of the Dayak peoples. From this large collection only one volume of Iban folk stories, *Jerita Tuai Enggau Ensera*, was published in 1995 in Iban language by the Social Development Council.

The present volume contains ten Penan *sukêt* (folk stories), taken from the collection in the Orang Ulu research section. The publication of this volume differs from the earlier publication in that the volume is published in Penan, the original version and English, the translated version.

The Majlis takes pride in the fact that this volume is published by Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS), a seat of learning for Sarawak. I would like to express my thanks to the Institute of East Asian Studies and the Dayak Chair for making it possible to publish this volume as a UNIMAS publication.

This volume would not have become a reality had it not been for the contribution of the storytellers. To them I say, “Thank you”. I would also like to express my appreciation to Jayl Langub for transcribing these stories in Penan, translating them into English and compiling them into the present volume.

Before the introduction of TV to the rural areas, folk stories such as these used to be a source of entertainment. Some folk stories also have moral implications for society. They are a product of a creative mind.

I have great pleasure in commending this collection of Penan folk stories.

DATUK TRA ZEHNDER
Ketua Majlis
Majlis Adat Istiadat, Sarawak
PIA' NEBARE


Tong naan itu' puun pulu' sukët Penan eh nalè jin tulat sukët Orang Ulu. Pia' eh senurat tong bup itu' petiken jin sukët irah Ivan eh tenipun tong bup lem duman 1995, duku nah eh tari' senurat tong pia' Penan ngan senalin tong pia' Inggerit.

Majlis Adat Istiadat kelu' bara' kenin eh jian, duku nah bup itu' nanu irah UNIMAS, jah naan irah alè pengajam. Jin kéh, aku' kelu' bara' jian kenèp ngan Institute of East Asian Studies ngan Dayak Chair eh sukët pepusit bup itu tong UNIMAS.

Tipun sukët itu yèng sukët jadi' daun nah yèng puun kelunan bara' sukët nanu' tong bup itu'. Ngan irah eh bara' sukët itu' aku' kelu' bara jian kenèp. Kéh pah iah, aku' kelu' bara' jian kenèp ngan Jayl Langub eh menyurat sukët itu' tong pia' Penan, nyaliah iah tong pia' Inggerit ngan nipun éh jadi' jah bup.

Yèng kali TV avi' tong iut bë, sukët kena' itu peging senukët irah niin ngejian kenèp ngan kelunan pina'. Iah tiken jin inah, puun sukët eh puun reti jian tong adët kelunan murip. Sukët kena' itu' saja' jah pengejam éh puun tong kelunan mejam.

Ngan itu aku' bara' jian muun kenèp mena' sukët Penan itu' ngan ulo'.
Foreword

Dayak Studies and the Oral Literature Series

The Dayak Studies Program was inaugurated at the Universiti Malaysia Sarawak in January 2001. Constituted within the Institute of East Asian Studies, and sustained by an endowment from the Dayak Cultural Foundation, the program was established for the purpose of promoting long-term research on issues confronting the Dayak communities of Sarawak and of the island of Borneo more generally.

In this connection, the Dayak Studies Program has initiated two publication series: 1) a Contemporary Society Series (comprised of data papers and monographs relating to issues of current concern), and 2) an Oral Literature Series.

About the Dayak Studies Oral Literature Series

A major challenge facing Dayak communities today is that of maintaining, or in some cases, of rediscovering the vitality of community cultural institutions and identities. Traditionally, the verbal and expressive arts--storytelling, epics, sacred and historical narratives--all formed a central and cherished part of Dayak life and embodied many of the most important values on which cultural identities were founded. Today, in the face of rapid change, many of these narrative forms are in danger of being lost. Others are being radically reshaped or are assuming new cultural roles and meanings.

The purpose of this series is to make possible the recording and publication of some part of this rich and rapidly changing corpus of oral literature. It is intended not only to preserve a record of traditional examples of oral literature threatened with loss, but also to record and document changing forms of contemporary Dayak expressive culture. Each volume is introduced by its author(s)/compiler(s) with an account identifying the narrator or storyteller and describing the context in which
recording was carried out. Texts are presented in both the original language in which they were narrated and in English translation. Where relevant, particular genres are described and their cultural significance within the community is explained as a background to the texts.

In addition to the publication of this series, a further objective of the Dayak Studies Programme is to preserve original recordings of Dayak oral literature, including oral history, biography and life-history narratives, in a permanent sound archive, maintained in co-operation by the Majlis Adat Istiadat (Chief Minister’s Department), the Tun Jugah Foundation, the Dayak Cultural Foundation, and the Institute of East Asian Studies. It is intended that most of the texts presented in this series (as well as others) will also be available in the form of sound recordings, so that it will be possible to listen to the actual words spoken or sung, as well as to read them on the printed page. In some cases, as indicated in individual volumes, this is already possible in our existing recording collections. In the future, we hope to make it universally so.

Professor Clifford Sather
Chair, Dayak Studies
Institute of East Asian Studies, UNIMAS
Pia’ Menen

Pengejam Dayak Ngan Tesok Sau

Ara’ pengejam Dayak itu’ kenurip tong Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS) dalam belilik Januari 2001. Iah muku’ tong the Institute of East Asian Studies ngan tenagung Tipun Adet Asën Dayak Sarawak. Puku’ ara’ itu’ tekejék, duku’ kelunan pekalai pengejam irah bangsa’ Dayak.

Duku’ itu’ ara’ Pengejam Dayak puun pepusit dua naan éh tong irah menyurat pengejam Dayak. Eh menen nah, pekalai kelunan ngan ayu’ urip Dayak langit itu’, mesëk inu’-inu’ éh pesakit ketawa’ mapat teneng urip kelunan Dayak. Eh keduah nah, pekalai ayu’ sukét ngan pengejam ukun tepun sau bangsa’ Dayak.

Reti Pengejam Dayak Ngan Tesok Sau


Puun kura’-kura’ opit ketawa’ tipun-tipun, kena’ Majlis Adat
Istiadat, Tipun Tun Jugah ngan Tipun Adēt Asēn Dayak Sarawak, pejah kenep manu’ hadui menakup pengejam sau bangsa’ Dayak. Irah mesēk pengejam itu’, kena’ alē pia’ irah eh mejam pengejam sau, tong rikod dai pengejam itu metat.

Professor Clifford Sather
Chair, Dayak Studies
Institute of East Asian Studies, UNIMAS
## Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Foreword</td>
<td>i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illustrations</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Storytellers</td>
<td>xi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### English Version

- **Kangkaput (Eastern Penan Version)**
  - *by Lesak Tukin*
  - 9

- **Kangkaput (Western Penan Version)**
  - *by Balan Balang*
  - 18

- **The Argus Pheasant, Honey Bees and Broadbill**
  - *by Dian Lawai*
  - 25

- **The Squirrel and the Forest Gecko**
  - *by Tugang Sugun*
  - 29

- **Lake’ Meduk, The Pig-tailed Macaque**
  - *by Bulan Dian*
  - 35

- **The Mouse Deer**
  - *by Madai Salu’*
  - 42

- **The Bear**
  - *by Dian Lawai*
  - 53

- **Oyau Ovi**
  - *by Ding Usang*
  - 62

- **Tamen Ovi**
  - *by Ding Usang*
  - 79

- **Tamen Ketanget**
  - *by Usang Japi’*
  - 88
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tulat Penan</th>
<th>tasap</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kangkaput (ha’ Penan Selungo)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nara’ Lesak Tukin, Long Lamai, Ba’ Kusan</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kangkaput (pia’ Penan Silat)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nara’ Balan Balang, Leng Bee,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silat, Bë Kusan</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kuai, Layuk ngan Tabuk</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nara’ Dian Lawai, Leng Jekit,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silat, Bë Kusan</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Megë Rawah Takang</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nara’ Tugang Sugun, Leng Jëk,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seping, Belaga</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lake’ Meduk</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nara’ Bulan Dian, Leng Peran,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seping, Belaga</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lake’ Bilun</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nara’ Madai Salu’, Leng Luar,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pleiran, Belaga</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lake’ Buang</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nara’ Dian Lawai, Leng Jekitan,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silat, Belaga</td>
<td>146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oyau Ovi</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nara’ Ding Usang, Bë Purau, Bë Kusan</td>
<td>155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tamen Ovi</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nara’ Ding Usang, Bë Purau, Bë Kusan</td>
<td>171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tamen Ketanget</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nara’ Usang Japi’, Leng Ketuet,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bë Belaga, Belaga</td>
<td>180</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**English Translation**

“Oh, that is coming. 

"Don't be brought down, I declare. 

“Oh, Kangkaput declared.

Mother legs and beyond

Finally, beyond Tabau...

"When the mother is able to observe.

The Argus, honey bee, Broadbill.

The wild mango, 

The Squid.

“...what a many fist observed...
**Illustrations**

**English Section**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Illustration</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Oh, that’s Kangkaput telling us that the fruit season is coming. Soon there will be a lot of fruits,” said the people to one another.</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Don’t kill Kangkaput. We suggest that Kangkaput be brought before a judge and given a fair trial,” intervened all the monkeys.</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Oh, Kangkaput, today I order that you be set free...” declared Judge Squirrel.</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother Bulēng Fish bit one of Kangkaput’s legs and broke it.</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finally, Gang Tabau, the Butterfly, reached the land beyond the ocean. There, Gang Tabau met Kangkaput.</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“When the eggs turn into young Kangkaput they will be able to call out to make the trees fruit again,” said Gang Tabau.</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The wild durian tree was fruiting, the rambutan, the wild mango, and all the fruit trees were fruiting.</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Squirrel caught a wild boar.</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“What a lucky person you are, my friend. You caught so many fish,” complimented the Squirrel.</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Their wives were very angry because their husbands hadn’t observed the important custom of sharing.</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
... the fish carried him across the river. .......................................................... 38

They roam the forest as they wish in search of food .......................................................... 41

The monkeys ran after the Mouse Deer. .......................................................... 43

The Mouse Deer stepped on each of the crocodiles as he walked from one bank to the other. .......................................................... 47

When the day of the race came, they met at the starting point. .......................................................... 51

“I don’t think I can fight you. I don’t have teeth. I don’t have a sword,” replied Tortoise. .......................................................... 55

“Why do you bite me? Don’t you know me?” said the Mouse Deer. .......................................................... 59

The Mouse Deer walked that night, and stepped on the Bear. .......................................................... 61

“Blowpipe me, then,” said the Masked Palm Civet. .......................................................... 66

“Yes, my fat is as thick as the head of a notched-log ladder,” said the Avung. .......................................................... 73

Then the Giant climbed up the longhouse, to the rooftop. .......................................................... 78

They wrestled for the third time. .......................................................... 81

“I don’t think it will be painful,” said the Penakoh .......................................................... 86

“I came to ask for a share of the meat, because I’m hungry,” said Bungan Tasit. .......................................................... 90

The tree felled on top of Boreng Laren, killing her. .......................................................... 98

Bungan Tasit decided to leave. She went home for good. .......................................................... 103
“O, inah ha’ Kangkaput bara’ ta’un bua’ mekang bua’
inc. Bé lebë dat pu’un bua’ tong tana’ iteu’,” kenat
ha’ irah Penan. ........................................................................................................ 106

Maai jak mematai Kangkaput nah. Hun néh kenat ko’
mihin tai temeu’ ngan akim Kangkaput teu’,” ha’ irah
Kuyat eh pinaa nah. ................................................................................................ 109

“O, ka’au Kangkaput, jin dau iteu’ ka’au lepahe pelapu...,”
kenat ha’ manai Kireng. .......................................................................................... 112

Inah nah duku’ Bulêng menyam teneng tong paan nah,
paan Kangkaput. Pejang paan nah jah bila’. ...................................................... 114

Ujung-ujung nah avi’ Gang Tabau dalem tana’ la’
dipa banget. .......................................................................................................... 116

Jadi peekang ilu’ nah itu’ jadi Kangkaput nanu’ Punai, puun
kéh buë sukut nanu’ irah ngan ulo’, kun nah, Kangkaput....”
kéh pia’ Gang Tabau. ............................................................................................... 119

“O-o-u-uk!” ngan Tebuk mia’, “Tebuk! Tebuk! Tebuk!” .................. 121

Puun buë lah, belu’. ................................................................................................. 123

Tai Megě alè jah mavui. .......................................................................................... 125

“Ah, inu’ bain ko’ alè betelu’ savui?” kéh pia’ Megě. ................................. 127

Perah redu rawah, tegu rawah pepiet tong rawah turu. ................................. 129

...niin Betelu’ menesët iah lapit dipë. ............................................................... 133

Inah duku’ Meduk nyerap lepu tana’. .............................................................. 136

Tuai Meduk irah pitah, pitah Lake’ Bilun. ......................................................... 138
Inah Lake’ Bilun tajah, majak kat-kat irah Bayeh inah
avi’ dipē bē. ................................................................. 141

Avi’ langit rawah pepau, iah rawah pepau. ......................... 145

“Oh, yēng aku’ sukat pepatai ngan ko’...” kéh pia’
Kelep ngan Buang. ................................................................ 148

“Inu’ ko’ ju’ mengetep aku’, yēng ko’ mejam aku’?”
kéh pia’ Lake’ Bilun. ............................................................. 152

Tai Bilun, tai-tai melakau, ramē Buang tedē Bilun
inah. .................................................................................... 153

“Meput aku’ ítu’,” kéh pia’ Busan.. ........................................ 158

“Oo, nyak ki’ kapan bulan san,” pia’ Avung inah. ................. 165

Tai Ukun Pengetē tai mukat penguung uma. ...................... 170

Ketelu’ liwet rawah petayu’. ................................................. 173

“Oo! inu’ pēh te’ ban,” kéh pia’ Penakoh. ............................. 178

“Inah duku’ ki’ tuai mapun, tuai pitah ketelu’, tegu ki’
melau,” kéh pia’ Bungan Tasit. ......................................... 182

Tedē mutan inah laba’ aba’ mutan inah, medē Boreng
Laran. .................................................................................. 191

Muli’ jian Bungan Tasit irai ne’. ........................................... 196
The Storytellers

Balan Balang is the headman of Long Bee in the Silat River, Baram District. He is in his early 60’s. His parents were Penan Gēng who migrated to the Silat River in the early 20th century. Besides being a good storyteller, he is perhaps the most knowledgeable in his area in matters pertaining to genealogy and the oral history of the Penan Gēng.

Bulun Dian lives in Long Peran on the Seping River, Belaga District. She is in her mid 60’s. As a storyteller, she is popular with young children.

Dian Lawai is in his late 60’s and lives in Long Jekitan on the Silat River, Baram. He is well known on the Silat River for his animal stories.

Ding Usang is the headman of Bē Purau on the Silat River, Baram. He is in his early 50’s and is one of the most articulate storytellers in the Silat River.

Lesak Tukin lives in Long Lamai in the Upper Baram. Her story of Kangkaput is the only Eastern Penan sukēt included in this volume. She is in her mid 60’s.

Madai SaIu’ is the headman of Long Luar in the Pleiran River, Belaga. He is in his early 50’s.

Tugang Sugun is the headman of Long Jēk in the Seping River, Belaga. He is in his mid 60’s.

Usang Japi’. The late Usang Japi’ was the headman of Long Ketuet in the Belaga River, Belaga. Besides being a good storyteller he was very knowledgeable in matters pertaining to genealogy and the oral history of the Penan Gēng.
Irah éh tesok sukét


**Bulan Dian.** Iah muko’ Lēng Peran tong Bē Seping, daleh Belaga. Redu itu’ kejau pengurip nah belua’ 60 duman. Duku’ nah itu’ mejam tesok sukét, iah kenelu’ lan irah anak.

**Dian Lawai.** Umun pengurip lake’ jau itu’ au 60 duman ngan murip Lēng Jekitan tong Bē Silat, daleh Bē Kusan. Pina’ kelunan tong Bē Silat mejam iah duku’ nah mejam tesok sukét kaan.

**Ding Usang.** Iah Pengajau Uma’ Bē Purau tong Bē Silat, daleh Bē Kusan. Umun pengurip nah lem 50 duman ngan ih iah itu’ jah kelunan tong Bē Silat éh atek mejam lan tesok sukét.

**Lesak Tukin.** Iah murip tong Lēng Lamai, iot Bē Kusan, daleh Bē Kusan. Sukét Kangkaput nah itu’ jah sukét Penan Selungoh éh nasék tong kura’-kura’ sukét éh senurat tong bup itu’. Pengajau urip redu itu’ masék 60 duman.

**Madai Sahu’.** Iah Pengajau Uma’ Lēng Luar tong Bē Plieran, daleh Belaga. Umun nah puun 50 duman.

**Tugang Sugun.** Iah Pengajau Uma’ Leng Jēk tong Bē Seping, daleh Belaga. Pengajau urip nah puun 60 duman.

Introduction

The Penan have a rich store of folk stories which they call sukêt. They categorize sukêt into sukêt jian ("good stories"), sukêt saat ("bad stories") and sukêt keletê ("playful stories"). They also categorize sukêt by whether they are about animals, human beings, or about human beings and animals sharing the same environment.

Sukêt jian can be classified into two categories. The first category contains stories about the adventures and exploits of folk heroes. These are the people at the apex of society, the aristocrats (maren or paren). According to Penan, this type of sukêt jian is borrowed from the Kayan and Kenyah, especially the Sebop, a Kenyah sub-group with whom the Penan have linguistic affinities. The Kayan and the various Kenyah sub-groups live in stratified societies.

The second type of sukêt jian is also about kelunan jian ("good people"), but unlike the first, the characters are ordinary members of the community. The kelunan jian ("good people") are different from the ordinary members of the community because they are always successful in whatever they do.

Sukêt saat are stories about kelunan saat ("bad people"). They are poor (mesikin); they often go hungry (melau'); and they lead a difficult life (urip tusah). There are also characters in sukêt saat who are lazy (meleku), stingy (iba) and envious (ratin).

Sukêt keletê are "playful stories" about idiotic, simple, or witless people (kelunan bêk) or fools (kelunan palê). Notwithstanding the fact that these characters are idiotic, simple, or witless, such stories can be humorous, similar to the character of Apai Salui in the Iban ensera (folk tale or saga tradition).

Sukêt are told at night on the longhouse gallery (awa), in an individual apartment (lamin), in a jungle camp (lamin tana'), or in a hunting camp (lamin turu). They are an important form of entertainment.

Listeners sit around the storyteller as he or she tells the story. While listening, the audience may engage in activities such as weaving mats or baskets, splitting or shaving strips of rattan, or carving the handles or scabbards of bush knives (malat).
Depending on who the storyteller is, listeners may participate in the narration. For instance, as the storyteller narrates a scene or an event, the listeners may chip in a quick remark or two about the characters in the story, praising the deeds or exploits of the hero or condemning the wicked schemes of the villain. They may comment on how well a particular scene in the story is described by the storyteller. This encourages the storyteller to be more innovative and lively in his or her narration.

When a person dies and people gather together to keep vigil over the body, sukēt may be told during the night to relieve the mourners’ feelings of bereavement (nevalau kenep). Only sukēt jian ("good stories") are told on such occasions.

Sukēt can be spoken (bara’ mengetē), chanted, or sung (kajun).

When a sukēt is spoken, the storyteller mimics and sometimes acts out the part of the characters in the narrative to make the story more exciting and entertaining. When a sukēt is chanted or sung (kajun), certain words are arranged in pairs (ipēt) to create rhymes. The art of pairing words is called mipēt. Mipēt adds beauty to the story.

Sukēt that storytellers chant or sing (mengajun) are, in fact, epics. To chant or sing an epic story requires a lot of skill. Very few Penan storytellers today can tell stories this way.

The main purpose in telling sukēt is to entertain listeners. However, there are other important purposes of sukēt in Penan society. Learning about human activities and behaviour, the challenges of life, and how life is lived, takes place through the telling and listening to sukēt. Activities, events and characters are used to mirror the realities of everyday Penan life.

Sukēt are a repository of Penan knowledge, beliefs and values which are passed down orally from one generation to another. Some of what comprise their norms and values are encoded in sukēt. Each time a sukēt is told, the norms and values of the community are unconsciously presented to the audience. Whether or not these are taken seriously, the sukēt is there to convey messages and keep alive traditions, norms, and values.

The present volume comprises ten folk stories: seven animal stories and three about human characters interacting with the environment. Of the ten
stories, nine were collected from the Western Penan and one from the Eastern Penan.

With regard to orthography, (e) is used in the Penan texts to denote a schwa, (') indicates a glottal stop, and two vowels represent a long vowel sound, for instance ‘aa’ or ‘uu’.

In compiling this volume of sukēt, various people have contributed their knowledge, time and energy. First and foremost, I would like to acknowledge with gratitude, the contribution of the storytellers: Balan Balang of Long Bee, Silat River, Baram; Bulan Dian of Long Peran, Seping River, Belaga; Dian Lawai of Long Jekitan, Silat River, Baram; Ding Usang of Bē Purau, Silat River, Baram; Lesak Tukin of Long Lamai, Upper Baram, Baram; Madai Salu’ of Long Luar, Plieran River, Belaga; Tugang Sugun of Long Jēk, Seping River, Belaga; and the late Usang Japi’ of Long Ketuet, Belaga River, Belaga.

David Kala of the Belaga District Office and Nyura’ Keti of the Baram District Office edited my transcription of the original texts in Western Penan, which I gratefully acknowledge. David Kala transcribed the Eastern Penan version of the story of Kangkaput, and for this I would like to thank him. Penghulu Pau Tului of Long Wat, Danum River, Belaga; and Matu Tugang and Avun Sugun of Long Jēk, Seping River, Belaga helped me with the more subtle aspects of Penan idiomatic expressions, and for this I am most grateful.

Dr Peter Brosius of the Department of Anthropology, University of Georgia, USA, read earlier drafts of both the Penan and English versions, and made useful comments and suggestions. To him I would like to say, “Jian lan adēt ko’ kēh!”

My wife, Ann Armstrong read an earlier draft of the English version. She helped to change the rigid literal translations from Penan so that the effect of the English translations is as in the original Penan version. For this, I am most grateful.

1 Needham classified the Penan culturally and in terms of their dialects into Eastern and Western Penan. The Eastern Penan are confined to the Baram and Limbang watersheds while the Western Penan are found in the Rejang watershed and along the Silat River in Baram District. The two groups speak variations of dialects of the same language, and although in broad terms they are very similar, for instance, in their adaptation to the forest environment, there are some significant differences between them (See Rodney Needham, “Penan and Punan”. In F.M. LeBar (ed.), Ethnic Groups of Insular Southeast Asia, Vol 1: Indonesia, Amdaman Islands, and Madagascar. New Haven: Human Relations Area Files Press, 1972).
The late Tan Sri Datuk Gerunsin Lembat, Head of the Majlis Adat Istiadat from 1987 to 1995, was the driving force behind the Majlis effort to collect and preserve the oral tradition of the Dayak. This volume is dedicated to his memory.

I would like to express my deep appreciation for the encouragement given by the present Head of the Majlis Adat Istiadat, Datuk Tra Zehnder. I would also like to thank the members of the Board of the Majlis, especially Datuk Amar (Dr) Leonard Linggi Jugah for his keen interest in oral tradition, his advice and much else. A personal note of thanks to Mary Dau William for keying these stories in the computer and integrating them in draft form.

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Professor Michael Leigh of the Institute of East Asian Studies, UNIMAS, and Professor Clifford Sather, Chair of Dayak Studies, UNIMAS, have not only been instrumental in getting this volume published, but have also provided professional advice. To them I would like to say, “Thank you”.

Any shortcomings in the original Penan transcriptions or the English translations are entirely mine, and I alone am responsible for them.

Jayl Langub
Majlis Adat Istiadat
Chief Minister’s Department
Kuching, Sarawak
February 2001
Puun Pia’

Irah Penan puun pina’ suket. Suket itu’ sukat tenulat tong telu’ tulat: suket jian, suket saat ngan suket keletė. Piah péh irah Penan menulat suket itu’ tong suket kaan, suket kelunan, ngan suket kelunan ngan kaan pekua’ murip tong tana’.

Suket jian sukat tenulat tong duah tulat. Tulat éh menen néh, sukét kena’ pengelakau ngan hadui irah bale’ suket éh pakat maren ketawa’ paren. Suket kena’ itu’ irah Penan alē jin irah Kayan, Kenyah ngan Sebop éh pedani pia’ ngan Penan. Irah Kayan, Kenyah ngan Sebop itu’ kelunan éh pun tulat pakat tong pepeng irah.

Suket jian éh keduaht itu’ bara’ irah bale’ suket jian, tapi’ irah yēng kelunan maren. Irah itu’ petiken jin irah kelunan male, duku’ irah kelunan mekawi’. Tong kekat hadui irah itu’, irah puun nasip.

Suket saat bara’ irah bale’ suket saat. Irah itu’ bale’ suket mesekin, bale’ suket peging melau yēng puun penguman, ngan pina’ penusah urip irah. Puun kah irah bale’ suket tong suket saat itu’ bale’ suket meleku, iba ngan ratin.


Suket itu’ tenēsok tong awa, tong lamin uma’ jau, lamin tana’ ngan lamin turu. Puku’ nah mara’ suket ngan kelunan pina’ ayu’ ngejian kenep kelunan pina’.

Irah éh ngenini’ suket itu’ menyun ngelivut kelunan éh tēsok suket inah. Atē irah tēsok suket itu’ kelunan éh ngenini’ suket inah sukat menyam berat ngan ingēn, memila’ ngan menyalit lakē ketawa’ manu’ peda’ ngan suah malat.

Naat sii éh tēsok suket inah, kelunan éh ngenini’ suket inah sukat alē tulat pia’ tong suket inah. Itung tada’ nah, daun nah kelunan éh tēsok suket
inah mia’ hadui irah bale’ sukét tong sukét inah, kelunan éh ngenini’ sukét
inah sukat menyukung ketawa’ mipè pia’ éh tésok sukét inah. Inah manu’
kelunan éh tésok sukét inah makin kelu’ éh manu’ sukét inah jian
kenini’.

Daun nah puun kelunan matai, kekat kelunan tong uma’ buat inah
petipun peteme patai nah inah. Tong merem inah, irah sukat bara’ sukét
nevalau kenep irah éh puun patai inah. Tong merem inah suma sukét jian
sukat éh tésok.

Puun duah jalan irah bara’ sukét: bara’ mengaté ngan kenajun.

Daun nah sukét itu’ tenésok mengaté, kelunan éh nara’ inah mengayau
irah bale’ sukét tong sukét inah daku’ nah rangah sukét inah manu’ jian
kenini’ irah kelunan pina’.

Daun nah sukét inah kenajun, irah mangun pia’ ipét inah jian. Manu’
pia’ ipét inah maan, tapi’ ipét inah manu’ sukét inah éh jian kenini’.

Sukét éh kenajun inah sukét éh bale’ sukét jian. Mengajun ketawa’
mipét sukét maan nanu’. Yéng puun pina’ kelunan mejam mengajun
ketawa’ mipét sukét.

Reti menyukét tong adét Penan, mena’ jian kenep ngan kelunan pina’.
Tapi’, puun kah reti beken tésok sukét tong adét irah Penan.

Ayu’ pekejam hadui kelunan, gaya’ kekat kelunan murip ngan ngelapah
penusah urip, inah irah Penan ngenini’ gaya’ urip bale’ sukét éh tong sukét.
Sukét inah itung menaat adét tong kelinge.

Sukét inah ayu’ jah laman tong mena’ penggejam ngan adét urip éh nena’
ngan anak avi’ ayam éh au itu’. Pemina’ adét Penan puun nina’ tong sukét.
Kat liwet sukét inah tenésok, puun adét ja’ poling ngan kelunan pina’.
Daun nah puun kelunan terima’ ketawa’ yéng puun terima’ adét éh poling jin
sukét inah, éh jian nah sukét inah jah tok pepusit adét Penan éh puun retil
ngan irah Penan.

Puun pulu sukét Penan senurat tong bup itu’: tujék sukét joh kaan ngan
telu’ joh kelunan murip pakua’ ngan kaan tong tana’. Jin pulu’ sukét itu’,
pian sukét jin irah Penan Belaga ngan Bë Silat. Suma jah sukét jin Penan
Selungo.
Dalem aku’ menakup sukét itu’, pina’ kelunan mena’ tulong ngan ki’. Eh menen nah aku’ bara’ jian kenep ngan irah eh tésok sukét itu’ kena’ Balan Balang jin Lengkap Bee tong Bé Silat, daleh Bé Kusan; Bulan Dian jin Lengkap Peran tong Bé Seping, daleh Belaga; Dian Lawai jin Lengkap Tikan tong Bé Silat, daleh Bé Kusan; Ding Usang jin Bé Purau tong Bé Silat, daleh Bé Kusan; Lesak Tukin jin Lengkap Lamai tong iot Bé Kusan; Madai Salu’ jin Lengkap Luar tong Bé Plieran, daleh Belaga; Tugang Sugun jin Lengkap Jék tong Bé Seping, daleh Belaga; ngan matai Usang Japi’ jin Lengkap Ketuet tong Bé Belaga, daleh Belaga.


Lake’ Jau Pit (Dr Peter Brosius) jin Department of Anthropology, University of Georgia, USA eh puun naat sukét eh senurat itu’ tong pia’ Penan ngan pia’ Inggerit. Iah puun pusit kenep nah eh miin pengejam eh jian tong sukét itu’. Ngan nah aku’ bara’ jain lan adet ko’ kéh!.

Redu ki’ Ann Armstrong puun naat ngan ngejian salin ki’ sukét itu’ tong pia’ Inggerit duku’ nah teneng reti pakua’ pia’ Penan. Ngan nah aku’ bara’ jian kenep.


Aku’ bara’ jian kenep ngan Redu Jau Datuk Tra Zehnder, Pengajau Majlis Adat Istiadat langit itu’ duku’ nah mena’ ami’ tong Majlis Adat Istiadat tulong tong hadui ami’. Kéh péh aku’ bara’ jian kenep ngan irah Lake’ Jau tong tipun Majlis Adat Istiadat, kena’ Lake’ Jau Datuk Amar (Dr)