

The Sarawakiana Series - Culture & Heritage  
**SARAWAK KAYAN CULTURE**



Traditional Kayan Wedding  
*Pelah Hawa*





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Bibi Aminah Abdul Ghani, Terry Justin Dit  
& Rama Venkatasawmy



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## About the authors



Bibi Aminah Abdul Ghani  
*MA, BA, GCTT*

Born in Miri, Sarawak, Bibi Aminah has been with Curtin University of Technology Sarawak Campus since 1999, as Coordinator for the Foundation Programme and later as Director of the School of Pre-University Studies (2005 - 2008). Bibi Aminah obtained her Bachelor of Arts, majoring in Education and Linguistics, from Macalester College in St. Paul Minnesota, USA and later received a Master in Teaching English as a Second Language at Georgetown University, USA. She also holds a Graduate Certificate in Tertiary Teaching from Curtin University, Western Australia. She is currently undertaking a PhD in ethno-linguistic with the Institute of Malay Studies (ATMA) at University Kebangsaan Malaysia.



Terry Justin Dit  
*MPhil, MA,*  
*Post Grad. Dip. DSS,*  
*BSoc. Sc*

Born in Sri Aman but raised in Miri, Terry Justin has been with Curtin University of Technology, Sarawak Campus since 2006. He obtained his Bachelor of Social Sciences majoring in Political Science and History, Postgraduate Diploma in Defence and Strategic Studies, and Masters and Master of Philosophy from the University of Waikato, New Zealand. He has written theses on British Counter-Insurgency Tactics and Maritime Piracy.



Rama Venkatasawmy  
*BA (Hons.)*

Originally from Mauritius, Rama Venkatasawmy has been with Curtin University of Technology Sarawak Campus since 2002 where he was previously the Head for the Department of Mass Communication. He obtained his Bachelor of Arts (with First Class Honours) in Communication Studies from Murdoch University, Western Australia. Prior to joining Curtin University of Technology, Sarawak Campus. Rama Venkatasawmy lectured and tutored at Murdoch University, Western Australia, and at the University of Mauritius. His video production experience was gained from working (editing, story-boarding, scriptwriting) on a number of short films/videos and documentaries, in Western Australia in particular.



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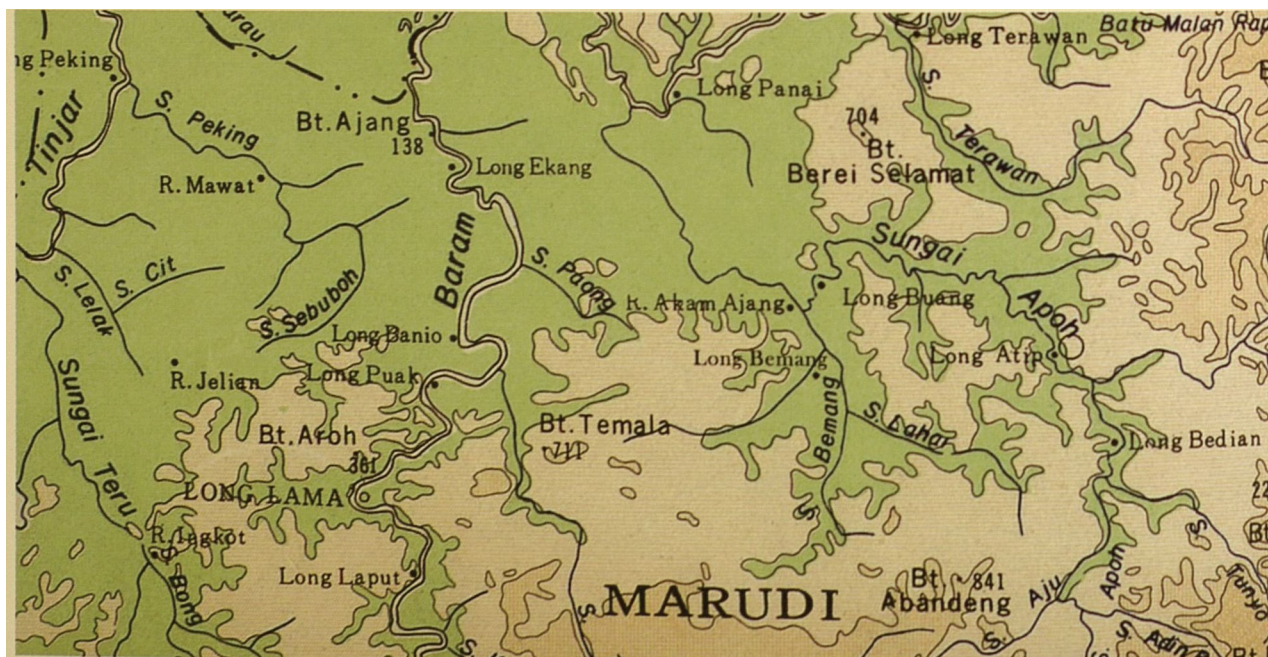
## Introduction

The traditional wedding ritual amongst the Orang Ulu community is rarely observed in the modern context due to several factors such as conversion to Christianity, urbanisation among the Orang Ulu community, the decreasing number of people from the older generations who observe the ancestral traditions, the financial implications and complexities of the process.

Due to limited available literature about the traditional Kayan wedding process, an important source of information has been the current Kayan community leader himself who is very well versed about Kayan traditions, namely Temenggong Pahang Deng Paramount Chief of the Baram Region and Henry Anyie Ajeng from Majlis Adat Istiadat, Sarawak.

The traditional Kayan wedding practices that are recorded in the accompanying CD-ROM and the pictures printed in this booklet were obtained through observations of weddings at Long Laput and Long Bemang, Baram, Sarawak. There are slight variations in how the wedding ceremonies were conducted in each location.

Long Laput and Long Bemang are situated in the Baram region. The road journey to these locations takes between four to six hours depending on weather conditions.



## The Orang Ulu / Kayan



The Orang Ulu ethnic groups can be located in the state of Sarawak in such areas like Belaga, Bintulu, Miri, Baram, Bario, Lawas, Trusan and Limbang. It was believed that in Kuching alone, the Orang Ulu population numbered up to about one thousand — the community's urban migration being mostly due to better employment, education and business opportunities available in Sarawak's capital cities'. The term Orang Ulu literally translates as "people of the upper river". Based predominantly on oral history sources, the term "Orang Ulu" — as used by Bruneian and Chinese traders for instance — was at one time referring only to the Kayan and the Kenyah people. The term became more popular during the era of Datuk Temenggong Oyong Lawai Jau (1950-1974) the paramount chief who was the leader of the Kayan-Kenyah community. The first official documentation which formally introduced the term "Orang Ulu" is the Orang Ulu Customary Code of Fines (1957) written by the Majlis Adat Istiadat Sarawak. But as mentioned above, the term referred only to the Kayan and Kenyah peoples.

The term was later revised and used in the Orang Ulu National Association's (OUNA) Constitution, established on 28 October 1966, to refer to the following peoples: Bukitán, Bisaya, Kayan, Kajang (inclusive of Sekapan, Kejaman, Lahanan, Punan, Tanjong and Kanowit), Kelabit, Kenyah (inclusive of Sebob, Seping, Kiput, Badang, Berawan, Morek), Lugat, Lisum, Murut (inclusive of Lun Bawang), Penan, Sian, Tabun, Ukit and Saban".

In general, the Orang Ulu are farmers, planting mostly hill paddy although they also do a lot of river fishing. Some Orang Ulu communities, such as the Penans, still practise a nomadic lifestyle, moving from place to place, hunting in the forest and gathering wild vegetation for food and crafts. Orang Ulu are considered to be highly skilled crafts people, especially with regards to long boat making and also to wood carving, mat weaving and painting. Like other Dayak tribes in Borneo, the Kayans live in longhouses. Longhouses differ slightly from tribe to tribe but share the same basic characteristic. Orang Ulu tribes are hierarchical, with a class of traditional aristocrats known as *Maren*. The headman and his family generally live in a very large apartment at the centre of the longhouse, surrounded on either side by their aristocratic neighbours whilst the commoners live further away from the centre. Social status was traditionally determined by a person's distance from the headman's apartment, although nowadays this distinction is becoming less important.

The Kayan originated from the upper Kayan river area (or Apo Kayan). They migrated to the Baluy, the upper Rejang and the Baram in the eighteenth and nineteenth century. The Kayans who reside in the Baram region belong to the Uma Bawang<sup>3</sup>. In the old days, the Kayan practised the *adat Dipuy* (the old religion) which preceded the *adat Bungan* (the reformed *adat Dipuy*). Following the conversion to Christianity, many of the old traditions are no longer observed.

## The Traditional Kayan Wedding Process

The traditional wedding process and associated rituals vary in accordance with the respective social class of the man and of the woman to be married, and of their respective families and longhouses within the Kayan community.

The present day class structures and hierarchies are the outcome of centuries of events and occurrences amongst the Kayans (warfare, enslavement, voluntary social associations, arranged marital unions, and so forth) spanning over many generations. And this aspect of Kayan culture has turned out to be crucial in terms of determining the nature as well as the ritual form of marital unions, that is who can/cannot marry who, what wedding procedure should be followed, who is allowed to perform what ritual and so forth.

The three class structures are the *Maren* or the high aristocrats, the *Hipui / Maren Uk* are the noble folk and *Panyin* are the commoners<sup>4</sup>. The *Maren* had close ties to the spirit world. A *Maren* individual had a tutelary deity which protected him and by extension, his tribe. Disobeying a *Maren* was tantamount to disobeying the spirits; therefore it was no surprise that the *Maren* class could get away with ordering the lower classes around and gaining their absolute obedience. Because of this traditionally rigid class structure, it is only in recent times that marriages are permitted between the different strata. When such a marriage occurs, the children from the marriage shall inherit the status of the parent from the higher stratum<sup>5</sup>. It should be noted that the class strata tends to be in disfavour with the increasingly secondary/tertiary-educated and urbanised younger generations of Kayans. However, the age old practice of respecting the traditional hierarchy is still observed in the longhouses. A modern day Kayan person belonging to the *Panyin* would not, for example, dare to wear or display designs that are meant for the *Maren* when visiting his/her respective longhouses. The adoption of Christianity by the majority of Kayans has also modified some of the thinking in relation to how the old traditions and customs should be observed.

If a marriage between the different strata happens, the person of the lower class has to undergo a class conversion process before the wedding can proceed.



The class conversion is done after the *atep hawa*<sup>6</sup>. The class conversion process is under the jurisdiction of the *Maren Uma*<sup>7</sup>. Witnessed by elders and guests, the Penghulu or the *Maren Uma* will conduct the class conversion ceremony where he will ask the respective family members if they agree to the conversion. The groom's family will then give a *tawak* to the bride's parents to formalize the conversion. Only after the conversion will the *Panyin* bride or groom be allowed to sit on the *tawak* (which is reserved only for the *Maren*) with his/her bride/groom. This class conversion process was observed during the traditional wedding at Long Bemang.

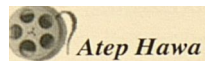
## The Planning of Weddings According to Social Strata

Traditionally, the Kayans would observe the phases of the moon before proceeding with such activities as weddings, building a new longhouse, farming, and so forth. It is considered auspicious to conduct the above mentioned activities during these lunar phases: the *musit* (crescent), the *butit halap* (2/3 moon), and the *beliling jaya* (full moon).



Before the man's parents can send a representative to the woman's parents for the purpose of asking for the woman's hand in marriage or *peteng doh*<sup>8</sup>, the right day has to be chosen. When the proposal is accepted, the parents of the couple shall inform the *Maren Uma* (the head of the longhouse) of the future betrothal.

Traditionally, a date is set for the *atep hawa* whereby the engagement tokens are given by the man to the woman to signify their engagement. The presentation of engagement tokens has to be done in front of the *Maren Uma* and the elders of the longhouse. The items presented are examined thoroughly by the group and other guests. The *atep hawa* must comply with the class structure / stratum of the couple to-be.

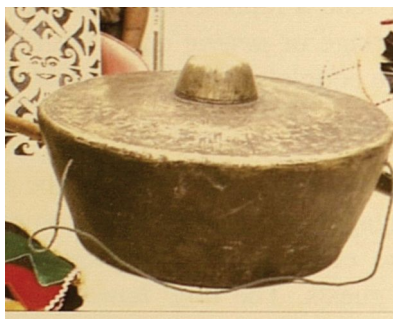
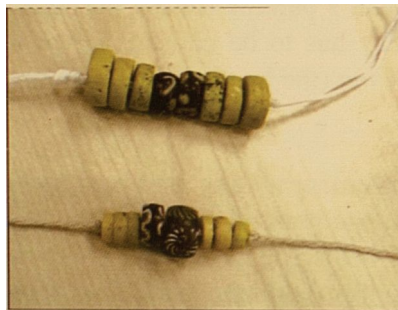


An important aspect of Kayan marriages which is similar to the Iban people's marriage practices is the question of "who joins whose *amin*" that is, whether the groom will join the bride's *amin* or the bride joins the groom's *amin*. This decision-making process is called *pekivan* and the result of the *pekivan* determines where the post-marital residence should be, that is either with the bride's family or with the groom's family. If for example, the bride chooses to take up permanent residence with the groom's family, then marriage gifts (*kivan*) will be given by the groom to the bride's family.

## *Maren*

For *atep hawa* of the *Maren* class, a string of eight beads must be given. A pair of blackish beads, with one mandatory *lukut bela* or *lukut sekala*<sup>9</sup> bead, must be accompanied by six yellowish beads called *lavang*<sup>10</sup>. There are many other colours of *lavang*, but for the *Maren* it must be the yellow *lavang* to show that the wedding is honourable. According to the Temenggong, the giving of the beads is compulsory as it shows the bonding of the couple<sup>11</sup>. Amongst the Orang Ulu of Borneo, valuable beads play an important ceremonial role. They are symbols of status as well as wealth. According to available literature, beads are still believed to have magical properties and often serve as amulets.

The next item to be given is the *tawak*<sup>12</sup>. It symbolises protection for a long lasting relationship. The *malat buk* - a ceremonial sword commonly known in Sarawak as *parang ilang* is the next item and it symbolises the law. If one of the parties does not fulfil his or her part of the deal, traditional Kayan law will be imposed on them. These three items are mandatory and constitute the basic engagement tokens.



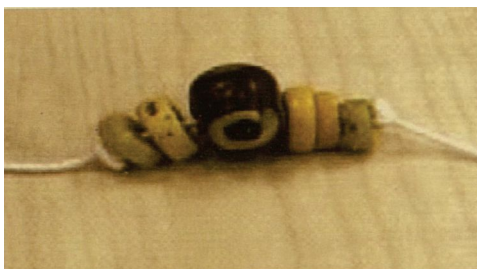
Apart from the mandatory engagement tokens, additional traditional paraphernalia like the *sunong* (war jacket) made of animal skin and decorated with eight honorific bird feathers could also be given<sup>13</sup>. The war jacket is also decorated with beads of particular patterns (usually snakefish, dragon, and tiger) and finished with a large seashell<sup>14</sup>. Next is the *tabin* (seat mat for a loin cloth) which is also decorated with elaborate patterns. Then comes the *lavung dok* or male headgear decorated with 8 honorific bird feathers. The *kelebit* (shield) with a human face can only be given by the *Maren* class. The *bah'* or loincloth is also given but it is decorated beautifully with beads. The *bakin* or spear which is made from *temehah* wood / *kayu ara* / hardwood is also a common item given by the *Maren* class as an engagement token. Lastly sarongs numbering eight in total are also presented. The giving of the sarongs creates the feeling that the man is with the woman whenever she wears the sarong.



In the past, due to the stratified nature of the Kayan society, even the creative output of the artisans was dictated by status. Only the *Maren* were entitled to have large intricate murals in front of their family *amin*, wear delicately and beautifully decorated beaded caps and waistcoats. A talented artisan belonging to the lower classes could produce these beautiful works of art for the *Maren* but he would be compensated with special beads to "protect his eyes" (to ward off illness or misfortune) when he begins work on creating designs meant for those above his social level.

### ***Maren Uk/Hipui***

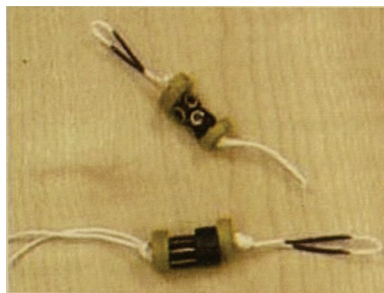
The engagement tokens for this class are similar to the *Maren*. However, the types of beads used are the *lukut ma'* and *lukut selibo* strung together with the yellow *lavang* totalling six beads. Other items are also similar but in substitution for the *tawak* in a *Maren* wedding, a different brass gong called *agung* which is shallow with a flat surface and a small knob is used in a *Maren Uk* wedding. For this class, the number of feathers on the *lavung dok* headgear is four. As for the sarongs, six would be the appropriate number.



### *Panyin*

For the *Panyin* class, the beads to be presented would be the *Lukut Halo'* or the *Ketubong Surat* which are black in colour or the green coloured bead (*inu' kelem*). The four beads will be strung together in a combination as thus: two black beads and two yellow beads or one black, one green and two yellow beads. For this group, the *parang Hang* given lacks the animal hair decoration and it is called *malat*<sup>15</sup>. The *bakin* or spear and four sarongs complete the ensemble.

Once the engagement tokens have been presented, the woman is required to display all the items presented by the man by hanging them on the walls in her *amin*<sup>16</sup>. This is to show to other men that she is already promised as a bride to someone. All of these engagement tokens will be kept by the woman for life.



In return for the engagement tokens given to her by her future husband, the woman gives the man the *hong inu* or sunhat. For the *Maren* and *Maren Uk*, the honorific bird feathers could be put on the hat but this is not allowed for the *Panyin*. When the man is travelling, he will wear the sunhat. Otherwise, he will hang the sunhat for display in his *amin*. This will also send the message that he is promised to be married to someone.



For the wedding, the bride would also prepare a special sunhat. The design would be very elaborate and it all depends on the creativity of the bride as to how she wants to decorate the *hong*. The prohibition is only the presence or absence of honorific bird feathers stuck on the *hong*. For the *Maren*, the number is eight; for the *Maren Uk* the number is four and none for the *Panyin*.

In the olden days, once this is completed, the *Maren Uma* will conduct the *melah sapet* betrothal ceremony by holding the *malat buk / malat* and the string of beads, and say "I *melah sapet* the two of you so that you can be together." With these words pronounced, the betrothed couple can then start living together.

According to the current traditional Adet Kayan-Kenyah<sup>17</sup>, the engagement shall not last more than six months. Any extension of the engagement period must be notified to the *Maren Uma*.

## Kayan Wedding Preparations

### General Preparations

As elsewhere in Sarawak, during festivities and celebrations, longhouse people communally work to decorate the longhouse. It is common to see the *peng' hud* hanged along the gallery (*ruai*) of the longhouse and staked along the road leading to the *amin* of the wedding couple and also around the food preparation areas.



The *peng' hud* is a traditional decoration made from the process of shaving wood from the rubber tree. In Long Bemang this decoration was in abundance and extending to the stage where the wedding took place. Coconut leaves were woven together and also used as decorations on the stage. The *peng' hud* was also used to decorate the edges of the stage. The atmosphere was jovial during preparations, and from time to time women and men who would play pranks on each other, like rubbing soot onto the faces of friends and relatives alike.



*General Preparations*

### Music & Dance Rehearsal

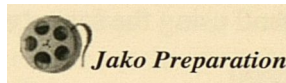
Traditional dances and *sape* playing are staple aspects of Kayan festivities and celebrations. Young and old alike participate in the dance rehearsals. The *sape* and the gong rehearsals were carried out mainly by men. It is common to hear the strumming of the *sape* and the beating of the gong in the background while longhouse people are working on various preparations.



*Music & Dance Rehearsal*

## Jako Preparation

Long before the actual wedding, the *jako'* would have been prepared by the people of the longhouse, and like other preparation activities, the *jako* preparation is communal. The *jako'* is used to "thatch" the roof of the two *uma jako* constructed for the wedding.

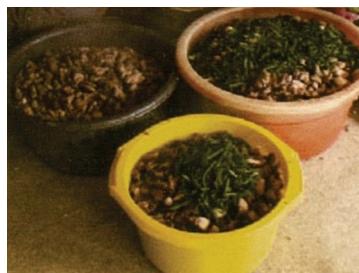


## Meat Preparation

At the break of dawn on the wedding day, pigs would be taken from their pens and slaughtered near the river bank. The pigs are tied up, placed on a specially constructed structure (resembling an "X") and their throats are slit.



After the slaughtering, the pigs are hanged from a wooden bar and the pigs' skins are scorched using burning firewood. The purpose of this is to get rid of the hairs on the pigs. The men scrape away the singed hairs of the pigs using sharp *parangs*. Then, the pigs are gutted into pieces and cleaned by the riverside. Any residual hairs on the pigs would be removed by scorching the carved pieces on big open fires and the process of scraping away the hairs will be repeated. The meat is then cut up into smaller pieces and transferred to large pots of boiling water under a temporary shelter specifically constructed for the cooking of meat and rice.



The cooked meat is later transferred to the *ruai* and heaped into two longboats. The floors of the longboats are covered with banana leaves. The longboats serve as a sort of chopping board and conveyor belt: the meat is cut into bite-size pieces at one end of the boat while at the other end, other people wrap the meat into leaf packets made out of the leaf of the *sip* also known as "daun *nyirik*" or *nyirik*<sup>18</sup>. Vegetable such as fern is added to the steaming hot meat before it is wrapped. The women work together with the men to wrap up the meat. The packets would be then skewered and placed one atop the other using a thin bamboo stick. The pre-packed meat packets are called *dapi*.



## Rice Preparation

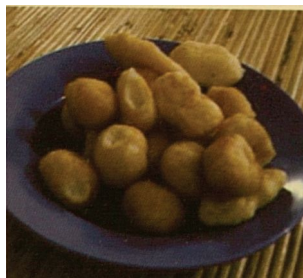
A separate packet that contains only rice is also prepared. At a Kayan wedding, rice plays an important part and it will be prepared and used in different ways. The packed rice is called *tapai kanen*. The *tapai kanen* is prepared mainly by women. Rice is cooked in large pots and then scooped onto mats for women folks to pack individually by hand using the same type of leaves for the meat.



A traditional Kayan rice "cake" called *dinuh* is also prepared. The *dinuh* is made from sticky glutinous rice flour, rice flour, sugar and coconut milk. This mixture is deep-fried in very hot oil in large woks placed on specially built wooden tripods near the temporary shelter used for food preparation.

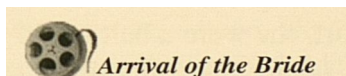
An important element of the rice preparation is the making of the rectangular-shaped *pitoh*, another rice "cake" made using sugar, sticky glutinous rice flour and rice flour. The mixture is packed in leaves and steamed for half an hour. The *pitoh* is used to construct the "thatched" roof of the *Uma Pitoh*. The *Uma Pitoh* is later hung from the ceiling over the wedding stage along with the two *Uma Jako* which were prepared earlier. The leaf used to wrap the *pitoh* is the "*sip*".

Another rice preparation is the *selukong* made from glutinous rice. It is wrapped inside yellow bamboo leaves in triangular shape. The yellow bamboo leaves used to wrap the *selukong* in is called "*sang*". Normally the *selukong* is soaked in water all day before the wedding itself. It is only boiled in the evening on the same day. Salt is added to the boiling water for flavour.



## Arrival of the Bride / Groom

If one of the couple is not from the same longhouse, the bride's / groom's wedding entourage will come a few days before the wedding takes place. In the old days, since the only means of transportation was the longboat, the journey had to be planned carefully so as not to delay the wedding ceremony. In Long Bemang, the bride arrived from Long Bedian a day before the wedding. The arrival of the bride's party is greeted at the river bank by the grooms' family and relatives together with other guests and people of the longhouse. Gongs are beaten to announce the arrival of the guests and to stop any "bad sounds" (bird sounds which can be interpreted as bad omens in the old days) from being heard. The bride's party arrives in three longboats-the first boat brought the *Penghulu* of Long Bedian, the parents of the bride and other important figures. The second boat carries the bride and her relatives while the third and final boat carries more relatives and guests from Long Bedian. Elderly ladies in the welcoming party chanted songs or *ne'na* to ward off the 'bad sounds' and also to welcome the arrival of their esteemed guests. The bride and her entourage are ushered to the groom's *amin* where light refreshments are served and welcoming speeches are made by dignitaries of both communities. Later in the evening, a communal dinner is served and more speeches are made by both leaders of the two communities.



## The Wedding

The *Maren Uma* can perform the wedding ceremony when the couple choose to marry under the Adet Kayan-Kenyah and the issuance of the Marriage Testimonial is done by the *Penghulu*. In the olden days, marriage ceremonial rites were performed by the *dayong*<sup>19</sup>. If the married couple is from the same longhouse, the *pelah hawa* or wedding ceremony is performed in the *amin* of the bride<sup>20</sup>.

In accordance to tradition, if the wedding is held at the groom's longhouse and the bride comes from another, then it is the groom who fetches the bride from her designated *amin*, the opposite happens if the wedding is held at the bride's longhouse.

In Long Bemang, the wedding is held at the groom's longhouse. Before the groom fetches the bride he waits in his own *amin*. The groom wears his traditional wedding attire which consists of a *sunong*, *bah*, *tabin* and *lavung dok*.

According to what was observed in Long Laput, the wedding was held at the bride's longhouse. Before the bride fetches the groom she sits and waits at the gallery outside her own *amin*. The bride was wearing her traditional wedding attire which consists of a top which is called *basong* and a traditional skirt called *ta'a*. With the skirt, she wore a belt called *je't tesa'* and to complete her attire is a sash worn across the chest called a *bilang inn'*. On her head, she wore the *lavung se'doh*. This traditional attire was prepared by the bride and her family members.



For a traditional wedding ceremony that involves the *Maren*, the bride is to be accompanied by eight women in full traditional attire and each carries a *hong inu* but only one is to be decorated with feathers. The *hong inu* is later to be held above the bride's head as a sign of protection.

The *Maren* groom is accompanied by eight male attendants in full traditional warrior attire. Each of the men carries a *kelebit* or shield that will be held above the groom's head when the couple exchanges the marriage vows.

The *Maren Uk* groom is accompanied by four men in full traditional attire. For the *Panyin*, one attendant is sufficient.

As observed in Long Laput and in accordance with tradition, before the bride fetches the groom from his *amin*, four delegations representing the bride's family go over to the groom's *amin* with offerings.

The first group of representatives of the bride go to the groom's *amin* to deliver the *jako'* or traditional cigarette to the groom. A group of eight women do the honours. The group is led by a man from the *Panyin* class who beat the *mebang* (a small brass gong).



The beating of the *mebang* is to shield the 'bad noise' from reaching the ears of the group. The rest of the representatives are women who sing the *ne'na'* that was filled with stories, advice, requests, blessings, hopes and praises. The entourage leaves the bride's *amin* and the man continues to beat the *mebang* and the women sing their songs until they reach the groom's *amin*.

Inside the groom's *amin*, the woman leading the entourage presents the *jako'* to the groom and lights the *jako'* for him.



She does the same for the groom's companions. When this has been done, the groom's family gives a sarong to each of the women who brought the *jako'*. The women hang the sarongs over their shoulders and walk back to the bride's *amin*.

The second group repeats the same process. This time the entourage delivers the *selapa'* or betel nuts and leaves. The third group follows to deliver rice and the fourth group delivers the *burn'* or rice wine. Each of the women in all four entourages comes back with a sarong over their shoulders. The sarongs are tokens of appreciation given to them by the groom's family. During each procession coming and going back to the bride's *amin*, the *Panyin* man continues to beat the *mebang* and the women sing the *ne 'na*.



Finally, the bride goes to invite the groom. For this, the bride is accompanied by her eight companions and other relatives. On reaching the groom's *amin*, the bride is seated next to the groom. The groom's parents are asked if they agree to the marriage and allow the groom to be 'taken away' to the bride's *amin*. After the agreement, the bride asks the groom: "Do you want to marry me?" The groom answers with a 'yes'. The couple then walk out of the groom's *amin* and proceeds to the bride's *amin*.



In the olden days, along the way back to the bride's *amin*, the couple would be stopped or blocked by the bride's family. This was where the *jai* was demanded by the bride's family in the form of sarongs, *malat buk* and even *tawak*. If the groom's family failed to fulfil the demands, the wedding ceremony might not continue.



On the other hand, if the groom succeeded in breaking through the blockade and entered the bride's *amin*, no *jai* was to be awarded at all to the bride's family. This also meant that the groom had shown his strength and merit. As a strategy, the groom would ask the assistance of the strongest men among his family or friends to break through any blockade put up by the bride's family.

In the contemporary traditional wedding, a prior agreement is made by the couple's family on what items are to be given as *jai* to the bride's parents and siblings to avoid complications. The *jai* is done at the wedding. The *jai* is given by the groom's parent to the bride's parents in the form of *tawak*.



Each parent will be given one. This is not considered as exchange or barter but more as a symbol that a man is now taking care of their daughter. The *tawak* will be kept by the parents in their original *amin*. The siblings are given the *malat buk* or *malat* according to the class structure. Sometimes, only the men are given the *parang* and the women are given the sarongs. The *Panyin* is expected to give *agong* as *jai* to the bride's parents.

If the groom succeeds in fulfilling the *jai* requests or succeeds in breaking through the blockade without having to give away any *jai*, the next process is *te'kaka*, the symbolic ritual of going to the farm to do work.



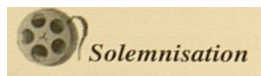
As observed in Long Laput, this was done symbolically whereby the couple walks out of the ionshouse and the groom pretends to cut the firewood, the bride assists in collecting the firewood and Drings it back to the bride's *amin*. A *Maren* wedding will see the couple going through this process sight times while for other classes four times will be sufficient. On the way back to the *amin*, they are isked how the journey along the way was. This is to check if they came across dangerous animals and lethal snakes or other bad omens. This is done eight times. If a bad omen was encountered, the marriage would be called off or the couple are to be separated. In the olden days, the couple actually goes into the forest to literally collect firewood and collect vegetables. Following the class structure, they either went out for eight days (for the *Maren*) or four days (for the other classes). At anytime during this period, if a bad omen was detected, the couple were to be separated. This separation process is called *pehelut jaki*.

If all is well, the wedding will then continue.

In a traditional *Maren* wedding, there are eight men and eight women accompanying the bride and the groom. The couple is seated on the *tawak* with the woman sitting on the left of the groom. Nowadays, this is when the *jai* has to be presented to the parents. The groom has the shield held above his head to provide protection. For the woman, a hat decorated with 16 feathers of honorific birds (hornbill / *manuk tingang*) prepared by the bride's family is held over her head as protection. The others will hold a similar hat but without the feathers. For the *Maren Uk*, there are four accompanying men and women for each.

For a *Panyin* wedding, the couple will be seated on a decorated wooden bench or *ladong* with four attendants. Commoners cannot sit on the *tawak* during their wedding ceremony as it is associated with the aristocrats.

This is the time when the *Maren Uma* / Penghulu solemnises the marriage / *pelah hawa*.



As observed in Long Laput, the Temenggong asks the groom if he wishes to take the bride and her family to be his family. The same question is asked of the bride. When both have answered "I do", the Temenggong asks for the right hands of the couple. The groom's hand is placed on top of the bride's. The Temenggong then holds the handle of *malat buk* together with the beads and passes the items to and fro a few times over the entwined hands of the couple. Witnessed by the guests, the blessing is fulfilled.



After the blessing, the signing of the marriage testimonial follows, witnessed by both parents of the bride and groom. The Temenggong as head of the community endorses the document by signing it. The couple is then asked to stand on the *tawak*. The certificate is awarded to them. Still standing on the *tawak* and shielded by the *kelebit* and *hong inu*, the couple are blessed by the parents from both families. The marriage vows are sealed. The guests then congratulate the couple.



Next is the bringing down of the *umajako* '.



*Uma Jako*

The *Umajako* is a structure similar in appearance to a doll's house in Western countries. The top of the *umajako* is carved to look like a hornbill and the roof and the walls of the *umajako* are decorated with traditional hand rolled cigarettes (wild jungle tobacco wrapped in dried wild banana leaves). As observed in Long Laput and Long Bemang, when the *umajako* is taken down, the bride is asked to pluck out one of the cigarettes and offer it to the groom and light it up for him. The groom then does the same for the bride. After that, the couple offer the *jako'* to the parents of both parties. The guests of honour are offered the same thing. The women companions of the bride distribute the rest of the cigarettes to the guests<sup>21</sup>.

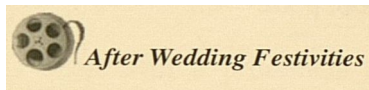
The bride and the groom are seated and given advice or *tebara* by selected elders before the ceremony ends.



The advices include matters related to a new life as husband and wife, children upbringing, patience, tolerance and caring in a married relationship.

## After Wedding Festivities

After all the formal aspects of the wedding ceremony are completed, the guests are entertained with traditional dances by the men and women of the longhouse and *sape* music is played. The festivities go on late into the night.



Finally, when the time comes for the groom to bring the bride to his own *amin*, the groom's family gives marriage gifts to the bride's family and this custom is called the *kaja amin*.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Jalone. Jeffrey. *Kalong: Seni Motif Tradisi Orang Ulu*. Malaysia. Kementerian Kebudayaan Kesenian dan Pelancongan Malaysia, 2001. p.4. James Ritchie affirms that the Orang Ulu communities number about 80,000 people or more. See also Ritchie. James. *Temenggong Oyong Lawai Jau: A Paramount Chief In Borneo: A Legacy*, Kuching. 2006. p.xii.

<sup>2</sup> Jalong, op.cit. p.4.

<sup>3</sup> The Uma Bawang came to settle in the Baram area after losing a battle for supremacy. According to Jerome Rousseau, the Kayans have changed very drastically in the last twenty years. See Rousseau, Jerome. *Kayan Religion: Ritual life and religious reform in Central Borneo*. Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde. 1998. p. 18.

<sup>4</sup> In the olden days, Kayan society was strictly divided into four distinct social *classes*-*Maren*, *Hipui*, *Panyin* and *Dipen*. The *Dipen* were the slave class. See Sellato, Bernard. *Innermost Borneo: Studies In Dayak Cultures*, Singapore, NUS Press, 2002, p.74. Because of rigid class structures, marriages between the different strata were unknown in the past, but as time went by and the population shifted more to the urban centres looking for employment and educational opportunities, the class consciousness amongst the Kayan people in the urban settings have diluted to a certain extent.

<sup>5</sup> *Adet Kayan-Kenyah 1994*. Majlis Adat Istiadat Sarawak. 1994, Chapter IV. item 97, p. 166.

<sup>6</sup> Engagement token given by the man to the woman to denote their engagement in accordance to the adat and based on the different strata.

<sup>7</sup> *Adet Kayan-Kenyah 1994*. Op.Cit. p. 166.

<sup>8</sup>

*Adet Kayan-Kenyah*, Op.Cit, p. 163. A formal request for a lady's hand in marriage.

<sup>9</sup> This particular bead is rare and the most priced of beads. At one time, this bead was equivalent to the value of a man's life in Borneo. According to Munan. 'In the old days of tribal warfare however, a *lukut sekala* could be used as ransom for a high ranking captive. A longhouse surrounded by an overwhelmingly stronger enemy force might manage to buy the attackers off with a payment of valuable beads". See Munan. Heidi. *Beads of Borneo*, Singapore. Star Standard. Singapore. 2005. p.79.

<sup>10</sup> Whatever the social rank of the couple, two opaque yellow *lavang* (doughnut shaped beads) are part of the set. These plain beads are considered very old and used in many ceremonial contexts. See Munan, Heidi. *Beads of Borneo*, Singapore, Star Standard, Singapore, 2005, p.59.

<sup>11</sup> From observations of weddings in Long Laput and Long Bemang, beads still play an important part of the traditional wedding process.

<sup>12</sup> A type of brass gong which is deep with a prominent knob; it is considered a valuable and prestigious item.

<sup>13</sup> The war-coat is usually made from the skin of a goat, bear, or (in case of distinguished war chiefs) of a tiger-cat. A large pearly shell usually adorns the lower end of the front flap of the war coat.

<sup>14</sup> The higher classes reserved many privileges for themselves, including the use of certain motifs and designs on their houses, clothes and personal belongings.

<sup>13</sup> Ordinary multi-purpose working parang.

<sup>16</sup> A room or apartment unit in the longhouse containing all members of the household and their property.

<sup>17</sup> *Adet Kayan-Kenyah*, op.cit, Chapter IV, item 98, p. 166.

<sup>18</sup> This is commonly used among the peoples of Borneo for wrapping food.

<sup>19</sup> A female shaman.

<sup>20</sup> *Adet Kayan-Kenyah*, op.cit, Chapter IV, item 93, p. 164.

<sup>21</sup> The *Uma Jako* is only for the *Maren* class. The construction of an *uma jako* is a work of art in its own right. Long before the wedding takes place, the *jako* is prepared communally by the people of the longhouse. The *uma jako* can be re-used for future wedding ceremonies.

## The Traditional Kayan Wedding Process - a Glossary of Related Terms

(This glossary of wedding-related Kayan terms has been compiled from information obtained in the *Adet Kayan-Kenyah 1994*, Majlis Adat Istiadat Sarawak, and from interviews with various Kayan community members)

**Agong.** a type of brass gong which is shallow, with a flat surface and a small knob in the centre; it is considered to be a valuable and prestigious item, used in significant social transactions such as settling the bride price and resolving disputes.

**Amin.** a room or an apartment unit in the longhouse containing all members of a household and their belongings.

**Atep hawa** (or **Atep doh**): engagement tokens given by the man to the woman to denote and confirm their engagement.

**Bah':** male loincloth beautifully decorated with beads.

**Bakin:** a spear made from *temehah* with a sharp pointed end of metal; it is one of the items used in significant social transactions such as settling the bride price and resolving disputes.

**Basong:** a blouse constituting the top part of the bride's wedding attire.

**Beliling jaya:** full moon.

**Bilang inu':** a sash worn across the chest, as part of the bride's wedding attire.

**Bura':** rice wine.

**Butit halap:** 2/3 moon.

**Dara atep doh:** the period of wedding engagement.

**Dapi:** packets of meat wrapped in leaves.

**Dayong:** a female shaman who is usually responsible for performing various ceremonial rites at the longhouse.

**Dinuh:** traditional Kayan rice "cake" which is deep-fried.

**Dipen.** in the olden days the slaves owned by the *Maren* constituted the *Dipen*, the lowest class in the overall Kayan social stratification; the position of slave was traditionally hereditary. This particular social class does not exist anymore in present times.

**Hong inu.** a sunhat usually decorated with traditional Kayan motifs, and sometimes also including feathers, used as engagement token, as marriage gift, and for other important social transactions.

**Inu** (as in *Inu pa'un*, *Inu beranei*). a bead or beads used as engagement token, as marriage gift and for other social transactions.

**Jai:** demands made during the wedding ceremony when the couple is stopped or blocked by the bride's family along the way back to the bride's *amin*.

**Jako':** traditional cigarettes made from wild jungle tobacco rolled in dry wild banana leaves. These cigarettes can only be prepared by the women of the longhouse.

**Je't tesaa** belt that forms part of the bride's wedding attire.

**Kaja amin.** marriage gifts to the bride's family from the groom's family after the wedding, when the groom first brings the bride into his own *amin*.

**Kelebit:** a wooden shield decorated with traditional Kayan motifs and designs.

**Ketubong surat:** a particular type of black or green bead.

**Kivan:** marriage gifts to the bride's family from the groom's family after the wedding, when she takes up permanent residence with the groom's family.

**Ladong:** wooden bench.

**Lavang:** a particular type of opaque yellow bead, usually very old.

**Lavung dok:** male headgear decorated with beads, animal hair and hornbill feathers (it may sometimes also include peacock and ostrich feathers).

**Lavung se' doh':** female headgear decorated with beads and animal hair.

**Lukut** (as in *Lukut bla*, *Lukut halo'*, *Lukut sekala'*): the name of a special class of beads, used as engagement token, as marriage gift and for other social transactions.

**Malat:** a multi-purpose working knife, commonly known in Sarawak as "*parang*", used as marriage gift or in other social transactions; it is also an item usually given by the offender to the injured party as payment or fine for a breach of customs.

**Malat buk:** a ceremonial sword, commonly known in Sarawak as "*parang ilang*", used as marriage gift or in other social transactions; it is also an item usually given by the offender to the injured party as payment or fine for a breach of customs.

**Manuk tingang:** hornbill.

**Maren.** the highest stratum in the overall Kayan social stratification; the *Maren* are considered as the upper ruling class of the longhouse.

**Maren Uk** (or *Hipui*): the stratum immediately below the ruling *Maren* class in the overall Kayan social stratification; the *Maren Uk* are considered as the "lower aristocrats" or "middle class" of the longhouse.

**Maren Uma:** the headman of the longhouse.

**Mebang:** a small brass gong.

**Melah sapet:** short engagement solemnisation ceremony officiated by the *Maren Uma*.

**Musit:** crescent moon.

**Ne'na':** songs filled with stories, advice, requests, blessings, hopes and praises, sung by women at various stages of the wedding ceremony.

**Ngivan:** the taking up of a residence by the newly-married couple, either with the bride's family or with the groom's family, depending on the outcome of *Pekivan*.

**Panyin.** the stratum below the "middle class" *Maren Uk* in the overall Kayan social stratification; the *Panyin* are considered as the "commoners" of the longhouse.

**Pehelut jaki:** the process whereby a couple to be married is temporarily separated if a bad omen is detected during the *Te' kaka* ritual.

**Pekivan:** the decision-making process which determines where the post-marital residence should be, that is either with the bride's family or with the groom's family.

**Pelah hawa:** the solemnisation of a marriage by the *Maren uma*.

**Peng' had:** a traditional decoration made from the process of shaving wood from the rubber tree.

**Peteng doh:** a man's formal request for a woman's hand in marriage.

**Pitoh:** rice "cake" made using sugar, sticky glutinous rice flour and rice flour.

**Ruai:** open corridor of the longhouse.

**Sang:** yellow bamboo leaves to wrap food.

**Sape:** a guitar-liked instrument.

**Selapa':** an offering of betel nuts and leaves to the groom by the bride's representatives during the wedding process.

**Selukong:** glutinous rice wrapped in yellow bamboo leaves in a triangular shape.

**Sip:** a type of palm leaves known in Malay as daun nyirik.

**Sunong:** a war jacket made of goat skin and decorated with hornbill feathers; the jacket is also decorated with beads of particular patterns (especially snakefish, dragon or tiger) and completed with a seashell. It is used as engagement token or as marriage gift.

**Ta'a:** long skirt constituting the bottom part of the bride's wedding attire.

**Tabin:** a seat mat decorated with an intricate bead design, usually used by the groom during the wedding process.

**Tapai Kanen:** cooked rice wrapped in palm leaves.

**Tawak:** a type of brass gong which is deep and has a prominent knob in the centre; it is considered to be a valuable and prestigious item, used in significant social transactions such as settling the bride price and resolving disputes.

**Te'kaka:** in the olden days, a ritual conducted during the wedding ceremony requiring the couple to go into the forest to collect firewood.

**Tebara:** literally means advice or giving advice.

**Temehah:** a particular type of hardwood commonly known in Sarawak as "kayu ara".

**Uma jako':** a wooden structure (which can be passed from generation to generation and re-used in other weddings) usually decorated with **jako'**.

**Uma Pitoh:** a doll-house structure decorated with *pitoh*.

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Bibi Aminah Abdul Ghani  
MA, BA, GCTT



Terry Justin Dit  
MPhil, MA,  
Post Grad. Dip.DSS,  
BSoc. Sc



Rama Venkatasawmy  
BA (Hons.)

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