

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

Laura Pranti Tutom¹, Siti Marina Binti Kamil²

¹Faculty of Music and Performing Arts, Sultan Idris Education University, Tanjung Malim, Perak, Malaysia

²Faculty of Language and Communication, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, Kota Samarahan, Malaysia

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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

get the blessings from the *Petara*. It could include getting good results in school or university examinations, getting good luck in business, getting work promotions and even winning the state elections. It is also believed that the *Petara*'s blessing can cure sickness.

An early survey done by the researcher has shown that the current younger generation of the Ibans do not know of *Timang Tuah* as it is not commonly practiced in the city. The reason this is happening is the lack of knowledgeable and skilled senior members of the Iban community to carry out the ritual. In addition, Soda (2001) stated that the migration on the Ibans born in the 50s to the 60s along with the migration of those born in the 70s and above to the city area and leaving the long houses have all added to the cause. This became the utmost reason to the question of why a majority of Iban old rituals are no longer being practiced. Another important reason is the spread of Christianity that hinders the need to perform these rituals (Durin, 2014).

According to Steiner (2007) and Durin (2014), Christianity became the main religion amongst the Ibans and *Timang* is no longer the main ‘go-to’ ritual to solve daily problems of the people related to agriculture, business and illnesses as the religion forbids paganism. An interview with Mr. Jimbun anak Tawai, a researcher from the Sarawak Native Customs Council, and Associate Professor Anna Durin, an active researcher in Culture in Sarawak, there exist only a few districts in Sarawak that still actively practice the old *Timang* rituals. These are in Kapit, Sarikei, Bintulu and Sri Aman.

Hence before this ritual become a forgotten tradition, the researcher aims to document the ritual and spread the awareness about it while finding the reasons why it should be protected. Documenting the ritual both in audio and video is priority as to preserve this valued cultural heritage of the Ibans and above all sharing it to the global community in order to mark its existence. The researcher believes that *timang* is rich in artistic values especially in the text and the singing style of the *lemambang*, whose role is central when inviting the *Petara* during the ritual. This ritual act is also a symbol of an old Iban identity that needs to be made known to the present Iban community in Sarawak especially.

Lastly as it is hidden from the outside world, and as it is only being practiced by a small community of Ibans left with no proper documentation, it would be a great loss to its owner if not documented. The decreasing number of *lemambang* left is also a major concern which adds to the more reason why this study should be carried out.

2 METHODOLOGY

This is a qualitative study looking at musicality of *Timang Tuah*. The qualitative method as stated by Kumar Ranjit (2005) and Uzairah (2017) begins with collecting the primary data by interviewing the identified primary resources. In this study the primary informant consists of the Head of the Iban community, the Head of the longhouse, the researcher from the Sarawak Native Customs Council and the *lemambang*. Data collected will include knowledge about *Timang*, the frequency of the *Timang* ritual carried out in Kapit Sarawak, the number of active *lemambang* and the number of younger Iban generation who participated in the ritual acting as observers and their interest in the ritual.

The method of choosing the types of *Timang* is taken from the total number of *Timang* that consists of four types, and choosing a sample via justification sampling. The chosen *Timang* for this study is *Timang Tuah*. *Timang Tuah* is chosen because it is most frequently done in Kapit as compared to all the other types of *Timang*. Furthermore, the scope of study is in Kapit and focuses on the singing done by the *lemambang* in the ritual, *Timang Tuah* is justified.

The next process is direct observation which is to be done in a thorough manner throughout the ritual in order to understand and immerse in the experience. The researcher is to follow the ritual from pre-stage which is the preparation before the ritual. Interviews with all participants involved in the preparation is to be carried out and if allowed, the researcher will participate in the preparation itself. In the while-stage, the researcher is to observe the preparation undertaken by the *lemambang* from the moment before the ritual until the ending. Passive observation will be carried out by the researcher once the *lemambang* starts the ritual and the focus will be on the singing of the *lemambang* and the musical instruments used.

The researcher will interview the *lemambang* and the elders to find out of their views on the *timang*. A survey will be conducted among the guests who are present during the ritual. This is to find out at the emotional effect and impact of the ritual on those present. The secondary data on the ritual will be collected through books, articles, and websites related to the *timang*. The need for the secondary data is to do comparison to the primary data. Textual analysis will not be carried out for the purpose of this study.

3 FINDINGS

Timang in Iban language refers to an Iban ritual that uses the service of two to four *lemambang* or known as the *Tukang Timang* who act as the medium of performing the text ritual sang in a monotonous tone while pounding the *timang* stick in order to execute the full ritual of the *timang* that normally takes up three to nine days in total. *Tuah* in Iban language refers to good luck and in the context of this ritual, luck here would reflect giving monetary luck or an abundant of fortune to the people who organized the ritual especially during the election of a politician and uplifting their status to becoming a minister (Tawai et al., 2017).

According to Masing (1981), *timang* consists of four categories, namely;

- *Timang Beintu Intu* (ritual for the wellbeing of man)
- *Timang Tuah* (ritual of getting luck)
- *Timang Beneh* (ritual of getting paddy seedlings)
- *Timang Gawai Amat* (highest form of ritual)

The difference among these four *timang* is that each *timang* differs in time consumed, textual plot and purposes. However, the singing style are the same. Eventhough all four *timang* are different, there are two main factors that contribute to why this *timang* is considered of high value among the Ibans.

The first factor is, the ritual done in a grand manner during a *gawa* day (festival day) or *gawai* (festivities) along with the *lemambang*. The second factor is through the text of the *lemambang*; as the text is an invocation to the deity known as the *Petara* from their world and leading them to the human world (the long house) and perform the ritual.

The *timang* performed in a chant is carried out by the *lemambang* to summon upon a genie to attend *gawai* or a festival. The singing is done during planting and harvesting paddy, medication and others. Matusky and Sooi Beng (1997) stated that in a *Timang* ritual where will be at least four *lemambang*. The *lemambang* will perform the chant for hours. In the chant, the first and second line will be started by the *lemambang* and these lines are called *genteran* or *couplet*. At the end of the second line or refrain of the singing will be sung together and repeatedly in a choir by the assistant *lemambang* and others. At the final two lines the assistant of the *lemambang* will answer to the singing of the main *lemambang* and this is known as *timbal*. All four *lemambang* will alternately pound their stick to the floor with a stable rhythm along with their *Timang*.

Petara, as mentioned here according to Ngadi (1998) in his book on Iban rituals, the old Iban society

believed in the existence of *Petara* (Deity) and *antu* (dead souls) whereby in all living things including animals, insects, plant produce, human both dead and alive, has a certain kind of soul. The deities referred here include *Singalang Burong* (war), *Menjaya* (health and cure), *Simpulang Gana* (earth and plant produce), *Simpandai* (creator and healer) dan *Anda Mara* (wealth).

In this old tradition, the Ibans believe that there exist good and bad souls (*antu manah, antu jai*). In the *Timang* ritual the god and goddess will provide signs to humans through *burong* (signs in the forms of birds, snakes, frogs and other animals) and through dreams related to the desired requests to indicate whether the requests are accepted or otherwise. Masing (1981) stated that all ritual activities performed in the Iban community is based on dreams. Through dreams, it will be known whether the rituals should be carried out or not. Everything begins with a dream.

An interview carried out with Madam Emma anak Philip, who is a clerk at a school in Kapit, upon the end of a *Timang* ritual at her house in Kapit, described how Madam Emma had a dream before performing the ritual. In her dream she had helped a group of *jugam* (black bear) whose family was killed by a group of humans. The question that came to amaze the researcher is the fact that there were two other people who lived in Kapit and who did not know Madam Emma. They had dreams that required them to look for a woman by the name of Emma as she has helped save their family (they did not mention that they were a *jugam* family).

The process of detecting Madam Emma took a few weeks eventhough Kapit is considered a small district. Once the three of them finally met, they arranged a meeting with the Head of the Community to organize a *Timang Tuah* ceremony for Madam Emma.

According to Mr Jimbun anak Tawai *Timang* usually begins with *Miring*, where food is offered to the desired *Petara* in order to give blessing and ease to what is being requested by the person who will be *Timang*. Food is prepared in a number of large plates made up of five to eight eggs in a plate, *penganan* (rice cake), sticky rice, *tuak* (rice wine) poured in a glass, pop corn and *sirih kapur* (slaked lime). The amount of food prepared would depend on the type of *Timang* being performed.

The purpose of doing *Miring* is to offer food to the *Petara* being summoned. According to Iban beliefs, the food consumed by the *Petara* is also to be consumed by the guests present for the ritual. The guests of honour are symbolic to the *Petara*

summoned. In addition, the presence of these guests in the likes of ministers and politicians are considered very important for the ritual.



Figure 1: *Miring* offered. Source from Emma anak Phillip, 2016

In March 2015, the researcher participated in a fieldwork led by Associate Professor Anna Durin on Old Iban Customs in Kapit. A *Timang Tuah* ritual was carried out at Madam Rheineld Minor Panyau’s house in Kapit town. Madam Rheineld is the Chairperson of *Serakup Indu Dayak* (Dayak Women Association) and is a business woman. The ritual was done in three days. Information gathered in the ritual will now be described accordingly; pre, while and post ritual.

3.1 Pre Ritual

A month before the *Timang Tuah* ritual is carried out, the owner or the organizer of the ritual will proceed with the preparation by getting advice from the Head of the Iban community and the elderly who are well versed of the ritual. The discussion would guide them on where to perform the ritual and who to delegate tasks. As the dream was received by more than one person and all three dreams suggested that the ritual be carried out by Madam Reineld’s family, the *Timang* will be carried out as proposed. Next is to delegate tasks and put things in order.

The outcome of the discussion is the list of people to be in charge of the several tasks. The tasks include preparing the *miring*, food and beverage throughout the ritual and for the vip guests, preparing the traditional costumes for family members and for those delivering the *miring* tray and choosing the *lemambang*. Preparation will also include looking for items to be given to the *lemambang* as a form of token for their service. The token will be in the form of four *baja* (iron rods), *tajau* (vase), *duku bersarung* (sheathed knife), *pendawan siti* (a spear with a single blade), a chicken, *pua kumbu* (a traditional woven cotton cloth), *piring singkat empat* (each item in the

plate is divided into four), a plain white cloth (about 13 meter in length) and monetary gift totaling RM750 to be divided among the three *lemambang*.

3.2 While Ritual

A week before the ritual takes place, a *pandung* containing items such as *tajau* (vase), *tawak* (gong), rattan, *pua kumbu*, betel nuts, a few pieces of clothing to tie the *pandung* and a flight of stairs, symbolic as the staircase to the sky is prepared.



Figure 2: *Pandung* Source from Yow Chong Lee, 2015

The chosen *lemambang* invited for this ritual is Mr Enggong anak Baning born in 1954. His hometown is Sungai Majau, Kapit and according to informant Mr. Enggong has had the skill of performing the ritual since he was 24 years old. For this ritual he will be assisted by two other *lemambang*. Up till present, it is informed that there are only four active *lemambang* residing in Kapit.



Figure 3: Mr. Enggong anak Baning (*Lemambang*). Source from Emma Phillip, 2016

The *Timang* ritual begins as early as five in the

afternoon and continues until the next morning. Once the first session finishes, the *lemambang* will have a rest until the afternoon and resumes for the second session at the same time on the second day until the ritual is done. This process will be repeated for three consecutive days. The textual plot used and sung by the *lemambang* follows the plot handed to them during the process by the *Petara*. The path that they will take are recorded as follows (taken by Allen, C., 2017);

- *Bujang Pedang ninga auh ribut lalu rari* (Bujang Pedang listened to gushes of wind and ran away).
- *Bini Sengalang Burung chelap bulu* (Wife of Sengalang Burung felt cold due to the strong wind storm)
- *Ribut mangkaka rumah Sengalang Burung* (the strong wind from the storm hit the house of Sengalang Burung).
- *Ngiga kayu rumbang tutong* (Looking for a holed wood to make drums).
- *Sida Ketupong Mansang ngayau* (Ketupung and friends went to war and found heads of enemies to be brought back to the fiesta)
- *Menua Besi Api* (World of Iron Fire)
- *Menua Tuchok* (World of Tuchok Lizard)
- *Menua Sandah* (World of Sandah)
- *Menua Rioh* (World of Serangga Rioh)
- *Menua Nendak* (World of Nendak)
- *Menua Beragai Samatai Manang Burung* (World of Bird Shaman Beragai)
- *Menua Kelabu Papau Nyenabung* (World of Bird Kelabu Papau Nyenabung)
- *Menua Pangkas tauka Kutuk* (World of Bird Pangkas or Bird Kutuk)
- *Menua Bejampung* (World of Bird Bejampung)
- *Menua Embuas* (World of Bird Embuas)
- *Menua Ketupung* (World of Bird Ketupung)
- *Menua Kunding Burung Malam Menua Rintung Langit Pengulur Bulan* (World of Bird Kunding)
- *Bala Ketupung nyurung lalu ngaga langkau kayau* (Ketupung and warriors built huts)
- *Ketupung enggau Beragai matak bala* (Ketupung and Beragai lead the warriors to war)
- *Bala Ketupung nuntung ba rumah Beduru/Nising* (Ketupung team arrived at Beduru longhouse).
- *Wa puji* (Singing of Praise).
- *Wa Empas* (Singing of Anger).
- *Pulai Ngabas* (Back from spying)
- *Sengalang Burung nusui mimpi diri* (Sengalang Burung narrating his dream).
- *Mimpi Ketupung* (Ketupung Dream)
- *Mimpi Beragai* (Beragai Dream)
- *Bala Ketupung ngerampas* (Ketupung group made their attack).
- *Datai ba tinting pangka sealing pulai nyerang* (arriving at the end of ridge ground, Ketupung warriors cheered for their victory)
- *Bini Sengalang Burung nyambut igi balang* (Wife of Sengalang Burung accepted the gift of enemy heads)
- *Aki Lang Sengalang Burung mai ngabang* (Sengalang Burung inviting people to visit)
- *Mansa Tembawai Lama Sengalang Burung* (Through the old path of Sengalang Burung longhouse)
- *Menua Bujang Jegalang* (World of Bujang Jegalang)
- *Mansa Batu Ansa* (Through the Road of Batu Asah)
- *Mansa pun buluh berani* (Through the Road of Buluh Berani)
- *Pintu Langit* (Arrival at the Door to the Sky)
- *Bala Sengalang Burung ngetu ba pintu langit ke rapit* (the Group of Sengalang Burung arrived at the enclosed Door to the Sky)
- *Menua Aki Ungkuk* (World of Datuk Ungkuk)
- *Menalan Sabung* (A place of Sabung Ayam)
- *Ngerara rampa menua* (Appreciating the beauty of the place encountered)
- *Menua Raja Siba Iba* (World of Raja Siba Iba)
- *Menua Burung Raya* (World of Burung Raya)
- *Menua Sera Gindi* (World of Sera Gindi)
- *Menua Bengkung apai Kuang Kapung* (World of Bengkung, Father Kuang Kapung)
- *Menalan Besai* (A place with great view)
- *Menua Bhiku Bunsu Petara* (World of Highest Deity, Bhiku Bunsu)
- *Menua Selampandai* (World of Selampandai)
- *Menua Raja Rengayung - Kijang* (World of Raja Rengayung - Deer)
- *Menua Rusa* (World of Deer)
- *Menua Raja Remaung* (World of Tiger King)
- *Kendi Aji* (Cross junction Road)
- *Kampung Baung* (A silent Jungle)
- *Menua Aki Dunju* (World of Datuk Dunju)
- *Menua Durong Biak* (World of the youngest Durong)
- *Menua Bunsu Petara* (World of Dewa Bunsu)
- *Menua Bangkung* (The resting place)
- *Bala Sengalang Burung mandi* (Sengalang Burung group bathing)
- *Bini Sengalang Burung mandi* (Wife of Sengalang Burung bathing)
- *Bala Sengalang Burung begari* (Sengalang

burung and followers dressing up to attend the feast or ritual held)

- *Bala Indu besanggul* (Women with buns hair)
- *Bala Sengalang Burung niki ke rumah* (Sengalang Burung and followers entered the house to begin the feast)

3.3 Transcripts of Timang Tuah



Figure 4: Excerpt of *Timang Tuah* Transcript, Bar 1 to 3

In the excerpt of the transcript from bar 1 to 11, the melody uses the la - do tone, in example, G, A, Bb. Depending on the vocal range of the *lemambang* and the text being used, the *lemambang* will sing the text with at least *interval thirds*. In the singing of the ritual, there is also *mordent* found to be stressed on the note with the longest duration.



Figure 5: Excerpt of *Timang Tuah* Transcript Bar 4 to 11

The use of inconsistent key is heard sung by the *lemambang* and this is due to the fact that they are not

equipped with any kind of tuner or musical instruments with a pitch. In bar 10 and 11, during the pause (not recorded in text) with a long note, the *lemambang* sang the vowel sound ‘eeh’ in minim duration or more and in vibrato. The *genteran* or the first line sang by the first *lemambang* will then be ‘ditimbal’ or echoed by the second and the third *lemambang*. This *call and response* style (Kamien, 2000) does not continue until the end of the ritual and it can be said that it is not in accordance to the use of the *call and response*.

Matusky (2012) in her article entitled ‘*Timang (pengap), pelian, and sabak: Iban leka main singing styles*’ stated that there are differences in the melody style performed in different districts. As the researcher observed the performance by the *lemambang*, it can be concluded that the feel invoked by the *lemambang* while carrying the melody at the beginning of each key is sang with inconsistent key and rhythm. However there is a pattern of rhythm being used and this can be seen in picture six.

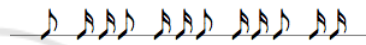


Figure 6: Melody Rhythm Motive

On the contrary the rhythm made by the *timang* stick showed a stable beat, crochet 85 to 90 beat per minute. At the beginning of each text being sung in the *Timang Tuah* is as inconsistent. It depended on the way the *lemambang* is engrossed in communicating with the spiritual world, which of course depended on their level of experience and the style passed down to the *lemambang*.

Masing (1981) stated that the stanza structure or the paragraphs in the *Timang* text is ABCD or ABCBDB. There are also stanzas in the form of AAAAB, and ABAB. Therefore any form of mistakes heard by the Iban audience may reflect a mistake in the text performed by the *lemambang* while the ritual takes place. This indicated that there still exist indifferences and inconsistency in the speech or the text stanza (Masing, 1981).

Unlike the Malay *pantun* as stated by Harun Mat Piah (2001), in general in each four lines of stanza, four words aligned will have the a, b, a, b rhythm. Each stanza in the Malay *pantun* is divided into two parts, namely the *pembayang* (clue) and the *maksud* (meaning). The difference between the *Timang* and the Malay *pantun* is that there are no particular part that acts as the *pembayang* and the *maksud* but the text will be in the form of either a metaphor, figurative and symbolic.

Through observations, it is noted that the *lemambang* during the ritual no longer wears the *baju burung*. A vest with the motive of the *pua kumbu* is worn instead. The *Tungkat Timang* (*Timang* stick) used no longer made of wood with bells dangling at the bottom but is modified into iron stick. This observation was based on Masing (1981) dissertation where he recorded that in 1981 the stick used by the *lemambang* is a long stick 2 meters in length, decorated with Iban traditional carving motives, ribboned with chicken feathers at the top and small bells at the bottom. The bells added to the sound made when the stick is repeatedly pounded to the floor while the ritual is taking place.



Figure 7: *Lemambang* with the *Tungkat Timang*. Source from Chemaline, 2007 published in 2013



Figure 8: *Lemambang* with the *Tungkat Timang*. Source

from Yow Chong Lee, 2015

3.4 Post Ritual

The *Timang* ritual ended in the morning of the third day. This is done by closing the *miring* in order to reopen the way back to the sky for the *Petara* invited to the ritual. According to the plan of the ritual, a more descriptive narrative on the dreams will be shared between the owner of the dreams and the audience present during the ritual including the family of Madam Rheineld. While waiting for the final stage to happen a *bebuti* (teasing) event will be carried out to prevent the audience from getting sleepy and bored. For the ritual observed and experienced by the researcher, the *bebuti* was done by tying a group of the guests present together and a *lelabi* is tied at the end of the line. There was also a woman dressed up as a grandfather and a man dressed up as a woman for this event.

After lunch, all guests were invited to listen to the story of the dreams that resulted in the ritual. Here the elderly and the *lemambang* interpreted the dream in the best manner. Although this was done in the early stage when getting advice from the elderly and other family members of Madam Rheineld, it is common to be done as to protect the family from jealousy among other members of the society who might not accept the good luck happening to the family. This is as according to Iban beliefs whereby good dreams have to be shared and repeatedly mentioned. It is also believed that this is done to appease other spirits before the ritual is done.

According to Mr. Enggong, once all guests are home with a happy feeling and contented with the kind of good service offered, with no quarrels or fights while the ritual takes place and most importantly happy with the food and beverages served is a good sign. This is because they would never know if there could be a *Petara* among the guests present.

After a few months after the *Timang Tuah* ritual, the researcher once again interviewed Madam Rheineld and Madam Emma. According to Madam Emma, after the ritual her family has experienced a number of good luck whereby when they bought lottery tickets with their house number, car and motorcycle plate numbers, her husband won first, second and third places consecutively in the span of one week. The prize totaled up to twenty thousand ringgit. And as for Madam Rheineld, she has successfully secured a mega project. As she and her late husband have always been considered successful

in business, their belief in this ritual has somewhat added good fortune to their family business.

The findings from this study with regards to the effect and emotion of the guests especially the younger Iban generation have found that this group is now aware of the ritual and they have learnt about the do's and don'ts of the ritual. They found out that the guests are not allowed to wear black clothing and it is better to wear clothing with the motive of the *pua kumbu*. They are also advised not to have any feelings of sadness, anger and the urge to fight during the ritual, they are not allowed to get in the way of the *lemambang* when the *lemambang* are circling the *pandung* and all women delivering the *piring* are required to wear a full attire of the traditional Iban costume.

As for feelings and emotion during the ritual, a group of young guests felt a bit of fear when there were frequent cases of black outs at the Rheineld household. It happened throughout the ritual and on the final day the whole of Kapit town had a power outage that lasted for hours. The emotional effect on these younger generation of Ibans were recorded as fear, anxiety due to curiosity and thrilled at the same time. The next morning a joke circulated saying that there was a ‘visitor’ to the Rheineld house hence the blackouts.

As for the guests who lived in the vicinity of Madam Rheineld's house, it was stated that it often rained and shined at the same time causing rainbows to appear. While the ritual of building the *teresang* was carried out, a lot of guests saw a flock of eagles flying in circles in their neighborhood. Of course how far this is true is still a question.

According to Iban beliefs, when it rain while the sun is hot, it indicates that there are spirits coming and while this is happening, children are not allowed to play outside because it is feared that they might have a weak spirit and might be affected by it. In addition, it is believed that the rainbow is the place where the *Petara* descended and the eagles flying about are summoned as *Petara Sengalang Burung mengintai ke bumi* (the spirit descending to earth).

From the experiences mentioned by the guests present especially the younger generation, this is a new encounter, never before felt and the knowledge gained have made them even more curious about the ritual.

4 CONCLUSIONS

A comparison based on the dissertation written by Tan Sri Dr. James Jemut in 1981 has given a detailed

description on all types of Iban oral literature. From his observations, the frequency of the *Timang* rituals carried out in Kapit consist of three to four types and is carried out simultaneously at different parts of Kapit. The migration of Ibans to big cities have just started (in the same year). The history on this migration was recorded by Soda (2001) stating that there are two generations involved in the migration. The first being those born in the 50s to the 60s and the latter being those born in the 70s and above. This became the contributing factor of people no longer residing in the long houses and consequently creating a large gap whereby old traditions are no longer practiced and hold importance in the lives of the Ibans.

An interview with Madam Rheineld who organised the ritual recorded an expenditure in the range of five thousand to hundred thousand of Ringgit Malaysia. This differs from what Masing (1981) recorded whereby Ringgit Malaysia five hundred was the highest amount spent. This became the reason why not many people can afford to organize the ritual. Another contributing factor on why the ritual is not carried out at present is because most Ibans have converted to Christianity and the religion does not support this act of rituals.

A pilot study carried out by the researcher has shown that as the majority of the younger Iban generation are not residing the long houses additionally contributed to the lacking in appreciation to this old custom. A majority of the respondent were recorded as not being aware of the existence of the *Timang* ritual. As for the younger Iban generation living in Kapit, they did not know the reason and relevance of why the *Timang* existed.

In addition, another contributing factor was the text of the *Timang* is hardly understood by the younger generation hence resulting them to be uninterested in the ritual. The content of the text written in figurative language and in old Iban terms concerning Iban lifestyle in the olden days made it even more difficult for them to comprehend.

From the musical aspects of the *timang*, the *lemambang* is seen as holding the most important role in delivering the intention and request of the organizer in classic text acquired from the older generation. According to the Iban elderly the melody of the *timang* text cannot be sung beautifully as it defeats the purpose of the ritual. The monotonous delivery style came into existence while the *lemambang* tried to recall the text. As the *Timang* text is considered sacred (Tawai, 2017) the researcher may compare this ritual to those of Christianity and

Buddhism whereby a monotonous style or chant is used to for praising God and meditation.

As there are a few books that discussed *Timang*, the problem lies in no circulation of the book or no active promotion. Most books did not describe the meaning of the *Timang* text hence the researcher is grateful to the researchers at the Sarawak Native Custom Council for publishing a complete book on the process of the *Timang* ritual entitled “*Timang Gawai Ngiga Tuah. Lemambang Badindang anak Bajun*”. Although the book is written in Iban, the language used is easily understood. This is proof of a noble effort to kick start the spread of awareness on the old Iban culture to the world.

In order to preserve and maintain this ritual, a more drastic approach needs to be taken. This may be in the form of increasing write ups with regards to this subject matter. Regardless of the level hold by this ritual, the fact that it exists and is a form of identity and legacy to the Iban community must be upheld. The function and artistic value of the *Timang* has been shown and shared by this study. However, there are still rooms for further research looking at other perspectives for example looking at the role of the *lemambang* in the ritual.

It is hoped that through this study, the positive functions of this ritual towards the Iban community provide a reason and help spread the awareness to the younger generation on the importance of safeguarding the practice of this old ritual.

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