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# A Sociohistorical Transition. Trade in Forest Products and Bride-Price among the Punan Tubu of Eastern Kalimantan

Nicolas Césard

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## A Sociohistorical Transition

### Trade in Forest Products and Bride-Price among the Punan Tubu of Eastern Kalimantan

Nicolas Césard

**Abstract.** – Most of the former nomadic Punan of Kalimantan (Borneo) reside along the large rivers of the hinterland. For almost a century in northeastern Kalimantan the increased trade in forest products along the Tubu River, as well as the settling process, had a significant impact on the Punan Tubu's social system and the interaction of the different groups with the outside world. The article analyses and summarises the continuity between the commercial trade of the past and the current “bride-price” as exemplified by the Punan Tubu – at first glance two unrelated spheres. A sociohistorical review highlights the effects of the evolution of trade and the emergence of new goods, of the neighbouring Dayak groups' influence, and of the adoption of complex marriage payments. [*Borneo, Punan, nomads, social change, forest products, trade, marriage, bride-price*]

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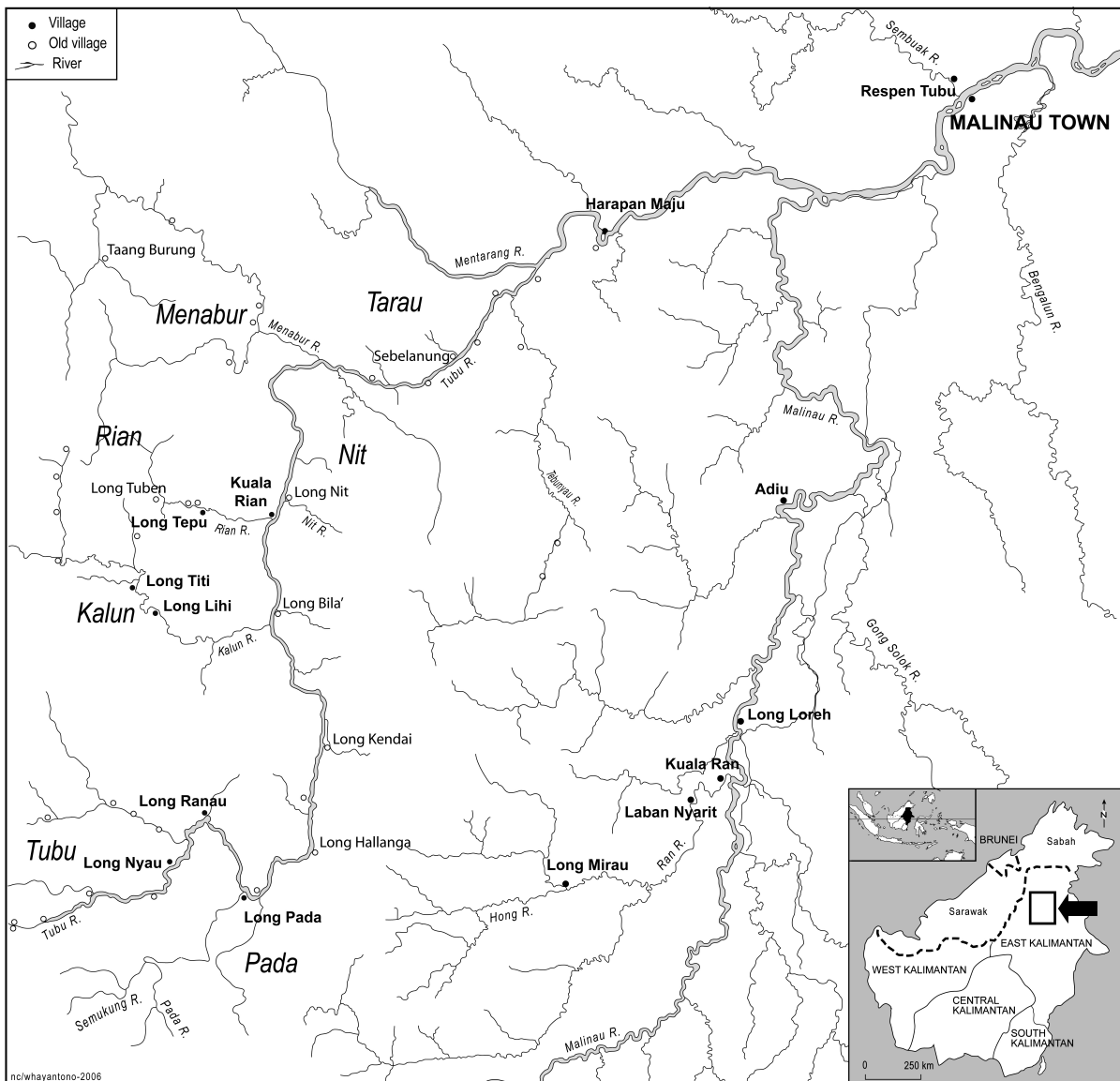
#### Introduction

The Punan, grouped into small bands of hunters and gatherers of forest products, travelled in the past in the inland forests of Borneo. They usually lived upstream from the Dayak, a generic term used to name several stratified and nonstratified farming groups.<sup>1</sup>

The band's subsistence depended mostly upon the consumption of sago palm flour, on hunting, and on food gathering. The band was formed by an extended family within which an elder, chosen among the most experienced adults of the group, ensured an informal authority. Punan groups traditionally established trade relations with their slash-and-burn farming neighbours. As time went on and government pressure increased, these groups settled in small hamlets and began basic farming activities. Supported in their conversion by their sedentary Dayak neighbours, some Punan groups became farmers and began to identify with their farming mentors, while some preferred to remain nomads.

In the 1940s, most Punan groups of the upper and middle Tubu River settled along the main river shores under the patronage of the Merap and Abai (Dayak) groups. In the early 1970s, the groups of the middle and lower Tubu River officially resettled downriver in village resettlement programmes (*Resetelmen Penduduk* or *Respen*) under the auspices of the local administration and the Church. The largest resettlement is still located in Sembuak

<sup>1</sup> The term “Punan” or “Penan” (or the transcription “Pnan” as suggested by Sercombe and Sellato [2007] to prevent ambiguity) is used by Borneo's settled peoples, Dayak and Melayu, to refer to various nomadic groups of hunter-gatherers. It stands in contrast to “Dayak,” a term generally carrying the meaning of upriver people and used by coastal, Islamised peoples to refer to settled or itinerant tribal farming groups.



**Map 1:** Former and present Punan Tubu and Abai locations.

(now Respen Tubu), in the vicinity of the town of Malinau – the district capital since 2003. Numbering 2,400 (410 families in 2004), the Punan Tubu are no longer nomadic. However, those living in the upper Tubu River region (140 families) migrate periodically for hunting and collecting forest resources. By contrast, those settled downstream for the past thirty years cultivate rice and vegetables which they sell at the market; some get financial compensation from the logging and mining companies exploiting their land (see Levang, Dounias, and Sitorus 2005).

The understanding of how Punan society works requires an analysis of the history of the group

and its encounters, from the first contacts with the outside world to their subsequent integration into that wider ethnic and economic context. To be fully complete, it is also important to understand the cultural basis, integral to their economic life. Following the same pattern as other hunter-gatherer peoples (Woodburn 1980, 1982; Testart 1988), the food economy of the Punan does not traditionally produce surplus; thus wealth does not play any part in the various stages of their social existence. However, for more than a century, the trade in non-timber forest products has allowed the Punan of the Tubu River to obtain goods which are locally unavailable, objects that are still valued for

their prestige. Today, ordinary or prestigious objects are at the root of Punan's wealth. Over generations such objects have become essential to the exchanges before and after marriages. These things do not necessarily or directly grant power or social status; but they are integrated into the assets transfer system which underpins family bonds. This wealth is above all used to fulfil social obligations and subsequently for further exchanges.

This article starts with the economic and the indirect social role of forest products. It also highlights the function of objects in Punan society. The sociohistorical overview yields some insight into market fluctuations in forest products and helps to understand why Punan people take part in the trade. Indeed, while nomads are the principal providers of these forest resources, all ethnic groups do not take part in this trade in an equal manner. This study also aims to explain the influence of sociohistorical events from the point of view of the Punan families. To do so, the first part of this article addresses the analysis of trade mechanisms rather than topics such as the organisation of trade or the regional and international supply networks, better documented in other publications.<sup>2</sup> As it will be demonstrated, commercial exchange implies negotiations of forests products for other goods. Hence, for the Punan, resources which have a direct utility value, such as rattan (for basketry) or dammar resin (for lighting or caulking canoes) gain an exchange value as well as those which heretofore have none, such as eaglewood.

Further on, it is shown that the importance given to objects by the Punan comes from both the trade itself and individual motivation, particularly in the way in which these objects are passed on and used. This role of objects is not new, but became more important as the Punan became owners of more prestigious goods through their trade in forest products. The research and analysis of the evolution in marriage payments, from their first appearance up to nowadays, lead to a valuable insight into the Punan's self-perspective. Compared to their past economic situation, the Punan do not own enough goods to ensure adequate marriage payments, and indeed consider themselves poor. Realising that the situation is complex, families are concerned about the future of a system that is seen by most as a constraint to their individual advancement and autonomy. The second part of this article takes these facts, and the Punan concept of wealth, as starting

points to understand the meaning of marriage payments and exchanges to Punan families.<sup>3</sup>

After looking at the generation of wealth and its redistribution in two closely related spheres, i.e., the commercial sphere and the social sphere, the concluding discussion will show how the transfer of objects sheds lights on their human and social context (according to Appadurai 1986). Both trade and matrimonial exchanges give a value to objects, and because that value is integrated into the objects exchanged, jars as well as other prestigious goods can no longer be considered as the simple basic currency for exchange, but rather as social forces driven by concepts such as honour, prestige, and authority. These forces explain the transfer of objects (Punan *pelawai taan*), for instance, the fact that they are given and returned on the occasion of a marriage. As it develops, the trade in forest products does not appear as a mere barter for merchandise but rather as an exchange of goods associated with social, political, and cultural norms in which objects are tools used to conduct relations between people.

### Trade in Forest Products and Goods

The historical sketch of the trade in forest products shows both the progression of an extraction front through rivers reaching from the coastal regions to the interior of Borneo between the 17th century and the end of the 20th century and its peak in the 1990s, which entailed an almost immediate depletion of the resources collected (Sellato 2001, 2005). The evolution of trade on the Tubu River attests to the long-lasting influence of international trade on groups occupying isolated inland areas. The Punan nomads, as the main collectors of forest resources, are especially concerned.

<sup>2</sup> Black 1985; Brosius 1995; Chew 1990; Cleary 1995; King 1993; Lindblad 1988; Peluso 1983; Rousseau 1989; Warren 1981.

<sup>3</sup> As Lars Kaskija mentioned (2007: 145) the Punan have no word for "rich" or "wealth." Like the Punan Malinau, the Punan Tubu use the expression *fi ubat* (literally "many things"), or *fi melat* (literally "lot of iron") to characterise someone who possesses many manufactured goods. The term *melat* refers at first to iron, the first and most valuable imported material upriver. It also used to refer to all outside goods, from metal to other material. We will consider here Testart's and his colleagues' definition of "wealth" (Testart et al. 2002: 185). It identifies two main functions: the function of exchange and the function of payment. Like Testart, we understand "wealth" as "the material goods that are necessary for man for his survival, or that could only be desirable. They could be either kept, exchanged in order to obtain other goods, or complete certain social obligations by being considered as a payment" (my translation).

### Non-Timber Forest Products in Borneo

Wood excepted, the term “non-timber forest products” covers all forest resources, whose commercial value, however minor, is recognised by local or international markets. These animal or vegetal-typed products include resources collected locally.<sup>4</sup> Qualitative pieces of information about coastal trade in Bulungan during the 19th century are available. Unfortunately, quantitative data are unreliable and cover limited periods (Sellato 2002). Regarding the Tubu River, recent information is restricted to the people’s memory; most of the Punan collectors interviewed recall their own period of activity and some factual stories from the previous generation.

From precolonial maritime trade to today’s exports, the history of trade in forest products in Borneo is long. Coastal kingdoms used to organise trade (mostly in camphor and gold) between the main rivers of Borneo, the isolated regions of the hinterland and the coastal harbours, where resources were sent to India (from AD. 400), China (from the 7th century), or the Persian Gulf (Sellato 2006). The Dutch took part in local trade in the mid-19th century. But it is not until the beginning of the 20th century that trade intensified, after they gained control over the interior. The end of tribal wars and head-hunting raids secured the region and the expeditions to collect forest products upstream increased. The volume of trade in the small harbours downriver, which were then under Dutch authority, rose quickly. To answer the growing demand of industrialised countries, the Dutch started to move in the 1880s towards the interior in order to have better control over the trade (mainly exudates). From 1880 to 1920, traditional commercial networks worked at the same time as the trade organised by the Dutch. In the 1920s, most of the trade in forest products was controlled by the colonial government, although a small portion evaded its authority (Sellato 2002).

River basins of the Borneo inland, such as the Tubu River basin, form relatively autonomous economic areas. Communications follow rivers on the up-and-down-stream axis (see Hall 1995; Sellato 2001). Despite a slow start in the 20th century, the history of forest product trade on the Tubu River shares common aspects with that of wider rivers of the island. Despite the arrival of Dutch representatives in this region, trade was handled by several downriver traders (*toke*), who regularly sent mid-

dlemen upriver to trade for them. One of the very first traders, Pangiran radja dinda (of Tidung royal ascent) travelled up the Ranau River. He also organised trade expeditions as far as the upper Bulungan region. Pangiran radja, or sometimes his brother, waited for collectors coming from the remote interior in shelters they had built at the mouth of the Tubu tributaries, or carried out indirect trade (known as “silent trade,” see Rousseau 1990).

During colonial times and then the Japanese occupation, trade in forest products was especially initiated with the Chinese Acai (Asai) and the Bugis Mada (Mado). Trade intensified between the market village of Malinau downstream and the middle Tubu River, notably the Abai (Tebilun) village of Long Nit. The traders or their middlemen met Punan families from the middle Tubu River, who brought their collections for the occasion, and set up new expeditions upriver. A decade later, several group leaders settled down on the large riverbanks. Those settled on the Tubu River (Pangin, Mabung, Agis), close to Long Nit, were used as middlemen between upriver Punan groups (Kalun, Rian) and visiting traders. During the first years, the trader, Mada, used to go up the Tubu River every two or three months with five boats loaded with merchandise; before returning a few weeks later with additional boats full of forest products.

In the late 1950s, some traders opened trading posts (*pos*) and lived there for several months. To obtain the privilege of trading with a specific group and of exploiting an area, some traders made matrimonial unions with Abai or Punan families. In the mid-1960s, having become familiar with the rattan trade, the Punan of the middle Tubu River managed to escape Abai control by directly selling their forest products downstream. In the 1970s, traders began to use cash in their business. Cash settlement spread in 1985, soon after the arrival of the Indonesian army’s Special Forces (RPK, Indonesian Resimen Para Komando Angkatan Darat) in Malinau. The traders and collectors had to sell all their eaglewood stocks to the army. This brief period marks a decisive change in the Tubu trading of forest products by introducing a monetary value to all forest resources.

### Forest Products and Merchandise

Through trade in various forest resources, Punan families managed to obtain staples, as well as numerous goods whose use became essential over time. Basing himself on field investigations and researching into colonial and Indonesian archives,

<sup>4</sup> Sellato (2002: 40); for a detailed inventory see de Beer and McDermott (1989); Brosius (1995); Fox (1995); van Valkenburg (1997).

Bernard Sellato (2001, 2002; see also Katz 1997) built up a detailed inventory of the various forest resources traded in Bulungan, as well as of price trends downstream. The Punan adapted their collections according to downstream traders' orders. Commercial value and price of forest resources fluctuated greatly depending on the periods (the fluctuation of international demand and exchange rates), the trade's location (especially transportation costs), and the traders (some offer attractive prices thus boosting competition), and also changes with the setting up of grade notions and the quality of products. The up-and-down river trade meets global demands and partly mirrors the situation in the region. It also differs locally by the range of collected resources, and I presume their exchange value plays a more decisive role than the nature of imported goods.

### Exchanges among Ethnic Groups

Interethnic trading on the Tubu River precedes and follows the development of trade of forest products. These exchanges reflect how long local groups have been specialised in the exploration of forest resources and in the production of certain types of goods. They also mirror the economic interdependency of the inland peoples who are involved in this trade in an unequal manner. A political alliance between ethnic groups by blood pact or debt (called *sebila'*) followed the first exchanges. Not only was it determined by a commercial motivation but it ensured mutual assistance and guaranteed protection from foreign intrusions. Along the Tubu River, those agreements justified several economic exchanges, such as jars, tobacco, and rice for game meat and other animal products (honey, fat, feathers, skulls, hides), sago, medicinal plants (like *Pycnarrhena cauliflora*), or handicraft. When the first traders arrived in the region, most of the Punan Tubu and Punan Malinau groups, their neighbours, got involved in the collection of forest products, be it occasionally or regularly, under the patronage of various Dayak groups.

Punan collectors carried forest products from the collection point to the meeting point by foot or on raft, sometimes directly to villages. As long as their role was limited to collecting and carrying, Punan groups took unequal advantage of their alliances with other ethnic groups. Direct trading with downstream buyers came late: the Punan dealt with the Merap and the Abai settled on the Tubu riverbanks, whose villages were in regular contact with Malinau occasional traders. Individuals might

also go down by themselves. For this reason, the Punan groups of the upper Tubu River were for long regarded as the Merap (Long Kendai) peoples' vassals. Technological borrowings followed material ones: Punan groups living upstream (Pada, Tubu) imitated their Merap neighbour's dry rice fields and the Bahau Kenyah's, where they used to work. On the other hand the groups of the middle Tubu River (Pangin, Mabung, Agis) learned from their Abai mentors to build boats and navigate.

Before the arrival of the first traders on the Tubu River, the interethnic relations were not limited to the Tubu basin or to its tributaries where trade was essential. Depending on their nature, the forest resources obtained by bartering with the Punan were kept either to be used locally or sold back to traders who had formed business relations with some villages. Upstream Punan collectors recall former exchanges of rhinoceros horns with the Kenyah, and most of all, numerous transactions in eaglewood, *ketipai*, dammar to acquire items such as swords, jars, and more recently to obtain hunting dogs. The Punan of the middle Tubu River exchanged gums, blowpipes, and rattan mats with the Kerayan Putuk (now known as Lundayeh) for swords or salt.<sup>5</sup> Unlike other interior regions (Brosius 1995; Sellato 1989: 68, 180), competition between Dayak groups for control of trade with the Punan was limited in the Tubu River region.<sup>6</sup>

Then, unlike other peoples of Borneo who limited their trade to occasional necessity, Tubu groups extended their trade tremendously. Despite their late appearance, commercial exchanges increased continuously. Goods demand, especially in valuable objects and forest products, rose regularly till the early 1990s. The regular participation of the Punan in the collection and the agreements between neighbouring communities guaranteed frequent exchanges with downstream locations.

### Commercial Exchanges with Downstream

Traders' demand for forest products mainly concerned six non-timber forest products. Punan families organised their collections (*ngusa*) according to the availability of resources within the areas under their control. Depending on the type of

5 The Kenyah and Putuk used *ketipai* to support sword-hilts. Salt (*yoh berau*) came from Kerayan and was brought up to Tubu River through Apo Ping, up the river Berau and crossing the Brini River.

6 Not until the colonial pacification did all ethnic groups of Borneo cease to fight in order to gain access to commercial and living resources of the best agricultural lands.



forest, the resources were either localised (sago palm groves, salt marshes) or scattered (game, incense wood, camphor trees). Forest products in the Tubu River area were practically similar to those traded in other regions (for the Apo Kayan region, see Eghenter 2001). Demand for forest resources on the Tubu riverside corresponded to the periodical, and sometimes cyclic exploitation of those resources within the island's hinterland (Brosius 1995; Whittier 1973). Following the trader's initiative, an order could succeed to another when its demand and price changed. The succession of resources in demand enabled regeneration of the forest product species. It also allowed an intense but sporadic trade. Different types of goods were imported through trade: agricultural or forest tools, cooking utensils and domestic goods, food, and prestige items. Products collected or made by local communities were exchanged either for other goods or for cash. Some products, such as food or crafts, became essential locally.

Eaglewood, or aloe wood (*Aquilaria* spp., Indonesian *gaharu*, Punan *lelah*) was and still remains one of the main forest products traded upriver by the Punan Tubu, mostly with downstream traders and neighbouring ethnic groups. Today, eaglewood still remains the main source of income for Punan families living on the upper Tubu River and its tributaries. The most intense collecting of eaglewood took place from the 1920s till the early 1960s; a period also marked by the Japanese occupation. It was not until the 1980s that the price of eaglewood started to rise when traders introduced a grading system and paid a set price for the resin collected. The collection continued up to the end of the 1980s and continues today; prices reached US \$ 1,000/kg in 2000. The resin was collected and carried in a special rattan basket loaded with approximately 35 kg of resin per collector when full. The resin was not weighed but rather estimated with a two-kilogram-oblong metal box, named *pilak tavén* or *bilik tavén* (Indonesian *kaleng*).<sup>7</sup> Traders left the boxes to collectors and took them back during their following rounds. Each piece was not meticulously examined as it is today. There were, therefore, two grades for resin determining their greater or lesser quality.

The most intensive period of dammar resin collecting (*Agathis borneensis* and other taxons, Punan *tumuh* or *nyatong*) along the Tubu River goes from the 1940s to the end of the 1950s (except

on the lower Tubu River). Eaglewood and *ketipai* were also collected at the same time. Three types of resins (Punan *ilu'*, Abai *salong*) were extracted by Tubu families and exchanged for merchandise: *damar daging* (or copal, Punan *tumuh*, *nyatong tumo'*), *damar tulang* (Punan *nyatong avang*) and *damar matakucing* (Punan *nyatong cak'*). In great demand, although hard to find and to extract, copal remained the most popular resin for a long time. From resin's extraction to transport, the collection of dammar is very hard work. The resin was carried and measured in a large basket, named *balot* (Indonesian *bangkat*). The *balot* was made on the collection spot with large bamboos or palm tree trunks cut in parts lengthwise, and then tied up with rattan. The rattan bonds divided the *balot* into four sections, called *bilit*; more resin could be wrapped on top. Each *bilit* contained approximately 15 kilograms of dammar. The trader counted the number of *bilit* on the collector's return; since the resin was not weighed, collectors were reticent about sorting out the resin.

Hard to find, camphor (*Dryobalanops aromatica*, Indonesian *kapur barus*, Punan *betiting*) was in great demand during colonial times and at the end of the 1950s. Trees are few and scattered. Only a small number is likely to produce enough resin for collection (5 *ons*, i.e., 500 g max. per tree). The round betel boxes with a 100 g capacity (Punan *bukuh kambhu' apu'*) were brought by the traders when they visited the collectors, and used to measure the amount of resin. The collector filled the box with camphor, if possible large pieces, and emptied it in front of the trader.

Three sorts of latex (Indonesian *getah merah* or *jelutung*) were traded during colonial times (with an intense collection in the early 1930s), especially by Chinese traders. Two exudates were collected: the red gum of the *ketipai* (*Palaquium* spp., Indonesian *getah merah* or *gutta percha*) and the *tawén* (probably *Litsea* spp.). The third gum, the white latex of the *merongguh* or *téwan* (Indonesian *getah susu*, *getah akar*, *jelutung*) was extracted from an aerial root (genus *Dyera* and *Alstonia*) and was the most valuable (1920–1940). Its sap was extracted by torchlight at sunset or during moonlit at night. A single tree could contain 30 to 50 measures of latex, and a *jelutung* tree more than 60 kg (a *pikul*). Collectors solidified the sap on the spot with salt, then washed the latex with hot water before adding extra salt. Latex was squeezed in a mat made of very thin rattan and rolled in short or long balls (Punan *ku'hung* or *ngelu'ung*, Indonesian *bulat* or *bundar*). Three or four balls weighed a kilogram.

<sup>7</sup> The size of the *pilak tavén* used varied among traders. In Long Semiling (Menabur), the boxes were bigger and could contain from 5 to 6 kg.

Rattans (*Calamus* spp. and other species, Punan *wéi*) were intensively collected in the late 1930s (especially *rotan segah*), and from the early 1960s to the mid-1980s, despite a slight decline in the early 1970s. Today, rattans are gaining market interests again, whereas exudates are no longer traded. The unit of measure was the bale (Indonesian *gelung* or *bale*, Punan *galung*). Along the Tubu River, three sorts of rattan were exchanged: the *rotan pulut* (Punan *wéi pulut*) and the *rotan cabong* bales (Punan *wéi cabong*), made of more than a hundred rattan stems while a *rotan segah* (Punan *wéi ogoh*) bale only contained 30. Collectors could transport between 3 and 5 bales in one trip; the strongest could carry eight bales tied together for a better transport. A large bale (Indonesian *ikat*) was made up of ten *gelung*. Twenty *ikat* were loaded in a boat that needed six men to manoeuvre it downstream.

Punan find gallstones or bezoars (Indonesian *batu guliga*, Punan *batuh*) in the stomach of several large animals such as stags or wild boars. The most sought-after are the gallstones of porcupines (*Hystrix brachyura*, Punan *totung*) and monkeys (mainly *Presbytis hosei*, Punan *eciu*). Collectors distinguish three qualities (three sizes) of bezoar for an animal like the porcupine.

Jars (*belanai*) are esteemed all over Borneo. Most of the oldest jars are of Chinese origin, a few are Thai or Vietnamese (Adhyatman and Ridho 1984; Harrisson 1986). Most of the jars found nowadays in Indonesian Borneo are good-quality copies made in Malaysia (Sarawak and Sabah) and Indonesia (Singkawang, West-Kalimantan and, for the most recent, Surabaya, East-Java), according to 16th and 17th century models. The number and type of jars depend on the frequency of the traders' journeys upstream and of their supplies downstream. The Punan distinguish more than 50 kinds of jars, half of them are spread among six families according to various criteria: size, shape, motives, colours, handles, etc. Each model is related to fluctuating values, according to one's interest, either in the time of collection or in its current exchange value. Since many jars traded in the past have been sold during the last three decades (especially since the settling downstream), the rarity of some models is now taken into account when they estimate their value. Gongs (*agung*), culturally valuable objects, vary in size, quality, and age. Traders also brought glass beads (*inu'*) of different sizes and colours from town. In order to exchange women combined them in strings of 10 to 12 beads. They create a whole range from basic necklaces to complex headbands.

Cooking utensils, such as heavy cast-iron pots and large curved-bottom cooking dishes (Indonesian *priuk*, Punan *kuren belanta* during colonial time, literally "Dutch dish") were among the most traded goods. Several Punan families up and downstream own and use betel boxes (*bukuh serapa*). Lengths of fabrics were also traded from very early on. Light-coloured (Indonesian *kain jali*, Punan *buro' ikuk*) and black-coloured (*buro' punyuh*) fabrics were used to make clothes. One of the most popular was the thick and strong white *belacu* type (*buro' ceroh*). Traders brought large boxes containing 250 tobacco (Indonesian *tembakau lempeng*, Punan *sigup jawa* or *sigup limbing*) blocks. Salt (*yoh*) was also prized: a pack contained 20 blocks (Indonesian *bulat*, Punan *bata*).

#### Unit of Measurement and Trading Values of Exchanges

The use of measurement standards to establish the exchange value of a certain number of forest products in return for various goods characterises the relation between collectors and traders. The Punan lay stress on the unit of measurement (usually a container) used to estimate their collection and to determine straight away the amount of resources needed to obtain the goods they wanted. The volume or the capacity of measurement enabled collectors to approximately evaluate on the spot their collection before meeting the traders. It seemed easier for collectors to memorise the number of measures needed than the fluctuating values of the goods. If the system was based on exchange, several traders would have scales at their disposal and rely on weight to pay products. However, both traders and collectors benefited from trading forest products and goods. On the one hand, traders determine their prices and the terms of purchase, on the other hand, collectors obtained the things they need without having to travel downstream. The goods brought by traders have been gradually monetised without being exchanged for cash.

For a costly item, Punan collectors connected the forest product's measure with the merchandise available or desired. By doing so, the collectors estimate the number of measures needed. Usually, small quantities would only provide common goods or staples. In the 1920s, for instance, a collector figured out that one measure of eaglewood could be traded for a few meters of white fabric, a 250-block box of tobacco, or a packet of 20 pieces of salt. A decade later, the same collector needed two measures to obtain a cast-iron pot and four measures

to obtain a two-handle dish. Another example: in the 1940s, ten baskets of dammar were enough to obtain a small gong, twenty for a large gong; at the same time, a trader demanded three boxes of camphor in payment for a necklace of medium quality. A minimum collection was necessary to make certain transactions: in the late 1970s, a rattan bale cost five pieces of salt or three pieces of tobacco. According to the Punan, this is not proportional to the effort required.

As one can see, each standard of measure provided collectors with the exchange value of the collected resources. However, this value remained approximate since the commercial value of goods imported from downstream depended on the trader, and most of all on foreign demand. The trader alone was aware of this. As the only intermediary between the families living upstream and the market city, the trader was careful not to give too much information on the fluctuations of forest products. On the whole, the different values for exchange depend finally on the trader's good will. His monopolistic status enabled him to organise by himself expeditions to collect forest products and to privilege a specific resource over another one, depending on his business. Collectors followed the changes in the commercial value of goods and regularly adjusted the necessary quantities of measure.

The historical reconstruction provides information on the local frequency of goods. However, it hardly helps the Punan to find why, like the example of the *abai*-type jars shows. In the 1930s in Long Nit, a collector who wished to obtain an *abai* jar had to supply 10 to 15 measures of eaglewood, or 15 to 20 measures for a first-quality jar such as the *kelapang* model. In the 1950s, a time of intense trade on the middle Tubu River, the *abai* jars were less common and their value in trade exceeded the value of *kelapang* jars. Likewise, an *abai* jar usually traded for 15 large baskets of dammar in the 1940s, was devaluated to 4 baskets a decade later because of the lack of interest in copal resin. However, the interest in a particular forest resource might only last a certain length of time, and the merchandise value for the same resource would remain unchanged. This was the case in the late 1950s when an *abai* jar was traded for 10 boxes of camphor or 40 balls of latex.

Based on limited information, the Punan had to choose between values set by traders and a constant negotiation on exchanges. And yet, the trader restricted this last initiative by keeping the collectors working for him constantly in debt (Indonesian *utang* or *bon*). Today, expeditions to collect forest products are at the cost of the sponsor (food and

equipment), whereas in the past the trader regularly advanced the most expensive goods to the collectors before the actual collection took place (also see Konradus 2003: 87; Momberg, Puri, and Jessup 1997: 174). Unlike a credit system but rather based on the principle of long-term exchange, the trader, in order to prepare his next round, also encouraged individual orders. In that way, the trader made sure of his collectors' faithfulness and of minimum discussions with them.

However disadvantageous for the collectors, these standardised exchanges allow the Punan to incorporate the goods received in a system of exchange values, despite the fluctuations in the commercial value of forest products over various periods and the variations depending on the trader. This phenomenon appears to the Punan as the increase or the decrease of the value of the merchandise. The situation changed somewhat in the late 1940s. More traders went regularly upstream with goods and a few metal coins. Lacking an immediate access to cash, collectors were slow to accept it. Then, because forest resources and goods, which are subject to calculation are exchange values (as pointed out by Macdonald 2004: 333), similarity between measures and prices went up and was quickly accepted. Today the Punan still base themselves on these old exchange values, which went up with the trade of forest products, to estimate and compare their old goods. A similar arithmetic can be observed in the exchanges of objects for marriage payments.

### The Value of a Jar: From a Trade Good to a Payment

Trade between Tubu groups of downstream villages is not restricted to the mere acquiring of commodities. An important part of the local demands concerns prestige objects, especially jars (Fig. 1). Jars were sought-after for their great variety, their various uses, and for standing the test of time. Exchanges were encouraged by the numerous models of jars, each with its own value. Punan families could obtain jars through various means: by bartering forest products or crafts for jars with neighbouring ethnic groups, or with traders, and, in the early 1980s and 1990s, from Sarawak (Malaysia) where jars were sold and brought back to Indonesia by the Punan. Retracing the appearance of the first jars on the Tubu River is a hard task, since legends of haunted jars suggest that they could be of non-human origin. Although testimonies show that jars appeared before the arrival of the first traders on the Tubu River, Punan families had to wait for the emergence of direct trade with downstream people



**Fig. 1:** A *bulan* jar (moon jar) and its owner in Long Ranau, upper Tubu River.

to capitalise on the benefits of their collection by amassing numerous goods. The regular exchanges of objects between families enabled them to keep a small portion of these goods up until today.

From now on, Punan associate the trade in forest products with jars and jars with marriage payments (Fig. 2). As the more representative item of exchanges, jars gradually became the essential economic and juridical objects to the Punan families: they are still used as compensation for adultery or murder and to conclude alliances between families. Jars remain closely related to the owner even after his death. They were even used as ossuary during secondary burials, a ritual Punan borrowed from their neighbours, as well as the distinction between male and female jars.<sup>8</sup> Especially on marriage occasions, jars represented the essential part of the exchanges of marriage payments between families. But since the scope of marriage and the nature of its payments change, jars are less exchanged than

in the past. The current appraisal of jars shows that the Punan find it hard to make an assessment of value in use that reflects the development of the exchange value of goods. This change calls to mind the customary use of an object that was standardised several decades ago, and which finds itself in a new context where criteria of values, especially economic ones, have changed.

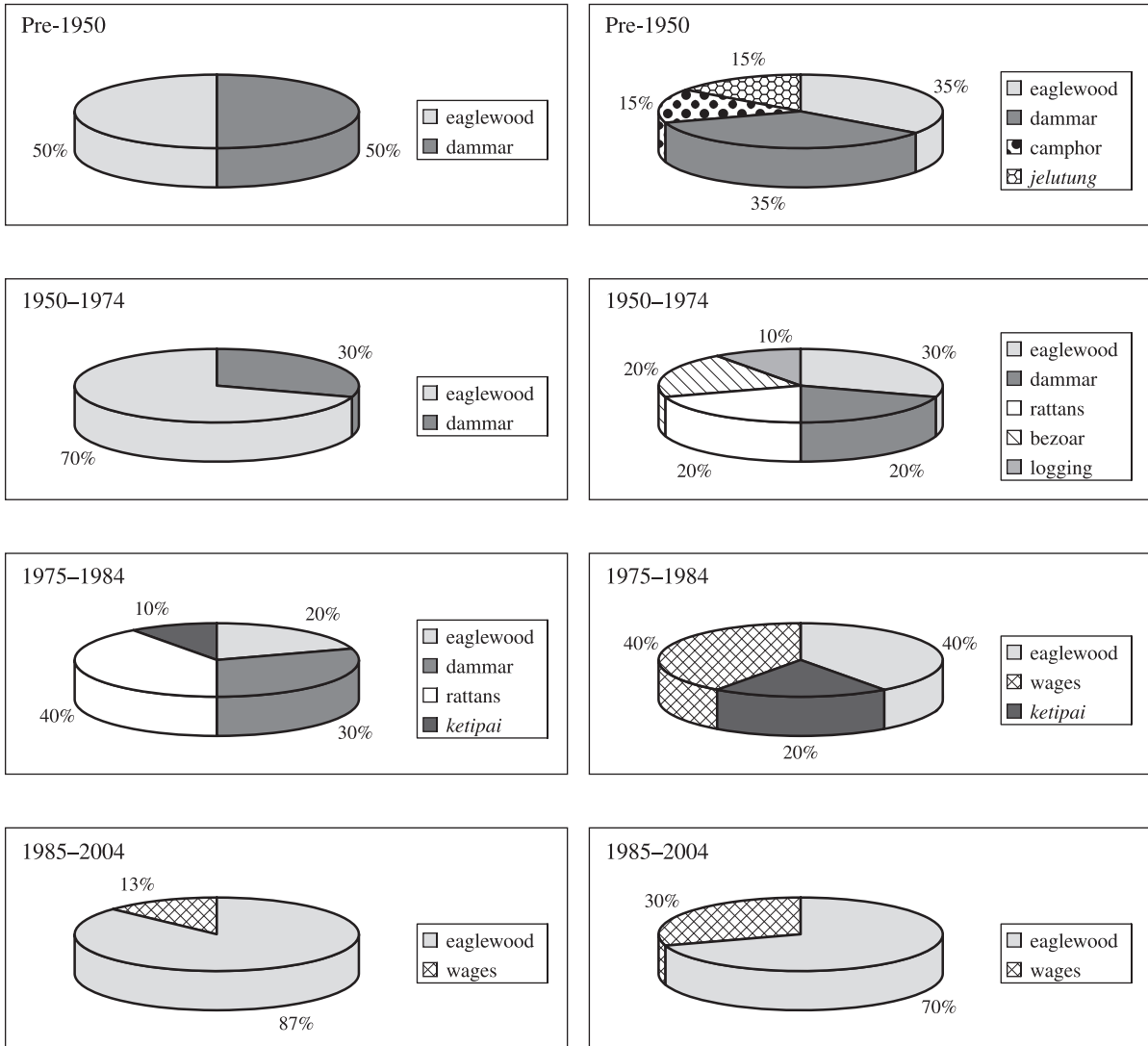
The fluctuation value of the *abai*-type of jar reflects this process. The *abai* jars were the most traded and exchanged models during the trade peak upriver. They were named after the Abai Tebilun, one of their first suppliers. The standard *abai* jar (known as *rubi abai*) indicated to collectors the change in the forest product exchange values over several generations. However, it is most commonly used as a unit of reference to value other jars. Indeed Punan families often assess the exchange value or the price of an object in number of *abai* jars. Today not only have new goods replaced the old and unobtainable ones, but the monetary value of prestige objects is established according to a price equivalent to their exchange value on the market (see also Macdonald 2004: 329). This value can be directly applied to more modern objects. Since the end of the 1980s, traders, whose parents and grand parents traded with the Punan in the past, buy from the Punan these objects, which are now considered as antiquities (*antik*). According to the quality of the goods, traders chose the clients to whom they would sell them back: neighbouring ethnic groups seek objects for marriage payments, while art collectors, local officials, or rich buyers from Malaysia seek the most beautiful ones. This recent change shows the rarity of ancient goods as well as the new material priorities of families. Thus, the monetary value of *abai* jars has doubled in a few decades: today, an *abai* jar can no longer be exchanged for a hunting dog, but rather for a boat engine (a 5 horses' *ketinting*) or 4 hunting dogs. The owners of valuable objects need to make complex calculations in order to assess the present value of an item which they obtained several decades ago through a relative or another collector. For instance, a *kelom muku*-type jar is no longer valued at 2 or 3 *abai* jars but rather at US \$ 550, that is, the equivalent of five *abai* jars (approximately IDR 7,000,000 in 2003).

Today, both the use and the circulation of traditional objects are jeopardised by their unavailability. The value of old jars has increased, making them often hard to obtain, as families part with their objects only on exceptional occasions. Traders offer to trade or buy expensive objects that cannot be compared with any others. Punan families have

<sup>8</sup> For information on Kenyah Uma' Jalan beads, see Colfer and Pelibut (2001).

Upper Tubu<sup>a</sup>

Middle Tubu<sup>b</sup> (Respen Tubu post-1975)



<sup>a</sup> Total: 28 respondents

<sup>b</sup> Total: 40 respondents

Fig. 2: Forest products used to finance marriage payments (pre-1950 to 2004).

gradually abandoned jars for modern goods, i.e., objects which are useful but fragile and costly to replace, such as boat engines or chain saws.

**Punan Matrimonial Payments in the Past and Nowadays**

Punan families follow a redistributive system of marriage payments, called *purut*, although they refer among themselves to the bridewealth or bride-price by the term *tiyu' oroh*, which literally means

“woman or bride-price” as well as “purchasing the bride” (*tiyu' oroh* covering both meanings). Today, the term *tiyu' oroh* includes all matrimonial transfers, from the boy's parents to the girl's, but does not describe counter-payments (*ulang*)<sup>9</sup> which circulate from the girl's parents to the boy's (Fig. 3). The current terminological use, *purut*, enlarges the

<sup>9</sup> In order to distinguish the *ulang* from the compensation (*tiyu' oroh*) and from the matrimonial payments or the bridewealth (*purut*), I will therefore use the term “counter-payment” or the native term *ulang*.

matrimonial compensation to all payments given to the bride's relatives. The *tiyu' oroh* historically precedes the *purut* and is similar to a simple and informal marriage which characterises nomadic life-style. The compensation offered was in the past at first minimal and the union between husband and wife was informal.<sup>10</sup>

### From Compensation to Payments

In the past, to ascertain the alliance, the boy's father gave an object to the girl's father before the marriage. The official reason to give an object was (for the girl's parents) to stay in good health and live long. This object could be a piece of metal (*melat*) (see note 3), such as the one used to light a fire (called *sepuon*). As far as the elders remember, the boy's parents gave the girl's father a whole set of objects essential to extract and prepare the pith of the sago palm (mainly *jemaa*, *Arenga undulatifolia* or *fulung*, *Eugeissona utilis*; see Puri 1997). The young man's father placed four elements inside a fifth one, a large basket, and then gave it to the girl's father. The first thing was a homemade adze (*pira' paluh*). The second was a short rattan mat (*pecahan*) that was used under a third object, an oblong piece of finely weaved rattan (*berat aru'*) that is used to retain, then press the pulp. The fourth was a calabash cut in half to serve as a ladle (*tiwai tikan*), which was used to add water to the preparation. The last object was a rattan basket (*kalong kiba'* or *kalong tegan*) traditionally made by Punan men to carry their belongings. The day before the union, the girl walked to the boy's parents' house and received from the boy the rattan basket and the whole set.<sup>11</sup> Marriage was effective once food was shared: the boy took the girl's hand and both dipped their forefingers into two dishes of cooked sago (*inau*), in the girl's dish first, and then in his own. The groom accompanied the bride to her house, stayed there a few days, and then both came back

to live with the groom's family till he built his own house.

This matrimonial compensation (*tiyu' oroh*) changed gradually. In the 1920s and 1930s, ordinary manufactured goods were added to, and then replaced the traditional sago set. Tribal wars, in which the Punan took part under the patronage of other groups, brought the first trophies to group leaders. Among the Abai, these trophies were gradually integrated into the marriage compensation.<sup>12</sup> Since Punan allies could not claim a good name without having any trophies, the Dayak ordered the abduction of heads and slaves during war to prepare their marriages. The importance of jars for Punan and Dayak groups increased after the ban on head-hunting was imposed. Nevertheless, until the late 1930s, heads and jars still formed the most important part of the wealthiest families' marriage payments. In turn, Punan families offered or claimed prestige goods such as one or two jars. Since traders were scarce at that time, those objects were still hard to find. Following marriages with the Abai, and later on with the Putuk – the middle Tubu Punan being the first to marry Abai upstream and then in Respen Tubu –, families exchanged more and more objects. In the 1980s, marriage transactions spread and turned essential, while commercial trade in old objects, especially jars and forest products, gradually declined. From the early 1940s onwards, the Tubu Punan adopted and expanded a marriage system based on redistribution<sup>13</sup> and strongly inspired by their farming neighbours. The marriage organisation relies on the sequence described previously, but one progressively distinguishes various stages by extending the time of their execution. Thus there is enough time for the family to find the objects for payment. Today, Punan families refer unanimously to this mode of marriage (*purut*) and the previous form based on the sole *tiyu' oroh* compensation remains unknown to them, except to a few elders.

Henceforth, a customary Punan marriage is organised in several stages, separate in time. The engagement period begins with the search for a groom or a bride (*mukum oroh*). Although the initiative may come from the boy's or the girl's father, it is the boy's father who must approach his counterpart. The first stage consists in offering an object to the

10 See Urquhart (1951: 519); Langub (1972: 220); Sellato (1989: 194f.).

This is still the case among the Punan Gong Solok, the Punan Bengalun, and the Punan Sekatak. These three subgroups originally from the middle Tubu (Mabung) use very low marriage payments, if any, in endogamous unions, but ask for or receive significant payments when getting married with neighbouring groups – especially with the Berusu' (Abai) people. The Punan Malinau refer to the *tiyu' oroh*, but did not ask until recently for high payments or *ulang*, except when they married Punan Tubu (in locations such as Adiu, Long Loreh, Long Mirau, Kuala Ran).

11 The poorest families could give a *gelung* of rattan (*lingkong wéi* or *wéi umé*), which is a bunch of the finest rattan.

12 A prisoner became slave (*ripen*) and his value would be higher than a head's (*landang*).

13 These matrimonial systems based on redistribution have been studied among Dayak groups, especially the Belusu' (Appell 1983) and the Putuk of Sabah (Crain 1970, 1978). These groups have greatly influenced the Punan, among others (Appell n. d.).

future father-in-law. A bond cannot be built until the object is accepted. Punan designate this first gift as the mark for the spouse (*tamong oroh*): since the children are too young, this mark establishes a lasting relationship between both fathers-in-law. Two compensating rules are used if necessary. The first objects are destined for the girl's close relatives – even if they are given directly to the girl's father – and make up for an absence (the *ukah*) and a dereliction (the *taang*) by pacifying the tensions which might exist before the alliance. The *ukah* is a payment of honour offered by the groom's parents to the bride's parents. This is the payment for the absent one, given to the deceased's closest living relative.<sup>14</sup> Also given before the union, the *taang* gift of objects reflects the end of a tension between two people (*taang* literally means “between”), among whom one was to blame. The thing offered is set (figuratively) in the middle of the relationship. There are today three types of *taang* relationships: between the parents of the groom and bride, between a husband and recent wife, and between two allies both linked to the husband. The Punan include all these relationships between closely connected people in the notion of *taang*. Its payment shows that matrimonial compensation plays a central part in building relationships between allies. According to some elders, by referring to the material exchanges as social relationships between individuals, the ideology of *taang* gives sense to marriage payments. Indeed, prior to payments, the true matrimonial union was seen at first as an exchange of relatives,<sup>15</sup> in which the girl's parents used to ask for *taang* (*menyit' taang*) before the union.

During the *mukum oroh*, the couple's fathers agreed to meet a few weeks later for the second stage of the engagement, the *peturui* (literally “sleeping”). The *peturui* is the stage in which the alliance between the two families becomes effective. The groom and the girl's relatives meet at the girl's parents' house. Presents are given to the girl's parents: a jar or two, sometimes three, clothes and other commodities. If the objects are immediately available, the next stages of the marriage shall quickly take place. The *pelulung* celebration marks the end of the *peturui* stage, putting an end to the temporary uxorilocality of the groom (called *niban*). On this occasion, and in the case of dissatisfaction, the girl's family can give back the objects previously received. The *pelulung* cer-

emony is considered a major one, mainly for two reasons: first, the young couple is allowed to eat and sleep together; second, the transactions of the next stage, i.e., the *petiran*, are being set. Both families' close relatives meet once again at the girl's parents' house (*pelulung* means “to gather”). The effective union is established by the *petucok* ceremony in which the boy and the girl plunge their forefinger into a cup of rice, while their parents hold their hands from behind.

The *petiran* celebration marks the beginning of marriage transactions between the families. It is a long-awaited moment in which many families take part. The organisation of the *petiran* starts with the gathering of the *pelulung* and continues afterwards. A distinction between both must be made: the *pelulung* concerns the bride's family's relatives – objects being given to them –, whereas the *petiran* favours the boy and his family through numerous counter-payments (*ulang*) in objects. Depending on how quickly families obtain the objects, its preparation can last from a month to one year. Matrimonial payments (*purut*) contain numerous prestige objects as well as more common things. In the past, most of the exchanged goods were jars; twenty jars were exchanged in ordinary marriages. Payments and counter-payments are placed on two spots inside the bride's house. Her relatives gather the *ulang*, most of all clothes, while the groom's relatives gather objects needed for the marriage payments. As the Punan emphasise, the *ulang* payments are made up of things that are commonly useful in a house: clothes, but also cooking utensils, mats, blowpipes, spears, swords, etc. Each member of the girl's kinship obtains two or three objects for payments, according to the intensity of the relationship with the girl's parents. However, some *petiran* held in the late 1940s show that most of those, who have given objects to the bride's close relatives, did not receive any *ulang*. Kinsmen then were given at least eight jars.

Matrimonial exchanges of goods end with the woman's return to the village of the man. Both families escort the bride (*ducuh oroh*) to her new home. This return may take place from two days to one month after the beginning of the *petiran*: on this occasion, the families usually stay a week with the bride's parents who see a flow of jars filled with rice alcohol continuously arriving. At last, the wife and her family return home, with the husband and his kin, to complete the last stage, *merah lowa'* (literally “to push away spider webs”). Before getting settled in the husband's village, the couple stays for at least a day, at most one week, with the bride's parents depending on the distance

14 The father or the mother, an elder, or an uncle if the father is dead.

15 The Punan use the expression, *pulang ofung*, literally “exchanging cover or sheath.”

to their village. Both trips take place in exogamous marriages. The last objects offered by the boy and his family during the *merah lowa*' marks the end of the *purut* due for marriage. From now on, any additional thing that the stepfamily may ask for shall be preceded by *ulang*.

### Exchange of Payments

Families pursue exchanges after the *petiran* ceremony and its celebration. Several small objects are given for free to close relatives, but the most valuable things are covered by *ulang*. As can be seen, payments and counter-payments go together: counter-payments call for payments and services for the bride, while payments call for counter-payments and services for the groom. Marriage payments, counter-payments, and services often last over generations, and thus unite numerous families in different villages. This creates regular and personal relationships between kins and affines.

The term *ulang* stands for the compensation that the girl's family gives to the boy's family for the *tiyu' oroh*. As a payment or a prestation, the *ulang* is the opposite of the *purut*. The *ulang* is material (more recently, but still only occasionally, monetary) and covers more or less half the value of the object received. For instance, a relative of the bride shall offer a *ulang* in order to obtain an object that he esteems of double value. Since the amount and the nature of the *ulang* determines the returned *purut* payment the term "counter-payment" (or "counter-prestation") does not appear entirely satisfactory (as Crain [1970: 117] notices for the Lundayeh).<sup>16</sup> For the same reason, transfers that circulate the other way round cannot be associated with the simple mode of the bride's price. Custom establishes the nature of the *ulang*, while the various elements composing it determine the value of the matrimonial payment to be given. *Ulang* payments that are higher by half than the bridewealth are deliberate and do not necessitate upgrading matrimonial payments.

The commitment for families is to cover at least half the value of the payment asked for. Payment is usually chosen before the *ulang* transfer, but it can also be ordered or obtained two or three days after. The groom's family may refuse the counter-

payment if it is considered insufficient or inadequate – on her part the bride's family has to give proper *ulang*. As a matter of fact, the amount and the value of things exchanged greatly depend on how good the relationship between both families is. The bride's parents may offer a counter-payment that is clearly higher than the coveted object, which would increase the respect of their in-laws. They may also give a jar of a slightly lower value than that of the received one, in order to protect their allies from the loss of a capital. Insufficient payments or counter-payments may cause long-term tensions.

Custom determines and defines the components of the counter-payment. Just like a marriage payment, the *ulang* is first evaluated in terms of valuable customary objects. According to their nature, which varies, the girl's relatives would give at least 5 objects or up to 20. In this way, a medium-valued object could compensate for an object of great value. In the 1950s, seven different types of items were included in the counter-payment of an ordinary *abai* jar. Those things were: a large carrying basket, a rattan mat with black and white patterns (*kalun* type), a *mandau* sword (with a Kenyah-style carved hilt), a good-quality blowpipe, a string of beads (*kelutan* type), a white bangle (*sulao* type), a small Punan basket, or another mat. These could be doubled (two blowpipes, two mats, and so on) to make an expensive matrimonial payment. Unlike payments in manufacturing goods, counter-payments favour locally produced objects that the groom cannot make by himself – although his relatives might be able to do so. The groom and his relatives need to turn them into gifts or advances from their relatives in order to obtain them. Unlike the marriage payment system, here there is no direct subordination to a wealth that is almost monetary.

Counter-payments generally take place during the *petiran* and after, nowadays, the wedding (Indonesian *nikah*, i.e., the Christian ceremony). During the first stages, various objects are offered without *ulang*. However, the bride's close relatives may propose counter-payments of certain objects. The *petiran* exchange follows a specific pattern. The day of the *petiran*, the bride's kinsmen bring their payments and offer them, – her parents stand in as intermediaries – to the groom's family (Fig. 3). Then, they express their request: "Here is my compensation (*ulang*), I ask for a gong." If someone among the groom's relatives owns a gong and finds this compensation acceptable, payment and counter-payment change hands. The bride's relatives might also have to wait a few days. If nobody owns a gong, they have the possibility of asking for another object. A large gong being equivalent

<sup>16</sup> Indeed, to the Punan, the transfers of *ulang*, whatever their quality or their nature, cannot be compared to matrimonial payments (as Testart, Govoroff and Lécrivain suggested for compensations higher by half than the bride-price [2002: 173]).



to 2 *abai*-type jars, one *abai* jar would constitute the counter-payment in that case.

Since all relatives need to collect the objects first, counter-payment depends on the bride's family. The boy's relatives prepare the things to be offered as payments. However, not until her counter-payments are offered shall the girl's family negotiate the payments. The family of the boy starts with the marriage payments: when his kin is ready, the girl's relatives should be able to pursue a month later. The boy's close relatives are the first to obtain the *ulang*. The first and second cousins of the bride cannot obtain objects without having suggested counter-payments. Nevertheless some of the groom's family would rather ask for very few *ulang* objects for fear of turning their in-laws against them. The most distant relatives are usually the last to claim payments and often give payments before the *ulang* takes place. There is a certain risk in this transaction since the girl's relatives would promise counter-payments that are long to come.

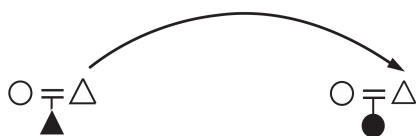
The *ulang* appears as a moral compensation and a return of the given things. The transfer of objects has become too unequal to be assimilated to a half exchange. The objects of the *ulang* are shared by the groom's parents or might be directly offered to the owner of the exchanged object. However, according to the groom's parents and his relatives, the counter-payment prevents families from completely squandering their goods. Its function is also to appease the resentment of the boy's kin because of the loss of their most valuable objects. As far as the Punan remember, the direct settlement of marriage payments and counter-payments has always been difficult to set up. According to an Abai elder, the Punan found it difficult to give the entire counter-payments and would have preferred to give the objects one by one. Families often gave incomplete *ulang* and received their payment after promising to quickly honour their debt. Today, the Punan imitate Abai families: they accept to offer payments without getting counter-payments, and they cannot offer complete counter-payments anymore, as they could, despite some difficulties, in the past. The Punan are proud to use a matrimonial system of payments that proposes such high compensations. And yet, today, to the despair of families, the rules between families are less respected: payments are often given before the *ulang* and some givers can wait several weeks, even several years, before receiving the counter-payments due.

The Punan make use of another custom, called *biyot* (or *bi'ot*) (Punan and Abai term), which is described as an ideal rule of reciprocity between the groom's and the bride's parents. The girl's parents

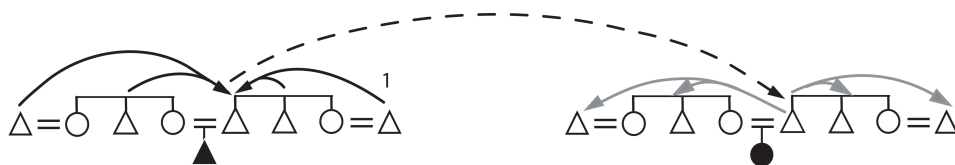
give an object and the boy's parents give another one back. Both its evolution and the present confusion about its true nature can be extended to all marriage payments used by Punan families. Originally, the *biyot* laid stress on the exchange itself, whereas today the stress is laid on a part of the exchange, such as the payment or the counter-payment. The oldest examples describe a fair exchange between both parents. It seems that this exchange was at first of the same value, i.e., a jar of first quality was exchanged for another jar of the same value, or by various jars of lower quality. The rule changed gradually: a jar could be exchanged for several jars of equal value, if not by jars of higher value. This switch from exchanging an object for another to exchanging an object for two can be explained by the rarity of the items exchanged. Families might find it difficult to obtain a jar of the same value as the one given, since jars – especially old ones – are unique models, rare, and nonrenewable. A unique jar being hard to replace except by a unique jar, it turned out to be easier for families to exchange a rare jar for jars of lesser value, whether old or new.

The lack of first-quality jars and the abundance of other objects at the same time lead Punan families to exchange at equal value other objects for a unique jar, or an old jar. This profusion of substitutes has greatly modified the nature of the customary exchange. The obligation of giving objects is no longer considered as a limit to exchanges in this context. On the contrary, it emerges as an encouragement to offer more things. The fact that several objects end up to be the equivalent of a single one – or several of different types – suggests that the exchange value tends to be dependent on choices set by families rather than by customary law. Since families are not conscious of the evolution of the *biyot* through time, it appears for most of them as a completely different rule. Numerous individuals see the rule as follows: if the parents of the bride offer one object, the groom's parents have to give at least two in return (see Fig. 3). The variety of objects is not a constraint anymore, since the *biyot* of one sole gong entitles the giver to obtain five jars. Here again, the payment may be postponed: the person has 2 years after the marriage to return the objects if he wants to. Faced with such a situation, the Punan emphasise the fact that the cost of a *biyot* is ensured most of the time only by wealthy families. If the groom's family owns numerous things, the bride's father can chose to do a *biyot* before escorting his daughter to her husband's village. Precisely, this wealth depends on the families' involvement in the trading of forest products. The use of *biyot* is, therefore, proportional to the implication

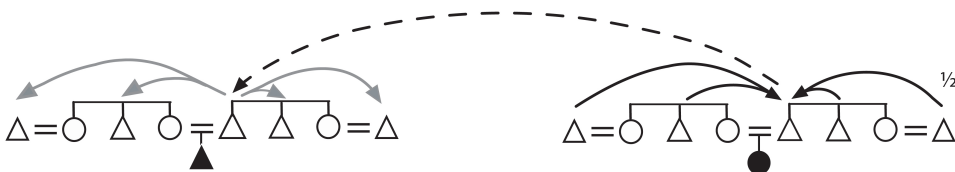
*tiyu' oroh* (original)



*purut*



*ulang*



*biyot*



△	male	→	first stage
○	female	- - -	second stage
▲	groom	→	third stage
●	bride	┌┐	is the sibling of
=	is married to		is descended from

Fig. 3: Matrimonial payments.

of Punan groups in trade exchanges, and is for the main part confined to the middle and lower Tubu River (Menabur).

Why do families practice the *biyot*? The wife's parents offer a *biyot*, but only the husband and his parents can negotiate or refuse it under the pretext that they have already given enough objects. The *biyot*, considered as a logic of settlement, favours the spouse's kindred group. By organising a *biyot*, both families increase their mutual prestige and fame in the eyes of the community. In the past, taking part in a *biyot* was a pride for families. The husband's kin, because it honours the bride and her rel-

atives, ensured a good name for the future child by replying to the *biyot*. When his turn came, the child – a girl – could ask for a *biyot* and obtain higher payments than those of her mother. However, in the 1970s, the meaning of the *biyot* changes: it appears clearly that the parents-in-law demanded the *biyot* in order to complete payments considered too poor. In this manner, the bride's father can ask the husband for a *biyot* several years after the marriage, and even after the birth of the couple's second or third child. Since they have to find or buy numerous things, the groom's relatives may refuse the object, and sometimes run the risk of disappointing the

girl's parents. Just as the *petiran* demands, today's *biyot* seems without limit.<sup>17</sup>

According to some, a *biyot* can be claimed when a close relative is not quick enough to get the *purut* items, or if this person takes part belatedly in the marriage's exchanges because he could not set out on his journey on time. There recently has been some confusion between the principle of the *biyot* and that of the *ulang*. This confusion is due to the great number of objects given back on recent *biyot*. A husband who does not own a thing of the same value as the one he has received can choose to give several objects of lesser value. As often in that case, the amount of those objects would be higher than the value of the first object. The confusion also comes from the fact that the *biyot* is considered as the counter-payment (*ulang*) that the bride's family gave first. Still by extension, each context in which the term *biyot* is used depicts the groom's parents offering a great number of objects to their in-laws. Moreover, a disinterested *biyot* (*ukah biyot*, literally "free *biyot*") is used in the rare event that the groom's family gives, for instance, five to seven jars to the bride's parents without expecting anything in return. The term is also used to name the food offered to the in-laws on various occasions, and originally known as *sanik*.<sup>18</sup> The original ideology seems obsolete: the evidence appears when today some individuals evoke implicitly a *biyot* payment as if it were a usual payment.

### The Origin of Payments

Punan groups are genetically and historically related to each other and the network of their relations extends from one side of the island to the other. Through its history and during its migrations, each Punan group lived for long or shorter periods with settled ethnic groups, or next to them. In Borneo, most of the Punan groups stopped their migrations between 1950 and 1990 and settled down more or less permanently next to a group of farmers,

who became their patrons in the settling down process. This political and economical vassalage of the Punan groups lead to a certain degree of assimilation to their mentors' culture (Sellato 1989, 2001). Assimilation or reciprocal borrowings vary according to the alliances established, but are also influenced by the social dispositions of the various ethnic groups in contact.<sup>19</sup> In our example, the adoption of complex marriage payments greatly depends on the history of trade in forest products for supplying ethnic groups with goods, as well as the relationship between the Punan and all the actors of these exchanges, be it traders or the Abai Tebilun. From the 1940s onwards, Punan Tubu families intermarried with families from other ethnic groups, first on the Tubu River, and, from the 1980s at Respen Tubu, with the Putuk Mentarang<sup>20</sup> in particular and other downriver groups, sometimes using marriage payments (also known as *purut*).<sup>21</sup>

The use of marriage payments among the Punan of the middle Tubu River follows the emergence and recognition of a certain kind of political representation.<sup>22</sup> Through alliances and economic issues, and in order to keep them under control for the time being, the Abai Tebilun developed privileged relationships with their neighbouring collectors. In their trade with people downstream, the Abai Tebilun negotiated directly the trader's orders with the Punan headmen (*lakin tukung*). When the collectors returned from their expeditions, the Abai paid the leader of the group with merchandise. Although the leader was supposed to share the goods

17 One of the last examples of *biyot* that we possess shows how excessive it might be. In 1991, a mother's brother and the spouse's young brother offered the husband (married in 1984 and father of 4 children) a small boat-engine that was already used and claimed a *biyot* in return. They received 2 earrings, a tape recorder, a black-and-white television, a shotgun, and a chain saw.

18 The person who asks for somebody's help (to provide food, work, etc.) is required to pay back his debt in the future by giving a *sanik* in objects. The frequency of *sanik* and the amount of objects is not limited. Usually a *sanik* does not concern marriage payments.

19 Called cultural "code-switching" (Kaskija 2007: 149 quoting Kratz 1980), the process of shifting from an internal culture to that of another group and back, according to context, is a well-known strategy among nomads. As Sellato (1989: 242–244, 253) points out: the lack of stratification makes this assimilation easier (see also Rousseau 1990: 245).

20 Sellato (1997) refers to the term "Putuk" to describe groups of the Kerayan province as well as their cousins living in Kalimantan and in the adjoining Malaysian states of Sarawak and Sabah, as well as the Kelabit, the Lun Bawang, the Murut, and the Lundayeh (Crain 1978). The Putuk of Kalimantan have been generally described through literature as Southern Murut and Lundayeh by non-Putuk groups. The Punan Tubu are an exception: they still refer to their Lundayeh neighbours as Putuk.

21 Tubu and Kerayan people did not have any relationship, except during rare Putuk attacks on the Punan territory and during the migration in 1963 of about 15 Punan families (Long Nit and Rian Tubu) in Pa' Amei. Recently, a few interethnic marriages have been arranged, although the Putuk Kerayan (Lengilu' in particular) ask for numerous marriage payments.

22 As other settling nomads (see Langub 2004), the Punan Tubu have, under the influence of their stratified neighbours, established patterns of hereditary leadership.

with his coworkers, he usually kept the bigger part for himself. Group leaders were also intermediaries with Punan groups of the hinterland. Occasional military successes during tribal conflicts might then turn the most valiant Punan headmen into war leaders (*lakin paren*). Political alliances lead to intermarriages: Abai men marry Punan women and offer payments to their Punan in-laws. In the next generation, the sons born from these mixed unions marry Punan wives.

In the 1940s and 1950s, the settling of several groups of the middle Tubu River in the vicinity of the Abai Tebilun village of Long Nit on the Tubu River intensified the preexisting bonds. Families started to use objects of high value obtained by trade as payments for marriage. Then, the old *tiyu' oroh* was replaced by a system of marriage payments that was highly inspired by their neighbours, but most of all, it suited best the Punan families' new economic situation. At first these matrimonial payments were modest for most Punan families. Afterwards, group leaders, seeking unions that would provide social advantages, increased the amount of payments settled among them, while changing the organisation of the marriage. At the same time, other Punan groups, those living in the remote hinterland, started to use for their own payments the merchandise received by trade. Soon, the Punan from the middle Tubu River made the most of their new partnerships, and started trading directly with merchants,<sup>23</sup> travelling downstream regularly. So, throughout their long association with the Abai Tebilun, the Punan ended up borrowing several cultural characteristics from their neighbours. The open and fluid ideology of the Abai, that allowed exogamous relations, lead a lot of Punan families from the Mentarang River and the middle Tubu River to get to the Abai assimilated after several generations.<sup>24</sup>

There is the beginning of an explanation in the hierarchical, yet not stratified, social organisation of the Abai. Unlike their other neighbours, the Merap, with whom the Punan Tubu never got married, the social ideology of the Abai resulted in a

highly competitive system and a diffuse authority (Kaskija 2002: 9; quoting Sellato 1997), quite similar to Putuk. In the past, just like the Putuk, the Abai families took part in statutory competitions when second funeral celebrations took place (Sellato in press, referring to the Putuk; Kaskija 2002: 10). A chronological sketch of interethnic bonds between the Punan Tubu and their neighbours showed that the Punan were under two major and indissociable ethnic influences: the first one concerns the Abai Tebilun (two separated groups in the past, the Abai and the Tebilun), the second one, more recent, concerns the Putuk Mentarang.

Punan groups lived in the valleys of the interior, when two groups, the Tebilun and the Abai opened rice fields along the Tubu River (in locations known in the 1940s as Long Nit, Long Tenipo', and Long Bila'). Coming from Sembakung and Mensalong, the Abai went up the Tubu River passing Malinau town, then the Mentarang River downstream, settled down in Long Nit, then Sebelanung, and then up in Long Tarau, where they met up with the Tebilun (Map 2). Most of the Abai got married to the Merap (Kendai) and the Tebilun, then becoming Abai Tebilun. Escaping head-hunting raids on the upper Mentarang, the Tebilun came from Semamu by land and were the first to settle on the Tubu River, in locations known as Mabung and Tunggu.<sup>25</sup> The Tebilun launched political alliances with the Punan neighbours in the 1880s, soon after their arrival in the region. In Mabung then, the Tebilun leader, Mawa Laing, took a Punan as his second wife and gave objects as payments to her family.

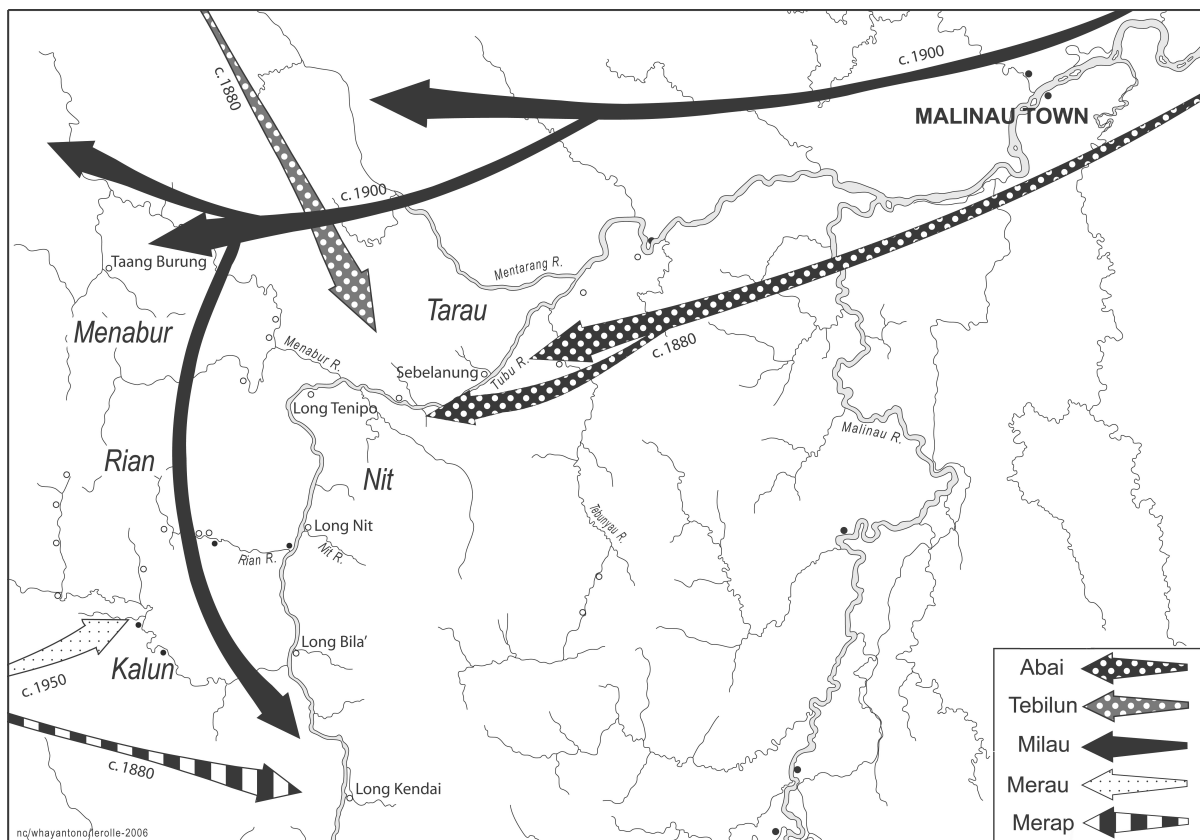
Various linguistic groups related to the Putuk, and known as Milau (or Ulun Milau), Tembau (or Tempuu), and Merau (or Berau), also resided on the Tubu River at different times.<sup>26</sup> The relationships between the Abai Tebilun and those groups refer to a time of wars and alliances which preceded the migration of both the Abai and the Tebilun to the Tubu River region. Once Tidung's neighbours, the Milau, came from downstream Malinau. From there, the Milau split into two groups to conduct their war

23 This has been reported by Tom Harrisson, who travelled through the Tubu area in the 1940s. He notes that the Tubu River was "mainly controlled by settled Punans, some of them very sophisticated." These Punan were "rich and business-like" (Harrisson 1975).

24 The Punan living near the large river were Abai, those living in the interior remained Punan (Sellato 2001: 35; quoting a Punan elder). Unlike other Punan groups of the region, the Abai Tebilun considered the Punan of the Tubu River as members of their kins (Hoffman 1984).

25 Two Tebilun relatives settled on the middle Tubu. The youngest, Mawa Laing, lived in the vicinity of the Mabung, Tarau, Pangin Punan groups, whereas the oldest, Uniat Mbi, settled down on the upper Rian River (Tunggu) close to Rian and Kalun Punan.

26 The term "Sa'ban" (or Saben) is often used by the Punan to describe both the Milau and the Merau, and sometimes the Tembau. Each of these groups has a recent personal history. According to Sellato (in press), the Tembau and the Milau are culturally close to the Sa'ban (Bahau).



**Map 2:** Ethnic migrations to the Tubu River (1880–1950).

against ironwood trees.<sup>27</sup> The first group went up to the Mentarang, the second went on the Tubu River and up to Menabur where they settled in Batang Burung (Punan Taang Burung, see Map 2) close to the Punan. After a few years in Menabur, following a dispute between brothers, the Milau split again. The eldest brother and his group went to the Kalun and then Lemunjung (Ranau) on the upper Tubu River, before settling down in Long Kipa', then Loo Kendi (Long Kendai) with the Merap (or Bahau) people. Once there, the Milau called themselves Tempuu. Taking the opposite direction, the second brother went to Kerayan with his group, lived there with the Lundayeh, and took the name of Lengilu'. Refusing to follow his brothers, the youngest Milau, Lawai

Lu Lengét, decided to stay in Menabur and married a Punan afterwards.

Even if the Abai Tebilun claim to ignore the origin of their marriage payments, the influence of the Milau ideology on the Abai's can be detected by their similarities.<sup>28</sup> The linguistic terms show in part those borrowings: the term *furut* used by all Lundayeh (Putuk) of Sabah (Crain 1970) to name the system of marriage payments calls to mind the

<sup>27</sup> Balang Asui and his men were building a boat in Kubiran, downstream from the actual location of Malinau town. The previous day, Balang's daughter and other spouses had brought food to the men. While sitting under an ironwood tree, a fruit fell down and killed the daughter. Inconsolably, Balang decided to fell all the ironwood trees (*Eusideroxylon zwageri*) his men would meet. The "metaphorical" war against ironwood trees most probably indicates a real tribal war and the malediction a defeat (Sellato, pers. comm.).

<sup>28</sup> As for the origin of the Putuk social organisation (including both Lundayeh and Kelabit), it is very unlikely that both groups imitated such a stratified structure through their alliances (according to Sellato 1987). The richest Putuk families (*lun do'*) tried to join in the groups of free family leaders and control a group of dependent people (mostly slaves) (Sellato 1997, in press). Both the families' autonomy and the circumstances in which partnerships took place enabled more geographical mobility for families, and even for whole villages, so that they could reach other regions of the Kerayan. Exogamy was very common in those groups. Secondly, since rich people differ little from their poor neighbours within the same village, social vertical mobility reached higher degrees, depending on individual fortunes: any poor person in debt could eventually buy himself back and become a *lun do'* (Sellato in press).

*puru*' of the Abai Tebilun. However, the information that is available can hardly sketch the history of the Milau. We know that the Milau lived previously in the Bnuang region on the middle Kerayan River (Sellato in press; quoting Schneeberger 1979), and that they practised marriage payments; a system which was abandoned when the Milau went to the Tubu River, until it was again used recently downstream. We also know that the Milau lived close to Tebilun once on the Menabur River, and probably before, on the upper Mentarang River. Thus, until the 1950s, only the Abai Tebilun practiced marriage payments on the Tubu River. A plausible explanation would suggest that for the time of migrations, the Milau gave up or at least reduced considerably their marriage payments because of the lack of links with their usual traders, and the upcoming of new material supplies.

Settled in Paking (now Harapan Maju) on the Mentarang River, at the mouth of the Tubu River, and in various villages nearby Respen Tubu, the Putuk Mentarang have had a growing influence on the downstream Punan families since the mid-1970s, especially in Respen Tubu, raising the payments of mixed marriages. While Christianisation and the colonial attempts to stop tribal wars progressed, the alliances contracted between the Punan Mentarang, close relatives of the Punan Tubu, and the Putuk Mentarang have partially reached the Punan of the middle Tubu River living downstream.

### **Discussion: From a Trading Exchange to a Matrimonial Exchange**

Throughout history, trade exchanges and matrimonial payments have always been linked and still are today. Indeed, the Punan who were born more than half of a century ago acknowledge without difficulty the increase in marriage payments. As shown previously, the transition to complex marriage payments is related to the evolution of the notion of value, since trading products have been endowed with a commercial value unknown until then. Social value was given to some ordinary objects, such as the utensils for the preparation of sago which, at first, were offered as payment. However, the ideology of the matrimonial union has changed with the standardisation of exchanges and with the settling down process. So far, the economic utility value of forest products was assimilated to the residential group's mode of subsistence. Through exchanges with the outside populations, they acquired an exchange value that was acknowledged. Through trade, the forest products'

economic value was transferred to the merchandise: units of measurement turned into units of account that enabled goods to be estimated between them. Gradually, the merchandise traded for forest products complemented to the items of common use, and then replaced them. These various valuable goods, once inspired by their Abai neighbours and mentors, were then added up to assess solely social-type transactions. Families integrated some objects into their marriage payments. These objects were to constitute the bulk of the marriage payments. From now on, Punan families associate economic goods with social relations, that is, they identify the merchandises and their economic value with their social dimension.

We have shown how an economic collection gradually found a social use, and then, how social obligations turned into economical concerns. What direct correlations do the Punan make between trade exchanges and the bride's price? Although the utility values and the exchange values rested on equivalences that enabled their comparison, switching from a commercial exchange value to a matrimonial one is not obvious for families. Indeed, each item exchanged for forest products had already acquired its own value in the previous transaction in which it was obtained. Now in a commercial transaction, just as through the discussions prior to marriage, families have to determine the value of an event, be it trade exchanges or the marriage payments. Its issue is known (the acquisition of the merchandise or the alliance between families), but its rules, if they exist, are vague. If a minimum value for an object and a minimum amount of goods are found, no maximum quantity would be determined, neither by collectors nor by families.<sup>29</sup> In both situations, individuals establish median values between a past, yet well-known transaction, and an indeterminate, yet probably superior request to come.

Just like in marriage, in trade families do not really rely on representations since each situation opens up new possibilities. Families have to face both the rule and the negotiation of the rule. In order to find an agreement, they have to make continuous adjustments. Collectors match a certain amount of forest products to several types of things. However they are aware that forest products in demand as well as objects offered change with time, and that all in all, the ultimate decision

<sup>29</sup> Quantities are often established by a precedent, that is, according to a similar case which has been previously debated and agreed. Ideally the bride-price should at least correspond to the amount given by the boy's father for his wife.

depends on the trader. Despite such constraints, collectors, especially downstream, try to set their own choices by discussing the quantities proposed, the merchandises requested, their debts, etc. Likewise, if the minimum cost of a former marriage is standardised, families take them knowingly into account, but refuse or circumvent its conditions if the rules appear restrictive. Individuals constantly discuss marriage payments, both at each stage of the marriage organisation, and after its celebration. In reality, the number of marriage payments requested or just available, increases in both cases without acknowledging the downward fluctuations of forest products, or the absence of a real trend. This is due to the fact that families tend to standardise objects more than the forest resources that enable them to obtain them.

As we have seen, the union between a man and a woman was once less formal. The alliance between families (*taang*) was confirmed by a common object or a set of items, however, sometimes by none. The objects that were given formed a whole and represented the marriage payment (*tiyu' oroh*). As years went by, the number of objects given to the bride rose as well as the range of available goods. Families ended up asking themselves for the things they wanted to receive. From this moment, the number of objects requested grew incessantly and individuals took their time meeting the demands. These multiple payments constantly put family bonds into question. Yet, by turning into a whole system of payments (*purut*), marriage payment lost in a way its first sense. Today, families fulfil an obligation and consider marriage payments as demanding expenditures. Because families will have to find the right objects, promise better items to their relatives, and most likely undertake one or two lucrative economic activities for a few months, the in-law's demands are awaited anxiously. After the marriage payments have been made, pressure on the husband and his kin does not diminish since demands can be made at all times. The situation is such that today the first ideology, that is, the responsible understanding among families, which is materialised by the transfer of an object, is hidden by the obligation of satisfying all the demands coming from the in-laws, as well as by the material impossibility of fulfilling those demands.

A historical sketch shows that in the past the Punan did not need marriage payments. At the time of bands, families functioned almost in autarchy, and endogamy was the prevailing mode of marriage. Cooperation between families did not use any payments. Now the question is, what the compensation (*tiyu' oroh*) compensates for, for the Punan.

The matrimonial payment compensates for the loss of the wife through the acquisition of a series of rights (see also Testart et al. 2002). For the Punan, the first right concerns the virilocal residence: the husband acquires through payment the right to take his spouse back to his home. By entering the jurisdiction of her husband, the wife is not supposed to come back to her parents' house. The second right is the incorporation of the couple's children to the father's lineage – and not to their mother's. Because of that principle, the father of the groom would be allowed to ask for objects when his granddaughter gets married. In the absence of payment, children will be bound to the patrilineage of the father's spouse. The marriage payment allows the transfer of other rights to the husband, such as benefiting from the spouse and children's work, and receiving fines for adultery or seduction, etc.

Payment justifies certain rights on the spouse and on children, but what social needs do marriage payments meet? The matrimonial alliance opens a series of material and immaterial lasting exchanges among the residence group. Unlike other ethnic groups using marriage payments in Borneo, these exchanges for the Punan families last for a lifetime. However, pacification followed by the opening to the outside and settling down, have created more and more exchanges among Punan families and between Punan groups and other ethnic groups. Families begin to contract matrimonial alliances outside their group of residence. Moreover, it is very likely that while the collection of forest products takes place, families living far away and the extension of kinship ties – which result from exogamic alliances – have challenged all rights gained by a single payment. With time, marriage payments became contributions forming a whole, organised in defined stages by marriage. The numerous and regular payments in objects turn out to be essential to make the husband and his kin's rights effective over the spouse. This implies a gradually institutionalising of the cooperation between families throughout the various stages of marriage and the exchanges that follow. Today marriage payments asked by the in-laws continuously legitimise the right for the husband's kin to keep the wife in their village. Unlike in other ethnic groups, this Punan right is never entirely acquired, since the husband's relatives keep giving payments after those of the *petiran* have been completed.

Most of the rights obtained by the husband through marriage payments actually belong to the bride's father. These rights are transferred to the husband as counter-payment for the bride's price. According to Alain Testart and his colleagues

(2002: 191), the exchange of rights for objects forms a real payment, even though the husband and his relatives actually do not buy the individual rights of his wife, but only certain rights on her person. The wife is not herself a good to be exchanged as a merchandise or a slave: some of her rights, such as her belonging to a lineage, remain inalienable (Testart et al. 2002). The Punan draw a parallel between the exchanges between forest products and manufacturing goods, and the very functioning of marriage payments, especially the exchanges of goods between kins and allies before and after marriage. In both cases, families set transfers, which, as we have seen, have to be continuously negotiated. For Punan families, values are brought into play by trade with downstream people through a set of exchanges, whereas the marriage goes through the buying of rights in order to build up an alliance. The second similarity is material and refers to the nature of those transfers. A matrimonial payment is not a commercial transaction. However, the origin of the things involved in marriage payments belongs to economic exchanges. The Punan directly associate marriage payments to the goods obtained from traders. Whether in commercial exchanges or within the payment of rights, prestige objects represent the price of a transfer. As Charles Macdonald points out regarding grain and precious objects among the Palawan, despite the fact that they belong to unconnected trade relations, that forest products and prestige goods are, most of all, things that people buy and sell, which create wealth and circulate (Macdonald 2004: 333).

Although the trade supplies objects that are exchanged as marriage payments, families do not consider straightaway the payments to their in-laws as a purchase. For Punan families, the transferring of payments between families, especially counterpayments, distinguishes them from gifts or mere payments. Faced with the misunderstanding of officials and the unawareness of certain representatives of the Church, the Punan tend to justify their social system by laying stress on the fact that they do not buy their wife but rather a long-lasting alliance between two families. These families acknowledge the fact that the nonrespect of the transfers cannot guarantee the balance of the exchanges. It also draws an unfaithful picture of their culture. Today, while marriage payments remain high, the link between forest products and matrimonial payments becomes less evident because of the lack of forest products. Regarding the current situation, one could draw on Arjun Appadurai's assumption (1986: 20; quoting Munn 1983: 283) and be tempted to say that although the Punan still establish the value

of their jars, they could hardly define their own value without these objects. This would be showing pessimism. Although it is true that the Punan adapt their rules more slowly than they take in the new economic values, the ideological pragmatism of their culture, which shows up in the switching to complex marriage payments, continuously makes adjustments to the advantage of the families. Of course, these changes are done to the detriment of older arrangements.

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