

# Meaning of “Pakan” Symbols in the Ritual of Penan Community in Ulu Jelalong Tubau, Bintulu Sarawak

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## Abstract

Beliefs are basically intended as a behavioural guideline for the entire community of those who understand and believe in any particular belief. The Penans, especially those reside at the Ulu Jelalong Tubau, Bintulu area have an important belief in bringing their community together. Thus, this research is conducted to study “The *Pakan* Symbol in the ritual of the Penan Community of Ulu Jelalong, Bintulu, Sarawak”. Its main focus is to study the roles of symbols available during the *Pakan* ceremony, which are also applied in every ritual related to the culture of the Penan people at Ulu Jelalong Tubau, Bintulu area. This *Pakan* culture has indirectly introduced the identity of the Penan people themselves where the superiority of the people derives from its cultural values as it reflects their uniqueness and privilege. Three main objective of this research is, *study the feed ritual processes in the Penan Saoh community in Kampung Julaihi Keti, Ulu Jelalong, Bintulu Sarawak*. Second, *identify the types of symbols in the ritual feed in the culture of the community Penan Saoh* and third is *analyzing the meaning of symbols in the feed ritual in the culture of the Penan Saoh people*. As a result, efforts were made to focus on the *Pakan* culture which became a symbol of the Penan community rituals at Ulu Jelalong area. *Pakan* is a spirit feeding ceremony. All spirits’ wishes and intentions are directed to a god called Ratalak. During the ritual, the Penan people will recite their prayers for protection, prosperity and for its community to remain united. The findings of this study are derived from observations and interviews of the conduct of this ceremony. This ceremony was found to be in a form of animism and is adapted to the contemporary Christian elements. The person conducting the *Pakan* ceremony for the Penan animism group is called “*Vaie Puwet*” or *Vaie Jau*. Meanwhile, the person performing the ceremony amongst the Christian Penans are the religious leaders consisting of pastors, priests

and prayer leaders. Although this ceremony is animistic, it is still accepted by the community in the Christian way of worship that they currently adhere to.

**Keyword:** Simbol, Upacara Pakan, Masyarakat Penan, Animisme, Baleik Atau Retalak.

### Introduction

According to Needham (1972:62-68), the earliest Penan community within the Bintulu district is at the area of Ulu Jelalong River. They are believed to have lived since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, followed by the Niah, Suai and Miri districts. Langub (1990:3) on the other hand stated that the Penan community residing at the Baram, Belaga and Limbang districts are believed to have lived since 30 years ago. They live in longhouses and villages especially in Bintulu and Suai-Niah, areas where agricultural activities shifted as a major source of replacing sago as their main, staple food. The Penan population growth has increased from 1990 to 2012. According to the Deputy Director of the State Planning Unit at the Chief Minister's Department, Mr. Awie Abang, the Penan population in Sarawak has increased from 13,186 in 1990 to 17,851 in 2012.

In general, the *Pakan* culture practised by the Penan community at Ulu Jelalong is almost similar to that of other communities in Sarawak. For example, the Iban people would hold a "miring" ceremony in their religious ritual and as for the Melanau Likow community, they would hold a "serahang" ceremony. This is not unusual because these ethnic groups as well as the Penans have also adopted Christianity as their religion. For the Penan community at Ulu Jelalong, *Pakan* is held in various rituals, such as the Feast of the Penan people known as the *Pinum* Festival and apart from that, it is also held during the seventh day of death. Furthermore, *Pakan* is also held for religious ceremony for the purpose of an opening of a new residential area or a new site. For example, building houses or farming sites.

In general, the Penan community is described as an ethnic group known for living as nomads once upon a time. The current living progress has transformed their lives from nomads to permanent residents. Even so, one thing that has not changed in the Penan community is that they value the forest as a complement to their daily activities. Like other communities, the Penans have experienced changes in terms of their practices, especially religious practices. Formally, the Penans still believed in the practice of the *Pagan* customs but at the present time, majority of them have embraced Christianity and Islam as their religion. However, some Penan communities are still practising the *Pagan* customs by worshipping and believing in the power of nature, the sound of birds and so on. Brosius (1990) in his article titled "*River, Forest and Mountain: The Penan gang Landscape*" explained the role of the nature in life of the Penan community especially in relation to their relationship with nature and the development around them in terms of conservation of resources in the forest. The Penan people have close ties to nature, especially the shape of the Earth's surface, mountains, rivers and so on. Every incident that occurred at the mountains, river valleys and so on has something to do with the life of the Penans.

According to Datan & Leh (1997:13), the Penans have made the jungle a place or site to earn for their living. The passage of time has transformed all the activities of relocation into a permanent activity for the Penan community at Ulu Jalalong, proving that the forest today has become an important source for the them to create their palm oil plantation. For the Penans at Ulu Jelalong, the *Pakan* ceremony will be held according to their beliefs each time

a new area opens. This is conducted for the purpose of getting better results, even in the virtuous way for the land, they will continue to be blessed by God and the spirits of their ancestors.

### Research Method

This discussion is an elaboration of the methodological aspects of the study applied to examine and understand the meaning of the symbols expressed through the feed ritual in the community of Penan Ulu Jelalong, Sebauh Bintulu Sarawak. The research will focus on the methodology used in this study. In an effort to study the meaning of symbols, researchers also explore the forms of symbols contained in this ritual feed.

This research is ethnographic which attempts to explain the *Pakan* symbol in the Penan community ritual at Ulu Jelalong area. In addition, it is also to find out about the beliefs and thinking of the Penans at Ulu Jelalong Tubau, Bintulu. In this research, researchers have used the *Pakan* symbol as a tool to witness the results of rituals that served as the identity of the Penan community at the Ulu Jelalong area. This choice was made to ensure that the symbols in the ritual are alive and well-practised by the Penan community to this day. In an effort to obtain information on the *Pakan* symbol in the Penan community ritual at Ulu Jelalong, researchers have used a number of collection techniques. First of all, ethnographic interview method was conducted. This technique has been widely used by researchers and some of their assistants. Throughout this research, the researcher has been in the field for a year starting from March 2019 until June 2020. A year had been used by the researcher to conduct the research and stayed at the village in order to understand the *Pakan* methods and its forms of conduct. The purpose of ethnographic research is to seek authentic information from informants. Interviews are used to obtain information from the villagers especially from the village heads, custom holders, religious groups such as conference attendants. In addition, researchers received explanations of the symbol applied in *Pakan* rituals held within a village with the participation of its entire community. Interviews were conducted and recorded by researchers and the ministerial readings were recorded as well.

The second method was participant-observation. An observation was conducted on 29<sup>th</sup> Mei 2022 and 3<sup>th</sup> June 2023. The researcher has witnessed the *Pakan* ceremony techniques entirely performed by the Penan community. On 29<sup>th</sup> Mei 2023, researchers get a full picture of the *Pakan* ceremony by both animism and religion groups. This was performed according to the custom and religious beliefs practised by the contemporary Penan community. On 29<sup>th</sup> Mei 2022, the researcher has witnessed the *Pakan* ceremony dominated by the animists because they intended to feed the spirits so that the villagers are not disturbed by evil spirits. Apart from that, the Penan Christians participated in a prayer ceremony led by a church servant leader with a prayer in accordance with Christian teachings and was interrupted by a mass meal of pot luck to avoid plague. Photos were taken by the researcher as evidence. With regards to this, the researcher has also conducted research and observations on the Penan community in several villages in Jelalong, such as Resa Mekapan Jelalong Village and Ramli Su'an Jelalong Village. The researcher too has made observations at Penan Suai Village, also called as Ogos Sugun Village. From a researcher's research perspective, both Penan Jelalong and Penan Suai are practising the same culture as most Penan Jelalong and Penan Suai communities are related. For example, the researcher herself also has both Penan Jelalong and Suai background due to the fact that her grandfather on her mother's side used

to be the village head at Suai area before he became one for Ogos Village. While her father used to be the village head for Penan Long Saoh Village at Ulu Jelalong area and is currently taken over by her own brother, Pengejau Uma Julaihi keti.

The third method applied was library research. This technique is used specifically for obtaining written materials related to research. Library research focused on literary materials on ritual symbols, culture, constitution, beliefs, nature, cosmology, humans and so on. This research was conducted at a few libraries, namely, the Sarawak Museum Library, University Malaysia Sarawak Library, Kuching Public Library, DBA Bintulu Library, UPM Bintulu Campus Library as well as several internet portals.

### **Research Findings: Symbol Analysis in Pakan Ceremony**

Symbolism can be categorised into two. It can be referred to as a pattern of people's thinking such as beliefs inherent in the myths. Symbolism can also describe legends that prevails in people's lives and thus create a belief. With the belief in Animism inherent in primitive society, its relevance now is no longer compatible with the changing societies that have embraced their own religion. According to Herusatot (1991:10), the meaning of a symbol comes from the Greek language *Symbolos* which means a sign or a feature which says something or to someone. There are others who say that "symbolos" means a sign or a feature that says something to a person. A symbol usually occurs on the basis of *metonimi*, the name of something else which will become a marker.

Turner in Endraswara (2003:172) stated that "*the symbol is the smallest unit of ritual which still retains the specific properties of behaviour it is the ultimate unit of specific structure in a ritual context*", which indicates that the symbol is the smallest unit or part of a ritual that contains the meaning of a specific ritual behaviour. On the other hand, rituals are a combination of various dishes or servings that have been prepared such as *Penyarem, Lupih, Gulong, Sipa, Beras Kuning, Kuih Capand* so on.

According to Spradley (1997:121), a symbol is an event or object which represents a sign or guidance for something. All symbols are divided into three, a sign for one or more things, the relevance between symbols and signs, and the symbol as the basis of all symbols. The symbolic meaning contained in the ritual will bring meaning to the people in the salvation they desire if it can be understood and practised. Symbolic meaning in rituals is a practice that motivates people to do good things to keep them away from disaster.

The symbol is semiotic. It is unlimited in terms of language, but everything that is done or shown must have a certain meaning. Like the society and other ethnic groups, each ritual symbol performed must have its own meaning. For example, the Dayak community at Borneo island celebrates Gawai Antu, Hari Gawai, Gawai Burung and ceremonies performed with meanings and symbols stated together with good wishes so that they will be continuously blessed in the future. Same goes to the Penan community at the *Pakan* ceremony whereby this marks one of the ways the Penan community expresses themselves for their appeal to the authority that they believe to be called *Retalak*. The elements of tradition are still practised even though the methods of implementation are not entirely the same, but they are practised according to their current religious beliefs, for example Christianity. During the *Pakan* ceremony, the Penan community will make preparations such as making food,

providing other equipment such as preparing the *Sang* and *Tapok* as well as the table for the ceremony. Later the villagers will call upon the religious leader to pray for all equipment and things, such as the food provided during the ceremony. Every practice found in the *Pakan* ritual is a demonstration of their submission to the power that helps them, the *Retalak* which is known as God by the Penan community in Sarawak. This ritual is performed by religious leaders with *Baleik* powers. Individuals with this power are also known as *Vaie Puwet*. Meanwhile, the Christians are united in prayer and they are led by religious leaders such as church servants or pastors. *Baleik* power is possessed by Penan animism. This power is derived from the supernatural powers that guard the forests where they live. These rituals are considered to be of benefit in addition to prevent any natural disasters, accidents and diseases from affecting the people living in the area. Although traditional practices have changed as time goes by, certain individuals within the community are still practising *Pinum* as their traditional practice of their ancestors, especially the Penans at Jalalong region of Bintulu district. At the same time, there has been a change in the perception of one's own experience with the *Pakan* ritual. This resulted from the influence of the religion which has altered one's submissions, beliefs and rituals. Even so, this tradition or ritual practices is still considered upright by the Penan community on the basis of the desire to protect themselves, families and descendants from disaster.

The Penan community has a concept of intentionality and it holds the tolerance and breadth of the concept of identity in which they hold to such an extent that it is extremely difficult to define who Penan is. This tolerance is consolidated by a concept known as '*pegangan malie dan tulah*' by the Penan community in Sarawak, especially the Penan community at the Ulu Jelalong area. It is a concept that binds the Penans, irrespective of religious boundaries and makes the Penan traditions and customs still in practice even today, although the rituals practiced by them are different from those practised according to the religious claims that they have adopted. The Penan people are very respectful of the elderly. They are also very respectful of the spirits of the dead until the dead will not be named due to *Malie* and *Tulah* in which they believed in. This is because every individual must abide by the laws and prohibitions that are central to the culture of the Penan community. It is not surprising then that this *Pakan* ritual was used as a vessel to create harmony and peace in the Penan community.

Religion is an essential element of a society. Therefore, as time went by, religion came and was absorbed into the lives of a group of community. In this *Pakan* ceremony, the role of the Christian Penan community is also vital. Although they hold different views, the concept of unity and harmony practised by the Jelalong Penan community in succeeding the *Pakan* ceremony is necessary to ensure its effectiveness. In the process of implementing these two different elements, there is a process of syncretism, which is to combine religious elements with traditional understanding. Therefore, there is no problem with the integration process as it is the most important factor to prevent any unwanted conflicts. All of these are driven by the intention of the community itself which seeks to create the gratitude, unity and well-being of life that is driven by the purpose of "*jah konin, jah piak*". Figure 1 shows the Ritual Model of Symbols.

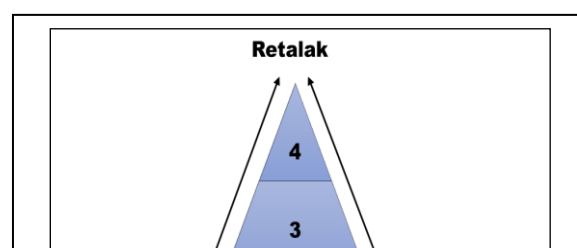


Figure 1: Ritual Model of Symbols

Based on the description of the Ritual Model of Symbol as shown in Figure 1, it is clear that the Jelalong Penan community has the same beliefs as those of other ethnic groups around the world. From this figure, there are four levels, levels that encompass the norms and world views that support the life of the Penan community at the Ulu Jelalong area. The levels can be summarized as follows:

According to the Penan community at Ulu Jelalong, the first level is about the culture and the way of life of the Penan community called *Penan Cosmology*. This includes the way of life of the Penan community for its primary importance to the harmony and unity of the Penan community and the forest. This is where peace and harmony are important and that the people must keep the restrictions that their ancestors had set. Problems will occur when a few of them are violated in their culture. Thus, there is a crisis and a problem on the second level, the *crisis and problem*. The crisis and problems that exist are like the occurrence of a *Tulah* and the *Bosong*. In the event of customary violations, problems such as disease, death and damage to all crops will also occur to the Penan community.

The level of crisis and problem called *Jojuk* has its own understanding of the cosmology of the Penan world itself. Cosmology carries the meaning of a field of knowledge about the universe (cosmos). This knowledge displays attention to the questions of the origin of the universe, the elements it contains, the relations between these elements and many other things that are directly or indirectly related to the universe. These include interpretation, pronunciation, appreciation, development and cosmological manifestations in human society and culture (Yaacob Harun, 2011). According to Anthony F.C Wallace (1967:71), cosmology is a theory about the universe. It is a belief in God, Gods, and a host of other supernatural powers, myths, life, death, sleep, dreams as well as the connection between causation and consequences. The strong belief in supernatural powers and their influence on humans often creates ritual

in the human effort to communicate with such supernatural powers. For the Jelalong Penan community, they still hold to the belief that animism is not only inhabited by humans but also by other beings called supernatural beings. They are the ones who are constantly influencing human life in terms of health, well-being and other disasters that affect the local community. The Jelalong Penan community also believes that if the needs of these creatures are not first met, then a disaster, so-called crisis will befall their lives.

At the third level, *Pakan* actions were taken over by the Penan people as a means of resolving all crises and problems. This way, all Penan people will unite and gather together for the *Pakan* ceremony. During this ceremony, the community will be joined by those who are members of the Animism Penan and the Christian Penan and will be united in holding the *Pakan* ceremony, led by the *Ketua Agama* or *Pengejau* to jointly seek protection and harmony by praying together with others which is called as *berniat*. At the *Pakan* event, all Penan people will unite to provide the necessary dishes to be prepared for the *Pakan* ceremony. All of them would gather at a place called the home porch where they would bring food and pray together. After praying and *berniat*, Animism Penans will send a special meal to a site called *tapok*. While the Christian Penans only pray together at the *jerah* and they do not provide *tapok* because they conduct *Pakan* based on the religious beliefs they adhere to.

The last level is the fourth level, a continuation of the third level. The *Pakan* act was aimed at the appeal for unity and harmony to return to the Penan people by seeking protection from *Retalak*, the God. *Pakan* actions will create harmony and reunification with the intention of bringing together the Penans' original intention called "*Jah Konin, Jah Piak*". For the Penan people, they believe in the power of *Retalak*, as for them, *Retalak* is the creator and protector of their lives. Religion is an essential element within a society. Therefore, as time went by, religion came and is absorbed into the lives of a group of people. In this *Pakan* ceremony, the role of the Christian Penan community is also very important. Although they hold different views, the concept of unity and harmony practiced by the Jelalong Penan community in the success of this *Pakan* ceremony is necessary to ensure its effectiveness. In the process of implementing these two different elements, there is a process of syncretism, which is to combine religious elements with understanding of traditions. Therefore, there is no problem with the integration process as it is the most important factor to prevent any unwanted conflict.

### **Animism Symbol (Tradition) in the Penan Community**

The person who performs acts and acts in one ceremony to supernatural or the supernatural powers is one who believes that such power exists and exists alongside other beings. This kind of influence is a bad thing for them because it is a passion and also motivation to conduct an act which is considered as good. Every ceremony performed must have its rules so that what is offered is acceptable to the supernatural powers. For the Penan community in Sarawak, they also do not miss out on the belief in animism or a practice of tradition especially in their synonymous lives with forests. These elements are present in their lives due to the daily necessity of still believing in the powers possessed by the supernatural elements such as spirits, ghosts, *penunggu* and whatever that surrounds them. According to the Penans, these powers should be naturalized by performing the *Pakan* ceremony.

### ***Lupeh***

For the Penan people, *Lupeh* is a dessert that should be provided at any important event. *Lupih* is an essential food that should be prepared during *Pakan*. *Lupih* is also known as *Kelupis*. *Lupeh* is made of medium-hardened rice mixed with coconut oil and a little salt to add some flavor to it. *Lupeh* can also be made from cassava flour in order to replace rice. As for the Penans at Ulu Jelalong, they will traditionally provide *Lupih* as the main menu for serving the guests at any event they attended. *Lupeh* is a source of their blessings from the results they produce and all the results will be presented as a dish to the delicate creatures and also to the guests.

When making *Lupeh*, there are a few precautions or restrictions to be obeyed. Cooking utensils for cooking *Lupeh* must be clean because cleanliness is a priority. *Lupeh* is usually prepared by women and not men. For the Penan community, their women are given priority in preparing meals at the kitchen, while their men are devoted to doing heavy work. For example, *Lupeh* served for the *Baleik* power and supernatural power should be cooked in a container that has never been used for cooking pork. If it happens, then the presentation is not acceptable. *Lupeh* will be placed on a bronze pedestal, symbolizing the prestige or splendor of the family. Ordinary people without extraordinary powers will not eat the *Lupeh* served to the *Baleik*. Only those with *Baleik* power are allowed to eat the *Lupeh* that has been given to other powers. *Lupeh* served for guests will be exiled. *Lupeh* is an identity of the Jelalong Penan community as it shows that Jelalong Penan has a long history of cultivation although not massively. Jelalong Penans need foods like rice, sweet potato and sago as their main food. Due to this, the community will prepare *Lupeh*, whether traditional *Lupeh* or the modern *Lupeh* during the *Pakan* ceremony and it does not matter how they are prepared as long as it is served.



Figure 2: Penan Lupeh

### ***Penyarem***

*Penyarem* is a type of traditional cake. It is a must for the Penans to serve *Penyarem* during the *Pakan* ceremony. *Penyarem* is made of rice flour and *gula apong*. The flour is not bought but is made by the Penans themselves. It is forbidden to speak much during the *Penyarem* making process in order to avoid being greeted by spirits. When greeted by spirits, *Penyarem* will no longer become *Penyarem* but will only be called as *Kemusén*. Due to this fact, only experienced aged women will be involved in this process. Furthermore, those who are having their period are not allowed or encouraged to prepare *Penyarem*, especially in its making



process. Having periods for women is considered being in a non-hygienic condition and it is believed that women in the said condition will not be able to produce or prepare *Penyarem* that is considered to be in good condition as well. As a result, it is also not acceptable for the *Baleik* power.



Figure 3: Penan Penyarem

### **Tapok**

*Tapok* is a flower made of timber which is said to be softened to become a flower. The usage of *Tapok* is vital during the *Pakan* ceremony. The *Tapok* flower is made of certain wood and those who are involved in its making process are those who are experienced. *Tapok* will not happen if the flowers are not softened the correct way. The *Tapok* timber is a forest product which will be used by the Penans and even at the present time, *Tapok* is still being used by other races as well during any ceremony or event. During the *Pinum* ceremony, every *Tapok* timber symbolises the number of days in which *Pinum* is performed. For example, the *Pakan Tapok* symbolises the day in which the *Pinum* ceremony is conducted. The usual *Tapok* are normally designed in a shorter height with only as tall as one or two feet tall. Meanwhile, the *Pakan Tapok* is a much taller one which is as tall as five to six feet tall. Every single *Pakan Tapok* symbolises either one, two, three or four until seven days in which the *Pinum* ceremony is conducted. This means that it represents the number of days the rituals are performed.



Figure 4: Lopau Tapok Pakan

### **Sang**

*Sang* is made of forest leaves. It is used by the Penans as a compulsory decoration being used during the *Pinum* ceremony. Its leaves will be torn and hung at every corner of the house. It represents the unity of the Penans with the plants in the forest. *Sang* is very useful for the Penan people as it is used for their needs. *Sang* can be used as a roof for their houses other than as hats. Therefore, *Sang* is a must during the *Pakan* ceremony. In fact, this leaf will be a natural flower and is original from the forest and it also symbolises that the Penans are more keen towards decorations that they are able to get from the forest. Penans without any symbol from the forest cannot call themselves as Penans.

### ***Ilang***

*Ilang* is known as machetes made of iron. During the *Pakan* ceremony, *Ilang* is a symbol of the spirit of its community. It is used to perform traditional dance such as *Ngajat*. According to the Penan tradition, *Ilang* must be used during *Pakan*. This is because it is able to strengthen individuals or one's spirit, and the religious leader will hold it behind the person who attended the *Pinum* ceremony. *Ilang* is made of iron and only those with experience are the ones who are able to create it. Iron symbolises violence, whereby the spirit of the people must be as strong as iron in order to overcome the problems that surround them for days to come.



Figure 5: *Ilang*

### ***Sipak dan Gulong***

*Sipak* is a type of food needed during *Pakan*. Ingredients for *Sipak* are *pinang* fruits, *sirih* and *kapur sigup* (tobacco). Meanwhile, *Gulong* on the other hand is a type of cigarette made of *daun apong* (citrus leaves). *Baleik* need both *Sipak* and *Gulong*. There are no restrictions in the preparation of these two things. The *pinang* and *kapur sigup* will be wrapped into *sirih* leaves, triangle in shape. As for *Gulong*, it will be rolled up with tobacco on the inside. *Sipak* and *Gulong* dish dedicated to the *Baleik* as a God of a river or jungle is known as a *Baleik* and also food is the link between humans and *Baleik* and it must be prepared before the ritual begins.



Figure 6: *Sipak and Gulung*

### ***Vas Kuning or beras Kuneng and cooked Egg***

The yellow rice, also known as *Vas Kuneng*, is a must have dish during the *Pakan* ritual. For the Penan people, the ceremony would not be perfect without the yellow rice. Cooked eggs should also be served on top of the yellow rice. While raw eggs will be eaten by the devotees during the *Pakan* ritual. There is no restriction on the preparation of these two ingredients according to the elderly. The said three ingredients are only necessary in the preparation of the food preparation requested by *Baleik*. But for the religious feast of the Penan community, they do not provide yellow rice and eggs on the basis of their religious claims. Yellow rice that carries the meaning of peace and unity and blessings so that you can get abundant life from God. While the egg is an meaning of human life because the humans should be at peace with nature and at peace with God because that egg is placed on a yellow rice. The yellow rice was used to summon the spirit of the ruler who was in the forest.



Figure 7: Yellow rice and egg

### **RITUAL SYMBOLS IN THE PAKAN RITUAL**

From the religious terms and with accordance to the understanding of the general public, it is the confidence in God and His worship to obtain blessings from the God of the universe. According to another view which is the primitive 'religion' society, it was about festive ceremony related to divinity or worship associated with sacrifices as offerings. The views from western writers define 'religion' as a belief in the supreme existence of God. It can be said that a person's religion is intended to enslave himself to God by performing worshipful activities as directed by Him.

The main purpose of holding this ritual is to seek protection, peace, unity and well-being. The main thrust of this cosmological question centres on three main questions, namely God, nature and man. These three core elements are inseparable from each other because every issue of nature and man is inseparable from our relationship with God. Besides that, any real being in the real world does not miss the belief in the real world and the supernatural also shares this belief with the Penan people. Such a belief can show that every human behaviour can not only be expressed outwardly but that every behaviour shown has an implied meaning. In fact, every act of conduct is performed while performing any particular ritual by a community. These ritual forms show the presence of its symbolic elements.

In this research, it can be seen that there is a religious influence that the Penan society has, namely Penan Animism, Christian Penan or Muslim Penan or better known as religious Penan. Every form of traditional faith has been transformed into a new form by incorporating the religious elements they adhere to. This belief was later changed by the process of reform that was brought about by the influence of a new civilization after the process of syncretism by *Vaie Puwet* and pastor. The beliefs that were received then gained the approval of the local community which had changed from its previous form. All elements exist in the Penan society have changed with the consent of all its citizens in relation to the practice. Each ritual treatment performed can resolve a tense situation that has often been said to be contrary to religious practice due to the emphasis on the principles of protection, integration and well-being.

### Elements of God

In the practice of *Pakan* rituals, the concept of God is referred to as *Retalak*. The Penan Society of Ulu Jelalong believes in the existence of this ritual and everything that is requested or asked for goes through mediators, *Vaie Puwet* and pastors to present their supplications to God. For the Penan *Retalak* people, they are extremely powerful and *Baleik* is an incredible force of forests in the forest. Naturally, human life is full of the process of interaction with which humans interact with human beings, nature and all natural phenomena, particularly in the real world. On the other hand, some humans also interact with the unseen (supernatural). From the world of the unseen, man recognizes the existence of God or whatever he believes to be God. As God's being, men communicate and interact with God in a spiritualistic or more spiritual manner. Therefore, humans have created sacral expressions and created an atmosphere of desperation to communicate with God. The existence of this sacredness cannot be depicted in the manner of the Lord, but the application to God is manifested in various ways and one of which is practiced by the Penan community by holding the *Pakan* ritual.

### Discussion and Conclusion

In general, the symbols found in the *Pakan* ritual not only can be depicted through outward actions but also in many ways reflecting the purpose of a given act. In order to convey the intentions among the Penan community, it is more about the rituals of traditional ceremonies and the form of *Pakan* being practiced once the community is religious, where today the Penan communities in the Ulu Jelalong area have embraced Christianity which are Catholic and Protestant sect. known as SIB. The Penan tradition believes in the power of *Vaie Puwet* as a link to the power of *Baleik* and *Retalak*. *Vaie Puwet* is very important in the Penan

tradition because it can be linked to supernatural powers related to spirits whereby such things are difficult and impossible for ordinary people without the *Baleik* power.

Whereas Christians believe in the Lord Jesus and all *Pakan* rituals are conducted in a Christian way of worship that must be prayed for and led by a religious leader, if the pastor or priest is not present. The *Pakan* ritual continues as usual as the Penans who practiced Christianity had their way in prayer to convey their intentions and supplications to God. Food symbols such as *Lupih*, *Penyarem*, *Tapok* and *Sang* still remain as the Penan identity. The pastor and priest are the ones who bring this prayer ritual to convey the purpose of the *Pinum* ceremony. The symbolic element of *Pakan* is perpetuated by the religious leader in worshipping all the symbols of *the Pakan*, which is to pray for all the food served during the *Pinum* ceremony.

Although within the community of practice for these rituals is mixed with elements of religious traditions and elements, it has actually created a unifying and harmonious society until present. Each ritual is aimed at resolving the problems that occur in their communities especially the Penan community and emphasize the harmony of life between the people and the surrounding forests. The beliefs inherent in these rituals are practised to create a new atmosphere of unity and harmony. In the end, all they did was aim to create a unity of their society with the power of nature, when the spirit of unity prevailed then their society could live in harmony. Apart from that, the rituals or ceremonies are intended to resolve the crisis and problems arising from the violation of its society by natural forces that are considered harsh for the Penan people. In the event of a violation, the community will be ill and will be destitute of the next generation known as *Tulah* and *Bosong*. Therefore, the Penan community adheres to the concept of *malie'*, when something is said *malie'*, the people should respect it for the fear of the *Tulah*. With that, the Penan people will hold the *Pakan* ceremony to bring their people together and live in harmony.

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