

TIWAH: THE ART OF DEATH IN SOUTHERN KALIMANTAN

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Abstrak

Kelompok etnis Dayak Ngaju di Kalimantan Tengah masih memelihara adat mengelola kematian, yang merupakan bagian tak terpisahkan dari kepercayaan Kaharingan. Kelompok etnis Dayak Ngaju (or Ngaju) terbagi lagi menjadi beberapa sub-kelompok kecil. Praktek mengelola kematian menekankan gagasan tentang hubungan kehidupan di alam maya dan alam baka yang dapat mempengaruhi kesejahteraan manusia yang masih hidup. Fokus pengelolaan kematian ini adalah upacara kematian Tiwah. Kegiatan pengelolaan kematian merupakan suatu karya manusia sebagai realisasi pemenuhan aspek spiritual kepada yang lebih berkuasa atas hidup manusia dan aspek sosial kepada sesama manusia dan lingkungan di sekitarnya. Artikel ini akan membahas kosmologi dan praktek Tiwah di salah satu sub-kelompok kecil ini mendiami daerah Pendahara pada Sungai Katingan. Tujuan pembahasan tersebut adalah agar dapat mengerti bentuk karya, representasi dari karya, dan konteks sosial karya tersebut.

Kata kunci: Austronesia, Ngaju, Pendahara, Tiwah, kosmologi, kematian, rumah, perahu, seni

A. Introduction

The concept of death was initially recognised by human in the Late Pleistocene and flourished in the Neolithic period. In the Neolithic period human gradually became more capable in dominating nature, which increasingly affected changes into their lifestyle Soejono (1993:125). Soejono claims that the most striking feature of the Neolithic lifestyle was the development of belief of life after death. The essence of prehistoric concept of death is conveying the ideas on relationships between life of the corporal world and the afterworld, which will influence the welfare of the living (Kusmartono 2001:53). Accordingly, this belief formed a specific mind-set and manners in managing death occurred in human's circle. The particular

viewpoint of death management comprises corpse-treatment and death ritual.

A group of people in Southern Kalimantan who persist ancient custom of death management up until today is the Ngaju. The Ngaju are believed to be descendent of the Austronesian-speaking people who migrated from South China into Island Southeast Asia, Pacific (Bellwood and Koon 1989:614) and Madagascar (Adelaar 1995:75). A group of people who will be discussed in particular are the Ngaju in Pendahara persists to practise the Kaharingan. I assume that some of the component of Tiwah practised by the Ngaju today has either been simplified or altered or omitted from Tiwah practised in the Dutch period. This article will provide information on Tiwah.

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Nevertheless, the Tiwah component which consists of activities of corpse-treatment, rituals and paraphernalia may be perceived as an art. A work can be defined as an art depends on the perception and interpretation of the perceiver. Furthermore, it depends also to the perceiver's background either culture or knowledge of concerning a work of art. The eternal question forwarded to recognise a work as art is 'to what extent a work (or activity) is considered art?' This article will discuss the cosmological approach and practise of Tiwah, added with personal experience attending the Tiwah, in order to be able to understand its form, representation, and social context.

II. The Ngaju in Pendahara

Pendahara is a village located along the west bank of the Katingan River in Central Kalimantan (Figure 1). Its territory is 152 square kilometres in width, surrounded by villages of Tarusan Danum and Kasongan. Pendahara lies on the south west lowland of the Barito Basin to the south of the Schwaner-Müller Mountain (Tono 1992:16). The majority of Pendahara is the Ngaju of the upper stream Katingan. Sulistyanto (2002:29) describes that the present population in Pendahara is approximately 100 family units. The main livelihood of the people is dry rice cultivation practiced alternately with horticulture and rattan-collecting. However, educational accomplishment in Pendahara is relatively high reaching tertiary level (informant: Widiyanto, 42 years old). 'Traditional' social stratification is administered by two leaders e.g. administrative governmental chief and

ritual chief. The first mentioned is the village head that manages and tends to the welfare of the community. The ritual chief consists of organizational chief, the Demang, and functional chief, the Pesor. Pesor is the most important position in relation to the Kaharingan, since it functions as the medium between human and supernatural being.

Ninety percent of the people in Pendahara maintain to practise the *Kaharingan*. Others perform Christianity and Islam. Etimologically, the *Kaharingan* derives from the word *haring* (existence without the presented by others), which is sacred, good, and perfect (Sjarifuddin 1992/1993:25; Riwtut and Husein 1993:112). This belief is taught and learned verbally from generation to generation. The *Kaharingan* followers believe that every object possesses spirit - animism and dynamism- which can either assist or destroy human (Schärer 1963:3). The mythology of heaven and earth and human, the *Kaharingan* acknowledge the 'Tree of Life', which constructs the concept of balance such as *im* (*yin*) and *yang* or female-male, day-night, light-dark, and up-below. This concept is subsequently manifested in the Ngaju's cosmological, social, ethical, and religious subsistence (Riwut and Husein 1993:120). This belief does not recognize the concept of hell (Mihing 1977/1978:57). The manifestation of human life is depicted in the lifestyle and custom performed by the Ngaju. The practise of custom is based on the principle that human life depends on nature. Therefore, the balance of nature -cosmos- has to be well protected; otherwise human will suffer imbalance life (Kutojo 1979:34).

III. The Concept of Death

Among the Ngaju, death is not merely the end of life, instead it is a transitional episode from the corporal world into the afterworld (Figure 2). Hence, death is the beginning of life in a new type of world. In order to commemorate the spirit of the dead and deliver it safely to the afterworld, the Ngaju perform death ritual. The Ngaju in Pendahara depict their afterworld as a new place with form and condition similar to the corporal world, however, more beautiful, perfect, and provide every human needs. In the afterworld, humans are relieved from miseries and illnesses. Although life in the afterworld is assumed comparable to the corporal world, differences faced by humans in the corporal world will not take place in the afterworld (Dyson and Asharini 1980/1981:29).

The Ngaju also believed that the life in the afterworld would not last. When the life of a spirit ends, it will suffer a second death. Consequently, it will return to the world in forms of a mushroom, fruit, flower, etc (Sulistyanto 2002:32). By means of those media the spirit will subsequently be reborn by a woman who has eaten either the mushroom or fruit. Based on this belief, within the family, if the child has physical or psychological similarities with the dead, he or she will be recognised as the reincarnation of the dead. Other means indicating future reincarnation is a vision perceived by a mother-to-be.

The everlasting continuity of human lifecycle is based upon the general Dayak myth and folklore that describes the world once does not acknowledge death. Humans live as immortals. However,

humans made a mistake for being bored living in contentment, and urged to find new things in life. Consequently, humans are punished into mortality.

IV. Death Ritual "Tiwah" in Pendahara

Tiwah is a term used by the Ngaju to address a death ritual in relation to a secondary burial in order to deliver the spirit to the Lewu Liau. The concept of death among the Ngaju comprises two levels of afterworld. The liau (spirit) of a recent deceased individual will temporarily occupy the Bukit Pasahan Raung. Not until a Tiwah has been performed then the spirit will be delivered into the lewu liau or lewu tatau (highest level of afterworld). The Ngaju believe that as long as the deceased has not been Tiwah, his or her spirit may disturb the living, especially who has direct relationships with the spirit (Dyson and Asharini 1980/1981:39). The main theme of death ritual represents a process of separation between the living and the deceased. The Tiwah is the climax and end of all the ritual performed in a human's lifecycle. A performance of Tiwah requires a large amount of fund. Consequently, it is necessary for the Ngaju in acquiring time to raise finance. Therefore, the Tiwah is usually held one until three years after the deceased has his or her primary burial. However, in certain case Tiwah can be performed directly after primary burial.

The Tiwah in Pendahara was performed collectively by 35 family units. The peak of the ritual was held on 15, 16, and 17 July 2002. However, the sequence of ritual could be classified as follow:

A. Pre-Tiwah Ritual

One month prior Tiwah the 35 family units formed a committee in charge of the ceremony. The first thing to be considered was to determine the location for the ritual and assign a Pesor to perform the *Tiwah* (Plate 1). The Pesor was acquired from another village, since Pendahara could not provide one. The Pesor would then decide the date of the Tiwah and managed spiritual contact with two eagles. These eagles flew around above a certain place, which will indicate the location to perform *Tiwah*. After the date was set, the work continued to focus on the construction balai tiwah (ritual platform) and sangkayraya. A Sangkayraya is an arrangement of bamboo poles (2 metres) resembling a cylinder. A small flag is attached to each point of the bamboo pole. The arrangement of bamboos is termed *sababulu*. There are two types of *sababulu*. The big *sababulu* is produced by splitting the upper part of the bamboo into several fractures. Afterwards, these fractures were plaited combined with rattan forming a relatively big cage on the end of the pole. In the olden times the big *sababulu* is functioned to place the enemy skull obtained by kayau (headhunting). After the headhunting activity has been banded, the posting of human skull became symbolic.

Adjacent to the big *sababulu* was placed a flagpole owned by the bekas tiwah (main organiser). The small *sababulu* was decorated by each of the anak tiwah (family units) involved in *Tiwah*. The sangkayraya was erected before the balai tiwah. After the Tiwah was concluded, the sangkayraya would be moved to the burial site close to the *pambak*, a wooden repository. The

pambak was the next object to be prepared, constructed as a wooden vault with a house-like-form approximately 4.5 cubic metres in dimension. One third of the *pambak* vault was planted underground. The *pambak* is usually made of ulin (ironwood *Eusideroxylon zwageri*) which can last more than a hundred year. Human bones were to be placed inside the *pambak* after *Tiwah*. Generally, before reburial the remnants of the deceased are burned. However, present day *Tiwah* in Pendahara does not recognise cremation.

Other preparation was the *sapundu*. The *sapundu* is a long post -2-3.5 in length- with one of its point crowned with a human figure. The *sapundu* post was planted at the courtyard where the Tiwah was performed. The *sapundu* was used as sacrificial tethering poles for water buffalos and an ox. A *bara-bara* was constructed in a form of a gateway located close to and facing the river. Next to the *bara-bara* were fixed wooden posts, as many as the number of *raung* (wooden coffin), connected to one another by strings of daun biru (local species of leaves). The last preparation before Tiwah was to gather the sacrificial animals comprising a water buffalo, an ox, one hundred and eighty nine wild pigs, and sixty-one chickens.

B. Tiwah Rituals

First Day

Monday, 15 July 2002, since 6am every family unit came to gather to the Tiwah court in the catchment of the Katingan River. The ritual is started at 7 am initiated by the Pesor (Kaharingan prayer lead). The Pesor sat on top of a gong (brass musical instrument). The family units sat in front of

the *Pesor* forming a horseshoe configuration. At the centre of the arrangement was placed a large mat-saucer of sticky rice. The prayers intended to inform the deceased that *Tiwah* will be performed immediately after recollecting their remnants and brought to the *Tiwah* court. Prior to inhumation, the family units stepped down from the *balai tiwah* and performed *manganjan* (ritual dance; Plate 2) encircling the sacrificial animals near the *sababulu*. Meanwhile, the *Pesor* took hands full of sticky rice and fed them to the sacrificial animals accompanied by mantras (charms). Subsequently, the wild pigs and chickens were the ones initially slain. The *manganjan* continued to performed while drinking the *baram* (rice wine). After seven lapses of dances, each family unit took the sacrificial animals to be cooked. Afterwards, the 35 family units and other villagers went together to the burial site and *tabuh* (inhume for *Tiwah*) 105 individuals.

Adjacent to the wooden grave markers were found *kelakang* (posts of bamboo) forming baskets to house oil lamps. Besides oil lamps, there were found sacrificial offerings such chicks, eggs, sticky rice, or "traditional" foods. The *kelakang* was placed three days in advance to the *Tiwah*. Before inhumation, the family of the deceased prepared and arranged clothings according to age and sex of the deceased. After the remnants were cleansed with coconut oil, they were placed in a small white coffins covered by cloths which acts as grave goods. During the inhumation, the family of the dead reverberated Dayak songs, the gongs were strike continuously, and *baram* is drank extensively by everyone attended the inhumation.

The small coffins were then gathered in the *balai raung* or *balai roni* (house of small coffins) accompanied by the families of the dead. At 3pm guests from other villages came to pay their respect bringing *laluhan* (ritual gifts) consist of animals or groceries. They were accepted at the *bara-bara*. Afterwards, the sacrificial water buffalo and ox were brought to be tethered on the *sapundu*. The family of the deceased alternately accompanied the coffins the entire night. Meanwhile, the guests continued to perform *manganjan* and drank *baram*.

Second Day

Tuesday, 16 July 2002, was the peak of the *Tiwah* ceremony. On this day, the sacrificial water buffalo and ox were to be slain. It is believed once in the past sacrificial offering tethered on the *sapundu* was a human or the *jipen* (slave) of the individual to be *Tiwah*. The water buffalo and ox were tethered by the neck. The rope was made of *akar tingang* (local wooden root) of 10 metres long. The icon-gender of the figure on the *sapundu* has to be definite, since it determines the sex of the sacrificial animals to be tethered. When a water buffalo is being sacrificed, there should be also other sacrificial animals that act as "companions". Otherwise, the family of the *Tiwah* will face certain threats of death.

The ritual was performed by piercing spears to the sacrificial animals alternately, by the family and guests of honour. In the past the sacrificial animals was butchered after pierced. However, today, after the influence of Islam has recognised by the Dayaks, the sacrificial animals are slain afterwards to be able to be eaten by

the Muslim. *Manganjan* was performed again either by the family or the guests, encircling the sacrificial animals three times, and eventually the meal was served.

Third Day

Wednesday, 17 July 2002, was the last day of *Tiwah*. There were more sacrificial wild pigs and chickens slain. The family of the dead prepared to bring the coffins to be reburied in the *pambak*. On the other hand, there was an old *pambak* that was demolished on the event, and replaced by a recent construction. However, the *Pesor* was said to be informed by the spirits housed in the old *pambak*, that they did not consent to be reburied among the recent dead. Despite the negation of the old spirits, the people of Pendahara seemed to understand the requirements because of the old spirits are ancient (500 years) and have a high social status.

At 2pm escorted by "traditional" music of gong, kenong, and kendang, the coffins were alternately stored inside the *pambak*. Two *pambak* were built by mutual cooperation of the people of Pendahara. When a member is performing *Tiwah*, either *pambak* (Plate 3) can be used as his or her secondary burial repository. The *pambak* was constructed to be able to provide as much space for many individuals that would last for a very long time. The *Tiwah* was ended by festive meals and *baram* (rice wine).

V. The Art of *Tiwah*

Every component of *Tiwah* shows particular characteristic of activity starting from the forming of *Tiwah* committee through the end by having meals together to mark

the end of the festivity. Each component could neither be separated nor omitted from the sequence of *Tiwah*, since it could obliterate the entire meaning of *Tiwah*. Furthermore, every component cannot stand alone, since it cannot represent meaning. The *Tiwah* cannot be performed without the preparation conducted in the Pre-*Tiwah* Ritual. Every form relates cosmologically and psychologically to one another.

Cosmologically, although the people of Pendahara acknowledge recent religions, they persist the belief and custom depending extensively to nature. The understanding of the refusal of the ancient spirit, which assumed to be old, powerful, and high in rank, to be reburied together with the recent deceased, psychologically represent high respect to the dead. Other psychological submission to nature, for instance, is total obedience to the *Pesor* who has the overall command of the *Tiwah* in progress, which consist of determining the date, location, prayers, and slaughtering the sacrificial animals. Only the *Pesor* can perform the *Tiwah*, since he is able to communicate with the spirits that are believed to dwell everywhere.

If we break down other components that are important in the sequence of *Tiwah*, the significant features are the *pambak*, *sapundu*, and sacrificial water buffalo and ox. There are several representations of *pambak*, which differ in every subgroup of the Ngaju in every geographical area of the river basin. Other form of repository that was not available in Pendahara is *sandong*, which is also made of wood; however, it is almost similar to a vessel than a house. Soejono (1993:31)

claims that prehistoric coffins usually form a vessel, which could bring the spirit of the dead to the afterworld. Ethnographic data in Kalimantan and other places in eastern Indonesia show that many burials of the 'traditional' groups tend to be boat-like forms. Hartatik (2001:101) also states that the term *perahu banama* used in Tiwah connotes with a boat in connection to death. However, Tillotson (1989) claims that burial repositories in Island Southeast Asia would be house-like. Her analysis was based on the historical background of population inhabiting the archipelago as descendent of the Austronesian-speaking people who practise agriculture. Furthermore, she describes that burial ritual usually carried out after harvest. Therefore, secondary burial structure has a house-like form. I argue that not all secondary burial repository will have a house-like form, first, because in eastern region of Island Southeast Asia exist groups of Proto-Austronesian that do not recognised agriculture, specifically wet agriculture, second, meaning beyond visual structure is 'deeper' and originate from a much older phase of history. In eastern Indonesia, the common shape of burial repository is a boat since the final destination of the soul is to the sea. Meanwhile, the *sapundu* in Pendahara has become a simplified form or more acculturated with the new religion recognised by the people. The simplified form addressed in this essay associate with the depiction of human figure on the *sapundu*. A five hundred years old *sapundu* would have carving of human figure showing rigid type forms. However, one will directly recognise it as 'traditional' *manusia kangkang*, which is almost similar to *tokwalu* of the *Kula* (Campbell 2002:106).

The *sapundu* in Pendahara depicts a human figure either wearing sarong or in slacks combined with shirt and a specific Muslim cap.

There are two versions in regard to Tiwah sacrificial offerings in association with the alteration from human sacrifice to animals. The first, based upon the Dayak myth, it is said that a was to be *jipen* tied up to a tethering post once approached by a human-like creature that freed him from the horrible ordeal. Once the tethering rope has been loosened, the *jipen* then transformed into the form of a water buffalo; second, sacrificing a *jipen* was prohibited in accordance to the band of headhunting activity. However, the interesting phenomenon is that although the Ngaju requires the necessity to be able to provide water buffalo for *Tiwah*, they actually do not breed water buffalos.

VI. Conclusion

The death ritual of Tiwah is a common activity to the Ngaju. The *Tiwah* is performed as respect paid to the deceased member of the family as well as their appreciation to nature. By appreciating nature they will be able to maintain the balance and the prosperity of their welfare. Each component of Tiwah can neither be separated nor omitted from the sequence of Tiwah nor can it stand alone, since it could obliterate the entire meaning of Tiwah. Every form relates cosmologically and psychologically to one another. To the perceiver, the ritual of Tiwah represent the particular style of the Ngaju in Pendahara in adjusting to an acculturation caused by the influence of recent religion either Christianity or Islam, which differs from other death ritual

either among the Ngaju or other groups of Dayaks in Kalimantan. Conclusively, can this particular style of activity be perceived as a

work of art? In the end, still, the perceiver is the determinant actor.

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