

BIRTH, INITIATION AND DEATH MOTIFS IN THE FOLK NARRATIVES OF THE TAMBUNAN DUSUN IN SABAH

(Motif Kelahiran, Inisiasi dan Kematian dalam Naratif Rakyat Dusun Tambunan di Sabah)

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Abstract

Rich in culture as reflected in their material culture, the Dusun ethnic group of Sabah (previously known as North Borneo) possess a wealth of folktales in the form of oral narratives that are rapidly fading along with the storytellers themselves. This research project has been initiated to reverse this threat towards the non-material folk culture by collecting and analyzing the folk narratives, popularly referred to as *tangon* among the Dusun ethnic group in the district of Tambunan, Sabah. This paper also hopes to demonstrate a method of interpretation that takes into consideration the social and cultural background of the respondents (storytellers) and the influences that affect the narrated tales. The method involved the collection of 20 *tangon* from 13 storytellers who are Dusun ethnic informants residing in Kampung Sunsuron, Tambunan. The analysis demonstrates an attempt to understand the Dusun ethnic group's perspective on the cycle of life, especially the elements of birth, initiation and death that are contained in their folk narratives. It is the objective of this paper to encourage a method of interpretation

and collection that emphasizes on the storytellers' social and cultural background and the integral part played by them in the creation of their folk narratives.

Keywords: Tambunan Dusun, *tangon*, life cycle, birth, initiation, death

Abstrak

Orang Dusun di Sabah, Malaysia bukan sahaja kaya dengan budaya kebendaan malah kaya dengan bahan folklor dalam bentuk naratif yang semakin hari semakin berkurangan bersama-sama dengan penceritanya. Kajian ini dimulakan dengan tujuan mengatasi ancaman kehilangan budaya rakyat bukan kebendaan dengan mengumpul dan menganalisis naratif rakyat, yang dikenali sebagai tangon dalam kalangan etnik Dusun di Daerah Tambunan, Sabah. Tulisan ini turut bertujuan menunjukkan satu kaedah interpretasi, yang mementingkan latar belakang sosial budaya responden dan pengaruh yang mendatangkan kesan terhadap cerita yang disampaikan. Kaedah interpretasi ini akan diaplikasikan terhadap dua puluh buah tangon, yang dikumpulkan daripada tiga belas orang pencerita etnik Dusun yang tinggal di Kampung Sunsuron, Tambunan. Analisis yang dilakukan menunjukkan satu percubaan untuk memahami Dusun Tambunan perspektif terhadap putaran hidup, khususnya unsur kelahiran, inisiasi dan kematian, yang terkandung dalam naratif rakyat mereka.

Kata kunci: Dusun Tambunan, tangon, kitaran hidup, kelahiran, inisiasi, kematian

INTRODUCTION

The indigenous people residing in Tambunan District are known as Tambunan Dusun. They belong to a Dusunic family and have a rich tradition of folk narrative culture. Before the 1980s, telling folktales, legends and myths was their normal pastime. Among the Tambunan Dusun, folktales are known as *tangon* (Pugh-Kitingan, 2012, p. 147; Gallus & Low, 2016, p. 2). In the Dusun Liwan language, *tangon* means “stories of the past” (Pugh-Kitingan, 2012, p. 47; Yalim & Low, 2019, p. 186). In terms of context, *tangon* are normally told as a bedtime story by parents to their children before they settle down and go to sleep. It was also a favourite pastime in the evening among friends who gathered after a hard day's work in the fields. It was a form of entertainment before the advent of modern entertainment and part of a routine that was adhered to by the farmers (Gallus & Low, 2016, p. 2).

The interest in collecting and documenting folk narratives in North Borneo began during the rule of the North Borneo Chartered (British) Company (NBCC) in North Borneo in the early 20th century. Evans (1923) was among the earliest to document folk narratives in North Borneo and published 10 myths and legends of the Dusun ethnic group from the district of Kota Belud. Rutter (1930) also published his own collection of myths, legends and folktales, which were collected from various locations in North Borneo. The study on the Tambunan Dusun's *tangon* is still rare to date, with Pugh-Kitingan (2012) briefly touching on the *tangon* of the Kadazan Dusun as a form of pastime and to impart moral values among the Kadazan Dusun people of Sabah. Gallus and Low (2016) followed suit with a comprehensive analysis on the various themes contained in the Tambunan Dusun's *tangon*. The analysis was based on fieldwork done among the Dusun Liwan informants residing in several villages in the district of Kirokot, Tambunan. A total of 33 *tangon* were collected by them and then categorized according to the themes in the tales. These themes were analyzed based on interpretation and comparison with Western, Malay and other local folktales. The analysis showed that the *tangon* from the Dusun Liwan ethnic group involves universal themes such as deception, greed, the origins of people and many others. It was discovered that exclusive to these folktales is the theme of "the biological mother who ate her own children," which is not found in the Aarne-Thompson-Uther (ATU) folktales' classification. The psychology or socio-cultural influence behind these themes within folk narratives such as the *tangon* reveals the fascinating worldview of ideas, mental state, traditions, manners and customs and even the wit and wisdom of the people in a particular region that Sahay (2000), in her study of Bihar's folktales, feel these tales uncover. Apart from their entertainment value, they provide an insight into the present and past traditions and culture of the region from which they originate.

As such, this paper hopes to interpret the folk narratives of the Tambunan Dusun from a personal socio-cultural perspective of the storytellers, which will provide additional perspective of the individual thoughts of an ethnic group. The informants' names and personal cultural perspectives were individually recorded through open-ended questions that were then corresponded to the analysis of their folktales. The results are a combination of an empirical and qualitative approach to the analysis of folktales. Along with the interpretation of these folktales, recorded interviews with the storytellers have added important dimensions to the analysis. The efficacy of this approach is demonstrated in the interpretation of the *tangon* about birth, rebirth and death.

FIELDWORK

The fieldwork was conducted in 2010 with the help of a research assistant who is well versed in the Dusunic language for the duration of two weeks in Kampung Sunsuron (*kampung* refers to a village) (Figure 1), with the aim of collecting *tangon* among the Dusun ethnic groups in Kampung Sunsuron. Among the Dusun ethnic groups, the term *tangon* refer to all the tales that have been passed down orally from one generation to another. They do not categorize *tangon* into myths, legends and folktales to date. Hence, in this paper, the term *tangon*, which means folk narratives (myth, legend or ordinary folktale) is used throughout. The research site, Kampung Sunsuron, is located about five kilometers from the nearest township of Tambunan, situated in the interior of Sabah, as shown in Figure 1.

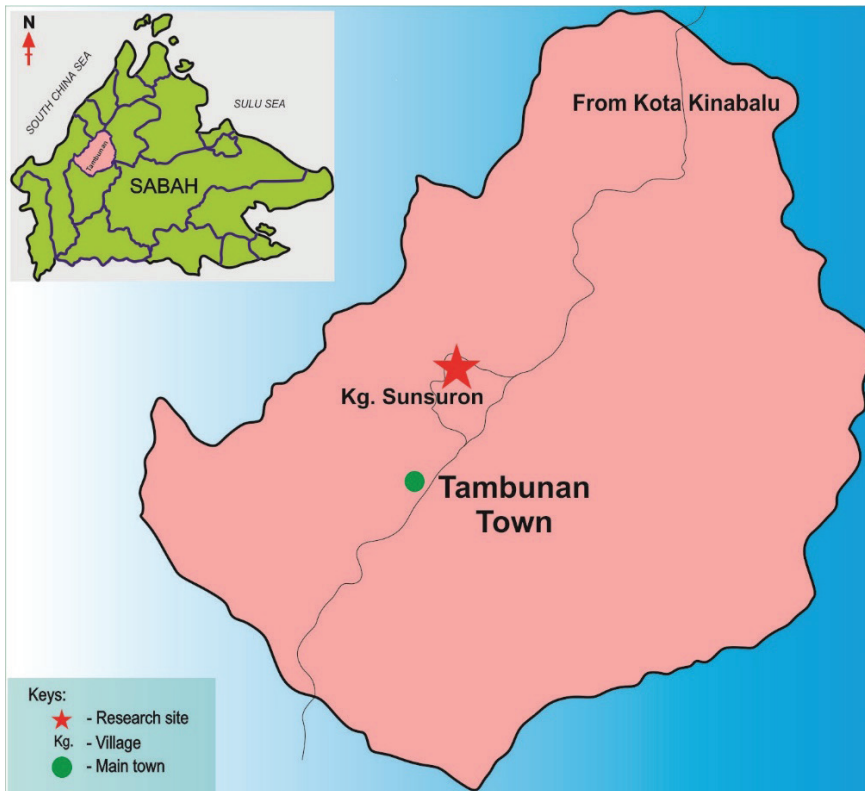


Figure 1 Research site: Kampung Sunsuron, Tambunan District (red star). Kota Kinabalu is the capital city of Sabah. (Map by Salbiah Kindoyop, 2018).

There are 15 informants or respondents who will be referred to as “storytellers” (Appendix). They are rural folk who are self-employed, retirees, farmers, housewives and small business owners ranging from the ages of 43 to 94 with minimal level of education. They were chosen based on the recommendation of the village head as the local folk who could tell *tangon* and provide other information related to *tangon*. Table I in the Appendix shows more details about the storytellers. Both the in-depth interview and focus group interview methods were employed to collect *tangon* and other information with the help of a voice recorder. The interviews and recording sessions were carried out with the consent of the informants in their respective homes, based on appointments made beforehand during their free time. In other words, the recording sessions were “planned sessions” by both parties and did not occur in the original context of storytelling mentioned earlier, that is, telling *tangon* between friends and family members in the evening or during children’s bed time since this is no longer practiced nowadays. This practice happened before the 1990s when there were no other forms of electronic media or readily available source of electricity in the interior of Sabah.

Other than recording the *tangon*, information on personal likes and dislikes, fears and perspectives on family ties, traditions, posterity and beliefs were also asked based on close-ended and open-ended questions. These questions specifically targeted areas such as birth, death, life, love, marriage, culture, children, attitudes toward power, money, physical strength, the government, education, religion, effects of Westernization and modernization as well as the spiritual realm. These were then used to view the kind of stories told by each individual storyteller on specific aspects mentioned above so as to treat these stories as a symbol of the storytellers’ *weltanschauung* or a comprehensive worldview (Edgar & Sedgwick, 1999, p. 434). In this study, personal information is also cross-referenced with the specific areas of the *tangon* to form an understanding of their worldview that is completely derived from the individual storyteller rather than from the researchers own interpretation.

THE TAMBUNAN DUSUN

In terms of historical migration, there are three main original points from where Dusun ethnic people came into Tambunan area: (1) Nunuk Ragang (in present-day Ranau District); (2) Libodon (in present-day Tuaran District); and (3) Kionop (bordering present-day Papar District) (Pugh-Kitingan, 2011,

p. 239). In the early 20th century, the Tambunan Dusun were made up of seven sub-ethnic groups, namely the Tuwawon, Tagahas, Tibabar, Bundu, Gunnah, Palupuh and Kohub. Three of the seven sub-ethnic groups, namely the Tuwawon, Tagahas and Tibabar, are still residing in the Tambunan district to date (Rhys Williams, 1960, p. 95; Low, 2006, p. 29). At present, the Tuwawon occupy three existing villages in the Tambunan District; they are Kampung Sunsuron, Kampung Megong and Kampung Nodu. The Tagahas occupy Kampung Tobou and Kampung Kintuntul, while the Tibabar are residents in Kampung Tibabar (Low, 2006, p. 31).

All the above mentioned Tambunan Dusun sub-ethnic groups belong to the Kadazan Dusun family. There are 545 700 Kadazan Dusun in Sabah to date (The Malaysia Statistic Department Census, 2010). The term “Kadazan Dusun” is a combination of two separate terms, “Kadazan” and “Dusun”. The term was officially coined in the 1990s with the intention of uniting all the sub-ethnic groups of the Kadazan and Dusun ethnic groups in Sabah (Reid, 1997, p. 120; Low, 2005, p. 20; Low, 2013, p. 920). However, some Dusun people who live away from Penampang, Sabah, do not want to be referred to as “Kadazan Dusun” and prefer the single term “Dusun” in reference to them. In this paper, the term “Tambunan Dusun” is used in reference to all the informants who live in Tambunan, where this study was conducted and also based on how the informants would like to be referred to (Low *et al.*, 2013, p. 88).

Like other Dusunic-language people, the majority of the Tambunan Dusun are farmers and most of them are engaged in planting paddy, vegetables and fruit trees as well as rearing cattle, poultry and pigs. The Tambunan town is surrounded by terraced paddy fields and 70 picturesque villages. The Department of Statistics Malaysia (Sabah Branch), in its Sabah 2010 population census, reported that there were a total population of 30 600 Dusun people in the Tambunan District. The population is homogeneous, rich in cultural traditions and experienced in transitional subsistence farming (Low, 2006, p. 31).

Like any other Dusun ethnic group, the Tambunan Dusun in the past believed in various good and evil spirits (Low & Marshall 2013, p. 11; Low & Solehah, 2018, p. 182) but have been Christianized during the colonial period. They believe that there exists a direct connection between everyday crisis (such as birth, disease and harvests) and the world of supernatural beings. The *tomboro* (which cause diseases) and *rogon* (the spirits of the dead) are the evil spirits responsible for life-cycle crises in humans (Rhys

Williams, 1960, p. 17). They also believe that there are various types of good spirits, such as the *bambarayon* (the spirits of the paddy) which ensure them a bountiful harvest each year.

The ritual specialist whose duty is to communicate with the supernatural beings in times of crisis is known as *bobolian* in Tambunan. Most of the *bobolian* are women, although there are a few male *bobolian* who play a different role in certain rituals (Low & Marshall, 2013, p. 12). The Tambunan Dusun believe that there are 25 known types of spirits that are used by the *bobolian* in various ceremonies. These spirits are known as the spirits of *komburongo*. Through this connection, the *bobolian* will use the *komburongo*, which is a type of ritual instrument made out of the roots of the *acorus calamus* plant, and sacred belongings of the *bobolian* for the purpose of communicating with the good spirits in order to get help during times of crisis (Rhys Williams, 1960, pp. 18–19; Low & Marshall, 2013, p. 12).

With the advent of Christianity in the late 19th century in North Borneo, many of the Dusun people in Tambunan converted to the Christian faith, with the majority of them being Catholic. Since 1855, the Catholic faith spread to North Borneo and remains as one of the main Christian denominations in Sabah (Mat Zin, 2003, p. 57). Despite the stronghold of the animist traditional belief system, there has been a lot of recorded changes to the culture, especially amongst the Tambunan Dusun people after their conversion to Christianity. With the onset of modernization and religion, traditional practices such as paddy harvest festivals are still being celebrated but in a smaller scale than before, with the animistic rituals observed either privately by the animist individuals or only by the surviving *bobolian* (ritual specialist) of the villages.

ANALYSIS

The scope of analysis in this paper is narrowed down to the *tangon* that revolve around birth, initiation and death in a life cycle. It is reminiscent of the monomyths of the cycle of life first introduced by Frye (1963), which eluded to the four seasons in temperate countries. While the Western literary corpus has universal metaphors of the four seasons that signify death, rebirth and life as reflected in the seasons of a year, the Tambunan Dusun's "metaphors" appear to be birth, initiation and death. It is a cycle that is reflected in the *tangon*, which is the creative pool of consciousness belonging to the Tambunan Dusun. The main objective of this study is an attempt to establish local tales and motifs that are culturally congruent to the Dusun natives to which it belongs in the hope that this will generate local

literary references to facilitate literary activities. This study is focused on this aspect of folktales, that is, “metaphors” or microscopic expressions of the understanding and perception of another spiritual world that exposes an internal reality of the storytellers.

As stated by Dundes (1980, p. 211):

Interpretation is often subjective and is not necessarily empirically demonstrable. Frequently, interpretations are like beauty insofar as they lie primarily in the eyes of the beholders rather than in the literary text analyzed. Therefore, interpretations are commonly criticized as being “read into” rather than being “read out of” the text.

As such, a functional approach of interpretation towards the Tambunan Dusun’s cycle of life folktales, which focus on the cultural specificity of the *tangon* pertaining to the social function, is more appropriate. It is an approach that views these *tangon* as part of a social and cultural legacy and identity of the storytellers—a fact garnered from the responses of nine (64.3%) out of the 14 storytellers involved in this study.

Tales of Birth, Re-birth and Progeny

The folktales that touch on “birth” project the essence of the life cycle where birth, journey to maturity and death are the general demarcations. The nature of these tales will illustrate the significance of birth and its importance to the Tambunan Dusun worldview. In this case, “birth” refers to the procuring of a new generation or the assurance of progeny of a group of people. Most “births” in the Tambunan Dusun *tangon* collected begin as wishes of childless parents such as the Oki-Oki and Kodu-Kodu in the *tangon* entitled “Sadlapak” by Ungguk Gimbau, Rogon and Siwodalan in “Utan-Utan” by Bagut Gundodog, “Tempurung Ajaib” by Norinah Jaris and “Tondoyutong” by Piah Anggut.

Ungguk Gimbau (Figure 2) is self-employed, grows vegetables in her own garden and also helps out in her neighbours’ fields in Kampung Sunsonon. She has forgotten her real age but thinks she is probably between 66 and 70 years old (Refer to Table 1). Married with 12 children, she believes that most marriages do not last because the couples are unable to have children, as children along with a lover and intelligence are among the things she values most. She feels that, nowadays, children do not follow the old traditions and should not subject themselves to contraception because with more children



Figure 2 Buyuh bin Gapuh and Ungguk Gimbu (left to right). Photograph by Stephanie John (Enumerator, 2010).

come more chances of being cared for when one grows old. According to her, the old ways and rituals are no longer practiced because she has a religion now. However, she wishes that her children will wear traditional clothes more often. Nowadays, she says she worries for her children and grandchildren who are far away in the city. She worries about their safety because she has many children. Her concern with children and how important they are to her is reflected in her *tangon* entitled “Sadlapak”. “Sadlapak” in translation means “half”, which aptly describes a child born to a childless couple. The wife in this folktale valued having a child higher than material wealth. This was the common wish of the villagers on a magical full moon night, where they would normally unfurl their bamboo mat called *kolobon* to ask for more harvest in their paddy fields. Her concerns with being cared for in her old age is also reflected in how this tale ends with Sadlapak, the “half boy”, finding his other half by travelling afar in search of God, who restores him when he successfully identifies his other half from seven entities that was set before him. Having achieved his goal, he returns home, only to be met with war. He fights and kills all his enemies, saving his mother and village from destruction. Most importantly, he returns as a savior who saves his mother after she fell ill from missing him. The idea of the prodigal son returning to help his parent is both a Christian metaphor and perhaps a wish by the storyteller that her children having experienced life away will now be prepared to come home.

Supaya Goririk also tells a similar tale entitled “Angkayau”, which literary means “a piece of heart”. She is another self-employed widow who has never received formal education and is a grand age of 67. Her *tangon* tells of a piece of heart that gets caught in a *siou* or a traditional fish trap; the heart turns out to be a child that the parents had prayed for. The parents



Figure 3 Siapa Matimbun, Supaya Goririk, Gondikul (top to bottom). Photograph by Stephanie John (Enumerator, 2010).

eventually reject the child, who turns out to be a beautiful girl who marries a blind seeress' son. "Utan-Utan", in the meantime, is about an old man who, in his desperation to outwit a giant couple, leaps into the womb of the giantess to be reborn as their child. This *tangon* is by Bagut Gundodog, a 72-year-old widower (no picture) of Christian faith who has a cheeky sense of humor as he often litters his *tangon* with sexual innuendoes and connotations, as demonstrated in "Utan-Utan" and other *tangon* such as "Urui-urui and Yangkaton". The *tangon* titled "Tondoyutong" tells of a monkey that is raised as a child; this *tangon* is by Piah Anggut (no picture), who is yet another 72 year old widower with no formal education and is self-employed.

In each of these tales, the center of the story is focused upon a child that is magically begotten through prayer; such child characters include Angkayau,

Sadlapak, who transforms from a piece of heart to a half a boy, Utan-Utan, an ugly old man reborn as the child of an ogress, as well as Tondoyutong, a monkey that transforms into a child. The circumstances of birth appears to be important to them as these four informants tacitly agree that *tangon* are not only instrumental to humor the children but also to ensure that aspects of their culture are passed down because some parts of these stories reflect the reality of their lives. Each of these four informants have between six and 12 children and three of them express the need for more children to help care for them when they are old.

All of the *tangon* mentioned above feature magical births and have happy endings in the form of riches and prosperity brought by the magical child. The character of Sadlapak finds his other half, while Utan-Utan, Tondoyutong and Angkayau are transformed into normal human beings who procure prosperity and riches. However, these rewards are circumspectly given to their parents who upheld their duties to their child and showered their love on their child despite their iniquities. Those who did not do so, such as Angkayau's parents, will receive retribution at the end. The sense of responsibility towards the child is so entrenched in the culture that it is also reiterated in other folktales, such as "Burung Gagak" ("Crow" by Ungguk Gimbu) and "Anak yang Malang" ("An Unlucky Child" by Buyuh Gapuh), where children who were not given the fruits of their parent's labour are transformed into crows or monkeys to literally inundate the selfish parents with complaints and theft. This is justified by the total identical response by the storytellers who acknowledged their need of children and love as being very important to them. All the storytellers who are between the ages of 45 and 92 view an abundance of children as a blessing.

However, the treatment of children is a reciprocal action that is reflected in the filial actions of the child. In "Si Gontolobon" (by Piah Anggut) and "Si Dongkor yang Pandir" (by Norinah Jaris), the unfilial children murder their parent out of greed and stupidity. Retribution comes in the form of death for all six sons of Si Gontolobon while Si Dongkor's foolish murder of his mother eventually leads to his own death. The moral message that is underlined in these tales have their own limitation, as seen in "Usak Soronggo" by Porison Bulindau. It tells of an overly-dependent old lady who insists on being carried on the back of whomever she leeches onto. She eventually kills herself after being tricked by Usak Soronggo and his friends who become tired of carrying her around. Children who do not reciprocate the love that their parents have showered upon them or become a burden to the younger

generation will be punished and destroyed. However, an overly-dependent and lazy older person will not be tolerated as well.

Although morality appears to be the primal function of these tales, there is another motif of supernatural birth that is recurrent in these tales. It is related to the institution of marriage, which indicates its importance in relation to progeny. The importance of marriage in the culture is made obvious in the pride the storytellers take in describing their traditional wedding that is often unsolicited. 80% of the marriage partners of the storytellers were determined by their parents. Some took pride in detailing the bride prices, which ranged from a *biola* (a three-string violin) and accordion to RM200, gongs and six heads of buffaloes. The many rituals involved in the traditional weddings of the Tambunan Dusun imply that the wedding ceremony is not only a celebration of two individuals becoming one but also an initiation or introduction into the spiritual realm of the people. Marriage to a supernatural being, such as a spiritual being or *bunian*, is recurrent in at least five tales, namely “Gadis Penyegat” (by Porison Bulindau), “Si Utan-Utan” (by Bagut Gundodog), “Si Monyet” (by Guitang Gindayuk), “Si Bulontoi” (by Siapa Matimbun) and “Kuntunan” (by Gondikul). The supernatural half is almost always a female that has to be caught or trapped into the marriage, as implied in “Gadis Penyegat”, “Si Utan-Utan” and “Kuntunan”. While some of the female entities are portrayed as bees, fairies and birds, they are often caught by a smart hero who either steals their clothing while they are bathing or impregnates them without their knowledge.

The response from Gondikul and Giutang Gindayuk—both of whom emphasized that a marriage should not be allowed if either the bride or groom has had a bad dream about the nuptials—encourage the speculation of marriage as being an initiation into the spiritual realm of the unknown. “Kuntunan” by Gondikul is similar to the Greek myth of Orpheus and Eurydice (Ovid, 1995); in the *tangon*, the hero Kuntunan is looking for his dead wife in the spirit world after she dies while pregnant with his child before he returns from an errand. He meets with the spirits who have spirited his wife away and eats with them. After performing all the necessary rituals, he is allowed to lead his wife back to the world of the living with the help of fireflies that light their way. However, the pair never make it back to the world of the living as heavy rain eliminated their chances. The search for a runaway wife also leads Si Bulontoi to the spiritual realm of the Goddess Runduk Ngadau, which is the dwelling place of the *bunian* or spiritual beings. After observing the rituals that is required to enter the place, the Goddess finally

allows him to retrieve his wife, but only after he is able to identify her from among the many fairies in the place.

Aside from the moral need to emphasize on the importance of responsibility, respect and keeping promises between a husband and wife, these tales about the relationship between a husband and wife is identified through supernatural motifs. Moreover, the estranged pair can only be together through elaborate rituals (this is discussed later in the tales of death section), whereby the husband is required to undergo otherworldly tests before being able to access the netherworld where their wives have been taken. Marriage is implied to be a sacred rite because it is an initiation into the spiritual realm of the Kadazan Dusun people.

Initiation: Innocence to Experience and Journeying

While the tales of birth appear to explain the relationship between human existence and the supernatural world through the pairing up of human parents with supernatural children, and husbands with supernatural brides, who are gifts from supernatural world, these motifs also suggest a belief by the local Tambunan Dusun of a cycle of life that is fostered at birth by a spiritual realm that is clearly expressed through birth or marriage. Although only four of the 15 storytellers are agnostic,¹ the tales that are told by all of them express an unconscious acknowledgement of their link to the spirit world that revolves around birth and marriage. Otherwise, the other tales revolve around retribution for disobedience and immorality, suggesting that these tales also function as moral governors of the people.

The cycle of life that is projected through the tales also involve the motifs of initiation, innocence to experience and journeying, also known as the *bildungsroman* (Sim, 2004, pp. 31–40) of an individual. All these motifs help us to understand the cycle of life that is part of the worldview of the Kadazan Dusun people. Literature derived its theme of initiation through an experience that involves a transformation from a state of innocence to experience from inherited cultural rituals and practices that sometimes signify an initiation into adulthood. The Jews have the *bar mitzvah*² while the Malays have the *berkhatan* or *bersunat*³ ceremony exclusively for the male species of the clan. Each of these rituals involve an act that includes pain, the shedding of blood, a celebration of the initiation (Burrow (ed.), 1973, p. 110) or even a sexual or evil experience that a young man or woman has to undergo before he or she has attained a maturity that is acceptable to her spouse or parents. These are symbolic of a spiritual growth, renewal of

the spirit and maturity or rebirth that is also metaphorically implied in the Tambunan Dusun *tangon*.

These rituals are found in eight of the 25 *tangon* collected and is the largest percentage of type of tale that is found in the collection (See Table 1). They are “Si Sadlapak” (by Ungguk Gimbau), “Si Bulontoi” (by Siapa Matimbun), “Pengajaran Si Anak-Anak” (by Gokin Sodikan), “Kuntunan” (by Gokin Sodikan), “Raja Tua dan Raja Muda” (by Lakunting Kendial), “Yangkaton” (by Bagut Gundodog), “Si Utan-Utan” (by Bagut Gundodog) and “Monsosoli” (by Loduhim Gomboot). While the title character in “Si Sadlapak” journeys in search of his other half at the prompting of God since he is only half a person, the title character in “Si Bulontoi” goes in search of his wife, whom he has lost because of a broken promise. In “Kuntunan”, the hero goes to the netherworld in search of his dead wife, whereas the young and old princes in “Raja Tua dan Raja Muda” have to past three tests before they are rewarded with a wife, power, status and position in a kingdom. Meanwhile, the hero in “Yangkaton” travels to heaven while he is tied to the legs of a huge chicken, only to be banished back to earth because of his curiosity. His actions also bring retribution in the form of a progeny of ghosts, poltergeists and spirits from his children who died after a storm. The young hero of “Pengajaran Si Anak-anak” is taught a lesson when he is hounded by a moving coffin all the way home after he refuses to heed to the taboos on his journey home. The heroine of “Monsosoli” is equally frightened by her experience with the paddy spirits in the *sulap*⁴ when she stubbornly refuses to leave after harvest despite her husband’s urgings. Only the hero in “Si Utan-Utan” is physically reborn when he jumps into the womb of the giantess whom he wishes to trick. His spiritual rebirth is signified by the ultimate confession of his crime to the pair of giants who had treated him as a son while he secretly robbed them of gongs to pay the bride prices for the seven fairies he had impregnated. The function of the tales as “moral governor” or keeper of traditional beliefs is obvious in these *tangon*.

What differentiates the Tambunan Dusun tales from others are the rewards that await the heroes and heroines who have undergone the trials and pains of the journey. They learn, just as the character Si Bulontoi learns, that there is retribution. The journeys undertaken by the hero or heroine do not often end with rewards of material riches, a wife and progeny. Often, as in “Si Bulontoi”, “Pengajaran Si Anak-Anak”, “Kuntunan”, “Yangkaton” and “Monsosoli”, the heroes of the tales learn that there is retribution if the rituals or taboos are ignored. For instance, the character Si Bulontoi loses

Table 1 Tale types.

<i>TANGON</i>	ATU Classification ⁵	Type
<i>Si Sadlapak</i>	Tales of Magic	Supernatural wives, husbands & Relatives (400–459); However, in this case, the son is literally only half a boy. Magic objects (560–649)
<i>Si Bulontoi</i>	Tales of Magic	Supernatural Wife & Husbands (400–459)
<i>Pengajaran Si Anak-anak</i>	Other Religious Tales	Tales of what to and what to avoid (827–849)
<i>Kuntunan</i>	Tales of Magic	Supernatural tasks (460–499) Supernatural husbands & wives (400–459)
<i>Raja Tua dan Raja Muda</i>	Tales of Magic	Brothers & Sisters (450–459) Supernatural Helpers (500–559)
<i>Yangkaton</i>	Tales of Magic	Supernatural Helpers (500–559) Supernatural Tasks (460–499)
<i>Si Utan-Utan</i>	Tales of Magic Tales of the Stupid Ogre	Partnership between man and ogre (1030–1059) Man outwits ogre (1155–1169) Supernatural wives (400–459)
<i>Monsosoli</i>	Tales of Magic Other Religious Tales	Magic objects (560–649) Tales of what to and what to avoid (827–849) This tale has more to do with the cultural taboos held by the Kadazan Dusun.

his wife when he breaks his vow to never to sing about her (supernatural identity) to others and is forced to acknowledge and receive punishment from the fairy goddess, Runduk Ngadau, before his wife is returned. The character Yangkaton also suffers retribution for defying the orders of the old wise men who forbade him from opening two clay pots (*bagaton*), one of which contains his fairy wife's 14 eggs and another that is tightly closed. Defying orders, Yangkaton opens the tightly closed clay pot, only to release sparrows that threaten all paddy harvest. His seven sons and seven daughters meet with dismal fates when they die after being crushed by

falling tress. The character Kuntunan defies death in his attempt to retrieve his wife from the spirits in the netherworld, only to lose his own at the end. The frightening experience of the heroine in “Monsosoli” and the young boy in “Pengajaran Si Anak-anak” lead us to the conclusion that these tales encourage a healthy respect for rituals and customs that is connected to the spiritual aspect of their lives through the retribution motif that is promised in all the tales. Retribution is flashed out at those who deceive, are vengeful, steal from others or are selfish and greedy. Among the most hated attitudes that the storytellers outlined are their dislike of thieves, laziness, greed, deceit and vengeful people. Table 2 shows that the two most despised traits among people in the eyes of the storytellers are those who deceive and are vengeful. The overarching projection of the retribution motif in the tales is connected to their belief that folktales are an important moral guide for the next generation as it is based on their traditional beliefs. As such, it is not surprising that more than half of the storytellers (See Table 3) feel that folktales reflect their life and that these tales should be passed down to the next generation (See Table 4).

Table 2 Level of dislike of attitude.

Level of Dislike for Attitude	Thieves	Laziness	Greed	Deceit	Vengeful People
Most Hated	14 (93.4%)	10 (66.7%)	13 (86.8 %)	15 (100%)	15 (100%)
Hated	1 (6.6%)	4 (26.6%)	1 (6.6%)	0	0
Neutral	0	1 (6.6%)	1 (6.6%)	0	0
Total	15	15	15	15	15

Table 3 Role of folktale.

Role of Folktale	Moral Guide	Reflection of Life	Explains the World They do not Understand
Agree	14 (93.4%)	10 (66. 7%)	8 (53.3%)
Disagree	1 (6.6%)	5 (33.3%)	7 (46.7%)
Total	15	15	15

Table 4 Perception of *tangon*.

Perception of Folklore	Folklore is a Tradition that should be Passed Down	The Root of Folklore is Traditional Beliefs
Agree	15	15
Disagree	0	0
Total	15	15

Aside from being a moral guide, these tales also appear to be a tradition that ensures that the spiritual aspect of their existence is passed down from one generation to the next. Therefore, only half of the storytellers felt that the folktales reflected a world that they do not understand. Out of the eight who agreed that these tales do reflect the world they do not understand, two are traditional believers, two are Christians who believe in the existence of otherworldly spirits, three are Christians who used to believe in the existence of otherworldly elements and one who said she does not in them anymore because she is now a Christian. However, two of the informants did not feel that the folktales reflect their lives even though the tales do not reflect a world that they do not know (Table 3).

The implication in the arbitrary responses from the two storytellers who felt that the tales were a reflection of their lives but not the world is that they understood the world or that they felt that these tales have no truth in the real world. The latter is not a possible conclusion as these are the same storytellers who wished that these tales would be passed down to the next generation because of the moral and traditional values that are in them. The former, however, implies that a large part of the Tambunan Dusun people's existence can be understood from the spiritual perspective, which is why they felt that there is nothing that they do not understand. Supaya Goririk, who is one of the two storytellers, admitted to persistently perform the *bambarayon* (paddy spirit) ritual each year while Siapa Matimbun, despite her protest about animistic beliefs, tells stories about them.⁶ The tales of initiation, innocence to experience and journeying are but motifs for an initiation into the spiritual realm in the perspective of life, which encourages a healthy respect for rituals and traditions that are affected through the promise of retribution.

Tales of Death

Tales of birth or initiation cannot be discussed without touching on death. Often, folklorists would discuss tales of birth as part of tales of death and

vice versa as it is an inevitable cycle that appears to be a beginning and not the end of a rebirth. According to Henderson and Oaks (1963, p. 4), in their analyses of tales of death and rebirth, it is initiation that bridges the distance between these binary opposites. They observed that the tales of death and rebirth are often related to the initiation into a particular tribe or shamanism. Where the Tambunan Dusun tales of death are concerned, there are three different aspects to be considered. There is the tale of death in which there is no rebirth, as in the case of the hero in “Kuntunan”, who lost his own life in his efforts to retrieve his wife from the netherworld. Myths of death that include a prelude, which is a rebirth, such as that in “Si Utan-Utan”, is an indication of the spiritual transcendence of the hero, as discussed earlier. The final and perhaps the most unique aspect of the Tambunan Dusun tale of death is that of “Si Anak, Penjaga Kapas” (by Anna Martina), which involves the resurrection of a young boy by his mother using chants and magic or shamanism. The ritual involves the sprinkling of water from the *banaga*⁷ on the bones of her son that have been secured seven times using strands of her hair.

In respect of the “collective unconscious”,⁸ the seven repetitions are reminiscent of the levels or steps that lead to the netherworld, which finds an echo in the myths of the Sumerian Goddess Inanna. However, the resurrection of the young hero in the Tambunan Dusun folktale is followed by a confrontation between the mother and the perpetrator of the awful deed, which is Si Rogon (a spiritual being). The mother is said to wield her *parang* (machete) and prevent Si Rogon from eating the resurrected boy again when it is discovered he is alive. She manages to enslave Si Rogon, who promises to help hunt and feed them from then on. The story ends with the death of the mother and the departure of Si Rogon despite the young man’s insistence on following Si Rogon. It is said that the boy begins a new life after that. Unlike the other tales of death and rebirth in the Sumerian and Greek cultures, this tale implies that the physical dismemberment or changes to the young hero and subsequent resurrection mitigates a new way of life in which his mother is no longer the physical provider of sustenance; this is now provided by the supernatural or spiritual aspect represented by Si Rogon. The death of the mother or the female principle, whose role has been emotional thus far in the life of the young man, is transformed again to become independent from both physical and emotional ties, as suggested by the departure of Si Rogon despite his protests. The tales of death and rebirth indicate the definition of maturity and adulthood (for a young man),

which involves a crucial departure from the female principle and a reliance on the spiritual aspect of life.

The tales of death and rebirth are exclusively discussed in relation to the mother and son relationship, rather than that of a mother and daughter or even father and daughter. In the Tambunan Dusun tales, the female principle appears to have no problems moving between the three “worlds” of mortality, immortality (fairies) and the netherworld, unlike their male counterpart. Besides the “mother” and “wife” or “heroine”, the rest are ephemeral and in possession of transformation powers that allow them to transform themselves into animate and inanimate forms, such as a pumpkin, a piece of heart, a bee, a coconut shell and—the most popular—a bird. The male principle cannot descend to the netherworld unless he observes the rites and rituals, as performed by Kuntunan when he descends to try to retrieve his wife. While he can survive a journey into the world of immortals, as Si Bulontoi does when his fairy wife returns to her original dwelling, the male principle is unable to survive the journey to the netherworld. However, a female principle is merely reprimanded for daring to challenge the spirits, as implied by the heroine in “Monsosoli” who survives the night in the paddy fields even though the spirits that emerged were aggressively seeking her. The female principle is not to be undermined, as in “Si Dongkor yang Pandir”, where the fool only learns when he loses his own life after foolishly ending his mother’s. The female principle is the voice of wisdom that guides the hero in “Tempurung yang Ajaib” (by Norinah Jaris) to nurture the magical coconut husk that eventually becomes his wife.

However, the storytellers unanimously disagreed with the statement that imply women are the guardians of tradition in the Tambunan Dusun community. Despite the prominence of the *bobohizan*,⁹ who are initiators of rituals and traditional celebrations mentioned in the tales, the female principles in the Tambunan Dusun are not the guardians of tradition as they are already the guardians of the spiritual aspects of the community. Spiritual aspects are linked to the traditional beliefs through “marriages” between the female and male principles. From these marriages, the spiritual and the traditional, the mortal and the immortal, life and death, the female and male principles, the young and the old and the youthful and the matured are symbolically integrated.

CONCLUSION

All the storytellers agreed wholeheartedly that tales of birth, initiation and death are important to be passed down to the next generation (Table 3), not only because they are moral guides but because they explain the cycle of life that involves delineating the course of life, life's goals, the gendered roles and the worldview of the Tambunan Dusun community. These tales and the input of the storytellers have provided a clearer idea of the importance of folktales in fostering continuous respect and regard for culture and tradition. Even though all the storytellers agreed that the younger generation do not practice the "old" ways or beliefs of their forefathers, they still tell these stories. Although 70% of them are Christians, religion has not hampered their desire for their stories to be passed down as the element of tradition and its cultural significance, which is more pronounced in these folktales than spiritual animism.

NOTES

- 1 Gondikul, Buyuh Gapuh, Giutang Gindayuk and Loduhim Gomboot still practice the Dusun traditional beliefs while the rest of the 11 informants are Christians.
- 2 It is a Jewish celebration held to celebrate a young woman or man who has reached his majority maturity, which is 13 years old. It is also a celebration that coincides with puberty.
- 3 A circumcision ceremony for young Muslim boys conducted by Islamic religious authorities.
- 4 A small hut reserved for keeping harvested paddy.
- 5 The tales have been divided according to the ATU Classification of Folktales in <http://www.mftd.org/index.php?action=atu&act=range&id=400-459>. Accessed on 04 May 2019.
- 6 Siapa Matimbun is the respondent for *Si Bulontoi* and *Kisah Si Anak-anak* myths.
- 7 A clay pot traditionally used to keep water for consumption; sometimes referred to as a *tajau*.
- 8 A psychological theory that was established by Carl Jung and used by folklorists to explain the similarities between the tales across cultures, ages, genders and religions (Dry, 1961).
- 9 Reference to an elderly female ritual specialist in a Kadazan Dusun community. They are also referred to as *bobolian*, *bobohizan* or *tantagas*, depending on the different Kadazan and Dusun sub-groups. The Lotud Dusun in Tuaran District refer to their ritual specialist as *tantagas* (Pugh-Kitingan & Baptist, 2009, p. 250). The majority of these ritual specialists are women, although there are a few male ritual specialists (Low & Solehah, 2018, p. 180).

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Table I Details of storytellers (respondents) and related folktale(s).

Storyteller	Tale	Age	Sex	MS	Ed	Work	Religion	Code
Siapa Matimbun	<i>Si Bulontoi</i>	70	F	W	None	Self-employed	Catholic	(KD22/T)
	<i>Kisah Si Anak-anak</i>							(KD29/T)
Gokin Sodikin	<i>Pengajaran Si Anak-anak</i>	60	M	M	Lower primary	Self-employed	Catholic	(KD1/T)
Lakunting Kendial	<i>Si Pelanduk</i>	85	F	W	None	Self-employed	Catholic	(KD2/T)
	<i>Raja Tua & Raja Muda</i>							(KD3/T)
Ungguk Gimbu	<i>Burung Gagak</i>	66	F	M	None	Self-employed	Catholic	(KD4/T)
	<i>Si Sadlapak</i>							(KD5/T)
Bagut Gundodog	<i>Si Utan-Utan</i>	72	F	W	None	Self-employed	Catholic	KD6/T)
	<i>Si Urui-Urui</i>							(KD7/T)
	<i>Yangkatan</i>							(KD8/T)
Supaya Goririk	<i>Si Piasau</i>	67	F	W	None	Self-employed	Traditional belief	(KD27/T)
	<i>Si Angkayau</i>							(KD 24/T)
Guitang Gindayuk	<i>Si Monyet</i>	76	M	M	None	Self-employed	Traditional belief	(KD21/T)
	<i>Mongurau</i>							(KD23/T)
Gondikul	<i>Si Anak-anak</i>	94	M	W	None	Retiree	Traditional belief	(KD25/T)
	<i>Kuntunan</i>							KD30/T)
Buyuh Gapuh	<i>Anak yang Malang</i>	65	M	-	None	Farmer	Unknown	(KD28/T)
	<i>Perlumbaan di Antara Sang Rusa dan Sang Tuntul</i>							(KD26/T)
Piah Anggut	<i>Si Tondoyutung</i>	72	F	W	None	Self-employed	Catholic	(KD10/T)
	<i>Kisah Si Gontolobon</i>							(KD9/T)

Storyteller	Tale	Age	Sex	MS	Ed	Work	Religion	Code
Gadusin Sepanggal	<i>Si Anak-anak dan Si Pondrogon</i>	83	M	M	None	Pensioner	Catholic	(KD11/T)
	<i>Perlawanan Si Buaya dengan Si Tenggiling,</i>							(KD12/T)
Loduhim Gomboot	<i>Monsosoli</i>	72	F	W	None	Self-employed	Traditional belief	(KD13/T)
Anna Martina	<i>Si Anak Penjaga Kapas</i>	43	F	M	Lower Primary	Self-employed	Catholic	(KD14/T)
Porison Bulindau	<i>Usak Soronggo,</i>	82	F	W	None	Sundry shop owner	Catholic	(KD18/T)
	<i>Gadis Penyengat</i>							(KD17/T)
Norinah Jaris	<i>Si Dongkor yang Pandir</i>	45	F	M	None	Housewife	Catholic	(KD19/T)
	<i>Tempurung yang Ajaib</i>							(KD20/T).