

AVIAN SPIRIT ICONOGRAPHY AMONG THE DAYAK AND OTHER PEOPLES OF SOUTHEAST ASIA

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Abstract

The use of avian 'spirit' images is documented among several ethnolinguistic groups across island Southeast Asia. Perhaps of most relevance to the study of Borneo's cultural heritage are the *kenyalang* sculptures of the Iban, Kenyah, and Kayan Dayak peoples of Sarawak State, Malaysia. The *kenyalang* are utilized within the complex of rituals associated with traditional warfare, social prestige, modern Thanksgiving, and the visualization of the Dayak spirit world through the iconography of the rhinoceros hornbill (*buceros rhinoceros* L.), a bird prized for its feathers (traditionally used for ornamentation), as well as its perceived role as a messenger between the human and spiritual worlds. The carving, presentation, and patronage of *kenyalang* figures became part of a socially central activity among the Iban Dayak in a way that eerily parallels the significance of the *sarimanok* among the Maranao peoples of Lanao del Sur, Philippines; and the *manuk-manuk* of the Toba Batak peoples of northern Sumatra, Indonesia. This paper is a preliminary attempt at connecting these geographically disparate practices of avian 'spirit' iconography across Southeast Asia. Utilizing a combination of cultural ethnography, iconographical analysis, and ethnolinguistics, the paper speculates on a common cultural link centered in Borneo that has successfully disseminated the idea of avian spirit mediums in pre-Islamic and pre-colonial times across maritime Southeast Asia, from northwestern Sumatra to as far as north Luzon Island, Philippines. Premised upon the movement of peoples and ideas (such as the Austronesian thesis of Bellwood, or the Nusantao thesis of Solheim) across the region, these indicators of common acculturation places Borneo at the crossroads of a thriving iconographic practice rooted in a shared premise: the celebration by peoples of the imagery of spectacular bird species as an index of their own ascendant social and political stature.

Keywords: iconography, Iban Dayak, cultural ethnography, ethnolinguistics, kenyalang

Introduction: Preliminaries to the Debate of Interconnectivity in Southeast Asia

The nature and question of the similarities and congruences of cultural practices across the peoples of Southeast Asia has been a subject of vociferous debate over the past seventy years. Perhaps the most relevant and profound of these debates have come from two not entirely incompatible schools of thought. Both locate these similarities to the movements of either peoples or artifacts across the littoral areas of Southeast Asia since the Neolithic Period. However, it is the disciplinary nature of each school's major advocate—not to mention a favored "origin point" from where these common practices are argued as centering upon—that creates a divergence of analysis and conclusion-formation. The first school of thought revolves around the theories of Wilhelm Solheim II, who in a series of papers and publications have argued the existence of the so-called Nusantao Maritime Trading and Communication Network (NMTCN). Briefly, Solheim describes the Nusantao as:

...a prehistoric, maritime-oriented people, as are their cultural descendants. These descendants have maintained their cultural orientation until today, or at least until the recent past, in many coastal and island areas in Southeast Asia, coastal China, Japan, Korea and Oceania...I felt it useful to coin a word for the people and culture from reconstructed protoforms of the language family. George Grace...suggested the root terms *nuisa* for "south island," and *tau* or "people"...From these...I changed the spelling of Nusatao to Nusantao without any reason or explanation... (Solheim, 2006, pp. 57-58)

In summary, the NMTCN is identified as a series of interlobed areas originating from Vietnam, and then spreading throughout Southeast Asia, Northeast Asia, and the Indian and Pacific Oceans that Solheim has identified as bearing a distinct set of cultural practices and their related objects grounded upon the Nusantao's existence as a maritime and sea-based peoples for the past ten thousand years. It was the shared use of certain cultural artifacts, ranging from pottery, to boat-building, to rice cultivation, that Solheim argues the primary factor in identifying a network of trade and communication, rather than a simple unidirectional migration of peoples. Solheim also locates the Nusantao firmly as a coastal and sea-faring people, and thus tends to exclude the hinterland-dwelling or upland communities. This focus on a trade and

communications network focused on sea-based exchanges necessarily delimits Solheim's Nusantao cultural distribution to primarily an artifactual, and secondarily, a linguistic phenomenon. Solheim does not limit the Nusantao to a strictly genetic or ethnic definition. Rather, the Nusantao share common cultural attributes through this exchange. Moreover, Solheim admits that Austronesian speech may be one attribute to the Nusantao that may be shared by the hinterland peoples, but that such similarities are a consequence of other patterns unrelated to cultural dissemination. As can be seen, Solheim's theory of the Nusantao is based on an anthropological model of exchange and networked relations between various kinds of peoples, utilizing archeology as the primary means of determining validity.

On the other hand, the other school of thought holds that the distribution of like-cultured peoples throughout Southeast Asia and Oceania is premised on a series of migrations by an ancestral branch of Austronesian speakers from an original ethnocultural location. Championed by Peter Bellwood, this is known as the Out-Of-Taiwan (OOT) hypothesis. The premise is that the distribution of like-speaking peoples throughout island Southeast Asia and Oceania is due to the interaction between migrants of an Austronesian language that originated from Taiwan and then spread to the Philippines, Indonesia, the Malaysian peninsula, and New Guinea before reaching Polynesia and Madagascar. Premised on the theories of linguistics, particularly the emphasis of comparing and differentiating various branches of the Austronesian language family, Bellwood's hypothesis also backstops its validity using archeological data, primarily the pattern of pottery assemblage characteristics among finds in the Philippines and Indonesia that are related to an "ancestral pattern" known as the Yuanshan pottery period, which itself is descended from the Tapenkeng culture in Taiwan. Due primarily to its lucid argumentation of a linguistic "diffusion" movement between the various Austronesian speakers of island Southeast Asia between 5000-1500 BC, Bellwood's theory has gained more acceptance among the majority of Southeast Asian scholars compared to Solheim's.

Both schools of thought assume that Southeast Asian populations were already preexisting before linguistic diffusion and/or trade and communication networks were established that fundamentally altered the material culture and practices of these peoples. It is, therefore, reasonable to assume that both the Nusantao trade and communications network and Austronesian speakers diffusion theories postulate common linkages between various Southeast Asian peoples, through such strategies as migration, trade, and intercultural or interethnic contact. A primary challenge to consider, therefore, is the attempt to

link up geographically disparate peoples and cultures via common characteristics, practices, and socio-cultural or socio-economic manifestations to be able to prove a common viability between peoples and their cultural practices, particularly the vexing issue of “peopling” (or the nature of the spread and transformations of human populations within geographical zones across prehistoric and historical times); as well as the idea of a “common culture” that is often argued as linking geographically disparate populations (who nowadays are confined within the territorial and governmental delimitations of the modern nation-state), arguing a common nexus or “connection” with these peoples.

To this author, whose expertise is on visual culture, the more relevant issue to explore is: “what common visual cultural manifestations can be identified in order to serve as an ‘index of interrelatedness,’ which can help identify broader patterns of migration or trade/communication exchange throughout Southeast Asia?” In answering this question, the author feels that the methods and issues that typify the study of visual culture are pertinent to the understanding of certain human practices—particularly object production—that require a comparative assessment whenever common linkages, such as topic, theme, or approach, argue for a more-than-casual relationship between any two cultures, especially those imbricated under larger formations of linguistic families, geographic boundaries, and issues of identity. Combined from the more traditional disciplines of art history and cultural anthropology, visual culture can be argued as “a way of seeing” among societies, whose practices require the visualization of common concerns and collective world views which are embedded in a society’s deeper practices of meaning-making and social signification. As Nicholas Mirzoeff argues, visual culture “is concerned with visual events in which information, meaning, or pleasure is sought by the consumer in an interface with visual technology. By visual technology, I mean any form of apparatus designed either to be looked at or to enhance natural vision...” (Mirzoeff, 1998, p. 3). Furthermore, he also implies that the strategic use of visual culture is as “a tactic, rather than an academic discipline. It is a fluid, interdisciplinary structure, centered on understanding the response to visual media of both groups and individuals in everyday life. Its definition comes from the questions it asks and the issues it seeks to raise” (Mirzoeff, 1998, p. 11). Developed over the past twenty years, studies in visual culture often focus on the effects that modernity have wreaked in contemporary life. However, the multidisciplinary nature of visual culture also implies that correlating visual knowledge produced by various societies—which in the contemporary period becomes an analytical frame from which common cultural practices of “seeing” or “viewing” can then be assessed based on affiliations with social, political,

economic, or ideological connectivities—may also be used to infer much older visual cultural practices in societies occurring within the “deep past”—that is, the prehistoric or “archeological” time frame where visual knowledge is poorly understood due to the correlative lack of information or field research on social formations, trade and communication linkages, and migration.

In these cases, it is often the task of anthropology or archaeology to infer analytical methods originating from art history, particularly the field of *iconography*. Constituting a venerable tradition in art history originating from the late-19th Century, iconography originally was the study of canonic or sacred imagery that conveyed specific meanings related to the manner of their formal configuration across space, utilizing forms like color, texture, and spatial composition to demarcate different sets of meanings that are often grounded in scriptural understanding. Utilized by modern art historians like Erwin Panofsky (1972) and Michael Baxandall (1985), iconography became a more generalized understanding of the nature of images to convey specific meanings based on social, political, ideological, or aesthetic foundations, meanings that were meant to be deployed across equally specific publics of viewers. Art historians have also used iconography to resolve issues of comparative social constructions that are embedded in the specifying visual codes of icons, such as the implied system of class hierarchy within a society, or the manner of intercultural linkages between societies that inform the configuration of an icon, thereby establishing the conventions of visual cultural practices to its associated objects produced in relation to its meaning-signifiers and resulting signifieds of social praxis. Iconography has also been used as a correlative indicator that connects geographically disparate societies. For example, the differentiation of imagery of the Buddha throughout the 3rd to the 6th century CE could be tracked to the visual practices of particular societies in northwestern and northern India of the same period, in the same way that various depictions of Christ in the Mediterranean and European world between the 5th to the 13th centuries CE could also be traced to specific “styles” associated with the patronage pattern of specific kingdoms or empires. What iconography assumes is that a source where the icon originates from is then disseminated via trade, communication network, or migration, resulting in the reproduction of the icon in other societies. The icon’s reproducibility is dependent upon the icon’s meaning-signification system relative to its productive or adaptive community, meaning that an icon’s effect to its society is dependent upon its significance to that society, on a social or symbolic level. One implication of this phenomenon is that common visual practices of iconography existing among geographically distant societies could

be accounted for as a result of these movements of objects, ideas, and peoples; as well as the common recourse among adaptive societies to treat the signification of these icons, and thus their visual practices, on a similar basis as that of the originating society. This “correlative” capacity in iconography among disparate societies could thus be used as a means of analyzing the connectivity between these societies, in which the increasing number of iconic details that correlate to any two or more societies’ visual practice serve as a congruent factor to their degree of contact: the more details in an icon that two such societies share, for example, means that their level of contact and exchange is greater. The idea of “diffusion” of icons through migratory practices and missionary activity is somewhat similar, but this movement is presupposed to be a unilinear process from a central “originating” society and is (somewhat passively) accepted by a “receiving” society, which may not take into account feedback and subsequent reintroduction of newer iconic elements from other cultural practices among the “receiving” societies. For the purposes of more rigor and adaptability of cultural praxis, the idea of iconographic distribution via both adaptation and diffusion is therefore included in this study.

An interesting subtext within the development of iconography as an art historical practice was its repeated use in ethnographic objects. Alois Riegl’s analysis of ornamental patterns in textiles from such sources as Neolithic Europe, Pharaonic Egypt or Ottoman Turkey relates to the production of such styles based on the idea of *stilfragen* (“will to form”), in which he argued that the historical development of style followed an immanent formation in human thought across various human societies throughout time (Riegl, 1893). On the other hand, Aby Warburg’s study of Native American Indian iconic motifs bridges similar practices among different—and often unrelated—societies in generating common meanings and symbols that are understood by the art historian as shared human responses to sensate phenomena (Warburg, 1997). Applying these iconographic methods—allied with another art historical method called connoisseurship—to specifically “Oriental” art works, William Fagg and Margaret Plass argued that “primitive” African art can be studied to the same exacting level of iconic analysis as the art works of Renaissance Europe (Fagg & Plass, 1970). In Donald Proulx’s study of Nazca pottery, he specifically invokes Panofsky’s notion of iconography as a means of deciphering the significance of cultural objects in relation to social and historical forces unique to the producing society. Since the Nazcans themselves did not leave accounts of their society, Proulx instead combines archaeology, ethnographic analogy, and the “thematic approach” (classifying icons into particular themes and topics) in order to

attempt a description and interpretation of Nazca iconography (Proulx, 1990, p. 2).

What these trends indicate is a growing interdisciplinary approach in the study of prehistoric iconography, conjoining art historical methods of investigation and theory-building with the empirical disciplines of linguistics, and archeology; as well as the behavioral specialization of anthropology to illuminate common visual cultural practices across disparate populations in regions like Southeast Asia, where a recent history of colonization and nationalism have often confounded attempts at interlinking common cultural identities across the landmasses and populations that live in this strategic area of the world. This study, in particular, would like to address its main problem by focusing on a visual cultural phenomena that is uncannily present in various parts of this region, one that can be explained by the various theories of trade and communication contacts, or by migration and linguistic diffusion, but ultimately could only be resolved through a comparative study of their visual cultures that indicate common cultural norms and world views, scattered among the vastness of the archipelagic network of Southeast Asia, from Luzon island in the northeast to Sumatra island in the southwest.

Iconographic Analysis: The Southeast Asian “Avian Spirit”

This study focuses on five key manifestations of a common iconographic referent that is distributed among various ethnolinguistic groups located in island Southeast Asia. These groups are the Ifugao and Bungkalot/Ilonggot peoples of the Gran Cordillera range, northern Luzon island, Philippines; the Maranao of the Lanao Lake region of western Mindanao island, Philippines; the Sama-Badjao peoples of the Tawi-Tawi Archipelago, Philippines; the Iban Dayak of Sarawak State, Malaysia; and the Toba Batak peoples of the Toba Lake region, northern Sumatra island, Indonesia. These groups, spread out across more than two thousand kilometers of island landmasses and littoral seas, all carry a common iconographic “symptom” in the form of what the study calls the “avian spirit” theme. The avian spirit can be argued as a manifestation of the world views and belief systems of these people, in which certain species of birds are invested with supernatural or symbolic powers that “empower” them in the eyes of their publics. This empowerment is based either on their status as large members of resident avian species within the territory of these groups; or as representations of various bird species, that are then hybridized and mythologized with particular supernatural attributes. Their nature and traits as “spirits” that convey

a specific culturally symbolic meaning is then interpreted in different ways via different attributes, in accordance to the group's belief system, or cultural significance of these icons in relation to social structuration and hierarchy formation.

Generally, two distinct manifestations can be observed: one, that they manifest specific representations of status and prestige to the community; and second, that they serve as auguries or indicators of spiritual fortune to the community. The first manifestation can be argued as based on the group's traditional ascriptions of the life or behavior of certain large-species birds in their environment, which is then conveyed and transformed into an index of power relations between members within the community; members of the community against those of other communities, or foreigners; and is utilized as an indicator of that relationship through object production, emplacement within socially significant sites, and subject to the governing body of rituals and social practices that reinforce these relations for the community patronizing the icon. This often results in the avian spirit icon being displayed in a prominent and socially hierarchical space within the community, such as the central courtyard of the ruling elite, or on the eaves and rooftops of elite houses or warrior-defined spaces. Rituals that reinforce the icon's connection to the community's world views and socially-defined power structure are then organized to connect the avian spirit icon to these "discourses" of power and prestige. The second manifestation can be argued as stemming from their "cultic" status in the first, wherein their potency as "avian spirits" are measured by the way that these icons collect good fortune, or warn of bad fortune to the community through their emplacement in strategic sites that require divination, such as approaches to villages, burial sites, or places where contact with non-community members are established. Places where political or social adjudication occur, such as "courthouses" or the headman's house, are also emplaced with such avian spirit icons to serve as confirmatory "witnesses"—or even supreme adjudicators themselves—to these communal proceedings.

This author would like to begin his analysis of such avian spirit icons in an area where considerable literature on such customs of attributing power to avian spirits exists. Further examples that contain lesser correlative research or published literature are then followed, and it is hoped that by the end of the paper, the author can argue tentatively that an iconographic comparison between these examples can lead to a preliminary understanding of the way that visual cultural phenomena can be used to unveil common political, ideological, or social characteristics among these far-flung peoples, who collectively can be argued as Austronesian speakers following the Bellwood hypothesis, but whose

avian spirit iconographic practice may or may not actually be the result of direct migrations or instances of stylistic “diffusion”.

The Iban Dayak *Kenyalang*

The scholarship regarding the avian spirit rituals of the so-called “Sea Dayak”, or Iban Dayak, are perhaps the most comprehensive of the various groups under study. This has been established as far back as the first decade of the 20th Century when Nyuak and Dunn (1906) publishes a comprehensive ethnography of the Iban Dayak’s cultural mores and religious rituals, particularly those associated with warfare, agriculture, and village life. In this early survey, Nyuak and Dunn recognizes the central role that the Rhinoceros Hornbill (*Buceros rhinoceros* L.) play in the social and political life of the Iban Dayak. An entire chapter is devoted to the description of the Iban Dayak festival named *Gawai Kenyalang*, or the Feast of the Hornbill, wherein

wooden figures of the bird are carved and fixed on the end of long poles in front of the village. This feast is only held by those who have obtained the heads of enemies and have been warned in a dream to hold the feast. To hold it without the above qualifications would render the Iban liable for his temerity by death caused by **the spirit bird** pecking at him... (Nyuak & Dunn, 1906, p. 421, emphasis mine)

Nyuak and Dunn proceed to discuss the role that the *Kenyalang* play in the Iban Dayak’s headhunting rituals:

The feast is connected with war. The *Kenyalang* is supposed to peck at an enemy in a far off country and disable him, so that he may become easy prey for the feast keeper whenever he goes again on the warpath...When the warrior has obtained the heads of his enemies, and on returning from the war path is commanded by the spirit in a dream to hold a feast, in such case only can the Iban hold the feast of *Kenyalang*. This feast is the greatest of all feasts held by the Iban; all his other feasts are inferior to this so that if one is not rich, he will not hold this feast unless the spirit bids him more than once to do so. (Nyuak & Dunn, 1906, p. 421)

Mounting the *Gawai Kenyalang* is thus contingent upon two factors: the existence of inter-communal warfare in which heads are taken by warriors

“directed to do so” by the *Kenyalang*; and the “demand” that such “service” by the *Kenyalang* be propitiated through a lavish communal feast, whose material expense is such that only the elites of the community can do so. This connection between political elites and the warrior class is a distinct conflation implied by the *Gawai Kenyalang*, one that future scholars like Davenport would note in great detail in his later study of the Iban Dayak *Kenyalang* sculptures. Aside from detailing how the *Kenyalang* are carved from the buttressed trunk of the Ply tree (*Alotonia scholaris*) as well as its related ironwood pole, Nyuak and Dunn also discuss the elaborate process of animal sacrifices that underpin each stage of the *Gawai Kenyalang*, including the rituals of gathering the wood materials from the forest; finding and paying for the services of the sculptor; and the central rituals of feasting during the *Gawai Kenyalang* itself, which involves food, the use and display of ceremonial mats and dresses, and the undertaking of performances within the households where the *Kenyalang* are enshrined over the course of several days (Nyuak & Dunn, 1906, pp. 422-425). Important visual details of these rituals are recorded in two archival photographs: one is of the *kenyalang* bird figure itself (Illustration 1), which shows the abstracted form of the *kenyalang*, with its extra-large open beak, with the upper beak coiled into an elaborate horn-like motif; the lower beak extended in a lower diagonal that features the bird’s tongue; a “crown” that surrounds the comparatively small head with a halo-like openwork crest; a small curved body; and a long curving tail. The other is a less documented practice of constructing a warrior’s ceremonial war cape and cap using the feathers of the Rhinoceros Hornbill itself (Illustration 2). Shown in real profile, and apparently



Illustration 1: Sculpture of the *Kenyalang*
(Source: Nyuak and Dunn [1906, p. 422].)

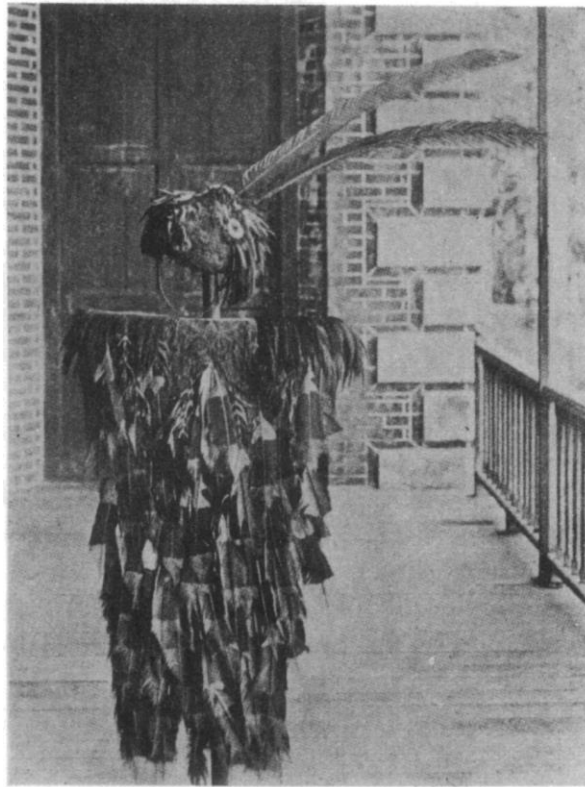


Illustration 2: Iban Dayak war coat and cap with Hornbill feathers
(Source: Nyuak and Dunn [1906, p. 423].)

photographed from the verandah of a colonial-era house or building, the Iban Dayak war cape and hat expands upon the significance of the Hornbill from simply being a sculptural icon of the avian spirit, and implies a closer connection between the warrior ethos of the Iban Dayak and the associated martial “virility” that the war coat and cap, dressed by the actual feathers of the *Kenyalang’s* terrestrial manifestation, with the significance of the Hornbill itself as a visual icon that indexes key notions of the Iban Dayak’s world view, cultural praxis, and social capital between a warrior class elite and their publics.

Davenport’s study of the *Kenyalang* sculptures in late-20th century Sarawak focused on the social significance behind the use of the avian spirit icon within the complex of political and economic practices of the contemporary Iban Dayak. Noting that their traditional belief systems predominate despite the colonial introduction of Christianity—not to mention their resistance against Islamization—Davenport locates the motivations behind which traditional and

contemporary Iban Dayaks revere the *Gawai Kenyalang* as part of their collective ethnic identity. This can be compared in the table (Table 1) below:

Table 1: Comparative Values of the *Gawai Kenyalang* among the Iban Dayak across time

| Traditional | Contemporary |
|--|--|
| To boost the courage and fighting spirit of the men actively engaged in raiding/taking heads | A kind of Thanksgiving celebration that is held somewhat irregularly, and only after a series of years of prosperity and good health |
| To call upon the supernatural realm for increased powers that would ensure success on future raids | A ceremony to which various supernatural personages are asked to mingle with humans and enjoy the celebration |
| To intimidate a designated enemy and weaken its resolve to defend itself | A more or less reciprocal event amongst neighboring communities/ a form of payback to some neighboring communities for celebrations they hosted in the near past, and a social event that obliges some in the communities participating to reciprocate in the future |

Source: Davenport (2000, pp. 127-128).

Establishing the supernatural value of the *Kenyalang* on the trophy-taking warfare practices among the traditional Iban Dayaks, Davenport sees a continuation of this social signification being translated among contemporary Iban Dayaks based on the social significance of the *kenyalang* as the central icon of their community, a source of collective empowerment and identity, and a current continuation of the spiritual iconography that empowered it in the older days. The source of this supernatural value must take into account both the terrestrial referent of the *kenyalang* (in the form of the living Rhinoceros hornbills that populated the forest), as well as its socio-spiritual correlation to the Iban Dayak’s trophy-taking practices. This is in the form of the severed trophy heads that the Iban Dayak captured from their competing communities, which are perceived as being “spiritually charged” with energy. This spiritual energy is then abducted by the act of head-taking, and the placement of the severed heads into containers (traditionally made of sacred *ikat* cloth shaped like a sling for holding babies) that are then clustered near the *kenyalang* on the ceiling of the collective longhouse where the Iban Dayak warriors traditionally congregated. These are morphologically compared to the *Ficus* fruits (taken from the

straggling fig tree) that hornbills normally digest as a vital part of their forest diet, and therefore the carved *kenyalang* is represented as “ingesting spiritual energy” from the severed heads in the same way that the terrestrial hornbill ingests the *Ficus* fruit in the natural environment. This motif, along with other decorative aspects of the *kenyalang*’s iconography, are then incorporated by Davenport as part of a larger study of the sculpture’s formal and social properties.

There are two general types of *kenyalang* sculptures. The first is the so-called “principal *kenyalang*”, which was larger, and carved during the period when it served ritualistic purposes within the Iban Dayak’s trophy-taking practices. Measuring between 6 to 9 feet in length, 2 ½ to 4 feet high, the principal *kenyalang* was elaborately embellished with many smaller carvings of animals, humans, and plant forms; and painted in bright colors. This was then mounted on top of a tall ironwood post that was installed during the *Gawai Kenyalang* feast in the courtyard of the longhouse; and then later on stored within the longhouse itself. The second type is the so-called *anak kenyalang*, which is generally smaller (about 2 ½ -3 ½ feet long by 2 ½ feet high), and contains no naturalistic carvings. However, the *anak kenyalang* tends to have a more “abstracted” form, with its distinctively exaggerated spiral horn, an ornate crest over the head of the bird figure, a symmetrical balance between a long downward pointing beak and a flat, fork-shaped tail, and is often referred to as the “female”, “consort”, or “child/subordinate” of the principal *kenyalang* (Davenport, 2000, p. 129). The demise of trophy-taking among the Iban Dayak starting from the early-20th century meant that most principal *kenyalang* are no longer carved, while the more portable *anak kenyalang* have become either treasured heirlooms or collectibles that are found in a few museums worldwide. Also, since the ownership of the principal *kenyalang* was collective, collecting them was a formidable challenge considering the communal stakes involved in negotiating their purchase; whereas the domestic nature of *anak kenyalang* sculptures (usually confined to that of the *bilek* household, or groups of senior women) allowed them to be more materially mobile. An example of the principle *kenyalang* from the Sarawak Museum (Illustration 3) as iconographically explained by Davenport showcases the central role that the *kenyalang* plays as a communal icon. This can be explained in Table 2:

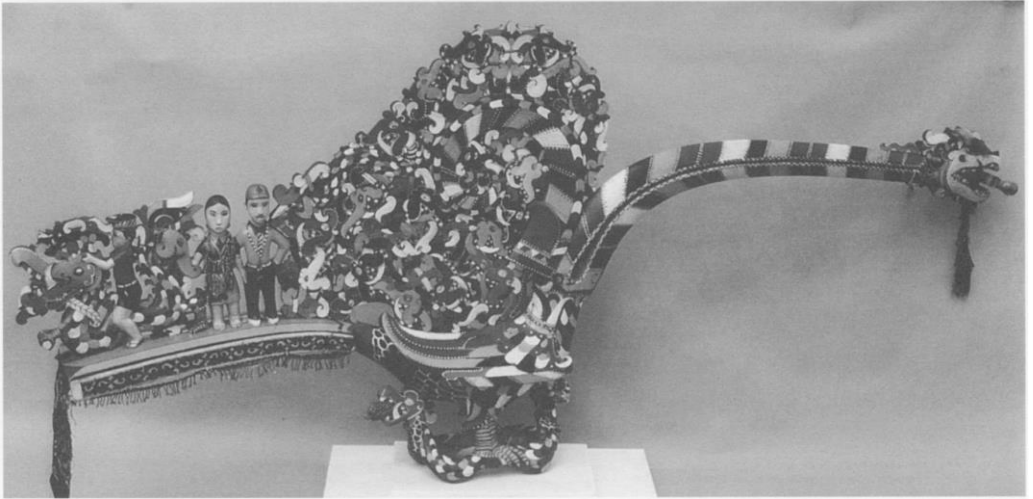


Illustration 3: Principal *Kenyalang* sculpture from Wong Panjai near Lubok Antu. Sarawak Museum Collection (Source: Davenport [2000, p. 137].)

Table 2: Iconography of Principal *Kenyalang*

| Term/Form | Associated Value/Meaning |
|---|--|
| Upraised head with beak curving horizontally, ending with a <i>naga</i> tongue with a human caught in its tip | Spiritual capture and ingestion of human head |
| Ornate <i>aso</i> tree motif forming a crown or crest above the head | Spiritual capture “storage unit” where the human head spirits are contained within |
| Flat tail with human figures standing on top interlaced with supernatural animals | Spirits of the community |
| Talons grasping serpents/reptiles | Supremacy of the <i>kenyalang</i> compared to other animal spirits |

However, it is the more portable *anak kenyalang* that is of more pressing concern to this study. Whereas the principal *kenyalang* dominated the *Garwai Kenyalang* feasts, it is the *anak kenyalang* that has iconographically predominated contemporary Iban Dayak sculpture in the present. Its abstracted indigenous forms, familial ownership, and relative portability have also drawn attention from various collectors and museums worldwide, and it is the *anak kenyalang* which one can see in the major museums, such as the Sarawak Museum, or the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (Illustrations 4-5). By comparison, the

iconography of the *anak kenyalang* is simpler, more austere, and yet contains the fundamental elements that “empower” it as a “surrogate” to the bigger principal *kenyalang* (Table 3):



Illustration 4: *Anak kenyalang* sculpture at the Sarawak Museum
(Source: Davenport [2000, p. 140].)

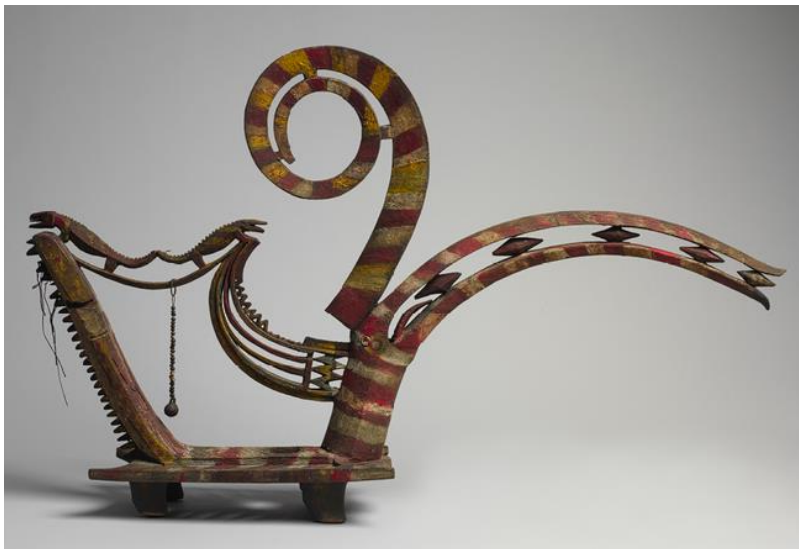


Illustration 5: *Anak Kenyalang* at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Gift from the Fred and Rita Richman Foundation, 2007
(Source: “Hornbill [Kenyalang]” [n.d.])

Table 3: Common Iconographic Characteristics among *anak kenyalang*

| Term/Form | Meaning/Value |
|--|--|
| Separated but parallel “open beak” with stylized <i>Ficus</i> fruit in between | “Swallowing the spirits of human heads.” |
| Highly curled horn | Emphasizes spirit potency |
| Highly stylized crest with geometric forms | Spirit container |
| Simplified diagonal tail | Counterbalance to beak form |

What can be observed from these visual practices is that the iconic value of the hornbill is as a “spiritual medium” through which the Iban Dayak empower themselves via socially significant rituals and feasts, rooted in traditional trophy-taking, but now translated into a manifestation of social prestige and political distinction through the patronage of the *kenyalang* sculptures: communal patronage as far as the principal *kenyalang* is concerned; and familial patronage, as far as the *anak kenyalang* is concerned. This social significance continues in the present when the political contributions of the Iban Dayak to the Malaysia state has been such that the hornbill is used in the present as the Coat of Arms of the State of Sarawak (Illustration 6), proving the enduring nature of its socio-political significance.

Ultimately, what the *anak kenyalang*—as well as its larger but scarcer partner the principal *kenyalang*—also ascribe to is a concept of spiritual potency that mimics the reproductive cycle of the hornbill in the forest (with its feeding habits and paternal role in feeding its mate and young hatchling ensconced within a fig tree) as an iconic referent to the larger spiritual world inhabiting the Iban Dayak’s social memory of trophy gathering, communal feasting, and identity formation. This is conflated within a social structure whose comparatively egalitarian nature (there is no prescribed “ruling class” among the Iban Dayak, save for the socially significant warriors) allows the community to participate in this identity formation through the rituals that empower and give meaning to the *kenyalang* in their dealings with the world around them. In a sense, this also prefigures the use of similar socially significant bird spirit figures in other parts of island Southeast Asia, such as the one “inhabiting” the island of Mindanao, about 1,700 kilometers northeast of Sarawak.



**Illustration 6: Coat of Arms, State of Sarawak, Federation of Malaysia
featuring the *kenyalang***

The Maranao *Sarimanok*

Along the shores of Lake Lanao, a crater lake on the province of Lanao del Sur in the southern Philippine island of Mindanao, another avian spirit figure can be discerned. This is the *sarimanok*, which has served as a status symbol for the Maranao people to such a degree that it was valorized during the 1970s as an essential representation of the Philippines' cultural identity through its use as the main motif of the 1974 Miss Universe pageant (then held in Manila), and which became popular as a source of commercial signage. Scholars of Muslim Philippine Art from Saber and Orellana (1973), to Madale (1974), Gowing (1979) and Francisco (1995) all discuss how the *sarimanok* is seen as a prestige icon originally among the Maranao elites, but has since been popularized among lower class Maranao as a symbol of their ethnic identity. Gowing situates this symbolic value within the corpus of mythic texts among the Maranao, specifically the epic poem *Darangen*. He nonetheless speculates that this symbol is perhaps of pre-Islamic origin:

Bird-figures in Maranao art are undoubtedly very old, and they are mentioned in the *Darangen* as decorative emblems on the royal boats of the epic's legendary heroes...Interestingly enough, the texts...use

two different terms for the bird-figure...earlier Darangen texts used the term *mera bulawan* ("golden peacock") while later texts use the term *sarimanok*. The *sarimanok* was once a symbol of royalty, and Maranao tradition says the sultans of old used birds to carry messages to their sweethearts... (Gowing, 1979, p. 141)

The *sarimanok* is often described as a fancifully-feathered rooster or "bird", in which a small fish is then dangled from the tip of its beak. Another larger fish is also used as the base upon which the *sarimanok* stands, and is thus seen as "grasping" on to it. It is a figure that is often used as a decoration in carved, woven, or painted form. However, the most socially significant form of the *sarimanok* is when it is carved as a free-standing sculpture roughly 3-4 feet high by 4-6 feet long and 2-3 feet wide, with intricately carved nape feathers, wings, and extravagantly extended tail feathers, which is then often painted in bright polychromes. This is the form that one sees inside the houses of Maranao "royal families" in Marawi City (of which there are several dozens). A sample collected by the Philippine Center for Advanced Studies (PCAS) during the 1970s is now preserved at the Asian Center Museum Collection of the University of the Philippines (UP) Diliman (*Illustration 7*). The abstracted



**Illustration 7: *Sarimanok* sculpture from Lanao del Sur, circa 1970s
(Asian Center Museum Collection)**

form of the *sarimanok*, with its torpedo-shaped body; long, slender neck ending in a simplified head and beak; and profusion of curvilinear lines that is a hallmark of the Mindanao sculptural tradition known as *okir* seems to be an attempt to

hybridize two disparate sources of the *sarimanok*'s iconography: the austere, Austronesian-oriented geometries of the sea-based Iban Dayak, or Sama Dilaut, or even Palawan Tagbanwa seemingly meets the florid style of arabesques and intricate lace patterns from India or Western Asia, resulting in a creature with "two heritage origins". Table 4 illustrates the distinct design features of the *sarimanok*:

Table 4: Parts of the *sarimanok* and their associated forms

| | |
|---------------|---|
| Head and neck | Elongated S-shaped neck with proboscis-shaped beak (often suspended with a small fish at its tip) |
| Crown | Elaborately carved and colored crown, mane, and "beard" in arabesque shapes |
| Body | Torpedo-shaped with elaborately painted "feather" motifs |
| Wings | Flat, plank-shaped with cutouts to articulate well-curved wing feathers, highly polychromed |
| Tail | Individually planked tapering long tail feathers in teardrop shape; individually colored; inserted to the body as individual feathers |
| Legs and Base | Tapering legs meet at a base shaped like a fish; often added with an x-shaped cross-beam leg brace for added stability |

The *sarimanok*'s explicit affiliation with the Maranao royal class is located in several sources, as Gowing notes. Madale (1974) discusses the connection between the *sarimanok* and its owner as "twin-spirits" (*inikadowa*) as that of an invisible counterpart to the person, one that also links the spirit world and daily world through the rooster's habit of crowing at dawn. The presence of the *sarimanok* in Maranao folk tales, such as that of Raja Indarapatra (who courted the beautiful princess of the moon through his magical golden bird, who flies him to the moon and back), also signifies the value of the *sarimanok* as a loyal companion and surrogate to a male warrior (Madale, 1974, p. 142). Separately, Francisco (1995) also cites Madale in his discussion the Maranao *Isa ka labo-ai*, or ritual flags displayed when ships drop anchor, wherein the *sarimanok* flag is the most paramount of ten other flags, and denotes the presence of a royal personage (Francisco, 1995, p. 3). The carved *sarimanok* sculpture is also seen in the context of ritual displays of power and prestige in Maranao feasts when they are installed alongside the *kulintang* gong set and *langkit malong* textiles to provide audiences with a royal "pedigree" of its owner and feasting host. Such *sarimanok* sculptures are then stored at the large wooden houses (*torogan*) of its royal owner, whose roof gables are sometimes decorated with wooden or brass

sarimanok finials of smaller size, which signifies the royal status of the household, as well as provide “spiritual protection” to that household against thieves and enemies. Similar *sarimanok* finials are also placed on parasols for the *Bai a Labi* (chief wife) or sultan to “confer upon them honor, prestige, and power...” (Francisco, 1995, p. 3).

In the modern Philippine setting, the royal signification of the *sarimanok* image has been coopted by both the state and private corporations during the 1970s as a symbol of native Philippine identity—and its implicit reference to both royalty and the political ascendancy of the non-secessionist Maranao in the eyes of martial law administrators, therefore becoming a coded text in “integrating” Muslim Maranaos to the national fabric, and the instrumentalization of their royal iconography for state and capitalist consumption and display. Examples of such designs include a mid-1970s poster advertisement for Pepsi Cola Philippines (Illustration 8) and the station logo of the media conglomerate ABS-CBN (Illustration 9), whose use of the *sarimanok* dates back to the late 1960s.



Illustration 8: Poster advertisement for identification logo of Pepsi Cola Philippines, circa 1970s.



Illustration 9: Station ABS-CBN is featuring the *sarimanok*, circa 2010

It can, therefore, be observed that the use of the *sarimanok* hinges on its prestige value as a regal “messenger/servant” whose magical ability to fly is surpassed only by its extravagant plumage, and serves as both adjutant and transport for royal personages. Carried over into the modern period, these values are continued as socially prestigious icons that carry a notion of native identity rooted in Maranao art, but amplified into the national popular cultural scene

through signage and its visual communicative values of majesty, royalty, and “supernaturality”. Its continuous presence in Philippine contemporary art, primarily through the efforts of National Artist Abdulmari Asia Imao (who has used the *sarimanok* in numerous paintings), only adds to its iconic signification as a prestige icon that symbolizes and legitimates authority and power. In a sense, the *sarimanok* figure is not much different from the *kenyalang* icon of the Iban Dayaks, despite their comparative distances and differences of acculturation and religious affiliation.

The Toba Batak *Manuk-manuk*

Gowing (1979) also identifies another aspect of the avian spirit among the arts of Muslim Mindanao, and that is the manifestation of the *manuk*. Understood widely to mean “fowl”, if not “chicken”, the *manuk*’s Malay definition as any “bird” should be taken into consideration as an entity that registers both spiritual potencies, as well as sustain the “protector” function of the avian spirit through its alert observations of their surroundings. The Toba Batak of Lake Toba in North Sumatra take these qualities of the *manuk* and convert it into an explicit talisman that serves a collective space with its ability to augur good or evil. Calling them *manuk-manuk*, the Toba Batak carve them

out of wood in the form of a bird, chicken, or eagle. During rituals, it is made sacred by a datu or ritualist priest and then suspended from a bamboo pole in the middle of the alaman or village square. This elevated position allows the *manuk-manuk* to overlook the entrance of the village and keep watch over all who enter and leave...The Toba Batak recognize two types of images that ward of misfortune. The first is the *manuk-manuk si baganding tua*. Placed on top of a pole, it can indicate by its movement whether village visitors come with good or bad intentions. The datu, basing his decision on the movement of this image, instructs villagers as to how newcomers are to be treated. The second type of village, the *manuk-manuk nasomal*, is more simply carved and remains inert. Ranked next in authority to the head of the community, the datu plays an important role in the Batak social structure. His tasks include deciding appropriate days for ceremonies, healing illnesses that plague the village, foreseeing the future, and exorcising evil spirits that harm the community. (Ernawati, 2006, p. 198).

An example of one such *manuk-manuk* can be seen from the collection of the Museum Nasional Indonesia (Illustration 10), in which the geometric and simplified form of the older *kenyalang* can be glimpsed from its austere composition. Sporting a conical neck climaxed with a downturned beak, simplified crown, and sporting plank-shaped wings and individually planked tail feathers that are eerily reminiscent of the *sarimanok*, the *manuk-manuk*'s primary differentiation is the lack of prominent legs. Instead, a peg-shaped spur that is used to plant the *manuk-manuk* to its bamboo pole serves as its base. However, this example from the Museum Nasional Indonesia also sports a strange “walking leg” motif that is human in origin. The “walking leg” obviously adds a visual cipher as to the *manuk-manuk*'s directionality when viewed from far below in the *alaman*.



Illustration 10: Toba Batak *manuk-manuk* from the Museum Nasional Indonesia

(Source: Ernawati [2006, p. 199].)

In this example of an avian spirit, the potency of the *manuk-manuk* is gauged by the divination of its movements in the air by the *datu*, who is both village headman as well as ritual priest and medicine man. This conflation of socially significant functions within the orbit of the local community captures the dependency of power that is formed by the *datu* and his symbol of authority and augury device, the *manuk-manuk*. All ritualistic functions and divinatory interpretations of the *datu* are circumscribed by his ability to “read” the *manuk-manuk*'s movements in the wind, which is also used to foretell events, and identify sicknesses (both physical and spiritual) that afflict the community. Due

to the relatively “egalitarian” nature of Toba Batak society (in which the *datu* serves the primary office of authority of the village, without being bound to higher ethnic power structures like a “royalty”, and whose other function is to lead village warriors to collective expeditions against common enemies of the Toba Batak), the *manuk-manuk* does not serve as a cipher to justify royal authority. Rather, it becomes a means of staking the practical spaces of the Toba Batak in guiding them in spiritual matters. The “guardian” nature of the *manuk-manuk*, which can be argued based on a symbolic model of onomatopoeia with the rooster, is also another aspect that we would have to consider as we reconnoiter back two thousand kilometers east, and compare the same symbolic use—and etymology—of the *manuk-manuk* to another communal ritualistic function: that of household or grave guardian.

The Sama Badjao *Manuk-manuk*

In his discussion of Muslim Mindanao concepts of space and identity, Sakili (2003) also mentions an avian spirit called *manuk-manuk* among the Sama Badjao, who are scattered from the Sulu to Tawi-Tawi archipelagoes. Focusing on an example from Sulu (Illustration 11), Sakili (2003) mentions these as

decorations on houses and boats. But they do not resemble the Maranao *sarimanok* and, unlike the latter, Sulu *manuk-manuk* serve a definite purpose. When found on the gables of houses, especially those with infants and young children inside, the *manuk-manuk* are said to ward off *balbalan* or ghouls which supposedly prey on little children and corpses. There are various types of *manuk-manuk* designs. There is the *sumayang galurah*, an eagle-like figure with outstretched wings. The other is the *tadjuh baunuh* (or terminal bud of *baunuh*, a kind of Sulu fruit tree) which is a small stylized bird figure. Occasionally, bird’s wings are carved as part of gravemarkers. In any case, bird motifs in Sulu art are not as widespread or as elaborate as those of the Maranao *sarimanok*. (p. 197)



Illustration 11: Sama Badjao *manuk-manuk* from Sulu serving as gravemarker. Base upon which it is perched is in the *tadju baunuh* motif

(Source: Sakili [2003, p. 197].)

As can be seen, the Sama Badjao *manuk-manuk* utilizes another aspect of the avian spirit figure: that of protector or guardian of the innocent (children) and the dead. The morphology of the *manuk-manuk*'s form, which despite its often miniature size can be clearly gauged in terms of anatomical details, seems to be a transitory form between the *kenyalang* and the *sarimanok*: it has a short, S-shaped neck that terminates in a proboscis-shaped beak; a beard of feathers carved in *ukkil* style (the Tausug equivalent for the Maranao *okir*); a turtle-shaped body that lengthens into a miniature torpedo shape towards the tail; and a fork-shaped "paddle tail".

Convergences of Visual Forms and Iconographic Functions

By comparing the four sets of avian spirit figures presented so far in the form of Table 5, the study "interconnects" the common characteristics and attributes of these figures as anchored on both their forms as well as their commonly-held meanings:

Table 5: Comparative Attributes of Avian Spirit Icons among the Iban Dayak, Maranao, Toba Batak, and Sama Badjao

| IBAN DAYAK KENYALANG | MARANAO SARIMANOK | TOBA MANUK-MANUK | BATAK | SAMA-BADJAO MANUK-MANUK |
|---|--|--|--|----------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Traditionally associated as messenger of power for the community through headhunting; • Principal type surmounted on tall pole at village center; • <i>Anak</i> type kept within the house as family heirloom; • Long curved beaks, no wings, flaring or platform-type tail; • Older prototype of “fork-type” tail & “horse saddle” body • Elaborate crowns; and • Simplified bodies with short legs to square base | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Traditionally associated as “magic messengers/vehicles” of local royalty; • Sculpture-type kept as clan heirloom to maintain social status; • Mounted as house finials to indicate “royal” status • Long, curved beaks, flat plank wings, planked tail feathers fish ornament on beak or base; • Elaborate carvings on crown/beard/wings; and • Torpedo bodies with long legs on cross-base | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Traditionally associated with monitoring evil spirits; • Mounted on pole at village center facing entrance; • Empowered by <i>datu</i>; • Simplified carving of head, neck, body; • Plank-type tail feathers, flat plank wings; and • Simplified base mount to attach to pole | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Traditionally associated with guarding the nuclear household/graveyard from malevolent spirits; • Mounted as finial on house gable/ gravemarker; and • Simplified carving of head with elongated beak, no wings, tubular body, and forked tail | |

Aside from the contrasting numbers of both iconic and formal values (with the Iban Dayak as the “thickest”, and the Sama Badjao as the “thinnest”), the Table also illustrates the comparative use of symbolic value for these avian spirits as measured across the social structure of each society, with the Iban Dayak and Maranao equating their avian spirits to the affirmation of regal or “national” prestige; whereas the Toba Batak and Sama Badjao look at their avian

spirits as primarily protectors and augury figures. Crucially, all four retain certain similarities of iconic morphology associated with their cultural value: the Iban Dayak, Maranao, and Toba Batak carve bird sculptures that have common attributes, such as the use of elongated necks, plank-shaped wings and tail feathers, elaborate headdresses and crowns, and the mounting of the larger versions upon communal poles. On the other hand, the “guardian” nature of the avian spirit is shared by the Toba Batak, the Sama Badjao, and to a lesser extent the Maranao, by their mounting as finials to roof gables or gravemarkers, or to their role as diviners of good or ill fortune. At each instance, the iconography is addressed in a relatively straightforward manner: all are designed as “birds” with recognizable necks, crowns, wings, torsos, and tails, the degree of affiliation to which then follows their relative significance to their community: regal and powerful in the case of the *kenyalang* and *sarimanok*; austere and simplified in the case of the *manuk-manuk*. That the environmental identification of these avian spirits to actual bird species, however, could only be made for the *kenyalang*, with its explicit comparison to the Rhinoceros Hornbill. The rest, such as the *manuk-manuk* of the Toba Batak and Sama Badjao seems to be associated with either domesticated fowl (i.e. chickens or roosters) or unidentified avian species like hawks, kites, or eagles. In the case of the *sarimanok*, however, there is an explicit connection to the “artificiality” of its origin, as the related mythic literature attests that these were mechanical devices or servants that are at the beck and call of their masters. Of course, the assertion that they are also “spirit twins” have not been exhaustively explored by other researchers, and it would be interesting to see if the characteristics of avian spirits in other societies occupy similar roles as “stand-ins” for their human equivalents.

As a final note to consider, however, the use of actual avian material as socially prestigious warrior wear can not only be seen in the pre-modern Iban Dayak warrior capes and helmets made from hornbill feathers and beaks. They can also be found in a group of upland societies more than two thousand kilometers away from the Iban Dayak, in the Gran Cordillera range of north Luzon Island.

The Hornbill Headdresses: Two Examples from the Ifugao and the Bungkalot/Ilonggot

The peoples of the Gran Cordillera and shorter Caraballo range in north Luzon share many characteristics with each other. For the purpose of this study, we shall focus on a peculiar type of ceremonial male headgear that denotes both courage and prestige to its wearer. As Benitez-Johannot (2006) recounts the

ethnographic work of Rosaldo (1986), the Ilongots (also called Bungkalot) of Nueva Vizcaya Province wear ceremonial headdresses called *panglao* that centers on the skull and distinctly red beak of a Rufous Hornbill (*Buceros hydrocorax*), known in Filipino as *kalaw*. The hornbill skull and beak forms the climax of a decorative program for a male cap that starts with intricate adornments using shells and beads that are wound across the cap, and produces a tinkling sound when its wearer moves. Made in the context of promoting male virility and desirability as a potential mate for its wearer among women, the *panglao* was originally donned by young Ilongot warriors **only upon the taking of a human head** (emphasis mine). The Ilongots, like most of the other Cordillera peoples, were renowned and feared as headhunters, and Rosaldo's research identifies their wearing of the *panglao* as not coded within notions of male beauty and desirability, but also on the male warrior ethic as a preferred modality of "reproductive masculinity" within Ilongot society.



Illustration 12. The Ilongot *panglao* with its Hornbill skull and decorative shells projecting from the metal skullcap that affixes this assemblage to the wearer's head

(Source: "Ilongot/Bungkalot Headhunter's Hornbill Headdress" [n.d.])

This traditional necessity of "proving one's manhood" by first taking a head, and then gaining the right to wear the *panglao* is associated by Benitez-Johannot with the "life enhancing" properties of this ritual, in which the head of the victim becomes part of a power charm assemblage that decorates the Ilongot house, documenting its owner's bravery and desirability as both as social and

sexual person through this act of violence. The red color of the hornbill's beak as well as its distinctive crying calls in the wild is also associated with the rituals of bloodletting and a victim's death-knells upon head-taking; as well as the blood of a pig's sacrifice, not to mention the healthy complexion of a normal human body (Benitez-Johannot, 2006, p. 147). Such an example of the decorative *panglao* can be seen in Illustration 12.

On the other hand, another Cordillera group also utilizes the hornbill head as a decorative element of their own ritualized male garb. The Ifugaos of the eastern Gran Cordillera range call their hornbill headgear as the *ulo di kang-o*. The National Museum of the Philippines presents one such example of an *ulo di kang-o*, dating from 1914, and collected by no less than Henry Otley Beyer himself. The Museum website elaborates that:

The *ulo di kang-o* is an Ifugao headdress worn on the head of the groom during wedding ceremony. This is made of a hornbill beak (*kalaw*) wrapped with a piece of blue cloth. The hornbill beak symbolizes a good omen and usually adorned to Ifugao headdress especially those worn by the *mumbaki* or religious practitioner. ("Ifugao Headdress Hornbill", 2014)

The Ifugao *ulo di kang-o* from the National Museum can be seen in Illustration 13.



Illustration 13: The Ifugao *ulo di kang-o* with its hornbill skull and beak wrapped in red-and-black Ifugao textile (Source: "Ifugao Headdress Hornbill" [2014].)

As with the Ilongot *panglao*, the Ifugao *ulo di kang-o* is produced within the context of identifying male virility and social desirability — often as a result of that young male's first head-taking. Although the signifier of the hornbill has been reduced (in comparison to its almost deictical power by the Iban Dayak) in social significance to being an “omen of good luck”, both the *panglao* and *ulo di kang-o* still preserve the same male warrior ethos that propelled the premodern Iban Dayak to honor their own trophy-taking practice through the *kenyalang*. This brings about a vital question: how does this coincidence of identifying common societal attributes to hornbill figures with an associated trophy-taking warrior practice, occurring thousand of kilometers apart, and divided by vast expanses of time and modern national boundaries, serve to argue for a common cultural praxis that may have been either communicated or diffused in the prehistoric past?

Conclusion: Avian Spirits Reflect Common Connections across Island Southeast Asia

As can be observed across all the samples of the study, there is a common manifestation of the same iconography involving similar referents (i.e. the bird figure as “hunter” or “guardian” spirit) or even the same referents (the hornbill as a symbolic bird for the male warrior class). The commonality of these references can therefore be used to argue for a commonality of connections that can either be read as manifestations of a common trade or communication link tying these various cultures together (and thus in a way reinforcing Solheim's Nusantara thesis); or that these common references to an avian spirit icon can also be read as originating from a “mother culture”, which is then dispersed through migration (reaffirming Bellwood's Austronesian thesis). In addition, common linguistic references of the same avian spirit icon (such as *manuk-manuk* by the Sama-Badjao and the Toba Batak); allied with a commonality of ritualistic use (the *manuk-manuk* as guardian spirit of the Sama-Badjao household or graveyard, as well as augury spirit of the Toba Batak village); and cultural referents to specifically “empowering” attributes of avian spirits (the regal messenger that is the *sarimanok* to the Maranao, the lordly “spirit devourer” that is the *kenyalang* among the Iban Dayak, and the manly virility of the *panglao* and *ulo di kang-o* caps of the Ilongot and Ifugao, respectively) can therefore be argued as common manifestations of a vast premodern system of distribution of cultures that is anchored on an “origin point” of such practices (simultaneously implying an originary culture or people that “invented” such practices), which is then

“dispersed” or “diffused” to various territories by peoples coming from the origin point, or as a consequence of intensive trade and communication contacts. The latter manifestation can already be seen in the historical transmission and growth of world religions in Southeast Asia: Buddhism from northeastern India migrates to Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam; while Islam takes hold on Malaysia, Indonesia, Brunei and the southern Philippines from the Middle East due to the activities of traders and missionaries. What would be a compelling argument that would favor the existence of the “origin point” or “hub” culture would be the area where the most number of ritualistic and iconographic attributes are present. If the argument for the avian spirit icon would be followed in these case samples, then that hub could be argued as “based” in Borneo, where the Iban Dayak’s *kenyalang* rituals constitute strains that can be seen from the Toba Batak’s *manuk-manuk* (elevating it on a pole at the center of the village as a talisman or augury figure), to the use of the hornbill as a symbolic bird in male warrior trophy-taking rituals (the *panglao* and *ulo di kang-o* practices of the Ilongot and Ifugao). Does this also mean that the Iban Dayak is the “mother culture” where all the other avian spirit cultures in island Southeast Asia derived their practices? This is a contentious argument since other fields, such as linguistics, would contradict that claim of cultural progeny.

Having saying so, however, the study would like to speculate that the Iban Dayak’s “complete set” of avian spirit attributes may also be the result of this people’s strong cultural autonomy that resisted both Islamic hegemony, as well as Christian inroads into their culture and belief system. In a way, this strong sense of “national identity” formed among the Iban Dayaks based on their prehistoric belief system preserved their corpus of *kenyalang* icons well into the period of modernity, when globalization and the eradication of traditional culture become the cultural modality. It is this preservation of premodern symbols, uplifted into national icons such as the state logo, that continues to inform ethnolinguistic groups of the potency of their past to define their present selves as both contemporary-minded, as well as grounded in the traditions of the past.

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