

## **CONSERVING THE *JADI MALI* RITUAL FOR CULTURAL SUSTAINABILITY: A CASE STUDY OF THE IBAN COMMUNITY IN SARAWAK**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The ancient practice of “jadi mali” among the indigenous Iban tribe in Sarawak is a custom and tradition birthed with the aim of attaining a marriage free from any unwanted catastrophe due to violating a taboo. This article suggests the protocols of “jadi mali” ritual as a vital intangible culture passed down from our ancestors’ knowledge to be preserved for future references. It adopts a philosophical approach of Husserlism of Transcendental Phenomenology (TPh) to qualitatively examine the issue of “jadi mali.” The affirmative lessons obtained from this ancient ritual may act as a rule for the younger Iban generation to be mindful of their courtship and to choose the right life partner in the future. The ancient ritual of “jadi mali” indicates a need for mutual respect and teaches intensive empathy about life’s details for genetic sustainability. This article contributes by providing a record for future reference on the ancient ritual of “jadi mali” among the Iban indigenous community in Sarawak. Foremost, this article is important for conserving ancestral knowledge.*

**Keywords:** indigenous knowledge, intangible culture, *jadi mali*, Iban, Husserlism Transcendental Phenomenology

## INTRODUCTION

Malaysia is geographically located at the centre of the multicultural region of Southeast-Asia. The 2010 census recorded the country's population as 28 million where the *bumiputera* (aboriginal) accounted for 65.1%, followed by Chinese (26.0%), and Indian (7.7%) (DOSM 2018). However, non-Malay indigenous groups made up half of East Malaysia's population; in Sarawak, Malays accounted for 23%, Chinese 26.7%, Indian 0.2%, and others 0.2% of its population. In Sabah, the non-Malay indigenous groups accounted for 66% population of Sabah (Malays accounted for 15.3%, Chinese 13.2%, Indian 0.5%, and others 5.0%). The federal government of Malaysia officially recognises 28 ethnic groups in Sarawak, namely the indigenous groups of Iban, Malay, Bidayuh, Melanau, and others. The ethnic fidelity of a person has much influence on their ways of life which vary from one group to another due to the socio-ecocultural variation of ethnicity (Awang 2018), and other demographic and socio-political profile (Beginda and Bala 2018). Thus, profound thought and awareness are crucial in harmonisation of intercultural relations in a multiracial society (Awang and Anees 2014). Modernisation and simplification of modern living have altered the way of life leading to changes in some of the ethnic groups' traditional identity. Along with this change, precious indigenous knowledge is gradually being forgotten. This concern is also present in the ancient ritual of *jadi mali* among the Iban community in Sarawak, a ritual carried out due to prohibited marriage which is gradually diminishing. Thus, the main objective of this article is to discover and discuss authentic and ancient protocols of the *jadi mali* ritual to serve as a guide for the younger generation.

First and foremost, Iban is the largest ethnic group in Sarawak and they belong to the Dayak ethnicity together with the Bidayuh. The Iban is known as Sea Dayak while the Bidayuh are recognised as Land Dayak. The ancient Iban way of life was influenced by forces of nature. This was before the teaching of Christianity replaced their pagan beliefs. Although most folk beliefs and norms were discarded by the "logical" teachings of the Bible, some ancient rituals (for example the Gawai celebration) is still perceived to significantly influence mutual linkages between society members and the universe. The Gawai festival, especially Gawai Kenyalang (hornbill festival) and Gawai Antu (festival of the dead) are observed to celebrate life and death, with the hope that community members rejoice in the present and craft the future without neglecting the past. Other intangible sacred rituals among the Iban community of descended traditions and customs are rejoicing pregnancy, postnatal celebration, marriage, death, and funerals.

Additionally, there are specific rituals and protocols to follow in aligning life with the universe. Some of the specific rituals are performed to bless the universe when

unexpected incidents happen, such as *jadi mali* and *berserara bungai* (rituals related to death). Hence, this explanatory article attempts to explore and preserve the knowledge of the intangible culture of *jadi mali*, which is an ancient intangible cultural practice that signifies harmonisation of married life, especially among pagans (those with no specific religion, but rather are eclectic and who believe in the force of nature to dictate one's life) (Postill 2003). Intangible cultural practices tend to be forgotten due to the evolution of modern living, undocumented records, and the influence of the new generation of Ibans' religion. The *jadi mali* ritual is solely based on the belief that new life starts with marriage and a decent life is attained when the couple is solemnised and are blessed. Hence, the following section of this article discusses the concept of intangible culture followed by methodology and discussion of the *jadi mali* ritual. The article concludes with a discussion on the future of *jadi mali*.

### **Indigenous Perspectives and Intangible Culture**

Kim and Berry (1993) defined indigenous theory as a “theory of human behaviour or mind that is specific to a context or culture, not imported from other contexts/cultures and purposely designed for the people who live in that context or culture.” The operational definition of indigenous varies across geographical location, instructional missions, and scholarly objectives. Indigenous groups refer to those maintaining some distinctive social-cultural norms and institutions (Kim and Berry 1993; Kim, Park and Park 2000; Peredo et al. 2004). Furthermore, indigenous people are identified based on their “descent from populations inhabiting a region before later inhabitants; and geographical, political, and/or economic domination by later inhabitants or immigrants” (Peredo et al. 2004). Existing indigenous culture is a tourist attraction. Cultural diasporas happen where the ancestor's knowledge is eroded far from its original due to immigration, cross-culture marriage or the effect of colonisation. For example, the ancient indigenous practises of “head-hunter” are not solely about the act but also associated with many other rituals and ceremonies. Apparently, with the advances in communication technology and today's modernisation, liberalisation, and simplification of life, most of local (indigenous) identity have been replaced or perceived as irrelevant.

According to Moreton-Robinson (2009, 11), “Colonisation morphologises in multiple ways as it continues to operate discursively and materially within cultural formations, institutions, and public culture.” The postcolonial world we inhabit today has changed the geographical, political, and/or economies of indigenous landscape. However, a growing awareness of the importance of conserving the indigenous knowledge received support from national and international organisations in recognition of the ancestral identities. Thus, an indigenous

conservation awareness movement around the globe has strengthened and resolved the indigenous ownership issues. For example, the issues of Pulau Galau in Sarawak where the traditional land ownership dispute is solved and the land is titled by taking into consideration stories of indigenous descent. Therefore, indigenous sustainability is expected to be significant in the exploration and conservation of indigenous and cultural information.

UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) on 18 May 2001, published the UNESCO Proclamation of Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity. This proclamation recognises and protects most of the sociocultural phenomena, namely theatre, music, folklore, and rituals from all over the world. Specifically, the intangible cultural heritage is defined as “the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills, as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts, and cultural spaces associated therewith that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage” (UNESCO 2001). The conservation effort is vital to keep the intangible culture that is endangered and deserved to be preserved for future generations (Prott 1998). The intangible culture is gradually being replaced by modernisation and simplicity of today’s living.

Most of the intangible cultural traditions (oral traditions and knowledge) were treated as sacred and not passed down to be documented (believed to be a taboo). These intangibles were the key to character building of people in the past. Thus, it is essential and vital to conserve and document them so they may be passed on to future descendants. One of these intangible cultures worth documenting is *jadi mali*. From a different perspective, *jadi mali* is considered a social phenomenology where there is a possibility of thinking, motivating, and developing social acceptance and social connectedness (Arslan 2018; Schuetz 1944) guided by the social relations which is established through this ancient ritual. Hence, the cultural context of *jadi mali* needs to be valued both by individuals and society collectively for harmonisation of social relationship and sustaining cultural identity, especially among the Ibans. The intangible cultural elements created in the past is perceived as a basis of character building for society in reducing psychological maltreatment (Arslan 2018). Specifically, the psychological maltreatment was a negative and significant predictor of social connectedness and social acceptance addressed in this article through the *jadi mali* ritual. Although there are initiatives taken by library services to document indigenous knowledge, this article serves as a knowledge supply to the library and trendsetter to assemble expanded traditional knowledge conservation initiatives. Hence, this article appreciates the protocols of *jadi mali* ritual as a vital intangible culture of the Ibans’ ancestors’ knowledge to be preserved for future references.

### **Jadi Mali among Iban in Sarawak**

There are specific rituals which are rarely performed and their implementation depends on the need, event or expected incident. The ritual is performed to motivate the victim to renew his or her life. Some of the rare rituals performed till today include *mlah pinang* (engagement), *enselen tikai* (marriage blessing), *jadi mali* (forbidden marriage), and *berserara bungai* (death). The *jadi mali* ritual is considered almost sacred because it may bring dishonour to a family. In the case of *jadi mali*, preservation of the distinctiveness of the rituals and adaptation for the younger generation is done for the sake of continuity of this intangible culture, especially among the Ibans. In principle, *jadi mali* is the unacceptable act of marrying one's close relatives such as an Uncle or an Aunt. In order to ward off bad luck, the couple is "bathed in swine blood." The ritual is conducted when a couple decided to get married despite being closely related. In other words, they have committed incest or are in a consanguineous relationship (i.e., relationship with closed kinship or first-degree relatives). *Jadi mali* happens when the marriage is prohibited or is considered as a "universal taboo" due to the moral contradiction. Taboo violation (Wadley 1999) means breaking social relations' structure and shows interpretations of disrespect. Hence, the *jadi mali* ritual is performed as a remedy "to restore cosmic and social balance, and to avert supernaturally-caused misfortune" (Wadley 1999), especially among the Iban. However, *jadi mali* is not part of Dayakism ideology (Mason and Jawan 2003) instead, it is a phenomenon among the Iban society to be observed in a matter of social acceptance and social connectedness (Arslan 2018).

From the biblical perspective, prohibition of incest and consanguineous relationship is found in the book of Leviticus 18:6–17 and 21:2–3. It is stated that "No one is to approach any close relative to have sexual relations. I am the LORD" (Leviticus 18:6). The book of Leviticus stated the prohibition of all sexual relations with (which also means prohibition to be married to) one's mother, father, sons, daughters, brothers, and one's virgin sister; stepchildren, aunt, sister or half-sister, daughter-in-law, sister-in-law, granddaughter, and step-granddaughter. The forfeits for those who committed this sin include exclusion from the covenant (Leviticus 18:29, 20:17–18), childlessness (Leviticus 20:20–21) or even death (Leviticus 20:11–12, 14). Nevertheless, there is some exception of being legally married as stated in Deuteronomy 25:10 and Genesis 20:12. Spiritually, *jadi mali* is also discouraged by other ethnic and religious groups in Malaysia. In Islam, it is stated in the Quran that:

Prohibited to you [for marriage] are your mothers, your daughters,  
your sisters, your father's sisters, your mother's sisters, your brother's

daughters, your sister's daughters, your [milk] mothers who nursed you, your sisters through nursing, your wives' mothers, and your step-daughters under your guardianship [born] of your wives unto whom you have gone in. But if you have not gone in unto them, there is no sin upon you. And [also prohibited are] the wives of your sons who are from your [own] loins, and that you take [in marriage] two sisters simultaneously, except for what has already occurred. Indeed, Allah is ever Forgiving and Merciful. (Surah an-Nisa, verse 23)

Herzog (2012) studied Czechoslovakian children whose parents were first-degree relatives. It was found that “fewer than half of the children were completely healthy, forty-two per cent of them were born with severe birth defects or suffered early death and another 11 per cent were mildly mentally impaired.” In a consanguineous relationship study on first-degree incest, it was found that “forty per cent of the children were born with autosomal recessive disorders, congenital physical malformations, or severe intellectual deficits; and another 14 per cent of them had mild mental disabilities” (Herzog 2012). Thus, incest or consanguineous relationships raise tendencies for children born of this couple to be biological or genetically affected. This leads to a high possibility of new-born of these couples suffering an early death, a severe birth defect or some mental deficiencies.

Likewise, among the Iban, the violation of the prohibition of couples who are first degree relatives to be married is believed by the elderly as a form of disrespect to familial ties. It also invites a stroke of bad luck to the family of the married couple and splashes *kudi'* (nature disaster) to the surrounding community, such as landslides or unusual monsoon. Unfortunately, this prohibited relationship may have bloomed (before married) far away from the village due to a family's migration, separation or the cliché love is blind. The couple who committed such a violation will face social judgement in terms of isolation from the community who are afraid that the curse-of-nature (*mali* or *kudi'*) may spill-over to anyone who dares to be close to the doomed couple. Should couples who violated this marriage law be caught, they must undergo the ritual of *jadi mali* to ask for forgiveness from the spirit of nature and to purify the marriage because *jadi mali* is viewed as a sexual peril which poses problems related to childbirth (Sather 1978). However, there is an exemption for marriages between cousins as these are not viewed as *mali* (bad luck).

The *jadi mali* ritual is performed by those who live in the longhouse. Anyone who lives away from the longhouse but have committed this “marriage offence” must return to the longhouse to ask for advice from the elderly and undergo the ritual. It is a ritual which is considered a must among pagans (atheists or those who are still practising the Iban ancient tribal beliefs) who believe in augury (Freeman 1961).

In this modern era, the ritual of *jadi mali* is rarely performed as most Ibans have converted to Christianity. To some Ibans, this ritual is considered old fashioned and scientifically insignificant. Hence, the ritual is performed only when there are requests by pagans or any religious believers who are seeking spiritual purification through a traditional healing technique.

*Jadi mali* tends to be a diaspora of culture due to the diminishing practices of this ritual in the present day. Diasporas of culture happens as a result of colonisation (Hall 2014), migration, settlement, religious evangelism, evolved ways of living and consolidation of social, economic and political circumstances in the recent demographic environment (Clifford 1994; Cohen 2002; Safran 1991). In the Iban society, social changes and local migration to the cities (Appell 1992) makes the traditional system of living in rural villages obsolete. Scholars (e.g., Appell 1992) have proved Iban studies insightful to national development but most of these studies emphasised the socio-economic (Soda 2001) and political (Beginda and Bala 2018) implications. The taboo on the written document of the ancient ritual is imperative for the future generation to evade this diaspora of culture (Appell 1992; Nyuak and Dunn 1906; Postill 2003), especially on the traditional familial system (Freeman 1969; 1961; Mitchell 1963; Sather 1978).

Conserving ancient tradition in light of new situations or experiences requires social education and learning for the young generation to understand the significance of rituals in their social life. Certain subjects in the form of capital, respect, honour of reputation and prestige need to become the basis of being acknowledged (Nyuak and Dunn 1906). Maintaining and reproducing culture are subject to judgments at a spectrum of social levels, from individual to family, the community and religious groups concerned. Considering the issues discussed above, this article focuses on the preservation of tradition and find cultural acceptance within different spheres to promote the understanding of the intangible culture of *jadi mali*. Hence, this article describes the protocols of *jadi mali*, especially for the attention of the young Iban generation. The following section discusses the methodology adopted to acquire the indigenous knowledge of *jadi mali*.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This article aims to be a transcendental experiential consciousness inquiry to preserve the knowledge and understanding of the sacred protocols of *jadi mali*. The enquiry focuses on the individual experience in interpreting *jadi mali*. Specifically, the Husserlism of Transcendental Phenomenology (TPh), is a philosophical approach adopted to qualitatively seek to understand human experience

(Moustakas 1994). The TPh focuses on people's meaning of lived experience as a concept or phenomenon. According to Moustakas (1994, 14), "The understanding of meaningful concrete relations implicit in the original description of experience in the context of a particular situation is the primary target of phenomenological knowledge." The TPh approach highlighted that different stages of empirical reduction are possible to reach a more fundamental understanding of the observed phenomenon. A transcendental phenomenology involves the process of identifying a significant phenomenon which requires a researcher to bracket out the participant's experiences (Creswell and Poth 2018). In principle, this article does not attempt to establish a substantive theory or test a conceptual model or hypothesis, nor generalise the fundamental understanding of the *jadi mali* ritual. Instead, the basic investigation initiated in this article attempts to preserve the understanding of the intangible culture of *jadi mali*, especially among the younger generation on the practices of the *jadi mali* ritual. It is important to restore traditional practices to enhance understanding of social development.

The empirical transcendental phenomenological approach embodied in this study is "to experience the comprehensive descriptions which provide the basis for a reflective structural analysis to portray the essences of the experience" (Moustakas 1994). This experience is bolstered by the fact that the second and third authors of this article are Ibans. Additionally, the data gathered consisted primarily of extensive critical and in-depth interviews. The unstructured interviews were conducted using a non-formalised interview schedule in which an in-depth conversation was developed from casual encounters with individuals (Burgess 1995). As mentioned earlier, *jadi mali* is one of Iban's ancient rituals which are exposed to the Diasporas of culture. This article is conscious of the saturation of knowledge (Bertaux 1981, 37) on the feasibility of sampling (Seidman 2006). This article is considered a preliminary point in exploring issues related to preserving the ancient ritual of *jadi mali*. To this end, two unstructured in-depth interviews were conducted.

The selection of the participants in this study was based on the credibility of sources of data. First, a *tuai rumah* (the head of a traditional longhouse) was selected as the cultural practitioner; trusted by the community to behold the Iban's customs and tradition. Second, an official Council for Customs and Traditions in Sarawak is known as a trustee and referee for local customs and traditions of the Ibans was identified. The interviewees were considered "the insider" (Schuetz 1944; Wilson 2002) to attain the objective of this article. "The insider" according to Alfred Schutz is:



Someone who, because of his relationship to a group which is more direct than my own, can report some event, or the opinions of others, with the authority of sharing the same system of relevance as the other members of the group. (Wilson 2002)

Furthermore, the insider information is perceived as valid (at least in part) referring to the insider's knowledge and experiences in the context of the discussed situation (Wilson 2002).

Therefore, the first interview was arranged with the *tuai rumah* who is also one of the most respected and eldest persons in the village (a longhouse) in the Betong province. This *tuai rumah* is among the few who still practices this ancient *jadi mali* ritual. The Iban community from Betong province live in Paku, Padeh, Layar and Rimbas areas (the Saribas basin). The ethical concern in writing this article was addressed by obtaining permission from the elder *tuai rumah* at the Suri Tengah longhouse. Usually, the *tuai rumah* will chair and lead the ceremony and perform the ritual organised at the village. He is well trusted and well respected. The interviews were conducted between April and June 2018. Questions posed included "What is *jadi mali*?", "What is the story behind *jadi mali*?", "What are the conditions necessary to perform *jadi mali*?", and "What are the rituals incorporated in performing *jadi mali*?". As mentioned earlier, the *jadi mali* ritual is hardly performed but it is done when there is a mutual confession from any married couple who have violated marriage rules or other family members.

The data collected for this article were narrated and explained based on the cultural memory of the *tuai rumah*. In particular, the practitioner embraced the culture's memory on specific knowledge about the texts, images and rituals to each society (Assmann and Czaplicka 1995). Although cultural memory contributed to some contextualisation issues of representation (Kansteiner 2002; Confino 1997), the present study believes it gives some significant reliability on the exclusivity of the ritual. The interviewees' narrations were contextualised to identify possible levels of indexing codes related to emerging themes and patterns. The codes were later checked to identify any single instances or recurring patterns. According to Polkinghorne (2005), the narratives or stories are data obtained which exclusively stand as an untainted description of any experience. The data gathered are important to dismantle the *jadi mali* issue and to explain its significance to the young generation. Therefore, the cultural memory is important as there are inadequate related references to this issue.

An inter-rater reliability check was conducted to assess the external consistency of the data. A second interview was conducted with a government-appointed

official at Majlis Adat Istiadat Sarawak (Sarawak's Council for Customs and Traditions) to validate the transcript data. The second interview is to cross-check and confirm the fact narrated in the main interviews and obtain their approval to ensure validity and credibility of the study. In addition, it was aimed at seeking consent from the official authority to publicise the findings of the article. This process is considered sufficient to validate the narrated data provided by the first interviewees. According to Beck, Keddy and Cohen (1994), a cross-paradigmatic communication could result in interpretation difficulties but the truth value, applicability, consistency and neutrality may offer the phenomenologist an appropriate alternative to logical positivists' terminology. Hence, the findings are well represented and justifiable for methodological validity (Winter 2000) and credibility (Patton 1999). The following section discusses the findings of the ancient ritual of *jadi mali*.

## **FINDINGS**

Although the *jadi mali* is perceived as irrelevant especially among the young *Iban* generation nowadays, it is crucial to understand the philosophy which lies behind this almost extinct ancient ritual. In order to achieve the main objective of this article (to explicate the authentic and ancient protocols of the *jadi mali* ritual, which the young generation today should acknowledge), the transcript data were contextualised according to: the folklore of *jadi mali*, types of *jadi mali*, and the ritual of *jadi mali*. In the local language, *mali* is considered a taboo that can lead to disaster. *Jadi* means simply to happen or to become husband and wife. Thus, *jadi mali* means disasters which may happen either to a married couple, a closed cluster of a family or to the whole community. Hence, the sacred ritual of *jadi mali* is performed to break the curse from the universe as a result of a prohibited marriage. In order to understand *jadi mali*, we should acknowledge the principle of *jadi mali* as mentioned in the earlier part of this article. The *tuai rumah* emphasised that *jadi mali* is not merely a ritual, but encompasses the values of living: "We should understand the folklore behind the ritual and types of *jadi mali* before performing the ritual."

### **The Folklore of *Jadi Mali***

*Jadi mali* is defined as a marriage taboo and refers specifically to those who marry their very close relatives. In ancient days, couples who committed the offence were killed using *buloh aur pantang* (a sharp-end bamboo) by the ritual's leader. Their corpses will be buried together in one grave. The executioner's bamboo will then

be planted near the grave to commemorate *jadi mali* as a warning sign to the others not to repeat the shameful behaviour.

This type of punishment ceased when a girl named Simba was impregnated by her brother. She had an innocent virgin-look and despite being caught and interrogated by the villagers; she kept her secret from the gods. The day she gave birth, a catastrophe struck the village. Thunderstorm and heavy rain forced the villagers to stay at home and this crippled their economic activities. Despite her parents' pleading for her to tell the truth, she kept her mouth shut. This caused the villagers to decide to kill Simba and the baby. Before being killed, Simba sat at the *ruai* (the corridor of the longhouse) to *ngenjut anak* (coo the baby) and she sang a *timang* (chant). According to the *tuai rumah*, "The chant was about the incident which led to her pregnancy and a plea to not kill them."

In her chant, Simba suggested the bathing ritual and several traditional apparatuses to be used such as *nyabor chundur* (sword), *beliong lajong* (axe), *jalong jebong* (skull), *pua kumbu* (weaved mat), *sumpit tapang* (wooden blowpipe), *chapak sesingkap* (a plate to offer dishes), and *benda rusa* (ceramic vase) instead of killing them. The chants were wistful and softened the hearts of the villagers to renegotiate her punishment. The rituals she chanted replaced her punishment. Only then did Simba reveal that her biological older brother named Lamit was responsible for her pregnancy. Since then, the ritual of *jadi mali* has been performed as a symbol of Simba's honesty.

### **Types of Jadi Mali**

There are three types of *jadi mali*. The first is known as *satu nangga dua* (one to two). The "marriage offence" happens when a father marries his daughter, or a mother marries her son; an uncle marries his niece (his brother's or sister's daughter), or an aunt marries her nephew (her brother's or sister's son). The rituals are performed at two places, at a river known as *sapat di ai* (divided at the water) and in front of the longhouse known as *sapat di darat* (divided at the land). Additionally, the couple will be charged a penalty known as *Adat Pelasi Menua* (a custom to take-off the land) of RM400 per person.

The second type of *jadi mali* is known as *dua nangga tiga* (two to three). The "marriage offence" happens where an uncle marries his niece (his first cousin's daughter), or an aunt marries her nephew (her first cousin's son). The rituals are performed only at the nearest river (*sapat di ai*). The couple will be charged the *Adat Pelasi Menua* penalty of RM300 per person.

The third type of *jadi mali* is known as *tiga nangga empat* (three to four). The “marriage offence” happens where an uncle marries his niece (his second cousin’s daughter), or an aunt marries her nephew (her second cousin’s son). The rituals are performed only in-front of the longhouse (*sapat di darat*). The couple will be charged the *Adat Pelasi Menua* penalty of RM200 per person.

The penalty charged is minimal with no standard rate and it is considered as alms from the couple to the universe. According to the *tuai rumah*, “The penalty is compensated to the *tuai rumah* and divided accordingly to the number of ‘doors’ or houses in the longhouse. The penalty is assumed as alms and sign of respect to establishing a blissful relationship with the universe.”

### **The Ritual of *Jadi Mali***

To avoid a *mali* or *kudi*’ (disaster), the couple who committed *mali* must confess to the eldest member of the family as soon as possible. It is the responsibility of the family to advise the couple to stop or discontinue such a relationship. Otherwise, the ritual of *jadi mali* is performed and led by the *tuai rumah*. The couple themselves will prepare the traditional apparatuses, such as *sumpit tapang* (blowpipe), *kain berangi* (fabric), *kumbu rayung* (waived mat), *pedang panjang* (sword), *beliung lajung* (axe), *pinggai besai* (dish), *rangki* (male bracelet), *kebuk* (pot), *tanggung seraung* (cap), *piring* (plate), and *kelam* (clothes used to submerge themselves under the water in the river). These apparatuses are to be used for the ritual, especially at the river. Each apparatus has its own function and significance in the ritual. Additionally, the couple will provide a rooster and swine to be sacrificed (two swine for *satu nangga dua* type of *jadi mali*; a swine each for *dua nangga tiga* and *tiga nangga empat* type of *jadi mali*). The ritual is only granted and performed once the necessities are prepared and completed. Besides, all the villagers are invited to witness the ritual of *jadi mali* except unmarried individuals and children. The rationale for not inviting unmarried individuals and children to join the ritual will be discussed in later.

The *jadi mali* ritual begins with the *miring* ritual. *Miring* is a prayer to the spirit of the universe, to ask for blessings and protection from any disaster while performing the *jadi mali*. For the *sapat di ai* of *jadi mali*, the *miring* is performed by the eldest person in the family at the nearest river. While performing the *jadi mali* ritual, the couple can wear regular attire instead of *ngepan* and *sirat* (a traditional Iban custom). After the *miring* and upon arrival of the couple, one person is selected and will be instructed to hide in the bushes to cover the ghost spirit (which is believed to be a disturbance during the ritual). The attendees or villagers will speak of the intention of their presence, i.e., enunciate to the spirit that their presence is to

*ngintu* (witness) the couple for the *jadi mali* ritual. The *tuai rumah* describes their presence as, “Kami saritu datai ngintu seduai jadi mali mandi darah babi” (We are present here today to celebrate both the *jadi mali* couple to bath in swine’s blood).

The disguised man will respond to the call by the villagers; only then the ritual of *jadi mali* can begin. The ritual starts by slaughtering a wild boar by the eldest family member of the couple. The couple will be submerged in the water at the downstream of the river, while the *tuai rumah* chants the mantras and let the swine’s blood flow from the upstream of the river. Once completed, the ritual is followed by the *sapat di darat*, especially for the *satu nangga dua* type of the *jadi mali*.

For the *sapat di darat* of the *jadi mali* ritual, a wild boar will be slaughtered in front of the longhouse. The couple is to step on the swine’s blood and then they are seated on a *tawak* (a traditional brass gong). While their heads are covered with *pua kumbu*, the *miring* will be performed by the *tuai rumah*. A rooster is slaughtered, held upside-down and circled around the *miring* plate seven times.

Once completed, the couple pays the penalty to the *tuai rumah*. The monies are for the longhouse uses and not for any personal use of the *tuai rumah*. The couple is declared and accepted as legally married in accordance with the Iban tradition. The significance and issues related to the ritual of the *jadi mali* are discussed in the following section.

## **DISCUSSION**

The findings point to some life lessons, particularly for the young generation. In essence, *jadi mali* is an ancient ritual which provides a guideline for a social arrangement which leads to marriage. The understanding of this ancient ritual is vital in developing social acceptance and social connectedness (Arslan 2018). There are several life lessons and both individuals and community should heed these lessons especially in social situations in the context of *jadi mali*.

First, the prohibition or *mali* as inherited through generations is not just folklore. It teaches the young to carefully plan their lives based on certain rules of life. The biggest lesson is to respect the older generation and other members of society. When it comes to married life, the purity of the relationship is important to ensure the generation or offspring is genetically normal. In the case of *jadi mali*, the eldest is strongly believed to be the one who will bear the effects of *mali* (bad luck) curses from the universe unto their life. Thus, prevention is very important before a *mali* really happened. From the Iban tradition, *mali jadi* (instances where it is not

possible for them to marry) is considered incest (totally prohibited in marriage) where the marriage ought to be dissolved and *pelasi menua* (ritual offerings to avert evil forces) must be performed (refer Adat Iban 1993, IV [144]). In contrast, *jadi mali* is an incident of prohibited marriage but there is still room for forgiveness by performing the *jadi mali* rituals (purification ritual of the marriage). Thus, the parent's intervention is necessary for the young generation of Ibans who wish to get married. This is to avoid the mismatch of the marriage arrangement. Or else, the couple needs to follow the customary protocol of *nanya bini* (to seek a maiden's hand in marriage) and *nanya indu* (the discussion to seek both families' approval with the witness of *tuai rumah*). In particular, the *tusut* (family tree investigation) should be clear during the *nanya indu* stage. Therefore, the young generation needs to recognise the chain of familial ties and possibly avoid *mali jadi* or *jadi mali* occurrence.

Second, the restoration of the intangible culture is found to be important for national identity creation. From the economic perspectives, the UNESCO recognition of the intangible culture becomes a selling point for the tourism industry. While performing the *jadi mali* rituals, the chair of the ceremony (*tuai rumah*) who leads the rituals will chant mantras and chants (Nyuak and Dunn 1906). These mantras and chants are highly sacred but which the younger generation does not understand; they were passed on to the *tuai rumah*'s successor through memorisation (oral tradition). The writing of the mantras and chants is prohibited. *Mali* is invited if the mantras and chants are transformed into any sort of written form. Inexistence of proper documentation results in the creation of intangible culture. Therefore, consistent with Prott (1998), it is recommended that future studies engages the elders of the community to find solutions on ways to document the mantras and chants for future references.

As discussed in the earlier section, unmarried individuals and children are not allowed to witness the *jadi mali* ritual as they are considered spiritually pure and clean (Nyuak and Dunn 1906). Thus, the elderly believe that *mali* may spill-over to them if they participate in the rituals. Furthermore, they are also prevented from asking, talking and discussing *jadi mali* due to the latter's effect, which is considered a taboo. The elderly also believes that any discussion of the ritual is like a prayer to welcome *mali*. Therefore, the best solution is to not talk about the ritual which is only performed when unwanted incidents happen. This sentiment is found to restrict the social learning process. Clearly, from cultural, even religious perspectives, *jadi mali* is considered a social problem and an offence against marriage. It is a ritual understood to cure rather than prevent social problems. Hence, the main question is how to educate the generation if they are not allowed to absorb the knowledge. When unwanted incidences happen, the blame will fall

on their shoulders. Therefore, proper and comprehensive documentation of the ritual is vital for future references (Prott 1998) and social learning.

An interesting finding of this article is that there are different interpretations of the *jadi mali* ritual based on the geographic location of the Iban community. Different villagers interpret and practise the ritual differently due to their demographic, socio-political, cultural variation and ecocultural differences (Beginda and Bala 2018; Awang 2018). The present study attempted to document the *jadi mali* ritual from a single longhouse in Betong district in Sarawak. The Iban community are also found to reside in other locations, such as in the valleys of Batang Ai, the Skrang River, Saribas, and the Rajang River basin. A different community may define and practice *jadi mali* differently. Therefore, future research should include other Iban communities, such as Balaus, Balehs, Undups, Rajangs, Sebuyaus, Serians, and Saribas. Methodologically, this is vital for saturation of knowledge (Bertaux 1981; Seidman 2006) in the preservation of the ancient ritual of *jadi mali*. Hence, this leads to a comprehensive understanding and generalisation of the *jadi mali*.

In building a harmonious community, both individual and society are in the collective need to consider the perspective of those who are involved in the establishment of this social relationship. Understanding the concept and context of *jadi mali* leads to the development and appreciation of the social act (Schuetz 1944; Wilson 2002). *Jadi mali* ritual can be considered as a subjective interpretation where “all kinds of human action or their result to the subjective meaning such action or result of an action had for the actor” as postulated by Wilson (2002). Those intangible cultures of *jadi mali* is important for character building of the society to avoid social-psychological maltreatment of the subject (Arslan 2018; Appell 2001; Nyuak and Dunn 1906; Postill 2003; Wilson 2002). Family chain recognition is important in showing respect and avoid *tulah* (plagues of disrespect). Although the Iban is not a hierarchical type of society, respecting the elderly and being aware of one’s origin is welcomed for social acceptance.

On the corpus of knowledge and policy, the findings of this article point to the importance of social connectedness and social acceptance on adolescents’ wellbeing, consistent with Arslan (2018). From the legal perspective, the Iban tradition and customs in Sarawak are gazetted according to Native Courts Ordinance 1992 (No. 9/92) and the Native Customary Laws Ordinance 1955 (Chapter 51). Specifically, the marriage customs are outlined in Section IV of the 1993 Iban Customs which discusses *mali jadi* and *jadi mali* (Adat Iban 1993). As discussed earlier, although the *tusut* is to be carried out during the *nanya indu* stage, there is the possibility that the family member is not sure of their genealogy due to a broken familial chain

(long lost separated family). Therefore, this article is considered a mind opener to show that *tusut* is the essence to unravel issues of *jadi mali*. The policymaker, the legislative and statutory bodies, especially Council for Customs and Traditions in Sarawak, could consider creating a reliable web-based system of *tusut*. This article hence, proposes a *tusut* system which not only solves *mali jadi/jadi mali* matters, but will close the loop of broken family chains and aid the native court of Sarawak in solving the issues.

## CONCLUSION

As stated earlier, the main objective of this article was to discover authentic and ancient protocols of *jadi mali* ritual for the sake of the young Iban generation. The younger generation should learn to appreciate the folklore of *jadi mali*, types of *jadi mali* and the ritual of *jadi mali*. First, the story about Simba shows that *jadi mali* is a taboo. These types of marriages should be avoided but if it happened, the ancient ritual must be performed to stop any unwanted catastrophe. Second, there are three types of *jadi mali*. The type of ritual performed and the amount of compensation to be paid depends on the severity of the “marriage offence.” Third, in performing the ancient ritual of *jadi mali*, there are sacred protocol, chants, taboo, equipment, and other customs and traditions to be followed to break the taboo’s disaster chains and to bless the couple for their future together. Notably, apart from modernisation and simplification of today’s living, traditional practices determine the harmony and politics of social development. Preservation and restoration of the intangible culture are vital for future references and social learning. Additionally, it is found that such indigenous knowledge brings certain attraction and commercial value to the tourism industry in this country. For *jadi mali*, this ancient ritual should be given mutual honour and respect, especially the conviction and honesty displayed by the couple who commit the “marriage offence.” The ritual of *jadi mali* remedies the problem and replaces social judgement and punishment. It is a life lesson for the young generation to carefully plan their future, especially when it comes to married life. Documenting this ancient knowledge is important for the next generation to show appreciation and respect for their genealogy to establish a respectful personality, for cultural conservation, and to ensure indigenous sustainability. Highlighting the intangible culture to celebrate the diversification of ethnicity adds more colour to this country.



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