

The Genealogy of a Langgai Tingang

A biography of an Iban headhunting sword

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Front cover image: *Antu palu* – the ‘spirit head’ of the *langgai tingang*
(Author’s image, 2014)

Abstract

This dissertation presents a biographical study of a headhunting sword originating from the Iban of Sarawak. A holistic approach is undertaken to review the objects sensory and physical attributes, resulting in a genealogical review of the three individual ownerships of the sword to discuss its aesthetic, functional and changes in significance throughout its life. Through examination of the different owners, contexts, spatial and temporal dimensions and an investigative study of the sword itself, it is suggested that the changing perspectives and sensory perceptions challenge and determine the swords meaning and significance. However the intimacies of design and function can resonate throughout dramatic shifts in ownership and a reflexive and personal approach can benefit the study of material culture.

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I dedicate this work to Anthony John Noël Richards, for all he did in his life and all he left behind.

Chapter One - Introduction

1.1 The story so far

The object of focus for this dissertation is an Iban headhunting sword given to my grandfather during his time in Sarawak as District Officer in Kapit (figure 1). Since his passing in 2000 the sword has been in the care of his youngest son, my uncle. I have always been interested in my Grandfather's life and involvement with the people of Sarawak, having memories of seeing the sword and other objects and art from his experiences. This dissertation has allowed an intimate investigation into an object that has had significant presence in my family for over 60 years. The sword has been in my possession during the tenure of this dissertation, becoming part of its biographical and genealogical history.



Figure 1. The *langgai tingang* (Author's image, 2014).

1.2 Aims

The aim of this dissertation is to examine the biographical and genealogical origins, exchanges and cultural entanglements between the sword and the people throughout its history. Through this I aim to explore the meaning and understanding of the sword's aesthetic and functional significance in its original context, its passage through time, and its place in the contemporary world. This will focus on relationships of material culture exchange through people and context and the shifting meanings of objects through their entangled life histories. Investigation and analysis of the sword and the materials and manufacture will explore its story and significance of origin. Finally this dissertation will discuss the inherent relationships between people and objects and reveal the sword's changing role and significance throughout its life. This will be produced through a critical review of object biographies within archaeology and the application of a new approach through intimate ownership and the genealogy of things.

1.3 Research questions

- How does the owner and context of an object change its significance and performance?
- To what success can object biographies be utilised in the archaeological discourse?
- What can be obtained by approaching material culture studies from a genealogical perspective?
- Is there scope for an 'intimate ownership' approach to material culture studies?

1.4 Objectives

1. To discuss the headhunting sword's form, style and materials in its original context, exploring its origins and significance from its conception.
2. To examine the sword's changing meanings through its exchange and entanglement through place and time and the changing significance during my grandfather's ownership.
3. To investigate the sword's authenticity and contemporary meaning through discussion of the sword's significance in the 21st Century and to myself.
4. To assess the importance and complexities of the relationships of the individual and the object, through the critical application of an object biography and genealogy.

1.5 The langgai tingang

Headhunting swords are a type of traditional weapon used by various inhabitants of Borneo and the Malaysian and Indonesian archipelagos. Many variations exist, some designed for and used in warfare, others for ceremony and ritual; this sword is a *langgai tingang* from the Iban of Sarawak (figure 2). It has a total length (from tip of the scabbard to end of the extended hair) of 115cm, the blade is made from a single piece of bar iron with brass inlaid discs along the underside with a total length of 61cm. The blade has patterning on both sides and is attached to a carved deer antler hilt with a zoomorphic design. The sword is designed for use with one hand, indicated by a few inches of rattan around the hilt. Attached to the hilt is a large hank of black tangled human hair. The scabbard is made of two pieces of medium hardwood and bound and decorated with plaited rattan. The locket of the scabbard is of carved hardwood with a slit on the underside for the finger guard. A length of red bark cloth is attached to the rattan to hang or hold the sword. The sword is probably from the Kapit region of Sarawak, of Iban origin, and dates to the 1890s. The sword is designed for beheading during war raids; the sword's balance is weighted to the tip of the blade allowing high impact with less exertion. This sword belonged to my grandfather to whom it was given by an Iban in the early 1950s under his position as the District Officer in Kapit. The practice of headhunting was an important aspect of Iban culture and spiritual beliefs; the Iban were and are still known as some of the fiercest headhunters in the island of Borneo.



Figure 2. Drawn *langgai tingang* (Author's image, 2014).

1.6 Structure and chapter outline

The objectives of the dissertation will be pursued first through a review chapter (Two) of the literature on object biographies. This will build an argument for the approach of the dissertation and the implications for its use in the study of the sword. This will set the foundations for the methodology which will lay out the framework for this dissertation. The origins of the sword will be discussed in detail in Chapter Three, investigating the significance of the sword and its relationship to the Iban and its original owner through an examination of its design and materials. Chapter Four will look at the exchange to my grandfather and its changing meanings and relationships therein. Chapter Five will follow the chronological life of the sword to its present day significance, comparing the sword to others in academic and private collections and contexts and its significance in the 21st century and to myself. Finally Chapter Six will involve a discussion of the object biography's success in developing an understanding of the sword's significance and relevance to the relationships between people and things, and the success of an object genealogy as an archaeological discourse, as well as possible scope for further research on headhunting swords from Borneo.

Chapter Two - Theoretical overview of object biographies

2.1 Object biographies

The theory, function and use of object biographies in contemporary archaeological thought all have entangled origins. It is unlikely to come across any literature relating to object biographies without mention or credit of the seminal work of anthropologist Igor Kopytoff (1986) in Appadurai's (1986) publication. Kopytoff discusses the cultural perspectives of economic commodity processes (Kopytoff 1986, 64) proposing that, like humans, objects possess life histories. Kopytoff suggests that analysing production, exchange and consumption of 'things' merits the same profitability as the biographical examinations of birth, life and death (Kopytoff 1986, 66). However, arguably, in archaeology the concept of the biographical application to objects can be traced to the consideration of the *chaîne opératoire* (see Leroi-Gourhan 1993 [1964] and Conneller, 2008) in which the operational sequences of procurement, production and disposal of an object allow analysis of the technical and social actions attached to it. Its main use has been in explaining the social implications of lithic technology (see Edmonds 1995) and in particular the existence of a trade and exchange network within the Neolithic (see Bradley and Edmonds 1993). The use-life of objects, sequencing an object from production to disposition has become prominent in archaeology and material culture studies; however Joy (2010, 8) argues that the technical and functional properties of objects cannot be divorced from their cultural and social significance. Therefore an object biography cannot be fully constructed using solely archaeological evidence; the *chaîne opératoire* and use-life analysis depend too much on the functional and physical and do not address the full biography of an artefact (Joy 2009, 542). To attempt to wholly understand an object a consolidation of the physical, functional and cultural is necessary.

2.2 Biographies of things

One implication of the object biography model is the terminology itself; 'biography' is a term derived from a Western narrative with a structured and accepted temporality. Following an object's life story from 'birth' to 'death' produces a helpful and relatable narrative, however the linear sequence set out by Kopytoff has come under scrutiny (see Joy 2009; Moreland 1999). Moreland argues that biography is created through series of

social re-evaluations and ‘reincarnations’ rendering the chronological nature of biography obsolete. Joy furthers this by stating

“The biography of an object is the sum of the social relationships that constitute it” (Joy 2010, 13).

The biography of an object does not need to be chronological. The life to death model only allows the object to take one path and does not account for the visibility of the complete material path. Its (sometimes) limited life path can create restrictions on the exploration of its different meanings and associations. The object biography must accommodate the radical changes and significances depending on its context and associations. An object requires a narrator to tell the story; it is therefore always subject to different interpretations and personalisations. Hoskins (1998) work highlights the importance of the individual in an object’s biography, and through anthropological work with the Kodi of Indonesia reveals how objects have the ability to tell the biography of their owner. She adds that their complex entanglements create an intertwined identity and a continuous narrative of self-definition (Hoskins 1998, 2). Thomas (1991) expands on the idea that the identity and biography of things is not fixed in one sphere, structure or form, and the circulation and changing classification of things is dependent on their social transformations and biographical entanglements (Thomas 1991, 28). Thomas focuses on the biographical possibilities of the circulation of material culture from a colonial context, highlighting the differences of an object’s meaning and value depending on its individual owner.

As an object is not just part of human action, but integral to it (see Gosden and Marshall 1999, 169), its relationship with its owner or various owners creates a mutual process of creating value and significance (Gosden and Marshall 1999, 170). The significant work of Gosden and Marshall’s object biography special in *World Archaeology* introduces the concept of object performance. If an object is created for a specific purpose or function, then its existence and possession outside of its ‘performance’ loses its meaning (Gosden and Marshall 1999, 175). However, meaning can be created and exist outside of the immediate physical object. For Joy (2002) a replica of his grandfather’s war medal created more significance as an object that facilitated new relationships, meanings and memory. The ‘performance’ was in its social role and not in its pre-programmed meaning.

2.3 Itineraries of things

Recently a new term has been proposed to explain the meanings and transformations objects undergo during their movement throughout existence: the ‘mobility of things’ may be better understood by observing the ‘itinerary of things’ (see Hahn and Weiss 2013). A cultural object’s existence is always bound in varying contexts, roles, uses and meanings, never standing still and forming its biography based on its movement (Hahn and Weiss 2013, 1). As the biographical metaphor presents a fragmented narrative, an itinerary of things demonstrates the non-linear movement of an object and the contextual and functional changes (ibid, 8). The object as an itinerant may follow an irregular course, creating moments of stasis and inertness as well as rapid transformations, necessitating different interpretations at the different stages in its journey (ibid, 9). However the term ‘itinerary’ may imply a pre-determined journey, therefore not appropriate when considering the biography of an object. An object cannot be determined by observing it from any one point in its existence and may transform from its original creation and meaning to something completely different, conversely an object found outside its original existence suffers the danger of re-interpretation and an applied afterlife.

2.4 Gifts and commodities

The focus on the concepts of ‘gifts’ and ‘commodities’ has been prevalent in the development of the object biography and life cycle models (see Appadurai 1986; Kopytoff 1986; Strathern 1988 and Gregory 1982). Kopytoff discusses the singularisation of commodities by being withdrawn from their usual commodity sphere or restricted within a certain one. Singularity and sacralisation can produce a non-commodity; that is an object of biographical uniqueness (Kopytoff 1986, 174-175). This can be effectively applied to objects of colonial entanglement (see Thomas 1991) as well as the world of art and collectibles (see Price 1989 and Gell 1998). Aspects of value and agency are created from the biographical entanglements and transformations that shape its story. The phenomenon of the gift within archaeology and anthropology has the potential to create these ‘unique biographies’. Hoskins (1998) observed that gift economies create complex social relations, the significance and value of which permeate their material culture. If an object is transferred between context and hands under the label of a gift, it maintains the link between the people and origin to the subsequent transactions and final destination of that

object (Gosden and Marshall 1999, 173). However, Thomas (1991) argues the term ‘gift economy’ suppresses these significant entanglements with other economic systems (Thomas 1991, 4). If an object is exchanged as a gift, then it enters a sphere of reciprocation and mutual dependence, giving it rank and placing its value and significance beyond the world of commodities and price (ibid, 14). Perceptions of value are altered within different ownerships and generations. The significance and personal value of objects are also subject to dramatic altercations, transforming the biography, meaning and performance of an object entirely dependent on the individual actors who encounter them.

2. 5 Applied methodology: the genealogy of things and the intimate ownership approach.

The application of the object biography to a headhunting sword presents many benefits as well as restrictions. As discussed the biographical model presents a pre-determined life route, laying particular significance on certain moments in an object’s life. Joy (2010) presents the problem that only the birth and death of an archaeological object is knowable, and the life course needs to be constructed; however, these cornerstones of chronology are as obscure as each other. Although the headhunting sword’s origins can be well traced, full knowledge of the manufacture and materials have been hard to obtain, the original owner is unknown and therefore inferences of its meaning and performance cannot be fully supported. A wholly-constructed linear story is not possible; therefore a certain level of fantasy may complement the memory (Kermode 1995, 37). However, an archaeological and contextual approach must bridge the biographical gaps by utilising different angles and interpretations and constructing informed and reflexive inferences. As the headhunting sword is now the subject of study, its death is inapplicable. The real death of an object can only come from its complete destruction, and even then its materials may be recycled and re-used thus reinvigorating their biography. A more appropriate term is afterlife (see Edmonds 2012), which encompasses the ongoing biography, relationships and entanglements of an object. The term itinerary has its merits in applying a more neutral set of circumstances rather than the convoluted term of biography; however it is concerned more with the object and less with the people involved. Yet, it is the people, contexts and relationships within that determine the life route of the object.

Therefore this dissertation will take on an approach unique to the object in question, adopting many of the theoretical frameworks set out in the literature review but not limited

to a specific one. Rather than attempting to narrate a biography of the headhunting sword, this dissertation will discuss three distinct periods in its life, following the changing hands, contexts, cultural meanings and significances. The theoretical framework undertaken will challenge the conception of an applied biographical model to the study of an object, by understanding the difficulties in applying a singular narrative or adopting any one perspective. By approaching the biography from three different contexts and stories what may be achieved is not a linear affair of events but rather an exploration into the lives of the people to whom the sword has passed, collecting new stories, significances and biographies and testing if this affects performance and significance. Although not applicable to all archaeological material culture, the presence for a personal approach and 'ownership' of the headhunting sword will highlight its ability to collect people and stories. This will be explored through an 'object genealogy', which incorporates a biographical approach in terms of both intimate ownership and the connections made between people, place and context. This will be reviewed through three main aspects of the sword: the aesthetic, the functional and its significance.

The aesthetics, which incorporate the sword's physical properties and emotive qualities, can affect different interpretations and sensory reactions of an individual. Its material form can best inform us of its origins and therefore primary function and significance. The functional aspects of the sword are in its role and performances in different cultural contexts. These are both dependent on and relative to its physical form and actions and to its social relevance. The significance is the total of its aesthetic and function creating the meanings and intimate associations to both the individual owner and the contextual background. By approaching the sword in terms of the three main periods of ownership; the Iban owner, my grandfather and myself, and applying the above, the 'genealogy' may reveal the information that is contained within its biography, addressing the dramatic changes in function and significance and asking if an object can be defined by the actors entangled with them by means of an intimate ownership approach.

Chapter Three - Origins: the *langgai tingang* and the Iban

3.1 The Iban

The origins of the *langgai tingang* are with the Iban of Borneo. The Iban are a people of the indigenous inhabitants of Borneo, known in a wider term as Dayaks. They are found mainly in Sarawak (figure 3), making up a third of its population but are also found in Indonesian Borneo (Kalimantan), Sabah and Brunei. The Iban spread from Kalimantan up into the North and North-East, pioneering the Rejang River for trade and transport. The growing population and usage of land led the Iban and other groups to take up warfare, headhunting and slave trading (Sutlive Jr 1992, 8). They were formerly known as ‘Sea Dayaks’ by the Brooke establishment to which the Iban initially reacted aggressively. The Iban are often quickly associated with their history of headhunting, gaining reputation as the fiercest (although not the first) and most notorious headhunters of Borneo. The Iban may have only begun the practice in the recent past, adopting the idea from the neighbouring Kayans (Heppell et al 2005, 36). The practice has been largely documented during the dynasty of the white Raja’s rule of Sarawak, and was largely outlawed and eradicated by the turn of the 20th Century by the British; however a large revival of the tradition was invoked during World War II against the Japanese during their occupation of Borneo and Sarawak.

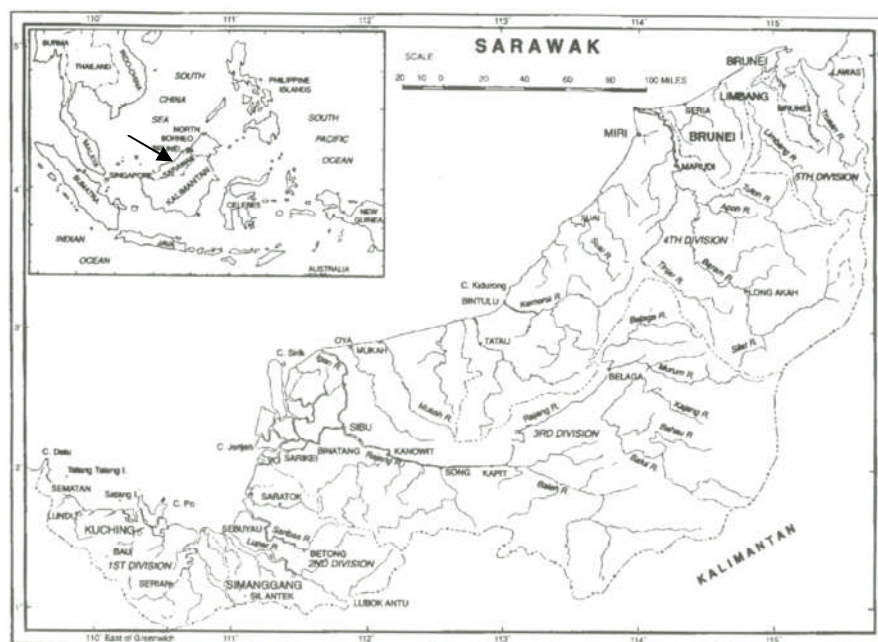


Figure 3. Map of Sarawak (Poritt 1997, 96).

3.2 Headhunting

Ian Armit (2012) defines headhunting as “a form of group sanctioned, ritualised violence, in which the removal of the human head plays a central role” (Armit 2012, 11). It may be argued that there has been a certain downplaying of headhunting when discussing Iban culture; this is understandable as it risks evoking images and popular stereotypes of the ‘savage’ (ibid, 48) and serves to distract interest from other aspects of Iban culture. However the significance of headhunting to Iban culture cannot be divorced from the other aspects of their life. The physical traces of headhunting only exist in the severed heads themselves and the art and iconography associated with the communities that practised it (ibid, 63-64). The headhunting swords are not only the functional tools for the practice of removing enemies heads from their bodies, but objects full of symbolic meaning, individual identity and cultural unity. Classifications of Borneo swords have distinguished a wide miscellany of material, style and form (For comprehensive classifications see Shelford, 1901 and Heppell, 2011), as well as Borneo swords featuring as objects of interest in wider publications of South East Asian weaponry and material culture. As discussed in the introduction, the sword of focus in this dissertation can be categorised as the distinctive Iban sword *langgai tingang* (Heppell 2011, 6).



Figure 4. *Antu pala* – hanging trophy head (Sutlive Jr, 1988).

3.3 The Blade (*Daun*)

The *langgai tingang* has a long deep-bellied upward curved blade with a convex edge and a concave back. A small protuberance on the bladed side near the hilt that serves as a finger guard is known as a *kerawit* or more correctly a *bulu kunding* (Heppell 2011, 4). A scrolled design along the posterior border extends from the hilt (figures 9 and 10) to three inches before the point of the blade, with a shallow groove running below. A sequence of 51 small inlaid brass discs run along the thick back of the blade. The iron is tough and the blade is still sharp. There is some discolouration of the design (possibly due to oxidisation) and a small number of serrations at the end of the blade.

The blade of the *langgai tingang* takes aspects of design from the traditional fighting weapon of the Iban the '*nyabur*'. By 1935 the *nyabur* had ceased being forged and occupied a place of honour amongst Iban swords (Heppell 2011, 5). The *langgai tingang* most likely replaced the *nyabur* in time, having much the same blade but with an improved grooved blade to increase the effectiveness of the cut. The blades share many similarities yet can be distinguished through a number of observations (figure 5).

Nyabur: "Curved blade to rout a multitude of armed men, keen, well-balanced, bright-shining, grief-maker cutting to the heart, slaughterer with ornament of long hair" (Richards 1981, 237).



Figure 5. *Nyabur* (top) and *langgai tingang* (below) (Iban word press, 2014).

The *langgai tingang* style blade can be distinguished from the *nyabur* owing to a deeper bellied curve placing the weight of the sword towards the tip (*puting*), as well as the broad groove running from the finger guard to the tip on both sides of the blade (Gardner 1936, 115). The weight of the *langgai tingang* and the line of the curve act to enhance its performance as a cutting weapon offering the user more striking power. The grooves on the sides of the blade are not just aesthetic, their presence allows efficient disposal of blood from the sword (Heppell, 2013).

The *langgai tingang* blade in question can be distinguished from the *nyabur* style of Iban fighting sword; the blade has a modest curve but is heavily weighted towards the tip. A shallow groove is present running underneath a scrolling motif running along the rib of the blade; towards the tip quality of preservation for both the groove and decoration begin to deteriorate (figure 6). Towards the hilt a more stylised pattern is formed, *nyabur* blades were rarely decorated (Zonnevold 2001, 90). It is therefore viable to consider the blade that of a *langgai tingang*. A series of brass inlaid discs lies in the back of the blade; although these have been documented in Iban and Dayak swords, the reasons for them are unknown other than decorative and probably the result of a ‘signature’ based on a dream the forger had (figure 7). The serrations at the tip of the blade’s edge would suggest heavy usage, however it is understood that the best quality Dayak blade would not incur chips from contact through slashing (figure 8).



Figure 6. Blade design on rib of blade (Author's image, 2014).

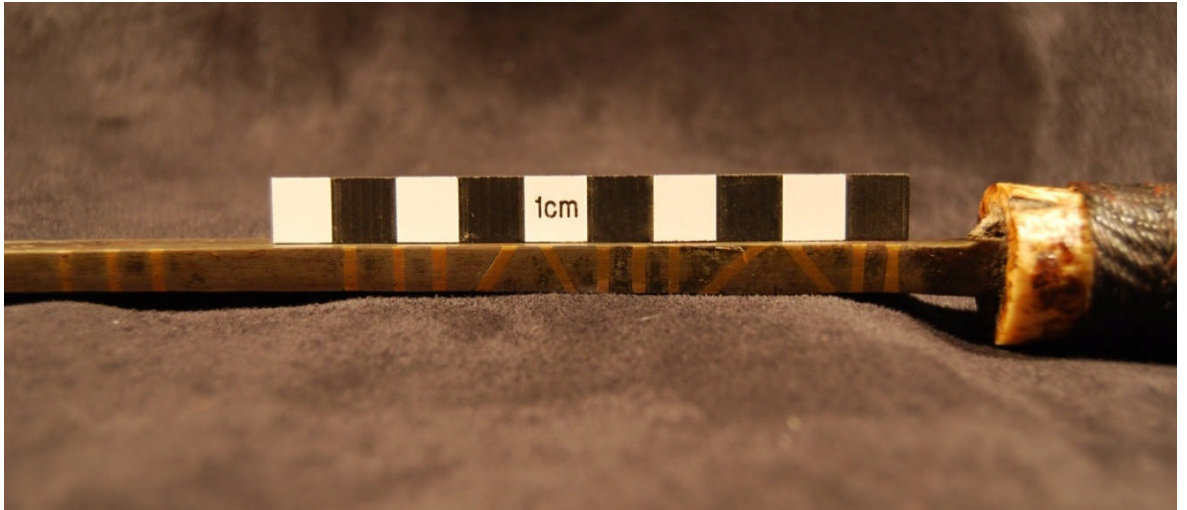


Figure 7. Brass inlays in the back of the blade (Author's image, 2014).



Figure 8. Serrations at the blade tip (Author's image, 2014).



Figure 9. *Bulu kunding* and blade design (Author's image, 2014).

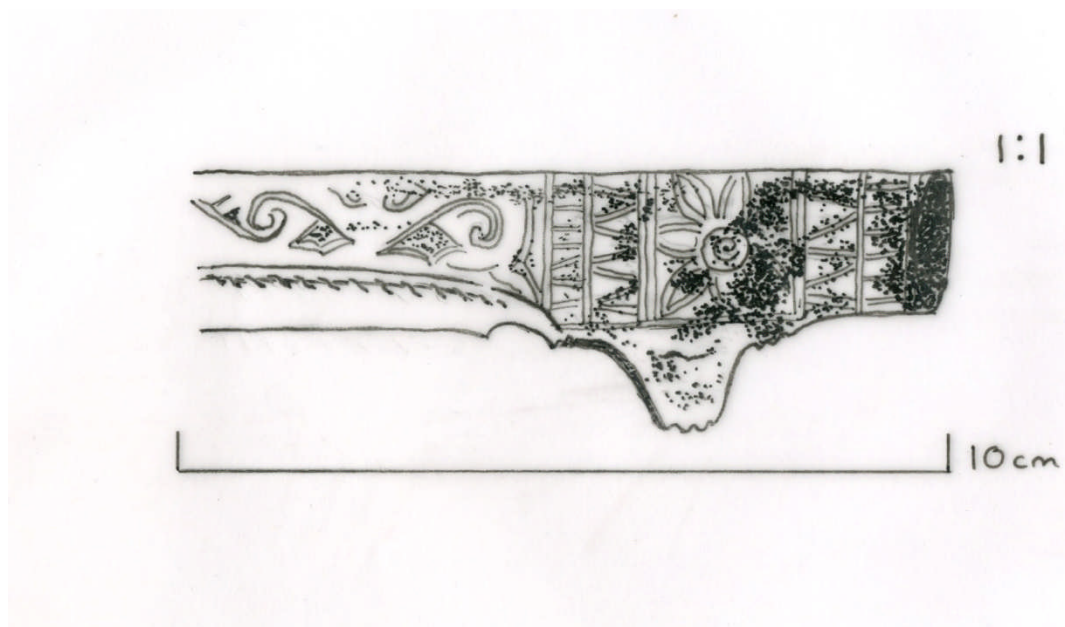


Figure 10. Illustration of detail on blade and *bulu kunding* (Author's image, 2014).

The Kayans (Dayak group in Borneo, known often to engage the Iban in combat) were sometimes known as the best smiths and therefore blade makers in Borneo (Hose 1926, 156). The Iban and other Dayak groups often acquired Kayan blades to copy design elements for their own swords. However the Kayan only made straight edged blades. Therefore it is highly likely the blade was Iban made from a single piece of bar iron rather than the traditional Kayan damascened smelted iron. The replacement of bronze by Iron (*besi*) in Iban society is a relatively recent phenomenon (Richards 2002, 33) adopting similar methods from the Kayans, using a charcoal furnace and bellows made of the stems of the sago plant (Hose 1926, 157).



Figure 11. "An Iban smithy" (AJN personal collection).

The name *langgai tingang* comes from the groove running from the shoulder to the finger guard, representing the longest tail feather of the rhinoceros hornbill (Heppell 2011, 5). The hornbill is a powerful omen in Iban life. Effigies are carved from wood to be animated and sent to attack the enemy's soul and peck out his eyes (Heppell et al 2005, 147). The great hornbill ceremony and ritual known as the *gawai kenyalang*, in which an effigy of the rhinoceros hornbill is erected on a tall pole, marks the headhunter's success in war and association with the gods (MacDonald 1985, 200). The spirit of the hornbill then heads down river to attack the enemies (Richards 1981, 155). The symbolic integration of the rhinoceros hornbill into the design of the *langgai tingang* demonstrates its significance as a headhunting sword. As a traditional tribute to the great Iban fighting *nyabur*, the *langgai tingang*'s blade was imbued with a certain agency from its conception.

3.4 The Hilt

The hilt (14 cm in length) is the product of the natural tine of a deer antler, most probably of the Sambar (*Rusa unicolor*) genus, traditionally used in Iban hilts. The head of the hilt protrudes on the bladed side of the sword and a single handed stem joins the blade to the hilt. Around the stem is a plaited ferrule of rattan (*rotan/temurak*), designed for single-hand use (figure 13). The blade is affixed to the tang of the hilt (*tunjai*), sealed with a ring of sticky resin (*damar*) moulded at the base of the hilt (Zonnevold 2001, 87). The hilt is built up from a series of leech motifs (figure 12) known as *lemetak* (Richards 1981, 189). The leech motif is built up from a flowing scroll of spirals and curves producing a grotesque on the top of the nose of the hilt representing a trophy head (*antu pala*). On headhunting iconography this is known as the spirit head (*antu palu*) (figure 15).



Figure 12. Leech design on side profile of the hilt (Author's image, 2014).



Figure 13. Rattan grip on hilt handle (Author's image, 2014).



Figure 14. Hilt, handle and hair (Author's image, 2014).



Figure 15. *Antu palu*-the spirit head of the *langgai tingang* (Author's image, 2014).

One characteristically significant aspect of the *langgai tingang* hilt is the relationship with the blade. Definitely the blade is an inspired replication of the Iban *nyabur*; however the hilt does not follow this and instead is the Kayan inspired *parang ilang* (figure 16) styled hilt (Zonnevold 2001, 87). The blade of a *parang ilang* is a short sword with a straight blade and a convex/concave side, which the Iban find deficient in battle due to the inability to slash backhand (Heppell et al 2005, 130). It is typically (for the Iban) more often utilised in ceremonies and symbolic displays. The combination of a *nyabur* style blade and the *parang ilang* styled hilt helps define a *langgai tingang*.



Figure 16. *Parang ilang* (Malay world edged weapons, 2014).

The balance of an Iban sword is of high significance; each part (blade, hilt and scabbard) possesses its own *animus* and spirit and must be in harmony with the others (Heppell et al 2005, 124-125). The animist beliefs of the Iban imbued the blade and the hilt with spirits; one must not outshine the other lest envy be induced within the sword, therefore either all parts must remain equivalent in beauty and skill, or, if one aspect is of immaculate quality the others must not try and compete and must remain modest (ibid). An Iban man must usually possess both the prowess and skill of a headhunter and artistic talent in carving or plaiting to be a successful member of a longhouse. Although the blade and hilt are not of the best Iban quality, the hair and scabbard are both testaments to the owner's ability as an artist and as a warrior.



Figure 17. "Indu Machan" some festival preparations equipped with swords (AJN personal collection).

3.5 The Hair

Protruding from the pommel of the hilt is an impressive hank of black tangled hair with a total length from the head of the hilt to the fully extended strands of 40cm (figure 18). Human hair is traditionally known in association with Bornean weaponry, although no known analysis has been carried out on a wide scale. Dyed goat and deer hair is known to be used in ceremonial swords, however human hair is best associated with weapons of war and head taking. There are four other visible ports where hair would have existed, two of these still have a small amount (figure 19), but the main hank from the pommel is perhaps one of the most striking aspects of the sword. It has a very impressive length and volume in comparison to other known Iban swords. The presence of hair was significant to the definition of the fighting *langgai tingang*; its clear association with headhunting was testament to its success in combat. The success of a man partly depended on the hair he could acquire for this sword.

Furthermore, I cannot take you back home my darling,

Because the cutlass with its tufts of hair, I'm owning

Is but an empty sheath with no locks of hair dangling. (Heppell et al 2005, 124).

Examination of the hair under a Zeiss compound transmitted light microscope (figure 20) shows this to be of human origin, more specifically of East Asian (Mongoloid) root specimen (Petrao and Kubic 2003, 65). This has been determined by the thick continuous medulla (central core), the thick cuticle (outer layer of shaft), the large patched pigment granules in the cortex (main body of shaft) and the reddish appearance (due to pigmentation) which are all characteristically determinable from European or African hair specimens (Deedrick 2000, 3). The absence of spinous or coronal cuticles confirms the hair as human and not animal (deer hair was often used to decorate the scabbards) as these are rarely (coronal) and never (spinous) found in humans (Deedrick 2004, 2-3). (For further research and result on hair identification in headhunting swords see Appendix 1).

The tangled condition of the hair is an obscure presence. Other known Iban and Dayak swords in collections generally have well kept untangled hair; this could be due to the nature of acquisition. As the sword was a gift from a headhunter and not bought or collected for the purpose of display the aesthetical properties may be of a less visually impressive standard. The impressive length and amount of human hair attached to the hilt advances the *langgai tingang's* prowess and significance as a headhunting sword and the desires and associations of its original creator and owner.



Figure 18. Hank of human hair (Author's image, 2014).



Figure 19. Ports of the hilt where more hair may once have been present (Author's image, 2014).

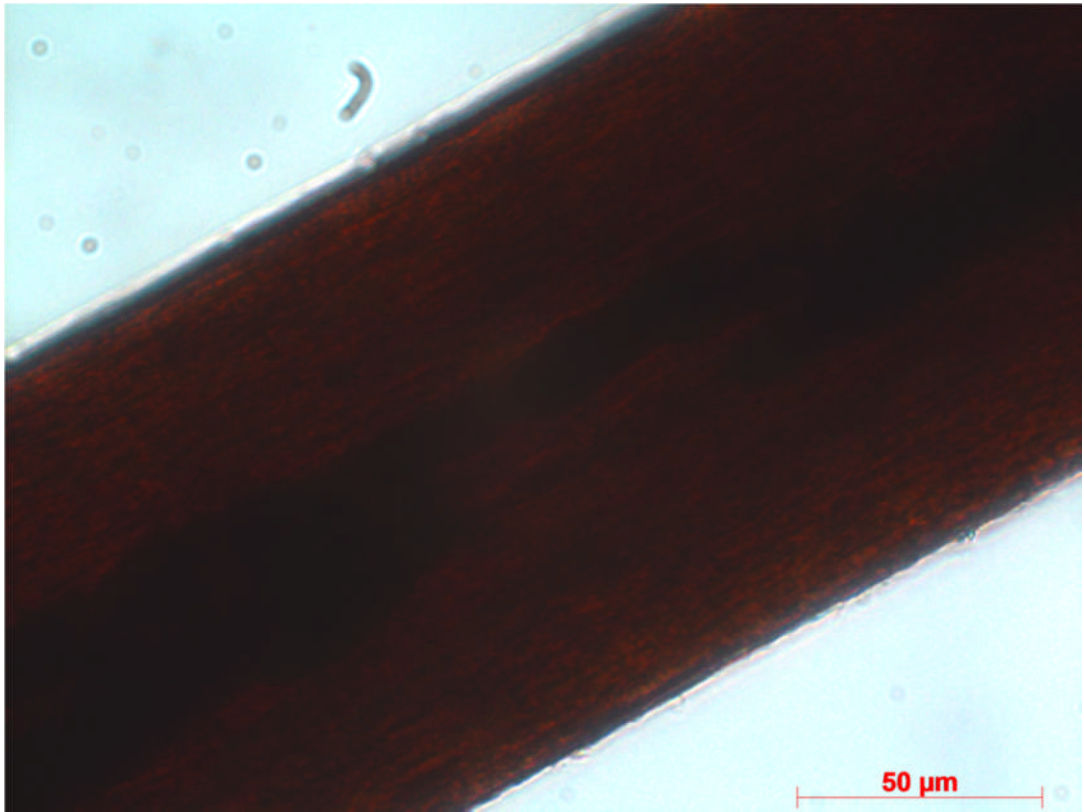


Figure 20. Photomicrograph of the human hair from the *langgai tingang* (Author's image, 2014).

3.6 The Scabbard (*Sarong*)

The scabbard is made from two pieces of medium hardwood shaped to fit the blade and bound together with ties of plaited rattan (figure 21). The wood is likely to be a hard yellow timber wood found in Borneo known in English as entawak and in Iban *bukoh* or *bintawak*. There are three decorative designs of rattan along the length of the scabbard, and a carved locket. A length of red bark cloth (*sementing*) was added by my grandfather to replace the original used to attach the sword to the owner's loin cloth (*sirat*).



Figure 21. Scabbard of the *langgai tingang* (Author's image, 2014).

The scabbard is an essential part of an Iban sword, as are the blade, hilt and hair; as discussed earlier all aspects must be in harmony with each other to create a successful weapon. Although Iban blades were often bought or commissioned, as occasionally were hilts, the Iban always made the scabbards themselves (Heppell 2013). The skilful use of textiles link the Iban to their gods, their use is indulged in activities that benefit from the intervention of the celestial deities for protection, fertility, and success in gaining heads (Heppell 2005, 41). This is wholly evident throughout Iban culture and their art; the deity Ragam is believed to have taught the Iban the dyeing of plaited objects (ibid, 6), and this fundamental aspect of Iban life still exists today. It was important for both men and women to display skills in art and craft, and the scabbard of the *langgai tingang* shows that the individual who made and owned the sword was highly skilled in knotting, dyeing and plaiting and therefore was likely to be well respected within his longhouse.

The scabbard may be an indicator of the sword's overall age, as the maker has followed the old *nyabur* tradition of not carving the whole scabbard, leaving the attention to the plaited rattan (Heppell 2013). The scabbards of ceremonial swords of the Iban were lavishly

decorated, with carvings, hair and feathers attached along the scabbard and hilt. The modest appearance of the scabbard may attest to its function as a weapon of war. The scabbard however has traditional Iban patterning carved onto the thick end of the locket mirroring the highly-decorated base of the blade just before the tang (figures 25 and 26). The aesthetic relationship, between the blade and hilt must also remain in harmonious relationship with the scabbard (Heppell 2005, 130), for it is the scabbard that protects the blade and therefore the owner.

The lozenge motif on the upper part of the scabbard is often called *buah bunut* (figure 22) and is intended to resemble the seed of the horse mango fruit. This has also been interpreted as a metaphorical symbol of the head; this plaiting may therefore be apotropaic and serve to protect the blade from any malevolent influence or attack (Heppell 2013). The overall significance of the scabbard is paramount to understanding its origins. As discussed, all aspects of the sword relay its function as a fighting weapon as well as its cultural symbolism of Iban rites, traditions and art.



Figure 22. *Buah bunut* motif on the scabbard (Author's image, 2014).



Figure 23. Plaited design on scabbard (Author's image, 2014).



Figure 24. Plaited designs and ties of rattan on scabbard (Author's image, 2014).



Figure 25. *Bulu kunding* and scabbard locket design (Author's image, 2014).

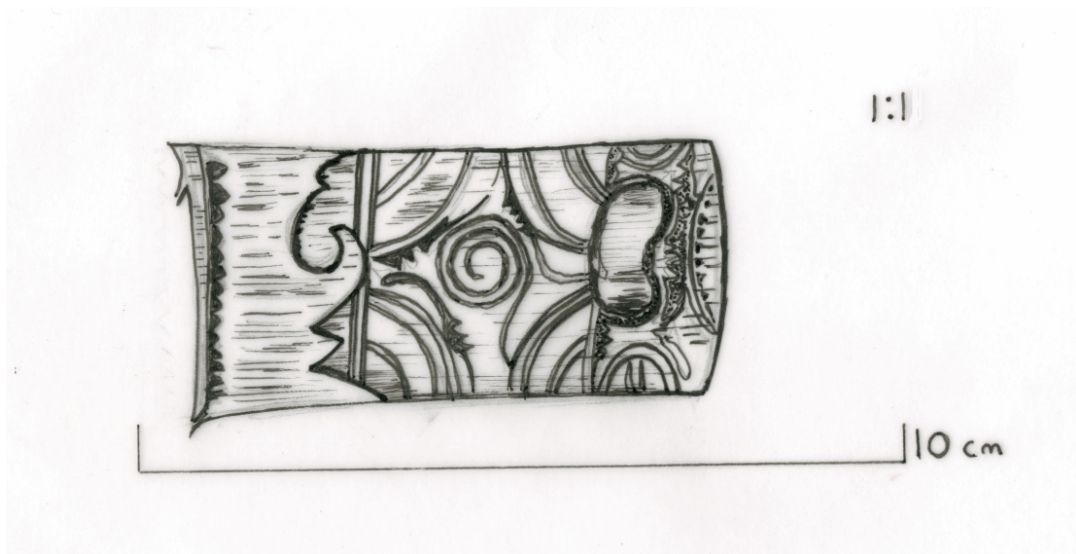


Figure 26. Illustration of design on locket of scabbard (Author's image, 2014).

3.7 Genealogy of origins

Examination of the *langgai tingang* reveals much of the sword and its original owner. Aesthetically, each aspect of its design held either traditional resonance or personal interpretation and expression. The blade symbolises the traditional Iban fighting weapon and honours the ancestral warriors, as well expressing the unique *langgai tingang* style belonging to the Iban. Functionally the blade is designed to be utilised for headhunting, for the weight, shape and groove all attribute to this. The hilt follows headhunting tradition with the clear presence of the *antu palu* and the leech design, the significance of which is to familiarise the sword with drawing blood, going ahead of the warrior in battle and sucking the blood of the enemies to make them faint in battle (Heppell et al 2005, 125). The long human hair (assuming it was obtained in warfare) offers great insight to the owner's prowess as a headhunter and significance of his *langgai tingang* to himself and his culture. The length and volume of the hair may have served as a symbol of personal achievement; although some has been lost, it still evokes thoughts of the origins of the hair. The scabbard shows the owner's artistic talents and where aesthetics meet functionality to encompass the significance of headhunting and Iban culture into a single object.



Figure 27. Warrior performing the *ngerendang* during a *gawai kenyalang* (Heppell 2005, 34).

3.8 Headhunting and the Iban

The *langgai tingang*'s origins incorporate much of the biography, initiated from its necessity and conception, for the sword's ancestral roots are deeply associated with the Iban headhunting culture. In the context of its origin and primary ownership the aesthetic qualities were synonymous with its function and significance. Materials, designs, and symbolic composition reflect its performance as a headhunting sword and its significance in Iban culture. The individualism of the sword retains the genealogy and memory of its maker and first owner. To investigate the first stage in the object's biographical genealogy, the Iban practice of headhunting must be explored.

The Iban practice and activity of headhunting has been best understood by anthropologists Derek Freeman (1979) and in other comparative studies, by Hoskins (1996) and Armit (2012). The dangers of the potential for sensationalism are always raised within discussion of headhunting. This is understandable as the image of the headhunter has been cut into the social imaginations of different cultures across the world (Hoskins 1996, 1). It is this problem with contextualisation that obscures our understanding of the symbolic behaviour of headhunting cultures. The physical activity of headhunting is deeply entwined with the beliefs and other activities of those who practise it, the deeper reasons and motifs become unclear, so that an etic (perspective of one who does not participate in the culture being studied) interpretation is applied (Metcalf 1996, 250). It is only the emic (perspective of one who participates within the culture being studied) explanations that the Iban can give themselves as to the true meaning of their culture of headhunting. Therefore I will not try and offer an explanation, but summarise an understanding of the Iban belief and thus the functional and aesthetic significance imbued in the *langgai tingang*.

The great hornbill festival known as *gawai kenyalang* once celebrated by successful headhunter's best explains the practice. In the allegory of the great Iban God of war *Lang Singalang Burong*, the ritual splitting of the trophy head *antu pala*, in a rite known as *ngelampang*, with one swift blow from *Lang*'s sword the head splits and pours forth the seed which grows into the human crop (Freeman 1979, 234). This is the foundation for the Iban 'cult of the head'. As in many other cultures, fertility and agriculture are closely linked by the Iban; their system of agriculture and the growing of rice (*padi*) are woven into their history and tradition, it is therefore vital to produce fertile soil to ensure a successful crop. From this belief, the *padi*, like all living things, possesses a 'vital source', or a soul (*semangat*), the fertility of the *padi* relies on the state of its *semangat* and for the Iban this *semangat* resides

in the head of a human body (Freeman 1979, 235). However when *Lang* split the head it contained seed, *benih*, not *semengat*; this allows a theory of agricultural importance but does not explain where the soul goes. A *langgai tingang* would be used in the *ngerendang* part of the *gawai kenyalang*, in which warriors perform ritual dances recreating scenes from warfare giving war cries (figures 27 and 28).



Figure 28. Iban war dance (K.F Wong 1960, plate 78).

A state of war formerly existed in Borneo and Sarawak between all the Dayak groups owing mainly to land disputes. It was therefore crucial that Iban men could defend their longhouse and instigate raids if necessary, so the swords were most essentially designed for the need to be effective in the art of war and therefore the success of the Iban. The taking of the heads after combat became evidence of a man's prowess and ability to facilitate the important acts of Iban culture. The sword's entanglement within the religious and cultural rites associated with agriculture and fertility became synonymous with headhunting practice

and symbolism. A desire to balance the number of heads lost drove headhunting to become a necessity in raids and warfare, to secure land and settle the disputes of ancestors (Low 1848, 212).

In old Iban culture a successful young headhunter would be most desirable to the young women of the longhouse and entitled to tattoos telling the stories of his victories. In a system without a formal hierarchical structure the collecting of trophy heads became the principal obsession of Iban males, providing the Iban with a system of social prestige (Freeman 1979, 238). The combination of religious rites and origin with the ambitious fervour to collect heads for social competition offers some insight into the true importance of headhunting to the Iban. As the tool that facilitated this important activity was the headhunting sword then its creation and power are entangled with the very foundations of Iban belief and culture. The aesthetics and form create layered details of functional performance and cultural significance; these are intimately associated with the owner of the *langgai tingang* and the origins of its genealogy.

“Sapa enda brani, enda bulih antu pala, enda brita”

“Those who are not daring, who do not take heads, lack renown” (Ibid).



Figure 29. "Fire place and heads" (AJN personal collection).

Chapter Four – Exchange: the langgai tingang and my grandfather

4.1 Anthony John Noël Richards

The *langgai tingang*'s origins are deeply rooted within the Iban and Iban culture, as a deadly headhunting sword and an item of Iban art and cultural significance. The maker and owner shaped its early biography in the selection and working of its materials, investing messages of artistic talent and fighting prowess into the sword. These aesthetic attributes cannot be taken from the sword, however the function and performance changed dramatically when it was given to my grandfather.



Figure 30. AJN snapshot-1939 (AJN personal collection).



Figure 31. AJN released from Batu Lintang P.O.W camp-October 1945 (AJN personal collection).

My grandfather Anthony John Noël Richards (hereinafter AJN) first travelled to Sarawak in 1938 after anticipating a career in the colonial service, reaching the capital Kuching under the employment of the third Rajah, Vyner Brooke, recruited by his brother Bertram Brooke in London. The Brooke dynasty, known as the ‘white Rajahs of Sarawak’ had controlled the independent kingdom of Sarawak since 1840 as Rajahs, nominally under the Sultan of Brunei, and since 1846 as sole and supreme rulers, accepting British protection in 1888. AJN remained in Sarawak until 1964, a year after Sarawak was granted its independence and became part of the new state of Malaysia. During his time in Sarawak, AJN spent his first year in the Government Secretariat in the Department for Native Affairs. At this time the administration was in crisis and the line of the Rajahs was become uninterested in government. AJN was critical of the old residential system and was tasked an exercise to write a memorandum on policy in which he diagnosed many of the Brooke regime’s problems, criticising convoluted policies and the lack of progress in the indigenous territories. In 1939 he became an official Outstation Officer and was appointed magistrate 3rd class in Bintulu. In 1941 he was posted to Betong where he first began to learn Iban

language and culture. Deciding not to retreat from the Japanese occupation of 1941, he was arrested and incarcerated for the next three and a half years in the Japanese Batu Lintang camp in Kuching. Surviving malnutrition and disease AJN returned to England after liberation by Australian forces in 1945. He soon returned to Sarawak in 1946 after a recuperative leave in which time he married Daphne Oswell (my grandmother). After being posted to Kanowit and Meluan as District Officer he was promoted to magistrate 2nd class before becoming District Officer in Bau for three years. Spending the next few years being posted up and down the Rejang River, he was stationed at Kapit (figure 33) as District Officer and there he came to know the important Iban leaders Temenggong Koh anak Jubang, Temenggong anak Barieng Jugah and the notable headman of the upper Baleh Penghulu, Grinang. Both Koh and Grinang had been notable headhunters in their youth.



Figure 32. AJN receives a drink of *tuak* in the *Uli Ai* -1953 (AJN personal collection).

He was briefly posted back in Simanggang in 1955 as Acting Resident for a few months before he returned to Kuching as Resident until 1957 when he returned to Simanggang (now Sri Aman) as Resident in 1957 where he remained until 1961. It was during this period from before the beginning of the Japanese occupation in 1941 until 1961 that he developed extraordinary expertise in Iban life and culture. In 1963 he was tasked to compile all that was known of traditional Iban law (*adat*) in an attempt to rectify land laws for the benefit of Iban as well as encompassing not only Iban (or Sea Dayak) law but also Bidayuh (or Land Dayak) law, and others. At the time he was also requested by the Sarawak Government to compile an Iban-English dictionary which was to have been

4.2 The exchange

It was during AJN's time in Kapit during 1951-1955 that the owner of the *langgai tingang* transformed its biography by giving it to my grandfather. A few years prior, on the 24th December 1949, Temenggongs Koh, Jugah, and 30 other Iban were baptised by an American Methodist missionary Reverend Burr Baughman, in Kapit (Sutlive Jr 1992, 35). However the profession of Christianity did not prevent Temenggong Koh, the Iban paramount leader in the Baleh region), from celebrating the pagan traditions. Koh ran a great number of festivals and in 1952 he held the great hornbill festival, known as the *gawai kenyalang* at which AJN attended (Richards 2002, 40). Temenggong Koh (figure 34) was a famous headhunter in his youth, known to have led many raids and to have taken many heads. This was evident from the tradition of tattooing one joint of a finger after successfully taking a head (figure 35): Koh's hands were completely covered from finger to wrist in these proud symbols (McDonald 1985, 85). It was at this time that various missionaries along the Rejang River encouraged the Iban to surrender the heads they had captured and kept over the years. The adoption of Christianity and the general abandonment of headhunting led the display of heads to begin to wane and many were handed in to AJN at Fort Sylvia, Kapit. However, even today many Iban retain heads, but they are not usually on display. It is thought to be at this time of certain cultural changes that the owner of the sword came forward and gave AJN his headhunting *langgai tingang*. It is this exchange that determined the sword's next stage in its biography.



Figure 34. Temenggong Koh (AJN personal collection).



Figure 35. Tattooed hands of a successful Iban headhunter (Morrison 1962, 195).

4.3 Genealogy of exchange

The exchange of the *langgai tingang* is entangled in dramatic shifts of function and performance. What the exchange meant to both the giver and receiver are equally significant yet wholly different. We can only speculate as to the full reasons why the owner handed over his weapon. Traditionally Iban fighting swords would be handed down through generations, being still used in ceremonial occasions or more recently being retired on display in a longhouse. The ex-Governor-General of South East Asia, Malcolm McDonald, was given an impressive *tilan kemarau*, an Iban sword that became popular after the decline of the *nyabur*, a lighter and shorter sword than the *langgai tingang*, highly decorated and with straight sides (Heppell 2011, 6). He was given this by Temenggong Koh and it now sits in Durham's oriental museum; this was most likely a ceremonial gift of peace and respect between two leaders (figure 36). The *langgai tingang* given to AJN belonged to and was used by a headhunter and the act of exchange may share the same signs of friendship and respect but not under an official capacity. Some warriors complied with handing in their captured heads (many heads of Japanese soldiers were taken at the end of their occupation during the war) and since headhunting was once again abandoned and conversion to Christianity had begun in the upper Rejang, the owner may have felt there was no more need for a headhunting sword. Knowing that AJN would not use the *langgai tingang* for its initial purpose, he felt comfortable in gifting him with its safe keeping, not wanting to use the weapon but not wanting to destroy it.

Very often the giving of such a gift was seen in Iban culture as an act of adoption into the family of the owner; for AJN to receive the headhunting weapon as a gift may suggest a high level of respect and friendship between himself and the owner. The gift of a sword is often associated with acts of peace and equality (Heppell 2014). If the sword was however exchanged under the influence of Christian conversion, it may be seen as the owner seeking some repentance for the previous actions of his headhunting. It is unlikely the owner would be ashamed of having taken heads, but rather the passing of the sword represented drawing a line underneath the practice. Being aware of AJN's knowledge and position he may have been formally forsaking his pagan beliefs and adopting the new Christian ways. In some parts along the Rejang River some missionaries were calling for the destruction of all headhunting associated artefacts as well as heads. However this is not documented in Kapit and although AJN was a Christian he was not a missionary and certainly would not have encouraged the destruction of the objects of Iban culture. Instead the acceptance of the sword as a gift may have been a mutual exchange to ensure the object and memory of the individual and significant part of Iban culture 'lived on'.



Figure 36. AJN's *langgai tingang* meets Koh's *Tilan Kemarau* (DUROM.1976.119.a-b, The Oriental Museum, Durham University).

4.4 AJN and the Iban

Of course AJN never did use the headhunting sword: it undertook a new role. It became an object of memory, for AJN's time in Sarawak and his relationship with the Iban and of respect for the power and responsibility imbued within him and the sword. Although the dramatic biographical shift of context and performance altered the sword's behavioural function, for AJN it maintained all the significance of the headhunting culture. AJN recognised the *langgai tingang*'s history, potential and effectiveness as a headhunting weapon. Having an almost superstitious feeling towards it, he embodied it as a living object (in line with Iban animistic religion). He strongly believed the sword possessed a soul (*semengat*) and that it did not like to be removed from its scabbard without drawing blood (a rule I have broken many times whilst studying it). This is not essentially an Iban belief but a popular mystical superstition associated with, for example Malay kris daggers.

He believed it should always be on display, where it can be seen by all, as part of the family. This belief was confirmed, when having stored it on top of a wardrobe, he took it down to show an interested visitor and it slipped from its sheath, slicing deeply through his right hand between his thumb and forefinger. This greatly upset him and he believed he was being punished for being disrespectful. A story also exists of a time AJN and his brother Neville took the sword to Oxford to have the sword's blade sharpened by an armourer, who upon seeing the blade, remarked he doubted if the blade would take much of an edge, before immediately cutting himself badly when as he applied the blade to the grindstone. This story was often recounted by Neville, a professional soldier who enjoyed elaborating on stories. However, AJN did believe that this 'blood letting' was once again due to disrespectful conduct towards the *langgai tingang*. It may be argued that in this instance the agency of the sword did not change during this biographical shift, only its physical function. The addition by AJN of a length of red bark cloth (following the Iban tradition) running under the large rattan plaiting was to both enable safe hanging of the sword and to replicate the original. Great care must have been undertaken by AJN not to damage the rattan but it was deemed necessary to fulfil his desire to proudly and respectfully display the object. It appears the scabbard has been varnished in more recent years, no-one remembers if my grandfather did this; however his beliefs in the sword would account for preserving the scabbard as the focus of display.

The genealogical step from the owner to my grandfather produced and maintained relationships and significances specific to activities around the sword. The specific meanings and functions attributed can exist in different spatial and temporal dimensions (Gosden and Knowles 2001, 19). The object does not exist solely as an agent of relationships, it is the facilitator and force behind the performance and significances created through human activity and exchange (ibid, 22). The exchange of the gift transforms the *langgai tingang* into a crucial indicator of the extent to which the relationships created are sustained or lost (Thomas 1991, 19). With AJN's passing in 2000 came the loss of nearly all the information on the full story of the sword. The 'gaps' in the sword's biography have been attempted to be contextualised with reflexive inferences gained by the knowledge and significances of my grandfather's personal ownership with the sword and the stories told to me by his children and associates, friends, and scholars from his time in Sarawak. The *langgai tingang's* aesthetic presence evoked beliefs and its form provided proof in the injuries sustained that formed my grandfather's perception and behaviour with it. Although the function and performance of the sword had been lost, its significance was wholly relevant to its new owner. Its genealogy had been dramatically transformed through the intimate ownership of its successor. However in 2000 came a new transition and significant moment in its biography and genealogical path. Since then the sword has been in the care of AJN's youngest son, my uncle John Richards, and the wish of the family is to donate the sword back to a museum in Sarawak sometime in the near future. Intermediately is my temporary ownership of the sword and its biographical shift therein.

Chapter Five – Afterlife: the *langgai tingang* and me.

5.1 Heirlooms and ownership

With Anthony Richards's passing at the turn of the century in 2000 the *langgai tingang* underwent a genealogical and biographical transition, its ownership had been temporarily obscured and its status as an object had been left hanging in the balance for interpretation of function and performance. To identify and compare the different contexts of the sword's biography for this dissertation and the archaeological record, it was necessary for me to take on the role of temporary ownership and facilitate the next stage of transition and the sword's meaning and significance in the 21st Century. To do this I needed certain definitions of the sword and how to interpret it. The status of an object from an artefact to heirloom and to a commodity can be interchangeable throughout an object's life and perception (Gregory 1982). If we consider the *langgai tingang* in my possession as a result of ancestral acquirement then the distinction of heirloom status can be applied, with this the disciplinary boundaries can be partially transcended when considering the object (Lillios 1999, 241) and my own intimate ownership can be assumed.

The changing perspectives and performances of the *langgai tingang* need a retrospective and review of the different contexts, ownerships and relationships to constitute a contemporary biography. The sword was once endowed with a culturally constructed entity with culturally specific meanings and classified into culturally constituted categories (Kopytoff 1986, 68). Its significance as an heirloom has allowed the study into its cultural past, transcending individual memory and creating symbolism and significance that link the ancestral and the archaeological (Lillios 1999, 237). Although the ancestral link is only between AJN and myself, the collective past can be encountered by considering the sword as an heirloom from its original context, passed down through ancestral transformations. The history, titles and events of the *langgai tingang* were intimate parts of the owner's, my grandfather's and my own present identity, serving as a vehicle to bring a sense of the unknown past to the present (Weiner 1985, 210). The hereditary power imbued within the headhunting sword has not been lost within its subsequent changing of hands, despite the dramatic changes of contexts, cultures and families. The sense of the sword to me has been constructed across the genealogical line of exchange between the different agents of representation (Burgin 1986, 58). No longer used as a headhunting sword its performance has changed and therefore has its meaning, however, the 'aura' and significance is not intrinsic to the object itself but in its new performance and value (Joy 2002, 139). The sword's personal identity

and agency as a ‘surrogate self’ (Hoskins 1998, 7), my grandfather, the original owner and myself, are at this point in time equally important in the biography. The performative actions of the people in possession of the *langgai tingang* are what have constituted its biography (Joy 2002, 141).


The subjective treatment of the *langgai tingang* as an heirloom as well as an archaeological and anthropological object stems from my choice to make it the subject of this dissertation. I could equally have chosen other artefacts and objects acquired by my grandfather during his time in Sarawak such as a hand-carved chess set he fashioned during his time as a prisoner of war, or his Iban-English dictionary. When I considered his collection the *langgai tingang* stood out: the stories I was told of how my grandfather acquired it, the number of heads it had reportedly taken (this ranges from 17-35) and about the long hank of human hair, gave it a sensory prominence over the others. This mutuality that exists between our sensory instincts and material things are part of how interpretation of meaning can emerge from the objects we choose to study (Edwards et al 2006, 5). Heirlooms possess an inalienable value and wealth to the owner (Weiner 1985, 210), possessing the power to evoke emotion and create links to a collective past of individual actors attached (Lillios 1999, 243).

5.2 The commodity sphere

Iban swords and, more widely, Dayak swords have become collectible pieces of indigenous art and as tokens of the renowned headhunting practice, commercial and collector’s prices can range from a few hundred to over four thousand pounds, depending on quality, origin and rarity (figures 37 and 38). The label of commodity can be applied to anything that has a value that can be exchanged for a counterpart (Kopytoff 1986, 68). To enter the *langgai tingang* into the commodity sphere would be an easy transition; however its singularization from the commodity sphere is dependent on its social and cultural agency. To be a non-commodity is to be “priceless”, either the uniquely valuable or uniquely worthless (Kopytoff 1986, 75). This is independent of its aesthetic and physical value, transcending the object beyond the realm of commodities; however, the transition from heirloom to commodity may only depend on the owner’s perception of an object. The *langgai tingang* has so far not entered the commodity market. This is due to the memories and stories attached to it that determine its story, and its story is what gives it its significance.

NORTH BORNEO -- BRUNEI, 1947

A DAYAK SWORD AND SHEATH (PARANG ILANG), PRESENTED BY H.E. THE GOVERNOR OF NORTH BORNEO, APRIL 1947



SHARE PRINT EMAIL

Price Realized ?


£4,375 (Set Currency)
(\$8,851)

Estimate
£2,000 - £3,000
(\$4,046 - \$6,069)

Sale Information
SALE 7470 —
EXPLORATION AND TRAVEL
26 - 27 September 2007
London, King Street

BUY CATALOGUE

Figure 37. *Parang ilang* for sale-1 (Christies, 2014).



Parang Ilang dayak iban machete Borneo Sarawak sword headhunting

Item condition: --
Time left: 5d 19h (Apr 14, 2014 04:46:52 PDT)

Starting bid: **US \$150.00** [0 bids]

Enter US \$150.00 or more **Place bid**

Price: **US \$230.00** **Buy It Now**
Add to cart

3 watchers
Add to watch list
Add to collection

100% positive Feedback
Tracked international Shipping

Figure 38. *Parang ilang* for sale-2 (eBay, 2014).

5.3 Evoking the West



Figure 39. "Gross items" (Oriental Museum, Durham University, 2013).

The anonymous "I like some of the more gross items" (figure 39) reaction to the Iban headhunting sword is illustrative of attitudes and sentiments often applied to ethnographic art. The comment is a reaction to the sword's biographical origins and its aesthetic aura that evokes feelings of the 'savage warrior'. It is true that the *lenggai tingang* can stimulate similar feelings, the sword's ability to 'speak for itself' and retain its symbolic significance is part in its aesthetic attraction as artwork and in its place within a documentable biographical framework (Price 1989, 83). The genealogy of the *lenggai tingang* has been marked with dramatic shifts of context and performance, yet the power and purpose of the sword which has been encapsulated within the physical form has remained. The biographical entanglements have carried the *lenggai tingang's* meaning and wider contexts of Iban culture into the contemporary world. Other Iban headhunting swords existent in museum collections and in the commercial market may be viewed as items of interest based on the pre-position that they at one time took heads. However the attitudes of a perceptual-emotional experience over a cognitive-educational one (Price 1989, 83) does not tell us about the owner and maker and therefore all perceptions are entirely of our own creation.

5.4 Genealogy and me

Through observation and analysis I have attempted to reveal the function and significance of the materials and designs attributed to the different aspects of the sword. This explains to some extent its original purpose and value, but what is its function and significance to me? Its function has primarily been to facilitate the basis for my undergraduate dissertation, yet it has facilitated old and new relationships with family and people living all over the world, including scholars who once corresponded with my grandfather on matters of the Iban, whose expertise I have in turn benefitted from. The function and performance of the *langgai tingang* may have changed dramatically; however, the meanings imbued into it have not wavered. Although created for a set of specific functions, its existence outside of its original genealogical and cultural context does not mean its significance has been lost. Through the intimate ownership and the stories and knowledge of the *langgai tingang*, as well as new research and understanding tracing the genealogy, reveals its biographical attributes as self-contained memories of its understanding, meaning and significance.



Figure 40. My grandfather and me – 1989 (Authors image).

Chapter Six - Conclusion and further research

The study of the Iban *langgai tingang* has sought to serve and demonstrate two main matters of research. Firstly it has undertaken an in depth study of an Iban headhunting sword from an archaeological perspective, examining its materials, manufacture and composition in light of its cultural contexts and significance. A number of Borneo swords associated with headhunting cultures exist in the UK, both in museum collections as a result of colonial contact and as desired collectibles. There is, however a gap in the classification of the different types and a tendency to group Bornean swords into easily distinguishable categories. What this study has hopefully highlighted is that through the investigation of the *langgai tingang* the 'headhunting' sword exists in a complicated set of characteristics and each distinguishable type holds its own relevance and significance.

Secondly, this study has set out to critically apply the theoretical framework of object biographies to a single modern anthropological object with personal connections to myself. Its outcome has been an attempt to establish a theoretical approach to understanding objects of immediate generational memory in terms of an object genealogy and intimate ownership. That is, to approach the biography of an object from the perspective and contexts of its owners throughout the history of lineage, with particular emphasis on its changing and developing aesthetic, function and significance. This dissertation has succeeded in demonstrating that although an object's function can be drastically altered, its significance and meaning is not necessarily in its performance but in its ability to retain those in its genealogy, allowing them to continue from inception into afterlife.

The genealogical model of interpretation however cannot be applied to all archaeological or anthropological objects. This dissertation has discussed how an object's biography can benefit from a known line of lineage. It however finally hopes to demonstrate the effectiveness of an intimate approach to object studies, through developing personal connections and as archaeologists taking on a certain sense of interstitial ownership and sensory perception, we may better understand the genealogy and therefore meaning and significance of objects as they were once intended. Biographical voids will always exist and some of the meanings, significances and personalisations imbued in the object from its very creation will remain unexplained. It is a multidisciplinary and multisensory approach to material culture studies that may benefit the multi-agency of the biographies and collective stories of objects and their owners.

Appendix 1 - Ancestral roots: hair analysis and identification

Long tufts of hair are common in most headhunting associated swords as well as being used in decorating blowpipes and war-shields. Dried goat hair is known to be used when decorating ceremonial swords and scabbards but it is human hair that is essential for the success of a headhunting sword. The *langgai tingang* discussed has an impressive length of thick black tangled human hair. Due to the age of the sword and the hair (estimated 1890's); the condition of the hair is not what might be expected in comparison to similar swords stored in museums and private collections. The evidence of human hair is an important step in realising the *langgai tingang's* potency, power and significance as a weapon once belonging to a successful Iban headhunter. Due to the nature of the acquirement of hair for swords, we can safely assume it is of Dayak descent and due to the length assume it is a head hair.

Images captured under a Zeiss compound transmitted light microscope have concluded the presence of human hair on the sword; furthermore this analysis has shown a strong specimen of Asian ancestry (Mongoloid) racial group determination. This was compared with a modern anonymous female hair specimen of Singaporean and Indian descent and a sample of my own European (Caucasoid) hair. Small fragments of each were mounted onto slides and viewed at varying magnifications. The Dayak hair in comparison to the other samples displays strong characteristics attributable to that of Asian descent. Its thicker cuticle (outer layer of shaft), continuous and wider medulla (central core) and larger pigment granules in the cortex (main body of shaft) and due to pigmentation, Asian hair often has a reddish colour to its cortex (figure 41). These are all prominent in Asian hair over European or African (Deedrick 2000, 3).

Table 1. Table of samples, origins and racial determination.

Sample and Origin	Racial determination
Sample 1: Hair from tuft protruding from hilt on headhunting sword.	Most likely from a Dayak, native to Borneo (Asian-Mongoloid)
Sample 2: Head hair from anonymous female	Singaporean and Indian descent (Asian-Mongoloid)
Sample 3: Head hair from myself.	Anglo-European descent (European-Caucasoid).

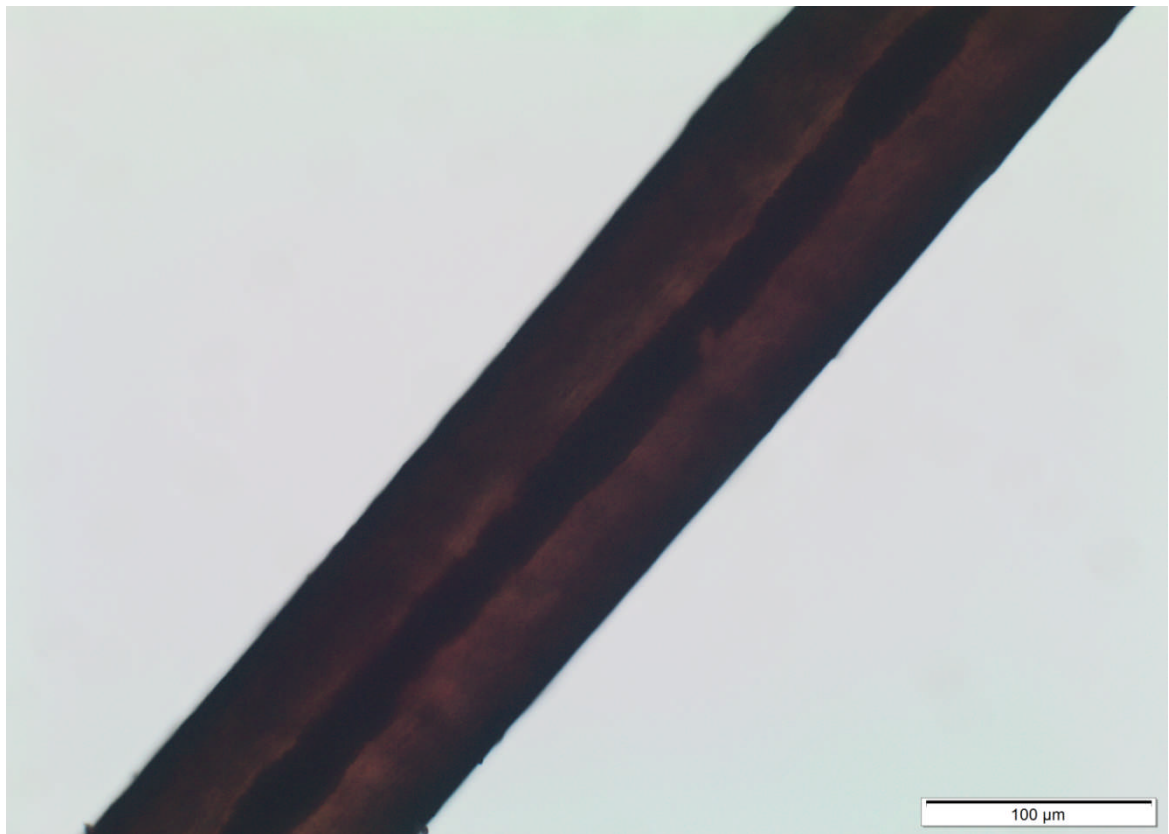


Figure 41. Photomicrograph of hair sample from the *langgai tingang* (Author's image, 2014).

It is interesting to note that in the divisions of the three major groups of human beings in trichology terms (Mongoloid, Negroid and Caucasoid) that Mongoloid includes the Inuit peoples and Amerindians (Petraco and Kubin 2003, 58). East Asian head hair may vary significantly from South American and Indian from African. These groups are only preliminary in distinguishing ancestral roots in hair identification. The characteristics of sample one is indicative to sampling of typical East Asian hair (Petraco and Kubin 2003, 65).

Samples 2 and 3 were observed under the same conditions to determine comparison of modern Caucasoid hair with modern Mongoloid hair and old Mongoloid hair. Sample 2 (figure 42) shows the characteristically common feature of a thick dark cuticle of a mongoloid specimen yet the colour is evidently lighter than that of sample 1. Sample 3 (figure 43) shows characteristics common in Caucasoid hair in the fine/medium pigment granules in its cortex (Deedrick 2000, 3). The ancestral roots of sample 2 aren't completely known, however it is possible the mixed ancestry has accounted for the lighter colour than compared to sample 1, despite Singapore and Borneo being in relatively close comparison.

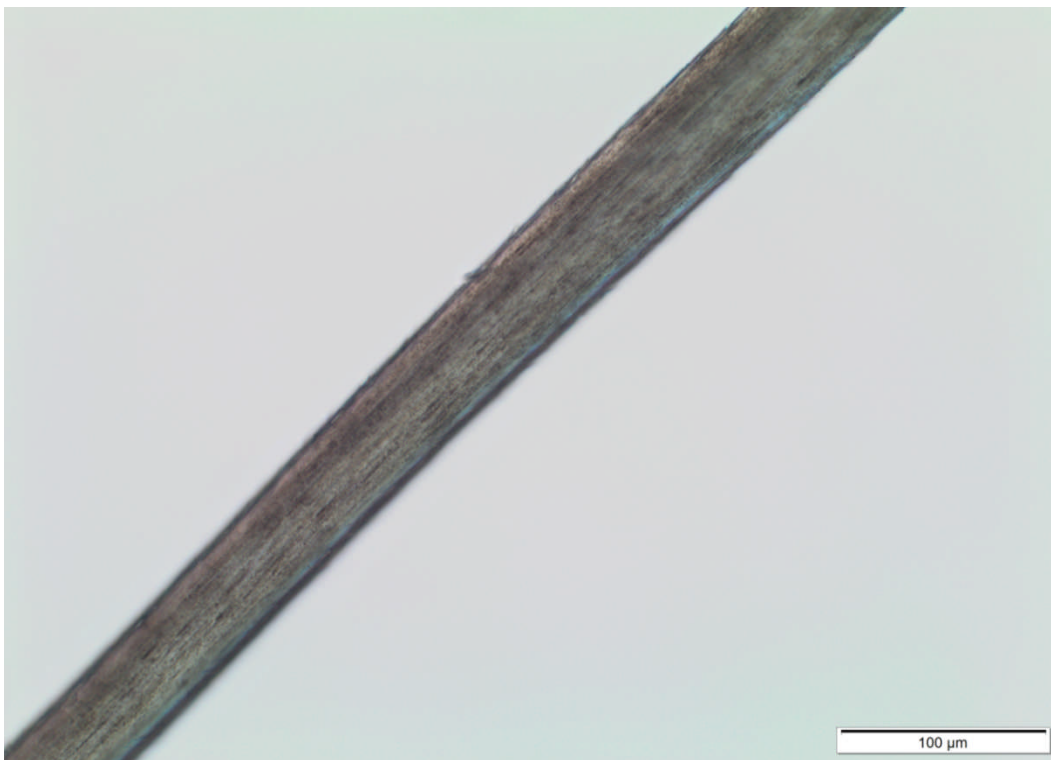


Figure 42. Photomicrograph of modern female mongoloid specimen (Author's image, 2014).

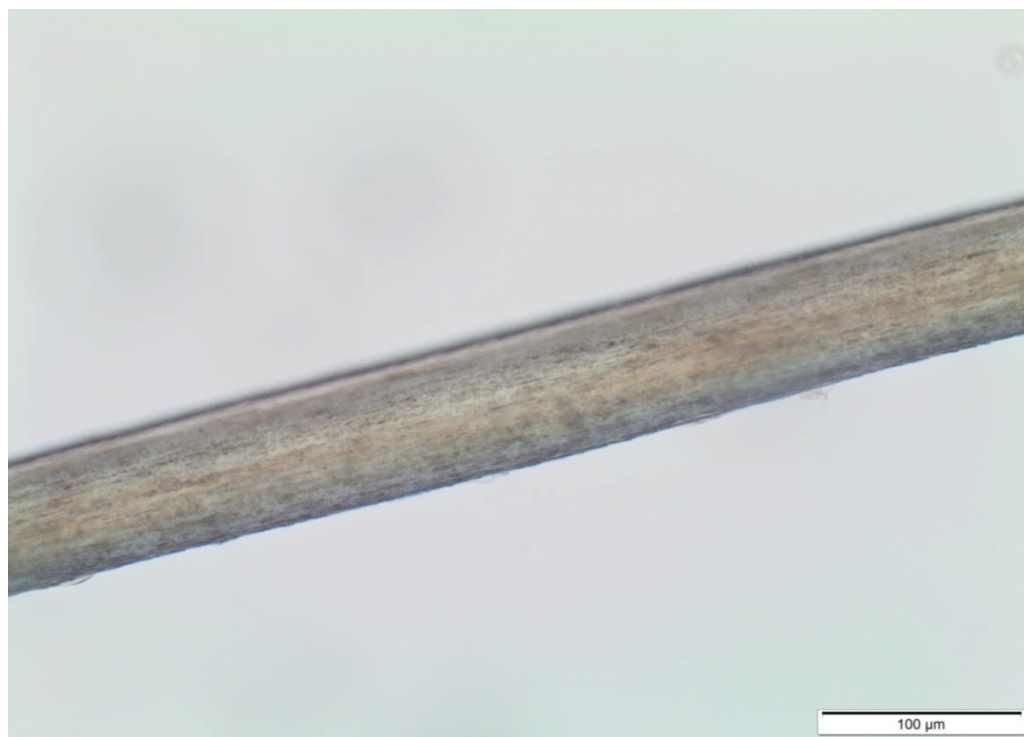


Figure 43. Photomicrograph of modern male Caucasoid specimen (Author's image, 2014).

Cross sectional analysis on sample 1 was attempted but unsuccessful, due to the age of the hair it had become too brittle to cut to required size for this type of analysis. Hair identification could play a vital role in understanding headhunting swords and related weaponry within Borneo. Many museum displays state the presence of human hair yet no analysis have been carried out on authenticity or ancestral origin. Not only could this be determined, but information on the hair owner's individual nutritional health, living environment, hygiene and cultural practices could be acquired (Petraco and Kubin 2003, 57). This would not only benefit Iban and Dayak material culture studies but information on the history of migration, social life and warfare might further be obtained.



Figure 44. Hank of human hair (East Asian origin) of the *langgai tingang* (Author's image, 2014).

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