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A Penan mourning usage

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A PENAN MOURNING-USAGE.

This paper deals with a terminological usage of the Penan of the interior of northwestern Borneo. For convenience I refer to it as a mourning-usage, but I do not therefore imply that it has any systematic relationship to other Penan usages that would more certainly be named so. It is a custom of the Western Penan and is unknown to the Eastern Penan.

Grandparents and all other persons in their genealogical level are known by Penan as *təpun* and addressed as *pu*. These refer to their grandchildren and others in the same genealogical level as *ayam* and in certain restricted circumstances address them as *tupou*. At certain deaths these terms are used between persons not in the relationship of grandparent and grandchild, who were not *təpun* and *ayam* with respect to each other before the death. The following are the situations in which this usage is seen:

If B, the father of E, dies, then B's siblings address E as *tupou* and refer to him as *ayam*, grandson. E addresses C as *pu*, grandfather, and refers to him as *təpun*. E also addresses the surviving parent (in this case, his mother, A) as *pu* and refers to her as his *təpun*, grandmother; while she in return addresses him as *tupou* and refers to him as her grandson. F, who is nephew to A, also addresses her as *pu* and is

addressed by her as *tupou*. If E has a wife, D, she is counted as a child of A and B and is included in the same terminological usages as E.

This is the usage as it is seen when there is a death in the parent generation. It is also seen when there is a death in the child generation. When a person dies his surviving siblings address their parent as *pu* and are addressed in return as *tupou*. They refer to their parents as grandparents and are referred to by them as grandchildren. If any of the children have spouses these are also included in the same terms: they address their parents-in-law as grandparents and are addressed as grandchildren by them. If E dies, D addresses A and B as *pu* and they address her as *tupou*.

One may thus hear a man address his sister's son as *tupou* and refer to him as his *ayam*, grandson, though when questioned he will say: 'He is not my real grandson, but his mother, my sister, has died'. Or another may introduce his 'grandmother' and say: 'She is not really my grandmother, she is my mother, but my father has died'.

The terms of address affect only the domestic group above: others refer to persons reciprocally using these terms not as grandparent and grandchild but by their biological or affinal relationships. The changes of kinship terms within this domestic group entail no changes among persons who are related to the group but are not in the kinship positions directly concerned.

The usage is said to be maintained for about a year after the death that occasioned it, but there is no set rule. Penan take no exact account of years, and individuals behave in different ways about the same custom. For example, more than a year after the death of one of his daughters the elder of a Penan Silat camp in the Kälame no longer addressed his other daughters as *tupou* nor referred to them as grandchildren; but while they referred to him as their father (not grandfather) one daughter addressed him as *amə*, father, and another continued to address him as *pu*.

There are also variations from group to group, particularly among some groups which are no longer nomadic. In Rh Upau (Penan Məsəkat, on the Kəməna) I was told that on the death of a child the remaining children address their parents as *po* (as they say it) either until the birth of another sibling or until the death of the parents. The same was said in Rh Ileh and Rh Ilun (on the Jəlaləng) of their *pu*-usage, in which even if the bereaved parent marries he or she is addressed as *pu* until the birth of another child. The Penan Nyivung and Penan Paro (in the headwaters of the Tinjar) use *pu* during the

life of the person addressed. Children who call their parents *pu* on the death of a sibling continue to do so even after a new sibling is born, though the new child will call the parents 'father' and 'mother'. In all these groups, particularly the former (those nearer the coast) the usage is being abandoned.

The usage is neither obligatory nor constant. The terms *pu* and *tupou* do not replace other forms of address, such as 'father', 'uncle', or teknonyms. The usage does not affect the application of the death-names, and is employed in addition to them.

The Penan give no explanation of this institution except that it is what their ancestors have always done. There are certain apparent clues to its understanding in their culture. A Penan grandparent is traditionally and in fact 'softer' with his grandchild than its parent is: there is a relationship between them which is easier and more intimate than that between a parent and a child. On the other hand, a grandparent is regarded with more deference and respect than a parent, and disrespect to a grandparent is believed to be ritually punished by an automatic attack of sickness, madness, or even death.

Something of this attitude is seen in the use of *pu* as a mark of respectful attention when a young man acknowledges a moral homily from a man who is not a grandparent. This will only happen when the man so addressed is very much older, like a grandfather.

Tupou, which in its most general use is a death-name signifying that the person addressed by it has lost a grandparent, is sometimes used as a term of address to a grandchild, true or classificatory, particularly when it has suffered some hurt or loss. For example, the child may have tripped on a broken slat in the flooring of a shelter, or a dog may have snatched away some of its food. The occasion is merely a small injury, and the person so addressed only a very small child: a grown person would resent being addressed as *tupou* in such circumstances. This contrasts with *tupou* as a mourning-usage, when it may be applied to persons in their thirties or forties.

The *pu*-usage is therefore not consistent with the other major uses of the terms *pu* and *tupou*, and understanding seems unlikely to be reached through them. It does not seem that to address a widowed father as *pu* is to express either intimacy or deference. One would expect a special term of address to a bereaved parent to express pity, sympathy, or comfort, but these sentiments are not associated with the normal uses of *pu*.

While it is true that the use of *tupou* to a small child is on the occasion of a hurt or loss, this is always a trivial affliction, and the term can be so used only with a very small child. But the loss of a grandparent is a very severe one to an individual and to a Penan group. How severe cannot be conveyed without a lengthy demonstration of the important place of age in Penan ideas.

One might suppose that the death of a man's wife emphasises to him that he also is nearing the grave, and that it is consistent with this that he addresses his son, who will replace him in the family, as *tupou*. But this suggestion does not fit the other applications of *tupou*, as when the man's small child dies and he addresses his other children by this term.

There are numbers of other speculative interpretations that might be made and which have some validity, but none that has occurred to me seems true or significantly consistent with other symbolically related Penan usages.

The Səbup, neighbours of the Western Penan who share many cultural characteristics with them, also have this institution, but I do not know them well enough to look for an answer among them. It remains for further investigation to disclose among which other Bornean peoples the institution is found.

The only similar custom that I know of in a southeast Asian society is from the Mentawai. Among them a grandparent is called *teteu*, and a widow or widower is also known as *teteu*. Loeb writes as though this were a general mode of address, but also that 'when the man marries again his children call him *ukui* [translated as 'father']'. . . . In case there is no remarriage the person retains the title *teteu*' [Loeb, 1928, pp. 422-3]. It is possible that Loeb means that only a man's children address him as *teteu*. Another word for widow or widower, according to him, is *si-lumang* [Loeb p. 422]. Morris writes *si-botok* for a childless widower, *tä-täu* for a widower with children, and *si-luman* for a widow [Morris, 1900, p. 333]; while Kruyt gives the impression that *siloemang* is a term of reference and *teteoe* a term of address [Kruyt, 1923, p. 179]. According to the latter, so long as a child's father is a widower or his mother a widow he addresses either as *teteoe*, but after a remarriage he calls the parent father or mother [Kruyt, p. 4]. The term of reference for a grandchild is *punu teteu* (*punu* = 'to replace'), and children are addressed by their grandparents as *teteu*, the same word as for grandparent [Loeb, p. 422]. With such confusing

data it is unfortunately not possible to be sure what the situation is, though there is undoubtedly some terminological parallel with the Penan institution.

It is remarkable that the Mentawai share this usage with the Penan, and that it occurs among them in conjunction with a system of death-names. I doubt whether the Mentawai usages can be usefully compared with those of the Penan without field-research among the Mentawai, but I hope to analyse them in a future paper. For the moment I merely record that from the literature no illuminating analogy emerges to explain this puzzling Penan institution.

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