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A note on 'spirit helpers' in the Lung Lejie epic of the Wehèa Modang (East Kalimantan)

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1 Introduction

This short presentation of the Wehèa Modang religious beliefs focusses on oral literature and, more particularly, on an extract of the *Tek'na' Lung Lejie*. My approach towards literary speech was influenced by Jack Prentice's outstanding study of ritual invocations by Timugon Murut minstrel-priestesses (Prentice 1981), and this presentation is just a humble homage to his scholarly achievements. The combination of ethnolinguistic and ethnographic analyses as demonstrated in Prentice's major article would in itself be enough to raise methodological issues in both linguistics and anthropology. In this light, the questions raised in his conclusions about the ethnohistory of Sabah (1981:136) should also be taken up for other parts of Borneo.

Furthermore, as Prentice stressed, the fragility of oral traditions when confronted with the current trends of social change and religious conversions makes it even more urgent to record the ritual speech forms and poetical narrative of mythology. These tend to be lost much faster than more 'profane' linguistic materials such as basic vocabulary, oral histories and songs. This is because their performance is a ritual function, and in these societies ritual functions are vested in only a handful of trained individuals, priests, priestesses, mediums, shamans and customary chiefs (Guerreiro forthcoming-a).

Another factor lays in the intrinsic difficulties of recording, transcribing, and translating such literary works, tasks that obviously require a deep knowledge of the language itself, including its grammatical structure, its phonology and its specialised vocabulary and archaic lexical forms. Here again it must be stressed that Prentice's main linguistic work on the Murutic languages of Sabah and their dialectology (1971) was a prerequisite to his study of ritual invocations. In the case of Wehèa Modang, I began to compile an Indonesian-Wehèa Vocabulary (Guerreiro forthcoming-b) during my fieldwork. Although not a professional linguist, I have a basic training in phonetics and I consider the compilation of this vocabulary as a preliminary step towards further ethnolinguistic studies.

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For reasons of space, it is not possible to deal with the entire *tek'na'* here. I will therefore only mention that the epic chant of Lun Lejie relates the many adventures of the hero, his fights against enemies, his encounters with spirits and ghosts (*sekiah*), deities (*metà*) and their omens (*nehon*), as well as his alliances with humans and spirits. The hero's visits to friendly village communities, drinking parties and romances are also depicted with the vivid poetic imagery common to Wehèa oral narratives. Among the 'secret' allies of Lung Lejie are the four spirit helpers (*kempöè*) which play a recurrent role in the tale.

2 The situation of the Modang in East Kalimantan, Indonesia

The Modang — a generic term based on a linguistic classification — numbering about 5,000 people in East Kalimantan, live dispersed in the Kutai regency along the Mahakam river and its northern tributaries. In the Berau and Bulungan regencies north of Kutai, Modang communities are known by the exonyms '*Segai/Segayi*' (in Malay) or '*Ga'ai/Ga'è*' (in different Kayan-Kenyah isolects).¹ Their autonym, however, is *Menggaè* or *Mengga'ay* according to their subdivisions along the Kelay, Segah and lower Kayan rivers. The Merap People of Malinau basin, Lung Tembaue (autonym) in northern Bulungan, can be considered as related to the Modang. Basically, all these communities speak the same language which belongs to the Kayanic subgroup of languages, but this language has dialects which vary considerably in phonology (including morphophonemics) and lexicon. The five river-based groups refer to themselves by names other than 'Modang' (which is a derogatory exonym originating from Kutai): Long Glit (or Lung Gelaat) in the middle and upper Mahakam, Long Belah on the Belayan R., Long Way on the Kelinjau R., Wehèa on the Telen-Wahau rivers and *Menggaè* as already mentioned. The autonym Wehèa comes from the name of the river Wahau. The Wehèa are also known locally as Long Wahau, or Wahau Modang, or in Berau, Sawaw, lit. 'they [from] the Wahau'.

The Wehèa are in fact the demographically most important Modang subgroup (with about 2,300 members). They have also kept their traditional socio-ritual system, be it with some adaptations. The Modang distinguish themselves from their Kayan-Busang, Kenyah or Bahau Sa' neighbours in the province by their language, the style of their houses and their settlement organisation (Guerreiro 1984, 1985, 1987, 1992, 1993, 1996a,b, 1997a,b, 1998, 1999).

All Wehèa practise swidden cultivation of paddy and other crops including maize, millet, tubers and fruit trees. Their material culture shares most basic elements with the Kayanic and Kenyah sub-groups, and, in this way, they might be considered to be part of a cultural complex in central East Borneo. However, in regard to social institutions, values and religious beliefs, they show a wider range of variations than the Kayanic and Kenyah sub-groups. Like the latter, they are organised in a hierarchical structure which recognises three main

¹ Actually, this ethnonym is composed from the noun *gay*, 'sword, machete' or *parang* (Malay), with a verbal prefix *meng-*, 'to have a gay/to wear a gay'. It refers here to the long war sword, which is well-known in East Kalimantan under its nickname of *mandaw*, lit. 'to [cut] the head' or 'head cutting'. Interestingly, this lexical item can be related to the Barèè language of central Sulawesi, where the two verbs *mengga'é*: '[to go] head-hunting' and *manggaé*: 'harvesting', show a close lexical and semantic connection, derived from the root *nga'é* (Downs 1977:123, quoting Adriani 1928:463 under *nga'é*).

Among the Segah people at Long La'ay, the *gay mesge*, a pusaka, cannot be kept in the house but only in the rice barn (*wong*); each year the blade (*nōng*) is ritually 'fed' (*emkan*) by blood unction from a sacrificed chicken. Otherwise, the owner would suffer from swelling (*plong*), a belief known also by the term *busung* in Kayanic (on this belief see Blust 1981:289).

social orders. The chiefly families (*hepuy pwun*) and the nobles of various status (*hepuy so'*, *pekgwa'*, *tephè'*) constitute the upper level of society. Another social order is the commoners (*pangin*); the 'good people' (*sewün kas*) are commoners who have a higher standing in this stratum, and possibly, remote genealogical links with the nobility. Formerly, the third lower social order comprised two categories, dependent (*psap*) and 'slave' (*megwes*), originating both from war captives (*sewün helut*) and rarely from debtors — in the later case for short periods only. These two categories were under the authority of the village chiefs for whom they worked at different tasks (for details see Guerreiro 1992:20–22). All social ranks were hereditary and based on bilateral descent (*pehu'* or *son des*), but *sewün kas* status could also be achieved. Ritual specialists include priests and priestesses of noble descent and spirit mediums (*lun enjuk*), who are usually commoners or influential individuals, and mostly women. The customary chiefs (*un edat* or *du' edat*) are generally commoners of good standing. The village (*ekung*) is the main ritual and political unit of the Wehèa.

3 The epic of Lung Lejie and Wehèa spirit beliefs

I should point out that I have selected only a very short passage of this oral text of more than 3,000 lines, because the *tek'na'* gives a dramatic expression to the notion of ['spirit helper'] (*kempöè*) among the Wehèa. It raises also interesting questions about similar beliefs in the larger Austronesian/Austroasiatic area. According to Wehèa' belief each individual has its own *kempöè* protecting him or her in difficult situations in the village as well as in the fields or forest.

In ritual invocations, the *kempöè* can be summoned by using the special call, *juy!* It differs from the mediums' call (*èèè...*) to their spirit familiars which form yet another category of spirits. Invocations to the *kempöè* take place in dangerous locations, such as a mountain or a remote forest environment, but also in the village inner space during some invigorating ceremonies for men.² In any case, the *kempöè* manifests itself as a secret helper in times of danger. I assumed at first that the *kempöè* notion would be related to that of a 'guardian spirit', similar to the Iban *ngarong* described in the literature (see Hose and MacDougall 1912:II, 92ff.; Graham 1987:129–130; Jensen 1974:124–125). However, it would be closer to what the Iban call the *antu nulong* (lit. 'helping spirit') which may also appear in the form of an animal. The latter are also referred to as *tua* or *tuah*.³

Wehèa informants themselves insisted on the idea that the *kempöè* is a kind of 'emanation' of the soul (*welgwen*) of the individual. It may well be that such a spirit would be conceived of as a protective agent for men only, as the ritual context seems to indicate. Furthermore, the Wehèa recognise gender differences in spiritual matters and the notion of the soul; certain nutritional taboos (*pli'*) are only imposed on women. Women should not eat the flesh of the monkey, palm civet, deer or mouse-deer. These mammals are considered 'forest animals' (*kot maè las*); they have their own soul (*pin welgwen*) which may endanger the woman's soul and the soul of paddy that the women protect along the ritual cycle (Guerreiro 1999). However, such a taboo does not apply to wild boar (*sa'*), the most common game. Besides, one notices that short-tail macaque, deer and mouse-deer are eaten by men

² It includes the great headhunting Festival, the Nemlèn (Guerreiro 1992:35–39) and the Nebloh, an annual ritual for cleansing the village from bad influences and starting the new cycle of paddy cultivation (*na' edat plaè*; Guerreiro 1998:80–81). These rituals involve only men and boys.

³ These spirits are to be distinguished from the spirit familiars of shamans called *yang* or *iyang*; see Graham (1987:131–132); on Iban beliefs compare Freeman (1967) and Sather (1978).

mostly during forest product collecting expeditions (*bos maè las*) or, in the past, head-hunting raids (*ngenie*). Various spirits, related to gender oppositions, may affect men and women differently, for example, in relation to pregnancy, miscarriage and still birth (*pe'us nèak*).

Interestingly, the passage of the *Tek'na* introducing the *kempöè* evokes the idea that the human afterbirth forms a 'container' of four symbolic 'friends' or siblings of Ego — although no gender or age indications are given.⁴ These ideas are widespread in the Austronesian world, besides the general notion of an 'adoption' or 'alliance' with particular spirits (see Kemlin 1917:27sq. for similar beliefs). Among the Wehèa, alliances with spirits (*metà*) or ghosts (*sekiàh*) are conceived as a 'mutual agreement' (*petde'*). It can be achieved by performing ascetic tasks in order to obtain secret powers (*nlem*), and also by making offerings at certain spots in the forest, in the mountains or near rapids on river banks, that is, in the 'dangerous' outside space (*maè las*), far from the security of the village (*maè min*). Alliance and communication between men and deities by means of dreams (*tempin*) is also common. The higher deities, such as the pair Doh Ton Tenyè and Dèa Long Meluen, respectively elder and younger sister, give their advice and messages while appearing to humans in dreams. Lesser spirits also manifest themselves in that way (Thunder, Bo' Jekiah, the protectors of human life).

Here these ideas are transposed on a mytho-poetic level relating to the deeds of the hero, Lung Lejie, in a stylistic mode peculiar to epics. In the text, each of the four siblings is further associated with 'charms' (*keban* lit. 'medicine, charm, drug'), meant to help the main character in his gallant fights against enemies.

The full title of the epic is *Tek'na' Lung Lejie Béang Yung Long Guang Dèa* which can be freely translated as 'Tale of the Manly Tiger Flying in this World Forever'. The 'Manly Tiger' (*lung lejie*) gives its name to the epic. He was a chief of full noble descent (*hepuy penggup*) and is known as a great warrior of the past whose bravery made him into a protective ancestor-deity (*metà*) famous to the people. He is the headhunter par excellence, collecting a great many trophy-heads (*kuhung*).

His very name, a prerogative of his noble rank, constitutes a mark of fame (*ngelnöng kelan*). *Lejie* or *Lejiu* (*Lejo* in Kayan-Busang, *Lenjaw* in various Kenyah isolects) refers to the invisible 'spiritual tiger' whose powers are limitless. In decorative arts the figure of the Tiger is usually treated as 'dog-tiger' (*aso' ejo* Ka). Among the Kayan-Busang, and Modang, the same character carries the souls of the dead on their journey to the after-world; wooden statues of *aso' lejo/sah lejiu* are placed beside or under the coffins of chiefs, e.g. among the Long Glit, Mengga'ay and Bahau Sa' (Guerreiro 1989; Juynboll 1910; Nieuwenhuis 1925). *Lung*, 'virile, brave, champion', also indicates a person of noble status.

⁴ The other components of the afterbirth, namely the placenta (*selah nèak*, lit. 'the child's nest'), the amniotic fluid (*si' selah*) and the umbilical cord (*pset nèak*) are not mentioned. Then again, the distinction between the 'elder' and 'younger' siblings of Ego, which could be expected in relation to the belief, is not expressed either, which maybe because it is implicit to the Wehèa audience. The precise meaning of the word itself remains to be determined. I was not able to elicit a gloss for *kempöè* (the prefix *kem-* implies 'to convey s.th. to s.o.' or 'to hold'); while the intransitive verb *ngempöè* could be translated as to 'have a victory' [over enemies: *ekung benu'*]. Besides *kempöè* also means 'sacred' (for persons) as a quality.

4 The Wehèa oral genres

I will outline in broad terms several different oral genres to show the relation of the epic to other formal speech forms or 'ritual discourses'. First, prose forms of ritual speech can be either invocation, prayer or spell, all known as *sekèang*. They show a whole range of vocal spectrum from high voice declamation to muttering. Speed and stress may also vary according to passages in the same text. On some rare occasions, *sekèang* are accompanied by the beating of the long conical drum (*tewung*), for example during the Nebloh, propitiating the omens of paddy and invigoration rites in the men's house (*ewéang*). *Sekèang* are also associated with most of the rites invoking spiritual entities during the annual cycle of the village, such as:

1. *Edat na' plaè*, the custom of paddy cultivation, from selecting the swidden sites to harvesting;
2. *Na' pli'*, to do the sacred, the ritual, i.e. to sacrifice to the deities and souls of paddy; or, when major festivals are staged in the village, such as the *Nemlèn* or headhunting festival;
3. *Na' lom pwun*, the death ceremony of chiefs; and
4. *Dèa Pehos*, the ritual for cleansing the village of incest and adultery (both elder men and women are able to perform a *sekèang* on the occasion of household rites).

The cycle of *Edat na' plaè* comprises not less than thirteen rituals, organised mostly in the swidden fields (about from June to January), while *Na' pli'* takes place after the harvested rice is stored in the barn (usually in February). *Na' pli'* starts in the beginning of March, and lasts for three months. The climax of *Na' pli'* is the *Bob Jengéa* Festival, lasting one full day, when the village is purified by priestesses and the 'soul of rice' (*welgwen plaè*) is symbolically brought in the village by masked dancers, the *hedo'*, for the new agricultural year (starting in June).

From a formal point of view, *sekèang* are characterised by the recurrence of formulaic phrases, doublets and parallelisms, with emphasis on assonance and euphony (Guerreiro 1996b).

Besides the *sekèang*, the Wehèa perform several oral genres which, in contrast, are all sung in solo or chorus. The latter can be summarised briefly.

- *Na' wa' juk* (lit. 'to do the *juk* speech' or *enjuk* 'to be entered by a *juk* spirit').⁵ These are texts displaying versified rhyme and archaic words. These archaic words are derived from the Long Way and Long Glit isolects, which in Modang constitute an 'older' speech stratum.
- *Tek'na'* are epics relating the deeds of the chiefs and distinguished nobles (*hepu*), the heroes of the past and tales of war and love. The singer performs in solo and a chorus of two to three individuals may repeat the last line (*bop*) of a stanza (*kehéang*). Usually only older men sing the *tek'na'* while sipping rice-beer (*benyè jakan*) or palm wine (*edap*).

⁵ A category of ancestral spirit (*metà*) but it is called *juk* or *enjuk* during the medium's séance, the latter is referred to by the same term *enjuk*.

- *Teluy* are ritual chants invoking deities, ancestors and the soul of paddy, i.e. the original paddy, *plàè long*.⁶ These are sung by at least two soloists, responding to each other in turn. The last line of a stanza is repeated by a chorus of four to eight persons, male and female. They sing in unison (*embop*), and at some point their song forms a musical transition between lines. According to the ritual context of the *teluy* (agricultural rites, transition rites for children, death ceremonies) men and women may sing separately or together. During performances, betel nut chewing is customary.

In the two above mentioned genres, *tek'na'* and *teluy*, it should be noted that the chorus (*embop*) is said to 'accompany' or 'join' in singing the line (*engèng-eh*), while the soloist who starts singing the line is 'taking the lead' (*ngelngut wa* 'reversing the line'). When performing *teluy*, the prompter repeats the line (*enje' teluy*) to the main soloist, then to the other singers. The prompter speaks out (*newa'*) a non-sung version of the text which is whispered or spoken at slow voice. The same technique may be used for *tek'na'* performances, if one of the singers forgets his line or is tired. In both kinds of performances, which may be staged on the platform below the house (*sun tah*) or inside the living quarters (*maè mso*), all participants sing together in good spirits (*memay*). Both genres are characterised by chromaticism (I Made Bandem, Maceda José and Nicole Revel-Macdonald 1979).

- *Na'yong*, the fourth oral genre to be outlined here, is the singing of the genealogy of a deceased person, especially for individuals of *hepuy* or *sewün kas* status; it is addressed to the dead relatives (*lun lewas*) and remote ancestors (*bo'*) of the deceased. It takes place usually on the platform below the living quarters or in front of the house on a special platform nowadays on the second and third nights following death (because people are buried on the fourth day at the latest). The *na'yong* chant is aimed at accompanying the soul of the dead person (*welgwen lun lewas*) during its journey to Pang Kung Kelung, the village of the dead, or at least to somewhere in the vicinity of it — (the performance of another ritual, *Ngepjoy* 'to raise again' some time after death, enables the deceased 'to go up' (*hebèa*) to the village itself). *Na'yong* is performed only by older women, although some men may join in to help to trace genealogical relationships. It is done twice in the following order: first, from the apical ancestor (s) (*bo'*) — usually a married couple — to the deceased in the 'female descent line' (matrilineal, *sot ledoh*) then in the 'male descent line' (patrilineal, *sot lekaè*); and, then, from the deceased to the apical ancestors.

Tales and stories concerning the dead relatives are inserted in the chants with descriptions of the lives of people in the village of the dead, that is, of people who have died a good death (*lewas kas* or *lewas te' betung*, lit. 'dead on the floor beam'). People who have died a 'bad death' (*lewas ak* or *lewas te' eyen* lit. 'dead on the spot') go to another place called Pang Kung Néang. They do not need the sequence of death rites and *na'yong* is not necessary. They include women who died at childbirth, warriors who died in battle, drowned people (*lewas lemas*), people who died in accidents, and people bitten by venomous snakes.

⁶ It is named after Long Déang Yung, the female deity associated in the myth with the paddy and the omens of rice cultivation, seven birds and animals; this young girl is sacrificed by her mother and her death allows the successful growth of paddy (Guerreiro 1996b, 1999).

5 The *Tek'na' Lung Lejie* text

The following passage has been transcribed and translated from the spoken version of *tek'na'* supplied in August 1994 by Lejie Tot, my Wehèa friend who himself is a performer of *Tek'na'* and *Teluy*. The numbering of lines here was made according to selected stanzas only; the Wehèa text is given after the translation).

Introductory lines

- 1 The Thunder of Long Ta' Wetà gave spirit helpers to Lung Lejie ...
- 2 Look, in his placenta there were four kinds of spirit helpers ...

Stanza I

- 3 The shirt made of Eagle feathers,
- 4 to fly as fast as the news.

Stanza II

- 5 The Tiger at the river bed,
- 6 whose eyes are like the *leléang* fish.
- 7 He circles around just like the Face of the Moon.
- 8 He gave him the shield looking like a flat gong.
- 9 To be strong I may ask to hold tightly to
- 10 the root Tong Méang Bléang.

Stanza III

- 11 The Dragon below the waterfall of blood.
- 12 When you arrive flying through the air.
- 13 He gave a strong sword, such a sword ...
- 14 Sharpening the sword which causes people to go mad.

Stanza IV

- 15 The Lady Dewing Ding Dep Liey Long.
- 16 Who owns the 500,000 — charm.
- 17 The charm returning breath [to the dead]. (see Table 1)

The vernacular text

- 1 *Dlay long ta' weta*
/thunder of long ta' wetà (toponym)
haaè kempöè te' lung lejie
/to give / spirit helpers / to / personal name /
- 2 *Hewin mensah selah kempöè paèt na'an*
/look / passing / placenta / spirit helpers / four / kind /
- 3 *Ebing blun neha*
/shirt / feather / eagle /

- 4 *Kepit mléang dengéah*
/wings/ to fly/ news/
- 5 *Lejie dya' las hanguy*
/tiger/ below/ the river bottom/
- 6 *ne' pin mtan leléang*
/who/ to have/ eyes/ leléang fish (Silurus sp.)/
- 7 *Ngendo tëang nōng wellun*
/turning/ like/ face/ the moon/
- 8 *Hi' haaè tewüp mehbéang*
/to give/ to give⁷/ shield/ flat brass gong/
- 9 *mlang nyen ka ngeduen*
/to be able to/ if / [I] ask something/ to hold/
- 10 *wekèah tong mèang bléang*
/aerial root/ personal name: 'which crush? [the bones]'/
- 11 *Gelong dia' dun leha'*
/dragon/ under/ waterfall/ blood/
- 12 *Hewin ki' hay nembéang*
/look/ you/ arrive/ flying/
- 13 *Hi' haaè klung ku'*
/to give/ to give/ iron ore⁸/ sword/
- 14 *sa' ku' na' heléang bengin*
/to sharpen/ sword/ to cause/ mad / epidemic/
- 15 *Dewingding dep liey long*
/Dewing = personal name of kempöè/
- 16 *ne' pin keban me' tus jemlèn*
/who/ to own/ charm-medicine/ five/ hundred/ thousand/
- 17 *keban emman lesgièn*
/charm-medicine/ to return/ breath/

To facilitate the reader's grasp of the text, I offer in Table 1 a chart of *kempöè* (spirit helpers) and their specific realms of activity.

⁷ Both *hi'* and *haaè* mean 'to give': *hi'* is a more literary term whereas *haaè* is the unmarked form.

⁸ The ore from local deposits in the Apo Kayan area is called *mlaét kluh* (Kayan-Busang *tité Ititey keluh*; Kenyah Lepo' Taw *malat kelu(h)*). It produces sword blades (*nōng ku'*) of the best quality iron. Usually these blades are decorated with small round brass incrustations (on one side only). Swords with such a blade are called *ku' mtan*. They are kept as prestige goods (*ku' nyang* or *nyen*).

Table 1

| | |
|--------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| The Spirit Helpers (<i>kempöè</i>) | Realm (<i>guang enyen</i>) |
| Eagle (<i>neha döng</i>) | Sky |
| Tiger (<i>lejie</i>) | River bed/Earth |
| Dragon (<i>gelong</i>) | River/Water |
| Lady Dewing Ding Dep ⁹ | Air: this world |

Here, I list the charms mentioned in the text:

the flying shirt (*ebing*), the shield (*tewüp*) and aerial root (*wekèah*),
the magic sword (*klung ku*'), the ultimate charm: 'life' (*lesgièn* = lit. 'breath').

The Wehèa differentiate between the 'life-principle' of an individual or 'breath' (*lesgièn*) which is equated with life (*blom*). It ceases to function at physical death, dissolving into air, while the personal 'soul' (*welgwen*) passes through several states from its existence in this world (*welgwen lun blom*) to the world of the dead (*welgwen lun lewas*), becoming eventually an ancestral spirit (*mtò*) in the village of the dead. Sickness (*lèng ak* lit. 'feeling bad') is caused by the elopement of the soul attracted by some ancestral spirits at Pang Kung Kelung or Pang Kung Néang villages. These are conceived as deities (*metà*) when possessing the spirit-mediums (*lun enjuk*). These mediums may have up to five spirit familiars which are also ancestral spirits and therefore their relatives (*pewellin*). Both domesticated and wild animals are believed to have their own souls. From a lexical point of view, it is worth noting that *kempöè* is distinguished from the words for 'shade' (*ngèa*) or 'reflection' (*kelnyèè*) that could have been attached formerly to the expression of a 'two-fold' notion of the soul. In contrast, one's personal name (*ngelan*) forms an element of an ancestral name (*ngelan waés*) that will be part of an individual's genealogy after death (see note in Appendix 1). It cannot be equated with the soul of the dead. On the other hand, the 'spirit names' (*ngelan metà*) are replacing the personal names only, the former are given to sick persons by the mediums during an *enjuk* ritual.

6 Commentary on the Spirit helpers in the context of *Tek'na*'

To recapitulate, the four spirit helpers of Lung Lejie are introduced in the following order in the text:

- (1) The Black Eagle *neha döng* (*Ictinaetus malayensis*) gave the hero a wing (*kepít*) to fly. If enemies (*ekung benu*') are coming too close, the wing can fly away with Lung Lejie. It can also be used as a weapon: when fanned it turns enemies into dust (*ewa*'). The Black Eagle is the main headhunting and war omen (*nehon*).

⁹ Dewing Ding Dep is an important mythical figure in paddy agricultural rites, especially during the sowing; she introduced humans to the custom of blowing into bamboo tubes, called *lu' bup*; they are played in combination with bamboo percussions, the *lu' teguk*. Only adolescent boys and girls may play these instruments in the swidden field. A Long Way Modang myth attributes the introduction of this custom to another character, the Lady Long Gèng (Liah Hong Djeng 1969:41–42). Lady Dewing Ding Dep's realm is the air, which is the intermediate level between the upper world and under world.

- (2) The Tiger of the river bottom gave Lung Lejie a shield which is as strong as a gong. It moreover gave a special root *wekéah* Tong Méang Bléang which can hurt the enemies in a peculiar way. If only touched by the root their bones are broken instantly. If only one enemy is actually touched all will suffer the same fate; they will be unable to engage in battle again.
- (3) The Dragon (*gelong*) offered him a magic sword (*klung ku'*) which can turn enemies into madmen (*sewün heléang*) so that they forget who they are. If sent by Lung Lejie, the sword can fly by itself attacking (*ha té*) his adversaries in a deadly manner.
- (4) Finally, Lady Dewing Ding Dep offered him a rare charm which has no price: it can return the breath (*emman lesgièn*) of the dead.

The belief in the four 'spirit helpers' of Lung Lejie can be also traced to current representations about this character. It should be noted that they encompass the three realms of the cosmos: the upperworld or sky, the underworld and river, and the world of humans which is the earth. Thus, the charms bestowed on the hero give him extraordinary fighting powers (*nlem*) and also mobility. He can appear and disappear at will, while living on his own for a long time. According to oral tradition, long ago Lung Lejie went on a headhunting expedition in the mountains (*sun kung*) and he never returned to his village. The area where this happened, on the fringes of the Apo Kayan plateau, is known as *Kejien*, lit. 'the Kayan', to the Wehèa. They think that he is not dead and will come back some day. As a great leader and warrior, Lung Lejie had accomplished many brave deeds in the Kejien area when the Wehèa and the other Kayanic groups were still living on the plateau (around the middle of the eighteenth century). Lung Lejie is said to have become a strong spirit, a deity (*metà*) guarding the people against enemies, diseases and misfortune (*enléa*). His former village site in the Kejien area, is mentioned in the *Tek'na'*.¹⁰ The place is actually located in the upper reaches of the Telen River (*ol ilan*), along a tributary of the main Kayan river (*singèt kejien pwun*) probably the Kayan uk, or Kejien so', which is the Modang name of the river. This very remote area, above the rapids of Po' Liah Léang, was settled when the Wehèa migrated downstream from the Telen River where it meets with the Wahau River (*leböng wehèa*) in the early nineteenth century. Some caves (*guang wetà*) there which were used as burial places for the *hepuy* are still remembered and occasionally visited during forest product collecting expeditions and bird's nest collecting in the caves themselves.

Another mention of the charms as described in the *Tek'na' Lung Lejie* is found in a short passage, referring again to the character of Lady Dewing:

¹⁰ The following toponym is recorded in the text: *Min Lung Lejie* [village of Lung Lejie], *Béang Yung Dewung Ding Bong Long Yéang* (= son of Béang Yung Dewung Ding (m.) and Bong Long Yéang (f.)) at the place named: *Dia' Kehde' Lengèt Pang Bing Wellun Kenmaè*, a tentative translation could be, 'The [place] under the broad sky when the moon is rising'.

keban lung bli' lan
/charm/ brave/ change¹¹ / real/

ketun guang lung gelong
/dirt/ nose / dragon/

tluang kepit pedan
/bone/ wing/ small bat, *Hipposideros* sp. ?/

dewing ding dep liey long
/personal name (female)/

jenie dèa léang mehbéang
/shelter with a flat roof / day [sun] / like / flat gong/

Translation:

A charm that can truly change into a brave warrior.
Dirt from the Dragon's snout.
Bone from the wing of the *pedan* bat.
Lady Dewing Ding Dep Liey Long [under],
A shelter like the top of a flat [shining] gong.

Here the *keban*, apart from being a 'medicine' (nowadays western 'drug') or a special plant brew sprinkled on paddy to protect its growth (*keban plaè*), is described metaphorically as a magic device with a characteristic transformative power. This female character is generally associated with life, i.e. 'breath' and 'air', the vibrating sound of the flat gong:

'she blows strongly the bamboo instrument,
Lady Ding Dep Dèa Long Mehbéang'
/ lu' bup lesgièn gandèng
Ding Dep Dèa Long Mehbéang / (quoted from the *Teluy Long Way*)

The variations on the name of the character are by no means surprising in the context of *tek'na'* and *teluy*. For instance, *liey* in the name of this *kempòè* Dewing Ding Dep Liey Long means 'brass or copper', and the flat gongs (*mehbéang*) are made from brass, so in her name and elsewhere brass is used metonymously for gong (one may also note that in this line the full name has been altered; to play on the rhyme Dewing is dropped, Ding coming in front; both lines have six syllables).

7 Conclusion

In this short introduction to some of the Wehèa religious beliefs that are expressed in the *Tek'na' Lung Lejie*, I have tried to show the main features of Wehèa oral genres, mode of performance and style, that is, some of the aesthetic choices made by the Wehèa. I have tried

¹¹ *Blie* 'to change into something', is an intransitive verb which is usually translated best as 'to become something' and in some cases 'to take place' (cf. Malay *jadi*). It is used attributively in certain idiomatic phrases, e.g. *Dlay blie* 'the Thunder which changes' (i.e. which petrifies people or villages, by causing a storm); *dlay la'* 'the Thunder which takes' (i.e. it punishes humans for transgressing correct behaviour (*edat*), an act called *nelhun* (for comparisons in central Borneo see Guerreiro 1989:490–491, 498, sq.).

to make this intelligible by combining the microanalysis of a passage of the text with general background information about Wehèa culture.

Honko (1996b:19–22) has stressed the close connection between epic and identity. He interprets the epic as a tale of identity which functions as a symbol or a point of reference for the community or group concerned. This happens through the ‘translation’ of history into myth and ultimately as a metaphor of the sacred (Honko 1996b:21). For small scale societies such as the Wehèa, the traditions which are linked to the character of Lung Lejie, point to Wehèa adherence to *edat*, way of life and religious beliefs, in contrast to their neighbours, whether Dayak (Kayan-Kenyah), Malay (including Kutai and Banjar Malays as well as Buginese), or, nowadays, Javanese.

Here the model of heroic conduct also reflects the martial values of Wehèa society which historically have ensured its survival as a distinct cultural group among demographically stronger peoples in the region.

The strong identification of the audience with the main characters of the tale suggests that the emotions and behaviour described in the epic are taking on new meanings in an era when the Wehèa’ environment and social space is experiencing rapid socio-cultural change (Honko 1996a). For instance, interaction with other ethnic groups has become more frequent. This is also noticeable in increasing ritual activity, such as the headhunting Festival Nemlèn, and other sumptuary rituals which have been performed lately in the six Wehèa villages.¹²

The *Tek’na’ Lung Lejie* is only a small part of the rich cultural heritage of the Wehèa, which is still maintained as a living oral tradition and needs to be recorded, at least on tape. The transcription and Indonesian translation of these oral texts and music could be carried out later on when more attention will be given to the expressions of local cultures in East Kalimantan. The example of the *Takna’ Lawe’* epic edited and translated *in extenso* by the late Father A.J. Ding Ngo of the Kayan Mendalam in West Kalimantan, a community of only 2,000 people or thereabouts (Ding Ngo & Lii’ Long 1985) demonstrates that such an undertaking is rewarding for the entire community.

Note

The Wehèa isolect has been transcribed here with the following simplified orthography (for more details, see Guerreiro 1996a:224; 1999:159–163):

¹² Since the pacification of the region by the Dutch (*circa* 1905), headhunting has been prohibited. However, it seems that sporadic raids took place during the 1920s against the Lebbu and Basap people on the Kutai-Berau border. From this time when the Nemlèn is celebrated, some old skulls and even fragments of skulls are used instead. During the last stage of the Nemlèn, on the eighth or the eleventh night, according to the category of ritual practised, effigies of dead relatives (*bo’ jöng*) of people of the noble rank are set up. Replacing the heads, (*kuhung*) now the jaws of the sacrificed pigs — at least one per image — are hung on the sculptures. Blood sacrifice and sprinkling of blood on the effigy is necessary for making it ‘alive’ (*na’ lom jöng*).

Formerly, the transition rites of the chief’s family (birth of a child, naming, burial, and the building of the ‘great house’) would require fresh heads as well. According to the Wehèa’s belief, the head houses a dangerous spirit, the ghost of the beheaded person (*sekiah ak*), who is being placated by offerings of food. However, after this rite has been performed the spirit abode is not known (see Guerreiro 1992, 1998).

| | | | | | |
|-----------|---|-----|-----|---|-----|
| [à] | : | /à/ | [u] | : | /ü/ |
| [ɛ] | : | /è/ | [ʔ] | : | /ʔ/ |
| [ə] – [ʌ] | : | /e/ | | | |
| [e] | : | /ē/ | | | |
| [œ] | : | /ö/ | | | |
| [ɔ] – [o] | : | /o/ | | | |

-ey, èa, eè, éa, ay, aè, aaè, iè, ie, oè, ue, ow, oy, uy (in all positions) are diphthongs.

Vowel clusters between consonants are articulated as one syllable in final position, in bisyllabic and monosyllabic words, morphemes and roots alike (*aè, èa, éa, èe, ie, iè, ia, ua, ue* occur in initial, medial and final positions, while *-èa, -eè, -ée, -ey, -ay, -aè, -aaè, -oè, -ew, -ow, -uy* occur in final position). Among the latter, length is phonemic in only one case, *-aaè* and *-ay*, according to my sample. In bisyllabic words, word stress is on the penultimate. All these diphthongs have a peak or stress on the articulated (first) vowel, especially in monosyllables it seems, with less stress on the glided part, the second vowel. This refers only to the spoken language; when sung accentuation may be different.

Appendix: The formal features of the text

The Wehèa language, and Modang in general, shows a trend towards monosyllabism which is accentuated in the literary speech of invocations, epics and *teluy* chants. As far as rhythm and prosody are concerned, monosyllabism functions as a mnemonic device. I have suggested that homophony is a general feature of the language (Guerreiro 1996a), and it is even more pronounced in the literary speech in regard to the polysemic values of the words in mytho-poetic narratives (on this point see Ottino 1966 for two Austronesian examples: Tahitian and Malagasy). In contrast to *sekèang*, it does not show a parallel structure but rather emphasises echo from one line to the other combined with assonance in endings. From the above text sample one notices that the four (rare) five, six, seven, height syllable lines are opposing final nasals (*-ng, -n*) to final open vowels, semi-vowels, diphthongs or glottal stop endings (*-a, -ah, -a', -u' -ie, -uy*).

Five-syllable and six-syllable lines are more common, alternating with shorter or longer lines. The initial syllable almost always begins with a consonant contrasting with the final consonant. Compare the following formulas which show the three variations (based on the *Tek'na'* extract above):

- initial consonant corresponds to ending vowel or semi-vowel/diphthongs
- initial consonant corresponds to ending consonant (nasalised)
- initial consonant corresponds to ending consonant (stops)

The vocal enunciation of the text, including the *teluy*, rather emphasises these stylistic choices. However, when it is sung with the melody these are much less noticeable, although it can be perceived as a recitative rather than a 'chant' or 'music' (*sèa*), according to the Wehèa perception. The drone in-between lines is another feature of *tek'na'* and *teluy* genres. It gives a rather deep tune (*tèl al*) to the singing which is accentuated by chorus repetitions. Interestingly, some children's rhymes (*wa' pelhan*, lit. 'play speech'), when recited, present more regular oppositions, as is shown in this extract:

- 1 *Luy Liah Ding Dung Léang Song
sege' Jie Déang Nedéang Dèa seka
nèak Giah Ding Met Bong.*
- 2 *Lèng wa' kuy nekjang
hebèa jel sun lan pwun pesdong.*
- 3 *Lan na' nèak hepuy pensèa
tong lo' li' teban hin Long.*
- 4 *Mi teban hin Long kas sèa.
melung un msow Ping Hong.*
- 5 *Nèak Doy Dung Helà Héang Dèa
lihgiasswan tsu' wellun hin Long. (...)*

A tentative translation:

- 1 Luy Liah Ding Dung Léang Song (f.)
and Jie Déang Nedéang Dèa (m.), the children
of Giah Ding Met Bong (m.)
- 2 Feeling like raising up I said,
a monkey jel (*Macaca fascicularis*) coming up the main street
[of village] continues
- 3 On the street the child of a chief passes,
on all fours inside Long's (f.) cubicle
- 4 In Long's cubicle, it sounds nice,
standing at the upstream end of Ping Hong's (f.) house.
- 5 Child of Doy Dung Helà Héang Dèa (f.),
a fine chiselled sword took seven months for Long (...).

Note

The full names are made up of two, three or even four words, according to the social status of the individuals (f.: female, m.: male; the first name is the personal name, the others are usually the father's and /or mother's name). The names of both parents may be juxtaposed or not. In literary speech, names of chiefs or aristocrats of both sexes may increase up to height, usually monosyllabic, words as in the name of the hero Lung Lejie, see note 6 above. These are the 'ancestral names' (*ngelan waés bo'*). In this extract the naming is quite peculiar, I suspect that some words have been added for rhyme only. Examples of naming are:

Ping Hong: Ping [daughter] of Hong (f.); Jie Bang: Jie [son] of Bang (m.); Ding Dom Ping, Ding [son] of Dom Ping (f.); Lung Béang Lèe, Lung [son] of Béang Lèe (see Guerreiro 1983).

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