

## **READING SYMBOLS AND MYTHICAL LANDSCAPE IN THE "TAMBUNAN DUSUN ORIGIN MYTH" OF NORTH BORNEO\***

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### **INTRODUCTION**

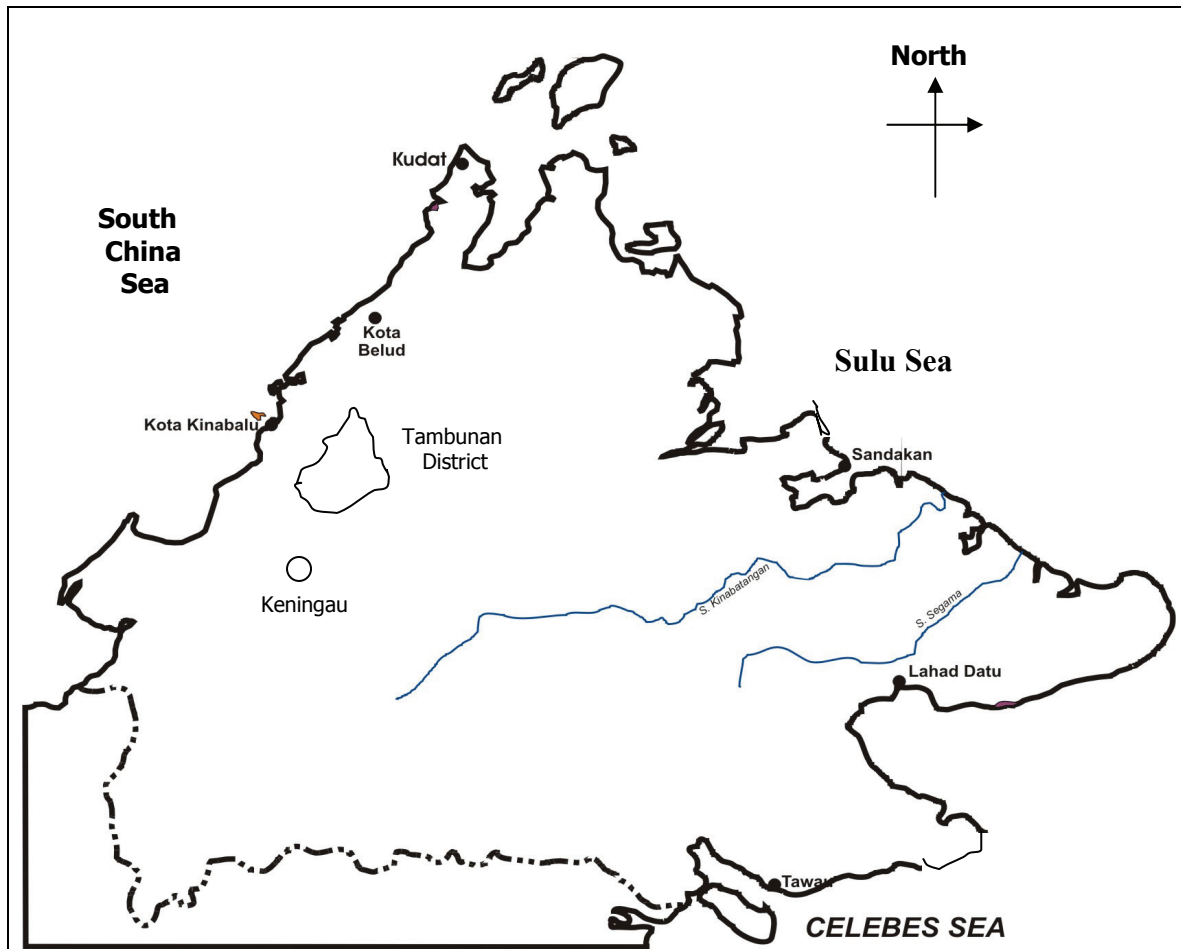
Tambunan is a district in the interior of Sabah, East Malaysia in Northern Borneo (Map 1). The majority of the indigenous peoples residing here are known as Tambunan Dusuns. Tambunan Dusuns belong to a Dusunic family. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the social structure of the Tambunan Dusuns was based on seven sub-tribes, namely Tuwawon, Tagahas, Tibabar, Bundu, Gunnah, Palupuh and Kohub. Three out of the seven sub-tribes, i.e. Tuwawon, Tagahas and Tibabar are still residing in Tambunan district to date. According to Williams (1965: 67):

Prior to 1880s, the Tambunan valley was occupied, and appears to have served as a boundary zone and cockpit of head warfare for several local groups. After 1885, native police patrols under European officers of the North Borneo Chartered Company established a tenuous form of order sufficient to allow initial settlement on the northern fringe of the plain, settlement of the valley floor along the eastward course of the Sunsuron River proceeds rapidly in the year 1900–1925. However, continued fears of head taking slowed settlement of the central and south portions of the Tambunan plain. Those areas, along the southward course of the Pegalan River, were not cleared of primary jungle until the mid 1930s'.

For many years in the past, Tuwawon and Tagahas Dusuns had carried on a guerilla war between themselves. Such guerilla warfare between these two main tribal groups assumed greater urgency to the

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**Map 1.** District of Tambunan and other major towns in Sabah.

Governor of the North Borneo Chartered Company when Mat Salleh, the well-known rebel in North Borneo allied himself with the Tagahas Dusuns to fight against the Tuwawon Dusuns in the 1890s. The seriousness of the guerilla warfare between Tuwawon and Tagahas Dusuns during the past can be revealed by one of the incidents as stated by Wookey (1956/57: 434):

He (Mat Salleh) had, together with the Tegas (Tagahas), attacked the Sunsuron people while the latter were at work in their paddy fields. To settle this affair, Fraser arranged for a meeting between Mat Salleh and his friends the Tegas, together with the opposing faction, the Tiawans (Tuwawon). Fraser was aware that the Tiawans were feeling particularly upset at losing some 80 head of cattle, as well as the lost of some 30 of their people.

Like other Dusunic-speaking peoples, the majority of the Tambunan Dusuns are farmers and most of them are engaged in planting paddy, vegetables,

fruit trees and rearing cattle, poultry, pigs, etc. The Tambunan town is surrounded by terraced paddy fields and seventy picturesque villages. The 1990 census shows that Tambunan has a population of 19,666 people. The population is homogeneous, rich in cultural traditions, and experienced in transitional subsistence farming (<http://www.ids.org.my/publications/ResearchPaper/>). To date, the Tuwawon occupies three of the existing villages in Tambunan district, i.e. Kampung Sunsuron (see Appendix 2), Kampung Megong and Kampung Nodu. The Tagahas occupies Kampung Tobou and Kampung Kintuntul, and the Tibabar are residents in Kampung Tibabar.

This paper concerns reading symbols that had appeared in the "Tambunan Dusun Origin Myth" published in the *Journal of Malaysia Branch Royal Asiatic Society (JMBRAS)* by Williams (1960). As Campbell (1988: 5) said, "We should read myths. They teach us that we can turn inward, and we will begin to get the message of the symbols. Read other people's myths, not those of your own religion, because you tend to interpret your own religion in terms of facts—but if you read the other one, you begin to get the message." In other words, myth is a manifestation of symbolic images. The symbolic field is based on the experiences of people in a particular community, at that particular time and place. Myths are so intimately bound to the culture, time and place that unless the symbols, the metaphors, are kept alive by constant recreation through the arts, life just slips away from them (Campbell, 1988: 72). According to Turner (1968, a: 1–2), a symbol is the smallest unit of ritual which still retains the specific properties of ritual behavior; it is a "storage unit" filled with a vast amount of information. Symbols can be objects, activities, words, relationships, events, gestures, or spatial units (Turner, 1967: 19). For example, the passive attitude of the male initiations may be symbolized by the wearing of female apparel (Turner, 1968: 576).

Middleton (1967: x) states that a myth is a statement about society and man's place in it, and in the surrounding universe. Such a statement is, in general, a symbolic one. As man's earliest belief systems were mostly told in the form of myths via oral tradition from one generation to another, thus in this paper, the writer is interested in finding out the meanings of symbols that could be read in the "Tambunan Dusun Origin Myth" collected by Williams (1960).

## THOMAS RHY WILLIAM'S FIELD WORK

The "Tambunan Dusun Origin Myth" discovery had been gathered by Williams (1960) through this manner: 25 informants selected by age, sex, and community status were questioned in a series of interviews varying from two to four hours per person. The first series of interviews completed a total of fifteen hours of time for each informant. These interviews were conducted in the Malay and Dusun dialects through the help of two English-speaking Tambunan Dusun interpreters.

The second series of interviews were a total of three to five hours in duration, and were directed to the elicitation of answers to questions concerning details of various myths or inquiries as to inconsistent data derived in the first interviews. At the completion of the second series of interviews, six of the 25 informants were selected on the basis of William's deduction of their intelligence, family history, experiences, frequency of contacts with non-native cultural tradition, and willingness to continue talking on a series of subjects seemingly adequately covered in previous interviews.

In the third series of interviews, a full record was made of all comments by the informants in a set of two three-hour meetings. This record was thereafter transcribed into the Dusun dialects. The transcripts were later translated by the interpreter into English. The report presented by Williams was considered to be the most concise final product recorded in full cycle translation interviews.

## READING THE SYMBOLS

The "Tambunan Dusun Origin Myth" started with the creation of the world, the primordial human, also known as the "Universal Man" according to Cirlot (1971: 198), a lizard and a snake by the Spiritual Being known as Kinoingan. Like most of the creation myths<sup>1</sup>, the "myth" contained the archetype of "the spirit" as one of the archetypes identified by Jung<sup>2</sup> (1992). In short, Kinoingan is the Creator who created current reality that is the way of life and the environment like "The Dreamtime" for the Australian

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<sup>1</sup> Creation myths are those that deal with the creation of the universe from chaos, from water or from nothing; from the emergence of the lower worlds, by some cosmic beings, by supernatural animals (Creation, *ENCARTA 99*).

<sup>2</sup> In *Four Archetypes*, Jung (1992) identifies and discusses four main archetypes: the mother archetype, the trickster archetype, the archetype of the spirit, and the archetypal pattern of rebirth.

Aboriginal people<sup>3</sup>. Right from the beginning, the mythmakers of the Tambunan Dusuns said, "The creation of the earth and man was at once, for God works at once. Man and animals were created by God from the clay of the earth..." Thus this myth defines the first batch of human beings and animals – a life form that was made from earth-material (clay, dust, soil and so forth) by God.

The motif of the primordial human being created by God using earth-material also appeared in *Genesis* and other myths that were well spread all over the world. In *Genesis*, Adam is the designation and name of the first human creature in the creation narratives found in the *Old Testament*. The word *adam* may refer to the fact that this being was an "earthling" formed from the red-hued clay of the earth. In Hebrew, *adom* means "red" and *adamah* means "earth" (Fishbane, 1995: 27). Besides, the Shilluk Tribe in Africa has this creation myth:

The creator Juok moulded all people of earth. While he was engaged in the work of creation, he wandered about the world. In the land of the Whites, he found a pure white earth, and out of it, he shaped White people. Then he came to the land of Egypt, and out of the mud of Nile, he made red or brown people. Lastly, he came to the land of Shilluks, and finding there black earth, he created black people out of it (<http://www.dreamscape.com/morgana/ophelia.htm>).

If one refers to the other versions of the Dusunic-speaking peoples creation myths, one should be able to notice that the belief among the Dusunic-speaking peoples regarding to the primordial human being created by spiritual beings using earth-material is in fact very significant and dominant. Leong (1968) has this myth that belonged to the Dusunic-speaking peoples in Keningau (Map 1): "First of all Kinoringan and Yumun made a man and a woman out of stones. But they could neither walk nor talk. So they burnt them, and the fire and ashes are now deserts. Then they made a man and a woman out of wood. These could talk, but could not walk, and so they were destroyed. Then they made them out of ants' nest (earth-material), and these could both walk and talk. So the human race was started". This myth implied that during the trial and error process of creating the primordial human being by the creators, they found out that earth-

<sup>3</sup> For the Australian Aboriginal people, "The Dreaming" conceptualizes the time of creation in which the universe, initially a watery expanse or a featureless plain, came alive with Spirit Beings. Through their activities, the Spirit Beings created current reality (Colin Bourke *et. al.*, 1998: 80).

material was the best among the rest. As such, the Dusunic-speaking peoples also believed that because the human being was originated from the earth, so when they die, they have to return back to the earth too. Williams (1965) has this collection of Dusun's myth from North Borneo: "The creators had intercourse, and made men of clay. They were like the men now, for some were strong, others weak, some well, some always ill. When these people died, they went back to earth, like we do now."

This study also sees that the "Universal Man" created by Kinoingan had weaknesses as revealed here:

- i. They (human, snake and lizard) were called before God and asked: Which of you would like to change your skin when you grow old? The snake and lizard quickly said "I". So God gave them the right to shed their skin when they are old. Man could not speak during that time because his mouth was full of porridge (paddy flour). Thus man is the unlucky one now and must die, rather than live forever like the snake and lizard.
- ii. Man began to live on earth. After some time, they forgot everything except enjoyment, and said things that were forbidden by God and hurt the feelings of others, offending them greatly.

We can deduce from quotation (i) that the first "Universal Man" created by God was greedy as his mouth was full of porridge when he was called before God to answer a question. This portion of the "Tambunan Dusun Origin Myth" gave explanation as to why man must die. In order to answer the question as to why a snake will not die, one has to refer to the symbolism of the snake. The snake or serpent is one of the most common creatures to feature in mythology. The Bassari tribe of West Africa, for example, has this myth: "Unumbotte created a human being. Its name was Man. Next, he made an antelope, named Antelope. Finally Unumbotte created a snake, named Snake..." (Campbell, 1991: 51). And in the *Genesis*: "Then the Lord God said to the woman, 'What is this that you have done?' The woman said, 'The serpent beguiled me, and I ate (the prohibited fruit).'" Campbell (1991: 52–54) went on to explain that in some mythologies, the snake is the symbol of life, a throwing off the past in continuing to live. The power of life causes the snake to shed its skin, just as the moon sheds its shadow. The serpent sheds its skin to be born again, as the moon sheds its shadow to be born again. Sometimes the serpent is represented as a circle eating its own tail. That is an image of life.

In some cultures, the snake is given a positive interpretation. In India, the king cobra is a sacred animal, and the mythological Serpent King is the next thing to Buddha (Campbell, 1991: 53). As stated in "Snake: The Path of Change" ([http://www.owlsdottir.com/totems/snake\\_totem.htm](http://www.owlsdottir.com/totems/snake_totem.htm)), before the snake begins to shed its skin, its eyes will begin to cloud over. It gives the snake a trance-like appearance. To many mystics and shamans this indicates the ability of the snake to move between the realms of the living and the dead, of crossing over from life to death and then back to life again. As the skin begins to shed, the eyes begin to clear as if they will see the world anew. For this reason, alchemists often believed that wisdom and new knowledge would lead to death and rebirth, enabling the individual to see the world from an entirely new perspective. In this notion of the "Tambunan Dusun Origin Myth", God gave the snake the right to shed its skin hence symbolizing a throwing off its past in continuing to live. The serpent represents the power of life engaged in the field of time, and of death, yet eternally alive. The world is but its shadow – the falling skin (Campbell, 1991: 53).

Besides the Tambunan Dusuns, the Tempasuk Dusuns also owned a similar portion of myth that provides explanation and symbolism as to why the snake will not die:

Kinharingan (Kinoingan) once pounded rice and made flour from it. When he had made the flour, he called all the animals in the world, and ordered them to eat it. When they had all got their mouths full, and could not speak. Kinharingan asked them, "Who can cast off his skin?" Now the snake had only been putting his mouth into the flour, and pretending to eat, he said, "I can." "Very well," said Kinharingan, "if that is so, you shall not die." So, until the present day, the snake does not die unless killed by man (Evans, 1923: 49).

Like the snake, the lizard has symbolic meaning for many diverse cultures and civilizations too. In Egyptian and Greek symbolism, the lizard represents divine wisdom and good fortune. In Roman mythology, it was supposed to sleep through the winter, and so symbolized death and resurrection (Cooper). The lizard is also to be found engraved on many of the old Roman rings and was used as charm against weak eyesight. The brilliant green of its body, like an emerald, causes it to be held in high esteem, both spiritually and physically, and, hence it was placed upon the breast of Minerva (Thomas and Pavitt). Morgan in "The Lizard as a Symbol" states that:

In Christian ideology the lizard is a more ambivalent symbol. All reptiles can be viewed as paler versions of the potent symbol represented by the snake or serpent. Taken alone on its own merits the lizard is said to represent "contemplative ecstasy". This is thought to arise from the fondness of these creatures for basking motionless in the sun for hours on end. St. Gregory "the Great" observed that the lizard might symbolize "the soul that humbly seeks enlightenment" ([www.hennapage.com/journal/issue\\_I/article\\_2/page2](http://www.hennapage.com/journal/issue_I/article_2/page2)).

In short, the lizard's practice of shedding its skin makes it an almost universal symbol for renewal and regeneration. Hence in this notion of the "Tambunan Dusun Origin Myth", the lizard is like the snake, it symbolizes regeneration and the renewal of life too.

From quotation ii, we can deduce that generally the human race is greedy, ungrateful, enjoys life and likes to offend others. This offended God and He sent a great flood to punish mankind except a good man named Muhgumbul. This notion of the "Tambunan Dusun Origin Myth" contained motifs, i.e., humans were guilty of transgressions, God sent a flood as punishment, instructions were sent to an individual to build a craft, the instructions included ensuring the survival of all species, and finally the flood destroyed the old race. After the flood, a new, less sinful race emerged to repopulate the earth. In this myth, they were none other than the ancestors of the Tambunan Dusuns. As a comparison, the "Tambunan Dusun Origin Myth" contained similarities to other flood myths. The Bible's creation stories, for example, center themselves in the flood story. It was told that God was once angry, and regretted that he had made humanity. Thus, God sent rain and floods to kill them all except Noah whom he favoured (Thompson, 1999: 93). The Australian Aborigine, Sumerian, Babylonian, Hebrew, Hindu and other races all over the world also described the similar flood myth ([www.dreamscape.com/morgana/titania.htm](http://www.dreamscape.com/morgana/titania.htm)). In other words, the role of Muhgumbul for the Tambunan Dusuns was just like Noah in the Bible's creation stories.

As Christianity was well spread all over Borneo since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, and the majority of the Dusuns in Tambunan to date are Christians, thus it is interesting to compare the tale of Noah's ark and Muhgumbul's boat for the purpose of finding out whether such a flood myth was the result of the missionaries taking the Noachian story to this part of North Borneo as well. Besides the theme and the story line of the flood tale in the "Tambunan Dusun Origin Myth" were similar to the story of Noah's ark,



one can find out that there are many other differences between these two tales. The differences are:

- i. Noah first received divine warning of the impending destruction 120 years before it occurred ([www.newadvent.org](http://www.newadvent.org)) but Muhgumbul received divine warning regarding the same catastrophe through his dream that there would be a great rain lasting for seven months and 70 days.
- ii. According to *Genesis* (7: 19–20), the flood continued for more than one year. During that time, nothing could be seen but the tops of the mountains after the waters had subsided for 74 days. In the "Tambunan Dusun Origin Myth", after seven months and seventy days, the big flood began to subside.
- iii. Seven days before the waters began to cover the earth; Noah was commanded to enter the ark with his wife, his three sons and their wives, and to take with him seven pairs, two pairs, a male and its mate of all clean animals, and unclean animals and birds (*Genesis* 7: 1–4). But in Muhgumbul's dream of the seventh night, he was told by God to take all his food, seven dogs, weapons, tools and his family members (Muhgumbul's wife, six sons and one daughter).
- iv. After the flood, Noah's ark rested upon the mountains of Armenia (*Genesis*, viii: 4) or Ararat as tradition is divided as to the exact place where the Ark rested ([www.newadvent.org](http://www.newadvent.org)). On the other hand, Muhgumbul's boat came to rest under the tree known as *nunuk ragang* (red banyan tree).

The rest of the tale that continue after Muhgumbul's boat came to rest under *nunuk ragang* is entirely different from Noah's ark. After comparing the Noah's ark and the flood myth in the "Tambunan Dusun Origin Myth", the writer could not agree more with the remarks stated below:

Flooding is experienced in every region of the earth where there are rivers. Myths about flooding can therefore arise independently around the world. Over time, story element from one local flood story gets mixed with other flood stories in distant lands. If one story had an unusually memorable story elements, such as boat saving a family from a flood, eventually some other local flood legends would absorb that story element. Similar stories in different parts of the world were the result of travelers and missionaries taking the

Noachian story to different parts of the world. No single worldwide flood is needed to account for these flood stories, many of which are unrelated to Noah's story ([www.flood-myth.com/navbar.htm](http://www.flood-myth.com/navbar.htm): 5).

In addition to the above quotation, Li Wei, a folklorist from Taiwan has traced 51 flood myths in Formosa, South China, Southeast Asia, and Malaysia that it hardly seems plausible to attribute it to Jewish-Christian sources (Kluckhohn, 1965: 62–63).

Another symbol that is of interest in this paper include number and colour. In this myth, the number seven appears frequently in the tale, e.g., Muhgumbul dreamed that there would be a great rain lasting for seven months and 70 days; on the seventh day, Muhgumbul dreamed that he had to cut down the *nunuk ragang*; he must take enough food for seven days; he was told in his dream to take seven bamboo tubes, Muhgumbul has six sons and one daughter (seven children), and other examples of number seven. According to Cirlot (1971: 233), seven symbolizes a perfect order and a complete period or cycle. In addition, seven is a sacred number in many traditions. Number seven gained its greatest importance in the Judaic tradition, whence it extended into Christianity and Islam—from the seven days of creation to the seven pillars of wisdom. In folktales and legends, seven is a round number: to do anything seven times is especially effective (Schimmel, 1995: 16). As in the "Tambunan Dusun Origin Myth", all the events associated with number seven symbolized sacredness (i.e., in Mahgumbul's dream of the seventh night, he was told by God to go with his family into the boat), effectiveness (i.e., Mahgumbul has to hunt the wild boar with his seven dogs), a sort of completion (i.e., on the seventh day, Mahgumbul had finished building his boat).

The dominant archetype colour in this myth is red. Red for the colour of *nunuk ragang*, and red for the blood of porcupine and wild pig appeared in this myth. Turner's (1966, reprinted in Turner [1967: 59–92]; [1977a: 187–189]) comments on the use of red, white, and black symbolic objects in the Ndembu tribe of Northern Rhodesia life-crisis rituals will prove useful for a comparison of Turner's approach with reading colour symbolism in the "Tambunan Dusun Origin Myth". In his study, Turner discovered that in many Ndembu rituals the colours red, white, and black are represented in symbolic objects (red or white clay, and black charcoal). From the informants' reports, Turner learned that the relationship between the three colours refers to the mystery of the three rivers (the rivers of whiteness, redness, and blackness). These rivers represent a power flowing from a common source in the high god Nzambi. Exegetical, operational, and positional meanings of the red and white symbols in Ndembu rituals also

indicated that white symbols are associated with goodness, health, power, visibility, and life; ritual whiteness refers to harmony, continuity, purity, the manifest, and the legitimate. Red symbols are associated with different kinds of blood; redness acts both for good and ill, for good blood (animal blood shed by the hunters) and bad blood (blood of menstruation and murder). Black symbols are associated with evil, disease, and witchcraft; black is often ritually neglected because it does not make things visible and is associated with death and impurity. Red and white are associated with life. White stands for the preservation of life, while red refers to the taking of life or bloodshed for the communal good. This binary structure between red and white is captured within a wider tripartite mode of classification of which black, referring to death, is the third element. The supreme antithetical pair of the triad is the white/black (life/death) contrast (Deflem, 1991).

Hence in the "Tambunan Dusun Origin Myth", the *nunuk ragang* symbolized good things like luck, hope and new life as the Muhgumbul's boat came to rest underneath it. In this case, Mahgumbul's family is the new race which emerged from the great flood. As we can read in this myth, the combination of the red colour and the tree brought hope and new life to Mahgumbul's family. They were the ancestors for the Dusuns in Tambunan till the present days.

In the Ndembu ritual *Nkula*, in which, as a ritual of affliction, a female patient's reproductive or menstrual troubles are dealt with, portions of the mukula tree are used (Turner, 1968: 52–88). This tree exudes a red gum, referred to by the Ndembu as the "blood of mukula". This "blood" as used ritually refers at the same time to the ore tic pole of childbirth, as well as to the normative pole of matrimonial and all female things. As a comparison, the *nunuk ragang* as told in the "Tambunan Dusun Origin Myth" also exudes red latex. This red latex contains medicinal values. To date, the *nunuk ragang's* latex is used to treat rashes and other minor skin diseases among the Dusunic-speaking peoples of Sabah (Topin, 1981). On the other hand, the red gum of the *mukula* tree, for instance, is known for its quality of quick coagulation, which in the *Nkula* ritual, it is hoped, will ensure quick healing of the patient (Turner, 1969: 42–43).

On the other hand, the red colour in the porcupine's and wild pig's blood is a symbol for sacrifices. As it was told in this myth:

- i. On the seventh day, *Muh/gum/bul* dreamed that he was to cut down the *Nuh/nuk/Arah/ah/gong* tree with his *wah/say* (axe). The next day he tried, but he could not cut the wood of the tree. That night he dreamed that he should make a spring trap and place it by the tree. In the morning he built a spring trap and placed it by the tree. The next

day he went to the tree and found a *lee/see/s* (porcupine) still alive in the trap. He took the *lee/see/s* from the trap and cut its stomach, placing a bamboo tube inside to drain the blood. He took the blood and mixed it with the water he used to sharpen his *wah/say*. Then he went to the *Nuh/nuk/Arah/ah/gong* tree and began to cut it as he had been told in his dream.

- ii. That night he dreamed that he was told by the Creator to return to the *nunuk ragang* place. He was told to pour the blood from the *bahkas* (wild pig) in each of the streams he crossed on his way, so the blood would go over the land and make cool<sup>4</sup> the animals and plants that grow on it. Men today make things cool this way, pouring the blood of the *bahkas* into the rivers that water their fields, or from which they drink.
- iii. Muhgumbul returned to the *sulap* (hut) where he had slept on the sixth night of his chase. He carried the blood of the *bahkas* in the seven bamboo tubes. That night he dreamed that he was told by the Creator to return to the *nunuk ragang* place. He was told to pour the blood from the *bahkas* in each of the streams he crossed on his way, so the blood would go over the land and make cool the animals and plants that grow on it. Men today make things cool this way, pouring the blood of the *bahkas* into the river that water their fields, or from which they drink.

Sacrifice can be considered a universal motif in the mythologies of many traditions and great religions. According to Adolf Jensen (as quoted by Henninger, 1995: 552), sacrifice cannot be understood as gift; its original meaning is rather to be derived from certain myths found in the cultures of cultivators, especially in Indonesia and Oceania. This term is identical with the English offering (Latin *offerre*) and the German *Opfer*; the latter is derived, not from *offerre*, but from *operari* (Old High German *opfâron*; Middle High German *opperu*, *opparôn*), and thus means "to do zealously, to serve God, to offer sacrifice" (Kluge, 1899: 288).

By sacrifice in the real sense is universally understood the offering of a sense—perceptible gift to the Deity as an outward manifestation of our veneration for Him and with the object of attaining communion with Him. Strictly speaking however, this offering does not become a sacrifice until a real change has been effected in the visible gift (e.g., by slaying it, shedding

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its blood, burning it, or pouring it out). At this stage, it is interesting for us to know some of the ancient's civilization before the writer touches on the symbols of sacrifices in the "Tambunan Dusun Origin Myth".

First, in the *Vedism* of the ancient Indies was, to an extent never elsewhere attained, a sacrificial religion connected with the deities Agni and Som as in a Vedic proverb: "sacrifice is the navel of the world". Originally regarded as a feast for the gods, before whom food-offerings (cakes, milk, butter, meat, and the *soma* drink) were set on the holy grass before the altar, sacrifice gradually became a magical agency for influencing the gods (*Catholic Encyclopedia*).

Second, among the Greeks, the sacrificial offerings, bloody and unbloody, were generally taken from articles of human food to the gods above; pastry, sacrificial cakes, pap, fruits, and wine were offered, but to the nether gods, cakes of honey and, as a drink, a mixture of milk, honey, and water. The sacrificial consecration often consisted merely in the exposition of the foods in pots on the roadsides or on the funeral mounds with the idea of entertaining the gods or the dead. Usually a portion was retained wherewith to solemnize a sacrificial feast in union with the gods; of the sacrifices to the nether gods in Hades, however, nothing was retained. Great banquets of the gods (*theoxenia*) were well known to the Greeks as were the *Leotisternia* to the Romans (*Catholic Encyclopedia*).

Next, the religion of the Chinese, a peculiar mixture of nature and ancestor-worship, is indissolubly connected with the constitution of the state. The oldest Sinism was a perfect Monotheism. However, we are best acquainted with the Chinese sacrificial system in the form which was given it by the great reformer, Confucius (6 B.C.), and which has retained practically unaltered after more than two thousand years. As the "Son of Heaven" and the head of the State religion, the Emperor of China is also the high-priest who alone may offer sacrifices to heaven. The chief sacrifice takes place annually during the night of the winter solstice on the "altar of heaven" in the southern section of Peking. On the highest terrace of this altar stands a wooden table as the symbol of the soul of the god of heaven; there are in addition many other "soul tables" (of the sun, moon, stars, clouds, wind, etc.), including those of the ten immediate predecessors of the emperor. Before every table are set sacrificial offerings of soup, meat, vegetables, etc. To the ancestors of the emperor, as well as to the sun and moon, a slaughtered ox is offered; to the planets and the stars a calf, a sheep, and a pig. Meanwhile, on a pyre to the south-east of the altar, an ox lies ready to be burned to the highest god of heaven as a sacrifice. While the ox is being consumed, the emperor offers to the soul-table of heaven and the

tables of his predecessors a staff of incense, silk, and some meat broth (*Catholic Encyclopedia*).

In this notion of the "Tambunan Dusun Origin Myth", the objects of sacrifice were animals (porcupine and wild pig). Animal sacrifice is practiced by many religion as a means of appeasing a god or gods or changing the course of nature. Animal sacrifice has turned up in almost all cultures. According to Cirlot (1971: 29), in spilt blood, we have the perfect symbol of sacrifice. Among the Dusunic-speaking peoples, the imbalance between the physical and spirit worlds is portrayed in the concept of *ahasu* (hot) and *osogit* (cold) in nature. A "hot" state refers to a situation where tragedy, sufferings, death or bad luck prevails (Tongkul, 2002: 9). As told in this myth that in order to restore balance between a hot and a cold state, Muhgumbul poured the blood from the wild pig into each of the streams he crossed while on his way back. The informant of this myth added that men today make things cool this way, pouring the blood of the wild pig into the rivers that water their fields, or from which they drink (Williams, 1960: 101). Such an act related to what had been said by Henninger (1995: 546). "The ritual slaying of humans and animals, and other blood rites are ceremonial repetitions of that killing in primordial time; they affirm and guarantee the present world order. Here blood plays a significant role as a power-laden substance that brings fertility. It is sprinkled on the field in order to promote crop yield".

Blood sacrifices consist primarily of domesticated animals, among cultivators, sheep, goats, cattle and pigs; among nomads, reindeer, horses, and camel used. In the case of the Tambunan Dusuns, wild pig and porcupine were used. Once again as stated by Jensen (1995: 552) and Henninger (1995: 546), blood sacrifice is generally not found in hunting cultures but among the cultivators. Hence, we could say that when the "Tambunan Dusun Origin Myth" was created, majority of the Tambunan Dusuns were cultivators too.

One can also read in this myth that the *nunuk ragang* can be considered the "Tree of Life" for the Tambunan Dusuns. As the largest plant on earth, the tree has been a major source of stimulation to the mythic imagination. The identification of sacred trees as symbols of life and renewal is widespread. In China, the Tree of Life, the Kien-Luen, grows on the slope of Kuen-Luen, while the Moslem Lote tree marks the boundary between the human and the divine. From the four boughs of the Buddhist Tree of Wisdom flows the river of life. The great ash tree Yggdrasil of Nordic myth connects with its roots and boughs the underworld and heaven ([www.arthistory.sbc.edu/sacredplaces/tree.html](http://www.arthistory.sbc.edu/sacredplaces/tree.html): 6). Besides, it had been told in this myth that from *nunuk ragang's* ashes there began to grow shoots

of the foods called rice, yam, tapioca, and tobacco for Muhgumbul's family to eat. On the whole, *nunuk ragang* is but a "Tree of Life" for the Dusunic-speaking peoples in Tambunan.

The origin of food plants like rice, yam, tapioca, and tobacco from *nunuk ragang*'s ashes is against the popular belief of the Dusunic-speaking peoples that those plants were originated from the blood and the body parts of Huminodun, the only daughter of Kinoingan (Chief Gods of the Dusunic-speaking peoples). Topin (1981) has this to say:

Kinoingan in his preparation for his creation of the Kadazandusun sacrificed his only daughter, Huminodun, cut her body into pieces and planted them like they were seeds. Rice then grew out of Huminodun's flesh. Other parts of her body turned into other varieties of foods for the people.

According to Campbell (1991: 61), the art of tilling the soil goes forth from the area it which it was first developed, and along with it goes a mythology that has to do with fertilizing the earth, with planting and bringing up the food plants – some such myth as that just described, of killing a deity, cutting it up, burying its members, and having the food plant grow. Such a myth will accompany an agricultural or planting tradition. True enough, generally, the Dusunic-speaking peoples till the present day are agriculturists, and planting paddy is the more common occupation among them (Gidah, 2001: 4).

Dream is another archetypal motif found in this myth. According to Campbell (1988: 48), a dream is a personal experience of that deep, dark ground that is the support of our conscious lives, and a myth is the society's dream. Throughout the "Tambunan Dusun Origin Myth", God communicated with Muhgumbul and guided him through various dreams. For Jung, the archetype is transcendental symbolic forms found universally in the psychic life of man embodied in a collective unconsciousness. In dreams, myths, ritual, magic and art, these forms reveal themselves and repeat from time to time (Righter, 1975: 17–18). Thus, God sent a dream to Muhgumbul to inform him about the great flood, to teach him how to cut down the red banyan tree, to perform the ritual of sacrifice using porcupine's blood and many more to ensure the maintenance of the cosmos and society. To Jung (1977: 247), myths go back to primitive story-tellers and their dreams as men moved by stirrings of their fantasies. And primitive story-tellers were never worried about the origin of their fantasies. To date, dreams still play a very significant role for the Dusunic-speaking peoples farmers to choose the suitable site for planting. Tongkul (2002: 52) stated

that after a farmer has marked a proposed planting site with a stick, they will be on the alert for any unusual dreams. Bad dreams signify that the site is unsuitable, and a new one is sought. Thus Muhgumbul's dreams are the dreams of the Tambunan Dusuns believed to be true and inbred by the community.

## MYTHICAL LANDSCAPE

The impact of the environment on story telling is that the people on the plains, the hunters, the people in the forest and the planters are participating in their landscape. They are part of their world, and every feature of their world becomes sacred to them (Campbell, 1988: 113). As revealed earlier in the "Tambunan Dusun Origin Myth", the world is shaped by the Creator using a small clay pot and a rounded stone. Thus, everything in this world like the landscape, man and animal was once created and shaped by the Creator using his great rounded stone. With the presence of the Supernatural Being creating the spiritual landscape in the "dreamtime" of the Tambunan Dusuns, this land is then marked with sacred sites and natural objects.

To date, *nunuk ragang* is considered to be the sacred place of origin for the ancestor of Dusunic-speaking peoples in Sabah (Topin, 1981: 19–20). According to Widu, a Dusunic-speaking old folk in Tambunan, the *nunuk ragang* is so huge that its canopy was estimated to be able to shelter under it seven joined Tambunan Dusuns' hut, measured 12 by 20 feet. Its numerous branches and giant thick foliage provided ideal shelters and playgrounds for wild life, birds, insects and even spirits according to local beliefs. During the hot day, the *nunuk ragang* settlers would climb up the branches of the tree to bask in the sun, and then enjoy plunging into the great cool river pool below (Topin, 1981: 19). What a carefree life in the mythical landscape of the Tambunan Dusun's ancestors in *nunuk ragang*! Besides, the Dusunic-speaking peoples believed that underneath the *nunuk ragang* is the place where Kinoingan planted his sacred jars with spirits in it. Thus an offering has to be made to the sacred tree by the Dusunic-speaking peoples (Abdul Jaffear Henry, 1981: 7&16).

When the mythmakers of the "Tambunan Dusun Origin Myth" said that *nunuk ragang* was the sacred location when Muhgumbul's boat landed after the big flood, and for no other trees in this world was so tall and huge that would survive in the big flood that lasted for seventy days—they were actually claiming the land by creating sacred sites by mythologizing the *nunuk ragang*. In Christianity, when Moses looked out on the Promised Land, he was simply doing what other spiritual leaders had done for their



own people. He was claiming that land. Another classic example can be found in Jacob's dream. When Jacob awoke, the place became Bethel—the house of God. In other words, Jacob has claimed that place with a certain spiritual significance (Campbell, 1988: 116).

The natural objects especially trees and landscapes are very significant to the original names for the early Tambunan Dusun's tribe as revealed in the later part of the "Tambunan Dusun Origin Myth". Here the story goes to say that Muhgumbul and his family decided to run away from Saroh's place for fear of his revenge. After leaving *nunuk ragang*, the family broke up and went on their separate ways and made a hut. The first person made his hut from the leaves of Tuwon tree, thus his descendants are known as Tuwawon. A second hut was built under the Tagahas tree. The offspring are called Tagahas. A third hut was built by a person in the intersection of two tracks. The descendants of this person are called Tibabar, i.e., people who built in a cross-wise way. A fourth hut was built under the Bundu tree. The heirs from this person are called Bundu. A fifth hut was made on a great plain on a level ground. The offspring of this person are today called Gunnah (plain) people. A sixth hut was made in the shade of the Palupuh tree. His descendants are now called Palupuh. The seventh person did not build a hut. He made a thick cooking pot to cook his food. The offspring of this person are today called the Kohub. Later, some of the Kohub people went another way, and made a hut from Nuhreoh (dead wood) tree. The offspring of these people are known as Kureo. Once again, the natural object (trees), landscape (the plain and cross-wise way) and house hold utensil (cooking pot) had been mythologized by the Tambunan Dusun mythmakers associated to the origin of seven other Tambunan Dusun sub-tribes.

According to Campbell (1988: 117), early settlers sanctified their landscapes. One could find the symbol in the landscape itself of the energies of the life there. For example, the early settlers of Iceland in the eighth and ninth centuries established their different settlements in a relationship of 432,000 Roman feet to each other (432,000 is an important mythological figure known to many traditions). Thus the whole organization of Icelandic landscape was in term of such cosmic relationships. In Egypt, because it is long, so they had sky goddess as a Sacred Cow, two feet in the south and two feet in the north—a rectangular idea. This is the same kind of mythology that we find among the Tambunan Dusuns, but for the Tambunan Dusuns, the mythical landscape took a different shape because Tambunan District is neither circular nor rectangular. It was surrounded by big forest, so they had *nunuk ragang* as their sacred "Tree of Life".

## CONCLUSION

The above discussion has highlighted several archetypal images and symbols which stand out in the "Tambunan Dusun Origin Myth". In sum, the above analysis points to several interesting symbolic concepts and creativity such as the mythical landscape as the Creator's craft, the weaknesses of human being, the dominance of number seven and the colour red, *nunuk ragang* as "Tree of Life" and the dream motifs which were revealed through the "Tambunan Dusun Origin Myth". This myth also revealed that there was a close relationship between people and natural objects and landscape.

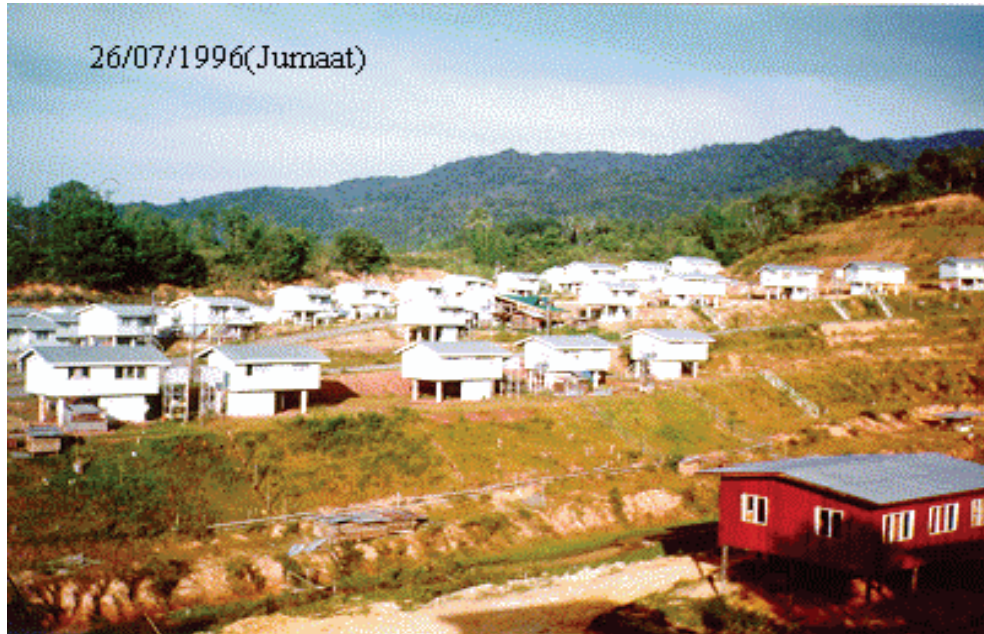
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**APPENDIX 1**



**Plate 1.** Sunsuron Village, Tambunan

*Source:* [www.geocities.com/Heartland/Village/1344/Sunsuron.html](http://www.geocities.com/Heartland/Village/1344/Sunsuron.html)



**Plate 2.** A typical banyan tree (*nununuk ragang*) commonly found in Sabah





**Plate 3.** A mythical *nunuk ragang* – Tambunan Dusun's "Tree of Life"