

BELIEF IN *BAMBARAYON* (PADDY SPIRITS) AMONG THE KADAZANDUSUN OF NORTH BORNEO

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Abstract

Rice is the staple food of the Kadazandusun community residing on the west coast of North Borneo (Sabah, Malaysia). Crop yields are of the utmost importance to the Kadazandusun farmers, and it is not surprising that great religious significance is attached to all aspects of rice cultivation. Belief in the paddy spirits, *Bambarayon* (variously pronounced by the different Kadazandusun subgroups), is witnessed in the myths and legends of the various Kadazandusun *subgroups*. *Bambarayon* is considered to be present in every grain of paddy and is the focus of the many ceremonies, charms, and taboos associated with paddy farming. Based on previous research findings and raw data gathered from the field trips, this paper represents an extensive study of the beliefs surrounding *Bambarayon*. As well as focusing on the origins of the paddy spirits and their classification, the paper examines related ritual ceremonies and charms and briefly compares the findings with those from traditional belief systems elsewhere in Malaysia and across Southeast Asia. In so doing, the author hopes to facilitate a better understanding of one of the Kadazandusun's central beliefs.

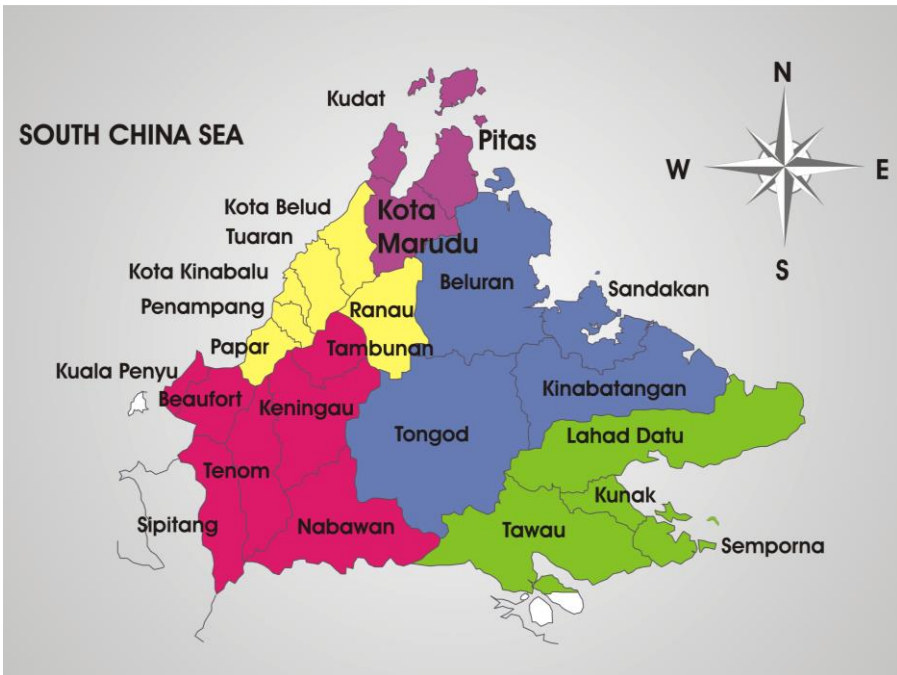
Keywords: Kadazandusun, paddy spirits, bambarayon, ritual ceremonies, charms, taboos

Introduction

The Kadazandusun¹ in Sabah, Malaysia are traditionally paddy cultivators. While those living in the hills and further inland cultivate dry paddy, the inhabitants of the coastal plains and valleys grow the wet variety (Sabah

Museum, 1993, p. 2).² Fernando (1978, p. 6) in his research on the Kadazandusun community in Tambunan Valley (Map 1) for instance, reported that practically every family in the region's seventy villages produces its rice to ensure self-sufficiency in the commodity. Keningau District (Map 1) is another Kadazandusun stronghold and the largest cultivator of paddy in the Interior Residency. The inhabitants cultivated 5,143 acres of wet paddy and 1517 acres of hill paddy.

Map 1: Sabah Districts Map



Source: Modified from <http://www.sabah.edu.my/itsr07023/About.htm>
Retrieved on 18 March 2011

As a staple food, rice finds mention in the early creation myths of the Kadazandusun. The Kadazan of Penampang district, Sabah believe that the creator of the world and its inhabitants include the spirits (malevolent and benevolent) is Kinoingan or Kinopunan and considered as Supreme God by the believers (Hanafi Hussin, 2007, p. 16). The inhabitants of Tambunan district believe that at the time when Kinoingan (Chief God) created the world, a primordial human, a lizard and a snake were called before God and asked: "Which of you would like to change your skin when you grow old?" The snake

and lizard quickly said "I." So, God gave them the right to shed their skin when they were old. The man could not speak during that time because his mouth was full of porridge (paddy flour). Thus, man is the unlucky one now and must die, rather than live forever like the snake and lizard (Williams, 1960, p. 98; Low, 2006, p. 32). This myth is similar to the one originating from the Kadazandusuns residing in Tempassuk, Kota Belud: Kinohingan (Kinoingan) once pounded rice and made flour from it. When he had made the flour, he called all the animals in the world and ordered them to eat it. When they had all to their mouths full, and they could not speak. Kinohingan asked them, "Who can cast off his skin?" Now the snake had only been putting his mouth into the flour, and pretending to eat, he said, "I can." "Very well," said Kinohingan, "if that is so, you shall not die." So, until the present day, the snake does not die unless killed by man (Evans, 1923).

From both of these creation myths, it is clear that the Kadazandusun believe that rice was present at the moment when God created the human race. In Southeast Asia, where rice is the basic food and its cultivation, the main occupation, it is a sacred plant with its own "soul" or "spirit." The rice soul concept is widespread among the peoples of Indonesia, Philippines, Thailand and Peninsular Malaysia, too (Hart, 1964, pp. 83-84; Amat Juhari Moain, 1990; Piper, 1993, pp. 72-73). Consequently, the planting, growing, and harvesting of the paddy are of great religious significance to the Kadazandusun of Sabah, Malaysia. It is believed that the paddy spirits, *Bambarayon* (variously pronounced among the different subgroups of the Kadazandusun), are present in every grain of paddy. As a result, spiritual ceremonies, largely agricultural rituals, are held involving the recitation of long *rinait* (charms) and performed for the protection of the paddy (Fernando, 1978, p. 92; Sabah Museum, 1993, p. 9; Phelan, 2005, p. 124; Pugh-Kitingan, 2009, p. 249, Hanafi Hussin, 2008, p. 176, 2007, p. 190, 2005, p. 176). Furthermore, harvested rice and rice wine have become the essential elements in the offering to deities during the multitude of rituals and ceremonies that are part of Kadazandusun social and religious life.

Like animists elsewhere, the Kadazandusun have held their beliefs in good and evil spirits for centuries. According to Mat Zin Mat Kib (2003, p. 23), before the natives of Sabah embraced Christianity and Islam, the belief in good and evil spirits, ghosts, and supernatural beings played a very important role in all aspects of their lives. In general, there are some spirit categories in the belief system of the Kadazandusun. Among the Kadazandusun in the Labuk area, spirits are classified as *rogon* (malevolent spirits that harm people), *divato* (helping spirits), *tombiruvo* (souls of the dead), a *Bambarayon* (rice spirits) and *binorit* (a race of small people) (Hurlbut, 1986, p. 114). The Kadazandusun also believe that all surrounding objects, plants, and even

household equipment possess spirits. For example, big jars originating from China are considered by the Kadazandusun to have special spiritual powers, or to be affected or controlled by the spirit world. One such jar, known as Gantung Sorili, resides in Kampung Widu, Tambunan. Some people believe that this jar has supernatural power to cure illnesses (Phelan, 2005, p. 140).

As a result, all Kadazandusun daily activities have traditionally been influenced by their belief in spirits and strongly controlled by taboos related to such beliefs (Evans, 1978, p. 152). According to Williams, personal crises associated with birth, sickness, death, fortune, hunting, crop yields are marked by the Kadazandusun as events in which it is necessary to deal with the forces responsible for engaging in the specific ritual behaviour (1965, p. 17). One of the most significant and popular beliefs is in the paddy spirits known as *Bambarayon*, a belief which has evolved through the creation of myths and legends, ritual ceremonies, chants, and taboos.

Based on previous research findings and raw data gathered from the field, this paper represents an extensive study of the beliefs surrounding *Bambarayon*. As well as focusing on the origins of the paddy spirits and their classification, the paper examines related ritual ceremonies and charms and compares the findings with those from traditional belief systems elsewhere in Malaysia and across Southeast Asia.

The Origins of Bambarayon (Paddy Spirits)³

The origins of *Bambarayon* (variously pronounced by the different Kadazandusun subgroups) can be traced back to the myths and legends of the various Kadazandusun subgroups. Williams (1965, p. 18) in his research on the Tambunan Dusun reported that the rice spirits have no specific story of origin, although it is agreed that the beings have existed since the time of creation as a gift from the creator to man for ensuring ample food. But in actuality, many versions of the Kadazandusun myths relating to the origins of rice and rice spirits across the various Kadazandusun subgroups. In general, the Kadazandusun believe that after Kinoingan (the Chief God) and his spouse⁴ had created the world and human beings, the people were visited by a great famine. In order to save the people from starvation, the deity and his wife decided to sacrifice their only daughter⁵ by cutting her into small pieces, and from the different portions of her body grew all things good to eat: her head gave rise to the coconut, her arm-bones became sugar cane and her fingers, bananas. Most important of all, her blood sprang into the first rice plant. Thus, the Kadazandusun believe that the transfigured sacrifice of Kinoingan's daughter is embodied in the rice spirits known as *Bambarayon* (Gidah, 2001, pp.

100-102; *Daily Express*, 2010, p. 24; Leong, 2010, p. 6, Hanafi Hussin, 2003, p. 17).

According to another version of the Kadazandusun myth obtained on a field trip to Ranau, it was told that once Bambarayon (the name of the rice spirit in this myth) took pity on the human race as they had not enough food to continue their lives. *Bambarayon* felt sorry for them and went to heaven to ask Kinoingan (Chief God) for help. When Bambarayon returned from heaven, she started to squeeze her breast so that her milk flowed into the empty ears of rice which then began to bear white rice. Bambarayon keeps on squeezing her breast until there was no more milk left, but the amount of rice produced was not adequate for the entire human race. Hence, she continued to squeeze her breast to the extent that blood flowed from it, and from the mixture of her blood and milk, ruddy red rice was formed (Jerumeh Ekul). Jerumeh Ekul went on to say:

Sekaligi lama-lama... habis (susu Bambarayon), dia jadi berdarah. Bambarayon itu terikut-ikut tu air susu dengan darah dia, om. Dia matilah-mati... om... itu yang dia bagi-bagi sama tu manusia tu sampai... sekarang itu, dia punya air susu sama itu darah itu. jadi buat makanan kita sekarang neh, om jangan nokoti (janganlah) kamu kasi buang-buang tu padi. Itu makanan kamu. Betul-betul sayang bah tu darah sama anu tu susu si Bambarayon...

(After a long, long time... finish (Bambarayon's milk), then she bleeds. Bambarayon let her blood flow, *om* (just a sound). So she died... *om*... that was what she gave to human race until now - her milk and blood. They are our food now, so, in the future, don't you simply throw away any rice. They are your food from the milk and the blood of Bambarayon...)

Evans (1977) published a similar myth which he gathered from the Kadazan informant of Penampang. This shows the popularity of the myth among the Kadazandusun subgroups. What astonished the author, however, is its similarity with the following Chinese myth:

In the time when people lived by hunting and gathering, life was very hard and uncertain. When Guan Yin saw how people suffered and often died from starvation, she was moved to help them. She squeezed her breasts so that milk flowed and with this, she filled the ears of the rice plant. In order to adequately provide for the

people, she produced such quantities that her milk became mixed with blood towards the end. This is why there are two kinds of rice – white and red (Whittaker, 1989, p. 42).

There are records, both in Sulu and Brunei history, of a Chinese colony on the Kinabatangan River of Sabah in the fifteen century. In addition, there is a popular legend among the Kadazandusun regarding an Emperor of China who lived many centuries ago: having heard from a traveler of a wondrous carbuncle that was guarded by a dragon upon the summit of Mount Kinabalu in Sabah, the Emperor sent his three sons on a quest to find this jewel (Rutter, 1922 [2008], pp. 85-86). These early contacts between the Chinese and the natives of Borneo inevitably resulted in the native peoples being influenced by the experience. Chinese jars and beads are found almost everywhere in Borneo (Evans, 1922 [1990], p. 18). Hence, it would not be a surprise to learn that a Kadazandusun myth maker may have modified a Chinese myth on the origin of rice.

Beliefs relating to the paddy spirits vary among the different Kadazandusun subgroups. According to the religious beliefs of the *Rungus* from Kudat district, *Bambarayon* (pronounced as *Bambarazon* by the *Rungus*) are a group of benevolent rice spirits. They live in a country beyond the sea, although no one can explain its whereabouts. One villager reported that *Bambarazon* lives at the edge of the Piromitan⁶ layer where good spirits reside. Above the Piromitan layer is the Monkulun layer, where the most powerful spirits (or Gods) – Sambavon,⁷ Kinoringan, and Minamangun - live. These spirits on the Piromitan and Monkulun planes protect human beings from sickness, death, and other misfortunes, but they do not take care of rice. Only the *Bambarazon* can do this. The *Rungus* believe that rice was first brought to them by *Bambarazon* in the remote past. To show their gratitude to the *bambarazon* for safeguarding their rice, the *Rungus* sacrifice fowl and pigs in their honour. If these ceremonies are not performed, a poor harvest is anticipated (Shimomoto, n.d.).

On the other hand, a *Rungus* ritual specialist said that the *Bambarazon* lived in a very distant land called Surung Rumuvab. Nobody knows where exactly Surung Rumuvab is, but the priest said it was in Pintigavan do Tavang (the place where the sky reaches the horizon). In this place, there is a wide river, on the banks in which *Bambarazon* live. The *Bambarazon's* family consists of parents and seven sons and seven daughters (Table 1). It is said that every rice season *Bambarazon* come to the rice field by sailboat. When the rice season is finished, *Bambarazon* then return to Surung Rumuvab by sailboat. This is why the *Rungus* make a small sailboat (3

inches in size) and place it on the rice container known as *lingkut* after harvest (Shimomoto, n.d.).

Table 1: Seven Types of Paddy Spirits and Their Role

No.	Name of Paddy Spirit	Role
1.	Ohinopot	- helps guard the supply of paddy in the store.
2.	Sambilod	- looks after the damaged rice and sees that the amount does not increase.
3.	Gontolobon	- gives rice piled up in "boulders."
4.	Momiaud	- gives paddy as abundant as spring water
5.	Moniudan	- gives paddy as abundant as spring water.
6.	Sompidot	- gives opidot (full grain in the ear).
7.	Kabang	- makes the rice kambang (swell) in the cooking pot.

Yutaka Shimomoto (n.d.) had gathered three myths from *Rungus* informants related to the origins of rice. According to one, rice was brought to the *Rungus* by a dog. Once, as a man from a *Rungus* village was walking along a pass, he noticed a dog walking along the trail near him. The man noticed that when the dog wagged its tail, seeds flew from it and were spread around the roadside. Because the seeds were unfamiliar to him, the man thought nothing of it and continued on his way home. Later, the man had a dream. In the dream, a person appeared and asked him, "Why didn't you take this rice seed? Why don't you sow it? It is a gift to you." When the man awoke, he remembered the seeds the dog had spread and returned to the spot. He collected the seeds and sowed them. From that time on, the *Rungus* have cultivated rice. This is why every year when the *Rungus* harvest their rice, a small portion of rice is first given to the dog of the household.

The second myth (Myth II) suggests that a woman introduced agricultural know-how necessary for rice cultivation. According to the story, once, a *Rungus* village man had twin children, a son, and a daughter. As the years went by and the twins reached the age of fifteen, they found that they felt such great love for each other that they did not wish to look for other marriage partners. Their father was so deeply worried about the matter that he consulted the village head and other villagers for a solution. Eventually, the villagers decided that the twins must immigrate to a new land. After they had found a suitable place, the village head and the father left some food for the twins and

returned home. After they had eaten all the food, they began to starve and grew weak. One morning when the twins woke up, there beside them were two plates of rice and vegetables. They were very surprised and did not know the source of the food. This continued for about a week, and at last, they discovered that it was an old woman who had been bringing the food to them all this while. The old woman then invited them to her house, and they followed her. The house of the old woman was a great distance away and took a very long time to reach. Finally, they arrived at a big tree. The old woman told them that it was her house although they could not see any house, they slept on the spot. Each morning and evening, the old woman offered food to the twins. This continued for a week, then one day the old woman gave them a *parang* (machete) and other equipment for cultivation. The old woman left the twins with the equipment and the rice and maize seeds. Before she left them, she reminded them not to burn the big tree as it is her house. The twins then slashed the jungle foliage and burned it. They then sowed the rice and maize. They also built a house near the rice field. Meanwhile, the old woman brought food to them every day. Time passed, and the rice and maize were harvested. After the harvest, the old woman disappeared. The twins had baby twins. The children grew up and married each other and had baby twins. This marriage of twins continued for many generations.

The common factor in both of the myths mentioned above is that rice was introduced to the *Rungus* by someone in the distant past. The third myth (Myth III) describes the relationship between the *Rungus* (rice cultivators) and *Bambarazon* (rice spirit). To summarize the story, in the remote past, a *Rungus* sailed until he arrived at a distant shore where he came upon a large red house in which many red men lived. But they did not welcome him, so he went on his journey to look for food and shelter. In all, he visited seven houses, but none welcomed him. Finally, he arrived at another house and asked if he could stay there. The people in the house welcomed him and offered him food and accommodation. Later the kind-hearted hosts told him that they were *Bambarazon*. The man noticed that *Bambarazon* had body burns. He asked them the reason, and they told him that a man had burned the *sulap* (rice storage hut) before he finished the rice harvest. That is why they have body burns.

The man stayed with the *Bambarazon* for seven days, and they gave him the directions to his homeland. On his way home, he re-crossed the sea. The crossing went well although he did not use the sail. When he arrived home, he met a farmer who complained of his long run of poor harvests. He asked the farmer for detail of his methods, and the farmer replied that he had burned his *sulap* before he finished the harvest. He remembered the *Bambarazon* and

their burns. Thus, he advised the farmer to sacrifice some chickens to *Bambarazon*. The harvests began to get better each year. Then one night, the farmer had a dream and heard voices telling him that for his final sacrifice, he must have the *Magahau* ceremony (the rite of sacrificing fowls and pigs to spirits like *Minamagun*, *Kinoingan*, and *Bambarazon* after the rice harvest). So, according to the myth, if people do not pay respect to the *Bambarazon*, they will take revenge on the people by bringing those poor harvests (Shimomoto, n.d.). From this myth, we are told that the *Rungus* believe that the *bambarazon* live in a distant land beyond the sea. They are good spirits and the protectors of rice. So if people do not pay respect to *Bambarazon*, like burn the sulap before the rice are harvested, the *Bambarazon* will take revenge on the people by bringing them poor harvests. In order to sustain the good harvest, farmers must conduct the *Magahau* rite.

In addition, several Kadazandusun legends refer to the paddy spirits. One of them is the legend of the paddy without husks. The story states that in an earlier time, the Kadazan believed that rice grains did not have husks. Thus rice could be eaten immediately after harvesting. But this did not last very long; for one day, while passing through their neighbour's field, some irresponsible people plucked the unripe grains from the stalks and put them into their baskets. They were even eaten raw. As a result, the spirit of the rice became angry and decided to cover the grains with husks, thereby protecting them from the people's terrible plucking habits (Palikat, 1988, p. 67).

Gumpai Beringgit, a Tobilung Dusun in Kota Belud District, tells a different legend regarding the paddy spirit. According to him, there once lived seven brothers, and each of them had their piece of land in which to cultivate paddy. During one harvest an old lady wearing an extra large *wakid* (traditional Kadazandusun backpack) came seeking a job as a paddy cutter. In those days, the payment for such job was in the form of a full *wakid* of paddy. Due to the large size of her *wakid*, six of the brothers refused to offer her a job; however, the seventh and youngest brother was kind-hearted and let the woman work. At the end of the day, when he went to check on the old lady, to his surprise, she had disappeared from the middle of his paddy field. After that, the youngest brother's paddy yield was greater than ever before. He knew that the old lady was, in fact, the paddy spirit and that she had come to test the farmers.

From the myths and legends recounted so far, it would seem that *Bambarayon* is presumed to be female by the majority of the Kadazandusuns. In one of the Kadazandusun creation myths, it was the transfigured sacrifice of Kinoingan's daughter who turned into the rice soul known as *Bambarayon*. In another myth, *Bambarayon* squeezed her breast, and

her milk turned into white rice, and her blood turned into red rice. Lastly, in the story of the Tobilung Dusun farmer, *Bambarayon* was a woman who helped the farmer to harvest paddy and disappeared in the middle of the field later. To the Lotud Dusun, rice is said to have originated from the blood of Muntaba who was sacrificed by her mother (Pugh-Kitingan, 2009, p. 251). However, according to the *Rungus*, there are male and female *Bambarazon* as their family consists of parents and seven sons and seven daughters (Table 2). The Eastern Kadazandusun of Labuk, too, believes in male and female paddy spirits. They are *Sinonggi* (female), *Sinamparang* (female), *Mongintonu* (male) and *Rumondavi* (male). The parents of *Sinonggi* are *Purondomon* (father) and *Bunsodopon* (mother). All these names are called on, at the time of harvest. Besides this, some of the Eastern Kadazandusun of Labuk believe that *Bambarayon* can appear in the form of a large spider (Hurlbut, 1986, p. 127). According to some of the Kadazandusun informants in this research, *Bambarayon* can also appear in the form of a swallow.

Table 2: Alternative names for the *Bambarazon* Family Members

Item	<i>Bambarazon</i> Family Name	Second Name
Father	Luzungpamagun	Tunouponidong
Mother	Korombugang	Kolintaban
Children (male)	1) Tindak ngavang	Simbul lagid
	2) Sokungavang	Timboulagit
	3) Momuruntung	Manimbakol
	4) Turug tambong	Tobou rondong
	5) Tindak ngadau	Ri'dang runat
	6) Vatang rizut	Geh'geu Ioni
	7) Lingao haji	Sarurimboi
Children (female)	1) Ginuguran	Sinintakan
	2) Tinonduan	Tinatalan
	3) Rinombuvan	Pinutungan
	4) Binolobou	Tinolidu
	5) Pinantakan	Pinansaaran
	6) Pinuliai	Sinulihang
	7) Sinumpalad	Sumpaladong
<i>Bambarazon's</i> country	Surung Rumuvab	Kumbang Sumukol

(Source: Shimomoto (n.d.))

Most of the Kadazandusun believe that there are seven types of paddy spirits and *Bambarayon* is a general name given to all of them. Evans (1953, p.

216) listed down all the seven types of paddy spirit and added another category which he named "The class of chief" in the beliefs of the Tempasuk Dusun. The seven spirits referred to and their roles are listed in Table 1.

Although the Kadazandusun believe that there are seven types of paddy spirit, their names vary among the different subgroups. The names employed by the Tempasuk Dusun (Evans, 1953, p. 216) bear comparison with those used by the Tindal Dusun from Kota Belud listed in Table 3 below:

Table 3: Seven Types of Paddy Spirits in the Belief of Tindal Dusun

No.	Name of Paddy Spirit	Role
1.	Olinopot	Unavailable
2.	Kiontolob	Unavailable
3.	Kiumbigo	Unavailable
4.	Malabai	Unavailable
5.	Dihuntun	Unavailable
6.	Tipudsu	Unavailable
7.	Pokotiru	Unavailable

Topin (1996, p. 27) does not give any explanation as to each paddy spirit's role in his list. Listed in Table 3 above are names and alternative names for the *Bambarazon* (*Bambarayon*) family members as indicated by the *Rungus* informant from Kudat.

The Kadazandusun believe that each type of paddy spirit has a distinct role to fulfill (Table 1). Gontolobon, for example, can supply rice piled up in huge quantities like *tontolob* (boulders). Prosperous farmers are assisted by most of the seven paddy spirits, who reside in their paddy fields and rice barns; whereas poor farmers are fortunate to receive the help of more than one or two. Evans in 1953 said, "I am told that at Kadamaian, the belief is that if a poor man has only one paddy spirit, it will be Sambilod, or if two, an Ohinopot and a Sambilod. Even the one spirit may desert him and go to a rich man's house, where there is plenty of paddies, only returning when the poor man has a little paddy in store" (Phelan, 2005, p. 166).

Paddy Spirits Related Ritual Ceremonies

According to Christian Jr. (1995, p. 371), many peasant cultures have rituals and routines for transitions relating to planting, germination, and harvest. As paddy planting plays such an important part in the life of the Kadazandusun, and they believe that paddy is a sacred plant with its spirit, thus several

elaborate ritual ceremonies have evolved - the chief aims being to restrain the malevolent spirits, protect the crops against pests and diseases, and to pacify paddy spirits so that they will protect their crops. There is a large amount of paddy spirit related ceremonies performed by the animistic Kadazandusun, with some of the common ones listed in Table 4.

Table 4: Paddy Spirits Related Ceremonies for the Kadazandusun in Tambunan

No.	Name of Ceremony in Kadazandusun	Aims or explanations
1.	Mangalahas	On clearing the jungle for cultivation.
2.	Monogit	To appease the paddy spirits. <i>Monogit</i> also means prayer and offering in Kadazandusun.
3.	Maganu Sakagon	For selecting the seed.
4.	Mangasok	Before planting the seed.
5.	Mongoguhi	To ask for a blessing on the paddy.
6.	Momongkos	To request permission to reap the paddy.
7.	Mamantas	To ward off damage to the paddy.
8.	Binatang	The ceremony of the paddy bund.
9.	Silau parai	At the appearing of the seed.
10.	Palakos	To satisfy the spirit of the paddy.
11.	Tangkob	New Paddy is storing hut ceremony.
12.	Paakan do Bambarayon	Giving food to the spirit of the tangkob (paddy storing hut).
13.	Magavau	Thanksgiving after the harvest.

(Source: Fernando (1978, p. 108)).

The Kadazandusun also believe that as human beings, paddy spirits are a sensitive lot and easily offended by rude conduct, such as shouting in the paddy field. When they get offended, they will move to another place. Once this happens, they need to be coaxed or cajoled so that they will return to their paddy fields to protect their paddy plants. Likewise, the traditional Malay paddy planters in Peninsular Malaysia have a similar belief regarding the paddy spirits' sensitive nature. The Malay paddy planters in Pahang state, for example, believe that paddy spirits are like small children that will sulk if not well-taken care. The rice goddess of Thai mythology is equally temperamental according to the farmers: she is beautiful and shy and will run off if offerings are carried to the field by men. No loud noises are made in the rice field for fear that the rice may fail to yield (Piper, 1993, p. 73).

So as not to offend the temperamental paddy spirits, it is necessary to perform a variety of appeasement rituals, such as those conducted by the

Malay ritual specialist known as *pawang* (Ahmat Juhari Moain, 1990, p. 48). In Kadazandusun communities, rites are performed by the *bobolian* (ritual specialist) at every stage of the rice-year, from the sowing of seeds through to the harvesting and storage of the crop in the paddy barn.

Before the sowing of seeds, the Kadazandusun of Tambunan will purify the seeds with blessed water in a ceremony known as *Mongobug*. This is followed by the ceremonial planting of the first paddy seedlings. When the paddy plants have established themselves in the paddy field, a *Monogit* (purifying) ceremony will be performed. At the moment the paddy plants reach a certain height after tillering, the Matsalud ceremony will be performed. This ceremony aims to ask the paddy spirits to protect the crop against disease when the paddy begins to bear ears. Next, comes the feeding of the rice souls known as *Paakan do Bambarayon*. After that, a ceremony designed to hasten ripening is conducted, with a secondary aim of getting rid of any poisonous qualities that the paddy may have. Before the harvesting of the ripened paddy can begin, the *bobolian* must go the middle of the field and pray to the *Bambarayon*. Once the paddy spirits have been consulted, the harvest is begun, and other ceremonies and observances follow the harvest (Fernando, 1978, pp. 93-94).

Just as at the paddy planting stages, elaborate ceremonies are also conducted at harvest time in Kadazandusun communities. As reported in the *Daily Express* (2010, p. 24) under the title "The Rituals of Tadau Kaamatan (Harvest Festival)," the Kadazan of Penampang and Papar district have a series of six paddy harvest related ceremonies, whereas the Lotud Dusun from Tuaran district have eight. Listed below are brief descriptions of the six paddy harvest related ceremonies observed by the Kadazan.

The Kumogos Ceremony

Before a harvest begins, a *bobohizan* (ritual specialist in Penampang District) will select and tie-up seven stalks of healthy paddy. The stalks will only be selected after the paddy field has been completely harvested. They will then be scatted over the plot. This gesture is to inform the spirits who may be present among the paddy not to cause any disturbances during the harvest; in return, each of them will be given something after the harvesting has been concluded.

The Kumotob Ceremony

The *bobohizan* selects seven stalks of good paddy from the field before harvesting. These are then tied together and placed in a *tadang* (traditional

basket for keeping rice). The rest of the rice in the field is then harvested. The seeds from the selected paddy are kept for use during the next planting season.

Photo 1: A Kadazandusun paddy harvesting knife – *linggaman*



(Source: Low Kok On, Pitas, Sabah on 17th June 2011)

The *Posisip* Ceremony

The *bobohizan* takes the *tadang* containing the seven stalks of paddy to a paddy hut. While reciting chants, she removes the bundle of stalks and inserts them in a bamboo pole kept in the *tangkob* (large rice storage container). The recital of the chants is to request the paddy spirits to stay in the paddy hut until the next planting season when the process will be repeated.

The *Poiib* Ceremony

In the rice hut, the *bobohizan* carefully pours the rice into the *tangkob*. The same process is sometimes repeated until all the rice have been poured into the *tangkob*. The *bobohizan* then recites chants appealing to the rice spirits to keep watch over the rice stored in the *tangkob*.

The *Magavau* Ceremony

This ritual ceremony focuses on the restoration of *Bambarayon* as well as offering the spirit food. In olden days, the *Magavau* ritual was performed in the

paddy field on the night of the first full moon after the harvest. Nowadays, this ritual is carried out in the house of the owner of the field.

The Humabot Ceremony

After all the serious ritual ceremonies, it is time to celebrate the harvest festival. The Sabah state level *Tadau Kaamatan* (Harvest Festival) is held annually from 30–31 May. After all the merry-making, which includes feasting, singing and traditional dancing, the climax of the *Tadau Kaamatan* is performed: the selection of the *Unduk Ngadau* (Harvest Festival Queen). The *Unduk Ngadau* symbolizes Huminudon, the daughter sacrificed by Kinoingan (*Daily Express*, 2010, p. 24).

The rice ceremonies for the *Rungus* may only be carried out in the biggest paddy field known as the Tagad field. The *Rungus* believe that *Bambarazon* travels from their home to the Tagad field by boat each rice season. When the *Rungus* sow rice in a Tagad field, they place a stake (Lotung), 3 inches in diameter and 2 feet long, at a certain place in the Tagad field. Around the Lotung, seven small holes are made in which the rice is sown along with the seeds of several varieties of flowers. This is the garden of *Bambarayon*. The Lotung is for securing the rope of the *Bambarazon's* boat. In addition to serving as a mooring place, some *Rungus* maintain that the Lotung also serves as a temporary home of *Bambarazon* until the farmers have constructed a *sulap* (rice storage hut) in the Tagad field to which *Bambarazon* are believed to migrate. Before the harvest, the *Rungus* build a *sulap* (hut) in the Tagad field. This is considered the actual house of *Bambarazon*. During the harvest, *Bambarazon* protects rice from evil spirits. When the *Rungus* thresh rice, they sacrifice some fowl to *Bambarazon* to secure the rice until the end of the entire village's harvest (Shimomoto, n.d.).

According to Kadazandusun beliefs, impolite acts, such as shouting in the paddy field and riddling outside of harvest time, are to be avoided. Next, as the Kadazandusun traditionally believe that *Bambarayon* lives in every grain of rice, harvesting must be carried out with the utmost care: no wastage is allowed. Many taboos are associated with harvesting and with the carrying home of the rice grain; for example, it is a bad omen if a sack of paddy which is being transported on the back of a buffalo from the paddy field to the storage barn happens to fall to the ground (Phelan, 2005, p. 124). For the *Rungus*, at the time of the first harvest, only family members are permitted to enter their paddy field. A utensil used to prepare rice may not be lent to a non-family member for three days, and no husked and unhusked rice may be sold or lent to other families. If these sanctions are violated, the family as a unit will suffer

since the rice spirits will flee and the harvest will be poorer (Appel, 1978, p. 150). Besides, some of the informants in this research told the author that they would avoid making unnecessary noise in their paddy field and hitting the *lingkut*, i.e., the traditional rice container (Photo 2) using a stick because both actions will offend the paddy spirits.

Photo 2: A *Lingkut*: A traditional rice container of the Kadazandusun made from tree bark.



(Source: Low Kok On, Tambunan, Sabah on 17th August 2011)

Paying respects to *Bambarayon* is carried out in different ways among the various Kadazandusun subgroups. In relation to this matter, Podtung Kuyag, a Tambunan Dusun comments as follows:

Sudah kau habis (menuai), em... barulah kau hormat itu bambarayon, itu semangat padi. Kau potong ayam, bawa tapai, masak telur, kau bawa kawan-kawanlah pergi makan di sulap (pondok) tempat padi itu. Kalau macam ada lima orang yang menghormati bambarayon, itu satu kali saja pergi itu mesti lima... kalau lima orang mau minta kasi hormat bambarayon, lima... lima sulap juga yang pergi makan tempat itu, pergi makan sama-sama minum sampai mabuk, ramai bah. Jadi itu bambarayon pun sana juga bersama-sama orang yang pergi makan di situ. Orang pun mabuk, bambarayon pun mabuk. Sama-sama gembira.

(After you have harvested the paddy, um... you have to respect *Bambarayon*, that paddy spirit. You should bring along with you the chicken, rice wine, boiled eggs and your friends to the *sulap* (hut) at the paddy field. If there are five people wanting to pay respect to *Bambarayon*, then five of them must go there. They must go there to feast and drink until they get drunk. *Bambarayon* will be there to join them too. So, both the people and *Bambarayon* will get drunk together. All will be happy by then.)

Rather similar traditions exist across Southeast Asia, with some differences in the rituals. Skeat, the authority on Malaysian Magic, recounts a reaping ceremony witnessed in Selangor, Malaysia: A mother-sheaf of fine, healthy, ripe rice was chosen within the field and still standing, was encircled with a cord. Seven heads of rice were selected to be the "Rice Child" and were cut with due ceremony and incense. Likewise, the Kadazandusun also select seven stalks of healthy paddy for their reaping ceremonies. On the other hand, Thai farmers will designate certain heads of rice as the "Rice Mother" instead of the "Rice Child." When harvest comes, the "Rice Mother" is thanked, and her pardon asked for reaping the rice (Piper, 1993, p. 73). The common ground between all these rituals is that paddy is to be well treated, protected, and honoured; lest it should fail and famine ensue. Besides, the paddy spirits concept is also widespread in many countries in Southeast Asia like Indonesia, Philippines, and Thailand where rice is the basic food, and the animistic nature of rice is accepted by most of the peoples in Southeast Asia too (Hart, 1964, p. 84).

Charms and Charming in Paddy Related Ritual Ceremonies

A charm, in general, is a rhythmically organized oral text, which is employed in a ritual situation and is believed to produce the desired effect because of the magic power both of the word and of the ritual specialist who uses it for a pragmatic purpose. The ritual specialists of the Kadazandusun community possess many charms for specific purposes. In the context of paddy planting, special *rinait*s (charms) are used in each of the paddy ritual ceremonies. The *tantagas* (ritual specialists) from the Lotud Dusun community-based in Tuaran District are skilled in memorizing a long *rinait* that is addressed to their deities. It is interesting to note that besides telling of the creation of the world, the exploits of the deities, prescriptions for moral living, ritual practices and other aspects of cultural life, this special *rinait* also covers the origins of rice. In this version of the Lotud creation *rinait*, rice is said to have been created from

the blood of *Kinoianagan* and *Umunsumundu's* daughter, *Muntaba* who was sacrificed by her mother for the sake of the human race (Pugh-Kitingan, 2009, pp. 250-251).

Different subgroups of the Kadazandusun community have their versions of *rinait*. *Pangalapik*, for example, is a special *rinait* which is recited among the *Rungus* of Kudat district after threshing rice. Yutaka Shimomoto (n.d.) recorded a long *Pangalapik* from a *Rungus* informant and transcribed the text into English. In the introduction of the *Pangalapik*, the priest praises the *Komburongo* and asks the spirit messenger to fetch *Bambarayon* as follows:

*Posikai ku i Komburongo, Rukahai ku I Rinokizan,
Amu ku dara om posikan, Tida ku dara om rukahan,
Nokodop dati i sinundu, Nokoturu dati I linodun,
Monimpa ki Komburongo, Mangampot ki Rinokizan,
Nunu ngaran ka i tiposik, Kuran tondo mala iti ruko.*

*Timpa ka ilo Bolizan, Ampot ka ilo Bozugan,
Mongulok mongogomos humongkob humamok,
Agazo kinokurangan ka i parai,
Natigagang novurosi i Tinongkob,
Ilo no otiposik ku, Alo no otirukou ku*

(Literal translation: Bobolian: "I wake up Komburongo,
If I do not wake him up,
Perhaps he cannot wake up."
Komburongo:

"Why did you wake me up?"

Bobolian: X [The name of the man who threshes rice is mentioned here.] wants to thresh rice, but he is afraid that a large quantity of rice will be lost.

Bambarazon is afraid of *Tinongkob* [The portion of the hut on the hill where the *Rungus* store the rice.]

This is why I wake you up.")

In actuality, "Komburongo" is a bracelet of charms made from a kind of grass's root, i.e., sweet flag or *Acorus calamus* Linn, which is known as *komburongo* also among the Kadazandusun (Photo 3). It plays an important role in most of the ritual ceremonies among the ritual specialists of the different Kadazandusun subgroups.

Photo 3: A Komburongo: An informant in Pitas, Sabah holding the komburongo grass (*Acorus calamus* Linn)



(Source: Low Kok On, Pitas, Sabah on 17th June 2011)

The act of the *bobolian* (ritual specialist) waking up Komburongo (a spirit in this context) in the above mentioned *Pangalapik* text has a similar function to the introductory chants recited by the ritual specialist of Tambunan Dusun in the *Mogundi* ceremony, which aims to ward away disease or crisis. Williams reported that in the “waking up” stage of the *Mogundi* ceremony, the female ritual specialist calls forth her familiar spirit from the *komburongo* root by running the tip of her right forefinger along the blade of a magically endowed knife. As she moves her finger, she chants softly:

Wake up, sacred plant (Komburongo), wake up!
Sacred plant I wake you to tell me,
I wake you to tell me,
If I may serve this person?
(Williams, 1965, p. 23)

Yutaka Shimomoto (n.d.) has edited the *Pangalapik* chant into 46 paragraphs. Briefly, after Komburongo is awakened, he sets off on a journey searching for *Bambarazon*. He travels from place to place with a gift for *Bambarazon* - a *tapi* (an undergarment). The *Komburongo* inevitably encounters other spirits to whom he enquires about *Bambarazon*. He changes his name twice to *Soribaungavan* and *Tangananak*, but Yutaka Shimomoto is not certain if

this is to disguise *Bambarazon's* identity or for other reasons. The spirits ask *Komburongo* questions concerning head-hunting, camphor collection, and sailing the sea by boat - questions which were of importance in the past. After the *Komburongo's* interlude with the two spirits, he finally meets a third spirit named *Mogintonou* who is asked to return *Bambarazon* to the farmer. *Mogintonou* agrees, in return for payment, which *Komburongo* pays in kind with chickens, pigs, etc. The *Bambarazon* are returned to the farmer, and with them, good fortune also returns. There the prayer ends.

Table 5: Dusun Tobilong charm

Tobilung Dusun's Charm	Literal Translation
Oligo-oligongogono	This line is a special form of charm which uses the classical language of the Tobilung Dusun. Its literal meaning is "an act of building a wall" or "something on the wall."
Olipo-olipantayo	This line is also a charm uttered in the Tobilung Dusun classical language. It means "having a desire to cross the wall without a door."
Sondiuku ondidigo	I am leaning and am surrounding (the object is not mentioned)
Kabai oku ondilungo	I am holding and giving support (the object is not mentioned)
Binagung-bagung id sawat	There is a bundle, (This "bundle" refers to the <i>pusakag</i> which is hanging on top of a Dusun Tobilung's rice barn. It is believed to be the dwelling place of the paddy-spirits.)
Tarok bungkau kud layagon	The melody of <i>bungkau</i> (a musical instrument) calling them from the ocean
Rinji kanja kumanja	They will come home

(Source: Simah Gurimit)

In each paddy planting season, the paddy spirits have to be invited to protect the crops. One of the charms collected from the Tobilung Dusun of Kota Belud District is considered sacred by the paddy planters. Such charms were specially created by the *bobolian* (ritual specialist) of the Tobilung Dusun community. According to Gumpai Beringgit, only the *bobolian* was allowed to utter such charms during the paddy planting seasons of his youth. These practices were a way of inviting the *Bambarazon* to their paddy fields. The classical language used to recite the charms below is rich in analogies, symbols and metaphors and the whole chant is closely aligned with the Dusun Tobilung beliefs about the paddy spirits. Table 5 below is the Tobilung Dusun charm supplied by

Simah Gurimit, a *bobolian* (ritual specialist):

Of all the paddy spirits related ceremonies, the *Magavau* ceremony is considered the peak ritual in the paddy planting cycle among most of the Kadazandusun subgroups. The ceremony mainly comprises the *Magaagandai* (Purification), *Mangambai* (Airborne) and *Mogkodin* (Summoning). The aim of these ceremonies and the importance of paddy spirits in the paddy planting cycle are revealed based on the charms which are recited in three separate stages:

i) *Magaagandai* (Purification)

Andazo-andazo' ku I tabui,
Ingg-ing-gidazo' ku tazas,
Andazo' silisilizo',
Inggido' ataatapo',
Sisilizo' I ngoo'o' ondulu,
I atapan ko.

(Literal translation: I winnow the paddy on the winnowing tray; I shake the tray and toss the paddy to wake it up.)

ii) *Mangambai* (Airborne)

Di au' no haazit panano,'
I id dadano buvai nga' pongki'oi,
Oi nokoi hozou ku I mangambai
Ku do I ahud ku do mangazing,
Hozou kosizong kosizong,
I ahud kogongok nga' kogongok.

(Literal translation: I will fly to the sky like a thunderstorm. I am singing and waving, singing and flying, as fast as the wind.)

iii) *Mogkodim* (Summoning)

Kodim-kodimon ku no,
Bambaazon di notimpan,
Kodim-kodimon ku no,
Andavi do paai za,
Tohuo titot no I zindud,
Nikoton I' do kinodim,

*Mongkiak no I paai haid,
Nikoton do paai vagu.*

(Literal translation: I summon the *Bambaazon* (paddy spirits) who are trapped there. The barn is filled with paddy spirits, overflowing as the paddy spirits return home. The older paddy that was harvested last year rejoices at the homecoming of all the freed *Bambaazon*. They are overjoyed at their return.) (Lasimbang, 2002, pp. 7-9)

Such recitations are not only used by the Kadazandusun. Using charms in paddy spirits related ceremonies is a common practice among paddy planters in and outside Malaysia. Like the Kadazandusun, the belief in paddy spirits (*semangat padi*) among the Malays in Peninsular Malaysia is equally strong. As a result, one can find many Malay charms (*mantera*) linked to paddy planting ceremonies. Before the Malay farmers start planting, a ceremony for a good harvest is performed which requires the arrangement of nine clumps of paddy, during which the following charm is recited:

Malay chants

*Bismillahir-Rahmanir-Rahimi.
Merpatai terbang seribu,
Singgah tidur di Kuala Perlis;
Tanam padi Sembilan perdu,
Kelaur padi Sembilan nalih.*

Literal Translation

*Bismillahir-Rahmanir-Rahimi.
Fly, thousand of pigeons fly,
Stop and put a night in Kuala Perlis;
Planting nine clumps of paddy,
Harvesting nine *nalih* of it.*

This short Malay charm starts with “*Bismillahir-Rahmanir-Rahimi*,” an Arabic phrase which means “In the name of most loving and generous God.” This is followed by a Malay traditional poem known as *pantun empat kerat* (Malay quatrain). In a four-line *pantun* or quatrain, the first couplet is known as a *pembayang maksud* (i.e. a message reflector) that produces the mirror effect of the *pantun* on the message or meaning of the second couplet that follows. In other words, the last two lines carry the meaning of this charm i.e. after planting nine clumps of paddy there will be a bountiful harvest later. *Nalih* is a Malay traditional unit of measurement – one *nalih* is equivalent to sixteen *gantang*, and one *gantang* is equivalent to 4.54 litres (Low, 2009, p. 280).

The Iban of Sarawak, Malaysia also have their paddy planting related charms:

Oh sacred paddy,
You the opulent,
You the distinguished,

Our paddy of the highest rank.

Oh sacred paddy,
Here I am planting you:
Keep watch over your children,
Keep watch over your people,
Over the little ones, over the young ones.
Oh, do not tire; do not fail in your duty.
(Piper, 1993, p. 74)

Not surprisingly, Thai farmers are also rich in paddy spirit related charms. At harvest time, it is traditional for farmers to designate certain heads of rice as the Rice Mother known as *Mae Posop*. In order to call *Mae Posop* (Rice Mother) to bless their crops, they recite the following charm:

Oh, Rice Goddess,
Come up into the rice bin,
Do not go astray in the meadows and field for mice to bite you and birds to take you in their beaks.
Go to the happy place to rear your children and grandchildren in prosperity.
Come!
(Piper, 1993, p. 74)

From the contents of all the charms cited in this paper, it is clear that for the Kadazandusun and other paddy planting communities in Southeast Asia, charms are believed to be one of the most effective mediums for appeasing the paddy spirits and persuading them to protect their paddy.

Conclusion

From the many myths, legends, charms, taboos, and riddles related in this study, it is evident that paddy cultivation is a vital activity in the life of the Kadazandusun and this is reflected in the richness and variety of their traditional beliefs concerning paddy practices and the role of the paddy spirits. This paper has also highlighted that the planting, growing, and harvesting of the paddy are of great religious significance to the Kadazandusun as they believe that the paddy spirits, *Bambarayon* are present in every grain of paddy. As a result, traditional spiritual ceremonies are largely agricultural rituals involving the recitation of long *rinait* (charms) and performed for the protection of the paddy. In addition, the concept of the paddy spirits seems to

be common throughout farming communities, not just the Kadazandusun and other paddy planters in Malaysia, but across South East Asia. The wealth of appeasement ceremonies and dedications offered up to the paddy spirits in all these cultures indicates the central importance of rice as a staple food in these communities, and the priority given to ensuring a bountiful harvest.

Endnotes

¹ The term Kadazandusun - officially coined in the 1990s - is a combination of the words Kadazan and Dusun, devised with the aim of uniting all the sub-ethnic groups encompassed by these two major ethnic groups. The official Kadazandusun language was first taught in schools in 1997 (Reid, 1997, p. 124). According to the constitution of the Kadazandusun Cultural Association of Sabah (KDCA), Kadazandusun is a generic term for forty indigenous communities of Sabah (Topin, 1996, p. 3). All the informants involved in this research, i.e., Bundu, Gana, Liwan, Lotud, Rungus, Tobilung, and Kimaragang are listed as Kadazandusun in the source mentioned earlier.

² Regarding agriculture practice, in the interior district of Tambunan, practically every family in the seventy sectors under review has its paddy field and is thus self-supporting in the commodity. In 1976, four thousand three hundred acres of wet paddy and one thousand seven hundred and fifty acres of hill paddy were cultivated in Tambunan district. The people in Keningau district cultivated five thousand forty-three acres of wet paddy and one thousand five hundred and seventeen acres of hill paddy in the same year (Fernando, 1978, p. 6).

³ A variety of synonyms is used for the term “paddy spirit (s)” such as paddy-spirit (s) or rice spirit (s) [rice-spirit(s)] or rice soul (s) [rice-soul (s)].

⁴ The name of Kinoingan’s spouse varies according to the different Kadazandusun subgroups. Typically, she is referred to as Suminundu, Umunsumundu, and Yumun (Evans, 1922; Williams, 1965; Leong, 1968).

⁵ The only daughter of Kinoingan (Kadazandusun Chief God) is now commonly known as Huminudon. She volunteered to sacrifice herself to save the human race from famine. According to legend, Ponompuan's flesh became rice, and most sacred of all, her spirit dwelled in the paddy and became the Seven-in-One Bambarayon, the rice spirit. Since then, Ponompuan has been referred to as Huminudon (The Transformed Sacrifice) in the context of Kinoingan's salvation of the Kadazandusun people (Topin, 2003, p. 33).

⁶ Piromitan is a layer in the sky. Luma'ag, Dioato, Lugu, and Onkusigal spirits reside on Piromitan. All these spirits help human beings (Shimomoto, n.d.).

⁷ Sambavon is stronger than any other spirit on Piromitan. Minamangun is the creator and the most powerful deity. Kinoringan is the second most powerful deity (Shimomoto, n.d.).

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