

DEATH AND RITES AMONG THE KADAZAN PENAMPANG OF SABAH, BORNEO, MALAYSIA

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Abstract

The funeral is the third most important rite of passage in the life of the Kadazan of Penampang, Sabah. An integral part of the funerary rites is playing the traditional gong musical ensemble called *dunsai*, which is played during the funeral. The gongs were traditionally beaten according to this particular sombre rhythm to announce to the spirit world the death and the pending arrival of a new member, and to the secular world that death has occurred and due preparations had to be made. *Dunsai* music is especially significant as only six hanging gongs without the drum are used. These days the *Dunsai* is widely recognized as the funerary music of the Kadazan Penampang, and is played during the wake and on the sixth day after the burial. This paper documents the traditional observances of the funerary rites featuring the *Dunsai* music based on the ancestral animistic beliefs of the Kadazan of the Kg. Kituau, Penampang, Sabah. It also attempts to show these funerary rites as a continuing cultural symbol of the Kadazan Penampang identity that transcends the past and present beliefs since many members of the community now subscribe to other faiths.

Keywords: gong music, *dunsai*, rite of passage, death, Kadazandusun, Sabah

Kadazan of Penampang Worldview

The Kadazan Penampang, an indigenous category of the complex Kadazandusun ethnic group who are speakers of the Dusunic languages, is defined by their geographical location and traditional residence in the Penampang District. They are customarily subsistence agriculturalists, planting