

Ritual Dance and Performance in Contemporary Borneo: A Study of the Kadazan and Sama-Bajau Communities of Sabah, Malaysia

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Abstract

The state of Sabah, comprised of various indigenous ethnic groups, has inherited traditional beliefs and practices practised for a long time. Ritual practices carried on through inheritance have contributed to the musicscape and dancescape in Borneo. The Kadazan community of Penampang district inherited the *sumazau* dance, which used to be the main practice of rituals manifesting the balance between the physical world and the spiritual world, such as *monogit* and *humabot* rituals. Meanwhile, the Sama-Bajau Community in Sabah's Semporna District manifests the bond between humans and spirits in the physical and spiritual realms through music and dancemaking in most rituals. The rituals are held periodically every three months, six months or annually, like *magpaigal-jin*, *magpali-bahau-magduwata*, *poon tahun*, and others, requiring the inclusion of music and dance to host the ancestors and spirit through trance music and dance. Thus, the presence of ancestors and spirits in the ritual signifies a balanced relationship between humans and spirits. This paper will present the importance of music and dance among Kadazan and Sama-Bajau. Based on an ethnographic study with observational methods and in-depth interviews with ritual specialists and contemporary music and dance practitioners of both communities, this paper will also present the current development of the music and dance of those rituals. This study concludes that the music and dances of these communities are important for preserving identity and nation building.

Keywords: *igal*, Kadazan, ritual dance, Sabah, Sama-Bajau, *sumazau*

Introduction

Kadazan of Sabah, Borneo

Music and dance play important roles in some communities like the Kadazan and Sama-Bajau of Sabah, Borneo. It works as an agent of social service and entertains all kinds of people. It helps to unify the communities and works as an agent of socialisation. It has a great impact on emotional and physical development. Furthermore, in some cases, music and dance strengthen social relations that no other tool could do (Lull, 1985) and boost inter-ethnic relations (Tassanawongwara & Hussin, 2019, pp. 1-18). Music, sounds, and dances often link the seen and the unseen (spiritual) world in ritual performances (Blacking, 1985).

The Kadazan of Penampang is a branch of the Kadazan Dusun ethnic group of Sabah, Borneo. They speak the Coastal Kadazan dialect of the Kadazan Dusun language. Kadazan Dusun is one of the Dusunic Family of Languages. The Kadazan Dusun is the largest indigenous and largest overall ethnic group in Sabah. They are defined by their traditional geographical location in the Penampang District, which encompasses part of Sabah's west coast (Figure 1). The Kadazan of Penampang traditionally relies on subsistence agriculture. They plant wet padi and other crops, including fruits and vegetables. They also rear livestock, including chickens, pigs, and buffaloes. Within their community, they differentiate themselves according to location and topography such as the "Kadazan," the lowlanders (people living near the coast), "Tangaah," middle inhabitants, and "Potiang," the Highlanders. Notwithstanding the minor differences stemming from their geographical distribution, these groups shared various common myths, practices, beliefs, and language (Hussin & John Baptist, 2015).



Figure 1. Sabah Map and locations of the District Headquarters in Penampang (Source: "Discover Sabah" [2018]).

The traditional Kadazan believed that the world they lived in was divided into the spiritual world (*pogun do hozob*) and the physical world, and balance between the two parts ensured the continuity of the humans' welfare (Pugh-Kitingan, Hussin, & John Baptist, 2011). For the coastal Kadazan, the two worlds had three realms: The upper realm or heaven (*hibabou* or *diwato*), the earth (*hiniba*), and the underworld or hell (*dahom tana*) (Hussin, 2007a). The organisation of the spiritual universe, in which human beings and spirits lived in separate parallel worlds, both groups lived

with families and offspring, was believed to be very complicated. The ideal relationship between the human and spirit worlds was one of balance or neutrality, described as “cool” (*osogit*). According to the traditional belief system, any transgression by the human community or its members would cause an imbalance between the two worlds and produce trouble in the natural environment, which would further warm the earth, making it “hot” (*ahasu*) — the heated earth results in disasters and misfortunes such as sickness, infertility of livestock and unproductive lands. Thus, transgressions are avoided.

If the natural and social environment experiences calamities, the traditional Kadazan of Penampang would call *bobohizan* or priestesses to restore the order and balance between the worlds by performing rituals which were embedded with long poetic chants (*inait*), gong ensemble music, and dancing called *sumazau*. *Bobohizan* also helped the communities to fulfil other religious and moral obligations (Hussin & John Baptist, 2015). Rituals, which include *sumazau* dancing and gong ensemble music, are traditionally performed to summon the spirits in the spiritual world to cure illness, to allow a good harvest (celebrated by both traditional feasts and modern harvest festivals), and are also performed in celebratory contexts such as the wedding ceremony.

Sama-Bajau communities on the East Coast of Sabah in Malaysia, including Bajau Laut or Sama Dilaut, live harmoniously with the spiritual, whose presence is liked and favoured for countless community benefits. However, the spiritual world is also deemed dangerous if the communities do not make certain arrangements; thus, in order to balance the two worlds (physical and spiritual), Sama-Bajau perform ritual performances not only fulfil the agreement between the physical and the spiritual worlds, but they believe that through *igal* soundscape and *igal* dancescape they create an environment that pleases the spirits so that life will always be balanced (Hussin et al., 2018, pp. 181-204). There are various dimensions to such dancescape and sound/musicscape among Sama-Bajau but unknown to the world. This article, therefore, would like to investigate those manifest and latent functions and dimensions of dance and music/soundscapes of Sama-Bajau communities, especially the significance of these scapes in sustaining the Sama-Bajau identity of these areas, particularly to Malaysia and the Philippines.

This paper will discuss the *sumazau* and *igal* among the Kadazan of Penampang and Sama-Bajau of Sabah which contribute to soundscape and dancescape of Borneo. Among the Kadazan and Sama-Bajau, the spiritual world is highly significant and living in harmony with this world is extremely important for the longevity and survival of the communities. Hence, the musicscape and dancescape play vital roles in communities’ cultures and meeting their spiritual needs. Understanding the vital role of *sumazau* and *igal* as a musicscape and dancescape in different social, cultural, and religious dimensions has gained little attention in the literature. In this paper, therefore, the author would like to focus on different and interlinked dimensions of the musicscape and dancescape of *sumazau* and *igal* with the traditional rituals and contemporary events of the Kadazan and Bajau and the wider Kadazan Dusun and Bajau of Sabah related to *sumazau*, *igal* and other music and dances. This is because *sumazau*, *igal* and similar music and dances in related contexts are very important in sustaining the communities’ identity.

Methodology

This study is based on research conducted from 2001 to 2022 on the Kadazan community of Penampang and the Sama-Bajau community of Sabah, Borneo, who were involved in *sumazau* and *igal* music and dance performances. The research began with a literature review based on past research and publications on the rituals of the Kadazan of Penampang and the Sama-Bajau of Semporna, Sabah. The literature review also covers other events such as ceremonies and festivals involving music and dance performances related to the *sumazau* and *igal* dance. Data were collected through observations, primarily participant observations in several rituals. These included the *monogit* rituals conducted in 2001 and 2004 among the Kadazan of Penampang, Sabah, and rituals of the Bajau-Sama such as *Magpaili-bahau*, *Magduwata*, *Mag-Kok Tahun*, and *Poon Tahun*. The Kadazan rituals were observed in several villages in Penampang, particularly in Kampung Kitauu, Penampang, Sabah. The Bajau rituals were observed in several villages in Semporna, Sabah, such as Kampung Kabimbangan, Bumbum Island, and Kampung Bangau-Bangau.

Interviews were conducted with the ritual practitioners, particularly the Kadazan priestesses, known as *bobohizan*, led by their chief, *bohunkitas*, and the Sama-Bajau families who inherited an heirloom or *langkapan* called *Jin* (*Jin Lella*/male Jin and *Jin Denda*/female Jin). These interviews were conducted to gather information and knowledge from local experts, especially the ritual practitioners. Rituals, *sumazau*, and *igal* dancing were filmed, and the music of the *sompogogungan* (Kadazan music ensemble) and *Tagunggu* music ensemble of Bajau-Sama were also filmed and transcribed. Observations and interviews were also conducted with several *sumazau* and *igal* practitioners—musicians, dancers, and cultural organizers—who appreciate *sumazau* and *igal* for their creative work in the creative industry.

Ritual of Kadazan and Bajau

Rice Farming Ritual

Before Malaysia's formation in 1963, the Kadazan planted rice and other plants for their consumption and survival. Their life's routine also depended on the cosmological order and organisation. At each stage of the rice planting or farming, rituals were performed by the Kadazan priestesses. They believed the rice spirit was present in the physical world and connected with the other spirits. The ritual implemented the ancestral myth (concerning the *pampang* or primaeval stone from which the Creator and his wife emerged before they created the world) and belief in the rice spirits. The ritual was performed by a *bobohizan*, who played an important role in transferring the myth and its practical knowledge to the next generation. The myth was a source of the ancient Kadazan belief in *Kinoingan* (literally, "Supreme God"), his wife or *Suminundu* (the miraculous one) and their daughter *Poninzuvung/Izoton* as the spirits. Through this mythology, the Kadazan explained the origin of the cosmos, the heavens, their cosmology, and the belief system of their community. In the myth, *Poninzuvung* was sacrificed to be the source of food (rice plants). The primary food plant was rice, which grew from the flesh of *Poninzuvung*.

Therefore, her spirit was considered the rice spirit and known as the *bambaazon*. This myth about the supreme spirits significantly affected the Kadazan way of life, including their thinking and living. The community and its customary norms (*adat*) worked as a guard through four institutions, namely the Village Head (*Huguan Pogun*), the Village Council (*Sinompu'uvan Komohoingan*), religious advisers (*Sinompu'uvan Bobohizan*) and warriors (*Sinompu'uvan Pangazou*).

Actions in the real world affected the spiritual world. Therefore, the rice planting ritual provided food and enriched the spirits in the spiritual world. It also means that the relationship between the spirits and the *bambaazon* should always be good or cold (*osogit*). In the opposite case, the social and natural environment would become hot (*ahasu*) and very unpleasant. In the ritual of planting rice, respect is given to Poninzuvung and other spirits, particularly the house guardian spirit, the *miontong*. The outcome included protecting the community members from disasters and sickness and ensuring the abundance of rice plants. The *monogit* ritual thus traditionally took place during the rice planting season. If calamity affects the community, it would be done twice or thrice a year to ensure that the house guardian spirit (*miontong*) is at peace and will put things back as they were.

Ritual Music and Dance in the Monogit

Monogit, part of traditional rice farming of the Kadazan of Penampang, used to be held bi-annually. The process of performing the rituals started with a single household and continued from one household to another throughout the village; it also depended on the availability of the *bobohizan*. In the ritual performance, the sacrifice of the pigs at least two years old was mandatory. It is traditionally performed over four days and three nights. The beating of the drum (*gandang*) (Figure 2, left) leading the music played by the ensemble called *sompogogungan* (comprising six gongs) (Figure 2, right) and the *sumazau* dance are essential parts of the ceremony.



Figure 2. Drum@*gandang* in the *monogit* ritual (left) and the *sompogogungan* ensemble accompanying the whole process of *monogit* ritual (right). (Source: Hanafi Hussin)

In the ritual context, the *gandang* beating and the composite sound of the gongs in the *sompogogungan* are believed to connect man with the spiritual world.

The *gandang* beating is periodically done by a *bobohizan* at various stages in the ceremony while reciting an *inait*. The sound of the *gandang* and the *sompogogungan* is believed to assist the *bobohizan* in entering the spiritual world to meet, stir, and awaken the evil spirits to ask them to return the trapped human spirits.

The first *gandang* beating or *mamason* takes place around 7.00 p.m. This particular gong beating is done by the father of the conjugal family, who is organising the *monogit* and marks the beginning of the *kotudungan*, the first night. It awakens and invites the spirits in the upper world to join the event. Other rituals by the *bobohizan* with the drum include *matang* (awakening the spirits in the spiritual world and also the spirits of the ritual objects), *tumingak* (raising and empowering the spirits), and *savak* (calling back the spirits who left). While these sessions with the *gandang* take place, food offerings or *pamanta* are prepared, especially fermented rice (*tapai*). These are placed in the part of the ritual space, together with antique clothing for the *miontong*, including a traditional male headcloth, jacket and coin belt.

Communication and negotiation with the spirits then continue in the special trance session called *modsuut*, when each *bobohizan* is believed to enter different parts of the spiritual world. This takes place from 1.00 a.m. until up to 5.00 a.m. *Pamanta* preparation continues on the second day, called *mamasa'an* or “feeding the spirits.” After a live, bound, the sacrificial pig is brought into the house and laid in the ritual space, more *gandang* beating and recitation of *inait* by *bobohizan*- called *mihung* (calling the spirits to come near) and *sumonson* (invitation to enjoy the prepared dish) takes place.

The *sumazau* music is collectively played using six hanging gongs in the *sompogogungan* ensemble, with the *gandang* drum. *Sompogogungan* playing the *sumazau* music accompanies the *monogit* ritual process, which bridges the human and the spiritual worlds. It is believed that the beating of the *gandang* and the sound of the *sompogogungan* play the role of connection with the spirit world. The *bobohizan* have a special power of connecting to the unseen world through the beat and rhythm of the music through their dancing. The recitation of *inait* to the spiritual world and the music and dance stir and awaken the evil spirits to return the trapped subsidiary human and rice spirits.

To connect the two worlds in traditional Kadazan ceremonies, ritual specialists or priestesses play the role of mediators. They recite sacred *inait* or long ritual poetry, perform rituals and offer blood sacrifices at different events to balance the seen and unseen worlds. Priestesses also attempt to connect the two worlds through dancing to the rhythm of gong ensemble music. In the ritual contexts, the spirits participate in the dance in two ways, either by possessing the priestesses or by symbolic representation. The importance of gong ensemble music as a bridge between the seen and unseen worlds is recognised in various other cultures, apart from the Penampang Kadazan (Pugh-Kitingan et al., 2011; Pugh-Kitingan, 2012, p. 2014).

The rhythm of the *sumazau* music is slow based on the beating of the six hanging gongs and single *gandang* drum in the *sompogogungan* ensemble. The *sumazau* dance movement follows the beat of this *sompogogungan*. The *sumazau* consists of two basic dance motifs. In the first motif, the dancer steps from side to side, shifting weight from one foot to the other while gently swinging the arms at the sides in time with the music. In the second motif, the dancer raises the heels slightly,

with arms raised. For men, the arms are stretched out at shoulder level, with hands moving up and down. The arms are also outstretched for women but at a lower level.

In the ritual *sumazau* dance movements vary due to its function in the ritual segments. *Sumazau* takes place on the second day of the *monogit* ritual, known as *sumazau magampa*, *mundang*, and *pasasazau do miontong*. In symbolic terms, these dances help to clean impurities and cure sicknesses. At the time of dance by the dancers, offerings (*pamanta*) of rice and rice wine are made to the spirits. The *pamanta* is offered in sequence and process. As mentioned above, the *bobohizan* specially perform the *sumazau*- each in a sequence. During *pasasazau do miontong* a *bobohizan* will become possessed by the *miontong*. *Sumazau* in the *monogit* is thus a means of communication and forming transactions with the spirit world on behalf of the family organising the ceremony. Through dance, the *bobohizan* directly interact with the spirit world and act out their transactions with the spirits.



Figure 3. Performing *sumazau* in *magampa* as part of the healing process in the *monogit*. (Source: Hanafi Hussin)

The *pamanta* offerings are also made following a process and sequences, while the *bobohizan* accompanied by the *sompogogungan* dance the *sumazau* uniquely, including dancing around a group of family members sitting under blankets who suffering from bad dreams, migraine and other minor illnesses (*magampa*) (Figure 3), dancing with palm fronts and swords during feast presentation for the spirits (*mundang*), inviting the *miontong* to dance and serving of the dishes (*sumasau*

miontong or *pasasazau do miontong*), sending back some of the spirits (*hoputan*), and grouping the spirits that are left (*monoinig*).

During the *pasasazau do miontong*, the *bobohizan* doing the *sumazau* is in a trance and possessed (*nosuang*) by the *miontong* when her body movements become unusually strong and full of energy. She will eat chicken, drink *tapai* and throw the fermented rice where the spirits are believed to line up in front of the sacrificial pig. At this time, all the good and evil spirits are believed to be invited by the *miontong* to partake of the food, which is the highlight of the ritual. This stage of the ritual dance is the peak and most significant point. Here, the beating of *gandang* (drum) from the *sompogogungan* and the *sumazau* dance has become essential tools in the *monogit*. The combination of both elements works in two ways: It is believed that the traditional Kadazan Penampang music and dance performance is also a healing ritual because it is believed to rid the house of evil spirits.

The third day is called *kinapangasan* (the climax of the series), which begins with another *modsuut* trance session, to meet with the spirits in the spiritual world in the early morning to send back the offerings and spirits and to bring home any last remaining stolen household spirits and rice spirits. No drumming, gong music or dancing is performed. Late in the morning, another pig is sacrificed. The whole *monogit* traditionally ends on the next day (the fourth day) in the fourth phase or *Pa'atod Hangod*, an appeal to the *dudui* or guardian spirits in the paddy field with offerings and requests to safeguard the rice field (Figure 4).



Figure 4. Rice farm (left) and performing the sacred *pa'atod hangod* sending an offering to the guardian spirits of the rice field (right) (Source: Hanafi Hussin, 2001)

Rituals of Sama-Bajau, Sabah, Borneo

The Sama-Bajau community's beliefs and traditions have shaped physical and cultural scapes (intangible) in Semporna, Sabah. The manifestation of traditional belief is a series of rituals performed quarterly, annually or any time of the year upon request by the ancestral practices, forming the sacred physical and intangible scape. The community's older generation mainly performs the ritual manifestations due to make-belief practices that harmonise and balance living in the physical and spiritual worlds. Meanwhile, the younger generations of Sama-Bajau continue to practice their ancestors' traditions as a heritage by learning traditional dance and music as a cultural activity, performed at community events such as weddings and cultural and arts programs such as official occasions and festivals. There are also members of the Sama-Bajau community practising their traditional art as a source of livelihood, especially in tourism. These phenomena created a dynamic cultural scape of the Sama-Bajau community in and outside the Bajau area. These physical and intangible cultural scapes show the secular scapes embedded with traditional values and functions as social obligation, entertainment, and identity maintenance and enhancement.

The Sama-Bajau which include Sama Dilaut or Bajau Laut of Semporna, Sabah perform various traditional healing ritual and scheduled rituals, including *mag-kelamat*, *magpa-igal Jin*, *magpaii-bahau*, etc. to honour the ancestors for newly harvested rice, *magduwata kabusungan* healing ceremonies, *mag-busung* rituals to ward off curses from the ancestors, *mag-kelamat* exorcisms or healing rituals for very serious illness, *mag-jikil* Islamic prayer ceremonies, and others. Depending on the context, some of these may be performed sequentially or as overlapping components in a single ritual event (Pugh-Kitingan, John Baptist, & Hussin, 2012, pp. 98-1002).



Figure 6. Magpaii-bahau of Bajau Laut, Kampung Bangau-Bangau, Semporna, Sabah (left) and Magduwata of Bajau Kubang, Kampung Kabimbangan, Bumbum Island, Semporna, Sabah (right). (Source: Hanafi Hussin, fieldwork, 2004, 2005)



Figure 7. Healing process during *Magduwata* ritual of Bajau Kubang of Semporna, Sabah. (Source: Hanafi Hussin, fieldwork, 2005.)

As the healing and scheduled rituals colour the sacred scapes, physical and intangible, many inherited sacred cultural activities are embedded in those rituals. The paraphernalia used in those rituals signified the rituals' manifestation and marked the Bajau sacred scapes being heard and seen. *Langkapan*, *kalangkang* and others marked the sacred physical scapes of the Bajau throughout the year. The Bajau Kubang community of Semporna performs a healing ritual like *magkelamat*, and an annual ritual like *magpaili-bahau* with a few different terms like *magkok-taun*, *magduwata*, etc., to hold the annual new rice offering ceremonies of *magpaili-bahau* (offering of newly harvested hill rice). Either return to Kabimbangan Island or Omdal Island annually, the Bajau community should perform this ritual without fail.

This event will add more variety to the Bajau landscape with ritual paraphernalia especially *langkapan*, *sambulayang*, *tipas-tipas*, etc. Fail to hold this new rice offering ceremony over two cycles is believed to contribute to the 'imbalance of spiritual energies' in the family's household who inherits the *langkapan*. To revive the relationship balance, the healing rituals of *magduwata* need to be performed along with *magpaili-bahau*. Therefore, *magduwata* healing ritual was conducted to placate the spirits of ancestors that were assumed to have caused illness to the household members, particularly the bearer of the *langkapan*.

Another sacred cultural scape from the ritual complexes of the Bajau community is the wearing of proper traditional cloth among the healers and the spirit

medium bearers in the ritual space and sometimes in the village. The healer (*mag-kalamat*) and the spirit bearer (*magduwata*), either a man or a woman, don the ancestral costume of black or yellow trousers (*saluar ruwata*) and black shirt (*badjud ruwata*), with a head cloth (*porong*) and sarong (*tadjing*) worn across the torso from the left shoulder. A woman spirit medium usually wears a yellow head cloth and a long yellow scarf over one shoulder. Holding a yellow cloth (*saputangan*) in the right hand and a frond of the areca palm (*bagaybay* or *bagaibai*) in the left, the dancer enters a state of conscious trance at the sound of the *tagunggu* and begins dancing in time to the music, adding more scape to the village which will be discussed in the next topic.

Ritual Music and Dance of Sama-Bajau

The Bajau community share commonalities in the way dancers are performed based the different options of musical tunes during the ritual ceremony of the offering of newly harvested rice (*magpaii-bahau* or *magduwata*) and to please the ancestral spirits (*magpa-igal*) or offerings for sea-spirits. These sacred dances and music give more colour to sacred activities and communal gatherings, adding more sacred scapes to few determined geographical spaces. Ritual healing ceremonies are linked with specific dance performances (*magpa-igal*) and the playing of specific music tunes (*titik*) through the *kulintang* music that is usually called *tagunggu* which is consisted of a set of graduated pot gongs, *tambul* (double-headed snare drum), and *tawag* (large hanging gong) or *agung* (two big hanging gongs). The tunes (*titik*) played during the ritual healing ceremonies are intended for the spirit bearer (*jin*) - the male spirit bearer (*jin lella*) or female spirit bearer (*jin denda*) represents the *jin*. The tunes (*titik*) may also signify the places where these events take place such as *titik lellang* for the *magduwata* ritual amongst Bajau Kubang in Semporna (East Malaysia) or *titik limbayan* for the *pagkanduli* ritual of the Sama-Dilaut in Sitangkai (the Southern Philippines). Likewise, the tunes have gender specific context; these are linked to the gender of the spirit-bearers, for instance, *titik limbayan* for female spirit-bearer (*jin denda*) and *titik lellang* for the male spirit bearer (*jin lella*). In other words, musical tunes of the *tagunggu* or *kulintang* ensemble played during the ritual healing ceremonies are identified with the gender of the spirit (Jin), which has entered into the spirit bearers' bodie; hencee a male spirit bearing body may either become a male spirit (*jin lella*) or a female spirit (*jin denda*). As an extension to the markers of gendering bodies, dance or *igal* within the context of these rituals are also identified and named after the tunes, such as *igal lellang* and *igal limbayan* respectively (Nor & Hussin, 2012a, p. 104).

Magtagunggu ritual music or music making is part and parcel of dance (*mag igal*). Therefore, the ritual musical collections of *magtagunggu* subsume dances (*igal*) and musical pieces (*titik*) are generally performed for non-ritual activities and at the time of specific dance styles and ritual pieces.

The musical tunes of *titik lellang*, *titik tabawan* and *titik limbayan* are played with corresponding dancing styles known as *igal limbayan*, *igal lellang* and *igal tabawan* as observed in *magpai-bahau/magduwata* ritual of Bajau Kubang in Kampung Kabimbangan, Semporna, Sabah, 2005. In the case of Bajau Laut of

Bangau-Bangau, *Titik Tabawan* is always called *Titik Lubak-Lubak*, which is used in the *magpa-igal* ritual. Only *titik limbayan* and *titik lellang*, are played for the dances of *igal lellang* and *igal limbayan*. These music tunes are specific for the spirit mediums (*jins*). The two music tunes are also for the ancestors and are called *titik duwata* (Nor & Hussin, 2011). Besides, additional tunes are played to invite ancestral spirits to the living world. These tunes are *titik tagna* (introductory piece), *titik jampi* or *titik jaupi* (incantations for the ancestors), and *titik lakkas-lakkas* (is similar to *titik tabawan* from Tabawan island and *titik lubak-lubak*-literally means to play fast and fast-played amongst the Tausug). In the *magpa-igal* ritual of Sama Dilaut in Bangau-Bangau of Semporna (Sabah, Malaysia), only three tunes (*titik*) are known. These tunes are the *titik jin*, *titik limbayan* for *jin denda* (female spirit bearer) and *titik lellang* for *jin lella* (male spirit bearer as can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1

Tunes (titik) in the rituals of Magduwata, Magpa-igal and Pagkanduli (Source: Hanafi Hussin, fieldwork, 2004, 2005)

Type of tune/ <i>titik</i>	<i>Magduwata</i>	<i>Magpa-igal</i>
Tunes for Female Jin (Jin Denda)	Titik Limbayan	Titik Limbayan
Tunes for Male Jin (Jin Lella)	Titik Lellang As a final piece, <i>titik tabawan</i> is played to the accompaniment of <i>igal tabawan</i> . Both are often referred to as <i>titik duwata</i> by the community. Other <i>titik</i> : <i>titik tabawan</i> , <i>titik jampi</i> or <i>titik jaupi</i> , <i>titik lakkas-lakkas</i> (is similar to <i>titik tabawan</i> from Tabawan island and <i>titik lubak-lubak</i>	Titik Jin Titik Lellang <i>Titik lubak-lubak</i> marks the end of <i>magpa-igal</i> and is played for the leader of the male spirit bearer. <i>Titik limbayan</i> , <i>titik lellang</i> and <i>titik tabawan</i> are played as final pieces.

Sacred soundscapes and musicscape among the Bajau Laut community are more vibrant as the music making is frequently played in Semporna, Sabah, in the *magpa-igal* ritual. The *magpa-igal* ritual is performed quarterly by the family members. It is common in the rituals of *magpa-igal* that *titik limbayan* is played by the *tagunggu* /*kulintang* ensemble in the beginning repertoire of female spirit bearers (*jin denda*) who perform the *igal limbayan* dance. The dance is followed by *titik jin* for the dance of *igal jin lella* (the male spirit bearers); after that, the tunes of *titik tabawan* and *titik lubak-lubak* are played for female spirit bearers who dance the *igal lellang* (Hussin & Santamaria, 2008). Therefore, tunes of the *tagunggu* /*kulintangan* correspond to gender specific dances of the spirit bearers. The male tunes of *titik lellang* for male dancers (and spirit bearers) are linked to the thunderous gongs and

beating of the drums to facilitate and encourage trance dancing during the ritual peak performance. In a trance state, the spirit bearers (*jin*) dance energetically and constantly stamping their feet on the floor, which echoes the energetic movements of the male spirit in the body of the male spirit bearers (John Baptist & Regis, 2012).

Ritual dance as sacred soundscape and musicscape filled with a variety of gendered music or *titik*, most of them accompanied by the sacred dance mainly performed by the male and female *jin* bearer, which is mainly generally called *igal*, *igal jin denda* (dance of female *jin*) and *igal jin lella* (male *jin* dance) (see Table 2). Along with the tune of *titik limbayan*, the dance of the female spirit bearer is performed, and the dance is called as *igal limbayan*. In the slow and languid dance, the body cologne is sprinkled onto the female spirit bearer to induce her to come into the male dancer's body. A burst of quick body movements marks the unification of spirit guides into the body of the male spirit bearer. Likewise, processes are also witnessed in the dance performed by the male spirit bearer (*igal jin lella*) when *titik lellang* (for Bajau Laut in Bangau-Bangau, Semporna, Sabah) or *titik jin* (for Bajau Laut/Sama Dilaut of Sitangkai) are played during *magpa-igal* ritual dance.



Figure 8. *Magpa-igal* Jin of Bajau Laut of Bangau-Bangau, Semporna, Sabah by Jin Lella. (Photo: Judeth John Baptist, Sabah Museum.)

A similar thing happened to the sacred dancescape of Bajau Kubang. Those individuals having the strongest feelings of falling into a trance are encouraged to perform the role of dancing spirit bearer.

Table 2

Dance (igal) repertoire in the rituals of Magduwata and Magpa-igal (Source: Hanafi Hussin, fieldwork, 2005, 2008)

	<i>Magduwata</i>	<i>Magpa-igal</i>
Dance for Female Jin (Jin Denda)	<i>Igal Limbayan</i>	<i>Igal Limbayan</i>
Dance for Male Jin (Jin Lella)	<i>Igal Jin</i>	<i>Igal Jin</i>
	<i>Igal Tabawan</i> – a finale dance piece of the magduwata ritual accompanied by <i>titik tabawan</i> .	<i>Igal Lellang</i>
	<i>Titik Tabawan</i> - played for everyone to dance, which includes all the spirit bearers, i.e., Jin Lella and Jin Denda as well as participants and observers of the <i>magduwata</i> ritual outsiders at the end of the ritual event.	<i>Titik Tabawan</i> was played in the middle of the ritual, enabling Jin Denda and Jin Lella to dance together at the same time.

Like humans, *jins* are gender specific. Therefore, possession by male or female *Jin* is recognised through the playing of specific musical tunes (*titik*). *Titik limbayan* is linked to possessing female jin, and *Titik Lellang* is linked to male jin. A spirit medium who dances the *igal-jin* holds a handkerchief (*jimpau*) in his or her right hand and areca palm fronds in his or her left hand. In a Malay myth, palm fronds from the areca plant are viewed as food for roaming spirits. The same processes may be followed among the Bajau Kubang. Once the *jin* falls into a trance, a family member places a handkerchief on his or her shoulder to confirm that the dance is performed in a trance. It is during the *igal-jin* dance that ritual healing takes place.

Dance and music (tunes) in the rituals have become necessary for the participants; these are found, virtuous and profound to the *magduwata* ritual. It is the peak of festive moments in the intense rites of the given ritual, cathartic and salutary, the former to ill health, while the latter to the spirits of the ancestors. All family members participate at the end of the trance-dancing (*igal-jin*) and ritual healing. They dance the *mag-igal* for the whole day until the sun sets. At this moment, the dance is turned into social-dancing, usually performed in a linear formation around the living quarters that was considered a sacred healing space (Nor & Hussin, 2012b, pp. 143-148).



Figure 9. *Magtagunggu* ' (music)-left, *mag-igal* (dancing) right in the *magduwata* ritual of Bajau Kubang of Semporna, Sabah (Source: Hanafi Hussin, fieldwork, 2005)

Contemporary Performances of Kadazan and Sama-Bajau

Contemporary Performance of Kadazan

Rice planting activities no longer require blessings from any spirits, and once in a while, rice agriculture has experienced loss due to external factors such as climate change or the introduction of new rice varieties. Farmers no longer believe that the spirits look after the rice fields. Modern technology such as fertilisers and pesticides, has taken over rice cultivation. Science and technology have also changed how the rice fields are worked. The society no longer needs to work together in the traditional labour exchange (*mitatabang*) to prepare the rice fields, which modern and sophisticated machines have taken over. Innovations have also changed land use, and the Penampang Plains landscape is no longer agricultural. The landscape has become filled with infrastructures such as housing, schools, churches, and mosques. Farming areas are now economic and commercial centres. Most of the coastal plains of Penampang are not agricultural land any more; the area has become a commercial centre, and its people are not rice producers but consumers.

In social contexts, *sumazau* dancing is often performed by pairs of male and female dancers, who lead the way during the dance if other participants wish to perform in the dance. *Sumazau* dance works as a customary way of life or *adat*, which maintains various traditional aspects of life, including religion and language.

Sumazau dance and music are taught to school-aged girls and boys so that they continue with the tradition and pass it on to the next generation. In Kadazan villages, classes of Kadazan traditional dance are organised for children to prepare them for the contemporary annual harvest festival (Barlocco, 2010). The Kadazan of Penampang is proud of *sumazau* music and dance, for which they are renowned throughout Sabah. In olden times, *sumazau* was primarily used in religious rituals, which also included a triumphant return from head-hunting, but was also used in celebratory contexts such as weddings and *moginakan* family feasting where ordinary

people danced *sumazau* to the *sompogungan* music.

The *sumazau* classes for children are often held in the middle of villages at the community hall (Malay: *balai raya*), where senior local teachers voluntarily teach the students. The sessions are held regularly three months before the annual festival, almost every afternoon. The dance learning includes movements with stretched-out arms and the 'war cry' (*pangkis*) as a form of cueing, characteristics which make an important example of the formation of ethnicity's basic socialisation (Jenkins, 2008;). It is not only the learning of the dance but the learning of Kadazanness. Children acquire the social, cultural, religious, and political Kadazan habitus, which is inscribed into children's minds and bodies. Dance and music are the primary sources of socialisation, which are important for understanding the differences between us and others and also essential for providing a sense of self-identity (Bentley, 1987; Jenkins, 2008). This socialisation process gives them "a deep sense of belonging and oneness with those sharing similar early life experiences." In this case, the children learn physically, through their bodies, to be Kadazan by moving as Kadazan, by acquiring physical skills that make them able to court a suitable partner not only properly but also unequivocally express their Kadazan identity and distinguish them from outsiders" (Barlocco, 2010, p. 417).

In the contextual interaction between ensemble *sumazau* music and dance, three gazes are observed at different levels or by different spectators. At the practical and auditory level, the gong music is seen through the gaze of the musicians (experts in playing the gongs). The dance experts' gaze as they move according to the specific sounds of the gong beats. The gaze of both human and non-human audiences who comprehend the underlying social, cultural, and religious meanings expressed through the specific dances (movements, steps, styles, angles) and musicscapes (high and low pitch of the music and slow and fast beats and rhythms). These meanings have been infused into the Kadazans' minds since childhood.

This interaction has been observed in many other cultures in Sabah. Among other Kadazan Dusun communities and other Dusunic ethnic groups, there are many varieties of gong sets, styles, music patterns, and dance performances. In many of these indigenous communities, large ensembles of hanging gongs produce a total composite texture of colotomic patterns within the gong music, which informs and enlightens the movements of the dancers at the time of dancing (Pugh-Kitingan, 2003, 2012, 2018). In other communities where the *kulintangan* is played together with hanging gongs, such as coastal communities and interior communities with river access to the coast, the melodic motifs of the *kulintangan* are of primary importance, with the hanging gongs playing a supporting role (Pugh-Kitingan & John Baptist, 2005). Dancers in these places tend to listen to the music of the *kulintangan*, but still move their feet according to the rhythm of the hanging gongs. At another level, dancing among indigenous societies in Sabah can reflect social relationships, especially gender balance and the principal role of women who, in the past, were the traditional ritual experts.

Moreover, it can also illustrate the egalitarian nature of social life, especially from a solidarity point of view. Traditional gong music and dance in both ritual and social contexts can reflect the idea of a stable and balanced universe (the physical environment and spiritual world) where humans live in proper relationships with each

other and per the traditional norms established by the Creator. The movement of dance, the visual manifestation of the gong ensemble music, indicates the balance and order between the unseen spiritual world and the seen world of human beings. In many communities, this aspect of dance as a reflection of social and spiritual balance continues into new contexts, including church celebrations (Pugh-Kitingan, 2012 and 2016).

Contemporary of the Sumazau Music and Dance

The contemporary Kadazan Dusun are somewhat different from their forefathers, who used to perform rituals along with dance and music to appease spirits. Today, the Kadazan Dusun worldview has adapted and changed given the modern world and its impact on their life routines (Hussin, 2007b). They no longer believe that the spirits care for rice fields because fertilisers and pesticides can perform these tasks for farmers still cultivating lands in Penampang (Hussin, 2008). New technology has changed the agricultural lifestyle to modern patterns of life. Today, most rice fields on the Penampang Plains have become idle lands or locations for housing estates.

Moreover, Penampang Kadazan, as part of the Kadazan Dusun ethnic majority, now shares their territory with various other ethnic groups. Changes in their worldview, lifestyle and practices also mean transformation in their economic, social, and political aspects, which have pressed them to search for their genuine identity, and they attempt to spark their spirit of indigenous nationalism. The Penampang Kadazan have adapted rice farming ritual elements through festivities or newly staged ritual events, particularly during the State-Level Harvest Festival or *Kaamatan*. For the coastal Kadazan, the former rice farming ritual is now a commoditised symbol of identity, which they perform onstage during the Harvest Festival, but in practice, they no longer practise rice cultivation (Hussin, 2008).

The *Kaamatan* has undergone many changes and developments from being a family and village level feast at the end of harvesting (as it still is in most interior Kadazan Dusun areas), to being an officially recognised Harvest Festival holiday for all indigenous Dusunic, Murutic and Paitanic rice-planting societies, as during the 1950s and for all of North Borneo from the 1960s under the British colonial government (before Malaysia's birth in 1963), to becoming a distinct statement of indigenous cultural identity as it is today. From the early years, the Harvest Festival included many elements that continue today, such as special church services, traditional sports, traditional music and dancing, traditional feasting, symbolic rituals and stage enactments of rice cultivation, and parades of best costumes that, since 1960, have developed into a cultural beauty pageant (formerly Miss Harvest Festival, today *Unduk Ngadau*). Today, the *Kaamatan* is celebrated at the family, village, district, state, and national levels for all Sabahans (Hussin 2008).

A pivotal development in the Harvest Festival as an expression of indigenous identity occurred in 1982, when Tan Sri Datuk Seri Panglima Joseph Pairin Kitingan (then Datuk), President of the Kadazan Dusun Cultural Association (KDCA, then KCA) and now the *Huguan Siou* a warrior for the rights of indigenous Sabahans, organised the true state level Harvest Festival in 1982 on grazing land in his village of Kg. Karanaan, Tambunan. This was in response to the official Harvest Festival

organised by the Berjaya State Government in Keningau, a few weeks beforehand, from which all indigenous people were barred, and native cultural elements were excluded.

In ensuing years at these celebrations, ideological and political differences were kept aside to promote unity. The *Kaamatan* played a central role in reinforcing the Dusunic identities. Including coastal Kadazan traditions at the State Level festival such as segments from the Penampang *magavau* ritual, *sompogogungan* music, *sumazau* dance, and others, led them to become icons of Penampang Kadazan identity. These segments together gave prominence outside of the *Kaamatan* to indigenous expression as a representation of Sabah indigenous identity and culture for the general public. Indirectly, the post-harvest *magavau* ritual and the Penampang *sumazau* music and dance for many years served as the dominant cultural identity and the *Kaamatan* festival at the State Level to promote and strengthen Kadazan identity. All these elements helped to unite different groups in Sabah. Therefore, in this context, the rice and its celebration as a festival was considered a powerful tool to unify the groups in Sabah (Hussin, 2008).



Figure 10. *Sumazau* dance of Penampang in the contemporary setting – as a stage performance and the backup dance for a popular song with *sumazau* beat (Source: Hanafi Hussin, 2023).

Heritagizing the Sumazau as Sabahan and Malaysian Heritage

Although the *sumazau* dance was a part of the *monogit* ritual, it is now choreographed for various events, including concerts for tourists, church services, staged festivals, and other gatherings. Therefore, *sumazau* has become a living Kadazan heritage. *Sumazau* music is no longer ritualistic but has become a part of popular music and is often used to accompany songs. Generally, *sumazau* is considered the state of Sabah's dance.

It continues to be performed during harvest festivals as a thanksgiving for a bountiful harvest and at wedding celebrations, as in traditional contexts. In contemporary times, *sumazau* music and dance have become an iconic scape of Sabahans and Malaysians. The *sumazau* muscscapes and dancescapes are often combined with other traditional and modern materials (tools and tunes), sung in songs, and performed in multiple ways. Today, markets are crowded with CDs of modern pop songs using the melodies and rhythms of *sumazau* beats, in which the listener can quickly identify the use of traditional gongs and modern electronic instruments. Simultaneously, the *sumazau* traditional dancescapes now also follow modern recorded music, where they follow gong-based ensemble music played on modern musical instruments. Various popular songs using modern *sumazau* music beats are available on CDs and online videos (Hussin, 2008).

The modernisation of *sumazau* music and dancescapes has also angered the older community members, who claimed that outsiders were now performing their traditional roles and practices, which are offensive to the community members. They also complained that the outsiders performed the *sumazau* dance distortedly because they did not use the required musical instruments and dancers (Tay, Hussin, Khaw, Mohd. Anis Md. Nor, & Bulan, 2010).

In order to preserve the cultural practices and costumes of the Penampang Kadazan community, the federal and state governments have declared the *sumazau* dance and its music, and the traditional costumes as a national heritage under the law (National Heritage Act, 2005, the Sabah Cultural Heritage (Conservation) Enactment, 1997, and the Copyright Act, 1987). The list of protected objects and practices includes ritual processes and tools, such as the *bobohizan*'s ritual paraphernalia, offering dishes (*pamanta*) to serve food, traditional drinks, ornate clothing, musical instruments (gong and *gandang* ensemble) and the *sumazau* dance. These objects are classified as Kadazan's tangible cultural heritage, while *sompogogunan* music and the *sumazau* dance are classified as intangible cultural heritage reflecting the Penampang Kadazan's fundamental identity (Hussin, 2008).

Contemporary Performance of Bajau

Apart from its role as a manifestation of spirit possession, *igal* also occurs without trance as a form of celebration in other traditional contexts, which also enriches the soundscape, muscscapes, dancescape and the physical and cultural landscapes of the Bajau in both countries. Important social gatherings, such as weddings and circumcision ceremonies (*berkhatan*) as well as the Maulud Nabi in remembrance of the birth of Islam's prophet Mohamed and any other significant Islamic events, are celebrated with *igal* accompanied by *tagunggu*' performances. These continue throughout the night in the house or on the jetty and can feature a solo dancer or a pair. Unlike ritual dance, where the spirit medium wears plain black trousers and tops, dancers in these celebrations wear bright, colourful costumes for special occasions.

A female dancer sometimes wears the narrow-sleeved blouse *badjud alal bimbang*, which features a butterfly-shaped collar decorated with *manik-manik* or strands of small beads, with the skirt called *hoos* or *siyal* and a sash or *sablay*. As in the bridal costume, she might also wear a *jabbang* (crown) headdress and curved brass

fingercaps or *salingkuku*. A male dancer may wear the narrow-legged *tinanjak* costume, in which the black top and trousers are decorated with *batawi* or gold buttons, *antuwilas* or gold lace, and *manik* beading. As in the ritual costume, the *porong* headcloth and *kandit* belt may be of matching textiles. *Igal* performed in non-ritual social gatherings in the village, demonstrating the virtuosity of the dancer and his or her slow, skilful interaction with the fast music of the *tagunggu*’ ensemble. It also reflects the distinctive styles of the family groups involved. In this context, *Igal* is always spontaneous. The dancer is naturally drawn to the sound of the *tagunggu*’ as it performs various pieces in its repertoire. The interaction and skilful concentration of dancers and musicians in this non-ritual setting are as intense as in the trance state of the ritual context (Pugh-Kitingan, John Baptist, & Hussin, 2012, pp. 87-97).



Figure 11. *Igal* dancers dance to the sound of the *tagunggu*’ performing various repertoires. (Source: Hanafi Hussin, n.d.)

Due to the development of the tourism industry in Semporna, the State Government of Sabah has sponsored the annual *Regatta Lepa* since 1994. Such developments have changed the cultural landscape of the Bajau of Semporna and has brought changes to the traditional styles and contexts of *igal* performance. The boats for Bajau Laut wedding celebration are decorated, with large *sambulayang* jellyfish-shaped sails and *panji-panji* pennants. A *tagunggu*’ ensemble plays inside each boat, and a lone *igal* dancer performs on the prow wearing a colourful decorated costume and headgear. Nowadays, this festival event also includes the *Ratu Igal* or “Dance Queen,” a competition for young women who perform *igal*. Each dancer wears the ceremonial wedding costume, featuring the *badjud alal bimbang* blouse

with a beaded butterfly collar, silken *hoos* or *siyal* skirt, *jabbang* headdress, and *salingkuku* finger caps. The girls try to outdo each other in costume and gaudy decorations. Clothing is often made from modern synthetic fabrics in garish colours and decorated with plastic sequins. This competition is a very popular highlight of the *Regatta Lepa* Festival. Entrants are awarded points for their costumes and dancing abilities, and the Queen is selected for her skill in performing *igal*. The contemporary cultural and political setting enables *igal* music and dance to be sustained and maintained among the current generation, young and old. It also shows the continuity of the musicscape and dancescape of Bajau as tools for enriching and enhancing the Bajau identity (Hussin, H., & John Baptist, J. (2019)).

Music and Dance and Continuity of Bajau Identity

Current development with improvements in sound and technology, the Bajau soundscape and musicscape have also ventured into techno sound, which the traditional sound and music transmit into the modern concept of performance, modern popular Bajau music and dance. These groups are often organised under various local cultural associations or sponsors, and dancers and musicians can be drawn from several places, not just one village, and occasionally from different dialect groups. Organising such a performance group necessitates conformity to standard requirements regarding costume, dance style and musical repertoire. The preservation and enculturation of family traditions are no longer a consideration in this context. Neither is the spontaneous demonstration of dancing skills. Rather, the emphasis is on fashion, choreographed conformity, and a desire to please the assumed whims of the audience, which increasingly includes foreign tourists.

The exchange of ritual space in the home or ceremonial space on the jetty for large stages supported by elaborate electrical lighting and sound systems has encouraged electrical band instruments to accompany so-called “traditional” dance. While the *tagunggu*’ ensemble is still widely played in the villages, modern bands of electric keyboards, electrified guitars and western drum sets, and their diatonic band music proliferates in the staged concerts of the *Regatta* season in Semporna town (the electric keyboard or organ is also beginning to encroach into traditional wedding celebrations). There is also a marked tendency for the dancers to be mainly young women, while the musicians are nearly always men.

Sincere efforts by the state government to develop *igal* and *tagunggu*’ as cultural icons of the Semporna Bajau for the tourism industry in the area have led to a distortion of tradition and the development of new regimented styles of dance, music, and costume. Nevertheless, *igal* continues to be a distinctive characteristic of Semporna Bajau culture.

Conclusion

The dancer performed unique dances on the sound/musicscape during the ritual. The actors and audiences knew the specific context (Smith, 1994) in which the two scapes (music and dance) coherently interacted in the ritual performance. These worked together to guide the audience on managing the relationship with the

unseen/spiritual world and how to live life without sins, which often caused anger among spirits. Music from the drums and other instruments combined with sounds from footsteps (dancescapes) created melody and rhythm, representing (or symbolising) the unseen world. The melody and rhythm had to be followed by the physical worlds through specific body and foot movements to strengthen ties with the spiritual world.

The *sumazau* performances are performed by priestesses and dancers on different occasions. These scapes were meant to connect and balance the spiritual and physical worlds in traditional contexts. The soundscape and dancescape constituted the desired environment in which physical actors summoned spiritual entities, who were met, invited to eat fresh food, and were amused or overpowered in cases where some of these had become harmful to the community or its members. Music from the drum and gong ensemble combined with sounds from footsteps (dancescapes) to create melody and rhythms that represented (or symbolised) the unseen world. These melodic and rhythmic structures had to be performed in the physical world through specific body and foot movements to strengthen ties with the spiritual world.

As for the Bajaus, beyond this traditional role of *igal*-dancescape and *igal*-musicscape, Sama-Bajau's ritual performance is subject to influence as Appadurai (1990) envisaged that nothing is permanent to remain the same state but changing of modern fluids which have influenced the communities, and in somehow changed their traditional dance and music scapes through the introduction of modern tools and instruments through many events and festivals. Though the genuinity of the dance and musicscape of the communities have reduced, these scapes are still cherished as the community's identity on both sides of borders and a great source of balancing the power between the two worlds.

The *sumazau* dance and music of Penampang and *igal* music and dance are accepted and recognised, not only as communal dancing and music of the Kadazan and Sama-Bajau community but also performed within the state level like the harvest festival of Kadazan and Dusunic group called *Kaamatan* and Regatta Lepa among Sama-Bajau community and other various state gatherings. The musical influence of the *sumazau* of Penampang and *igal* of Semporna have also affected the development of popular Kadazandusun and Sama-Bajau music and songs. Many popular songs composed by Kadazan Dusun and Sama-Bajau composers and musicians follow the beat and rhythm of the *Sumazau* Penampang and *igal* of Semporna. Expressing their identity through music and dance is flexible and can be changed spontaneously according to place, situation, and context. Although the showcasing of the community's identity may change dynamically, it is clear that the culture of the Kadazan community on the Penampang Plains and Sama-Bajau of Semporna, Sabah, has directly played an essential role in making the Kadazan Dusun and Sama-Bajau of Sabah as a community known and respected not only at the state and national levels but also internationally as well. Therefore, *sumazau* and *igal* in the context of Malaysia are crucial tools for the nation-building processes.

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Biography

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