

Rice and Performance for the Sustenance of Traditional Heritage in Southeast Asian Communities: Selected Cases in Borneo, Sabah, Malaysia

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Abstract

Rice is not merely a dietary staple for the people of Asia and Southeast Asia. Rather, it reflects ways of life that revolve around the growth and protection of rice. Deeply embedded within the spiritual heritage of communities which grow this staple, rice is sacred and revered. In many Southeast Asian countries, rice is believed to be the incarnate of a Goddess and addressed by a number of names including *Dewi Sri* in Java and Bali, *Mae Po Sop* in Thailand, *Po Ino Nogar* in Laos and *Bambazon* or *Bambarayon* in Sabah, Malaysia. Rice rituals, enacted through performance that have been inherited for generations, determine the balance between the relationships of the Rice Spirit, other spirits that inhabit the spiritual world and human beings who inhabit the physical world. These rituals, which are crucial for the sustenance of traditional heritage, are embodied through the preparation of offerings, the inviting of spirits to join in the rice ritual, music making and dance performances. This paper focuses on two rice rituals of Sabah, Malaysia: the *Monogit* ritual of the Kadazan community of Penampang, and the *Mag-paii bahau* ritual practiced by the Sama Bajau community in Semporna. By observing these rituals, this paper intends to

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