

## MORTUARY PATTERNING AND THE EVOLUTION OF THE RICE ANCESTORS\*

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### THE PREHISTORIC PROBLEM

The cemetery sites of island Southeast Asia comprise a significant and complex part of the archaeological record of the region, from pre-Neolithic times into the modern period. However, the patterns generated in these sites, in terms of the methods used for disposal of the dead, the types of containers used for the remains and the disposal of grave goods, are highly varied and cannot be explained in terms of simple diffusionary relationships.

A highly significant element in the mortuary systems of this region is the practice of secondary burial, or redeposition of the bones of the dead after a period of temporary deposition to allow for decomposition of the flesh. Reorganization or disorganization of the remains of the dead is evidenced in pre-Neolithic contexts at the sites of Gua Cha (Sieveking 1954) and other Hoabinhian burial sites in Malaya (van Stein Callenfels 1936; Tweedie 1936; van Stein Callenfels and Noone 1936), at Niah Cave in Sarawak (Harrisson 1967) and in some southern Indonesian sites (Soejono 1969:2-3). Although some human remains from this era had apparently undergone post-mortem rearrangement, grave goods in the form of tools or jewellery were scanty or absent entirely.

In the Neolithic phase, greater elaboration of the disposal of the dead in the form of grave furniture such as pottery, tools, jewellery and sometimes elaborate mortuary jars or wooden coffins appeared. This elaboration could also include complex processes of secondary burial. However, the processes used on the bones could vary from site to site. The distribution of variant practices within cemetery populations could also vary, as could the material culture correlates of burial. This can be seen from a comparison of the reports on such sites as Arku Cave in northern Luzon (Thiel 1981), Leta Leta Cave and the earlier Tabon Caves sites on Palawan (Fox 1970) and Niah Cave in Sarawak (Harrisson 1967).

In the Early Metal phase, from the late 1st millennium BC through the 1st millennium AD, a variety of burial complexes proliferated around the coastal regions of the Southeast Asian islands. Two broadly defined stylistic or cultural zones are apparent in relation to the disposal of the dead. In the northern regions, encompassing the Philippines and northern Borneo, secondary jar burial in caves accompanied by elaborate pottery and other grave goods became a widespread phenomenon. Such cemeteries are exemplified by the Tabon sites on Palawan

(Fox 1970), Kalanay Cave and related sites in the central Philippines (Solheim 1964), and Leang Buidane in the Talaud Islands (Bellwood 1981). These cemeteries generally contained only secondary burials.

In southern Indonesia, coastal inhumation sites contained very mixed varieties of primary and secondary burial. The cemetery at Gilimanuk in western Bali contained formal secondary jar burials, informally disordered burials, skeletons from which major bones appear to have been abstracted and intact primary skeletons (Soejono 1979). Prehistoric cemeteries in coastal Java, Sumba and Lembata shared these mixed characteristics.

These two major zones are not, however, zones of uniformity, but areas where sites with characteristics in common are interspersed with a range of cemetery sites with other very different local characteristics, suggesting a very labile and interactive cultural environment. The process of secondary burial, whether by partial or total transfer of bone, and whether associated with such practices as application of haematite or burning, is a unifying characteristic which ties together burial practices over a long time span, from pre-Neolithic times to some modern societies in the region. However, it is not a universal practice, and its distribution within and between societies follows variable patterns.

Secondary burial practices disappeared in some coastal areas of the Philippines in the 2nd millennium AD and bodies were then buried in the ground with large quantities of imported ceramics. In Sumatra, Java and Bali during the Early Metal phase some cemeteries reveal substantial stone cists and sarcophagi containing definitively, rather than secondarily, deposited bodies. This so-called megalithic tradition has been perpetuated in the eastern Indonesian islands of Sumba, Sumbawa and Flores into modern times.

An explanation for the variety of patterning within and between cemeteries must be sought outside a simple diffusionary framework. Many elaborations in mortuary behaviour appear to have developed within the island regions themselves. These suggest interactions between peoples and adaptations to economic, ecological and social factors. Although some elements of the Island Southeast Asian mortuary tradition may have been brought in from outside, the tradition in its full complex working is indigenous.

#### THE MODERN ETHNOGRAPHIC PARALLEL

Among the animistic societies which survived around the region into modern times, mortuary practice was highly varied. Secondary burial was a feature of many of these societies, from Luzon to Sumatra and the Moluccas. Such societies do not, however, provide a direct window into the past. Social relations and mortuary behaviour have continued to change over time, including during the period of colonial contact and the post-colonial era.

The observed responses of recent systems to different types of cultural influence and economic, social and religious change can suggest the nature and significance of behavioural shifts in the funerary domain in the past. In general, the influences of Christianity and Islam and modern public health requirements have acted to truncate and simplify the procedures carried out on the dead. The process of abandonment of the long and complex mortuary rituals which required the decomposing remains of the dead to be tended by the living was a gradual one, accelerated in areas where such behaviour was offensive to politically or economically

dominant neighbours. However, the less elaborate methods of treatment of the dead which existed in some societies cannot all be explained away by acculturation.

Although there is a great deal of variation in the social organization and economic strategies of societies which have practised secondary burial within the last 150 years, it is possible to relate these variants to a model. This model defines the type of society most likely to practise secondary burial, at least for some of its members, although in reality various historical circumstances have caused many divergences from this ideal.

Such a society consists of self-sufficient subsistence agriculturists with a major concern for the growing of rice in swidden fields. Although practising shifting cultivation, they own and defend a relatively stable territory, and are neither nomadic nor dramatically expansive. Contacts with the world of commerce are limited, and trade is used to acquire prestige durable commodities whose possession ensures status within the community. Wealth is perceived in terms of the ability to generate and redistribute an agricultural surplus, rather than in terms of the acquisition of large quantities of material possessions or fixed assets such as land. Society is stratified, although the differences are essentially based on wealth, and the status of high ranking individuals must be ratified by the highly competitive sponsorship of community ritual and feasting rather than by hereditary right. A certain degree of social mobility is possible as a result.

In such societies political power is restricted to the leadership of relatively autonomous communities, without complex intercommunity political hierarchies. The practice revolves around a highly competitive ethos both within and between communities. The delay between death and completion of the mortuary rites allows for the accumulation of supplies and the organization of public ceremonial requiring intensive labour and resources. Such public ceremony increases the status of the family of the deceased.

On the other hand, secondary burial also implies a duty of care. Those within a community who are able to accumulate a surplus of expendable resources have some obligation to expend such resources in public ceremonial. This involves the redistribution of wealth and confers benefit on other members of the community. Status within the community is dependant upon obtaining the resources to fund such community ceremonial, so that the whole system tends to widen status differentials based on wealth differences, as those families of lesser means who attempt to live, or die, above their means are liable to end up in debt.

Not all societies who have practised secondary burial in the archipelago in recent times conform to this social model exactly. Groups such as the Kajang of Sarawak or the Bataks of Sumatra restricted the use of secondary burial to a hereditary aristocracy, who acted as ancestral representatives for the community. While the competitive ethos prevailed within this social stratum between community or clan leaders, a large segment of society was excluded from this rite.

In certain other societies, such as the Ma'anyan-Siong of southeastern Kalimantan, the Nyubin of the Bahau River in eastern Kalimantan or minorities of the central Philippines such as the Sulod of Panay or some Mangyans of Mindoro, secondary burial was apparently carried out for all normal adult members of society. All of these groups had embattled histories, and it

seems not unreasonable to assume that mortuary ritual had become democratised in defence of traditional *adat*.

The competitive nature of the organization of secondary burial ceremonial suggests, however, that its origins lie in competitive social stratification, where status at birth can be altered by public redistributive ritual. Such an ethos is strongly suggested in the descriptions of secondary death rituals among the Kelabit of central Borneo, the Ngaju of southeastern Kalimantan or the Ifugao of northern Luzon, to list only a few of the more extensively recorded examples.

So far I have presented a socio-economic rationalisation of the process of secondary burial, but such an approach considers only some of the aspects of death in society. The whole procedure is founded in certain beliefs about death which, in general terms, were widely disseminated throughout the archipelago, although varying in many details. The disposal of the dead was a multi-stage process, in which various transformations of the body were accompanied by transformations of the soul of the dead, culminating, in the case of significant members of society, in deification and the creation of a truly functional ancestor.

Hertz's essay on secondary burial (Hertz 1907) expounds on the metaphorical relationship between the changes to the mortal remains and the transformation of the soul of the dead. This essay was based on descriptions of the rituals of the Ngaju, and makes much of the significance of the secondary death feast as a separate event. However, such metaphorical relationships can also apply to practices of disposal of the dead which are less explicitly separated into stages.

In most societies in the archipelago, before such practices were stopped by government interference, it was not customary to dispose of a body until decomposition had set in. Even if there were to be no separation into primary and secondary stages the decomposing corpse and the fluid escaping from it were tended, and a sequence of ceremonies carried out to ratify the various phases of the changing status of the deceased. At a later date, even if the bones were not going to be transferred, it was customary in most agricultural societies to hold a feast and ceremonies in honour of the dead, either individually or communally.

The difference between a simple and definitive disposal and a secondary burial procedure is quite obvious when comparing, for example, the mortuary procedures of the Iban and the Hindu-Balinese. The Iban interred their dead, usually within 24 hours of death, and never interfered with the mortal remains again. The Hindu-Balinese subjected the remains of all who were to undergo secondary ceremonial to cremation at ceremonies which often took place many years after death.

However, there are intermediate forms, such as placement of the deceased in a communal family ossuary. In many places where such structures were used, it was not permitted to open the mausoleum to place a fresh corpse inside until the remains of the previous occupant had had time to decompose completely. If two deaths occurred in rapid succession, the second corpse had to be stored in a separate place until the ossuary could be opened. Each opening of the communal tomb provided visual evidence for the transformation of the family's previous dead.

In many societies definitive disposal was above ground, so that the gradual obliteration of the corpse was apparent, even if it was simply allowed to occur by natural agency. In other societies, disposal of the high ranking dead could be delayed in order to allow for preparation and collection of resources for a suitable funeral. In such cases the funerary festivities had something of the character of a secondary death feast, even though the bones were not re-arranged. Even some groups who carried out the full cycle of secondary burial, such as the Ngaju, did not necessarily remove, clean and re-arrange the bones of all who were accorded this rite.

Although the sequences of ritual and ceremony associated with the disposal of the dead had unifying threads in societies all over the archipelago, the symbolism associated with these rituals was highly flexible and capable of abstraction. Certain ritual functions could be carried out literally, or metaphorically. This is exemplified by the attitude to grave wealth.

Valuable items, tools, weapons, clothes and jewellery were required by the dead, according to status and wealth, for use in the afterlife. If these goods could be spared they might be deposited in or on the grave. However, if they were required by the living, either for functional purposes or for social prestige, they were transferred to the land of the dead metaphorically. The valuable goods were displayed with the corpse, but not actually buried with it. Functional weapons were replaced by old or worn-out items, or models of wood or bamboo. Valuable items were exchanged between kin, or saved by their owners as heirlooms after their spiritual essence had passed over with the dead.

Similar abstractions could occur with the symbolism relating to the disposal of the corpse. The ceremonies associated with the transformation of the dead could occur without actually interfering with the bones. In agricultural societies, secondary death feasts were incorporated into a complex cycle which included agricultural ceremonies at which ancestors were invoked to promote the harvest, initiation ceremonies or graded rites and village purification ceremonies. Patronage for personal prestige was not confined to secondary death feasts. Prestige feasts were sponsored by individuals during their lifetime, and in some societies durable monuments were erected to commemorate the event.

Such agricultural people as the Iban or Kayan and Kenyah of Borneo did not transfer the bones of their dead. However, they did participate in a rich community ceremonial cycle which incorporated many beliefs and concepts in common with the societies which carried out secondary bone transfer. Ancestral assistance was invoked for subsistence activities, even though the creation of ancestors had not been carried out through the medium of literal re-arrangement of their bones.

Thus, the practice of secondary burial is based in a system of belief and ritual, modified in relation to certain socio-economic correlates of society. Differences in the methods of disposal of the dead between modern animistic societies in the region are based on variation in lifeways rather than diverse cultural origins or variant belief systems. Differences in practice define current economic and political realities rather than the past.

For example, among the coastal Melanau of Sarawak the practice of secondary burial for members of the aristocracy gradually disappeared as cash cropping replaced subsistence agriculture and as permanent land ownership replaced the possession of heirloom wealth as a

prestige indicator. Bodies were simply interred. Large quantities of grave wealth, in the form of imported prestige goods, became the indicators of high status burial. Among the Kadazan of Sabah, similar processes of simplification may have been completed before ethnographic recordings were made.

The rapidly expansionary and egalitarian Iban of Sarawak practised simple and definitive disposal of the dead. Their rapid expansionism made secondary burial logistically difficult, while their highly egalitarian lifeways did not concentrate the accumulation of an agricultural surplus in the hands of a sub-section of society.

The Kayans and Kenyahs of central Borneo were also expansionary but they possessed a strict set of hereditary social ranks. They also practised definitive disposal of their dead. Funerals of the high ranking achieved their splendour with the assistance of contributions from guests, who were obliged to erect a large funerary monument. Funerals in these strictly ranked societies were sponsored by obligation to the high ranking dead rather than by obligation by the dead. This reflects the situation in other aspects of life, where the lesser citizenry were obliged to provide food and services for high ranking individuals (Rousseau 1979).

In parts of eastern Indonesia, lineage and clan affiliations had developed importance. The use of communal mausoleums in the form of large stone structures, sometimes located in public areas of the village, ensured that such relationships were perpetuated. The processes carried out on the bones had been simplified, and status in death related to the right to be buried in an ancestral tomb.

Secondary burial was not a feature of hunting and gathering groups, or groups with a specialised economy, anywhere in the archipelago in recent times. Complex ritual activity was associated particularly with rice growing, even when rice was not the major nutrient staple. Secondary burial ceremonial combined in a complex way with rice ritual through shared involvement with ancestors. An increasing mastery of the agricultural environment, as in the development of rice irrigation techniques, seems to have led in some societies, such as the Kadazan, to a diminished importance for these rituals of ancestor validation. Other wet rice societies, such as the Ifugao of northern Luzon, continued to practise secondary burial into recent times, while the Kelabit of central Borneo incorporated the communal construction of ditches into the community activities of secondary burial feasts.

There is no simple one-to-one relationship between the various social, economic and political factors which contribute to the way mortuary ritual is carried out. However, the type of society most likely to carry out secondary burial practices can be defined. Mortuary ritual is part of a socio-cultural system which can adapt to changes in society through shifts in ritual behaviour. Mortuary behaviour does not merely reflect society, but contributes to its regulation.

#### MORTUARY PATTERNING

The nature of the model society which practised secondary burial in the very recent past cannot simply be transposed into the distant past. However, the information from the recent past can be used in a number of ways. The likely residual patterns left in the material domain

from known types of mortuary system can be compared to the surviving patterns from the past to test for congruences.

Secondary burial in modern societies always has some implications for social status or prestige. However, because grave wealth was so often treated symbolically, and because such items as were deposited with the body were not necessarily transferred with the bones, the use of comparative grave wealth as a measure of status differentiation has no validity. This applies to comparisons between societies, as well as to comparisons between different methods of disposal of the dead within one society. A poorly furnished secondary burial can have implications of higher social status than a rich primary burial in the same cemetery.

Secondary burials, although indicators of status, were not necessarily accompanied by the construction of conspicuous monuments for individuals. In fact, loss of individuality for the mortal remains after the conclusion of the ceremonial series, whether in a communal man-made ossuary or a natural cave, seems to be a feature of this mortuary process. Conspicuous funerary monuments were certainly in use in parts of the area, particularly in regions of territorial dispute, but their absence need not imply a lack of status for the deceased. A simple pot of secondarily transferred bones usually implies considerable funerary expenditure, even without other material remains.

Another common, but not universal, practice is the separation of definitively and secondarily deposited remains within a society. One village may have two separate cemeteries of entirely different character, one with primarily deposited bodies, some of which are never intended for secondary burial, and another for secondarily deposited remains. A cemetery containing only secondary burials need not, and probably does not, contain the remains of a cross-section of society. In the Early Metal phase, jar burial caves tended to contain only secondary burials, while the inhumation cemeteries in the south of the archipelago contained a variety of different burial types. These differences probably represent variant forms of cemetery organization for basically similar mortuary systems, rather than profound differences in social organization.

All complex mortuary systems in the archipelago have multiple provisions for aberration or variation in the mortuary procedures for individuals, which cannot be explained except in highly specific terms. The most random form of variation is bad death, whereby a person's entire social persona can be obliterated by the nature of his death. A high ranking man may be simply buried like a dog if his head has been cut off, or a woman if she has died in childbirth. Simplifications or variations of mortuary practice can occur for a variety of reasons; position in the family, number of recent deaths in a family, personal idiosyncrasy, unpaid debts. With a great deal of variability of mortuary practice available the patterning across a cemetery must be regarded as a probability statement about society as a whole. Intricate attempts to ascribe status ranking to individual burials would be fraught with hazards.

While there are innumerable specific variations on cemetery arrangements around the archipelago, there also appear to be some predictable features of patterning. The practice of secondary burial does define a certain kind of society, within which the use of secondary practices on the remains of individuals implies their higher status in the community. Rigidly defined social ranks and political hierarchies, as well as more egalitarian societies, tend to

move away from long and complex treatment of the dead with its attendant redistributive ceremonial.

#### REGIONAL HISTORICAL CHANGE FROM THE CEMETERY

The model secondary burial society of the recent past is something which has evolved over time in response to various social, political and economic changes. It may be possible to work backwards in time to unravel the various contributing factors to its development. This requires venturing into areas where prehistory lasted until modern times, so that some speculation is necessary concerning the meanings of changing mortuary patterning in the past.

During the 1st millenium AD, cemetery sites in which secondary burial was prominent appeared around the coastal regions of the whole archipelago. They would appear to reflect some sort of coastal population expansion and interchange of ideas. The most obvious difference between these societies and those practising secondary burial in recent times is that the latter were largely located inland, sometimes in remote mountain areas, since the coastal regions had been converted to Islam or Christianity and affected by great economic change.

Into these recent inland societies, imported goods with high prestige value were traded up the river systems. The high ranking individuals in the up-river communities had no control over the nature and supply of these goods. However, they utilised their social position to monopolise those items that arrived and used them to ratify their status. They were circulated in bride price payments and used for the payment of fines. The parsimonious deposits of such items on graves were potent symbols of status as most were retained as heirlooms to ensure continuing family prestige.

Some coastal burial sites of the Early Metal phase contain small items of prestige wealth which would have been acquired through inter-island trade or exchange. Jewellery items made of exotic materials such as jade, agate or carnelian represent highly portable items of value. The same can be said for bronze items, whether jewellery, small decorative objects such as bells, or axe heads. Even among such common items as glass beads there are fancy designs which may have travelled long journeys because of their special qualities. It seems likely that these items represent significant maritime endeavour for trade, political exchange or prestige seeking. Competition for prestige through heroic endeavour could have established the essentially competitive nature of secondary burial and community ritual during this time. Possession of prestige wealth in these coastal locations may have required a more active participation in the risk taking aspects of trade than was necessary, or even possible, in modern inland societies.

After commercially based trading networks were established between the northern part of the archipelago and the Asian mainland, some time around AD 1000 as evidenced by the appearance of Chinese and other mainland porcelains, secondary burial sites began to appear in inland locations. A number of such sites has been reported from Luzon (Beyer 1947:223-227; Evangelista 1960; Dizon 1979, 1983), Romblen (Beyer 1947:262-263), Masbate (Smith 1921) and from Mindanao (Beyer 1947:319-322; Spoehr 1973), although there is not an enormous amount of published information about these. A series of secondary jar burial caves containing Sung ceramics in inland Samar has been reported in rather more detail (Macdonald



1972). Presumably, populations of subsistence agriculturists in small political units moved inland, both to expand the range of their agricultural activities and to acquire jungle produce to exchange for these new prestige commodities.

At about the same time, very large cemetery sites in which bodies were buried definitively with large quantities of imported porcelain appeared in coastal areas of the Philippines. Such sites include the cemeteries of Bolinao (Legaspi 1974), Calatagan (Fox 1959) and Santa Ana (Fox and Legaspi 1977) on the western coast of Luzon. These sites presumably represent trading entrepôts where the economy became more specialised and entrepreneurial and the complex rituals associated with subsistence became less significant. Mortuary status markers became simpler and more materialistic.

Simplification of mortuary process is also apparent in the caves of eastern Sabah, perhaps when the economically specialised activity of collection of edible birds' nests for the export trade became the predominant economic activity of the area. Secondary burials were formerly deposited in the caves in this area during the Early Metal phase (Bellwood 1988:248-253). In later centuries certain caves in the area were used for the simple and definitive deposition of corpses in coffins (Creagh 1896; Orolfo 1933; Pryer 1887:232), although the precise antiquity of the coffins described by these writers is not known. In recent years, only some isolated groups were practising cave burial in this area, and these people had difficulty in finding caves which were not required for commercial exploitation (Harrisson and Harrisson 1971:33-116).

During the Early Metal phase in Java and Bali, two distinctively different types of cemetery were present. While mixed inhumation cemeteries containing both primary and secondary burials existed in coastal areas, in some other areas the dead became permanently commemorated by deposition in stone cists or sarcophagi. Where skeletal material has been recovered, it is apparent that the dead were simply placed in these tombs definitively (van der Hoop 1935; van Heekeren 1955; Ardika 1987). On Bali, these sarcophagi were located on the southern plains where wet rice agriculture became most intensive (Ardika 1987:44-88). The permanent demarcation of territory and the perpetuation of lineage may have been conspicuously indicated here in a situation where the inheritance of specific parcels of land seems to have had more importance than the conduct of ceremonies for the communal good.

The growing of rice in swidden fields, a characteristic of modern secondary burial societies, is sometimes considered to be a primitive form of agriculture. However, pioneering is probably a more accurate term than primitive, as the growing of rice in dry swiddens is a method of expanding rice production into new environments and turning relatively unproductive tropical forests into productive land. The traditional method of swidden management, especially as practised in modern Borneo, involves clearing and burning mature forest in order to grow only a few crops of rice. This does not result in the establishment of a new, domesticated ecological succession. Rather, the natural forest ecology gradually regenerates before the land is used for grain production again. This form of management requires extensive acreages of land and low population densities, as well as a continuing process of tree clearance.

There is no direct archaeological evidence for the antiquity of this form of land management, or for the use of rice as a preferred crop with a profound spiritual significance.

Nevertheless, the intimate relationship between rice growing and community ritual in societies practising swidden agriculture suggests a mature and intimate relationship between complex community ritual, including secondary burial, and this form of subsistence.

At some stage in the past the desire or necessity to expand the growing of this ritually, as well as nutritionally, important plant into a wider range of environments may have necessitated a more elaborate process of ancestral involvement. Risks of crop failure were high, but success meant that the grower could expand his community prestige by sharing the results of his success through redistributive community ritual.

It seems likely that such a system would have been in place when the communities practising secondary burial in the 1st millennium AD were expanding around the coasts of the region. The development of a series of local mortuary styles at about the same time as certain practices, such as jar burial in caves, were spreading around the region implies an interaction between expanding cultures and communities already living in a local area. Interaction between mobile or expansive people and pre-existing populations is a more satisfactory explanation for culture change in the region than simple culture-people relationships associated with waves of migration.

Looking further back into the Pre-Metal period it becomes more difficult to disentangle the relative significances of the various factors which ultimately led to the modern type of secondary burial society. Neolithic burial sites containing highly elaborated forms of secondary burial occur in widely dispersed locations around the archipelago. For example, the Pre-Metal cave sites of Palawan, Arku Cave in northern Luzon and Niah Cave in Sarawak contain cemeteries of very different character, but all with deliberate and formal re-treatment of some skeletal remains.

There is practically no evidence to indicate when the growing of rice assumed a position of major eminence in the ritual life of the island people, although there is ethnographic information which indicates that economic dependence on rice was not an event, but an on-going process which continued to extend into the lifeways of various ethnic groups into modern times. It seems a reasonable assumption that the great expansion of swidden agriculture post-dated the introduction of iron tools, especially in the form of the expansive and pioneering system which requires the constant clearing of acreages of mature equatorial forest.

The earliest Metal Age cemeteries in the Tabon Caves on Palawan did not contain iron tools, but were furnished with some bronze items and jade jewellery. Highly distinctive grave goods included jade earrings of a type known as *ling-ling-o*, and other jade ear pendants in the form of double-headed animals (Fox 1970). Such highly recognisable artifacts have been found in burial sites all around the South China Sea (Loofs-Wissowa 1980-81; Thiel 1981; Chin 1980), indicating that significant contact and exchange by water was established before, or at least at the time of, the introduction of iron tools. Possibly these new artifacts represent an expansion of networks for the exchange of stone and shell valuables. Ocean voyaging for exchange and the gaining of personal prestige may have been the high risk activity which initially set up a competitive social environment rather than swidden agriculture.

The process of formal deposition of the dead is generally considered to indicate belief in some form of afterlife. The earliest appearance of mortuary processes involving secondary re-arrangement of bone may imply the development of a metaphorical relationship between the remains of selected individuals and their powers in that afterlife. The increasing elaboration of that ritual may reflect the development of high risk endeavours which require greater degrees of ancestral protection; expansion and establishment of communities in new environments, voyaging and exchange, and changing subsistence strategies. Those successful in such endeavours acquired prestige in life, and efficacy as ancestors in death. Developing competitive social stratification and elaboration of ritual life go hand in glove.

#### CONCLUSIONS

In presenting this very generalised analysis of the significance of secondary burial and the development of mortuary variability in the islands of Southeast Asia, certain important assumptions about cultural diffusion and culture change have been made. Culture is not seen as a tightly welded agglomeration of characteristics bonded to the fortunes of migrating groups of people. Rather, culture change is seen as the result of interaction between ethnic groups and adaptation to varying ecological, economic and social factors. The recent cultures of the islands as recorded by ethnographers are seen as having matured and developed in the islands themselves, whatever the ultimate genetic origins of the inhabitants.

Changing mortuary behaviour is just one aspect of the totality of changing social and cultural behaviour in the region. It is therefore associated with changing patterns which would appear to have nothing obvious to do with death. Trade and exchange patterns, rice cultivation, subsistence strategies, patterns of social organization and the variable correlates of social prestige all contributed to the patterning of death. As social patterning has changed in modern, historic times, associated changes to mortuary ritual have been noted by various observers. Similar readjustments to the whole system have undoubtedly occurred in the past.

Reconstructing the contributions of all these factors to the patterning of death in the past makes for a complicated equation. Certain changes, such as the introduction of iron tools and technology or the expansion of trade with the Asian mainland, might be seen in broad terms as events initiated within a relatively short time span and having profound social and economic repercussions. Other changes, such as the development and expansion of swidden rice agriculture, must be seen as long term processes. Such processes may have undergone periods of acceleration, but essentially they represent a constant underlying force for cultural re-adjustment throughout long periods of time.

The original basis for the practice of secondary burial may lie in the fundamental belief in the efficacy of ancestors. Complex procedures for the deification of ancestors may have resulted from the development of high risk activities within a competitive social environment, where continuing status was dependant upon the ability of the individual to ratify his place in society through the sponsorship of community ritual. Voyaging, trade, rice cultivation and the expansion of population into new environments perpetuated this ethos of competition and risk.

In many areas of the islands, population densities remained low until recent times. Politically autonomous small scale societies practising expansive forms of swidden agriculture

survived and spread over wide areas. Populations expanded by the splitting off of independent communities without pressures for increasing the complexity of political structure. Such stability of structure, combined with the persistence of this pioneering subsistence pattern, meant that the ancient rituals of ancestor validation continued to be relevant.

In those areas such as Java and Bali where population pressure and soil fertility allowed the development of intensified agriculture, mortuary behaviour appeared to follow a different pattern. Simplified mortuary procedure and permanent commemoration for high status burial appeared in the Early Metal phase. The later social history of these islands is one of some complexity, although the ancient rituals of animism and ancestor worship never completely disappeared.

Over time, mortuary patterning reflects the complex role assumed by funerary behaviour in the regulation of society. Comparisons between the recent and distant past can be made with respect to the nature of mortuary patterning and to processes of change, even though the modern animistic societies, cut off in inland locations from the inter-island contacts characteristic of earlier times, are not identical to their prehistoric forebears.

#### NOTES

\* This paper is abstracted from my thesis submitted to the Australian National University for the degree of Master of Arts, entitled *The Graves of the Rice Ancestors*. Summaries of the ethnographic data used to draw the conclusions expressed in this paper are contained in this thesis.

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