

## LABEL, TITLE, AND *JULUK*: THE NAMING SYSTEM FOR WEAVING DESIGNS OF IBAN RITUAL FABRIC

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### Introduction

This paper discusses the naming system used in the Baleh region of Sarawak to refer to weaving designs of *pua' kumbu'*, a ritual fabric of the Iban people of western Borneo. To this end, Gavin's formulation of a naming system based on "titles" (Gavin 1996; 2003) is reexamined. Its relevance to *juluk* (or *pejuluk*), the conventional naming terms used by the Baleh Iban, is analyzed in terms of data collected by the author during fieldwork in the Baleh region.<sup>1</sup>

Among the Iban, textiles were customarily passed down as family heirlooms. Old ones had value and it was these which were sought by local Chinese dealers who made large-scale purchases. Many of these old textiles found their way onto the ethnic art market in Western and Asian countries from the 1970s to the present (Fischer 1979:13). At the time, elementary school education was just spreading into inland areas. Often, to meet the costs, especially after poor harvests, parents had to sell a textile as something of value that they owned. The Chinese dealers who purchased these textiles did not seek to record the names of pieces nor any other information which might have been provided to them by the weavers concerned. Textiles were treated simply as commercial commodities (Gavin 1996:13).

Ong, a promoter of the revival of Iban weaving traditions and himself a Sarawakian Chinese collector and dealer, mentions that precise interpretation of traditional design patterns today is extremely difficult because weavers who have a good knowledge of *juluk* are rare. In such a situation, according to Ong, dealers have little choice but to disseminate "false" information arising from their own interpretations of a design when they sell a piece (Ong 1994:161-162).

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1 Gavin stated that the word *juluk* (or *julok*) was used in the Baleh where she conducted part of her fieldwork (Gavin 1996:88). However, I found that in the Baleh *juluk* is never used by the Iban to refer to textiles; *pejuluk* (or *jejuluk*) is the correct expression. *Juluk* is certainly found in articles by Freeman as well as Masing who studied the Baleh Iban, but it can be speculated that that was because of the translation work of the late Patrick Ringkai, Freeman's assistant, who was originally from Stambak longhouse in the Betong Division [**Editor's Note:** Patrick Ringkai was, in fact, a son of the famous Saribas weaver, Sendi anak Kedit, whose textiles are described in the writings of Datin Empiang Jabu and Vernon Kedit, see Peter Kedit, "Patrick Ringkai 1912-2009," *BRB*, Vol. 40, 2009.] Similarly, Gavin also seemed to have depended on information from Betong. In this paper, to avoid any confusion with the usage of other authors, *juluk* is used.

Since the 1980s, however, information has been provided by knowledgeable Iban such as Jabu and Linggi about the underlying beliefs which guide the weaving of a cloth. For example, weavers have to be given permission by the gods through the medium of dreams when they weave a design with spiritual potency. If the beliefs are ignored and any proscriptions violated, weavers are punished. Moreover, a whole community and anyone who later handles the cloth will fall into a state of *layu*, which in Iban means ‘withering’ (Jabu 1991:80; Ong n.d.:5; Linggi 2001b:1490).<sup>2</sup>

In her 1990’s fieldwork in the Baleh, Gavin set out to challenge established symbolic interpretations of Iban designs and developed the concept of “title” to explicate a naming system which she believed a weaver worked within to illuminate what her design sought to express. In this paper I would like to examine carefully Gavin’s concepts of “title” and “label” within the context of the Iban’s existing system of *juluk*.

### “Label” and “Title”

Haddon’s naming system of Iban textile motifs was based on labels attached to cloth motifs purchased by Charles Hose and acquired by the Cambridge University Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology and the British Museum early in the twentieth century. Gavin argued that there was an Iban indigenous system which names particular pattern designs that were imbued with divine power.<sup>3</sup> Gavin defined the motif-based system as “label” and the divine power one as “title” (Gavin 2003:79-83). In contrast, the Iban refer to the names of designs and motifs simply as *nama* (name).

Gavin, while acknowledging some regional variation in their usage, uses the term “label” to refer to such woven motifs as deer, shrew, hawk, etc. For example, in the West, names are assigned to particular woven patterns like “herringbone” and “checkered pattern” and written on tags supplemented by sizes and prices. Further, labels can be seen in some simple descriptions presented as merchandise information in handicraft shops where textiles are sold to tourists as well as on captions for objects in museum exhibitions (Gavin 2003: 169).<sup>4</sup>

For Gavin, names of sufficient ritual efficacy function as “titles,” by which they are assigned to a combination of motif designs which possess spiritual power, for example, the well-known *lebur api* (blazing fire), or *bali belumpung* (divided pattern), which are composed from a couple of words. Sometimes a “title” comprises a *juluk* which combines metaphor and allegory in a number of lines of rhyming verse (Gavin 1996:81; 2003:79). Gavin defined *juluk* as referring to lengthy names regardless of the power of a design (Gavin 2003:79). Even names composed of only a couple of words are “titles” if the motifs are powerful (see Table 1).

Consequently, Gavin classified the *nama*, or ‘names’ of designs, into “label” and

2 *Layu*, *layus* means: 1. ‘withered’ and ‘scorched (dry)’ and 2. ‘dead’ in poetic language (Richards1997:184-185).

3 The primary concern of A. C. Haddon, the pioneer of Iban textile studies, was the fact that woven motifs like animals did not resemble the particular animal depicted. To add to this confusion, the names of such motifs were widely shared by the Iban. Haddon’s answer was that woven motifs functioned not only as decoration but also as a primitive language (Gavin 2003:201).

4 Gavin seems to have confused “label” for a design motif and “title” for the textile’s whole compositional design.

“title” based on their power/strength. She also divided “titles” into two categories: short and lengthy. She also graded “titles” into two levels: “newly created” and “conventionally succeeded over generations.” The power of a newly created title can be approved in some cases by divine messages through the medium of a dream, but the power of the design will be regarded only at a personal level. It would not yet be so regarded by others. Gavin cites an example, when a weaver copied (as later discussed) a traditional design of *miga duduk*, ‘cumulus cloud.’ While weaving the piece, it did not rain for a month, which is rare in Sarawak. The weaver read a spiritual power from this experience and called the design *sintau kamarau, hari sebulan mali hujan* – ‘cirrus clouds in the sky, one month without rain’ (Gavin 2003:167n.). In theory, the copying of this newly created design by other weavers would endorse the title and design. It would be regarded as a traditional design (*buah berasal*) and its divine power would be acknowledged.<sup>5</sup>

Gavin’s example of *sintau kamarau* certainly shows a flexible quality when naming a design based on a weaver’s personal experience, without regard to the original name. According to Gavin, Iban explained this by the simile that people cannot guess a person’s name from their face (Gavin 2003:80). Conversely, it is also said that people cannot tell what a person looked like from his/her name or nickname. That is, a “title” does not illustrate or explain a design. Accordingly, for Gavin, this explanation provided an answer to Haddon’s question of why the names of motifs differed from their visual images (Gavin 2003: 80).

In conclusion, Gavin attempted to classify the naming system of Iban woven designs based on the spiritual power level. Iban textiles long have been interpreted as locations where spirits dwell. This interpretation will be reviewed within the context of the Iban’s unique weaving system in which designs are copied to acquire divine powers. Gavin’s concept of “title” will also be discussed further.

### Spiritual Power Acquired from Copying

Divine power infuses not only Iban textile designs but also the whole weaving process from the dyeing of threads to weaving itself, and then is extended into the ritual usage of textiles. Power is described as *bisa*, or ‘strong.’<sup>6</sup> The quality of the textile itself as well as the prestige of the weaver who conquers the power is determined by the level of power captured (Gavin 2003:79). In short, Iban women achieve social rank by mastering weaving skills under the auspices of the gods. According to Jabu, they are five phases, or ranks: from the highest to the lowest, *indu’ nakar indu’ ngar* – ‘master dyer,’ *indu’ nengkebang indu’ muntang* – ‘master weaver,’ *indu’ sikat indu’ kebat* – ‘skillful weaver,’ *indu’ temuai indu’ lawai*, or *indu’ asi indu’ ai* – ‘ordinary woman who takes

5 Gavin wrote that “making *anak* (child)” is how the Baleh Iban describe making a copy (Gavin 2003:212). However, I found that in the Baleh people did not understand this. They said copying was *tunda*, and a copied design was a *teladan*. Gavin also translated *asal* more as ‘traditional’ rather than ‘original.’ For the Iban, *asal* refers to an original design. Accordingly, an *asal* design might possess power, but not necessarily so.

6 The word *bisa* is according to Gavin is derived from *visa* (poisonous) in Sanskrit, as expressed, for example, by the strength of alcohol in drinks, the potency of medicines, or intensity of pain, etc. In ritual contexts in Iban it expresses the spiritual potency of prayers, spells, amulets, and so on (see Gavin 2003:26).

good care of housework,' and *indu'paku indu'tebu'* – 'ordinary woman who gather edible wild plants' (Jabu 1989:95, 1991:80).<sup>7</sup> These names can be regarded as *juluk* and will be discussed later.

The process by which a weaver acquires the necessary skills and power is a graded one.<sup>8</sup> First, the novice weaver at the stage of being an "ordinary woman who takes good care of housework" or an "ordinary woman who gathers edible wild plants" undertakes copying within a small size such as the vine motifs that are relatively safe for anyone. After mastering this phase, a weaver would attempt to copy traditional stronger motifs like the crocodile, snake, demon figure, etc. In doing so, a relative novice would ask a skilled weaver to help her by starting a design and thus protect herself from spiritual attacks (Gavin 1996:70; Linggi 2001b: 1501). As the weaver further improves her skills, she becomes recognized as a "skillful weaver," or more aptly as *pandai ati aja* – 'a weaver skilled from the heart' (Gavin 1991:15), "spiritually strong" – *semangat tinggi* (Davison and Sutlive 1991:207), or *indu'sikat indu'kebat* – 'a woman who knows how to do *ikat*' (Jabu 1991:80), and so becomes spiritually strong enough to make copies of more powerful designs. With further improvement, a weaver through divinely inspired dreams would become regarded as *indu'nengkebang indu'muntang* – 'a master weaver who has produced original designs' (and is able to do a tapestry weave) (Gavin 1991:4-16; Mashman 1991:246). The highest rank of women weavers, there being only one in a longhouse, is *indu'nakar indu'gaar* - 'master dyer' - who is capable of conducting a communal ritual ceremony for treating threads of dyeing (Jabu 1989:95; 1991:80; Linggi 2001a:7).<sup>9</sup> This ceremony is called either *ngar* or *gaar*, and it is deemed to be the most spiritually dangerous. Accordingly, it is said to be comparable to a male headhunting expedition, and so is called *kayau indu'*, or 'women's warpath,' in which the leader's spiritual strength to overcome evil spirits is tested (Howell 1912:64; Gavin 1991).<sup>10</sup> To

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7 Heppell, et.al. (2005:95-106) refers to a similar classification. Both Heppell and Jabu observe that women at the bottom of the pecking order, *indu'paku'*, *indu'tebu'*, are locked into a cycle of having to work for other households and so have less time to acquire weaving skills. This helps explain why dyeing and weaving are so highly valued by the Iban. However, in theory, even lower ranked weavers have a chance to enhance their status through spirit-inspiration, personal skill, and application (see Sather 1996).

8 The following descriptions are only a template for these graded stages. Vernon Kedit (2009) describes cases where novice weavers from prominent households do not follow these generalizations. Heppell in personal communication also suggested that there were many weavers whose careers did not conform to this template.

9 In practice, there is not necessarily only one master dyer per longhouse. Regarding the ritual ceremony of *ngar*, or *gaar*, in a recent article, Gavin (2013) has argued that technically the process that occurs during the *ngar* ceremony is not, as it has been previously described, "mordanting," the application of a mordant, but, rather, is "scouring" and "wetting out," a treatment of the cotton threads that takes place prior to dyeing.

10 Regarding the name *kayau indu'* for the *ngar* ceremony, the Baleh Iban are totally unaware of it. Mr. Walter Wong of the Tun Jugah Foundation in a personal communication, points out that *indu'* has two meanings in Iban; "major" and "women." Therefore, *indu'kayau* means, literally, a major headhunting expedition consisting of about one hundred men. Mr. Joseph Ingai, a former Sarawak Museum staff member, in a personal communication guesses *kayau indu'* might be a *juluk* for the woman leader who plays the important ritual role of receiving severed heads into a community. Neither informants knew of *kayau indu'* as referring to *ngar*.

carry out the *ngar*, the leader must possess a special amulet called a *penyeliah jamah* (risk aversion) to ask for divine assistance (Gavin 1996:27; 2003:46). Amulets can be acquired from the gods, for instance, a person has a dream in which she is told where to find one. The following morning she would go to the spot indicated where she would find something curious such as a pebble or bone fragment and bring it back home. In time, the power of the charm will be demonstrated, and those which are particularly powerful are likely to be inherited by her children.<sup>11</sup> The master dyer who leads a *ngar* is not necessarily technically a good weaver, but has been chosen by the gods which affirms this most prestigious social position among women (Linggi 2001a:2, 7). Almost all weavers have knowledge of the dyeing process (cf. Gavin 1991:1). However, for the *ngar* ritual, the leader must have been ordained by the gods.

According to Gavin, a new design or motif, and particularly those created by a master weaver, becomes stronger the more other weavers copy it. The custom of lower-ranked weavers copying new designs of master weavers is unique in comparison with other weaving cultures and worthy of attention as it combines a system of traditional designs and motifs passed on with one in which new designs continue to be created and enter an expanding inventory.

In the process of copying, changes are often generated. A motif may be woven upside down, some design elements may be changed or replaced by others, or a totally different name may be given to a design. Gavin showed some pictures of well-known designs to weavers and asked them to identify the designs. Though they were familiar with the title (name), many could not relate it to a particular design (Gavin 2003:166, 211). Because of this, the fact that designs and names were not always matched by a weaver, Gavin, in short, revealed that the long-established theory proposed by A. C. Haddon, namely that woven designs were “coded symbols” or a “visual language for illiterate societies” does not hold up.

By clarifying the Iban system of copying weaving designs, Gavin has attempted to provide a systematic and logical explanation to oppose to the cliché of so-called textile-dwelling spirits. But her study of titles and *juluk* remains ambiguous because of a lack of evidence-based data. To substantiate this, I would like to provide data about the naming system of Baleh Iban textiles.

### **Analysis of works entered in a Kapit *pua' kumbu'* competition**

In this section, I will examine the titles or names (*nama*) assigned to woven designs by their weavers. A list of the names of designs and the weavers' ages are taken from 54 *pua' kumbu'* textiles entered in a competition held in Kapit town in 2003, see Table 1.<sup>12</sup>

I have extracted this list of the names for each design (*nama buah pua'*) and the exhibitors' ages from the entrance forms submitted by each exhibitor/weaver. I have

11 *Penyeliah jamah* are not only possessed by weavers. War leaders also possessed them.

12 I would like to thank Ms. Minor Panyau, Chairman of the Iban Women's Association (*Sarakup Indu Dayak Sarawak*) in Kapit and the organizer of the competition who kindly allowed me to read the weavers' entrance forms. Her association seemed to have held the competition on a regular basis; however, she said that in her capacity she could not freely provide me with further material. A question raised was, to whom did the cultural property belong?

arranged the names (*nama*) in the list according to the motifs, such as tiger, snake, etc. I follow the spelling of the *nama* entered by each weaver, noting that they are not always consistent.

In the section on Description/Interpretation, I briefly explain each name as much as possible in English to help readers understand its meaning, which is often derived from a metaphor or allegory expressed poetically. I include the section on ages to indicate roughly each weaver's proficiency. But it must be reiterated that not all weavers will reach the status of "master weaver" or "master dyer." Rather, they will simply remain an "ordinary weaver" all their lives.<sup>13</sup> When considering the level of proficiency between the aged and young, differences are inevitable; for example, most young weavers are unlikely to become master weavers. It is necessary to keep this in mind when considering the quality of the listed works.

In table 1, 54 works are listed which were entered by 34 weavers aged from eighteen to seventy-three years old. Of the 54 works, 36 are assigned names of between one and three words. The remaining 18 works have names consisting of long sentences, with the longest comprising 18 words. As Gavin observed, poetic titles can be assigned by weavers to original designs. Of these 18 names, no name exactly replicates another.

The name of cloth 36 in the list is a good starting point. It is called *buah sempuyong bunga pejulok Kumang bayik* – "basket of flowers" with a *juluk*: beautiful Kumang.<sup>14</sup> The first three words, *buah sempuyong bunga* - works as a "label," while the final two, *Kumang bayik*, comprise the *juluk*. Consequently the name is composed of two elements: "label" and *juluk*. This particular structure of naming is found for only this one *pua* in the list, but I have learned from my fieldwork in the Baleh that among the Iban it is used very frequently (see plate 1, mentioned below). Gavin states that a *juluk* requires a lengthy sentence (Gavin 2003:79), but in the above example, two words: *Kumang bajik* suffice.

In the list, the 73-year old, the oldest weaver, assigned the longest name consisting of 18 words (no. 53 in the list), while the 18-year old youngest also produced a long name of 15 words (no.11 in the list). According to Gavin, the status of a weaver is irrelevant to the length of a name. In this case, a long, ingeniously named cloth was produced by a relative novice.<sup>15</sup> As mentioned earlier, new designs can be woven only by master weavers.<sup>16</sup> It is therefore difficult to understand how an 18-year old weaver could reach this level. Consequently, it seems likely that she copied an existing design and perhaps only the name changed from the original one. This would then match Gavin's example of "cirrus cloud, one month no rain" mentioned earlier.<sup>17</sup>

13 Heppell observes that many women never learn to weave, but rely on others to do the tying and dyeing for them (Heppell, et.al. 2005:95).

14 Kumang is an Iban spirit heroine of the Panggau-Gelung world famous for her weaving skills.

15 I was not able to attend the competition in 2003. In 2008 I tried to contact the 18-year old weaver at the contact address given on the form. Unfortunately, I was told she had moved to Kuala Lumpur. Vernon Kedit (2009), as mentioned earlier, has suggested that novice weavers from prominent households might produce powerful cloths.

16 Heppell in a personal communication claims that to become a master weaver a woman has to weave an original design first. My understanding is that until a woman has achieved the status of a master weaver she cannot even try to create an original design.

17 Gavin, however, does not clarify the relative position level of her informant weaver.

**Table 1: Names of weaving designs and weavers' ages**

Nos.	Name of Design ( <i>nama buah pua'</i> )	Ages	Description/Interpretation by the author
1	<i>Remaong Bejanggau</i>	38	Bearded? <i>Remaung</i> ( <i>Remaung</i> is a tiger spirit).
2	<i>Remaung Laki</i>	46	Male <i>Remaung</i>
3	<i>Buah Padong Remaong</i>	64	Sleeping Place of the <i>Remaung</i>
4	<i>Sandong Betong Melapi Nabau Ngerarau Gali</i>	38	<i>Nabau</i> lying down at an <i>engkabang</i> tree and a big tree ( <i>Nabau</i> is the strongest of the serpent spirits).
5	<i>Nabau Ngararan</i>	48	Stretching <i>Nabau</i>
6	<i>Buah Nabau</i>	n/a	<i>Nabau</i> motif
7	<i>Buah Nabau</i>	44	<i>Nabau</i> motif
8	<i>Tangga Remaung</i>	34	Ladder of clouds (ladder used by the gods to descend from the sky to attend festivals).
9	<i>Tangga nitar bebelitjalai niki ka langit nepan ke panggau bulan</i>	33	Ladder shaped like lightning streaks for ascending to the sky and the moon
10	<i>Aki Buga Mangkang ka Tangga Pintu Remang Aki Ungkuk Japi Kiruk-Kiruk Nali Era Belimbinei Tenggang</i>	36	Grandfather Buga arrives at the door of clouds, and Grandfather Ungkuk carefully twines <i>tenggang</i> fiber
11	<i>Terpong mambang Menani puchuk tebelian wie tangga Beji ka nangga ari patah dititi jembatan entulang</i>	18	Magnifying glass? of Menani (shaman) and the tip of the ironwood ladder held together with rattan breaks and Beji falls onto the quay (Based on a famous story of Beji who falls from the sky as the ladder he has erected collapses).
12	<i>Kancha Tedong Langit Ekos Bebelit Dalam Bulan</i>	34	Coiled cobra ascends to the moon in the sky
13	<i>Tedong numpu, nabau nerumbu, Penududuk pau penyandih ngelai</i>	39	<i>Tedong</i> sitting on the opposite side of <i>Nabau</i> who leans against a tree
14	<i>Tedong Mengkong Melit</i>	47	(Exact meaning of this is not known)
15	<i>Bujang Malaya</i>	37	Young man who wanders to the Malay Peninsula
16	<i>Niga Bekurung</i>	37	<i>Niga</i> in a cage? (" <i>Niga</i> " here may refer to <i>Naga</i> , or dragon spirit.)
17	<i>Niga Berkurung</i>	46	<i>Niga</i> in a cage?
18	<i>Belia Indai Abang</i>	50	Shuttle of Mother Abang (Mother Abang is a goddess of weaving.)
19	<i>Belia Indai Abang</i>	48	Shuttle of Mother Abang
20	<i>Bingka Lia Kerang Janggau Indai Abang</i>	34	Ripe <i>Janggau</i> roots of Mother Abang ( <i>Janggau</i> is a plant for dyeing.)
21	<i>Keleku Gajai Antu Ngasu wi ulu kampung puang</i>	50	Gajai goes in search of rattan in the upriver empty forest (Gajai is a spirit that resembles a frog, or grasshopper)
22	<i>Buah Gajai Langit</i>	34	Motif of Gajai in the sky
23	<i>Kechandi Urik</i>	40	(Exact meaning of this is not known)
24	<i>Sepit Api</i>	40	Fire-tongs
25	<i>Buah Menyeti Sepit Api</i>	48	Fire-tongs with the <i>menyeti</i> motif ( <i>Menyeti</i> is known as a traditional strong motif, but its meaning is not known.)
26	<i>Menyeti rebur api singa-rang baya</i>	52	<i>Menyeti</i> , a burning fire, the jaw of a crocodile
27	<i>Aso</i>	40	Dog
28	<i>Sepepat</i>	37	Firefly

29	<i>Buah Sepepat</i>	61	Firefly motif
30	<i>Buah Sepepat</i>	42	Firefly motif
31	<i>Buah Sepepat</i>	28	Firefly motif
32	<i>Buah Sepetai</i>	18	Firefly motif
33	<i>Buah Sepepat</i>	66	Firefly motif
34	<i>Buah Sepepat</i>	33	Firefly motif
35	<i>Buah Sempuyong Mata Hari</i>	n/a	Basket for Mata Hari's head (Mata Hari was a famous Baleh war leader. Sempuyong Mata Hari can also refer to a headhunting ritual.)
36	<i>Buah Sempuyong Bunga Pejuluk Kumang Bajik</i>	51	Sempuyong Bunga; <i>juluk</i> is beautiful Kumang. (Kumang is the most beautiful of the Iban spirit heroines)
37	<i>Buah Sempuyong</i>	34	Sempuyong motif
38	<i>Buah Sempetai</i>	34	Animal-trap motif
39	<i>Buah Rangai Bersembah</i>	46	(Exact meaning of this is not known)
40	<i>Pating Seribu badas lelendu, tumbuh di-ulu seradak pangau buah raya badas beria-ria, mending, menua mansau bekenarau</i>	62	Very beautiful hundred branches, fruits of <i>mending</i> trees are ripe to be harvested in the sky in the upriver ( <i>pating seribu badas lelendu</i> is a traditional motif.)
41	<i>Buah Gantung Sengayuh</i>	48	Motif of an idle paddle
42	<i>Buah Bebuli air</i>	48	Whirlpool motif
43	<i>Buah Lang Ngerembang Laki</i>	48	Motif of Lang who marches with men (Lang is Lang Singalang Burong, the Iban's supreme god.)
44	<i>Buah Lang Ngerembang</i>	44	Motif of Lang marching
45	<i>Gumbang Bersimpan</i>	39	Spiral shape
46	<i>Buah Bengkong Ayong Berdilang Ngitang Rang Galang Bergili</i>	39	Motif of the string hole for the rattan basket for a skull which is suspended, its shadow trembling***
47	<i>Tungku rebur bintang bertubur</i>	48	A blaze of shooting star
48	<i>Apai Sali Nginti</i>	48	Father of Sali goes fishing
49	<i>Lelayang Mandi</i>	64	Bathing swallow
50	<i>Buah Kuching</i>	n/a	Cat motif
51	<i>Buah Sandong</i>	33	Pillar motif (the pillar on which a hornbill statue is erected during a festival.)
52	<i>Kumang Dani</i>	n/a	Kumang wakes up
53	<i>Wa Aki nyabak kesi-kesi minta ambi ka indu mandi besambau de sa bujang kesanggas kesas ngemansang ka menua</i>	73	In the time of grandfather, sobbing and asking a bathing woman, a young man heading for the field
54	<i>Gellanggang Langit</i>	68	Perch for the hen in the sky

Note: There are variations in spellings, e.g. remaong, remaung, etc. They are written here as original texts.

\*\*This reflects Iban etiquette; to use meditating agencies or objects is regarded as more polite and courteous when handling powerful things, such as a "hole" rather than a "cord," a "cord" rather than a "basket," and a "basket" rather than a "skull." The latter in each case is the more powerful. Also as seen in other *juluk*, the shuttle of Mother Abang (nos.18-19) rather than Mother Abang herself, and fire-tong (no.24-25) rather than fire. In practice, when people address you in a polite way, it is always better to ask a third person to talk to you. For instance, when I was asked to pay an amount of money, the man, to be polite, did not ask me directly, but asked someone to speak to me. What is more, successful hunting dogs and many other things are given euphemistic *juluk*, or nicknames, which only hint at what they really are.

And so, what if a popular design is copied and assigned different names by different weavers? Obviously, in such a case, the same design might have a different name. But, in the case of the 18-year old weaver, there is every possibility that she copied a piece woven by a prior generation member of her household and gave the cloth the same name as the original she copied. These two possibilities raise the question of whether a particular design always has the same name. Gavin found two alternatives: either a *juluk* of a particular design is passed down from generation to generation to establish a known pedigree (*tusut*), or it is not passed down at all (Gavin 2003:80, 211). Heppell, however, argues that *juluk* and design need not be concatenated, as weavers assign different names or *juluk* to designs they might have copied or simply seen (Heppell 2006:186-187).

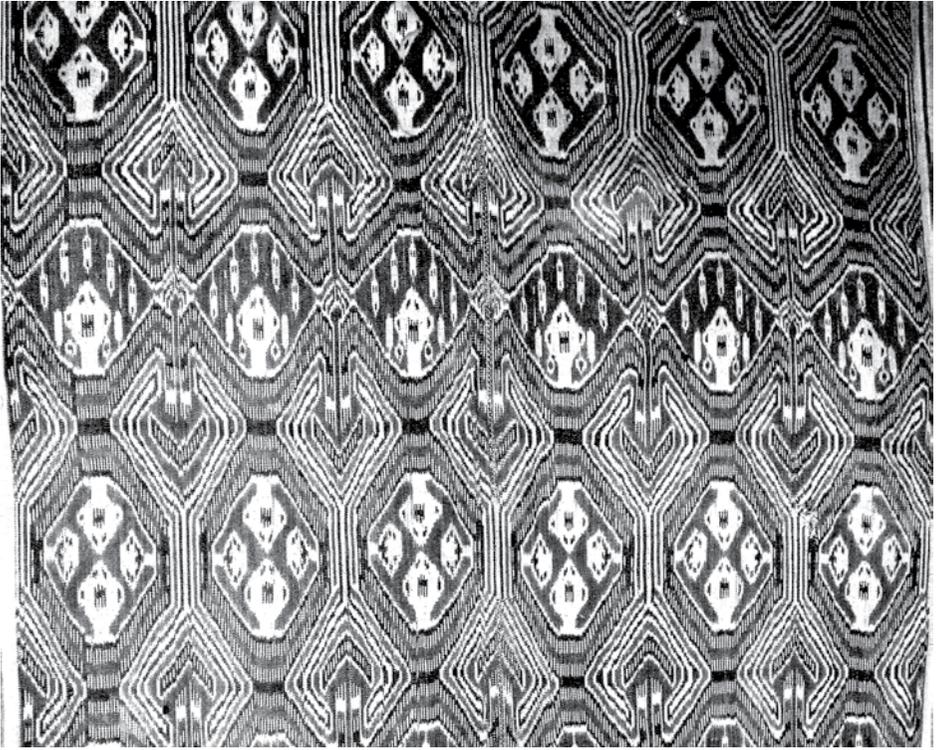
Now let us return to the list. The well-known design *sepepat* or ‘firefly’ was the most popular with seven out of fifty-four entries by weavers whose ages ranged from 18 to 66 (nos.28-34). The firefly design is one of the mostly widely known among the Iban. What is surprising with the range of ages weaving a *sepepat* is that this old design, which is deemed to possess a high level of power based on the huge number of copies made of it through the generations, is woven by young inexperienced weavers. This fact might suggest that the design is not so powerful because a young weaver has woven it. But then one would ask why experienced weavers were satisfied with such an easy task and did not set out to produce a higher-ranked cloth or attempt an original work?

Past studies of Iban weaving have indicated that a weaver cannot handle a quick succession of powerful designs because of the risk of illness (e.g. Gavin 2003:170; Heppell, et.al. 2005:106). In this context, it might be speculated that weavers entering cloths in this competition might not have been able to prepare a powerful design because it takes a longer time. A question is why weavers risk their lives to weave strong designs. One reason is, weavers might take the risk of producing a powerful cloth in order to enhance their prestige in the community. Assuming this to be the case, one would expect weavers to present their powerful or original works in a competition.

From the above analysis, two questions are raised about the naming system governing weaving designs. The first concerns the differences between Gavin and Heppell about whether or not the *juluk* is passed on to a weaver along with the design she copies. The second concerns the question as to why a well-known design like the firefly can be woven by weavers ranging from inexperienced young weavers to experienced senior weavers. The second question cannot be answered here. The Iban concept of ritual power in the context of woven objects needs to be studied further. In this paper, I will discuss the first question with reference to the data I have collected.

### **Are *juluk* passed on with a design when the latter is copied?**

For this discussion, I will be referring to two *pua'kumbu'* which I photographed in the field in the Baleh (plates 1 and 2). Plate 1 is a photograph of a *pua'kumbu'* design which a household (*bilik*) inherited from the previous generation. Its name was given as *buah pala manusia pejuluk bengkong ayong bedilang pengitang leka baling beguni bedil meletup beringan sulang beseper manggum bara api* – ‘a human skull, the *juluk* of which is a skull tumbling down from the basket hung at the hearth that eats the embers of



**Plate 1:** *Buah Pala Manusia Pejuluk Bengkong Ayong Bedilang Pengitang Leka Baling Beguni Bedil Meletup Beringan Sulang Beseper Manggum Bara Api*—a human skull motif, the *juluk* is a skull tumbling down from the basket hung at the hearth that eats the embers of the fire. A woman inherited this cloth from her mother. Photo by the author in the Baleh in 2008.

the fire.’<sup>18</sup> The core motif in the design is *bengkong*, ‘skull basket,’ which is powerful.

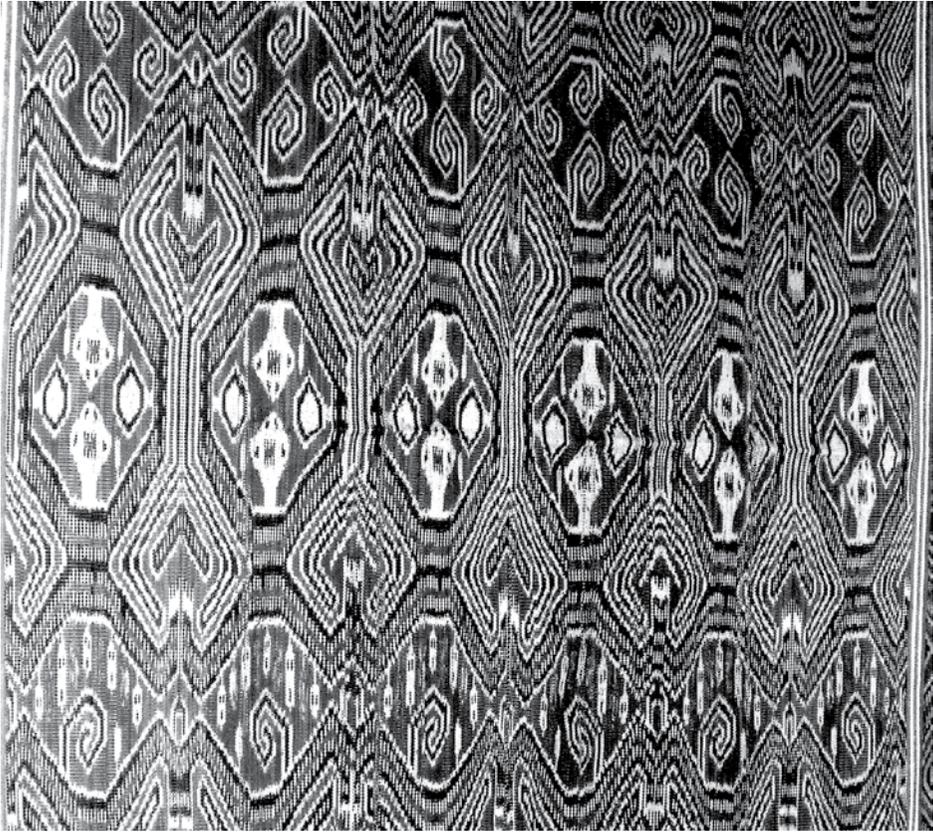
Plate 2 represents a copy of the design in plate 1. This was woven recently by a 40-year old weaver who inherited the original. She explained that the copied design is named the same as the original. This clearly demonstrates that weavers customarily pass on as a unit the *juluk* together with the design to which it corresponds.

However, it is important to note that there are a number of differences or rearrangements in the copied design, as if the copier could not technically produce a faithful reproduction. As Gavin explained, weavers are flexible in reproducing a design and assigning names. Consequently, little is known about how the naming system is applied to woven objects. Of immediate concern is how a *juluk* applies to the everyday life of a weaver.

*Juluk* are given not only to weaving designs, but also to persons, fighting cocks, hunting dogs, and treasured heirlooms (*pesaka*), that is, to things which are believed to possess spiritual power, including also ritual cloth, amulets, jars, and skulls.<sup>19</sup> In regard

<sup>18</sup> Translated by the author.

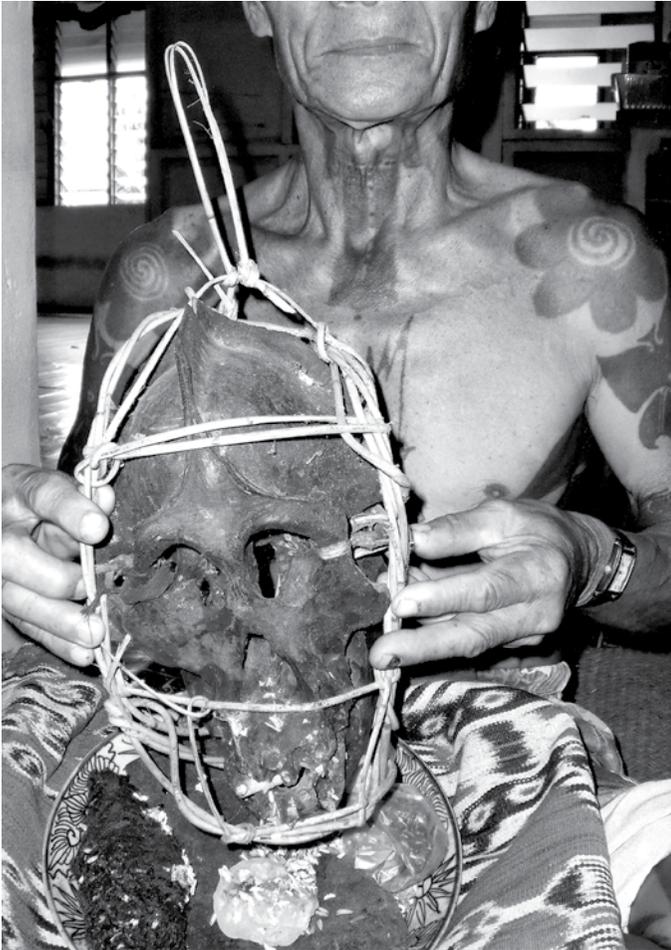
<sup>19</sup> Joseph Inggai in personal communication.



**Plate 2:** Design copied from the original (plate 1) and assigned exactly the same *juluk* by the weaver. Photo by the author in the Baleh in 2008.

to *juluk* for persons, as mentioned already, *indu'paku indu'tebu* – ‘ordinary woman who gathers edible wild plants,’ or *indu'nakar indu'ngar* – ‘master dyer,’ etc., for weavers, all of these can be described as *juluk*. Peter Kedit, who is from Betong, notes that men who do not go outside to work are commonly referred to as *baka mayau di telok dapur* – ‘like a cat beside the hearth’ (Kedit 1993:51). This is a *juluk* that, as far as I am aware, is not known in Kapit. But when I spent a day in my room (*bilik*), I was ridiculed and told of a *juluk*, or nickname, which a middle-aged woman in the longhouse had made up for me, “like a slaughtered chicken waiting to be cooked by the cooking hearth.” Thus, the Iban had great fun at my expense.

Like weaving *juluk*, the *juluk* for a person is transmitted orally, especially in *pantun* songs during festivals (*gawai*). As an honorific title, *juluk* may be passed down over generations. Well-known *juluk*, for example, for war leaders-*tau'serang*—one who ‘knows attacking,’ or *raja berani*—‘rich and brave,’ or, for farming, *tau'padi*—one who ‘knows rice’; these are still widely used (though with different implications for contemporary times). In earlier studies these were considered ‘praise names,’ or honorific titles (e.g.



**Plate 3:** Skull of a *gerasi* (*antu pala gerasi*). Said to be a skull severed eight generations ago, now treated as a *penchelap rumah*. Photographed by the author in Lubok Antu in 2008.

Heppell, et.al. 2005; Heppell 2006:186). However, for the Baleh Iban they are described as *juluk*.

What separates textile *juluk* from other *juluk* is that they are attached to a specific design and can be passed on to other weavings of the same design; in other words, they can be duplicated. When a *juluk* is transmitted widely, a design is regarded as powerful, while when

it is not, the acceptance of the power of a design might be restricted to a limited area, or the *juluk* itself might be only a temporary nickname, as happened to me.

*Juluk*, however, do not always accompany the design to which they were initially applied. Gavin has noted that they are sometimes deliberately changed. Another reason for *juluk* being changed is that people do not remember what the *juluk* for a particular cloth was. For example, in Baleh, I was shown an old cloth and the owner explained it used to have three different *juluk*, but she could remember only one. A second old cloth I was shown was owned by a weaver who could not remember the *juluk* and asked a neighbor to tell me what it was.<sup>20</sup>

Plate 3 illustrates another example of this possible forgetfulness. A man holds a large skull which is said to be that of an *antu gerasi*, or forest ogre. In 2008 I heard a

<sup>20</sup> Vernon Kedit noted that one of the difficulties in studying Iban weaving is that the activity was shrouded in secrecy. As a weaver develops in skill and spiritual strength she attracts attention and sometimes jealousy. Consequently, Iban weavers were reluctant to reveal powerful names (Kedit 2009). This may be what I experienced in this case; it is a puzzle.

rumor about the existence of this skull, called *antu pala amat* (lit. spirit-head-true), in Lubok Antu town, and indeed, I found it in a longhouse nearby where I photographed it. The owner in the picture, who is also the longhouse headman, explained the skull had been passed down over eighth generations and was very powerful. Long ago a woman in the village had been raped by the *gerasi* and her husband killed it. The skull had become a *penchelap rumah*, the amulet preserving the community from spiritual heat. This type of amulet is normally owned by the leaders (*pun*) of a longhouse, and, indeed, in this case, it is owned by the longhouse headman. Further, the owner told me that at one time when an upriver longhouse was suffering from a drought, the man who then owned the skull was asked to use it in a rain-making ritual. Afterwards, the whole area was flooded. This showed, he insisted, how strong the skull's power is. Further, he said, many people have come from as far away as England asking to buy the skull. He declined their offers. What is significant here is that the owner told me that the skull had a *juluk* but that no one any longer remembers it. This I would attribute, most likely, to the secrecy that surrounds the use of *juluk*.<sup>21</sup>

## 5. Conclusion

Here I have discussed the term *juluk*, in the context of the Iban naming system applied to weaving. Some have claimed that *juluk* for weaving designs have been forgotten by the present generation. Ong, for example, has argued that *juluk* are neglected among present-day weavers. In contrast, I have presented evidence that today, in reality, even young weavers are familiar with and use *juluk*. However, I find little, if any, value in Gavin's distinction between "title" and "label." Weavers use *juluk* and either *nama* for a design name or *buah* for a motif.

From an analysis of my sample of *juluk* it is quite clear that they are related to Iban religious beliefs, especially those surrounding the taking of heads.<sup>22</sup> As modernization has proceeded since the 1950s, headhunting has come to be regarded by some as a primitive custom of the past. As Gavin explains, weaving is viewed by the Iban as being closely related to headhunting, and it can only be understood in a headhunting context (Gavin 1996:13).<sup>23</sup> Not only the introduction of modern education, but also Christianity appears to have restricted people's willingness to talk freely about weaving and its relationship with traditional religion.

From all these circumstances, the linguistic information embedded in *juluk* seems to be just unwanted (but not really neglected) by weavers when they present their woven cloths to the outside world. Consequently, it can be understood why dealers today feel that they have to invent information so that they can sell cloths to buyers. However,

21 In the Lubok Antu area, the Iban use the term *juluk*, but not *pejuluk*, when referring to *pua*. In addition to a reluctance to utter the name of a strong *juluk*, this experience also suggests, as I indicate, the secrecy of *juluk*. Heppell, in a personal communication, strongly doubted that Batang Ai Iban would forget the *juluk* of such a powerful spirit.

22 Freeman roughly calculated there was a total of about 1,260 skulls stored as family heirlooms in the Baleh region of Kapit in the 1950s (Freeman 1981).

23 When Gavin conducted fieldwork in Baleh during the 1980s, most of the people had received at least an elementary school education, and therefore weavers were unwilling to talk to strangers about weaving in the context of the past (Gavin 1996:13).

the situation may be changing. There are nowadays many Iban longhouses where ritual heirlooms such as skulls are publicly hung from the rafters, not necessarily for ritual reasons but to encourage tourists to visit their longhouse. Thus one can expect that Iban may come to feel more at ease with that part of their linguistic culture that is embedded in their *juluk*.

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