



# Living Together:

## Spirit Guardians And People in Singkawang\*

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‘Before religion, there was tradition’ (*sebelum ada agama, adat sudah wujud*) is an expression commonly heard among traditional medical practitioners in Singkawang, West Kalimantan, Indonesia. This saying hinges on the belief in *penunggu* (spirit guardians). Locals from different ethnicities—Chinese, Dayak, and Malay—all believe in the presence of *penunggu* in their surroundings. If these beings are disturbed, they will cause sickness or discomfort. To appease them and cure illness, people rely on the help of *tatung* (spirit mediums). Mediums, by means of spirit possession, can effect cures and negotiate ways to bring about peaceful relations between *penunggu* and people. This study finds that the people of Singkawang set aside their ethnic and religious differences to reconcile with the local spirit world in a harmonious manner.

Keywords: Chinese, Dayak, *penunggu*, spirit medium, Singkawang

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Received: May 20, 2019 Accepted: February 21, 2020

\* The Hakka pronunciation used in this paper follows the written Hakka used by local Singkawang people. In text messages, Facebook postings, etc., it is common for them to romanize the dialect and this romanized Hakka is uniquely uniform and intelligible. The romanized Hakka will be presented along with the Chinese characters. For Chinese words in pinyin, (M) will be indicated. The author is indebted to Dr Monica Janowski of SAOS London for helping to improve and proofread the paper.

## Introduction

On a winding road down into the valley of Sungai Duri,<sup>1</sup> drivers often honk their horns. Some honk twice, others three times, whether coming from Sungai Duri town or from the opposite direction. The honking is not to warn oncoming vehicles, nor to alert pedestrians at the road's edge, both of which are common in Indonesia. People who commonly travel along the Singakawang-Sungai Duri route know about the black bull spirit that may appear around any bend in the road.<sup>2</sup> Some say that if one does not honk, one might hit the sleepy bull, which will retaliate by launching unto their vehicles. Others say the honking is required so that bull will be aware of their presence and thus not run into them. My first encounter with the belief in spirit guardians (*penunggu*) occurred when I was embarking on a book project about the temples and spirit mediums of Singkawang town.<sup>3</sup>

This paper will explore human-spirit relationships in the multiethnic society of Singkawang town in West Kalimantan. It follows from Bird-David's (1992, 1999, 2004) argument that these relations can be forged and integrated to be beneficial. Singkawang folks believe that spirits, particularly *penunggu*, if properly pleased, can become benevolent and provide aid and protection, per Bird-David's notion that human-spirit relationships can be "cultivated" (2004). However, the possibility of cultivating a friendly relationship seems to be limited to the spirit guardians and does not extend to other type of spirits.

This paper draws upon ethnographic accounts collected during six months of fieldwork in 2016 and another three months in 2017. Tales and encounters of respondents with *penunggu* and other spirits are prevalent in locals' daily lives and concerns. The stories presented in this paper will explain their understandings and relationship with the unseen world.

## Multiethnic Singkawang

Singkawang town is located on the west coast of Borneo and is a semi-urban town with good road access to Pontianak and Kuching (the capital of Sarawak, East Sarawak). The town started as a stopover for gold miners traveling inland in the

1 Locally known as Pak Bu Jan 百富院 in Hakka, Sungai Duri is a small town located on the outskirts of Singkawang.

2 *Bu ngiu* 黑牛 in Hakka.

3 See Chai, *Of Temple and the Tatung Tradition in Singkawang*. Unimas Publishing, 2017.

1860s.<sup>4</sup> The population of Singkawang stood at 246,306 people in 2016, according to one statistical report.<sup>5</sup> It has a Chinese majority of 50 percent; the remaining residents are Malay (15 percent), Dayak (10 percent), and other ethnic groups such as Jawa, Madurese, and Bugis. It has been given tag lines by the tourism bureau and local media such as “Kota Seribu Kelenteng” (town of a thousand temples), “Kota Wisata” (cultural town) and “Kota Amoy” (town of Hakka girls).<sup>6</sup>

During Suharto’s New Order, Chinese culture in Indonesia was suppressed, with Chinese schools and newspapers forced to close. Chinese New Year and other displays of Chinese practices and culture were banned. However, in Singkawang, temple activities, an integral part of Chinese culture, were not entirely prohibited. Temples were renovated and upgraded discreetly, and local authorities gave leeway for the Chinese to conduct their deity birthday rituals and Cap Go Meh celebrations (Chai 2017).<sup>7</sup> During Cap Go Meh, spirit mediums possessed by Chinese, Dayak, and Malay deities gather and walk through the main streets. In Indonesia, such events are famously known as Pawai Tatung (parade of the *tatung*). A *tatung* is a medium who can be possessed by gods or deities. Locals are accustomed to using this term for people who can *phan tung* (hold up under possession) or *cho ki* (are able to be possessed). The term *tatung* was popularized by the government when the Pawai was officially promoted as a national tourism event in 2009.

About 70,000 tourists flock to the town for this half-day event each year.<sup>8</sup> In 2018 it featured a grand total of 1,129 *tatungs*, which made it the highlight of ethnic cultural events in Indonesia. Of this formidable number, more than half are mediums for Dayak and Malay deities.<sup>9</sup> After several complaints and objections expressed by Islamic authorities and organizations in Pontianak and Jakarta, the organizing committee announced in the early stages of the Cap Go Meh’s preparation that

4 See Purcell 1951; Yuan 2000; Heidhues 2003 for the social history of West Borneo Chinese.

5 Laporan Populasi Badan Pusat Statistik 2016. The town’s truly resident population is less than reported by about 50,000, since most people travel to Sarawak, Pontianak, and Jakarta for work, according to Bong Wui Khong and Lin Chang Li, local businessmen active in temple activities, pers. comm.

6 Some local elites expressed dissatisfaction over the “Hakka girls” reference being derogatory with its connotation of prostitution [OK?].

7 Cap Go Meh is the fifteen day of first lunar month. It is the closing of the Chinese New Year celebrations. In Singkawang locals call it Zhang Yet Ban 正月半.

8 Norman Bong (Kepala Dinas Pariwisata, Pemuda dan Olahraga Kota Singkawang), pers. comm. on 16 August 2016.

9 Thjai Leonardi, Ketua Panitia Imlek and Perarakan Cap Go Meh 2018 (Head of the 2018 Committee for Chinese New Year and Cap Go Meh Procession), pers. comm. on July 2018.

Muslim healers (*bomohs*) and mediums would be prohibited from participating. Malay deities can take part as long as the medium is not a Muslim. The committee does not forbid Muslims from being assistants who play the drum and cymbals or carry flags or sedan chairs for the *tatung* entourage. As a matter of fact, for every *tatung* group performing in the Cap Go Meh celebration at least fourteen to sixteen helpers are required, and Malay Muslims are usually the ones assisting the Dayak and Chinese *tatungs*. Since Muslim healers and mediums are not allowed to take part as such, many of them render service to the spiritual world as assistants on this occasion. For many years the Cap Go Meh organizer has made it a point to have halal lunches provided so that Muslim helpers can also enjoy sponsored food along with the Dayak and Chinese *tatung* participants.

In Pontianak, Medan, and Surabaya this celebration was opposed by religious political groups in the early 2000s. Only as recently as 2015 were celebrations there successfully held, but none have been as extravagant as that of Singkawang. In Singkawang people of every ethnic group anticipate Cap Go Meh with much excitement, and preparations are underway as early as the turn of the Gregorian new year. The town is decorated with red lanterns and sculptures of animals of the twelve zodiac signs, and trees are adorned with plastic plum flowers to welcome the grand celebration. Dayak and Chinese *tatungs* start preparing their regalia as early as the Gregorian new year is ushered in, while the Malay helpers and assistants organize themselves with a division of tasks for their entourages. Young and old from every ethnic group acknowledge Cap Go Meh as “the event” in Singkawang town, and they celebrate it each year with much hope and pride.

Singkawang has become a well-known tourist destination thanks to this vibrant and exciting celebration. It has been ranked among Indonesia’s top ten cultural events by the Ministry of Tourism since 2012. With national exposure the event has captured the attention of overseas media from Italy, Spain, China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore. Its success has been due to the support of the Dayak, Chinese, Malay, and other ethnic communities. Cap Go Meh is not only important for the Chinese but signifies a true spirit of tolerance and respect across Singkawang’s multiethnic society.

According to Margaret Chan (2013), the spirit-medium procession during Cap Go Meh showcases the fraternity of Dayak, Malay, and Chinese mediums united “in the purpose of exorcising demons from the neighborhood.” In my earlier work, I argued that the participation of these communities is “not just about presenting themselves as people of the land, but rather as a form of open recognition of their presence, and to imprint [that presence] in the social cultural landscape the new government is welcoming” (2018: 299). The present study contributes further by

exploring the worldview shared by Chinese along with the Dayak and Malay. It is through their shared worldview that social cohesion persists and remains strong in this region of Indonesia.

## The World with Spirits

From Sillander's account (2016) of Bentian society to Kaartinen's work on Banda Eli Muslims, we know that belief in a multitude of spirits among the living prevails in Indonesian society. In West Kalimantan Singkawang society, the social world in which humans conduct their daily activities is closely linked to the natural world of the unseen. In that unseen realm exist *dewa*, *pantak*, *leluhur*, *penunggu*, *hantu*, *kuntilanak*, and *babi ngepet*. Some of these beings are benevolent and cordial relationships can be forged with them, while others are to be avoided at all cost.

*Dewa* and *pantak* are considered heavenly spirits that will assist and answer people's needs. These are heroes from the past who have become deities. Local Chinese use both the term *dewa* and *sin* (in Hakka) for such heroes. They are worshipped for their great virtue, self-sacrificing deeds, and also their special skills. Among these are the Goddess of Mercy (觀音), the Monkey God (齊天大聖 or 哪吒三太子), God of War (關公 or 廣澤尊王), and the Earth God (福德正神 or 伯公). Lesser-known military deities at the ranks of general 將軍 and marshal 元帥 are also venerated for their loyalty and bravery in hundreds of temples in Singkawang. It is believed that the military gods are especially potent for warding off calamities caused by evil spirits. On every first and fifteenth days of the lunar calendar, temples and their courtyards are crowded with devotees offering prayers. The birthday of the main deity, Sin Ming San 神明生, is celebrated in a vibrant mood, with devotees making offerings and visiting *tatung* representing deities from other temples making the town bustle.<sup>10</sup> Sin Ming San celebrations are welcomed by people in the neighborhoods since they believe that the gathering of deities via their *tatung* helps to purify the area and keep them safe.

The Dayak, especially the Dayak Kanayatn (the majority Dayak group in Singkawang), believe in the supremacy of ancestor-heroes known as *pantak*. In a past article I observed:

When a highly respected hero passes away, a ritual is performed to thank and acknowledge his sacrifice and efforts. His status is recognized by the entire

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10 See Chai, 2017 for more on this deity's birthday celebration.

community by the erecting of a *pantak* statue. The spirit of the deceased hero or leader is believed to transfer to the statue via this ritual and lives on eternally. (Chai 2018: 308-309)

There are myriad types of *pantak*, which differ from Nek Jubata, who is regarded as the one and only Creator. Communities deify their own heroes. Only very brave and significant heroes are qualified to become *pantak*. Once a *pantak* statue is erected, a caretaker with a consanguineal connection is tasked to take charge. A *pantak* will not descend into a medium's body, but its caretaker receives messages through dreams. In the event of births, marriages, and house moving, prayers and offerings are made to the *pantak* for his blessing and protection. For critical cases such as healing and countering black magic, a senior *tatung* is called upon to perform a more complex ceremony, which involves the blood sacrifice of a black dog and a pair of fowls.<sup>11</sup>

All ethnic groups make a clear distinction between ancestors who have been deified and those who have not. While the gods, including deified ancestors, are benevolent and aid humans, ancestors known as *leluhur* among the Dayak occupy more neutral ground. People do not seek the aid of the dead who are not deified except in dire circumstances. People visit the graves of their ancestors at certain times of the year. Local Chinese visit these graves during the third and seventh lunar months. They arrive early in the morning, clean the area, and offer foods such as boiled pork, chicken, squid, steamed rice cakes, fruit, and also incense, candles, and spirit money. Other increasingly popular offerings include paper spirit goods such as apparel, electronic gadgets, luxurious cars, credit cards, and jewelry. The mood at the graves is jovial, with family members reporting and updating on the recent happenings at home. Family members will often try their luck at asking forebears for lucky numbers. Ancestor worship at graves is like that practiced by Chinese in Malaysia on Ching Ming 清明節 (Tomb Sweeping Day). In Indonesia it is called Ka Ci 家祀 meaning "family worship." This observance is conducted once a year, during the third lunar month, by Malaysian Chinese, but twice among Indonesian Chinese. Graves are visited again on the seventh lunar month and the same activity is repeated. Both visits are conducted in the morning and end before noon, with family members taking their meal at the graves after their ancestors have "consumed" the food offerings. Descendants visiting graves might report to their late parents and grandparents and even their great-grandparents. But they are also concerned

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11 Chai (ibid).

about those related to them who might be neglected during Ka Ci. A great-great-grandfather whose grave has been forgotten might be angry and hungry. A distant relative who died at a young age might become vengeful for not receiving any prayers or offerings. Therefore, the community organizes mass offerings on the fourteenth day of the seventh lunar month that are presented to the forgotten dead to avoid any retribution. This is usually carried out in an open area in the neighborhood. People come by with bags of food and prayer offerings for any forgotten deceased.

According to local Chinese, ancestors are benevolent spirits that look after the welfare of their descendants only if they are paid due respect with Ka Ci. Although ancestors may communicate through mediums, most mediums do not approach them for fear the dead will continue to roam the human world. "The ancestors are easy to invite but difficult to send off," observed one Chinese *tatung* at Jalan Diponegoro.

Dayak Kanayatn seek the blessings of their ancestors during the harvest period, which is called Naik Dango. Before the day of Naik Dango rituals, families gather to thank their ancestors for a successful harvest and to pray for blessings in the future. The community then comes together during the actual Naik Dango ritual to thank the creator Nek Jubata for the source of life they continue to receive. Dayaks visit the graves of parents and grandparents on Christmas eve or Christmas day to show respect and gratitude. They share with the Chinese the belief that ancestors should not be invited into the human world. They see disturbing the ancestors or asking them to become involved in human affairs as disrespectful. Thus, prayers and offerings made to the ancestors during Naik Dango and the Christmas season are always limited to expressions of gratitude and respect.

Some spirits are dangerous. Among the most fearsome is the *kuntilanak*. These ghosts are believed to be women who died in childbirth and take revenge on pregnant women, women who have just delivered, and newborns. They devour their victims' internal organs, which they pluck out using their sharp long nails. These ghosts are attracted by the smell of post-natal blood or, in the case of a pregnant mother, the smell of the fetus. Some elders say pregnant mothers smell of lactation, which also attracts the bodyless female ghosts. For protection, pregnant women and mothers in confinement wear small foldable scissors wrapped in red cloth and talismans. Their bedrooms are lined with sharp objects like scissors, penknives, razors, and nail clippers. The most important precautions are taken during the disposal of the placenta. All ethnic groups are particular about this. The Dayaks sprinkle the afterbirth with salt and place it in a, usually black, plastic bag. The bag is then put in a jar with a cover and placed outside the house. On top is set a candle that is kept lit for a week. The Malays wash the placenta thoroughly, wrap it in white

cloth, and bury it near the house. Chinese wrap the placenta in layers of plastic bags and either bury it or dispose of it like garbage waste, making sure it is not scavenged by animals. The predatory ghosts are also closely associated with owls, which they are believed to turn into to search for a victim. Thus, among all locals, owls are considered unlucky and any contact with them is avoided.

Charms and talisman obtained from temples or given by mediums are worn for protection against malevolent beings such as *roh* (spirits) and *hantu* (ghosts). They are also hung at the front door and corners of the house for protection. Another prevention measure is the avoidance of isolated places, since it is believed that the sight of living people frightens *roh* and *hantu*. Malign spirits are also believed to roam the human world at certain times of the day, such as during Maghrib prayer and after nightfall. So long as one avoids going out at Maghrib or to secluded places, contact with such spirits may be avoided. There are, however, no protective measures against the spirit guardians (*penunggu*).

### *Penunggu*

The term *penunggu* is used by all the ethnic groups in Singkawang and is believed to be a spirit that watches over a place.<sup>12</sup> Some define it as the owner of the place, the one that guards the place or its protector. Engaging with *penunggu* is unavoidable since they are believed to have existed from time immemorial, a feature of the land. They may appear in animal forms such as the black bull at Sungai Duri, and tigers or monkeys elsewhere. Some take forms that are half human and half animal. Others reveal themselves as an old person, a strong person, or a beautiful lady, and all are aided by distinctive animals such as a white tiger, a white crocodile, a huge cobra, and so on. Gunung Sari (Mount Sari) in south Singkawang, for example, is inhabited by a white monkey guardian (*penunggu monyet putih*).<sup>13</sup> The perception of *penunggu* as animals or anthropomorphic forms is shared by all ethnic groups in Singkawang.

The Dayaks, being the earliest settlers of the region, believe the spirit world there existed long before human existence. The Malays believe something similar. They believe that before their forefathers embrace Islam, they practiced traditional beliefs (*adat lama*), which place strong emphasis on the existence of *penunggu* (also known as *penjaga tempat*). They use the word *tempat* which means “place” to refer

12 Locals use the terms *penunggu* and *penjaga* interchangeably.

13 *Phak Heu Jin* (in Hakka) 白猴精.



to the spirits that guard over a place. Though Muslim, the Singkawang Malays still acknowledge the presence of *penunggu* in their physical surroundings. The Chinese, being the latecomers to the area in the middle of eighteenth century, adopted their neighbors' beliefs about *penunggu*.

The belief that every place, every patch of jungle, river, and mountain are watched over by a guardian spirit was only strengthened among the Chinese when they took up gold mining work for the Sambas and Mempawah sultanates. The mines were located in deep jungle and the daily encounters with nature and the dangers and risks the Chinese miners faced instilled in them the belief that the *penunggu* had existed in the area long before their arrival. The belief that humans are encroaching into the world of *penunggu* is widespread among the people of Singkawang.

Hence the saying "Before religion, there was tradition" is often used by mediums to explain encounters with *penunggu* to their victims. *Adat* (tradition) prescribes a way of life circumscribed by spiritual confines. According to a famous Malay medium:

Before humans existed, the world was inhabited by *penunggu*. When people came into existence and progressed, the world of the *penunggu* was disturbed. Human beings trespassed into their territory by building houses, bridges, etc. Is it okay for someone to drive you out of your own home? That's why there are many stories of *penunggu* disturbing people. (cited in Chai 2017: 64)

Almost everyone in Singkawang can relate a story about an encounter or contact with *penunggu*. They are simply a part of the social world there.

## Encounters

Caution is required in encounters with *penunggu*. When one needs to "pass motion," a Malaysian English term used to politely indicate urinating, at Gunung Sari mountain, one has to be extra careful and seek proper permission from the white monkey spirit. Climbers are cautioned to ascend the mountain before dusk and make as little noise as possible. Many people who have seen white "shadows" jumping from tree to tree on the mountain have fallen sick thereafter. An account by one male respondent illustrates the need for care. His family had just moved into a new housing area at Roban that is quite secluded and surrounded by rocky hills. His three-year-old daughter was seen chasing after something not visible to him or his wife. When asked, the daughter said she was chasing a chicken. In her sleep, she would sometimes scream, smile, or laugh in a voice foreign to her parents. Upon

consultation with a *tatung*, the family learned that the new housing area was guarded by a *penunggu kokang* or cock guardian whose territory had been transgressed. Their house was located at the tail end of the *penunggu*; thus, the effect was mild. If it were located at the head, the *tatung* said the effect would have been more serious.

People do not talk about *penunggu* with great fear or anxiety, however. Encounters with them seem to be quite common and casual. They are ever-present and can be sensed by anyone at any given time. Encounters can be intentional or unintentional, but usually people do not initiate contact with a spirit on purpose. People vary in their vulnerability to these encounters. Two people may be in the same place at the same time, but one will be “polluted” (Hakka. *fam tor*) by the spirit while the other is not. The victim is said to have a lower level of luck (Hakka. *jun*). People with lower levels of *jun*, it is said, tend to see and feel spirits more easily. Young children are especially vulnerable since their *jun* is still at a low level (*jun ai*) and will only become higher (*jun ko*) as they grow older. Parents usually refrain taking young children to unfamiliar places and going out with them after sunset. Children who have encountered *penunggu* show symptoms that include not sleeping well, feverishness, crankiness, and crying in their sleep. For adults the signs usually begin with nightmares or sleepless nights. This is followed by loss of appetite, feeling nauseated and lethargic, and fever and body ache. Such symptoms are considered the normal outcome of a brush with *penunggu*.

A female respondent in her early twenties had contact with *penunggu* quite often. She was deemed one of those possessing lower *jun* and so was affected when those with her at the same place and same time were not. Her first encounter occurred in her early teens during a family outing to the beach. Upon return, she had a nightmare with shadowy figures chasing her. When she woke up, vomited, and did not dare fall back to sleep. She was only able to sleep the next evening, but not soundly. Her mother related that her daughter started with mumbling, then struggled with both arms swinging as if trying to ward off something, and finally she started screaming. The family was terrified and took her right away to a temple where a *tatung* went into trance to seek help from his deity. According to the deity, a *penunggu* who had a desire for offerings had chanced upon the young girl. After negotiation with the *penunggu* by the medium/deity, the family was instructed to prepare offerings of food, spirit money, incense, and candles to satisfy the spirit. The offerings and prayer were made at the same beach area and the *penunggu* stopped disturbing the girl after that. But following that incident, the girl had many more brushes with other *penunggu*, whose symptoms continued to be nightmares, screams, and struggles in sleep. Almost every outing with family and friends would result in such contact. Although she now refrains from going to secluded or unfamiliar

places, her contact with *penunggu* seems unavoidable. According to her mother, “It also happens in town. That’s her fate.” But she went on to add, “At least the spirits do not demand exorbitant offerings or things we cannot fulfill. What they want, we just try to fulfill.” These encounters with the spirit world have become routine; the girl is taken to a *tatung*, and offerings and prayers of propitiation to the *penunggu* are made, with no serious consequences.

But there have been more serious cases in which victims were harmed, receiving physical injuries. In July 2016, a male respondent’s family member got a bad scratch on her arm while taking a shower. The scratch looked like that from an animal. The bathroom door had been closed and she had been alone throughout the shower. That very night, the mother of the victim had a bad dream about being chased by an animal with human limbs. The family went to a *tatung* and found out that a *penunggu* was seeking vengeance because its homestead had been destroyed. The family’s house stood behind a plot of land where the *penunggu* resided that was being cleared for a new building. The spirit wanted to chase the family out of their home as a form of revenge. Through cleansing rituals and offerings of food, incense, and spirit money over twelve consecutive Friday nights, the *penunggu* was finally appeased and left the family in peace.<sup>14</sup>

## Humans Inviting *Penunggu* Assistance

Since the natural world is believed to be inhabited by *penunggu*, there are some instances where people intentionally initiate contact. A good example of this initiative is the Cung Yong Pak Kung temple located right at the town center. This is where almost every *tatung* enters and seeks blessing before the annual Cap Go Meh procession. The temple is believed to be among the oldest in town and according to temple history, it was built in 1878 when Singkawang was just a transit town for gold miners working in Monterado. The town was then surrounded by jungle, and since locals believed that every forest has its protector, a small shed was built to house the protector spirit of that area, which the Chinese called Pak Kung 伯公 (Hakka for Grand Uncle). In time the shed was dismantled and replaced with a permanent temple. A clay statue was brought from China to be worshipped there, and the temple was named the Pak Kung temple after its main deity.

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14 For full ethnographic account, refer to Chai 2018: 297-324.

Among the pantheon of deities worshipped by Singkawang Chinese, Pak Kung is the most important.<sup>15</sup> There are temples dedicated to this deity in almost every corner of the town. It is not an overstatement to say that of the “thousands” of temples, more than half are devoted to the Grand Uncle deity.<sup>16</sup> Such temples can be found by the river’s mouth, in the foothills, up in the mountains, in the middle of rice fields, in coconut plantations and rubber gardens, at the seaside, on top of rocks, and so on.

Since Pak Kung is believed to be the guardian of a territory and is related directly to the land, he is comparable to an area’s landlord. Before clearing a piece of land, starting cultivation, undertaking mining activities, and even before setting to sea for fishing or water activities, Pak Kung’s blessing and protection is sought. [Each] Pak Kung is believed to guard over a locale and doesn’t trespass into another Pak Kung’s territory unless invited, according to the temple chairman of Central Singkawang. He further explained that, “There is usually a temple in each area.... A Pak Kung guarding the foot of a hill will not be efficacious at the river mouth or at the kampung and vice versa.” This description best exemplifies the function of Pak Kung as a tutelary deity watching over and protecting a territory. (ibid.: 307)

The Singkawang Chinese belief in Pak Kung is closely related to local beliefs about other spirit guardians of the territory. It is not linked to any pioneers or heroes like the 伯公 *pekong* (in Hokkien) of Tanjung Tokong, Penang (Malaysia).<sup>17</sup> Pak Kung is believed to watch over all matters in its territory, from life to death; thus before any activity related to the soil is started, prayers and offerings are made seeking the deity’s permission and blessing. The birth of a family member, marriages, and deaths are also reported to Pak Kung. The father or grandparents of a newborn will report and pray for the child to grow up healthy. Couples getting married pray to the deity a few days before their wedding seeking blessing. After a death, a family member, usually the eldest son, will inform the deity and then go to the nearest river to “buy”

15 These include the military deities, the Goddess of Mercy, the God of War 廣澤尊王, the Monkey God 齊天大聖, and the God of Medicine 仙師.

16 Edhylius Sean (Kepala Lembaga Pembinaan Keagamaan Buddha Kota Singkawang), pers. comm. on 12 July 2016.

17 See Han Wai Toon 韓槐準 (1940), Xu Yun Qiao 許雲樵 (1951), Chen Yu Sung 陳育崧 (1951), Kuang Guo Xiang 龐國祥 (1957), Teoh Shiaw Kuan 張少寬 (2003) for the history of Tanjung Tokong in relation to the three pioneer leaders deified as Tua Pek Kong.

water from Pak Kung by tossing a coin into the river as payment. This water is then used to cleanse the body of the deceased to ensure that he or she will have a safe journey to the other world.

Humans may instigate contact with *penunggu* to seek protection, blessings, or personal gain. During the administration of the previous mayor, there was a rumor about his relationship with what is described as a *melihara* (rearing or looking after) *penunggu*. When I asked the ex-mayor about his views of the spirit world, he openly admitted that he has a few *penunggu* that listen to him and help him learn the latest rumors about him. He told me that every day the *penunggu* fly around town and enter coffee shops to listen to townfolks' conversations. He justified this by saying that he needs to know about problems among his people so he can help to solve them and improve their lives. Some of the locals who knew about his use of *penunggu* said that he was concerned about gossip because he had been involved in a lot of wrongdoing. Others say that he used *penunggu* to find out who was badmouthing him and take vengeance. Local folks think that anyone who uses *penunggu* for greedy purposes will face consequences, such as not having any offspring or losing loved ones. They said this why the ex-mayor has not had any children in his recent marriage.

## ***Penunggu* Inviting Themselves into the Human World**

*Penunggu* are known to initiate contact with the human world, usually through dream revelations to a chosen person. It is believed that through such dreams the guardian spirit is offering his or her services to help people in exchange for offerings. Most people do not reject such offers of help—indeed, they dare not reject them, or the person concerned will experience torment. There is no difference between a *penunggu* and a deity, except that a *penunggu* does not have a constructed place where it is worshipped. Communication with *penunggu* in dreams is interpreted by mediums, who can determine the date and place of worship, and the types of offerings required. Preparations for such rituals are, at least initially, simple and cost little. Once a place of worship has been set up, other people are likely to also make offerings, and if they find success in life through those offerings, the arrangement of the place is likely to be elaborated. It may eventually give rise to a full-blown temple.

Some dream messages, as interpreted by *tatung*, are explicit about the spirit's requests and desires. Some lack explicit messages and are simply visions of the *penunggu*. Sometimes the dreams go on for several nights, causing the person to lose sleep. The symptoms are similar to those suffered by anyone said to be "polluted" by *penunggu* following encounters with them in their waking lives—nightmares,

sleepless nights, headaches, nausea, fever, body aches. The help of a medium is required in both cases to ensure recovery. The victim relates the dream to the medium who will go into trance to communicate with the *penunggu* and find out his or her wishes and requests. Normally this communication is a simple two-way interaction, with the medium asking all the questions and receiving feedback from the *penunggu*; the victim and their family are essentially bystanders.

If the guardian spirit makes demands the dreamer cannot fulfill, the medium will help negotiate a deal between the two parties. For instance, at a temple near Jalan Nusantara Dalam, a *tatung* in trance was trying to negotiate a deal with a Malay *penunggu*. This *penunggu* had appeared in the dreams of a middle-aged Malay man over a few nights. It was asking for an altar to be set up at the back of the man's barong where he sold fried banana fritters.<sup>18</sup> The *penunggu* also asked for a cow to be slaughtered together with other prayer offerings including kemenyan, candles, incense, coconuts, and local delicacies.<sup>19</sup> The man was anxious about the demand for a cow and the medium tried to negotiate replacing the whole cow with a piece of beef. The *penunggu* would not agree to that but said it would accept two chickens. These fowls were to be presented, with the other offerings, on for four consecutive *malam Jumaat*.<sup>20</sup> *Malam Jumaat* is a night when mediums make special prayers to deities and purify ritual weapons such as swords, *mandau*, and *parang* with water or kemenyan. Temples are crowded with devotees, who come to see the *tatung* in trance and receive lucky numbers. Rituals conducted on that night are believed to be especially efficacious.

The origins of many of the Chinese temples lie in dreams related to *penunggu*. An example is the Kut Lut Pak Kung temple, also known as Pekong Kulor, about 4km from Kuching on the way to Bengkayang regency. The area is predominantly occupied by Dayaks and sits near the town's main army camp. According to the oral history of the temple, in the mid-1880s a local farmer dreamt of an old man with a long white beard telling him about a rock. The farmer went to look for the rock the next day and prayed to it by offering incense there daily. Thereafter, he had another dream. He dreamt of the same old man telling him lucky numbers. Those numbers won him quite a lot of money, so he bought an incense burner and placed it at the rock to show his gratitude. Word spread, and many people came by to pray.

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18 A *barong* is a simple makeshift tent or hut.

19 Kemenyan comes in powder or granular forms. It is made from tree resin and when burned produces a lot of smoke and a strong fragrance. It is widely used in Southeast Asia countries.

20 Thursday night. In Indonesia, the names of nights are based on the next approaching daylight. For example, *malam Selasa* is a Monday night, *malam Rabu* is Tuesday night.

People won lotteries and donated money to build a temple for the spirit. The current devotees of the temple are not only Chinese, but also Dayaks and Malays who come from near and far.

The origin story of the Kut Lut Pak Kung temple is just one example of spirit revelation leading to the construction of a permanent temple by which the spirit becomes a deity. Others include the Green Mountain Pak Kung (青山伯公), Great Mountain Pak Kung (泰山伯公), Field Guardian Pak Kung (官田伯公), Jungle Mountain (林山伯公), White Stone Pak Kung (白石伯公), Great Stone Pak Kung (太石王伯公), Wealth Mountain Pak Kung (裕山伯公), Yellow Mountain (山伯公), Green Leaves Pak Kung (青葉伯公), and Rivermouth Pak Kung (水口伯公) temples. These all represent *penunggu* that were deified as Pak Kung.

### Multi-ethnic *Penunggu*

*Penunggu* can be anthropomorphic, often appearing in human form. When they appear as humans, they may present as Dayak or Malay as well as Chinese. People do not only dream of *penunggu* of their own ethnic group. They work out whether they are dreaming of a Chinese, Malay or Dayak spirit by its appearance, and they will make offerings to it whatever its ethnic affiliation. A Dayak *penunggu* has darker skin than a Chinese one, and is usually shirtless, revealing a strong torso and wearing a headband that may be ornamented with feathers. A Malay *penunggu* is usually a tanned old man, wearing *songkok* or *kopiah* on his head and carrying a *tongkat*, sometimes with a long beard or a mustache.<sup>21</sup> People associate dreaming of *misbaha* (Muslim prayer beads) to indicate that the message is from a Malay *penunggu*, especially when the dreamer is a non-Muslim. Dreaming of a *mandau* implies that the message comes from a Dayak *penunggu*.<sup>22</sup>

Another belief shared by all ethnic groups concerns the tigers, cobras, and crocodiles that are all believed to be the *penunggu*'s pets. These animals can serve as messengers for their owners. Therefore, when one dreams of any of them, it is considered a message from the spirit world.

In Singkawang, it is common to see *penunggu* altars set up in front of or beside a house, on temple grounds, under a big tree, or by a big boulder. Some altars are

21 Traditional cap for Malay men and a cap usually worn by Muslim men during religious activities; a wooden stick or cane used for walking.

22 A *mandau* is a traditional cleaver Dayak used in the old days. It is largely confined to ceremonial use today.

simple, consisting of just a roof over a jar or bowl for offerings, while others have more elaborate items such as plaques or mirrors inscribed with the name of the spirit. Chinese, Dayaks and Malays are often seen praying to them with offerings of black incense and kemenyan. They pray to the *penunggu* just as they do to the *dewa* and *pantak*, with respect and humility.

## Conclusion: Living Together

Communication between the social world and the natural world in Singkawang is abiding. The two interact through negotiated exchanges. Like the *larada* in Eves' study of the Lelet people, the siting and movement of territorial beings creates a sense of self and personhood via imaginatively created social space (1997: 188). The *penunggu*, through its encounters with the social world, intentionally (or unintentionally) creates a "lived space" that is shared among people and spirits.

Singkawang's numerous temples and their mediums serve as connectors between the two worlds. The *penunggu*, through medium negotiations, are willing to make exchanges feasible and of benefit to both sides. The exchanges between the *penunggu* and the human world are reciprocal; both help each other, both gain something in return, to create a dependable symbiotic relationship. A *penunggu* can be placated through negotiation and then appeased by offerings; it can be invited into a temple and worshipped as a deity. It can also offer its protection to people proactively by approaching the human world through dreams. People's relationship with *penunggu* can be forged, or to borrow Bird-David's term, "cultivated," to their benefit.

Either way, the people of Singkawang have learned to reconcile with the local spirit world, which is believed to have existed since time immemorial. They set aside religious differences and uphold the belief that there is a natural world of *penunggu* alongside which they must live. By sharing and living together in a space also occupied by the unseen world of spirits, they blend and adopt each other's beliefs in a harmoniously cordial manner. They uphold the concept of mutual respect between people and the natural world as essential to living together. This is indeed essential to achieving stability amidst the ambiguities of social, economic and political upheaval.

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## 共同生活： 山口洋的守護「精靈」與人群

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*Sebelum ada agama, adat sudah wujud*（在宗教之前，有傳統），是在西加里曼丹省山口洋市傳統醫療者中常聽到的說法，這句諺語是關於 *penunggu*（守護靈）的信仰。當地不同的族群－華人、達雅族（Dayak）、馬來人－相信守護靈存在於周遭環境中。如果這些精靈受到騷擾，會引發生病或不適。為了安撫守護靈和治療疾病，可求助於 *tatung*（靈媒）。靈媒透過將精靈引入自己體內，治療疾病，與精靈協商，讓守護靈和人之間的關係趨於平和。

本文處理西加里曼丹省山口洋市的多元族群社會中人與精靈的關係，採用 Bird-David's (1992, 1999, 2004) 的論點，即人與精靈之間可以形塑良好關係。山口洋市的人們相信，如果精靈--尤其是守護靈--受適當安撫，就可能成為提供協助與保護的善靈。守護靈被認為是監管一處的守護者，山口洋市的所有族群都共享這個信仰，幾乎每個人都能說出與守護靈相遇或接觸的故事。守護靈的存在融入了山口洋市的社會世界。本文建立於2016年為期六個月與2017年三個月所蒐集的民族誌田野資料，這些與守護靈和其他精靈互動的故事遍及於在當地人的日常生活與關注之中。

山口洋市數以千計的廟宇和靈媒扮演兩個世界之間的連結，守護靈透過靈媒，協助並試圖製造有利於雙邊的往來，這些往來是內生性的。守護靈可能透過協商而受安撫，守護靈可能應邀入廟當成神靈一樣受崇拜，它也可能主動接觸人類提供保護服務。為了人群的利益，與守護靈的關係可以形塑，或借用 Bird-David 的說法，可以「培養」。

關鍵詞：華人，達雅族，守護靈，靈媒，山口洋

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