

# **TUTURAN KOMBURONGO IN THE CONTEXT OF ORAL NARRATIVE AND BELIEF OF THE TOBILUNG ETHNIC GROUP OF SABAH**

***(Tuturan Komburongo dalam Konteks Cerita Lisan dan Kepercayaan Etnik Tobilung di Sabah)***

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## **Abstract**

The oral narratives that revolve around Komburongo are known as *tuturan* Komburongo among the Tobilung ethnic group in Sabah. The purpose of this article is to analyze the elements of belief contained in these stories. All the *tuturan* Komburongo that are analyzed in this article are obtained from fieldwork interviews with informants from the Tobilung ethnic group in the district of Kota Belud, Sabah. The important issues dealt with in this article are concerned with the Tobilung ethnic group's belief in the supernatural powers of Komburongo, as told in their oral literature. The result of the analysis by way of interpretation in this study finds that the *tuturan* Komburongo are divided into myth or legend in the context of folklore. On the question of its origin, Komburongo is believed to have been created by Tinamaru, the Creator of the Tobilung. The traditional Tobilung ethnic group are found to be highly dependent on Komburongo as the good spirit that provides guidance and possesses

magical powers that help to solve various life crises for generations. This study is considered significant because it highlights many aspects of the belief of the Tobilung ethnic group passed down from generation to generation based on *tuturan* Komburongo.

Keywords: *Tuturan*, Komburongo, Tobilung, elements of belief, good spirit

### **Abstrak**

*Cerita lisan Komburongo dikenali sebagai tuturan Komburongo dalam kalangan etnik Tobilung di Sabah. Artikel ini bertujuan menganalisis unsur-unsur kepercayaan yang terkandung dalam tuturan Komburongo. Semua tuturan Komburongo yang dianalisis dalam makalah ini diperoleh daripada kerja lapangan menemui bual informan keturunan etnik Tobilung di Daerah Kota Belud, Sabah. Isu penting artikel ini berkaitan dengan kepercayaan masyarakat Tobilung terhadap kuasa-kuasa ghaib Komburongo yang wujud dalam sastera lisan mereka. Hasil analisis secara interpretasi dalam kajian ini mendapati tuturan Komburongo terbahagi kepada sama ada mitos atau legenda dalam konteks sastera rakyat. Dari segi asal usul, Komburongo dipercayai telah dicipta oleh Tinamaru, iaitu Pencipta Tobilung. Etnik Tobilung tradisional didapati banyak bergantung pada semangat Komburongo sebagai semangat pembantu, yang mempunyai kuasa ghaib bagi menyelesaikan pelbagai krisis hidup mereka sejak turun-temurun. Kajian ini dianggap penting kerana telah menonjolkan banyak maklumat kepercayaan turun-temurun etnik Tobilung berdasarkan tuturan Komburongo mereka.*

*Kata kunci: Tuturan, Komburongo, etnik Tobilung, unsur kepercayaan, semangat baik*

## **INTRODUCTION**

The Tobilung is one of the Kadazan Dusun ethnic groups that reside in the district of Kota Belud, Sabah. For generations, the Kadazan Dusun believe in a variety of spirits that are either good or evil (Evans, 1953; Mat Zin, 2003; Low and Marshal, 2013; Low and Sri Ningsih, 2013; Low, 2017). Similarly, the Tobilung ethnic group residing in Kota Belud believe in the existence of various spirits. In the Tobilung language, the good spirit is known as *olundu*, while the evil spirit is known as *rogon* (Informant: Sunda binti Tampisal). It

was reported by Kandok and Low (2016:106) that there are many types of *rogon* that the Kadazan Dusun are afraid of. Thus, *rogon* must be pacified through ritual by a *bobolion* (ritual specialist) if the people are disturbed, faced with disaster or fall ill. The good spirit, Komburongo<sup>1</sup>, instead plays an important part in helping people in their everyday lives. The Tobilung ethnic group turn to Komburongo for help in solving spiritual issues they might face. This belief has been passed on from generation to generation within the Tobilung ethnic group until the present time.

Research on Komburongo within the Dusun ethnic community have been carried out by several researchers. For example, Evans (1953:61), who was an early researcher of traditional Dusun beliefs, highlighted the importance of belief in Komburongo among the Tindal Dusun ethnic group living in Kota Belud. Similarly, it was reported by Low and Solehah (2016:1337; 2018:185) that the Dusun ethnic groups in Pitas, Kota Marudu, Ranau and Membakut Kecil believe in Komburongo's power in rituals to help in curing physical ailments and spiritual problems. Three different entities are attributed to Komburongo—that of a plant, a ritual tool and a good spirit (Evans, 1953:61; Low & Solehah, 2018:186).

Other researchers who have mentioned Komburongo in their studies are Arena Wati (1978), Hurlbut (1986), Tongkul (2002), Hanafi (2003) and Marlenny (2014). On the whole, each of these previous researchers explained that Komburongo, in general, especially its function via its three identities — as a tool for the performance of rituals, a beneficial plant used as a herb in traditional medicine as well as a good spirit—comes to the aid of the Kadazan Dusun people. However, no study has yet been done on the Tobilung's belief in Komburongo. This study is to fill the research gap left open by past researchers.

Oral narratives about Komburongo are known as *tuturan* Komburongo in the language of Tobilung. All the *tuturan* analyzed in this article are obtained from fieldwork interviews with informants of Tobilung descent in the district of Kota Belud, Sabah (see Attachment I). This study is considered significant as the *tuturan* Komburongo contain a great deal of information on the Tobilung's belief which have been passed down from generation to generation. This article highlights several important issues that require in-depth analysis. The first issue concerns the question of Tobilung belief in Komburongo's supernatural powers. These are recorded in their oral stories known as *tuturan* Komburongo. Next is the knowledgeable informants that relate these *tuturan*; they are the *bobolian* (ritual specialist) and elders only. The concern is that, without any effort to document and analyze the

elements of belief in *tuturan* Komburongo, important information about these narratives and the age-old beliefs of the Tobilung ethnic group will eventually be forgotten with the passing of the *bobolian* and the Tobilung elders, whose numbers are already dwindling.

From the theory perspective, Bascom's (1957; 1965) and Dundes' (1984) myth and legend theory is used as a guide to analyze *tuturan* Komburongo. According to Bascom (1957:103, 1965:4) and Dundes (1984:1), myth and legend are oral narrative prose that are considered to be true by their proponents. In myths, the main characters are the Creator and demigods that are considered sacred. Bascom (1965:4) further stated:

Myths are prose narratives which, in the society in which they are told, are considered to be truthful accounts of what happened in the remote past. They are accepted on faith; they are taught to be believed; and they can be cited as authority in answer to ignorance, doubt, or disbelief. Myths are the embodiment of dogma; they are usually sacred; and they are often associated with theology and ritual. Myths account for the origin of the world, of mankind, of death, or for characteristics of birds, animals, geographical features, and the phenomena of nature. They may purport to "explain" details of ceremonial paraphernalia or ritual, or why tabus must be observed, but such etiological elements are not confined to myths.

Dundes (1984:1) also explained that myths are sacred narratives about the origins of mankind and the world. The sacred aspect of myth differentiates it from ordinary folklore, which is fictional in nature. Myths contain elements of a belief system of a society that narrates them; they are not fables that are nonsensical or untruthful according to present-day assumptions. In other words, the mythical elements that are considered sacred are believed to be true and contain the beliefs of the society that inherit these stories, as stated by Bascom (1957, 1965) and Dundes (1984). Thus, they will be used as a guide for future researchers in analyzing *tuturan* Komburongo in the form of myths.

In the case of legend, Western legend researcher, Robert A. Georges, defined it as an oral narrative of historical events that had just taken place, and are believed to be true by the storyteller and his audience (Mohd. Kalid, 1989:165). Folklore literature researchers, such as Dorson (1972:162) and Mohd. Taib (1988:244), have also stated that legends are stories believed to be true by the society that inherits these legends. These legendary

stories typically revolve around particular figures within a society, whose greatness are acknowledged by members of that society. Harun (2003:25) and Low (2005:25) stated that the story of a legend is a serious story that is considered to be true about sacred personalities and secular figures and contains extraordinary elements. Legends of saint figures are considered sacred (Skeat, 1965:673; Noriah, 1991:310; Low, 2010:6). Legends can be divided into several different categories, among them are: legends of local icons that are normally related to bravery or religion; legends that are historical as well as having to do with natural signs; or legends that are related to a person's beliefs and experience (*memorat*) (Aripin, 1996:57–58). This article deals with legends that are *memorat*, as told by Tobilung informants based on their own experience and believed to be true by them.

According to Bascom (1957:104), although not all myths and legends are based on historical and true incidents, some stories may have arisen from the social conditions or historical episodes of a particular society, passed down from generation to generation orally. Based on the premise of *tuturan* Komburongo being believed to be true and the Tobilung belief in them, these are the data collected from the field for analysis.

## **TUTURAN KOMBURONGO**

Before presenting the analysis of *tuturan* Komburongo, it is necessary to elaborate on the term itself. The term *susumud* has a similar meaning to *tangon* (folktales), which is used by other Dusun ethnic groups (informant: Mansor bin Rambayau). According to Pugh-Kitingan (2012:147), *tangon* refers to folktales or fictional tales that are of entertainment value only and are created to entertain the listener. In the Dusun Liwan language, *tangon* means stories from the past (Gallus & Low, 2016:18; Yalim and Low, 2019:186; Sim & Low, 2020:170). The difference is that the Tobilung ethnic group considered *tuturan* Komburongo as true stories because their ancestors who inherited these narratives believed them to be true.

The term *tuturan* closely resembles the word *patuturan*, which is used by the people of Brunei in their storytelling tradition. Maslin (2018:xiii) stated that *patuturan* is the Brunei pronunciation of *pertuturan* in standard Malay language. *Tuturan* means a story that is delivered orally. He added that in the context of Brunei Malay, *patuturan* means a collection of *tuturan* or folktales. Hashim Abd Hamid also stated that Brunei folktales use the word *tuturan* because the stories are narrated orally by the elders to their

children and grandchildren. This oral tradition is alive and well in Brunei until today (quoted by Maslin Jukim, 2018:xiii).

As North Borneo (the old name for Sabah) was part of the Brunei Malay Sultanate in the past, it is not surprising that Brunei Malay influenced the language of the indigenous people along the western Sabah coastline. When compared, it is clear that *patuturan*, as used by the people of Brunei, refer to oral narratives. In the context of the study of folk literature, oral narratives are divided into myth, legend and folktale. Myth and legend are believed to be true stories by the society that narrates it, whereas a folktale is a fictionalized story that is considered to be made up. However, *tuturan* Komburongo are stories that are believed to be true by the Tobilung ethnic group. In other words, the *tuturan* Komburongo that are selected for analysis in this study are either myth or legend in the context of folk literature studies.

## SYNOPSIS OF *TUTURAN* KOMBURONGO

Since *tuturan* Komburongo are acquired from fieldwork and narrated by different informants with their own stories, the researchers will integrate the important parts of the oral narratives as a synopsis. Related parts of *tuturan* Komburongo will be discussed in the analysis section.

The *tuturan* Komburongo in this study tell the story of the Creator of Tobilung, known as Tinumaru, who originally created everything on this earth, among them including Komburongo (name of spirit) and mankind. If mankind faces any difficulties, they would need to seek help from Komburongo to appeal to Tinumaru for protection. From the *komburongo* plant, the *komburongo* ritual tool is created. Each time one needs to seek help, a *bobolian* (ritual specialist) has to recite the *rineat* (ritual verses) in order to invoke Komburongo's spirit. Each time it is invoked, Komburongo will ask the one who is seeking help the reason it is summoned. The beseecher will then confide his problem, whether he is sick or facing some other issues.

After that, Komburongo will seek an audience with Tinumaru. In going towards Tinumaru's abode, which is the seventh heaven, Komburongo must pass through six dwelling places of Kinoringan (spiritual being). When it meets Tinumaru and presents the case of the beseecher, Tinumaru will unquestionably settle the problem. Tinumaru can solve problems that involve spiritual creatures in the world—since these spirits are created by Tinumaru, they are also controlled by it. Tinumaru's role is to mend the relationship between humans and spirits. This is done by Tinumaru offering

a sacrificial animal as a sign of apology and agreement that the spirits will not disturb the humans anymore. Fowls and pigs are among the animals that are sacrificed.

For the long-used *komburongo* ritual tool, the Tobilung ethnic group believe that the *rineat* (ritual verses) that were previously recited remain within. Hence, those who do not know how to recite the *rineat* can also conduct the ritual with the used ritual tool. The first step in invoking the Komburongo spirit is to blow on the ritual tool and then rub it, followed by reciting the *rineat*. Once Komburongo is invoked, it will ask the person the reason it was summoned.

Among the rituals that involve Komburongo are *mengatod doh toromos* (to calm a situation between a spirit and human) and *mongorunduk* (to determine the cause of a human's illness). Usually, the *mongorunduk* ritual is first carried out, followed by the *mengatod doh toromos*. In this ritual, the spirit of Komburongo is invoked and is asked to meet Tinumaru for help.

While the *rineat* is being recited, the spirit of Komburongo becomes more powerful and, thus, can overcome obstacles and meet and discuss with Tinumaru. Tinumaru does not reject the appeal to descend to earth and help humans who face physical and spiritual problems. Sometimes, a *bobolian* can determine the type of ailment inflicting a human simply by asking Komburongo. The ritual tool will shake to indicate a response to the *bobolian*'s question. The *bobolian* can also ask about the type of ritual that is best for solving a human's particular problem. Finally, Komburongo's extraordinary power is also highlighted in their everyday lives to those who are currently facing danger and sickness.

## THE ELEMENTS OF BELIEF IN *TUTURAN* KOMBURONGO

In order to analyze the elements of belief in *tuturan* Komburongo, the researchers identified important themes from 36 *tuturan* Komburongo obtained from fieldwork. Out of these, the researchers divided the findings into three themes that are closely related to ethnic Tobilung beliefs passed from generation to generation. The themes that have been identified are origins of Komburongo, Komburongo as a good spirit and the magical powers of Komburongo. The current detailed study on the elements of belief of the Tobilung ethnic group is based on these three themes.

## The Origins of Komburongo

The oral narratives revolving around the theme of origins have a broad meaning, but basically, they narrate about the occurrence of natural phenomena or how an unseen matter exists. Generally, these stories arise from surrounding situations and experiences (Mohd. Taib, 1991:303).

With reference to the *tuturan* Komburongo in the researchers' corpus, five informants stated that Komburongo was originally created by Tinamaru (Creator) from the time the latter created the world. The following Table 1 displays the citations in verbatim text by all five informants that have been translated from the Tobilung language.

**Table 1** *Tuturan* on the creation of Komburongo.

No.	Verbatim text (translated)	Notes
1	Anything in truth, Tinamaru is the one that creates. That which moves and lives is also Tinamaru. Komburongo too Tinamaru created.	Informant: Sunda bin Tampisal.
2	“That’s why the place you took, over there” reminded Tinamaru. Nah (filler word), it’s there, it’s like Komburongo. Tinamaru created everything. Nah (filler word), that is the place taken by Igot Liow.	Informant: Imbagong binti Gumang. Igot Liow: the first person to receive guidance from Tinamaru (Creator) that <i>komburongo</i> (plant) has spirit.
3	In the olden days, it is said that <i>komburongo</i> was created by Tinamaru and that’s how when it grows, it has power.	Informant: Kimpin Sombion.
4	Since I was small, my parents told me that Komburongo, Tinamaru created it.	Informant: Luntugon bin Masondal.
5	Originally, <i>komburongo</i> and <i>rineat</i> (ritual verses) are from Tinamaru. It created this world. We too are created by Tinamaru. It was made by Tinamaru for humans.	Informant: Kimo binti Gungurupa.

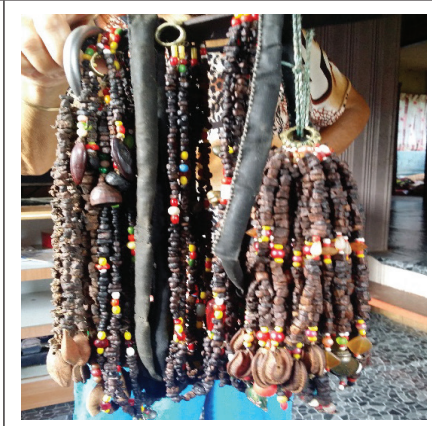


Based on the translated verbatim text of *tuturan* Komburongo above, it is found that the Tobilung ethnic group believe in Tinumaru's existence as the Creator of the universe, including the creation of Komburongo in the form of a plant, ritual tool and spirit. Besides Komburongo, Tinumaru also created all other things in this world. This creation myth reveals that since the distant past, the Tobilung ethnic group believed in a Creator that has the power of creation similar to God in Christianity and Islam. With this concept of a Creator, one cannot presume that the natives of Sabah in the past were animistic, meaning they believed in spirits only, or label them as pagans, meaning those who do not believe in God. The same conclusion was reached by Low and Marshall (2013:38), which was that the Kadazan Dusun ethnic groups had their own old religion, with the hierarchy of a Creator and then the various good spirits, just as the polytheism of Chinese and Indian traditional religions. Similarly, Low and Azlan (2014:100) reported that the Rungus ethnic group also have a religion because they believe in a Creator akin to God. Therefore, they are not pagans or animists. In this context, the researchers agree with Evan's book title (1953)—*The Religion of Tempasuk Dusun of North Borneo*—on the study of the traditional belief of the Dusun ethnic group in Tempasuk (Kota Belud). In other words, from early on, there were Western researchers who considered the faith of the Dusun ethnic group in Sabah in the olden days as a religion. Hence, the Tobilung in the past who believed in a Creator that is all powerful was an ethnic group with a religion.

In comparison, the other Kadazan Dusun ethnic groups believed in the creation myth of Komburongo as such. For example, Hanafi (2003:28) reported that the Kadazan ethnic group in Penampang believe that Komburongo was created by their Creator, known as Minamangun, to help perform rituals for those undergoing spiritual problems and illness. Other than that, Low and Solehah (2016:1336) stated that the Dusun ethnic group in the district of Membakut Kecil believe that Komburongo was created long before mankind by Kinoringan (Creator of the Kadazan Dusun). This means that the ethnic Tobilung belief that Komburongo was created by the Creator is similar to other ethnic Kadazan Dusun beliefs. The difference is the name of the Creator. The researchers believe that this is because the spoken language of each Kadazan Dusun ethnic group is different from another. In addition, they reside far away from each other. Thus, it is not surprising that the name of the Creator differs from one group to another. It is important to note that, based on the quotes from *tuturan* Komburongo, we know that other



**Figure 1** *Komburongo* plant, *Acorus Calamus*. (Researcher's collection)



**Figure 2** *Komburongo* ritual tool. (Researcher's collection)

than the Kadazan Dusun, the Tobilung ethnic group also believe there is a Creator that has created everything in this world, including *Komburongo*.

In terms of the order of arrangement of the origins of all three *Komburongo* identities, the informants of this study related that Tinumaru first created the *komburongo* in the form of plant, then the *komburongo* ritual tool and finally the spirit of *Komburongo* (Informants: Mansor bin Rambayau, Imbagong binti Gumang and Kimpin Sombion). In other words, basically, the three identities are attributed to *Komburongo* in the form of a plant<sup>2</sup>, a ritual tool and a good spirit. The identities of *Komburongo* are interrelated. *Komburongo* as a spirit is believed to reside in the plant and in the *Komburongo* ritual tool. The *komburongo* ritual tool does not function if the spirit of *Komburongo* is not within (Figures 1 and 2).

All three *Komburongo* identities are also found in other ethnic Kadazan Dusun belief systems. For example, the Tindal ethnic group also believe in all three *Komburongo* identities (Evans, 1953:62). The same applies to the Dusun Tuaran, Kimaragang and Rungus ethnic groups (Low & Solehah, 2018:186). Evans (1953) and Low and Solehah (2018) provided detailed explanations about other ethnic Kadazan Dusun beliefs regarding all three identities of *Komburongo*. They believe that all three *Komburongo* identities are sacred, should be respected and are able to help them solve many life problems through the rituals conducted by a *bobolian*. The *bobolian* uses the *komburongo* ritual tool in order to appeal to the spirit of *Komburongo*

to meet with his Creator for help. Such a belief is highlighted in the *tuturan* Komburongo of the Tobilung ethnic group and examined in this analysis.

### Komburongo as a Good Spirit

As explained in the beginning of this article, the Tobilung ethnic group believe in the existence of good and evil spirits that dwell in the unseen realm. Evil spirits always bring disaster and threaten their safety. Hence, they need help from good spirits to overcome the threats by evil spirits. There are several *tuturan* Komburongo obtained from the ethnic Tobilung informants, showing that Komburongo is a good spirit, whose role is to help them. This is mentioned in the verbatim text of the *tuturan* cited below:

That Komburongo is not an evil spirit. People are mistaken. Komburongo's power is special. Komburongo is not an evil spirit because it helps people. (Informant: Kimpin Sombion)

**Table 2** *Tuturan* related to Komburongo's meeting with Tinumaru.

No.	<i>Tuturan</i> verbatim text (translated)	Notes
1	This Komburongo, only follows instructions to go and meet Tinumaru. To inform Tinumaru.	Informant: Mansor bin Rambayau
2	Can be felt by <i>bobolian</i> who knows how to awaken Komburongo's spirit. Because the <i>bobolian</i> knows how to ask Komburongo's spirit to go up and knows that Komburongo acts when asked by someone who knows <i>rineat</i> (ritual verses).	Informant: Mansor bin Rambayau
3	Aii (filler word), that's why Tinumaru says, "Do not continue your journey because I know what to do", it says. "Because from the beginning I am the one they turn to by <i>riniba</i> (humans on earth) as I created humans, I created <i>pimbaya-baya</i> (spiritual beings), I created this <i>rineat</i> (ritual verses)."	Informant: Mansor bin Rambayau,
4	This Tinumaru, when Komburongo arrives there, it's as if they're chatting, "What are you doing?" he says. "That bah (person) asked me to," he (Komburongo) replies.	Informant: Kimo binti Gungurupa

The quotes from the verbatim text of collected *tuturan* indicate that when the spirit is invoked by the *bobolian*, Komburongo's role is to meet Tinumaru (Creator) in order to solve the crises faced by the people. The above Table 2 lists the *tuturan* related to Komburongo's meeting with Tinumaru for further discussion:

The verbatim text narrated above by Mansor bin Rambayau and Kimo binti Gungurupa (informants) recount how Komburongo meets with Tinumaru (Creator) at the request of its owner or *bobolian*. After meeting with Tinumaru, it will follow Tinumaru's advice. The citation above also tells that the Creator is willing to help humans after a crisis has been informed by Komburongo. This shows that Komburongo is a good spirit because it goes to see Tinumaru, the all-powerful Creator. The phrase "at the request of its owner or *bobolian*" in the Komburongo narrative can be interpreted to mean when Komburongo is invoked through the ritual conducted by an ethnic Tobilung *bobolian*. In the context of ethnic Tobilung belief, only a *bobolian* in a trance can communicate with Komburongo and plead with it to solve the problems faced by those who come to seek help.

According to Mansor bin Rambayau (informant), in Komburongo's journey to ask for help from Tinumaru, it must pass through dangerous situations along the way. This is because Komburongo has to go through six levels of heavenly powers, known as Kinoringan, before it reaches the seventh heaven, where Tinumaru resides. Komburongo has to inform each Kinoringan his intention, and whether they can help it, before it continues its

**Table 3** Names of Kinoringan and their heavenly dwelling places that Komburongo has to pass through.

Level	Name of Kinoringan and dwelling place
1	Kinoringan Dolipusung - Kinopunan Salahtiwow
2	Kinoringan Dontolon - Kinopunan Doolon
3	Kinoringan Lungkaap - Kinopunan Lungkaap
4	Kinoringan Mogolingiw - Kinopunan Moginanaw
5	Kinoringan Kinombura - Kinopunan Kinandawai
6	Kinoringan Tosundu - Kinopunan Tolodun
7	Tinumaru

(Informant: Mansor bin Rambayau)

journey to Tinumaru's abode. The above Table 3 lists each of the Kinoringan level that Komburongo has to pass through before it can meet Tinumaru, according to ethnic Tobilung belief.

Based on Table 3, it is clear that Komburongo has to pass six Kinoringan dwelling places before it reaches Tinumaru's abode. In each step of the journey through these dwelling places, Komburongo is said to be faced with dangerous situations. Nevertheless, Komburongo still carries on its journey for the sake of a human's safety and well-being. Such is Komburongo's gift to mankind. As soon as it meets Tinumaru, Komburongo would immediately present the problem that has befallen the human. As the all-powerful Creator, Tinumaru is always ready to help humans in trouble. This is the role of Komburongo in helping to solve the spiritual problems of the Tobilung ethnic group.

Based on the above discussion, it can be concluded that the Tobilung ethnic group believe that Komburongo is always helping humans and is willing to face dangerous situations to meet Tinumaru to help them. A similar observation was also reported by Low and Solehah (2018:185), that is, the Kadazan Dusun ethnic groups in Pitas, Membakut, Kuala Penyu and Ranau acknowledge that Komburongo's nature and character is that of a good spirit that assists them in solving spiritual and health problems or in giving advice about their lives.

### **Supernatural Powers of Komburongo**

As previously stated in this article, in the Tobilung belief, Komburongo has three identities: a plant, a ritual tool and a good spirit. Each identity of Komburongo is believed to possess its own supernatural power. It is believed, for example, that the *komburongo* plant sometimes hide by creeping below the ground and simply vanishing. The verbatim text of *tuturan* Komburongo below (Table 4) relates the *komburongo* plant's supernatural powers:

Since the *komburongo* plant has supernatural powers, before taking it, one must perform a ritual. Note the verbatim text below that relates the procedure required to take the *komburongo* plant for the purpose of making a ritual tool (see Table 5).

Based on the verbatim texts of *tuturan* above, it is understood that the *komburongo* plant should only be taken through a special ritual and not in any random manner. If the ritual of taking the *komburongo* plant is not done properly, it is believed that the plant will not have magical powers. Through a special ritual, the *komburongo* plant that is pulled out from the

**Table 4** *Komburongo* plant's supernatural powers.

Number	Verbatim Text (translated)	Notes
1	This <i>Komburongo</i> , um... many <i>komburongo</i> grow, but "hide yourself, the earth and the cloud will overlap," we said. Not even a year, <i>komburongo</i> already disappears. Clever at disappearing.	Informant: Kimpin Sombion
2	This <i>komburongo</i> has power, clever at hiding. Disappear just like that. It's still there until now but only a few can see. Those who can see are the elders who are still living. My in-law. He once related that he had once passed the place. But ordinary people cannot see. Those with knowledge are those who can see. Just like a human it's said, this <i>komburongo</i> , just like us.	Informant: Luntugon bin Masondal
3	It grows on its own in the jungle there [and] it's also planted by those people. Good at hiding, this <i>komburongo</i> . Goes inside right down under the ground. We search, others also cannot see.	Informant: Sunda binti Tampisal

soil is cleaned from the bottom part of the stem to its roots and then cut into suitable sizes. Then, the rhizome part of the *komburongo* plant is winnowed, with holes pierced in it, then dried. When dried, the *bobolian* will again recite the *rineat* as the pieces of cut rhizome are winnowed using a *nyiru* (winnowing basket). It is believed that the pieces that fall or fly off from the *nyiru* are *komburongo* that have no spirit. Therefore, only the cuttings from the stem and rhizome that are left behind have magical power. The rhizome parts that are cut are pierced and strung together in the form of a chain and added to it are other decorations, such as beads, shillings, little bells, animal teeth and other items. The end result is the *komburongo* ritual tool (see Figure 3), which is believed to have magical powers and used in rituals to awaken and invite the spirit of *Komburongo* because it resides within.

Upon comparing the rituals conducted to take the *komburongo* plant between the Tobilung and Tindal ethnic groups, Evans (1953:61) found that both ethnic groups perform elaborate rituals for that purpose. The ritual by the Tindal ethnic group is known as *Magambawon*. In this ritual, three persons are involved. One is a man with a sword and a round wooden shield (*kolid*) used to pull out the *komburongo* plant where it grows. The man must

**Table 5** *Tuturan* on the procedures required to take the *komburongo* plant.

No.	Verbatim Text (translated)	Notes
1	Has power too that <i>komburongo</i> that grows on the ground. If take it, it's not an evil spirit. There should be a ritual performed, only then you can take it. Nah (filler word) take that root, recite the <i>rineat</i> first. Awaken its power. Then you can take it.	Informant: Sunda binti Tampisal
2	There's already a spirit, <i>komburongo</i> that is still growing (as a plant). There is bah (filler word). Must pull out. <i>Apit kou poh dolipusung, songdipuu salahtiwow, robuton ku, onuon ku posonimburu, pengos di liminodun</i> ( <i>rineat</i> recitation before pulling out <i>komburongo</i> that grows on the ground). Must clean the area around <i>komburongo</i> using a <i>parang</i> (a type of big knife), then pull out. Pull out by using a long shawl. Reaching home, keep it in a <i>nyiru</i> (winnowing basket), ask first to step over it by jumping by the person who took it. While making a sound like calling someone. Then change with the female <i>bobolian</i> who steps over it and jumps on the <i>komburongo</i> . At night, take the <i>komburongo</i> from the <i>nyiru</i> and cut into small pieces. The cutting should be done by the <i>bobolian</i> . Open the leaves, recite <i>rineat</i> . Nah (filler word) after cutting, put back into the <i>nyiru</i> then winnow it. Open the <i>dolipusung</i> (the <i>komburongo</i> stem that does not contain any power). Nah (filler word), then it's distributed. Those who want it, will take. Back at their houses, they will pierce them. Got to be dry before stringing them into the form of a chain (ritual tool).	Informant: Imabagong binti Gumang,
3	The original one is planted again. Cannot simply take the <i>komburongo</i> . During the <i>Modsongodou</i> ritual only. Nah (filler word), in full attire the man, with a long <i>parang</i> . But now <i>gia tioi</i> (filler word), <i>barang ieh barang</i> (simply take). Because they don't know. There should be three persons, that is one man goes. Then they <i>moduok</i> (reciting <i>rineat</i> when taking the <i>komburongo</i> ) and shout "Kii hii", supposedly it's a man. Then take. Cannot simply take the one before.	Informant: Kimo binti Gungurupa



**Figure 3** Bobolian Kimo binti Gungurupa with her completed *komburongo* ritual tool.  
(Researcher's collection)

perform a send-off ritual to expel the evil spirit called *Pamaiyak-Baiyak* and the unusable spirit of *Komburongo*, followed by a woman who cleans the rhizome. When observed carefully, the Tindal and Tobilung ethnic groups have similar procedures for taking the *komburongo* plant, that is, a ritual where the *rineat* (ritual verses) are recited beforehand and, in terms of the number of participants, three persons are responsible for taking the plant. The comparison shows that both ethnic groups strongly believe in the *komburongo* plant and the sacred *Komburongo* spirit to the extent that they must hold a serious ceremony in order to extract the plant to make a ritual tool. This act is to ensure that the *komburongo* ritual tool possesses magical powers.

According to the *tuturan* by Kimo binti Gungurupa (informant), the spirit that dwells inside the *komburongo* ritual tool can transform into a human when its owner appeals for its help. The power possessed by the spirit of *Komburongo* that can transform into a human was also related by Sunda bin Tampisal (informant). According to this informant, the *komburongo* ritual



tool hung at home is believed to be able to transform itself into a human according to its owner's gender. His *tuturan* is about his child who kept the *komburongo* ritual tool in his house and the child's friend happened to see that there was another woman in their house. The woman is believed to be an incarnation of the spirit that dwells in the *komburongo* ritual tool, and protects the child's family. After the child returned the ritual tool to his mother, there was no longer any sighting of another person by the friend.

Kimo binti Gungurupa (informant) further recounted the story of a man who went hunting. Unfortunately, he was disturbed by spirits while resting in the jungle. Luckily, his mother had the *komburongo* ritual tool and she appealed for help to the spirit of Komburongo to protect her son. With the magical power of Komburongo, her son escaped the danger posed by the spirits, and was able to return home safely.

The spirit in the *komburongo* ritual tool is believed to be able to appear in a person's dream and communicate with the latter. Only a *bobolian* or a person who truly believes in the spirit of Komburongo can get such a dream. The *tuturan* obtained in this study also tells about how a ritual tool was lost and found by someone else who also believed in the spirit of Komburongo,

**Table 6** *Tuturan* on dreaming of the spirit of Komburongo.

No.	Verbatim Text (translated)	Notes
1	If a <i>bobolian</i> , usually a woman who owns a <i>rineat</i> , she can dream of the Komburongo spirit. She'll see a person walking; anyone she'll be able to see.	Informant: Luntugon bin Masondal
2	We know, supposedly they're like that, "Si Mina owns <i>Komburongo</i> ," says si Ondoroi. Given back by them to me. They're not angry. Just hang it. Can only give back if Ondoroi dreams of me. Sinking, as if that's my soul, fully attired, as if sitting down. Other people dream, I was seen as fully attired.	Informant: Sunda binti Tampisal
3	Can you recognize Komburongo spirit? Aii (filler word), if in a dream can know the spirit is Komburongo because it follows the woman who has the <i>rineat</i> .	Informant: Sunda binti Tampisal

and Komburongo appeared in his dream. See the verbatim text above (Table 6) for additional information.

The Tobilung ethnic group also believe that the spirit of Komburongo possesses other supernatural powers. Some of these include being able to predict that something will happen, cure ailments, communicate with other spirits, possess magical powers in rituals and give an indication to humans if there is a problem or a hardship. All these accounts are based on oral narratives delivered by different informants in this study (Attachment I). The descriptions of all Komburongo supernatural powers in this study's corpus that were obtained from fieldwork is deeply rooted in Tobilung belief.

## CONCLUSION

The discussion above is about Komburongo oral narratives, or *tuturan* Komburongo, whether they are myths or legends, which are believed to be true by the Tobilung ethnic group. The above analysis of the elements of belief in the *tuturan* Komburongo of the Tobilung ethnic group is supported by the myth and legend theory perspective of folklore researchers such as Bascom (1957; 1965) and Dundes (1984). These two researchers emphasized that myth and legend are believed to be true, and the stories contain truth of the past of a certain age. Although, at present, most members of the Tobilung ethnic group are either Christians or Muslims, a small section of them still believe in Komburongo. *Tuturan*, the focus of this article, are the oral narratives passed down from generation to generation, especially the myth related to Tinumaru (Creator) and Komburongo. From one aspect, the Tobilung ethnic group believe in an all-powerful Creator such as God, therefore, they are an ethnic group that has an ancient religion. Currently, the myth of a new creation is no longer created by them. All the myths collected in this study are passed down from generation to generation. Nevertheless, legends in the form of *memorat*<sup>3</sup> which are stories narrated by informants based on their respective experience, especially in the context of the spirit of Komburongo helping the people, still continue. Through *tuturan*, the elements of belief of the Tobilung ethnic group towards the traditional Komburongo are recorded and in them is their ancient belief system.

## NOTES

1. There are three identities attributed to Komburongo, according to the Tobilung ethnic belief: a plant, a ritual tool and a good spirit. Komburongo spelt upright and in capital letters refers to the proper name of the spirit. Komburongo spelt in lowercase letters and italicized (*komburongo*) in this entire article refers to the plant or ritual tool.
2. Its scientific name is *acorus calimus*, or *jerangau* in Malay.
3. Specifically, memorat recounts a human experience that is believed to be true (Normadiyah Nassir *et al.*, 2017: 65). Danandjaya (2002: 71) states that memorat is a story that really happened and was experienced by someone.

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**TUTURAN TOBILUNG DUSUN INFORMANTS.**

No.	Details of Informant
1	Name: Mansor bin Rambayau Age: 82 years Occupation: Farmer Date(s) of Interview: 14 September 2014, 10 February 2018 and 13 January 2019 Place: Kampung Taburan Puka, Kota Belud.
2	Name: Sunda binti Tampisal Age: 80 years Occupation: Farmer Date(s) of Interview: 02 October 2016 and 02 April 2017 Place: Kampung Taburan Besar, Kota Belud
3	Name: Kimo binti Gungurupa Age: 81 years Occupation: <i>Bobolian</i> /Farmer Date(s) of Interview: 12 November 2017 and 14 April 2019 Place: Kampung Dudar, Kota Belud
4	Name: Kimpin Sombion Age: 52 years Occupation: Farmer Date(s) of Interview: 16 February 2019 Place: Kampung Taburan Besar, Kota Belud
5	Name: Imbagong binti Gumang Age: 86 years Occupation: Farmer Date(s) of Interview: 17 February 2019 Place: Kampung Sarang, Kota Belud
6	Name: Luntugon Bin Masedal Age: 94 years Occupation: Farmer Date(s) of Interview: 09 December 2018 Place: Kampung Taburan Besar, Kota Belud