

## **Kadazan Customs**

The Kadazans are the largest single indigenous group in Sabah. Most of them are found in the western part of the country, that is around places like Kuala Penyu, Papar, Penampang, Tuaran, Ranau and Kudat, in the Tambunan District of the interior and in the Labuk Valley on the east coast.

Some people say that the Kadazans are of Chinese descent. Although there may be some truth in this, judging by the colour of their skin, the shape of their eyes and certain other features, so far no concrete evidence has been found on which such an assumption can be based.

The Kadazans are predominantly agriculturalists, and it can be said that almost all the rice cultivated in Sabah is grown by them. They are hardworking and easily adapt their way of life to more progressive times the mechanization of ploughing, artificial fertilisers and double cropping of Ria and Malinja strains of rice each year, all of which have been introduced by the government, they have taken up with great enthusiasm and in their stride.

A large number of the Kadazans are pagan in belief. Some of them are Christians, particularly around Penampang and the larger towns. In the district of Ranau there are also a number of Kadazans who have embraced Islam.

### **Marriage Customs**

Marriage customs amongst the Kadazans vary a little from one district to another but in general are the same. The most important thing about Kadazan marriage customs is the role of the parents of both sides, for it is they who make the choice and all the arrangements for the joining together of their children. Usually the children abide by their parents' decision.

The business of making the engagement is done when the boy is only twelve years old and the girl eleven. The Kadazans call this 'miatod'. The process begins with the boy who is to be engaged paying a formal visit to the girl's house, accompanied by some relatives and close friends. The visit is made at a time which has been agreed upon beforehand.

In the girl's house everybody is ready, waiting with members of the family and close friends as well. Whilst waiting for the arrival of the boy's party, the girl is told to make seven rice-balls as a special dish for her future husband. When she has done this, she is hastily sent to the house of one of her relations, which is never, however, far from her own.

As soon as the boy arrives, he is invited to enter and is seated on a mat specially woven for occasions such as this, and which is called 'lawangan' by the Kadazans. In the meanwhile the question of the size of the dowry is discussed by the elders from both parties. Usually a Kadazan dowry consists of a large gong, a small gong, a (small) cannon, a buffalo, some bronze, land, and so forth. The agreement is made to become effective on the day of the actual wedding.

Finally a meal consisting of rice and buffalo meat, pork, chicken and similar dishes, washed down with drinks like rice-wine and the juice of the coconut blossom is consumed to the accompaniment of the beat of gongs.

This is when the special rice which has been prepared for the boy by his bride-to-be is fed to him by an old lady from the girl's side. This is done in front of all present. After this everything is over and the guests depart, except for the bridegroom-to-be and some of his close friends who stay behind in the girl's house. Now the girl returns from her relation's house in order to meet her future husband and in order to serve him with more food and drink.

That night the boy and his friends sleep in a room by themselves in the girl's house. They will return home the following morning.

Three days later the girl returns the visit. The same procedures are followed as with the boy's visit to the girl's house, except that the boy does not have to move out of his house while his fiancée and her friends are there.

The next day the girl is sent back to her own house by her fiancée along with other members of her family.

While they are waiting for their coming of age, the engaged couple stay with their own parents. However, the boy is obliged to help in his future mother-in-law's house, doing such chores as collecting the firewood, ploughing the soil and putting up temporary sheds and the like. Similarly, the girl must help her future mother-in-law to plant the rice, cook and so on.

The boy may visit the girl's house whenever he likes on his own. The girl may also do likewise on condition that she is accompanied by her mother, an aunt or an elder sister. If the boy has an elder sister, he may invite his fiancée to stay a night or two in his house. At the same time if either one of them breaks the rules, a penalty will be exacted.

When the parents think that the time has come for their children to be married - usually around sixteen or seventeen years of age - the date for the wedding is fixed by mutual agreement.

At last the betrothal ceremony can take place. A man who is fairly advanced in years from the bridegroom's side is chosen to carry out the betrothal rites, by reading a short couplet set to a Kadazan melody. Then a huge feast is held at which several buffaloes, pigs and chickens, as well as a number of jars of rice-wine and bamboo stems of coconut blossom juice are consumed.

### **Birth and Naming Ceremonies**

When a woman gives birth to a child in a house, a leaf known as wongkong is immediately tied over the door. This serves to give notice that a birth has taken place and that only those who live nearby may call.

During her period of pregnancy until several days after delivery, the mother is completely in the hands of the midwife. The midwife is usually an elderly woman who is held in high esteem amongst the villagers.

Apart from looking after the delivery of the child, the midwife is also responsible for all the medicines, which consist of the roots of trees, herbs, and so on. The midwife advises the mother on the relevant taboos and massages her both before and after childbirth.

The name of the newborn babe is chosen by its grandparents. If the child was born in the house of the mother-in-law, they will have this responsibility; if in the house of the mother's own parents, they will choose what they consider to be an appropriate name.

The names chosen are taken from these ancestors and are based on the world around them such as the names of trees, animals, and so on. Kadazan boys take names like Gimbang, Kunul, Kerupang, Galumau, Gantuong, Empurut, Ampingan, Sangan and so forth: typical, girls' names are Semitah, Rangkumas, Ansayu, Baimin, Salud, Amin, Nani and Mainah.

When the newborn child is about a month old, the shaving ceremony takes place. Goats, pigs and chickens are always slaughtered for this occasion. There are also jars of rice-wine and dozens of bamboo-stems of coconut blossom juice for those with means, and whatever they can afford for the less well-off.

### **Beliefs about Illness**

According to Kadazan belief, illness is caused by supernatural beings such as ghosts and devils which dwell in the virgin jungle, in fig-trees and in large boulders. Besides this, the Kadazans also believe that some people (called stridden) have the power to cause illness in others whom they do not like.

When someone falls ill in the house, his family will call for a medicine-man who in the case of Sabah is not a man at all, but a woman. This woman not only casts spells and explains the necessary taboos to be followed but also provides medicines appropriate to the sickness from which the patient is suffering. These medicines include, inter alia, the tail and skin of a python, the tail and fat of an ant-eater, cockroaches, bees, rats, rattan roots, nibung-palm roots, betelnut roots, langsat (a fruit) skin and wild bananas.

The medicine-woman brings a chicken, a pig and some yellow rice to a fig-tree or a large boulder which she believes to be the abode of a resident spirit. All these things are provided by the family of the sick person. At the boulder or beneath the fig-tree the woman softly chants her spells in the language of the spirits. This done, she will put the yellow rice in a bamboo stem, to which is added the chicken and pig's blood which she has just slaughtered, as well as their hearts and lungs. The bamboo stem is then placed on the boulder or below the tree in the ordained manner to the accompaniment of certain words.

The medicine-woman then returns home without looking back once. The slaughtered pig and chicken are left where they are for the time being so that the resident spirits can cast their spells over them; the spells will be absorbed into the carcasses of the dead animals. After about half an hour the carcasses will be brought back to the sick man's house.

The slaughtered chicken is smeared all over the body of the patient, followed by the pig which is held by two men. Then the pig is suspended between two poles outside the house and roasted over a fire of bamboo. (No other wood may

be used for this purpose:) Whilst the roasting is going on, no one is allowed to utter coarse speech, for to do so — according to the general belief—would prevent the sick man from ever recovering, because the spells of the spirits would have been rendered inoperative. Should someone reveal an easy heart by laughter in the sick man's house, the person concerned has to pay a customary fine of one chicken. If untoward remarks are made about the fat running off the roasting pig, it may not be eaten.

The methods described above for the treatment of the sick applies to those who have been crossed by a ghost or a spirit.

## **Funerals**

When a death occurs in a village, everyone is informed. A taboo which must be observed is that no one must do any kind of work on the day of the funeral, above all, the work of planting rice. It is believed that any work done on such an occasion can only bring misfortune, engendered by the fate of the deceased. However, this taboo does not apply should the deceased die far from his own village.

First of all, the body is washed and then dressed in fine clothes and sprinkled with rose-water. Sometimes, if the deceased was a cigarette or cheroot smoker, a cigarette or cheroot is placed in his mouth. The body is kept in the house from three to seven days before it is buried. While the body is in the house, all the occupants must keep awake. Whoever falls off to sleep will be doused with water, and cannot take offence.

The purpose of keeping awake is to watch out for the devil or genie which in the guise of a large bird will try to fly away with the body. Should the bird come, the day will become overcast and gloomy and there will be thunder and lightning, which will give the creature its chance to dash into the house and look for the body. This bird is known as the pendaatan bird. In order to avoid the bird's onslaught, cloth is hung around the body. The bird is frightened off by the cloth which it mistakes for human beings.

There should be an atmosphere of complete calm and silence in the house; there should be no idle chatter or angry words. In this quietness, solace is sought by the slow beating of gongs or drums, the sound of which the Kadazans refer to as Surabaya. These gongs or drums may only be beaten three times a day, that is when the sun sets, at midnight and as the sun rises the following morning.

The greatest care is taken to prevent a cat from jumping over the outstretched corpse, for the Kadazans believe that if this happens the dead man will be transformed into a dangerous and terrifying giant.

No coffin or burial jar is used for those with neither rank nor wealth. They are carried to the burial ground wrapped up in cloth and tied to a pole which can be easily lifted.

When the body is ready, it is carried in procession to the grave to the accompaniment of gongs and drums, firecrackers and gunfire.

On arrival, a spell is cast over the body by an elderly man specially chosen to wait by the open grave. The grave itself is swept with green betelnut leaves so as to prevent the spirits of those who have come along being left behind there.

The body is then lowered into the grave while a sprig from a banyan tree is taken and stuck over its navel. After this has been done, the grave is filled in. The purpose of the banyan sprig is to ascertain whether the deceased still thinks of his wife and children. If he does, the sprig will sprout a shoot; if no shoot appears, this means that he has forgotten all about those he has left behind.

A small hut with an attap or zinc roof and with beautiful designs carved on its plank walls is erected over the grave. A shirt, a clean metal cigar/cigarette box, and some betelnut quids, cigarettes and similar items are placed in the middle of the hut.

The family of the deceased will send food to the hut every afternoon for seven days, because it is believed that during this period the soul of the dead man has not yet left the body and so still requires food from its living relatives.

No one is allowed to disturb these things. Anyone found doing so will be fined a chicken or five dollars.

The bodies of well-to-do Kadazans are placed in large burial jars, which are firmly closed before they are buried with the body inside. Then another very expensive jar is placed above the grave. In some places the burial jar and its contents are not taken straight away to the burial place but are kept in the house itself or in a special hut erected nearby

so that the family can mourn there whilst waiting for other relatives who live far off to arrive. Then only is the jar buried.

After three days have passed since the burial, a feast is held at night. On this occasion members of the deceased's family let fall three drops of candle wax through the cracks in the floor of the house onto the ground below. This is known as 'the 'three blighted thrusts'. The same performance is repeated on the seventh day, though this time seven wax drops are made. These two ceremonies are carried out on a small scale, only relatives and neighbors being invited to attend.

Another feast is held on the fortieth day. This time the arrangements are rather different. If the earlier ceremonies were held only at night, this time it is held at midday as well as at night. At the midday meal, when all the dishes of rice, meat, fruits and the like have been prepared, a boy - usually a son of the deceased - goes to his parent's grave and invites him (or her) to come back to the house to partake of the feast. Only when the boy has returned may the dishes served be eaten by those present.

That night gong and drum are beaten continuously. Apart from the usual food, a special dish complete with betelnut quids, cigarettes and other such things is laid in the centre of the doorway. A white candle is lit in the middle.

When the old lady who has been appointed specially for the purpose of watching over this dish gives the signal, the gong and drums are beaten simultaneously. The children of the deceased then start to dance the dance known as the sumazau round the dish, each one in his turn; they are then followed by the grandchildren and finally by other relations. When the dance is over, those present are invited to eat.

One hundred days later yet another feast is held. This feast is much grander than any of the previous ones, a buffalo and several chickens being slaughtered for the occasion. The main purpose of this feast is to mark the changing of the white clothes of mourning which the deceased's family has been wearing and the cutting of hair which, to meet the dictates of custom, has been allowed to grow for one hundred days without hindrance.

When the mourning clothes have been taken off, they are immediately burned. From now on the members of the deceased's family are free to wear what dress they please and whatever colors they fancy. In this way, so it is believed, all traces of contamination and calamity have been removed from their bodies.

## **Kadazan Houses**

One way of identifying a particular group of people or race is by the style of their houses and the area around them. Even so the materials used for a house differ a little from district to district. Kadazan houses in the Tambuna'n District are all made entirely of bamboo, including the pillars, the roof, the walls and the floor, for in that area bamboo is in abundance.

In the Ranau District house pillars are of timber, the walls and floors of bamboo and the roof of thatch.

A number of Kadazan houses in the vicinity of Mount Kinabalu have their kitchens in the centre of the house, the reason being that this room is not only used for cooking but for keeping the people of the household warm, as the weather in this particular region is very cool. All Kadazan houses are detached, unlike those of the Muruts and Dayaks who live in longhouses. However, the Kadazan and Rungus in Kudat also live in longhouses.

You will usually find around a Kadazan house some coconut trees, and a few fruit trees such as big limes, langsung, jackfruit, rambutans, and so on. There are always pigs and fowls running around. Not far from the house can be seen the rice fields and buffaloes wallowing in the river or in the ditches.

Kadazan women from Kudat differ from the rest. Their dress consists of a single sheath of black cloth which covers the body from the breasts down to below the knees. On both legs they wear copper rings which look like spring coils and cover the leg from knee to ankle. Their arms are also adorned with rings made from snail shells.

## **Kadazan Women**

Many Kadazan women in the Tuaran District still wear traditional dress; this can be seen any day at the Tuaran market. Every year there is a Beauty Queen in Traditional Dress Competition held during the annual Great Fair.

The Kadazan dress is black in color and tight-fitting, similar in cut to the Malay gown known as the kebaya. The skirt or lower cloth is also black and goes down to about two inches above the kneecap, with red embroidery running down the sides, which the women do themselves. Kadazan women wear their hair in a thick round bun, and they have

bracelets of silver around their arms and legs. They do not usually wear their famous conical-shaped hats except when working in the rice fields or clearings.

Around their waists Kadazan women wear coils of fine rattan in colors that hold special meaning. Red shows that the wearer is not yet a mother; black denotes a woman who has a child or is middle-aged; white shows that the wearer has grandchildren who are already grown up.

Kadazan women from the districts of Penampang and Papar do not wear rattan around their waists. Instead they have belts made from silver dollars to which have been added other belts of metal which look like rings threaded with string. The women of Penampang and Papar wear blouses which are almost the same as those of Tuaran, but the skirt reaches down to the heels. Both skirt and blouse are black. On the head they wear attractive, conical-shaped hats which they have made themselves.

## **Beliefs and Customs**

The Kadazans believe in the rice spirit. All their ceremonies connected with rice cultivation from the clearing of the land till the harvesting of the rice are governed by this belief.

A large stone can often be seen in the middle of a Kadazan rice-field. These stones are known as 'oath-stones' or Batu Persumpaan. Some of them are hundreds of years old.

The purpose of these stones is to serve as reminders of agreements sworn between those who first cleared the land and the ghosts of genies believed to be resident there. The agreement always is that neither side should disturb the other. Apart from ceremonies connected with the clearing of new land, there are also other rites which concern the opening of one-day markets or fairs and similar things.

At the time of making the agreement between the clearers of the land and the earth spirits, another ceremonial which involves the casting of spells and the recitation of incantations also takes place, and the oath-stone is spattered with the blood of a pig or a chicken so as to give food to the spirit or its attendant.

When the rice grain swells, spell-casting or incantation ceremonies are carried out by each individual farmer instead of by the inhabitants of a village as a whole, as is done on other occasions. The purpose of these rites is to ensure that the rice is healthy and will not be attacked by disease. The rites are performed in the midst of the growing rice under the surveillance of a magician. A pair of fowls, a pot of rice, seven betel-vine leaves and a bottle of rice-wine are given as offerings.

Once the incantations have been made over these offerings, which takes about three hours, the two fowls are slaughtered and their feathers together with the betel-vine leaves are left behind in the field. All the other things are brought back where a feast is held in the house of the man who had made the offerings.

Cutting the rice must also follow established forms. First of all a bunch of rice stalks is taken, divided up into seven and put into the ketawai, a basket made of tree bark. Three months after cutting the rice, 'garis' (lines) which are highly respected are drawn over the rice and further offerings are made, this -time consisting of a boiled egg which has been de-shelled and a glass or cup of rice-wine.

This is the season when the Kadazans hold the greatest and most enjoyable of their festivities. Feasts, rice-drinking sessions and dances are the order of the day wherever the Kadazans live. The occasion has been made into a two-day public holiday throughout Sabah so that the Kadazans may enjoy themselves to the full.

## **Language**

The Kadazan language is a separate tongue, quite distinct from Malay. Kadazan is one of the languages given most time on the air by Radio Malaysia, Sabah. Official announcements and information are given out in Kadazan as well as in Malay, Chinese and English.

One page of the Kinabalu Sabah Times and also a page of the Sabah Weekend are given over entirely to Kadazan.