

The Other Tiger : History, Beliefs, and Rituals in Borneo

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▶ **To cite this version:**

Bernard Sellato. The Other Tiger : History, Beliefs, and Rituals in Borneo. Institute of Southeast Asian Studies –Yusof Ishak Institute, 2019. halshs-02173873

HAL Id: halshs-02173873
https://shs.hal.science/halshs-02173873

Submitted on 27 Jun 2020

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The Other Tiger. History, Beliefs, and Rituals in Borneo

Bernard Sellato[#]

Un tercer tigre buscaremos. Éste
será como los otros una forma
de mi sueño, un sistema de palabras
humanas y no el tigre vertebrado
que, más allá de las mitologías,
pisa la tierra. Bien lo sé, pero algo
me impone esta aventura indefinida,
insensata y antigua, y persevero
en buscar por el tiempo de la tarde
el otro tigre, el que no está en el verso.

Jorge Luis Borges, "El otro tigre" (1960)

In what distant deeps or skies
Burnt the fire of thine eyes?

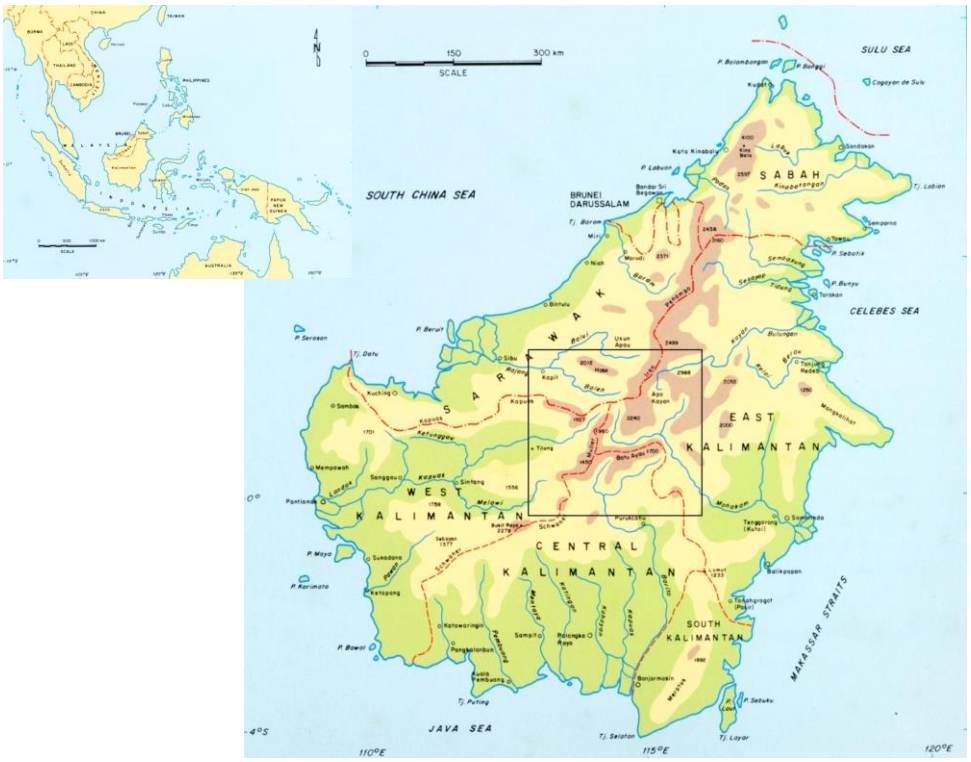
William Blake (1757–1827)

INTRODUCTION

So far as is known today, the true tiger, *Panthera tigris* (L.), does not (any longer) exist in Borneo. Among the island's indigenous peoples, however, the tiger has a significant reality in historical traditions, folk literature, myths, beliefs, and rituals. The present study endeavors to seek out this "other tiger" in some of these peoples' "systems of human words" (J.L. Borges, above). It originates from my earlier (1983) article, focusing mainly on a set of minor ethnic groups of the eastern and western slopes of the Müller mountain range, in the center of the island – the Aoheng and their neighbors, *pro parte* deriving from nomadic hunter-gatherers.

Much has appeared in press subsequently on the theme of the tiger, though Borneo has remained quite marginal in comprehensive studies such as Robert Wessing's thorough work on Java and across Southeast Asia, Peter Boomgaard's on the Malay world, or Jet Bakels' on Sumatra (Map 1). Much of what these authors wrote of the tiger elsewhere or in general has relevance to Borneo, bar the current presence of live tigers there. I found it particularly interesting to investigate the roles and functions of the tiger in societies not actually sharing their living space with the real animal.

Quite a substantial portion of the Borneo data presented and used here derives from my own field notes spanning more than four decades, the balance mostly comprising tiny pieces of tiger information scattered in dozens of published or unpublished studies dedicated to other topics – which explains the large reference list appended.



Map 1: Borneo in Southeast Asia; inset: the wider Müller Mts. region, see Map 3 (source: Sellato 1989: 6).

This study is primarily centered on the ethnic groups of the Müller Mountains, resorting to data about other groups whenever deemed useful, in agreement or divergence (Map 2). These data are mainly extracted from the literature on the Central Borneo area (as defined by Rousseau 1990, and reduced to groups speaking Kayanic languages) and on groups of the Barito language cluster (as defined by Hudson 1967). Both the "Kayanic-speaking" and "Barito-speaking" peoples robustly influenced the languages and cultures of the Müller-Schwaner groups, their close neighbors. Data from farther afield within Borneo also are called upon when relevant, as well as data from unsystematic forays into the literature on regions beyond Borneo (e.g., Sumatra, Java, Peninsular Malaysia, the Philippines, Vietnam).

This paper is not intended as a historical study, neither is it meant as an anthropological synthesis. Rather, its purpose is to combine all sorts of available materials to, ultimately, beyond the tiger, try and shed some light on "ancient belief systems" and the modalities of their evolution through time and cultural contact.

Section 1 surveys the diverse species of wild cats in Borneo, the specific names given to the tiger in local languages, and the physical evidence of tiger body parts among interior communities, and it examines the possibility of remaining tigers in remote corners of the island. **Section 2** reviews representations of the tiger in the oral literature of indigenous Borneo societies, highlighting its widespread value as a symbol of martial manliness and, among the Aoheng and related groups, its regional standing as a culture hero who brought them "civilization"; it then looks at the broader religious beliefs surrounding the Aoheng tiger, discusses the thin boundary between its animal and spiritual nature and, due to this


Bidayuh and related groups
"Barito" and related groups
Nomadic groups
Central northern groups
Iban and related groups
Kayan, Kenyah, and related groups
Northeastern groups
"Malay" groups
Others
SOUTH CHINA SEA
SULU SEA
CELEBES SEA
MAKASSAR STRAIT
JAVA SEA
BRUNEI DARUSSALAM
SABAH
SARAWAK
EAST KALIMANTAN
WEST KALIMANTAN
CENTRAL KALIMANTAN
SOUTH KALIMANTAN
Kota Kinabalu
Mt. Kinabalu
Kuching
Sibu
Miri
Bintulu
Kapit
Sintang
Pontianak
Sambas
Mempawah
Sanggau
Sukadana
Ketapang
Sampit
Pangkalanbun
Kotawaringin
Purukcahu
Sendawar
Tenggarong (Kutai)
Samarinda
Balikpapan
Tanah Grogot (Pasir)
Tarakan
Tawau
Semporna
Sandakan
Kudat
Labuan
Bandar Sri Begawan
Limbang
Lawas
Marudi
Niah
Serasan
Natuna Besar
Cape Datu
Cape Batum
Cape Selatan
Cape Puting
Cape Layar
Pulau Laut
Sebuku
Banjarmasin
Palangkaraya
Kuala Pembuang
Ketungau R.
Melawi River
Kapuas River
Rajang River
Baram R.
Mahakam R.
Kayan R.
Sesayap R.
Sembakung R.
Sebuku R.
Kelabit Kerayan Plateau
Usun Apau Plateau
Apo Kayan Plateau
Batu Ayau Mts.
Kapuas Mts.
Schwaner Mts.
Meratus Mts.
Muller Mts.
Iran Mts.
Hose Mts.
Penrisen Mts.
Mt. Lumut
Mt. Serayan
Mt. Bukit Raya
Mt. Tilung
Mangkalihat Peninsula
Sebatik
Bunyu
Tidung R.
Kinabatangan River
Segama R.
Cohat R.
Padas R.
Baleh R.
Balui R.
Belaga
Kapit
Tanjung Redeb
Tanjung Selor
Berau R.
Kelai R.
Kayan River
Mahakam R.
Barito R.
Kahayan R.
Kapuas R.
Kahajan R.
Kapuas Hulu
Pembuang R.
Mendawai R.
Melawi River
Ketungau R.
Landak R.
Sambas
Bawai
Maya
Karimata
Serasan
Natuna Besar
Balambangan
Cagayan de Sulu
Bonggi
Mt. Kinabalu
Kinabatangan River
Cape Batum
Cape Datu
Cape Puting
Cape Selatan
Cape Layar
Pulau Laut
Sebuku
Mangkalihat Peninsula
Sebatik
Bunyu
Tidung R.

ambivalence, its common function as a mediator between the human and spiritual worlds; finally, it examines various cases, excerpted from oral traditions, of human-tiger hybridization and its offspring. **Section 3**, focusing on indigenous societies' rituals, stresses both the tiger's benevolent features, such as initiation, redemption, and purification, and its sinister facets, such as the diverse forms of punishment for breach of taboo, both meant to warrant a "cool" socio-cosmic balance; and it inspects the various transpositions of the tiger's name (dragon, dog, bear, thunder). **Section 4**, returning to the tiger's function as culture hero, investigates the historical background of the Aoheng and related groups and identifies a real regional chieftain named Tiger who, in the early nineteenth century, played a crucial role in urging bands of forest nomads to settle down and start farming, which was instrumental in the ensuing emergence of the Aoheng cluster's ethnocultural identity; it then briefly explores the modalities of the myth-generating conflation of historical elements with earlier religious beliefs. **Section 5** scrutinizes the complex relationship of the tiger with the moon and the thunder/lightning; it suggests the pre-existence among former nomads of non-dualistic beliefs in a "tiger-moon-thunder" set of deities, which agglomerated with two separate farming societies' distinctive cosmogonic beliefs to become what is observed today among Aoheng and related groups; it touches briefly on the question of the so-called "thunder complex"; and it closes on remarks about ambiguity and variability, reflecting, respectively, the systemic cultural plasticity and singular cultural histories of these societies.

1. TIGERS, PAST AND PRESENT

There are in Borneo today a small number of Felidae (cat) species, known to and named by local hunters, prominent among which is the Clouded leopard. However, local languages also have a name for the tiger, which is not known to exist in Borneo today (Fig. 1). Interisland trade networks have brought to Borneo various tiger body parts (fangs, pelts), which became familiar to local people. Recent zooarchaeological research has established that the tiger remained a resident to Borneo well into the recent Holocene, while ongoing genetic studies may now be leading to taxonomic revisions.



Fig. 1: Javan Tiger (*Panthera tigris sondaica*) in 1938 at Ujung Kulon (West Java); source: Hoogerwerf 1970 (Wikimedia Commons).

1.1. Borneo Cats, Small and Big

To date, five species of wild Felidae have been discovered living in Borneo.[2] The Clouded leopard of Borneo – *Neofelis nebulosa*, *Neofelis diardi*, *Pardofelis nebulosa* – was recently, based on molecular evidence, reclassified as an endemic subspecies of the Sunda clouded leopard, *Neofelis diardi*, and renamed *N. d. borneensis* (Hearn *et al.* 2008). The Bay cat, *Catopuma badia* or *Felis badia*, also endemic to Borneo, is now also called *Pardofelis badia*. The Marbled cat, sometimes called *Felis marmorata* and now more commonly known as the subspecies *Pardofelis marmorata marmorata*, is found across Southeast Asia. The Flat-headed cat, also resident elsewhere in Southeast Asia and sometimes called *Felis planiceps*, is now commonly known as *Prionailurus planiceps*. And the Leopard cat, earlier known as *Prionailurus bengalensis*, now viewed as a distinct species, *Prionailurus javanensis*, is native to the Sunda region. To these the domestic *Felis catus* must be added (Puri 1997: 459, 2001: 194, 2005: 364).

The knowledge that local hunters have of wild animals also provides valuable information on their habits and their past and present distribution. Aoheng hunters easily identified the five taxa of wild Felidae present in Borneo (Sellato 1995):[3] *kü£ï burung* (*Neofelis diardi borneensis*), *kü£ï hova* (*Pardofelis marmorata marmorata*), *seva£ï* (*Prionailurus planiceps*), *éot* (*Prionailurus javanensis*), and *bïlung* (*Pardofelis badia*). Of the ecology and habitat of the *bïlung*, the only cat species endemic to Borneo, very little is known (Payne & Francis 1985, Meijaard 1997). Elderly Aoheng hunters reported that it lives in caves and holes, hunts alone, and is famed for its powerful leaps. They also stressed that it has become very rare in the last half century in the upper Mahakam and the Müller Mountains (see also IUCN 2017).

Among these five wild Felidae, four are rather small cats, and the Clouded leopard alone would be large enough to conceivably be mistaken for a (smallish) tiger.

1.2. The Many Names of the Tiger

Let us begin with this Clouded leopard, more present in the flesh as well as in languages than the tiger. It appears, in a relatively homogeneous way in the central regions of the island, to be called *kuleh*, *kuli*, *koli*, *kole*, *kleh*, *kluyh* (in Kayanic, Barito, and Punan languages; also, Iban *engkuli*); *kuri*, *kü£ï* (Aoheng, Hovongan, Kerého); in a slightly more remote way, *kuyir*, *kuwir*, *kuir* (Kelabit, Lundaye, Tahol); and other related names (see the reconstruction *kuliR; Smith 2017: 381), while non-cognates occur in languages of different families. (The term *kule* or *kulö* occurs among the Gayo of Sumatra; Wessing 1986: 95, *Kamus Indonesia-Gayo*.)

The Aoheng language has a specific name, *sengiru*, for the tiger, *Panthera tigris* (L.) or *Felis tigris* – hence a sixth member in the local cat inventory, whether it is meant to refer to an actual animal, a spiritual entity, or a symbolic object. Other Borneo languages, likewise, have a distinctive name to call the tiger by. As a "tiger" entry is usually *not* included in wordlists

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[2] See Medway 1977: 139–140, Payne & Francis 1985: 134–135, 288–290, MacKinnon *et al.* 1996: 235–236, Puri 2001: 191–193.

[3] In this transcription of the Aoheng language, [é] stands for /e/ or /ɛ/, [e] for shwa, [ï] for /i/, [i] for /I/, [ü] for /ʉ/, [u] for /ʊ/, and [v] for /β/; [£] is the retroflex flap /ɽ/, phonemically distinct from both /l/ and /r/; the glottal stop /ʔ/ is noted ['] (see Sellato & Soriente 2015: 345-347).

collected in Borneo, however, only a limited sample is available from the broad scope of Bornean languages. This name varies with regions and ethnic groups, and several major sets of cognates can be recognized:

- *Lejo, lijau, liju, lejau, lojau, lenjau, lencau, lenco*; this set of names appears restricted, linguistically, to the Kayanic family and, geographically, mostly to ethnic groups of the remote interior regions of the island (some of which were historically Kayanized), among which it occurs in regular contrast to the *kuleh* ("Clouded leopard") series. Among Kenyah groups of the Bahau drainage, however, *lenjau* refers, alone or in the *kole lenjau* binomial, to the Clouded leopard (Puri 2001: 191). The name *linjo* also occurs in relation with the tiger in Kerinci, Sumatra, where tigers (*P. tigris sondaica*) do roam the forest (Bakels 2003: 76).

- Two sets of words, not always clearly delineated, seem to occur: *harimaung, horomaung, remaung, halimaung, rima'ung*, derived from reconstructed PWMP[4] *qari-maquŋ as "wild feline" (ACD 2017); and *halimau, rimau, limau, horoma'u* (?), which may derive from a protoform *harimaw and whose distribution is likely due to borrowing from Malay (*id.*). These words are common in Borneo's non-Kayanic languages – Iban, Kendayan, and Bidayuh languages in the West; Ngaju and related Barito languages in the South; and Kadazan in the Northeast – and, geographically, among ethnic groups located in coastal and lower-elevation regions. Malay and Indonesian, it should be noted, tend to contrast, with quite some regional variation, *harimau belang* (or *loreng*), the (striped) "tiger", and *harimau kumbang* (or *tutul*), the (spotted) "leopard", and the first-order label *macan* may replace *harimau* in some of the above binomials (KBBI 1989, 2017; see also Boomgaard 2001) – which contributes to blur lexical identification of the large Felidae in Borneo (e.g., Munan 2012: 338). The languages of Borneo's coastal polities usually have *harimau* or a cognate – e.g., Banjar *harimau* (Abdul 1977: 77) or Kutai *remaong* (Fudiat 1979: 9, Erwin 2013: 341) – although the languages of polities historically closely associated with Javanese kingdoms (later, sultanates), such as Banjarmasin, may also have *macan*, like Javanese (Musdalipah *et al.* 2008: 19). In any event, the tiger being commonly viewed as absent from Borneo, terms belonging to the two sets above seem to be, nowadays, mainly focused on the leopard.

- *Sengiru, sengiro, singiro*; this set, insofar as is known, is restricted to a small cluster of languages deriving from those of former nomads of the Müller Mountains (see Sellato & Soriente 2015); this term might be related to Western Penan *sang* or *saang* (Brosius 1992: 86, 2001, n.d.), which refers to tiger spirits, and to an Eastern Penan term, *sieng*, translated as "betwitchment" and strongly associated with the tiger (Mackenzie 2006: 180–181);[5] it is quite unlikely, however, to be related to the Malay word *singa*, of Sanskrit origin and referring to the lion, which has been in common use as one of various titles granted by coastal Malay monarchs

[4] WMP, Western Malayo-Polynesian, is a blanket term to cover the miscellaneous Austronesian languages of the Philippines, western Indonesia, the Malay Peninsula, and Madagascar; PWMP, Proto-WMP, refers to tentatively reconstructed etymons for these languages. Recent studies tend to abandon the WMP category.

[5] The Western Penan frequently use *sieng* as an avoidance term for "tiger" (Brosius 1992: 86 n. 135). It should be noted that several Kenyah groups of the upper Bahau have *sing* or *sieng* to refer to the Domestic cat (Puri 2001: 194; cf. Malay/Indonesian *kucing*).

to interior tribal chieftains;[6] and a link with *seniang*, *sengiang*, *sangiang*, and a series of cognate terms (see, e.g., Nieuwenhuis 1900: II, 344, Lumholtz 1920: I, 122; *cf.* Javanese *sanghyang*), widely used in Borneo to refer to (usually benevolent) spiritual entities, is also highly unlikely.

- Punan Tubu *fi'at* or *vi'at* (with [f] standing for /φ/ and [v] for /β/; Dollop 1998, Césard *et al.* 2015), Sihan *piyat* (Kato n.d.), and Western Penan *biat* (Brosius n.d.) refer to the tiger; however, the Punan Vuhang *viat lanum* would rather refer to smaller cats (*F. planiceps*, *F. badia*) than the tiger (Chan 2007: 383); this set of words in Borneo seems restricted to the languages of a cluster of hunting-gathering groups stretching from sub-coastal eastern Sarawak to interior North Kalimantan province; but the *babiat* tiger of the Batak of Sumatra should be mentioned (Wessing 1986: 21, 37; also, *Kamus Batak-Indonesia*).

- *Mondou*, *mondau*, *mundau*, *mandau*. In the languages of Sabah and North Kalimantan, this word is often translated as "tiger", referring to a mythical tiger-like creature,[7] although sometimes it explicitly refers to a lion (e.g., Kating 1971). However, among ethnic groups in Sabah it also sometimes refers to some kind of monstrous and/or evil and malevolent spiritual creature, or a "dragon" (Muda & Tongkul 2008: 141), or possibly a crocodile (Mahmud *et al.* 2016), or else a giant "spirit bird" (e.g., Cohen 1993, 1999, Brewis *et al.* 2004).

Other, quite different names are found, such as Kelabit *balang* (Janowski & Barton 2012), Maloh *baro* (King 1975, 1976b), Berawan *upo'* (Metcalf 1989), and the *timang* or *timaang* spirits of the Benua' (or Benuaq) and Bentian (Oley 2001, Herrmans 2011, Sillander 2012, Madrah 2013; see Section 2.4). It may be suggested that Kelabit *balang* derives from PWMP *balaŋ, "striped, banded, multicolored" (ACD 2017), which would hint at the tiger (but see Venz 2013: 240). However, Agabag *tantakinun* (A. Linder, pers. comm.), Berusu *mintik inon* (Smith 2017: 640), and Serudung *takinon* (Townsend 2017: 23) probably refer to "leopard" rather than "tiger".

The Eastern Penan tiger's name, *tepun*, also means "grand-parent, ancestor" and "master, owner", as these Penan believe that they are descended from a tiger ancestor (Mackenzie 2006: 200; see a myth of origin in Janowski 2016: 192). Berawan *upo'*, a cognate of *tepun*, also derives from the ancient Autronesian *e(m)pu etymon and refers to "grand-father" or "ancestor" (see also Section 3.1 about the Kenyah). Indeed, the use of a respectful term of address as an alternative to "tiger", especially when uttered in the forest, is commonplace.[8]

1.3. Body Parts Traded to/in Borneo

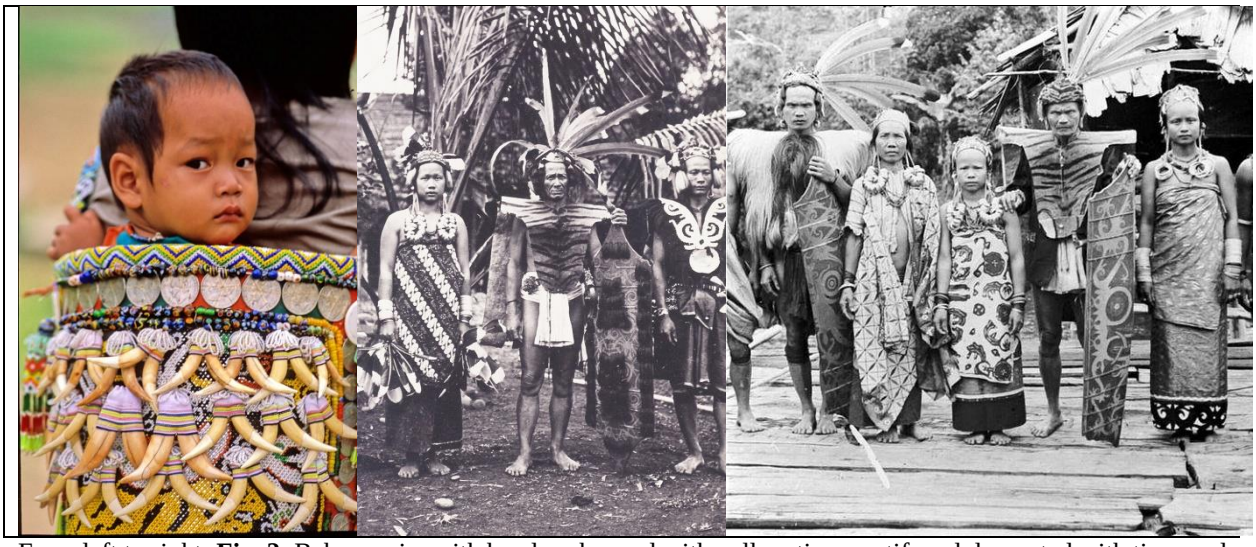
It is generally admitted that nowadays tigers are absent from Borneo, and that they have been for centuries, as local hunters themselves acknowledge, although belief in their continued presence in remote mountainous jungles still lingers (see Section 1.4). Body parts of tigers, however, have

[6] See Tromp 1888, Okushima 2008. The name Singa, translated as "lion", occurs in a Bidayuh spirit-medium prayer (Rubenstein 1973: 491). In East Java and Madura, the word *singa* is often used for "tiger" (Wessing 1994: 371, 2006b: 230 n. 54).

[7] For Murut, see Baboneau 1922, Woolley 1928, 1932, and see Sellato 2012d: 165; for Tidung and Tingalan/ Agabag, see Van Genderen Stort 1916, Radjaban 2012; for Tempasuk Dusun, see Evans 1953; for Bisaya, see Peranio 1972: 166; see also Needham 1964.

[8] See also Bakels 2003: 76 on Sumatra; and on Indonesia, more generally, see Boomgaard 2001: 172 (see also Section 3.3).

long been known among interior groups, and have been reported by explorers and colonial personnel since the nineteenth century. Foremost among them are the large, awe-inspiring fangs, usually in the hands, and being the prerogative, of prominent or chiefly families. Such tiger fangs, along with leopard and bear canine teeth, can still be seen, often in pairs, among heirloom property in remote interior villages and, likewise, tiger claws.[9] Tiger (and other) fangs are displayed – as what would look like "decoration", but rather is potent protective amulets – on noble families' baby carriers (Fig. 2; see Whittier & Whittier 1988). Among the Ngaju, Uut Danum, and other groups, tiger fangs are worn as protective devices (*penyang* or *ponyang*) by famous headhunters and war leaders.[10] Mockup fangs made of wood are attached to ritual dance masks among various people (Heppell 2015: 119, 128). Tiger claws also feature, along with gongs and spears, in peace-making ceremonies among Kenyah (Liman 2003: 183) or help to keep households free of people with the evil eye among Iban (Heppell 2014: 130).



From left to right: **Fig. 2**: Baby carrier with beadwork panel with yellow tiger motif, and decorated with tiger and Clouded leopard fangs; Kenyah, Apo Kayan Plateau; source: Samson & Raymond 2008. **Fig. 3**: A Kenyah chief wearing a war cape made of a tiger pelt, East Kalimantan, c. 1928; source: KIT Royal Tropical Institute, collection MSF, No. 173680. **Fig. 4**: Kenyah chief with a tiger-pelt war cape, 1920–1930; source: unidentified.

Tiger pelts also have long been in circulation through Borneo.[11] Banks (1931: 78) noted: "Real tiger skins imported and made into war coats are occasionally heard of and are objects of such veneration that many natives will not enter the same house" (see also Hose & McDougall 1912: II, 72–73). Tiger skins, along with gongs, appear to have been sent as presents to Kalimantan Kenyah high chiefs by the rajah of Sarawak in 1898 (H. Whittier 1973: 161–162, citing Smythies 1955: 506). According to oral tradition, in the island's center in the late eighteenth century, Kayan chiefs fought over a war cloak made of a tiger pelt (Fig. 3 & 4; see Sellato 1986). Among Iban, seat mats made of tiger hide are also mentioned (Masing 1981: 285, Heppell *et al.* 2005: 121). In

[9] About fangs, see, e.g., Nieuwenhuis 1900, Banks 1931, Lii' & Ding 1972, H. Whittier 1973, King 1985a: 91, 1985b: 129, Armstrong 1992, Puri 1992, Lenjau 1999, Lenjau *et al.* 2012, Sellato 2012a, Sillander 2012; about claws, see Banks 1931, Liman 2003.

[10] See Schärer 1963: 123, 125; P. Couderc, pers. comm.; on Iban, see also Masing 1981: 423.

[11] Nieuwenhuis 1900: I, 195, 1904–1907: II, 374, Hose & McDougall 1912: II, 72–73, Elshout 1926, Banks 1931: 78, H. Whittier 1973, Sellato 1995, Meijaard 1999. See also an early engraving in Belcher 1848: I, 224, reproduced in Roth 1968 [1896]: I, 32.

1869, Everett (1880) found, preserved in one of the head houses of the Singgi of western Sarawak, next to leopard and other skulls, a true tiger's skull, which clearly was a most precious, revered, and dreaded object (see also Banks 1931, Nieuwenhuis 1904–1907, Wessing 1986). A.W. Nieuwenhuis (1904–1907: I, 63), the famous Dutch explorer of the turn of the twentieth century, brought tiger skulls and fangs from Java as presents for Kayan chiefs of the upper Mahakam and Kapuas rivers in Kalimantan (see also Meijaard 1999).

It was thus recognized, early on, that such body parts must have been imported from the Malay Peninsula, Sumatra, or Java. That Borneo's hinterland ethnic groups ("Dayak") may have been familiar with tangible trade objects such as tiger fangs and pelts, and even the odd skull, should not be surprising. Curiously enough, however, the Aoheng and other ethnic groups are also aware of a number of details pertaining to the tiger's habitat and behavior, such as the fact that, contrasting with leopards, tigers are relatively poor tree climbers and are comfortable in water and with crossing rivers by swimming (and see Wessing 1986: 7, Boomgard 2001: 17). Still, as Hose and McDougall (1912) remarked, these tiger body parts having been brought from abroad by Malay traders, whatever knowledge the Dayak may possess of the animal probably came from the same source. Alternative reasons – that the tiger may indeed have been present in Kalimantan in a not-too-distant past, or that the peoples who populated Borneo came from a Southeast Asian region where tigers were present – might account for this knowledge: In either case, languages would have retained the tiger's names, and oral tradition its habits (Sellato 1983, 1995).

1.4. Tigers, past *and* present?

Everett (1880) mentioned a widespread tradition of a large carnivorous animal among the tribal people of Borneo's northwestern corner (Bidayuh and Iban), who describe it as being of great size, having hair a foot in length of a reddish color striped with black, and making its lair in caves (see also St. John 1862 about the Murut people of the island's northeastern region). Also in the northeast, there have been reports of tiger sightings in the Kinabatangan river drainage and in the Bengalon area, the latter animal described as differing from both the Sumatran tiger and the Clouded leopard by being largely brown-colored with only faint stripes (Witkamp 1932, cited in Meijaard 1999). Reports of hearing a tiger's growl are also forthcoming (e.g., Oley 2001: 21).

While such occasional reports suggest that tigers might still have been present in remote parts of the island in a recent past, the scholarly community has remained skeptical, as Boomgaard (2001: 11) remarked – and so it should. It is, nonetheless, interesting to note the somewhat convergent descriptions, from far apart regions, of alleged tigers rather differing in looks from the Malayan tiger (*Panthera tigris jacksoni*) or the Sumatran (and extinct Javan) tiger (*P. t. sondaica*), which is suggestive of a possible local variety (Boomgaard 2001: 11).

The biogeographic range of the tiger species, *Panthera tigris* (L.), extended from India through China, as far as Japan and Beringia to the northeast, and south to the Malay Peninsula and parts of the Indonesian archipelago, west of Huxley's Line[12] (Map 1). Everett (1880) found it

[12] "Huxley's Line runs between Bali and Lombok, Borneo and Sulawesi, Borneo and the Sulu Archipelago, then east of the Calamianes and Palawan, and finally off into the Pacific [Ocean] between Luzon and Taiwan" (Bellwood 2017: 15).

remarkable that the tiger should be entirely wanting in Borneo alone of the three Greater Sunda Islands, while Borneo appears to provide suitable conditions for its existence. Taking stock of its absence, Wallace (1869: I, 228) suggested that, the tiger being known as a good swimmer, it may have found its way across the Sunda Straits, or it may have inhabited Java before it was separated from the mainland, and from some unknown cause had ceased to exist in Borneo. Indeed its biogeographic range is now much contracted and fragmented.

Recent zooarchaeological research has shown the tiger to have been present during the Late Pleistocene and Early Holocene, and until recent times – possibly the second millennium CE (Piper *et al.* 2008, Cranbrook 2010: 373, 387, 2016) – not only on Borneo, as evidenced by finds from the Niah Caves (Sarawak; see Medway 1977, Harrisson 1984) and Madai Cave (Sabah; see Bellwood 1988), but also on the western Philippine island of Palawan (Piper *et al.* 2007). The tiger, one among the few survivors from the Javan Middle Pleistocene large mammal fauna, eventually became extinct. While human predation and climate change are cited as possible factors, its extinction "remains unexplained in the local context of Borneo" **(**Cranbrook 2016: 15; see also Piper *et al.* 2013:126).

Meanwhile, genetic studies are currently reconsidering the taxonomy and history of Southeast Asian tigers, as has already been done with other taxa – the Clouded leopard or the Pygmy elephant. Borneo being one of the world's biodiversity hot spots, with dozens of new species discovered every year, its remote forests may still be home to a small population of local tigers, which may lead to the creation of a new endemic tiger subspecies taxon.

Between scientists' steadfast skepticism and recurrent popular accounts of tiger sightings, the question may simply be left pending: Are there still a few tigers living today in remote corners of Borneo's rainforests? In any event, the cultural and socio-religious sphere of many of its traditional ethnic groups is suffused with tigers, whether based on collective memory of ancient encounters, in Borneo or elsewhere before they came to Borneo, or on cultural incorporation of tiger stories peddled around, along with fangs or pelts, by traders from other Southeast Asian regions.

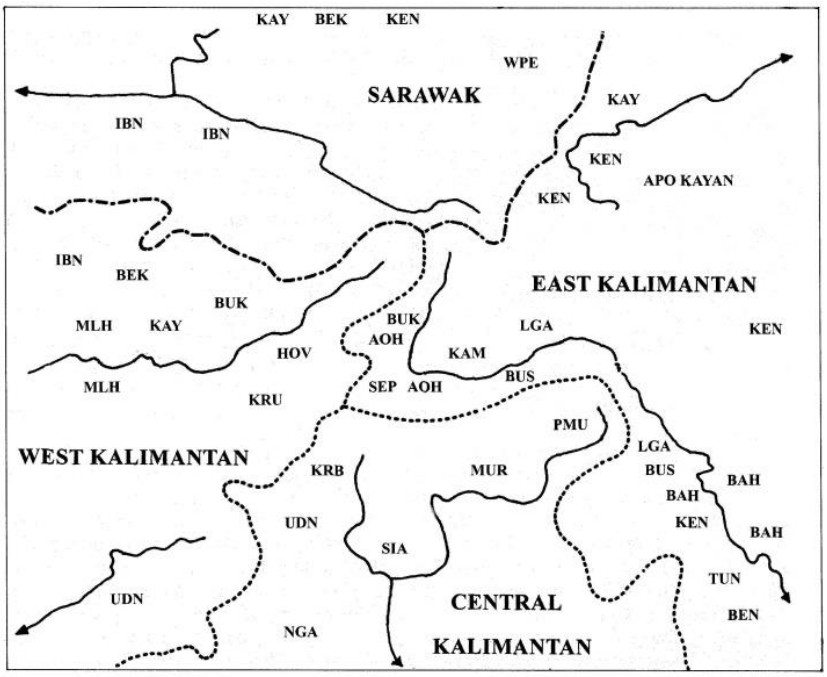
2. TIGERS IN ORAL TRADITIONS

Oral traditions in Borneo often include large bodies of literature, or "texts", belonging to a number of genres, formal or not, sung or recited, such as myths, epics, folktales, folk songs, as well as prayers, invocations, and other ritual texts, keeping in mind that the boundaries between what we usually call genres are not always clear-cut. This literature is principally transmitted within an ethnocultural community and, to some extent, also circulated to neighboring communities. Among many ethnocultural groups, the tiger commonly appears as an important character in texts of different genres.[13] The pages below examine the tiger character's traits as revealed through the oral literature of a variety of Bornean groups, with a special focus on a

[13] The tiger will be referred to below in the masculine or the neutral gender ("he" or "it") varying with context and semantics. As a historical or a folktale character and as a divinity, "Tiger" is written with upper-case initial.

narrower corpus of myths from the Aoheng and related minor ethnic groups of the Müller and northern Schwaner mountain ranges, right in Borneo's center.[14]

A brief introduction to this cluster of poorly-known groups located in one of the island's most isolated regions (Map 3) is necessary. The Aoheng (aka Penihing) consist of six sub-groups (five in East Kalimantan, one in West Kalimantan) totalling about 3,000 people. Each sub-group originally comprised an assortment of forest nomads, socially stratified Kayan and Long-Glat rice swiddeners, and unstratified Pin horticulturalists (see Sellato 1986: 289–453, 1992, 2002c, Sellato & Soriente 2015). Under pressure and supervision from the Kayan and Long-Glat, these mixed communities settled down and started farming rice (see Sections 4.1 & 4.2), and eventually amalgamated to become the Aoheng group, with a common culture, language, and identity, but no overall political or ritual leadership.



Map 3: The wider Müller Mts. region (inset from Map 1): AOH Aoheng, BAH Bahau, BEK Beketan, BEN Benua', BUK Bukat, BUS Busang, HOV Hovongan, IBN Iban, KAM Kayan Mahakam, KAY Kayan, KEN Kenyah, KRB Kerého-Busang, KRU Kerého-Uheng, LGA Long-Glat, MLH Maloh, MUR Murung, NGA Ngaju, PMU Punan Murung, SEP Seputan, SIA Siang, TUN Tunjung, UDN Uut Danum, WPE Western Penan; source: modified from Sellato 2017b: 328.

The Seputan lived in three autonomous groups in the Kacu River drainage until they were removed to the main Mahakam stream by the government in the early 1970s. They became true rice swiddeners by the turn of the twentieth century. Their language (c. 500 speakers) is closely related to Aoheng. The Hovongan (or Punan Bungan, c. 700 people) comprised four sub-groups located in the Bungan and upper Keriau river drainages, which are now found in several hamlets near the sources of the Kapuas. The Kerého nomads, about 1880, split into two: while the

[14] In 1981, I called Müller-Schwaner Punan the languages of this cluster of minor groups, and later contributed this linguistic grouping label to Wurm and Hattori's (1983) *Language Atlas* (see also Sellato & Soriente 2015). Recent linguistic research recognized a distinctive "Müller-Schwaner" language cluster (Smith 2017).

Kerého Uheng (or Punan Keriau; c. 300 people) remained in the upper Kapuas drainage, the Kerého Busang (also Punan Busang or Penyabung; c. 200 people) moved into the upper Barito drainage of Central Kalimantan (see Sellato 1994). Both groups began settling down and farming in the first decade of the twentieth century. Due to the latter group's sustained contact with the Uut Danum of the Barito drainage, its culture and language now slightly differ. Hovongan and Kerého languages are related to Aoheng.

2.1. The Epitome of Manliness

Among some of Borneo's ethnic groups, the tiger is regarded as a dangerous spiritual entity, much feared for its powers.[15] For the Punan Tubu, it belongs to an ambiguous set of malevolent creatures, along with snakes, bears, crocodiles, dragons, monkeys (evil spirits or real animals? See Césard *et al.* 2015: 42, 71, 77, 253). As for the Iban, they view tigers as both dangerous animals and supernatural beasts, the latter believed to prowl for human victims by leaving bait for them, which is fatal if touched (Sutlive & Sutlive 2001: 1860). The Eastern Penan of Sarawak, who believe that they have a tiger ancestor, nevertheless regard tigers as typically malevolent spirits, set on bewitching humans (Mackenzie 2006: 180, 200). Their neighbors, the Kelabit, regard both the tiger and crocodile as very powerful spirits (Janowski 2016: 192).[16] At the other (southern) end of the island, the Raja Hantuen or Raja Haramaung of the Ngaju, "the tiger king whose bones are spears, whose back is a shield" (*raja haramaung batolang dohong…*),[17] lives in the Upperworld, but has an army of witches (*hantuen*) living on Earth and preying on mankind (see Hardeland 1859: 160–161, Schärer 1963: 20–21). So, real dangerous beast, evil spirit, or both? Where does the boundary between these categories stand?

In many settled farming groups' sung epics, the tiger's primary behavioral features (as, indeed, the leopard's) – strength, agility, rapidity, fierceness; whether they had been recorded and stored for centuries in collective memory following frequent encounters, or thanks to stories originating from elsewhere – were turned into the epitome of manly qualities, to which a young man is commonly likened. "Tiger", then, is a praise-name to refer to the epic hero. Among the Benua', the tiger is the most potent of all animal signs of their augury board (Hopes 1997: 59), which may account for the word *timang* being used as an honorific for respected persons, as well as for human and mythological ancestors (Venz 2013: 230, 250).

Commonly associated with bravery and fierceness, sometimes also with cruelty (e.g., Oley 2001: 20–21, Appendix 3), the tiger also often symbolizes the quintessential warrior. Among Iban, Kelabit, Uut Danum, Bidayuh, and others, a young warrior is likened – or likens himself! – to a young tiger: "You are like the young tiger in its den, like the young leopard watching from the top of the honey tree" (Rubenstein 1973: 647). Analogy with a real tiger may be more elaborate: "Let them come and try the young tiger, the tiger who lies in wait on the long mountain, his coat is designed with big and bold stripes, his eyes gleam, his teeth are as sharp as the cutting edge of

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[15] Cf. the notion of "man-eating were-tigers", as in Sumatra (Bakels 2000) or, more widely, in South, East, and Southeast Asia (Newman 2012).

[16] As for the Punan Tubu, in daily language, they call the "tiger" *fi'at* or *vi'at* (and the "crocodile" *bowai*), but in folktales the tiger character is called *baya'*, which is their Kenyah neighbors' term for "crocodile" (Dollop 1998, Césard *et al.* 2015: 214, Morgan 1995). Crocodile and Tiger are commonly interacting folktale characters.

[17] The *dohong* or *duhung* is the traditional two-edged dagger of the Ngaju and Uut Danum, and not a spear.

the knife, sharp for chewing people, for tearing giant gashes in flesh" (*ibid.*: 785; for the Kayan, see also Lii' & Ding 1972). The Ngaju of the upper Kahayan River praise a successful headhunter by calling him "tiger" (P. Couderc, pers. comm.). Among the Kenyah, the phrase "brave tiger" (*lenjau makang*) is used to refer to heroes, especially those from the nobility (Lawing 2003: 263). The young hero, wearing his war outfit, 'becomes' a tiger: "He puts on his tiger-skin cloak, with beautiful feathers attached to it, he places on his head his headdress, the cap of which is the face of a tiger, its face stretched so that its nostrils are big, its great fangs overhanging above and below, its eyes gleaming" (Rubenstein l973: 867). The Kenyah also set up wooden effigies of tigers around their village to impress upon potential enemies that local warriors are fierce as tigers (Haddon 1901: 360). Moreover, tiger spirits (*remaung*), as depicted in Iban *pua'* textile motifs, are regarded as warriors' tutelary spirits (Heppell 2014: 130); magically incorporated into Iban war boats, tiger spirits (*antu remaung*), are believed to attack and weaken the souls of enemy warriors (C. Sather, pers.comm.).[18] And among the Uut Danum, such a spirit (*horomaung*) may become a warrior's (or a hunter's) *urai*, or personal ally (P. Couderc, pers. comm.; see also Kayan tiger spirit helpers, Section 3.1).

Epics, however, also often liken enemies, or an enemy war leader, to a tiger. Then, it no longer is its wild splendor that is suggested, but rather its raw animality, brutality, and ferocity: "Let us ambush the animals lying in wait and kill them, the tiger with his striped legs and long fangs will die" (Rubenstein 1973: 769); or: "You ill-tempered tiger, rushing to eat people raw, jumping on people" (*ibid.*: 750). In rare cases, a young and beautiful woman may be likened to a tigress, probably in order to emphasize her noble origin and high spirits: "There is one tiger, a lady of royal blood, ready to leap, a beautiful lady, fine and quick" (*ibid.*: 765).[19]

This notion of the tiger's noble character is frequently encountered. Among the Aoheng, the tiger is the king of aquatic animals – while the Clouded leopard is the king of terrestrial animals, and the Rhinoceros hornbill (*Buceros rhinoceros borneoensis* Schlegel & S. Müller, 1840) the king of airborne animals. Noblesse and bravery are matching qualities and, among the Kenyah, the title *kulong lenjau* ("tame tiger") is bestowed upon a prominent and respected high-nobility man (Anonymous 1970); this epithet *kulong* mitigates the tiger's base brutality, making him more human, more civilized, at the same time stressing the man's wisdom and his aptitude at keeping in check his natural ferocity. Also among the Kenyah, another of the tiger's talents is its capacity to be the first, the best: "I, always the first", "tiger who has always been foremost" (Rubenstein 1973: 1306).

In oral literature, a hero is commonly said to have a tiger ancestry (or he says so of himself): "You are descended from the man named Pawan Lenjau Pengau, chiefest tiger", so a hero returning home with a head trophy is praised (*ibid.*: 1240). As C. Rubenstein (*ibid.*: 969) remarks, "The [hero's] full name refers to his being the son of a tiger, […], one who leaps upon its prey, a descendant of great 'tigers', or great honored men". The prestige a man has secured by gaining the title of "tiger" reverberates on his male descent, called "sons of tiger". We shall see

[18] Contrasting with the *antu remaung* spirits, a divinity called Bunsu Remaung, closely associated with warfare, is said to protect certain Iban territories and their warriors against enemy attacks (C. Sather, pers. comm.).
[19] The Malagasy term *trimo*, a cognate of *harimau*, occurs as part of powerful men's personal names; and the word *trimobe* refers to an ogre, a frightening giant children-eating monster (J.-P. Domenichini, pers. comm.).

later (Section 2.6) how some ethnic groups' historical and literary traditions reveal mythical matrimonial alliances between humans and tigers.

It is of note that young heroes likened to tigers in Borneo epics are often quintessential serial lovers, as much as they are quintessential warriors (e.g., Lii' & Ding 1972 for the Kayan; this also holds for Iban epic heroes). Much of the action in these lengthy – and reiteration prone – epics comes under the "war" and "love" categories, heroes' twin, parallel fields of conquest. Indeed, the Iban tend to apply the term *remaung* to a young man "of a predatory character", a womanizer (Sutlive & Sutlive 2001: 1575). In folktales, however, tigers may be defeated in battle by stronger characters (e.g., orangutans) or deceived by tricksters (e.g., mouse-deers).[20]

Generally speaking, such is the tiger's cultural standing that its names, in many Bornean languages, are used as prestigious personal names; as *lejo*, *lenjau*, or *sengiru*, they commonly appear – along with Leopard and Hornbill – among a number of ethnic groups (Kayan, Kenyah, Aoheng) as personal names restricted to high-nobility men, and they therefore came to symbolize high status (see, e.g., P. Whittier 1981: 59). Balang is a very common boastful name taken by senior Kelabit men, highlighting the link between bravery and masculinity and the nature of the tiger (Janowski 2016: 192). And in Bukat "spirit language" (*melain uboh*, contrasting with daily language; Thambiah 2000), men are metaphorically referred to as *singiro* (tiger) or *kuli* (leopard). As for Punan Tubu, Dounias' (2007) study shows that children have so deeply soaked in stories (myths, folktales) about tigers that they consistently express their fear, awe, and admiration.

Here may be the place to raise the question of the existence of possible traces of totemic beliefs in Borneo (see a brief mention in Sellato 1992: 45). As Peter Boomgaard noted, many references can be found about such beliefs in Sumatra, where several clans trace their ancestry back to a tiger (Boomgaard 2001: 175, and references on p. 259 n. 27; see also Bakels 1994). Regarding Borneo, expressions of totemism have been reported from various ethnic groups by various scholars.[21] Whatever might be meant precisely by "totemism" by each of these scholars, the Borneo situation suggests that further investigation into and analysis of its various corpora of local traditions will allow for a better understanding of these societies' organization and cosmogonies (about cosmogonies, see Section 5).

2.2. The Tiger as Culture Hero

On this theme, twelve versions of a myth are available, all collected in 1979–81, ten of which from the Aoheng of the upper Mahakam and upper Kapuas areas. The basic structure of the myth is consistently the same in all versions, with only slight variation found in two versions collected among the Hovongan (or Punan Bungan) of the upper Kapuas area.

A young woman, Nyanéo Aran, fell from the Sky and was taken in by the Aoheng of the village of Long Apari. Her celestial husband, Sengiru O£ong Hivan – "Tiger from the mouth of Iban

[20] e.g., Evans 1923: 123–124, Ngabut 2003: 246–247; Césard *et al.* 2015: 81; throughout the Malay world, tigers are cheated by tricksters (often the tiny mouse-deer, *Tragulus* spp.); see also Dournes 1986 on Vietnam.
[21] See Hose & McDougall 1912, Evans 1923, Rassers 1928, Schärer 1963, Metcalf 1982, Kershaw 2000, Couderc 2012a; and see a review in Couderc & Sillander 2012: 16–17.

[River]", aka Sengiru O£ong Kéhan, "from the mouth of the Mahakam", or Sengiru O£ong Danum, "from the mouth of the river"; we understand that he came up from the coast – has looked for her all around Borneo and finally finds her at the Aoheng village. He has a tiger's body, or a tiger's head, or else he seems human, but he is an animal and eats raw meat. In order to ensure privacy to have sexual intercourse with his wife, he brings night into existence and, as markers of the alternance of day and night, introduces the rooster (which crows at sunrise) and the *tiling* cicada (which stridulates at sunset; see Sellato 2004)

Sengiru lives for some time amongst humans, teaches them all they know today, sires children, then returns downriver. Several versions of the myth concur in attributing to Sengiru and Nyanéo one or two sons, one of whom invariably is called Ba'ing Sengiru. Sons of Tiger, these boys are heroes. In one version, Ba'ing succeeds in killing a monstrous man-eating hornbill and hence takes the name Tingang ("Rhinoceros hornbill", a noble name), while the other son, Awi, kills a dragon and takes the name Anyang (a very large river fish, also a noble name). In another version, Ba'ing follows his father down the river, while Awi-Anyang supposedly remains in Long Apari. In both Hovongan versions, Ba'ing leaves with his father, whereas his brother, called Bahavang Murun, remains with his mother.

Some of the Aoheng versions disregard Sengiru's children because, it is said, they died at a very young age during a war that the Kayan waged against the Aoheng. However, the Aoheng chiefly dynasty of Long Apari, it is claimed, "stems from Sengiru" (see Section 4.2) and, to this day [1981], a ceremony with a sacrifice is held every year at harvest time on a pebble bank dedicated to him along the river (see Section 2.4). Likewise, the Hovongan insist that there still are among them some descendants of Bahavang Murun, son of the Tiger. In any case, the names Sengiru, Tingang, and Anyang are still used among Aoheng noble families.

Most versions agree that, before Sengiru's coming, mankind did not know the night. That was not fun, as men were ashamed of having intercourse with their wives in full daylight. Sengiru himself, on his being reunited with Nyanéo, abhorred this uninterrupted daylight, so he went to fetch 'night gum'. Nobody can explain what this is, but night resulted (see a Kayan myth in Guerreiro 1989). People were terrified, to the point that, according to certain versions, some wanted to kill Sengiru. But Sengiru had also brought the rooster and the *tiling* cicada, and he explained how to make use of them. When people saw that daylight returned in the morning, they felt reassured. Sengiru also taught them how to make lamps using *damar* resin.[22] This being done, people and Sengiru himself could copulate as much as they liked, and then only could their community grow and thrive.

The 'night gum' also occurs in an Aoheng story from the upper Kapuas, though its introduction is not credited to the tiger: "A very long time ago, a chiefly married couple wanted to have children, but there was permanent daylight and no night, they had no mosquito net for privacy, and they could not have intercourse. Then, the husband went downriver, caught the celestial cicada, made night gum, and then night came, till the cock crowed. People could make love without feeling ashamed, and they begot children". This story establishes the same strange link between the coming into existence of the circadian cycle – along with its markers, the rooster and a cicada – and the usual pressing social concern for demographic growth.

[22] *Damar*, a resin obtained from trees of several genera of the Dipterocarpaceae family.

Night was not the only important novelty, and Sengiru taught lots of other things to mankind who, it is said, knew nothing and lived "like animals". "Imagine, they were using stone axes!" Sengiru taught them how to weave cloth, plait rattan, breed dogs, make canoes, and tattoo; and also, according to some versions of the myth, how to hunt wild boar, cure its meat, and eat it, as well as catch fish. For some storytellers, it is clear that Sengiru also introduced rice to the Aoheng; for one of them, he even introduced sago.

The link between sago and rice is stressed as follows: "Sengiru cut a notch in a sago palm trunk and pulled out paddy grain from it. A man, who had followed him and witnessed the scene, did the same, let some paddy run to the ground, and closed the cut with bark. Ever since that unfortunate gaffe, paddy can no longer be found in sago trees". This story possibly points to the Aoheng's historical transition from a subsistence economy based on wild sago starch to swidden rice agriculture. Some versions of the myth explicitly state that Sengiru taught people how to prepare a rice field and sow paddy seed. The introduction of farming to the Aoheng, however, is one feat claimed by the Busang and Long-Glat, two farming groups living just downstream from them. Based on their own chiefly genealogies, they would have "civilized" the Aoheng (or, at least, some of their subgroups) around 1800. We shall later (Section 4) explore our Sengiru's historical connection with these groups.

2.3. Tiger, its Origins, its World

Where did Sengiru come from? His various names (Sengiru O£ong Danum, etc.) indicate that he came from a coastal area and up the river – here the Mahakam. For people like the Aoheng, isolated in mountainous areas in the center of the island, novelties, or progress in general, can obviously only come from downstream, so Sengiru is no exception. One Aoheng version describes his quest: "Sengiru searches for Nyanéo everywhere. He looks for her in Apo Kayan, goes up the [Kayan] river and up to Mt. Tibang, but cannot find her; he goes up the Jengayan [from the Batang Rajang to the Baleh, Sarawak] and up to Mt. Tibang, nothing; he goes up the Barito River, as far as its sources, nothing. Then he goes up the Mahakam and, there finally, he catches Nyanéo's scent, carries on up the river, and reaches the village".

We are made to understand that Sengiru must have travelled up all the island's main rivers – and, we would assume, going back down each river, and moving from the mouth of one river to the mouth of another by way of the open seas. Actually, he travelled around the island "from the outside". Sengiru is a celestial denizen and, contrary to his wife, who fell from the Sky by accident, he traveled down to Earth. The Aoheng, like some other groups, conceive of the Sky, *Havun*, as a huge dome resting on a flat disk, Earth (or our world), and touching it on the horizon, called the "foot of the sky" (*kukut havun*). Therefore, someone traveling far downstream, as far as the sea, would eventually reach *kukut havun*. Conversely, a Sky resident intending to reach the center of the island would leave the Sky via *kukut havun* and travel up a river on Earth. Sengiru, who did not fall from the Sky, would thus be expected to come from downriver. Upstream from the Aoheng, indeed, there is nothing, no people, only places with spirits that are unhealthy to associate with.

Sengiru, therefore, is said to have swum up the Mahakam River. Central Borneo ethnic groups seem familiar with the tiger's aquatic habits. The Aoheng take it for granted that the tiger lives in water, in rivers, or in caves or holes on a river bank, and regard it, as noted above, as the king of aquatic animals. The association of (spirit) tigers with caves, however, may be more relevant: One such tiger, mentioned in the oral tradition of the Kelabit, lived in a cave just below a ridge (Janowski 2016: 195; see also Roth 1968: I, 352 about the Tatau; and Evans 1953: 27 about the Dusun); likewise, Uut Danum spirit tigers are said to live in caves at the top of mountains;[23] and the Iban believe that tigers dwell in caves, the openings of which, wherever they are located, in a sense represent entrance doors to the Underworld.[24]

Mistranscribing the Aoheng's Sengiru as Sungai Ru ("Ru River"), lvanoff (1955: 77), makes him a "water god". In Kenyah and Kelabit oral literature, the name of the tiger, whether or not standing for a warrior, often appears in association with the idea of water: "The tiger cloaked in falling rain" (Rubenstein 1973: 782), "leaping and springing lightly in the rain" (*ibid.*: 1305), "rolling in the mud of the swamp" (*ibid.*: 749), whereas the leopard is rather described as sitting or lying on rocks or up on tree branches. The Dusun *mondau* "tiger" is associated with rain, thunder, and lightning (Evans 1953: 27). Like the Aoheng's Sengiru, one Kenyah tiger, named Laeng, "comes from the mouth of the river" (Rubenstein 1973: 1307), and the Kayan know of a "river tiger" (*lejau danum*; Southwell 1990, cited in Venz 2013: 240). The Tiger character, therefore, appears recurrently associated, among Aoheng and other groups, with water, rain, rivers, the downstream direction, river mouth regions – and the idea of progress.

2.4. Animal, Spirit, and Human

Sengiru came to the Aoheng to teach humans what they needed to know but, whether human or animal in appearance, he seems to have experienced some difficulty in communicating with them. In other words, as a "stranger", his command of the Aoheng language is insufficient, although language is, at least in part, the means of his teachings. Anyway, for years, so the story goes, he has taught the humans, when the time of his leaving comes: He gathers the people at Noha Héo ("Pebble bank of the Talking"), by the river, to give them his final recommendations (see Section 4.2). Then, after taking his leave, he slips down into a hole underneath a large boulder, called Batü Takop Aong ("Cavern's Cap Stone"), in the middle of the river; but he pops out again a moment later, as he has forgotten something important: "*Ki ang bong nyam ang tung*", he said. Then, he slips back into the hole and disappears for good, going down the Mahakam by swimming under water. A few places along the river are mentioned, where he is said to have come up to the surface to breathe.

With a smile, storytellers explain that Sengiru had a speech impediment, to the effect that only every other syllable could be heard, and that his real words were: "*Loki nyang havong, manyam nyang butung*", which means: "[mix/use] *loki* [a relish] with *havong* [sliced bamboo shoots],

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[23] P. Couderc, pers. comm.; see also Hopes 1997: 144 about Benua' spirit tigers; and the association of Agabag *mondow* with caves and holes (A. Linder, pers. comm.).

[24] Heppell *et al.* 2005: 35, 97, Heppell 2014: 128; see also Masing 1981: 320, 423; among the Iban of the Saribas, caves associated with the tiger, usually located near mountain tops, are identified with the presence of sea shells (C. Sather, pers. comm.), which may have prompted an association of tigers with the sea ("tigers are believed to originate from the sea but to dwell in mountain caves"; M. Heppell, pers. comm.; see Section 5.1) and with the Underworld. In Java, real tigers sometimes do make use of natural caves (Boomgaard 2001: 23).

weave [cloth] with [fibers from the] *butung* [liana]". If weaving fibers certainly can be viewed as a significant oversight, one may wonder why the *loki* condiment (made from the leaves of plants of the Menispermaceae family), commonly used to offset the bitter taste of bamboo shoots, was noteworthy, and why this particular detail has survived in almost all the versions of the myth.

One may also wonder why Sengiru's last words are not properly heard. Is it because of the din of the river stream? Or is Sengiru progressively returning to his animal body and losing his speech capacity, and his humanity? In one Hovongan version, Sengiru and his son Ba'ing, tricked by a jealous villager, become ill and then return to tiger form: tail, fur, fangs, and claws grow; but, the storyteller stresses, they can still speak – which suggests that, when leaving the villagers for good, the Aoheng's Sengiru would completely return to tiger nature, hence speech loss. As mentioned above (Section 2.1), the boundary between true natural beast and spiritual entity seems rather permeable – the Iban *remaung* "are believed to have the ability to become spirits, or spirits [to] become *remaung*" (Sutlive & Sutlive 2001: 1576); the Benua' *timang*, tiger (or leopard?) spirits (Hopes 1997: 144, 167, Herrmans 2011: 235; see also Hopes *et al.* 1997), as well as the Kenyah *lenjau* (Date *et al.* 1997), both dwelling in caves, can take human form; Uut Danum epic narratives (Couderc 2012a: 171) also mention human characters donning the hides of certain powerful animals, including the tiger, and thus acquiring their physical appearance and behavioral traits.[25] Following from the permeability of the boundary between human and non-human beings, the boundary between the different worlds – the Upperworld, this Earth of mankind, and the Underworld (see Section 5.1) – is also so permeable that this ambivalent tiger is alternatively believed to reside in the Sky, from where he comes down to Earth, and in caves on Earth, which lead to the Underworld (Heppell 2014: 128).

The Tiger may well be a celestial being and bring cultural progress, he somehow is and remains an animal, as all the versions under scrutiny attest in one way or another. Before Sengiru's irruption in the Aoheng's lives, he searched for Nyanéo's scent, in a very cynegetic sense, until he sniffed it on the Mahakam. But his animality is ambiguous, because, in the same version, like a human in Borneo would do, "he stops at each confluence along the Mahakam and tries to get a dream", or some celestial clue that would set him on the right track. In an Aoheng folktale, *Tan Tuvung* (not part of the Sengiru myth), a celestial heroin's husband is a debonair and sanctimonious individual named Sengiru, who can detect newcomers by their scent (Sellato 1982).

Sengiru's animal appearance varies with the versions of the myth. In the most "human" (Hovongan) version, he has a totally human body, but he leaves behind him tiger footprints on the ground and claw marks on tree trunks. In another, he has a human appearance, "but he is a true tiger". In several versions, he is a mixed being, with a human body and a tiger head; or he has long fangs in a human face; or else, long fangs and a thick fur. In most versions, he inspires fear among the humans among whom he resides, especially since he eats raw meat and fish, and cannot share a meal with them. Worse, sometimes, "it would not take much for him to grab small children to devour them". Yet, strangely, in spite of all Sengiru taught the Aoheng, it is his inability to eat like them that triggers his decision to leave: "I cannot live with you, eat like you"

[25] As this clear continuum between human and non-human beings suggests, the latter – real or imagined wild animals and spiritual entities, not to mention mixed beings (Sections 2.4 & 2.6) – are endowed with agency, intentionality, subjectivity, i.e., a whole set of traits analogous to those of the former and recognized by them.

– which suggests that, somehow, he must belong to another world, that of the Sky, and that, somehow, despite this inability, he is (or has been) carrying out a civilizing mission to the Earth people.

Highlighting Sengiru's connection with another realm is his capacity to make himself invisible at will. While in most Aoheng versions Sengiru, in either human or tiger forms, shows up in a "normal" way, in both Hovongan and one Aoheng versions, he makes himself invisible to visit Nyanéo at night – although his footprints (*tapin sengiru*) betray him. In one of the Hovongan versions, Sengiru and his son suddenly disappear from human sight. An invisible tiger also occurs in a Kelabit legend (Arnold 1959: 186): Being challenged in battle by a (human) hero, it makes itself visible as a tiger-like creature the size of a water buffalo. One Kelabit war song goes: "I am the tiger who cannot be seen […], at will invisible" (Rubenstein l973: 782). Among the Kayan, the tiger is a bodiless spirit (*lejo-to'*, "spirit-tiger"), the size of a dog or a cat, "visible for a second and immediately disappeared" ("*nampak lalu lenyap*"; Lii' & Ding 1972: 90). Under its punisher aspect (see Section 3.2), the tiger is present among many ethnic groups, often invisible when he comes down on humans (e.g., Roth 1968: I, 352). According to the Aoheng, "one can see its body but, when it kills a man, it is invisible, and one can only see fang and claw marks on the corpse".

2.5. Tiger as Spiritual Mediator

As noted above, the tiger symbolizing cultural progress and civilization, thanks to whom "humans finally became true humans leading a good life", remains, at heart, a beast; the tiger, who introduced agriculture and sophisticated techniques, such as weaving or making canoes, eats raw meat and "cannot eat the rice of humans". It is the Animal who, paradoxically, takes people across a cultural threshold, turning humans from primitive into civilized – among Agabag and other Murut groups, the dog plays this part (A. Linder, pers. comm.; Section 3.3).

Among the Kenyah of the Telen River, East Kalimantan (Revel-Macdonald 1978), "Punan" characters play major roles in post-harvest rituals. These nomadic hunters subsisting on wild sago flour are represented by performers with "their mouths covered, as an indication of their speechlessness, and often their faceless heads signal their denied humanity" (*ibid.*: 39). These parodical Punan, who do not understand anything, behave in inept ways, and copulate like animals, are meant to be made fun of. They are viewed as members of a pre-humankind of which it is made clear that little distinguishes it from animals. Nevertheless, in these rituals, the Punan characters are those who bring to mankind the precious paddy seed, as a largess from the gods (I witnessed a similar festival among the Seputan of the upper Mahakam in 1975). These characters, like the tiger, are the Animal, the messenger between men and their gods, between the earthly world of mankind and the "downriver" world of the Sky, the gods, and the spirits. In a Ngaju myth from the upper Kahayan, the paddy seed comes down to earth from a cloud right into the tiger's den, where it grows under the tiger's protection (Zimmermann 1968: 351–352; and P. Couderc, pers. comm.).

The Tiger's ambiguous nature and its special relationship with mankind are attested in the literature beyond Borneo. For example, according to the Maa' highlanders of Vietnam, the tiger was created by Nduu, the Supreme Spirit, to constitute a threat for isolated humans and press

them to get together, and so give them the foundations of community life (Boulbet 1967: 57). In these highlands, the tiger's only too real threat, partaking in the "civilizing" process, more tightly focuses people's activities and shrinks the human horizon, which contributes to more strictly delineating the world of humans from the world of the forest and of divinities. In the long run, this leads to mankind's increased withdrawal from the forested environment and the animal realm, and the completion of "civilized" mankind's break from the world of the forest, animals, and spirits. In Borneo, this divorce, Revel-Macdonald (1978: 41) notes, is a matter for worry to the farmers-breeders, and rites can be interpreted as a reconciliation to annually reinstate the bond between the two worlds (see also, on the Jarai of Vietnam's highlands, Dournes 1978: 115).

2.6. Tiger-Human Hybridization

The mythical alliance of the Aoheng of Long Apari with Sengiru, as well as its annual renewal through a blood offering at Noha Héo, must probably be considered in the light of the reconciliation rites described above. Among the Aoheng and other Bornean ethnic groups, however, an alliance with a tiger is biologically materialized, like any alliance between two ethnic groups, by a marriage. Such a marriage is not viewed as unnatural or against nature – interbreeding is possible and produces viable offspring – but it is against culture and, although it may last long enough to secure a progeny, it breaks down after some years because the tiger just cannot get used to mankind's life ways.

These "children", the product of this peculiar hybridization, who are they and what do they look like? For the Aoheng, they are fully human, and Sengiru's two sons grow up to become heroes. In one of the Hovongan versions, both become heroes as well, but the first-born, Ba'ing, has powerful tiger fangs and, in the course of bravery tests commanded by his father, he substantiates his tigerness by capturing a "thunder" (a spiritual entity in animal form; see Section 5), while his brother faints with terror, thus betraying his human nature – as if the brothers' mixed human-tiger genetic heritage had been split amongst them.

When Sengiru acknowledges that he cannot live among humans – nor eat the very rice he is said to have introduced to them – he leaves the Aoheng, and one version of the myth states that he then divorces Nyanéo, and that the divorce compensation owed by him, usually a ritual fine, rather consists in what he has already taught them. Nyanéo, for her part, seems comfortable enough in Long Apari to refrain from contemplating her return to the Sky. While one Aoheng version has Sengiru departing just after his sons' birth/s, most versions make it clear that the boys are then already teenagers or older, suggesting that he would have remained some fifteen years among humans.

When an exogamous marriage is dissolved and one of the spouses returns to his/her home village, the sharing of the children may be settled. In one Aoheng version, which features a boy, Ba'ing, and a girl, Iko, Ba'ing departs with Sengiru, who leaves Iko behind "so that s/he [Iko or Sengiru] has offspring in the village". One of the Hovongan versions shows Ba'ing, obviously because he has long fangs, going away with his father, who predicts that Bahavang, his younger son, remaining with the humans, will be insuperable in battle. In the other Hovongan version, as mentioned earlier, Sengiru and a fully human Ba'ing fall victim to deceit: They eat a meal of rice

wrapped in *puti sengiro* leaves (the forbidden "tiger banana") and, turning into tigers, they both have to leave the village, whereas the younger brother remains. Here, Ba'ing's otherwise undetectable tiger nature is exposed by the forbidden meal, which drives him to validate his nature and leave.

One Beketan myth from Sarawak (Sandin 1968: 114) tells of a tiger prince who abducted a young woman from a village. An exchange of wives possibly settled the matter, resulting in a human brother and sister marrying a tiger and his tigress sister. The two couples live for some time in the forest and both beget a son. While visiting relatives in the village, the boys prove the strongest of all. Eventually, both couples split, each individual parent returning to his/her home village or forest, each boy going with his father, and the son of man and tigress having offspring at the village. This is reminiscent of a theme touched on earlier, the sudden irruption of the tiger among humans: Here, the tiger kidnaps a village girl; the Aoheng's Sengiru comes to find Nyanéo, his wife; and one Sengiro of the Hovongan claims the woman who was cursed to become his wife (see below, Section 3.1). With the tiger, the forest and its animal world are barging into the human sphere.

If the tiger feels uncomfortable among humans, so do humans find it difficult to reside in the forest for extended periods of time, which explains the visits that the mixed couples above paid to their village relatives. There is, then, no way out, and a double divorce ensues, with the sharing of the offspring. In the last myth, interestingly, the sons follow their fathers, each completely abiding by or returning to his father's (human or tiger) nature, thus denying his mother's. The son of a man and a tigress has a totally human offspring, who will be called "children of tiger".

"The boundary between the two species is easily crossed", Dournes (l978: 117) wrote about the Jarai and the tiger in Vietnam. But, somehow, so that all things are in order, it is – most of the time – necessary that tigers be among tigers in the natural domain of the forest, wild animals, and wandering spirits, and humans among humans in their safe cultural domain. Then, it feels right, it is "normal", that Sengiru must return to his home, and his tiger-looking son with him.

3. THE TIGER AND RITUALS

Among the Aoheng and related groups of the Müller Mountains, Sengiru is never explicitly designated as a divinity and his name never uttered in the context of major rituals (see Section 5.1). Rather, his status is that of a culture hero, who brought about major changes in their lifeways (Section 2.2), but who had not been turned into an ancestor or had become the object of a cult (see Sellato 2002a). In their minds, Sengiru is also consistently present as both a compassionate and benevolent spiritual entity, who taught people about important taboos and introduced purification rituals so that they could achieve and/or restore a "cool" socio-cosmic equilibrium; and a stern censor unwaveringly punishing breaches of taboos and other infringements, some incurring death penalty. Unsurprisingly, the powerful animal's real body parts (fangs, hides) are highly dreaded and subject to taboos, and even the tiger's names are subject to various transpositions, with the "dog" as a common alias and avatar. However, Sengiru is also, more innocuously, commonly present as a man's personal name, a folktale character, or a representation on various material media.

3.1. Initiation, Redemption, Purification

Almost all Aoheng tales place strong emphasis on practical novelties introduced by Sengiru, but make little mention of ritual innovations. However, the transition from a hunting-gathering subsistence economy to farming would not have occurred without associated rites relative to rice. A single Aoheng version from the Kapuas tells, without further detail, that Sengiru taught humans the whole compendium of rites (*adet*)[26] known today and that, upon leaving, he turned back to add the following words: "A sword may only have one sheath, and someone else's sheath may not be borrowed", thereby prohibiting polygyny and adultery.

According to several Aoheng versions, when the Sky people were gathered for the *mengosang* festival, Nyanéo disobeyed her father, the great chief Aran, and as a consequence she fell off the Sky down to Earth. The *mengosang* is the Aoheng's highest religious festival (see Sellato 1986, 1992), somewhat similar to the Busang's *dangai* festival. *Mengosang*, in the past, was staged in times of extraordinary hardship, e.g., during an epidemic or after a succession of bad rice harvests, to cleanse the village and its people. The Aoheng's historical tradition states that they learnt how to hold the *mengosang* from the Aüva, an ancient pre-Aoheng group, implying that the ritual was borrowed from other people, rather than introduced by the tiger. The Aoheng versions of the myth cited above suggest that the Sky people were already holding this ritual while the Earth people were still "Barbarians". Since sophisticated rites can only signal an advanced, "civilized" community, the Sky people, regarding religion (as well as technology), are viewed as superior to the Earth people.

For the Seputan, neighbors to the Aoheng, the *mengosang* ritual has been revealed by the tiger, here called "Tiger from the mouth of Iban [River]" – this may in fact refer to the Kayan (or Busang) Uma' Suling, who came to the upper Mahakam from the Baleh River, Sarawak, hence the reference to the (river of the) Iban people (in which case they would have come from upstream, across the mountains, not from downstream; see Section 4.1). An outline of the myth (for a complete version, see Sellato 1984, 1993) is as follows: A brother and sister married and, due to incest, the woman falls ill and nothing can cure her. The tiger shows himself to an old man in a dream, then acquaints the villagers with the domestic pig, and demonstrates how to perform an anointment ritual on a sick person using pig blood – the woman's health is restored – and, later, the *mengosang* festival with the sacrifice of a pig.

This is the "classic" original incest, committed by ignorant people unaware of its prohibition, who are chastised, as for any transgression, by some supernatural penalty, realized as death from consumption. But here, the tiger, usually a harsh punisher of social transgressions (see below, Section 3.2), appears helpful and caring – owing to mitigating circumstances, these first-time offenders are granted the gods' clemency – and he takes this opportunity to instruct the humans in the fundamentals of *savoir-vivre*. It is then necessary to introduce the domestic pig in order for the Seputan to properly carry out the *mengosang*. In the Aoheng versions, it is Nyanéo, not Sengiru, who introduced the pig, as a present from the Sky people. In a Bukat story, his compassion leads the tiger (here, called Singiro) to bring back to life a man who had accidentally been killed by his friend (Thambiah 1995: 136).

[26] *Adet* (Indonesian *adat*), a local corpus of social, legal, and ritual traditions, customs, and practices.

In a Hovongan version, Sengiro Batu Bua ("Tiger of the Fruit [Tree] Rock") bursts into the human sphere because a girl who refused to get married was cursed by her parents to become the tiger's wife. Since he has been summoned, he comes to claim his due. He lives for a while with his wife and the humans, sires children, and then decides to leave. Upon leaving, the myth goes, Sengiro calls off the initial curse and gives a few recommendations (his only teachings, in this version): "Do not *semerérang*; do not swear by the tiger, as this is ours and we shall devour s/he who swears by us; do not step over food, as it will become our food; do not curse others to be devoured by a tiger or bitten by a snake." *Semerérang*, equivalent to Malay *kempunan* (or, locally, *kepohonan*), refers to transgression of minor taboos: e.g., to take leave without eating some of a food dish that has already been served (Kayan *puni*; see Rousseau 1998: 66, Venz 2016: 171), or at least making a gesture of the hand toward that dish. Among the Maloh (or Embaloh), who seem to possess a broad inventory of curses (King 1976a: 131–134), the tiger is not listed among the spiritual entities likely to devour the cursed person, which include large, aggressive characters, *sakong* or *langké*, with sharp fangs (*ibid.*: 135), possibly tiger aliases.

The use of the first person plural above ("our food") hints at the notion of a class of spirits, a category of *sengiru* tigers, in charge of the repression of taboo violations. Among Uut Danum, it is said that each mountain has its *horomaung* spirit tiger (P. Couderc, pers. comm.; *cf.* the Kerinci's "village of tigers" in Sumatra; Bakels 2004: 151). Among Kayan, certain individuals (craftsmen, musicians, hunters) are said to have spirit helpers, some of them tigers (including one "underwater tiger", associated with ritual experts), who ensure success and prosperity in exchange for offerings (Rousseau 1998: 107), which supports the view of a spirit category (see the case of the Iban *antu remaung* war spirits, Section 2.1). The Uut Danum, too, believe that tigers may associate with humans, e.g., by possessing a shaman as his/her personal spirit helper (*urai*; P. Couderc, pers. comm.; see also McNeely & Wachtel 1988: 137; about the Temiar of Peninsular Malaysia, Benjamin 2014). Regarding the Iban's man-eating flying tiger spirits, however, Masing (1981: 29) notes that "while these malevolent spirits help some individual Iban, they do not cease to be malevolent towards other humans."

The tiger, therefore, is both an initiator, prompting among humans the practice of new rites (blood anointment, *mengosang* festival, as well as minor taboos), and a redeemer, defusing the ill effects of transgressions (curses, incest); at the same time, he stands firm as a fierce guardian of taboos and chaser of infractions (see Section 3.2). However, his name does not occur in ritual routines, in ceremonies, in invocations, or even during *mengosang* – notable exceptions concern oaths and curses (see Section 3.2). As a matter of fact, such is the fear the tiger inspires that nobody dares utter his name in ritual circumstances, and innocuous pseudonyms may then be used (see Section 3.3).

In Hovongan stories, a tiger or, rather, its death may have symbolic value. Orphan is a very bad person, having killed his father and mother. He happens to kill a tiger, and he suddenly turns into a good person. Another version of the same story has the tiger-slaying Orphan becoming the village leader – which is another way of becoming "good". In another story, Tuja and Kecopeng have just built their first true village at Data Kecopeng, but their small community is decimated by one Sengiro; they kill the tiger and hold a *mengosang* ritual on its body (instead of sacrificing a pig). It is then implicit that the village community will thrive again. In a Kendayan (Kanayatn) folktale of West Kalimantan, following a tiger's death, a poor, abused young boy replaces him as

the king of the animal kingdom (Heppell 2015: 74). Through his death, it seems, the tiger brings blessings to both his former victims and his executioner.

It is worth mentioning that in Vietnam's highlands, the Jarai, having slayed a tiger, apologize for this killing and hold a ceremony on its corpse (Dournes 1978: 116; see also Bakels 2004: 159 about the Kerinci of Sumatra); the Mnong Gar view a tiger's intrusion into the human sphere as an affair requiring cleansing rituals (Condominas 1957: 22l); whenever coming across a dead tiger, some Khmu groups perform a lengthy dirge because the tiger is their totemic ancestor (Dang Nghiem Van l973: 129), while some Côông must hold a sacrifice (Vuong Hoang Tuyen 1973: 194).

Returning to Borneo, the tiger is the only animal playing such a central role in the mind's eye of the Aoheng, Seputan, and Hovongan, in their daily life, and in their oral tradition – along with the dragon, to a much lesser extent. This may also be true of (some of) Vietnam's highland peoples, among whom the tiger seems to stand as man's alter ego: Practically, it is the king of the "outside" (Dournes 1978), i.e., the forest, the realm of spirits, as opposed to the "inside", the world of mankind.

Then, each time a *mengosang* is held with a sacrifice of a pig, or emblematically with the corpse of a tiger, the pact of man with the wild "outside", the world of spirits, is repeated and updated; or, as Dournes (1978: 115) writes about the Jarai (hunters), "the ritual alliance, [is] periodically renewed, […], through or beyond the tiger, with the forest divinities […]". The tiger always standing concealed behind the pig, redemption and purification ensue and, as a consequence, good fortune and prosperity. To conclude like the Hovongan, "Sengiro suddenly disappeared, never to be seen again, but once in a while we dream of him" (J.L. Borges' "una forma de mi sueño", see p. 1 above), suggesting that he is still present.

Among the Seputan, likewise, the tiger manifests himself in a dream to cure the incestuous woman through pig blood anointment. This is a ritual that Aoheng, Seputan, and Hovongan ritual experts continue to practice in real life in case of an ailment assumed to have been caused by evil spirits – even when there is no suspicion of a serious breach of taboo. Here, the tiger is not in the picture, and neither is the dream. However, the Seputan say that a terminally ill person, seeing or feeling a tiger's (or a dog's) tongue licking his/her skin, can be sure of pulling through – this equivalence of dog and tiger being quite common (see Section 3.3). It is through dreams or delirious fever that the world of divinities becomes accessible to humans; and, for a sick person, being licked by the Animal is proof that the gods care. The tiger's saliva being viewed as an elixir of life, the saliva anointment in dream equates the pig blood anointment in the ritual, and the person is then released from illness by the implicit renewal of the alliance of mankind with the gods.

The association of the tiger with water among the Aoheng has been highlighted above (Section 2.3), as well as the cleansing value of the tiger's saliva among the Seputan. The Kenyah stress the relationship between the tiger and purifying water: A guardian spirit, named Pelenjau Ugu or Pelenjau Dangai, residing in deep river pools, is believed to endow with spiritual power this water, which is used to dispose of illness and misfortune and to purify the village and its residents (Anonymous 1970). Pelenjau really is Pe-Lenjau, "Grand-father Tiger" (where Pe-,

short for Pui, is an honorific address for elderly persons; *cf.* "Great Tiger" in Rubenstein 1973: 1240), and the associated name Dangai is evocative of the Busang's cleansing festival.

Therefore, these three aspects – initiation, redemption, purification – encompass the tiger's generous, philanthropic disposition. But there is more to this character, and darker sides.

3.2. Retribution: the Heat of the Tiger

The tiger routinely punishes minor transgressions, such as the *semerérang* of the Aoheng, which occurs when humans disregard food that has already been served. Among other groups, the tiger sanctions similar infractions (Kayan *kempunan* [or *puni*], Lii' & Ding 1972: 94; Benua' *tapatn*, P. Kadok, pers. comm.; Busang *kesahpan*). The Dusun of Sabah believe that the tiger (*mondau*) will punish those who broke taboos (Evans 1953: 27).

Among the Uut Danum, minor transgressions, *pohunan*, are said to be sanctioned by mixed human-animal entities, viewed as apical ancestors in the guise of tiger-spirits – or a fierce giant dog, *bohutai* (Couderc 2012a: 180; and pers. comm.). In this southern Borneo cultural region, the tiger is but one among several nemeses: For example, among the Ngaju, it is the prerogative of one of the Upperworld lords, Raja Pali (or Nyaru/Nyaro), Thunder, to punish, in the form of the lightning, the most critical transgressions – incest and mockery of animals – which puts the whole community at risk of terrible spiritual danger (Couderc, pers. comm.; see also Section 5.2).

It appears that culture heroes or ancestors under tiger form punishing human misbehavior are reported from elsewhere, as in Java and Sumatra (Couderc 2012a: 200 n. 39, citing Barendregt 2006, Wessing 2006a; see also Bakels 2000). Retribution is expected to be commensurate with the transgression.

Among the Aoheng, as appears clearly (Section 3.1), once the tiger has redeemed the original incest and coached the humans on how to conduct the proper rites, he carries on overseeing their behavior and chastising them whenever they go astray. Should a grave transgression subsequently occur and the rites remain powerless to cure the sick person, it will be accepted that the fault was too serious and that the tiger took the culprit. The whole village is spiritually put at risk by the transgression, and a general cleansing is compulsory. A similar connection seems to exist between incest and the tiger among the Benua' of eastern Borneo (Herrmans 2011, Venz 2013). In regions where true tigers exist, comparable situations prevail. Among the Mnong Gar highlanders of Vietnam, there is a relation between incest, bad death, and the tiger (Condominas 1957: 134). As for Peninsular Malaysia – where the tiger is both physically present and a regular folktale character (e.g., Nicholas 2018) – its spiritual role fluctuates: Among the Batek, he is also a righter of wrongs (Endicott 1979a); among the Semang, he is but one natural means which the thunder god puts into action to punish those guilty of incest, adultery, or murder (Evans 1937: 176, Freeman 1968: 363, Blust 1981: 296–297, Robarchek 1987a: 286); and among the Temiar, punishment for mockery of animals and incest is credited to the thunder and thunderstorm, not the tiger (Benjamin 2014).

In Borneo, among the Aoheng, it is also prohibited to swear by the tiger, step over food, or curse others to be devoured by a tiger, least the tiger comes to take his due. In the case of a curse, both the cursed and the curser may be punished, which suggests that both the offender and the object of the offense (person cursed or food) may become the tiger's fare.

Oaths in Borneo are often taken on a tiger fang, with the standard formula being something like: "May the tiger take me if I lie" or "… if I do not keep my word" (see Evans 1923: 168 about Negritos in Malaya: "May the tiger seize me"). As among the Aoheng, for the Kayan and Busang, taking an oath on the powerful tiger fang (*ipen lejo*, *lipan lenjau*) is serious business (Barth 1910: 109–110), and he who breaks his word will suffer a fatal illness (see Nieuwenhuis 1900: I, 252, 295, 305). Among the Tunjung (or Tonyooi) and Benua', he will be pounced upon by the tiger (*timaang*; Madrah 2013: 29, 109–110; this may also apply in case of adultery, *ibid.*: 81). Oaths may also be taken on tiger claws or other valuable heirloom objects, such as gongs, war shields, or spears, as among the Kenyah (Liman 2003: 183), or on stones and whetstones (e.g., Hopes 1997: 98) among the Benua'.

In conflicts between two individuals accusing each other of a serious crime, if the culprit cannot be foiled by the usual means, Borneo people resort to trial by ordeal. Two procedures are known. One, with immediate effect, consists in dipping one's hand into a pot of boiling water: The innocent party won't be harmed (e.g., Rousseau 1998: 83). The other, with delayed effect, has both parties swearing on a tiger fang. The Aoheng ritual expert summons the tiger: "Spirit of the Tiger Fang [*tuku sengiru*], if this man is guilty, may you devour his entire body, may the rest of his life be miserable, or may he die soon. If he is innocent, Spirit of the Tiger Fang, give strength to his body and soul, give him a safe and long life" (Kaja 1973: 6; see also Rousseau 1998: 83 about the Kayan). The culprit, sooner or later, falls ill, "devoured by the curse" (Aoheng *kinan patot*; *matot*, "to swear, to curse"), and people say that so certain is he that he is doomed that he stops eating and wastes away, thus realizing the trial's verdict. Likewise, the Kenyah call on the tiger to come and devour the guilty person's heart and liver and drink his blood (Anonymous 1966; see also H. Whittier 1973: 139, 164).

But this is a hazardous situation not only for the culprit, but also for all those involved in the trial, which is carried out at a spot located far away from the village (Kaja 1973: 7). While the innocent party is safe from harm, the trial's organizers and ritual specialists – those who call on the tiger – and anyone else in attendance would be at risk as well. Only elderly noble men with strong souls and prior acquaintance with the tiger would dare conduct such a trial.

The tiger, therefore, is a menace to anyone he would get close to: those who challenge him by their ritual transgressions; those who summon him by their curses, both the curser and the cursed; and those who call on him for a trial by ordeal.

Even in the form of real animal body parts, the tiger is infused with enormous spiritual power. Fangs and pelts are the property of certain tribal leaders, and even these tangible material remains of once powerful live beasts are viewed as extremely dangerous to those who are not worthy of touching them, as among the Kenyah: "No ordinary man, but only a distinguished and elderly chief, will venture to wear such a [tiger] skin as a war-coat, or even to touch it" (Hose & McDougall 1912: II, 72–73); and among the Kayan, only great chiefs dare touch tiger fangs

(Nieuwenhuis 1904–1907: I, 63). The Ngaju of the upper Kahayan River rank animal fangs on a scale of *gana* (units of spiritual potency) value: 100 *gana* for tiger, 50 for leopard, 25 for bear (P. Couderc, pers. comm.).[27]

All of this refers to a sort of divine punishment – Aoheng *masot*, Kayan *parid* or *parit*, Kenyah *parib*, related to Malay *tulah* (see Couderc 2012b: 306, Venz 2016: 171) – for disrespecting or improperly handling highly sacred objects or animals – e.g., for a young inexperienced warrior to wear hornbill feathers on his headgear, or for a woman to hold an ancient sacred war sword – or "presuming above oneself generally", as P. Whittier (1981: 30) put it. Such improper behavior brings about *panah lejo* (Kayan, "the heat of the tiger") and prompt death (Rousseau 1998: 62). Among the Eastern Penan hunter-gatherers, sharing – a crucial social value – is stressed, and the tiger will punish young people who do not share their food (Janowski 2016: 192).

In terms of spiritual danger, a leopard pelt war coat is close second to one made of a tiger hide. The tiger "risk factor" resonates, to some extent, on the other "animal kings" (Clouded leopard and Rhinoceros hornbill; see Section 2.1). This punishment, as in the case of incest, is achieved through death from consumption: here, "death by the tiger". The Aoheng may eat hornbill or leopard meat, but are strictly prohibited from eating tiger meat – if ever they had a chance – although Western Penan claim that their forefathers ate tigers (Brosius 1992: 86).

3.3. Pseudonyms and Representations

Unsurprisingly, given the tiger's darker sides described above, Borneo people in daily life are reluctant to utter its name. This is consistently the case in Kayanic languages, in which the term for "dog" is substituted to that for "tiger": As the great explorer, A.W. Nieuwenhuis (1904–1907: II, 237, 242), flatly puts it, *lejo*, "the mythical tiger", is called *aso'*, "dog" – as among the Aoheng *asü* is a code name, an alias (*aran alik*) for *sengiru*. In daily exchanges, the Aoheng frequently exclaim: "*Asü kuman a'ung!*" ("May the dog devour me! [if I lie]"). When staging a trial by ordeal, they may use the body of a dog rather than taking the spiritual risk to call on the tiger; and the Kayan may take an oath by just pointing to a dog (Roussseau 1998: 83). But the tiger is always there, behind the scenes.

Curiously, though, the tiger, as one of the *dramatis personae* in Borneo epics or folktales, is plainly referred to by its name, here subject to no spiritual taboo or supernatural sanction, possibly because it is only a praise name for a hero or an innocuous folktale character. The tiger's name is also placidly uttered by the Aoheng when discussing decorative motifs, such as one common basketry motif called *tapin sengiru*, "tiger footprint"[28] (Fig. 5).

Among North Kalimantan Agabag, another motif is called *linuang mondou*, "tiger's den" (Fig. 6); in related groups' languages in Sabah, it is labelled "tiger's face" (*bulus mandau*, Woolley 1932; *binulos mondow*, Prentice n.d.) or "tiger"s track" (*inuoy mondow*, *id.*).

[27] The word *gana*, in Ngaju cultural context, may derive from the *gana* spiritual attendants of the Hindu god Shiva, under the leadership of Ganesha, "lord of the *gana*" (see Miksic 2010).
[28] See Klausen 1957, Sellato 2012a: 26, 2018b; among the Bukat, *rama singiro* (Thambiah 2016: 14).

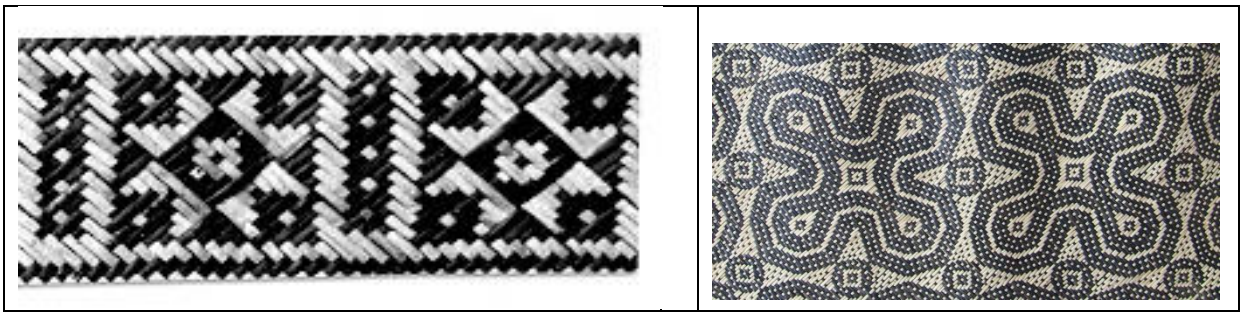


Fig. 5 (left): The Aoheng's "tiger footprint" (eight-branched star) plaited motif in a rattan basket. **Fig. 6** (right): The Agabag "tiger's den/face/track" plaited motif used in rattan mats; photo: M. Linder.

Mixed-breed animal characters sometimes appear in the oral literature: Like the Kayan with their *aso'-lejo* ("tiger-dog", a ghost animal; Lii' & Ding 1972: 91), the Aoheng have an *asü-sengiru*, which an ogress sets on the hero of a folktale. There is also a "bear-dog", a rather unfriendly character, which can make itself invisible or transform itself at will – some among the tiger's many talents (see Section 2.4). During solar (or lunar) eclipses, the Aoheng believe that such a bear-dog (*asü-bohang*) is devouring the celestial body, and they make a din by beating on gongs and pots to scare it off, so that daylight returns (Sellato 2017b: 331); this calls to mind Sengiru's introduction of the night (see Section 2.2).[29] Another bear-dog, known among the Aoheng, Busang, and Kayan of the upper Mahakam River, is said to have been routinely climbing down from Mt. Batu Mili – a rocky peak believed to be a very high tree connecting the Earth and the Sky – to wreak havoc among the humans, till they finally got together to fell that tree, leaving only its stump (Sellato 1989, 2010). The Kenyah Bakung use *buang* ("bear") as a safe alias to refer to the tiger, and *asu* ("dog") to refer to its images (Morgan 1995). Just like the dog, then, the bear appears to occur as an alias of the tiger. Finally, there is this "tiger-eagle" in Kelabit oral literature (Rubenstein 1973: 799), which, along with a "kite-watersnake" (*atang lobahta'*) in Uut Danum oral literature or ritual language (P. Couderc, pers. comm.) and the tiger-dragon-bird *mondou* spirit of Sabah groups (Section 1.2), stresses such mixed-breed characters' Upperworld-Underworld ambivalence.

In spite of Borneo people's reluctance to have dealings with the tiger or utter its name, it is often explicitly represented in material culture – carving, wall painting, or beadwork (see, e.g., H. Whittier 1973). The tiger's prominence in traditional Bornean arts has been often noted (from Nieuwenhuis 1904–1907 to Meeijaard 1999). Among socially stratified ethnic groups speaking Kayanic languages, as well as among other groups culturally influenced by them, such representations, just like tiger fangs or pelts, are mostly restricted to the upper social categories: Great chiefs and high-nobility families have a strict monopoly on the creation and use of certain powerful (and, therefore, dangerous) objects and decorative motifs (Armstrong 1992: 203, Sellato 2017a), which require a "strong soul" and a ritual compensation for the spiritual risk incurred (see, e.g., the case of a spiritual sanction following the prohibited carving of a wooden tiger image, in Nieuwenhuis 1900: I, 80).

[29] The Iban ritually blow away the spirit Antu Rau responsible for an eclipse using a *pua' remaung* cloth (M. Heppell, pers. comm.). Farther afield, the Ao Naga and Sema Naga believe that an eclipse of the sun or moon occurs when a tiger tries to eat it (Wessing 1986: 31, citing from Mills 1926: 299–300).



From left to right: **Fig. 7**: Baby carrier with beadwork; tiger, hornbill, dragon and godly face; additional beads, coins, and fangs; Kenyah style, middle Mahakam; photo: author. **Fig. 8**: The Aoheng's Sengiru, painted on a pillar of a longhouse gallery; upper Mahakam, 1978; the Tiger is shown seated on a chair, stressing its human quality; photo: author. **Fig. 9**: Tiger figure on a house post; Merap, Malinau River; photo: M. Linder.

Noblefolks' baby carriers among Busang, Kayan, or Kenyah, then, often display tiger fangs or motifs of tigers in beadwork[30] (Fig. 7). Tigers may be painted on house walls or pillars in the chiefly family's section of the longhouse veranda (Fig. 8 & 9; Barclay 1980: 169, Sellato 1989: 64, Tillotson 1994: 234), more commonly today in communal halls (Fig. 10 & 11), or carved on heavy wooden door panels leading to chiefs' apartments (Chin & Mashman 1991: 72). Tigers, along with hornbills, are represented even in churches (Fig. 12). Iban textiles (and mats) in Sarawak commonly depict so-called *remaung* motifs, though it is unclear whether they refer to the true tiger (*remaung bendar*) or rather the leopard (*engkuli*; Haddon & Start 1982: 126). In any event, weaving powerful *remaung* motifs appear restricted to experienced elderly ladies (Heppell 2014: 53). A "tiger" (?) carved on a large boulder, briefly mentioned (Banks 1937, Schneeberger 1979: 63, Sellato 2016), probably was associated with feasts of prestige among non-stratified northeastern ethnic groups.



[30] Nieuwenhuis 1904–1907: II, 248, H. Whittier 1973: 163–164, Whittier & Whittier 1988, Sellato 2012c.

From left to right: **Fig. 10**: A tiger, *lenjau*, with limbs ending in hornbill and dragon heads, and more dragons around; wall painting: Kenyah, middle Mahakam; source: Sellato 1989: 64; photo: Dicky WP. **Fig. 11**: Tiger figure on the wall of a meeting hall; Bulusu', Malinau area; photo: M. Linder. **Fig. 12**: Carved tigers associated with hornbills and the Cross in church; Kenyah, upper Baram area, Sarawak; photo: M. Villard.



From left to right: **Fig. 13**: *Kohong lejo*, the "tiger head" motif; beaded panel for a Kayan woman's headdress; an impressionistic rendering, with red eyes and tongue; source: Nieuwenhuis 1904–1907, II, pl. 74. **Fig. 14**: Monster face, painted in lime, soot, and iron oxides on the wall of a village meeting hall; Long-Gelat, upper Mahakam; photo: author. **Fig. 15**: A frightening monster face painted on the wall of a grave shelter; Aoheng, upper Mahakam; photo: author.



From left to right: **Fig. 16**: Aoheng plaited ritual sun hat displaying a monster face (*irap aran*, "thunder face") and a pair of hornbill heads; photo: author. **Fig. 17**: The *irap aran* motif in a beadwork panel on a baby carrier; Aoheng; photo: author. **Fig. 18**: Monster face, combined with two "dragons (or dragons-dogs, *aso'*) painted on the wall of a village meeting hall; Long-Gelat, upper Mahakam; photo: author.

In line with the typical *pars pro toto* principle, in scores of representations, the tiger's head stands in for the whole animal. Nieuwenhuis (1904–1907: I, 364) discusses a Kayan beadwork panel showing a tiger head (*kohong lejo*; Fig. 13).[31] Scarier, though less realistic, monster faces, with horns and scrolls, are commonly found painted on war shields, house walls (Fig. 14), grave shelter walls (Fig. 15), or apartment doors (Sellato 2001), as well as plaited in sun hats (Fig. 16; see Sellato 2012b) and in beadwork on baby carriers (Fig. 17), in which the implicit reference to the tiger ("tiger head") appears conflated with the thunder ("thunder face", Aoheng *irap aran*; see Section 5.1), as well as with the dragon ("dragon face"; *cf.* the *naga* motif, Nieuwenhuis 1904–1907: II, 278). And in some of the monster dance masks of the same ethnic groups, with their long fangs and frightening bulging eyes, there also seems to be a reference to the tiger (see *hudo lejau*, "tiger mask", Lumholtz n.d.; and the *hedo' lejie* of the Modang, "the mythical Tiger of the Underworld", Guerreiro 2011).

[31] See also Nieuwenhuis (1904–1907: I, plates 70, 74; in Sarawak, another Kayan group has a tattoo motif called "tiger's face" (*silong lejau*; Hose & McDougall 1912: I, 259 + plate 140).

The common decorative motif known as *aso'* in Kayanic (and other) languages, found carved, painted, or plaited on virtually any kind of objects, is interpreted as standing in for the tiger (Nieuwenhuis 1904–1907: II, 237) and, alternatively, for the dragon (see Section 5.1). Some images exhibiting combined motifs clearly suggest a single character (Fig. 18). It is notable that, since massive conversion to Christianity in the first half of the last century, the Cross has been integrated into the monster face motif (Fig. 19), as if it was meant to assuage or "tame" the vindictive tiger or, conversely (see Fig. 12), as if the old divinities were called upon to lend assistance to the Cross to provide the people with extra blessings and protection.



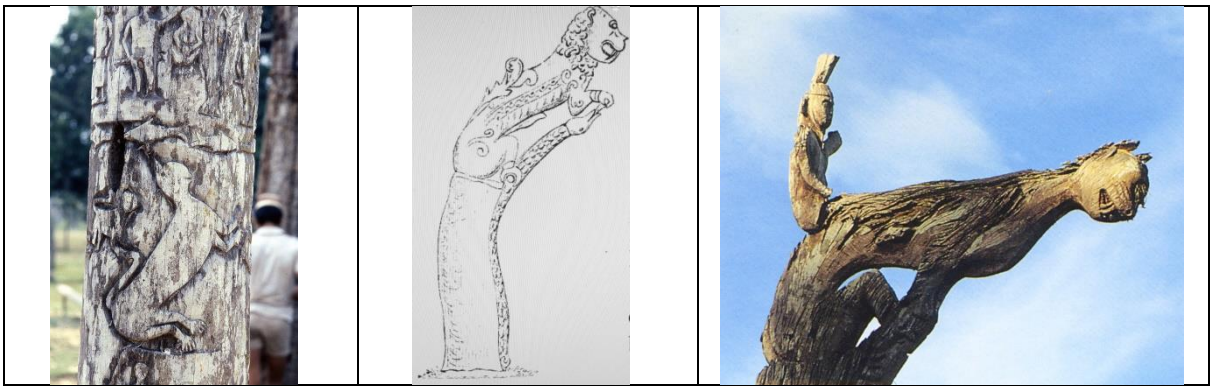
Fig. 19: The scary "thunder face" mitigated by the Cross, with hornbill heads; painting on a grave shelter; bundles of braided Licuala leaves as substitutes for human heads; Aoheng; photo: author.

Representations of tigers also occur among the ethnic groups speaking languages of the Barito family, in the southern half of Borneo (see Section 1.2), mostly in ritual context, especially funerary. Tigers are carved in low relief on high wooden poles or in the round sitting on top of thick wooden posts erected by the Ngaju and Uut Danum in secondary funerary festivals (Fig. 20 & 21).[32] These posts are called *hampatong (?)halimaung* by the Ngaju (see Grabowsky 1889, Schärer 1963: 89) and *sopundu' horomaung* by the Uut Danum (P. Couderc, pers. comm.). Some of them depict a human figure riding the tiger[33] (Fig. 22). Tigers on top of wooden posts most usually are represented in a seated position and called "sitting tigers" (e.g., the *timang nuat* of the Benua'; Oley 2001: 21, 71).[34]

[32] See also a remarkable photograph by Martin Schernus in the Basel Mission archive (BMA B-30.53.020; http://www.bmarchives.org/items/show/52597), dated 1908-1920; and another showing the 1894 peace-making meeting at Tumbang Anoi (now in Central Kalimantan; Tropenmusem, Collectie Stichting Nationaal Museum, TMnr 60046395; https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11840/303948).

[33] The Hindu goddess Durga (aka Parvati), Shiva's consort, is often depicted riding a tiger. In Java, there is a symbolic relationship between rulers (from kings down to village founders) and tigers (or crocodiles, as both animals are said to be manifestations of Shiva; Wessing 2006b: 217). This, again, would point at Hindu influences from Java on the cultures of the southern half of Borneo (see Note 27).

[34] A large stone statue (allegedly) representing a tiger has been reported in Uut Danum country in the upper Melawi area, West Kalimantan (Jumadi 2010).



From left to right: **Fig. 20**: A tiger, *horomaung*, carved on a *soka£an* funerary pole; Uut Danum, upper Melawi; photo: P. Couderc. **Fig. 21**: A funerary monument, *hampatong halimaung*, with a tiger (and snake) carved on top of a thick wooden post; Ngaju, Kapuas area, Central Kalimantan; source: Grabowsky 1889: 190. **Fig. 22**: Funerary monument; tiger statue, *sopundu' horomaung*, jockeyed by a human character; Uut Danum, upper Kahayan area; source: Sellato 1989: 212; photo: E. Sellato.



Left: **Fig. 23**: Charm carving, *karuhai*, as a stopper to a bamboo container; representing the tiger lord; Ngaju; H 13cm; source: Sellato 1989: 188; photo: Dicky WP; right: **Fig. 24**: Another *karuhai* wooden stopper in the form of a tiger, with traces of blood and egg offerings; Ngaju of Kahayan River; photo: author.

Tigers are found carved, also in a seated position, on the wooden stoppers to small cylindrical bamboo or wooden tube containers (Ngaju *solep*, Uut Danum *sulop*) among southern Borneo groups (Fig. 23 & 24; see also Corbey 2018: 43). Some of these tigers, definitely belonging to a wider "Malay" culture area (see Section 1.2), show certain stylistic features (posture, beard) reminiscent of coastal Javanese seated feline figures dating from the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries, which may be evidence of an Islamized Sinitic or Vietnamese culture (Njoto 2017, 2018), possibly spreading to southern Borneo via the early "Banjarese" (Banjarmasin) polity.

4. WHO WAS REAL-LIFE SENGIRU?

Returning now to the tiger's function as culture hero, this section investigates the historical background of the Aoheng and related groups (see Section 2 & Map 3) and identifies a historical chieftain named Tiger. This character played a crucial role in inducing various bands of forest nomads to settle down and start farming, which was instrumental in the ensuing emergence of the Aoheng ethnic identity. It then briefly explores the modalities of the myth-generating conflation of historical elements with earlier religious beliefs, which shaped the tiger character's particularly prominent presence in the Aoheng's and related groups' culture and daily life.

Investigations into the historical traditions of these diverse ethnic groups of the upper Mahakam suggest that our Sengiru character, in its culture-hero aspect, as well as, to some extent, in its punishing aspect, has its origin in one authentic, singular, and emblematic individual, a famous leader of the Long-Glat people in the early nineteenth century. The reconstruction below, based mostly on oral historical traditions collected in the field, is excerpted from Sellato 1986 (see also Sellato 1992, and an abridged sketch in Sellato & Soriente 2015).

4.1. Invaders, Runaways, Nomads

The Long-Glat are a Modang subgroup with strict social stratification, speaking a Kayanic language and originating from the Apo Kayan plateau, to the north of the Mahakam (Sellato 1980; see Map 3). They migrated to the Mahakam, in the region of the great rapids, c. 1800, and one of their chiefs, Liju Li' (or Lijiu; spelled Lejiw Lie' in Okushima 2008), settled on the upper Mahakam (Nieuwenhuis 1904–1907: I, 274–275, Rousseau 1990: 123) – as noted earlier, the name Liju means "tiger". A Kayan group, now known as Kayan Mekkam (= Mahakam), had already entered the upper Mahakam from Apo Kayan a few decades earlier; and, around 1810, another Kayan group, the Uma' Suling, later called Busang Uma' Suling, entered the area of the sources of the Mahakam from the Baleh river drainage in Sarawak. These three groups, not on truly friendly terms with one another at the onset of their moving in there, eventually struck alliances through intermarrying among their leading families and, by c. 1820, all gathered along the Serata, a northern tributary of the upper Mahakam.

This massive intrusion of Kayan groups strongly upset the pre-existing settlement pattern: Part of the prior population of Pin farming groups (related to the Uut Danum of the upper Barito and Melawi areas, to the south and southwest), who occupied territories along the whole east-west section of the upper Mahakam above the rapids, was subjugated or enslaved, eventually subsisting as several minor vassal sub-groups called Busang, and part scattered away to the west, south, and east. The remaining groups took refuge farther upstream, in the foothills along the uppermost tributaries of the Mahakam: the Pïratoran on the Kacü (or Kasau) River, the Pin Bawan on the Apari and Huvung rivers, and the Aséké, Amüé, and Aüva on minor upper left side streams.

In the uppermost reaches of the Mahakam also lived a few bands of local forest nomads: the Seputan, straddling the water divide between the Kacü drainage and the upper Barito (Busang River); the Acüé, the autochthonous residents in the sources of the Mahakam; the Halungé, who had come from the north (somewhat later came the Semukung from the northwest and, later yet, the Lugat and the Punan Kohi from the west). These unruly nomads launched raids from their rock-cave hideaways against the Long-Glat, who had to retaliate and eventually, rather heavy-handedly, "pacified" the area – a policy that was also a way to secure a trade monopoly over the valuable forest products collected by the nomads (Sellato 1986).

By c. 1820, after two decades of "pacification", nomads and farmers had left their strongholds in the mountains or in caves to gather on the main Mahakam stream (see also Okushima 2008), first at Long Acüé (the Acüé and Amüé), then at Data Paku (joined there by the Halungé and Aséké). Data Paku, a flat surrounded by farming lands, must have been home to a relatively substantial

population, settled or in the process of settling down, and the nomadic bands, still relying on wild sago, must have been introduced gradually to farming practices, likely focused on roots and tubers rather than rice.

One reason why the Long-Glat, Kayan, and Uma' Suling gathered in the Serata area c. 1820 was the preparation for an all-out war about to be waged against the Taman (or Maloh) and related peoples of the upper Kapuas drainage. Several causes have been put forth for this war – by either the local oral tradition or later reports by explorers – among which a call for help from another Uma' Suling group that had moved recently from the Baleh area (Sarawak) into the upper Kapuas. Two main footpaths leading from the upper Mahakam to the upper Kapuas exist, one from the Huvung River, the other from the Kacü and its tributary, the Penané. Liju Li', who appears to have been the paramount war leader, had to set up a heavy logistical backing for his army, especially regarding rice.

4.2. From 'Tiger' to the Aoheng

Liju forced alliances onto all farming and nomadic groups along his way to the upper Kapuas: This included the Seputan and some Pïratoran of the Kacü, the Hovongan on the other side of the watershed, and all the groups already gathered at Data Paku. He summoned the last groups, possibly at Noha Héo (see Sections 2.2 & 2.4), where he harangued them and persuaded (or forced) them to move together with some of the Pïratoran to Pacan Asü, at the confluence of the Apari River, and to open large rice swiddens (the Apari was then called Danum Paré, "paddy river"). He gave them paddy seed, cassava, metal tools, chickens, and then returned to his village on the Serata.

Under an Acüé chief by the name of Beraré' (meaning "thunder", from Uma' Suling *belaré'*), all the groups gathered at Pacan Asü were therefore set to work to produce rice supplies for Liju's army – and the same situation prevailed, further south, with the Seputan and Hovongan. At Pacan Asü, nomads and farmers intermingled and gradually became rice swiddeners, and there they collectively held their first *mengosang* festival – in the name of Beraré', but under the guidance of Aüva ritual experts, said to be the original "owners" (or "holders") and practicioners of this religious ceremony – for the consecration of their new village.

Liju defeated the Taman and other groups of the upper Kapuas (Bouman 1924: 182, 1952: 48, Rousseau 1990: 332), pushing them down, it is said, as far as Sintang. Now known as Liju Aya' (Liju the Great), our "Dayak Napoleon", as M.A. Bouman (1952: 50) called him, returned to the Mahakam with a huge booty of valuable goods and large numbers of slaves, not to mention heads, of course. The Long-Glat were then firmly established as the most prominent group in the upper Mahakam. In the mid-1830s, Liju made all the people of Pacan Asü move to Aring Opung, where junior nobility from Kayan, Uma' Suling, and Long-Glat were made to marry local chieftains' daughters, and carried on promoting, teaching, and overseeing rice swiddening. Liju himself is reported to have taken several wives from amongst nomadic groups of the uppermost Mahakam (Okushima 2008). Before 1850, all these people (were) moved to Data Noha, a short distance upstream, where Kuhi, son of Beraré', became the village leader. They remained there for thirty years. There were also, at that time, some Pïratoran on the Huvung, and other Pin and half-settled Seputan on the Kacü.

The continuing intermarriage with Kayan, Uma' Suling, and Long-Glat men, as acting chiefs and farming instructors, led to Data Noha's motley population progressively becoming like their sponsors, that is, a stratified society of longhouse dwellers and keen rice swiddeners, which became known to its members as the Aoheng (aka Penihing and related ethnonyms; about the origins of these names, see Sellato 1986). It may be said that the Kayan and Long-Glat, as they like to brag, "civilized" the Aoheng,– to which we may add that they powerfully contributed to the emergence of the Aoheng as a homogeneous ethno-cultural entity of six autonomous sub-groups, showing today only minor dialectal and ritual variation (see Section 2).

An unusual leadership dichotomy must be noted: The acting Aoheng leaders, in a line descended from either Acüé chiefs or Kayan nobles or both, cannot rule without their ritual counterparts, the Aüva religious leaders. A party splitting from Data Noha or from a later settlement to establish a new Aoheng village (and subgroup) had to take along one or more Aüva families, so that the *mengosang* festival could be held, in the name of the Aoheng chief, to consecrate the new village and on recurrent occasions – which is why all Aoheng villages today have in common the *mengosang* festival as a strong ethnic identity marker, despite minor variation (see Sellato 1992).

4.3. History, Myth, Ancient Beliefs

Let us return to our Sengiru. Indisputably, there is a link between Sengiru, the culture hero of the Aoheng myth, and Liju Aya', the Long-Glat paramount chief. Whether or not this particular Liju personally interacted with the incipient Aoheng group, married one Nyanéo, or several women, and brought rice, pig, chicken, and whatnot to the future Aoheng is irrelevant. Interestingly, the chiefly Aoheng dynasty of Long Apari is regarded as "stemming from Sengiru" (see Section 2.2), as is that of Tïong Ohang, and some individual members of these families, having befriended Sengiru as their spirit helper, often dream of him and give him food offerings. However, no Liju or Sengiru appears in the early generations of the various Aoheng chiefly families' genealogies, nor does any Aoheng chieftain today claim to be a direct descendent of Liju Aya'.

Actually, any Long-Glat (or, possibly, Kayan or Uma' Suling) man, marrying into one of the future Aoheng's leading families, even for a limited duration, with or without offspring, would have been regarded as acting on behalf and with the authority of Liju Aya', in effect, therefore, "being" Liju, hence Sengiru. It is not surprising, in any case, that not only Liju Aya', but also all the anonymous, lesser "sons-in-law" and "husbands" who came to live with the Aoheng, took on, with time, the "Sengiru" stature of culture heroes in Aoheng history and myths (see Sellato 1986: 329, 1994: 199). The Seputan and Hovongan, likewise, built a Tiger myth and stories based on the same culturally constructed relationship with the real Liju.

The Sengiru myths of the Aoheng and related groups, as they were told to me, conflated the culture-hero aspect of one historical character (or one or several of his affiliates), who happened to really interfere in a meaningful way in the development of their cultures and societies, with earlier and deeper elements of a local religious substratum common to this set of small ethnic groups occupying territories straddling the Müller mountain range, and possibly of a wider distribution.

This religious substratum, as it can still be perceived in Borneo, is examined (Section 5 below) and correlated, whenever possible, with situations in neighboring regions.

5. TIGER, MOON, THUNDER

The religions and oral traditions of various Borneo groups feature certain celestial characters apparently distinct from the tiger. The intimate, though complex, relationships of the tiger with the moon and the thunder/lightning are examined here, leading to hypothesizing the pre-existence of non-dualistic beliefs in a single set of deities, "tiger-moon-thunder", which in the course of time agglomerated with two separate farming societies' distinctive cosmogonic beliefs to become what can be observed today among Aoheng and related groups. It touches briefly on the issue of the so-called "thunder complex," in relation to beliefs in petrification phenomena, and it closes on remarks about ambiguity and variability, reflecting, respectively, the systemic cultural plasticity and singular cultural histories of of the Müller Mts. societies under scrutiny.

5.1. Godly Imbroglio in Borneo

Reference to the moon is uncommon in the central regions of Borneo but, among the Aoheng, the moon belongs to a set of deities frequently called upon in major rituals: "Tingai mo Tipang, Kito mo Bangka'an (or Bang Kahan), Halung mo Ha'an (or Lawang), Oü mo Büan, Uhing mo Üan". Here, Moon (*büan*), a feminine entity, always occurs paired with Day (*oü*), a male entity (actually referring to the sun, *maton oü*). The referents of this more or less frozen formulaic invocation have been forgotten, so Moon's and Day's roles could not be clarified, and neither could the identities and functions of several other deities.[35] Bulan (Moon) is one of the most common female personal names in the upper Mahakam region, as among many other ethnic groups speaking Kayan/ic languages.[36]

The lunar cycle is widely recognized as having an influence on the weather, the natural world, especially plants, as well as on all sorts of human activities, and Aoheng always want to "look for [a propitious phase of] the moon" (*nyaha büan*) when planning and scheduling important work (sowing rice, going on an expedition, building a house, felling a tree to make a canoe).

In the Aoheng terminology of lunar phases, the moon is said to be "pregnant" (*büan betohï*) during the two or three days prior to the appearance of the new moon in the sky; and the thin crescent on the sixth and seventh lunar days is called "tiger fang" (*tuku sengiru*, equivalent to Bahau *ipan lejau* and Busang *lipan lenjau*; Zulkifli n.d., Sellato 2004: 248–249). Kenyah oral

[35] There is some variation in this list among the different Aoheng villages. Some names, Tingai (or Tingei, Tingé), Tipang, and Bangka'an, are loans from Kayan and Busang neighbors; Kito is a high god among some Kenyah groups and nomadic Punan; among the other groups of the Müller Mountains, a male Kito is paired with a female Minang; Uhing and Üan are two female deities; Halung, Ha'an, and Lawang so far remain unidentified (see Sellato 1986: 406, 2002b, 2017c; see a similar setting among Buket in Thambiah 1995: 168–169).

[36] It may be noted that, contrary to most Bornean languages, in which the term for "moon" is derived from PAN *bulaN ("moon, month, menstruation"), the languages of some former hunting-gathering groups display various distinctive terms. In the Müller Mountains region alone (Sellato & Soriente 2015), the Semukung (or Uheng) and the Kerého-Uheng of the upper Kapuas have *among*, while the Hovongan have *arit* or *a£it* and the Kerého-Busang *karit* (author's word lists; it is noteworthy that the gender here ascribed to the Moon varies). PAN (or Proto-Austronesian) is the tentatively reconstructed original language of the Austronesian language family.

literature sees a biological relation between the moon and the tiger: "I (the tiger Laeng) want to visit my mother, the Shining Moon" (Rubenstein 1973: 1307). And the Uut Danum believe that the tiger is heard growling during full-moon nights (P. Couderc, pers. comm.; see also Masing 1981: 317 about the Iban). The moon's femininity, as well as the reproductive metaphor above, would confirm this link. Among the Ngaju, while the moon is clearly associated with the Underworld, the ambiguous tiger lord, Raja Hantuen (Raja Haramaung), residing in the Upperworld, actually straddles, in the course of his godly functions, the boundary between worlds (Schärer 1963: 19–21, 89).

In one of the Aoheng versions of the Sengiru myth examined earlier (Sections 2.2 & 3.1), Nyanéo, the daughter of king Aran of the Sky people, falls down to Earth and, immediately, "all the trees and grasses around her dry out because of her radiance, her glow, her beauty, her skin's whiteness". And in a folktale (Sellato 1982), another celestial woman, Tan Tuvung, because of her radiance, "makes bananas turn yellow, but they remain hard, they are not ripe". These two celestial female characters with a pale cold glow likely point at the moon.

Let us now examine the link between this selenic Nyanéo character, her celestial father, and the tiger. King Aran, according to his Aoheng name, *aran*, is the "thunder" (or "thunder and lightning", sometimes merged).[37] The Aoheng represent him as a frightening monster face, *irap aran* ("thunder face"), quite identical to the so-called "tiger head" and "dragon face" of other ethnic groups (see Section 3.3). The "thunder face" has long sharp fangs, a fact endorsed by the Kenyah about their own "thunder god", Balingo (Hose & McDougall, 1912: II, 11–12; really, Bali Ngo, lit., "thunder spirit") and by the Busang (in their wall paintings). For the Punan Tubu, it seems that humans must only fear tiger spirits and Duru, the thunder god[38] (Césard *et al.* 2015: 42; see also Peranio 1959 about the Bisaya). When the tiger takes a man, Tatau people say, the clap of thunder is heard (Roth 1968: I, 352). And the Dusun's mythical tiger creature, *mondau*, appears like a flash of lightning (Evans 1953: 27).

The Aoheng point at twin "fang marks" on trees struck by lightning and state that stone "fangs" can be found by the foot of such trees. Throughout Borneo, stone adzes found in fields are called "thunder/lightning teeth",[39] reminiscent of tiger fangs (Fig. 25). They are kept as amulets, generally for success in farming or hunting – the Aoheng keep them at the bottom of their paddy seed storage baskets, under the name of *batü üngot*, as fertility charms – while, among the Maloh, *balian* shamans use them as "tiger-stones" (*batu baro*), said to be inhabited by tiger

[37] Aoheng has *aran* for "thunder" and *koko£it* for "lightning". However, the word *havun*, "sky" (or "heaven", in a religious context) is often used in daily life (and in folktales) in place of *aran*, possibly as an avoidance term, e.g., *lum ko havun, bocïp ko koko£it*, "rumble goes the sky, crack goes the lightning". Seputan language, close to Aoheng, uses *aran* in daily life. The thunder's "voice" (Aoheng *aran moté*, "the thunder screams") seems to refer, according to context, to either the rumble of the thunder or the clap of lightning – the latter viewed as the punishing weapon. Hence, a common amalgamation of thunder and lightning, e.g., in folktale performances. More generally, about this sort of confusion in Peninsular Malaysia and the Philippines, see Blust 1981: 303.

[38] The word *duru* (or *duro*) for "thunder" occurs in various languages of Punan, Penan, and related former Bornean hunting-gathering groups – and Duru as a name for a thunder spirit or divinity.

[39] E.g., Kayan and Busang *ipan belaré'*, "thunder tooth" (or Dusun *gigi guntor*, Evans 1922: 267); more on this in Okushima (2014); about "thunder stones", see the Kelabit *batuh pera'it* (Janowski & Barton 2012) and the Kenyah *batu nggau* (Sellato 2016), among a number of sources. Freeman (1968: 357, citing Blinkenberg 1911) stresses that this relation of stone tools with a "sky-god" is found "throughout the world".

spirits (King 1975: 109). The question of "stone" or, rather, petrification will be touched on briefly below (Section 5.2).



Fig. 25: A common quadrangular stone adze; Apo Kayan area; photo: author.

Among the Hovongan and the Aoheng of the Kapuas, the tiger has control over the waters and lightning: He can cause the rain to fall, the river to flood, the lightning to strike. Interestingly, in the oral literature of the Kenyah, he can halt things as well: "I am the tiger, he who can stop the wind, […] can halt all currents, can even make the flowing of the river cease"; and more: "I am able to stop the enemy in their tracks" (Rubenstein 1973: 1306–1307). For the Kayan, "the rain is associated with the Thunder, which is associated with snakes and tigers" (Rousseau 1998: 100). This control of natural elements fits in well with the tiger's dual personality: He can give and withdraw, reward and punish. The Ngaju, under their two supreme deities, Mahatala (the hornbill, Upperworld) and Jata (the watersnake, Underworld), have a set of lords – four of which live in the Upperworld: Raja Ontong and Raja Sial, both being associated with thunder and lightning; Raja Haramaung, tiger and witch master, mentioned above; and Raja Pali, the Upperworld avenger of taboo transgressions, "[probably] identical with Nyaro, the lord of thunder and lightning" – who personify various aspects and functions of the total godhead (Schärer 1963: 19–21).

It has been suggested above (Section 3.3) that the bear is an avatar of the tiger. It is also associated with the thunder. The Hovongan tell of Sengiro taking along his two sons up a limestone peak and ordering them to catch one thunder who lives there in a cave and looks like a bear; the thunder wakes and screams, they truss him up but he is still struggling, so they tie his testicles and he no longer moves; later, they give him bamboo shoots to eat, he has diarrhea and dies. This bizarre story, clearly linking tiger and thunder, also suggests a belief in a taxonomic category of thunders (similar to that of the *sengiru* tigers; see Section 3.1).[40] The Aoheng and Seputan view thunders as "a species of spirit-animals resembling bears and living in mountain caves; their mouth is blood red and long-fanged; their scream is the thunder, and they [as the lightning] can kill people". Moreover, the Aoheng claim, thunders have wings and can fly and chase down humans. In representations of the "thunder face", a red triangular tongue (*céla aran*, "thunder tongue"), sometimes oversized, is meant to symbolize a thunderbolt (Fig. 26; see also Fig. 16 & 17). This is the strange animal that Sengiro's sons captured. In western Sarawak, Everett (1880) reported that a man who accidentally broke a piece of a tiger skull was at once struck dead by lightning.

[40] See Rousseau (1998: 105): "[…] in [Kayan] religious texts, reference is made to a number of thunder spirits".



Fig. 26: The "thunder face" (*irap aran*) of the Aoheng, represented with mouth wide open and screaming, as the overemphasized tongue symbolizing the thunderbolt attests; photo: author.

An Aoheng folktale (see Section 2.4; Sellato 1982) features Tan Tuvung, a young woman who fell from the Sky to Earth by accident. The wife of one Sengiru, she is a magician, can make herself invisible, and make a spring appear. The thunder king, for some reason intent on taking revenge on the Earth people, has barred the river with a huge tree trunk [like the tiger, he can stop the river's flow], and the humans are suffering from thirst. Tan Tuvung climbs up to the Sky and has a showdown with the king: He screams and the thunder is heard, but Tan Tuvung screams louder, overpowering the king, who collapses, falls down to Earth, and sinks into the ground. Then, Tan Tuvung releases the river waters. This character – *tuvung* is the name of the village ritual drum, made of a huge hollowed log, which sounds like thunder – brings together the Sky people's powers: control over water and thunder, and invisibility.

The tiger and thunder may therefore be viewed as two facets of the same character – the master of natural elements and holder of supernatural powers, such as magic, invisibility, transformation, and the ability to cross at will the boundaries between the Upperworld (Sky), this Earth, and the Underworld – and the bear and dog, as alternative proxies for either or both. As for the moon, it appears closely associated to both tiger and thunder. What, then, of the dragon? As suggested above (Section 3.3), the tiger and dragon are names for the same otherworldly character and its representations, in which their combined bodies often feature (Fig. 27; see also Fig. 7, 10). For the Aoheng and their neighbors, the tiger character is prominent (Sections 3.1 & 3.3), chiefly in its association with the thunder.



Fig. 27: A beadwork panel on a Kenyah baby carrier, displaying a tiger with paws in the form of dragon heads; photo: author.

This otherworldly character's ascription is ambiguous: The dragon is an Underworld character; the moon and lunar women, also Underworld characters, actually live in the Sky; the tiger, associated with rain, initiation, etc., is another Underworld character, and so are "ordinary" tigers who live in caves, but Sengiru lives in the Sky (i.e., Upperworld; Section 2.4); Aran, the thunder king, resides in the Sky, though "ordinary" thunders also live in caves.

Contrary to the Ngaju's cosmogony (above), which features an Upperworld-Underworld dualism, with two high gods, Mahatala (the hornbill) and Jata (the watersnake), that of the Aoheng and related groups does not ascribe any important divine position to any bird, whether the Rhinoceros hornbill or the Brahminy kite.[41] The Aoheng view the Rhinoceros hornbill in folktales as the king of airborne animals and use its feathers as a status symbol and its name as a personal name (though they kill it and eat its meat), and they also make use of a set of omen birds. Now, what is the dragon's status among the Aoheng and their neighbors? Nieuwenhuis (1904–1907: II, 278; see Section 3.3) uses the word *naga*, which is a loanword (ultimately of Sanskrit origin). The Aoheng language has the word *ovï*, referring to mythical animals evolving from real pythons or eels that, reaching an old age and large size, grow horns and legs. These *ovï*, though reminiscent of the Ngaju watersnake, have no religious or ritual function.

In their high religious festival, *mengosang* (see Section 3.1; Sellato 1992), the Aoheng uproot a wild *sengaang* tree (*Nephelium* sp.) in the forest, which they carry to the village as a guest of honor expected to deliver divine blessings and prosperity. They merely call it *kaü sengaang* ("*sengaang* tree") and only hardly ever, when pressed, do they equate it with an *ovï*. Upon the tree's arrival on the main village square, a mock-hostile war dance is performed (with hornbill feathers), first defending the village against the incoming guest and finally admitting it in. As mentioned above (Sections 4.1 & 4.2), the *mengosang* festival originates with the Aüva, an early Pin group related to the present-day Uut Danum, who themselves are, in terms of their cosmogony, closely related to the Ngaju, among whom similar antagonistic dance performances are staged during major rituals between village people and arriving guests from other villages.

[41] The Rhinoceros hornbill (*Buceros rhinoceros borneoensis*, Bucerotidae) and the Brahminy kite (*Haliastur indus*, Accipitridae) are of major importance in the beliefs and rituals of the Ngaju and related groups, as well as in those of groups in other regions, such as the Kenyah.

This suggests that, in the course of the Aoheng group's formation process, when nomadic hunting-gathering bands and Pin farmers merged and cohabited, features belonging to the beliefs of the wider southern Borneo (Ngaju, Uut Danum, etc.) ethnocultural sphere, including an Upperworld-Underworld dualism, combined with the beliefs of the hunting-gathering groups. Later on, the Aoheng's protracted relations with Kayan and related groups led to strong cultural Kayanization, in both their social organization and rituals (as well as in their language; see Sellato 2015b, Sellato & Soriente 2015).

Leaving aside bears and dogs (avatars of the tiger) and dragons (as a Pin component, part of a dualistic pair with the hornbill, and possibly influenced by dragons depicted on Chinese ceramic jars), we may contemplate an amalgamated tiger-moon-thunder divine set. But this threesome (or trinity) clearly requires some unraveling. Indeed, Sengiru, the tiger, son of the moon and a resident of the Sky, rules over the wind, water, and thunder, and his wife, Nyanéo, herself a selenic character as well, is the daughter of Aran, the thunder king of the Sky people. This makes their relation to one another somewhat complex: Individually, they cannot unambiguously be credited with given, separate roles or functions, nor can they be clearly ascribed to one or the other "worlds".

This would suggest that a concept of clearly contrasting Upperworld and Underworld – an ouranian-chthonian dualism – was missing from the ancient, pre-Aoheng, hunter-gatherer belief system. Obviously, the conflated tiger-moon-thunder set embraced these ancient peoples' whole cosmos, and no sharp boundaries were set between the Sky, this Earth, and some below-ground, chthonic domain, if any.

What we are dealing with today is a rather untidy, all-encompassing and all-purpose godly assemblage, the historical end product of the amalgamation of an ancient set of half-forgotten (hunter-gatherers') deities – which I shall call "tiger-moon-thunder", for want of a better phrase – with Pin and Kayan components, an untidiness that the current formulaic Aoheng invocation ("*Tingai mo Tipang, …*") adequately reflects.

Regarding Java, where the tiger has become extinct quite recently, Wessing (1995: 191) wrote: "With the disappearance of the actual tiger, the panther has come to take over many of the roles once held by the larger cat" in people's minds and rituals. Contrasting with Java, the tenacious relevance of the tiger character among Borneo's traditional peoples, despite its (assumed) current physical absence, is quite arresting, as well as the fact that their beliefs about this character have not been reassigned to the Clouded leopard.[42] As late as a few decades ago, these peoples' daily lives, not to mention their oral literature and visual arts, remained suffused with tigers.

5.2. Insalata Mista (con Sentimento)

An interesting relation exists in Borneo between the thunder (or thunder/lightning, see Section 5.1, note 37) and the occurrence of petrification of people or objects as punishment for the transgression of certain taboos. While the tiger and thunder are closely related, no clear link

[42] Lumholtz's (1920: II, 351) mention of carvings of a "tiger-cat" holding a human head, meant as protection against evil spirits, among the Ngaju of the Katingan River appears to be a personal misinterpretation, since the Ngaju do have a *remaung* tiger character.

connects the tiger to the phenomenon of petrification, as the data presented in this article attest, at least regarding Borneo and the ethnic groups surveyed.

This association of thunder with petrification has triggered a set of works focusing on what has come to be called the "thunder complex" (Blust 1981: 294) and examining, throughout the broader context of Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Philippines (and beyond), the connections between certain types of taboos and certain types of supernatural sanctions, mainly by storm, heavy rain, hail, lightning, and petrification, but also by disastrous floods.[43]

Some authors have debated psychoanalytical (Freudian *vs.* Jungian) approaches to the "thunder complex" and focused on such ideas as, e.g., thunder gods' oral and phallic aggression, while others have suggested a common inheritance of the "complex" and, therefore, a deep common historical origin of Negritos in the Philippines and Peninsular Malaysia against the likelihood of chance (linguistic and cultural) convergence. However, we may need more than the weaving together of a few scattered bits and pieces of ethnographic information and long-distance linguistic interpretations to be able to elaborate both a convincing symbolic "thunder theory" and a reliable historical reconstruction of the origins and dispersal of its "complex".

Borneo, in terms of human migration routes, lies between Peninsular Malaysia and the Philippines, but this island currently has no Negritos, which seems to be a problem, because it does show widespread occurrences of beliefs in petrification caused by thunder storms, often as punishment for mocking animals.[44] The Aoheng know about a phenomenon of petrification (*ba£i batü*, "transformed into stone") following a supernatural gale or thunderstorm (*hüvon*), and so do the other Müller Mountains groups. However, the Aoheng *hüvon* being a close cognate of the *huvaan* of Busang, Kayan, and related peoples in the Mahakam area (see also *uven* among the Kayan of Sarawak; Rousseau 1998: 105–106, Venz 2016: 171), it seems that this knowledge and associated folk stories originated from these neighbors, along with the word itself and various other religious beliefs (including names of divinities; see Section 5.1).

Contrasting with the Kayan – who would rather not keep pets for fear that inadvertently laughing at them might cause people and their house to be turned to stone (Rousseau 1998: 105) – and many others in Borneo, the Aoheng seem rather unconcerned with the question of mockery of animals. Furthermore, so far as I am aware, some of the "thunder complex" components, as they are listed in the literature[45] – e.g., blood, hair, fire, leeches[46] – may only find little echo among present-day Aoheng, as among related groups. As for incest, the most offensive of all human turpitudes, which among the Kayan is punished by petrification (death by the thunder; Rousseau

[43] See Cooper 1941, Needham 1964/1967, Freeman 1968, 1987, King 1975, 1985b, Endicott 1979a, 1979b, Blust 1981, 1991, 2013, Robarchek 1987a, 1987b, Forth 1989, Okuno 2012.

[44] E.g., Kayan, Rousseau 1998: 105; Kenyah, Blust 1991: 527; Dusun, Evans 1953: 146; Ngaju, Hardeland 1859: 25; Kelabit, Janowski 2016: 186; Melanau, Morris 1967: 192; Penan, Brosius 2001: 142; Janowski 2016: 189; Maloh, King 1975: 115–118; and see Blust 1981: 296–297.

[45] E.g., "thunder-stone-tree-incest-mockery of animals" (Needham 1964: 147) or "blood, thunder, lightning, hair, fire, trees, stone, and leeches, […] incest and adultery, and the mockery of animals" (King 1985b: 145); see also Cooper 1941, Blust 1981, 2013 for lists of offenses likely to trigger the thunder god's wrath.

[46] Regarding Penan Geng, Brosius (1992: 82–84 *et passim*), discussing thunderstorms, does not mention blood, hair, or leeches. However, one elderly Aoheng leader stated that his father used to burn some of his hair to halt a thunderstorm (Dirung Dahing, pers. comm.). And see Kaskija (1998: 342) about the Punan of Malinau.

1998: 105), among the Aoheng it is death from consumption (death by the tiger). Likewise, in the case of oaths and curses (Section 3.2), and minor infractions such as *semerérang* (Section 3.1), the tiger is expected to devour the offender, and no petrification is involved. Such aspects of the "thunder complex" as mockery of animals and punishment by petrification clearly standing beyond the scope of the present study, the whole matter of the "thunder complex" will therefore be discussed no further here.

What is left, then, of these great ancient divinities in Borneo societies today? While the name of the Moon, still mentioned in ritual petitions, is no longer associated with any explicit role in the supplicants' minds, a potent and dreaded Thunder god seems to endure among certain ethnic groups. As for the Tiger, if he lingers in daily language, oral literature, and the visuals arts – and even though "once in a while we dream of him" – he is now disconnected from cult and ritual.

5.3. Ambiguity, Plasticity, History

The situation described in the pages above (Section 5.1) regarding the tiger's uncertain locus (see William Blake's "In what distant deeps or skies…", p. 1) within the "rather untidy" cosmogonic framework of the Aoheng and related groups shows a high level of ambiguity – the word "ambiguity" also appears as a recurrent theme in the wider literature on the tiger (e.g., Wessing 1986). Apart from the tiger case itself, in these societies' beliefs the boundaries between humans, animals, and spiritual entities are hazy, the roles and functions of godly beings are somewhat nebulous, as are their cosmogonic location and ascription. Ambiguity, then, appears to be less an expression of a form of laxity in something that might have been a "structured" set of beliefs, than of a deliberate mental inclination toward "plasticity", a trait that has been mentioned frequently (as "flexibility") regarding hunter-gatherer groups' social and economic practices (about Borneo, see Sellato 1986, 1994, 2015a, Kaskija 1998, 2017, Sellato & Sercombe 2007). Contrasting with anthropologists, who tend to seek out coherent "systems" and be allergic to sweeping ambiguity (see, e.g., Sellato 2018a), these groups, in tune with neuroplasticity, have no problem with plasticity in beliefs.

The high level of tolerance to ambiguity that some hunter-gatherer groups display has been stressed elsewhere. The Bushmen's social reality, Guenther (1999: 228) argues with no want of epithets, is "ambiguous – loose, fluid, labile, resilient, adaptable – in its structure, institutions, and ethos […]." Further (*ibid.*: 236), he links tolerance to ambiguity to their "foraging way", "[…] in the context not only of their subsistence economy, but also of their society and ideology." Foraging – or "shopping" – for ideas is consistent with a hunter-gatherer mindset (see Barnard 2002). In the Borneo context, nomads' frequent moves and sometimes long-distance migrations, along with cultural interaction with different successive neighbors, on the one hand, and their typical high degree of permeability to higher-status rice-farming neighbors' cultural elements (Kaskija 1998, 2007, 2012), on the other hand, unfailingly led to extensive cultural borrowing, ranging from hunting methods to religious ideas (Sellato 1994, 2015a). Borneo nomads' forest environment has been likened to a free supermarket, and the comparison can be extended to embrace their broader historical and contemporary social and cultural environment (Sercombe & Sellato 2007: 44).

In the particular cases of the Aoheng and some of the related groups (Hovongan, Seputan; see Sections 2 & 4.2) in the Müller Mts., which have similar mixed hunter-gatherer and farmer historical backgrounds, it is relatively easy to identify in their present cultures the substantial contributions both from their Pin constitutive ethnic components and the later Uut Danum influence (here, "Barito") and from their imperious Kayan, Long-Glat, and Busang neighbors and patrons (here, "Kayanic";[47] see Sellato 1986, 1992, 2015b, Sellato & Soriente 2015). As depicted in the present paper, their current beliefs reveal two critical facts: first, parallel borrowing processes focusing on particular elements from either "Kayanic" origin (basic cosmogony, certain deities, headhunting rituals) or "Barito" origin (*mengosang* festival, socio-cosmic dualism, secondary treatment of the dead; see also Sellato 1994: 206), which combined with earlier hunter-gatherer beliefs;[48] and second, variability from one group, and even one sub-group, to the next in their combination of elements from these three different origins – abandoned, preserved, borrowed from here or there – not to mention innovations.

In the course of time, each community (or village) developed a singular, distinctive assemblage of beliefs, reflecting its cultural history. More generally, any community's culture, as we can witness and study it today, is the current and in-progress product of its unique history of internal development and external cultural and social interaction. As change and continual adjustment to it are intrinsic features of human societies, so is variability an intrinsic feature of cultures (regarding plaitwork decoration across Borneo, see Sellato 2018a). The Aoheng and related groups are the current end products of the blending of various ambiguity-prone hunter-gatherer bands with two major, quite dissimilar, farming tribal clusters – here labelled "Barito" and "Kayanic" – which was followed by diverse forms of protracted cultural interaction in the dynamic ethnohistorical setting of the Müller Mts.

With this study of the Tiger, I had set out "to try and shed some light on 'ancient belief systems' and the modalities of their evolution through time and cultural contact." As the study developed and, summoning "all sorts of available materials", I examined every possible aspect of the Tiger character, the topic proved an unruly and elusive one – wild animal, indeed! While I do believe that this attempt to tame that tiger is worthwhile and meaningful, it has led me only so far, to an ocean of ambiguity and variability, and not so much closer to the expected deeper understanding of the "ancient belief systems" of the Müller Mts. peoples.

NOTE

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[47] Barito and Kayanic referring to language families, the labels exceptionally used here, in quote marks, are for convenience only.

[48] These can only be identified as elements both common to the beliefs of several (present or former) nomadic groups and absent from those of their respective historical neighbors as possible sources of cultural loans.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My heartfelt gratitude goes to Alexander Adelaar, for his linguistic information and review; Jet Bakels, for copies of some of her tiger papers; Pascal Couderc, for comments on Barito speakers of Central and West Kalimantan, as well as references; Dirung Dahing, for information on thundestorm rituals; the late Jean-Pierre Domenichini, for insights into the tiger in Malagasy; Michael Heppell, for detailed data on Iban tigers; Lars Kaskija, for his comments on early drafts; Paulus Kadok, for Benua' ethnographic information; Adrian Linder, for ethnographic information and elusive publications and archive materials on Sabah and North Kalimantan tigers, including from the late Jack Prentice's archives; Margrit Linder, for her tiger photographs; Hélène Njoto for pieces of information, corrections, and critical comments; Clifford Sather for detailed data on Iban tigers' lairs; and to Steinar A. Sørensen, who kindly provided data from Carl Sofus Lumholtz's (c. 1910) manuscript field notes (in Swedish) in the Lumholtz Archives, Museum of Cultural History, University of Oslo. Remaining errors are my sole responsibility.

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