

## Revisiting the Dusunic Boat Lutes of Sabah: Disappearing Musical Traditions

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### Abstract

The Kadazan Dusun *sundatang* from Tambunan, the Rungus *sundatang*, and the Lotud *gagayan* are three kinds of boat lutes from Sabah. Each is carved from a single log of jackfruit wood, but they vary structurally. Resembling somewhat Philippine boat lutes, they differ from the *sape*-types of Sarawak and Kalimantan. They are played solo in non-ritual contexts. The *gagayan*, however, was played in pairs and the Tambunan *sundatang* was sometimes accompanied by a hand-held gong when accompanying the slow, sedate *magarang sundatang* dance. Today, there are very few musicians playing the unique Tambunan *sundatang*, while the Lotud *gagayan* has recently declined with the demise of older performers. The Rungus *sundatang* is still extant and continues to be performed in many longhouses. This paper discusses these three types of Dusunic boat lutes, their structures, performance practices and music, and suggests a possible origin for these kinds of instruments found in northern Borneo.

*Keywords:* boat lutes, *gagayan*, Kadazan Dusun, Lotud, Rungus, Sabah, *sundatang*

### Introduction

Boat lutes, so named by western scholars because their long slender soundboxes somewhat resemble boat shapes, were once widely played throughout Borneo, the Philippines, and Central and Southern Sulawesi. Those generally known as *kucapi* in the southern Philippines are normally double-stringed and have small bodies and long necks (Brandeis, 2012, 2017, 2019). These differ from the various kinds of *sape* or *sampe* found in Sarawak and Kalimantan that have short necks, long rectangular bodies, and differing numbers of strings according to culture and location (Matusky, 1986, pp.188-189; Matusky & Tan, 2017, pp. 286-287). Boat lutes are also played among the cultures of Central and South Sulawesi and have narrow bodies like the Philippine types, but with short necks (Daud, 2011). Sabah also has so-called boat lutes which, like those of the surrounding regions, are each carved from single logs of certain kinds of jackfruit tree wood. Jackfruit woods are preferred, because they are soft and can be easily carved into the required shape, and are also resistant to termites. The instruments have two strings, with frets placed below the higher pitched string on the right side of the neck from the observer's viewpoint<sup>1</sup>.

Three main types of long-necked boat lutes are found among the indigenous Dusunic peoples of Sabah.<sup>2</sup> These include the *sundatang* of the Kadazan Dusun of Tambunan District, the *sundatang* of

the Rungus of Kudat District, and the large *gagayan* of the Lotud of Tuaran District (Figure 1). Except for the Lotud *gagayan* which was normally played in pairs, these are usually solo instruments. They are performed in non-ritual contexts for entertainment and personal expression. These three boat lute genres were chosen for discussion here because they represent three distinct types of such instruments from three musical traditions that, until recently, were still being performed.

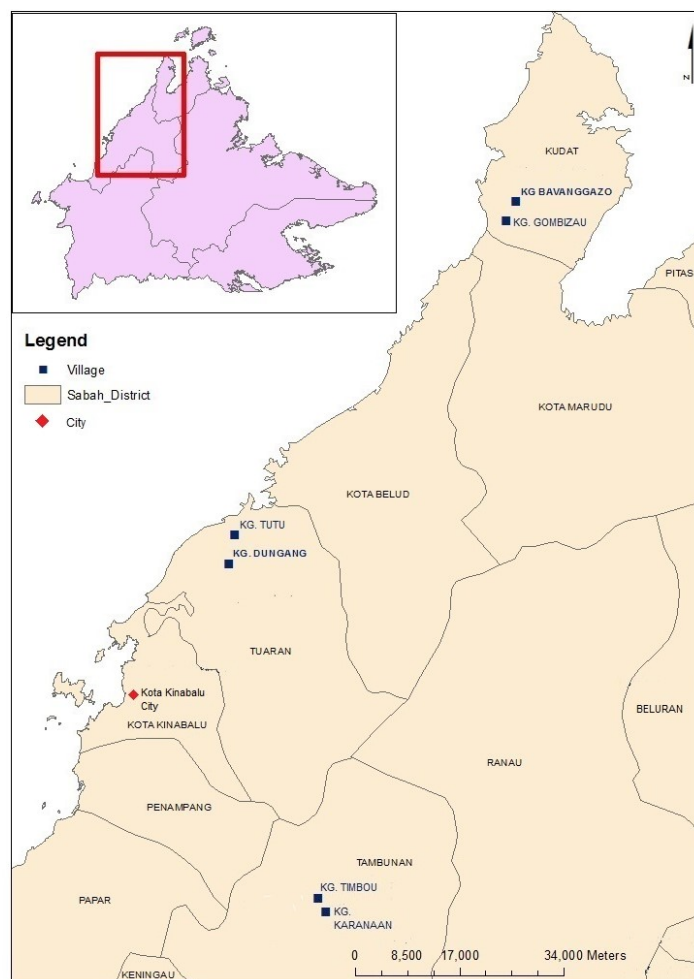


Figure 1. Map showing locations of villages mentioned in this article. (Source: Oliver Valentine Ebo, 12 November 2020)

The ancient indigenous Dusunic Family of Languages consists of around ten major languages (*Ethnologue*<sup>®</sup>, 2016). Dusunic ethnic groups traditionally inhabit parts of the central interior, western and northern Districts of Sabah. They are non-segmented, acephalous societies with bilateral kinship systems and gender balance. As large sedentary agrarian societies, they cultivate wet rice on alluvial plains and dry rice in mountainous areas. Traditionally, they lived in villages composed of longhouses in which each conjugal family occupied a private apartment. The last Borneo smallpox pandemic of 1904-1905 and World War II led to the demise of Dusunic longhouses, except among the Rungus where many contemporary longhouses are found.

Of the three Dusunic cultures whose lutes are the focus of this discussion, the Kadazan Dusun or Dusun are the largest single ethnic group in Sabah with a population of approximately 25% of the state's population (Regis, 1989, p. 415). They inhabit the Districts of Ranau, Tambunan, Kota Belud, Penampang and Papar. There are dialectal and cultural variations across these areas. Those from

Tambunan District, number around 33,000 (based on 2008 District Office figures and allowing for 10% increase). The Rungus are the second largest Dusunic group with a total population of 120,000 to 150,000 (Porodong, 2012, p. 111). They are the original ancient inhabitants of the Kudat Peninsula in northern Sabah. Around 150 years ago, a group migrated east to the Bengkoka Peninsula (part of today's Pitas District). Today, some mixed Rungus villages are also dispersed across Kota Marudu District among the Kimaragang Dusun and other groups there. The Lotud number around 20,000 and are the main ethnic group of Tuaran District (*Ethnologue*<sup>®</sup>, 2016).

I first heard about the *sundatang* while visiting my husband's village, Kg. Karanaan<sup>3</sup> of the inland upland Tambunan District in 1977. This was a short three-month trip for a *moginakan* family feast in honour of our marriage in 1976 in Australia. The instrument was said to be quite rare and many people claimed they had never seen one. Later after returning to live in Sabah in 1982, I was able to study this *sundatang*, as well as other instruments from Tambunan and the music associated with these. Over the years, I have undertaken deeper research among many other local cultures. Recently, I have re-examined and updated some of my earlier findings on the structure and nomenclature for parts of the Tambunan *sundatang*.

Gleaned from decades of ongoing ethnomusicological research in Sabah, this article compares the Kadazan Dusun *sundatang* from Tambunan, with the Rungus *sundatang* and the Lotud *gagayan*. It seeks to answer the following questions. What are the differences in structure, performance practice and context between the three main types of boat lutes played in their respective Dusunic cultures of Sabah? What are the characteristics of their music? Are there organological relationships between these lutes and those of surrounding regions? And finally, what is the status of these performance genres in Sabah today?

### **The Kadazan Dusun *Sundatang* from Tambunan**

The *sundatang* of the Kadazan Dusun from Tambunan has a small, somewhat diamond-shaped or oval body with a neck of over a metre long. It is made from jackfruit tree woods, either *nangko* (*Artocarpus integer*; Malay *nangka*) or *timadang* (*Artocarpus odoratissimus*; Malay *tarap*). During construction, the front is hollowed out, then covered by a thin piece of wood with a bridge and a "nose" or stringholder.<sup>4</sup> The rounded tapered tuning pegs for the two strings are inserted diagonally into either side of the pegbox that is an extension of the neck. The lower part of the body is carved into a large thick "tail". Of the two strings, the lower pitched one on the viewer's left is made from wire (formerly brass), while the other one on the viewer's right nowadays is made from nylon string (formerly *giman* root, botanical classification undefined). The latter is affixed to the neck roughly halfway along its length with a small lump of beeswax (*sopihut* or *sopinit*). Four to seven frets of thin cane or *tuai* (*Calamus javensis*), that has been cut crosswise, are gummed to the neck with beeswax under this string below this lump. The other, longer string has no frets below it, and its sound functions as a drone in the *sundatang* music.

During performance, the musician sits holding the *sundatang* vertically or tilted slightly to his or her left, with the tail at the lower end of its body supported under the right thigh. The performer strums and plucks the strings across the front of the body with the fingers of the right hand, while the fingers of the left hand stop and unstop the fretted string on the right (Figure 2).

Madam Kimoi, now 88 years old, of Kg. Timbou (not far from Kg. Karanaan) is among the last *sundatang* performers in Tambunan. She inherited her *sundatang* from her father. It is made from light coloured *nangko*, the common jackfruit tree wood. The front of the instrument is also a piece of *nangko* that was glued to the body with *sopihut*. According to Kimoi, the neck of the *sundatang* was originally much longer, but the instrument was broken when someone grabbed it to hit a dog that had entered the house when she was a child. Her father repaired the instrument, but the neck is shorter than it was originally and there is now a joint that can be seen on the front below the frets and higher up across its back. There are also only four frets on the front (Figure 3a and Figure 3b).



*Figure 2.* Madam Kimoi (then around 54 years) of Kg. Timbou, Tambunan playing her father's *sundatang*. (Source: Jacqueline Pugh-Kitingan, 15 December 1986)



*Figure 3a (left)* Madam Kimoi, then aged around 53, showing the front and *Figure 3b (right)* back of her *sundatang*. (Source: Jacqueline Pugh-Kitingan, 20 July 1985)

Kimoi's nomenclature for the parts of her *sundatang* is a mixture of terms for body parts, functional words and, for the strings and frets, the materials from which they are made (Figure 4). She refers to the pegbox at the top of the instrument as *timbok*, the term for a lady's hair bun, while she calls each of the tuning-pegs *pongisusan*, "the place that you turn" referring to the turning action of tightening the strings on the pegs. Each string is wound onto its peg, which is then inserted into the pegbox. The strings are collectively called *pongombitan* ("the place that you pluck"), but are individually named according to the materials from which they are made. Thus, the longer string on the viewer's left is called *kawot* (that Kimoi pronounces as *kawat*), which refers to brass or metal wire and also conveys the idea of tightening or tuning. The shorter string on the viewer's right was traditionally made from the root of the *giman* plant and hence was named *giman*. Nowadays, she uses thin nylon fishing line or *tansi* for this string, and thus calls it *tansi* (some say *tangsi*).

Kimoi refers to the soundbox as the *tinan* or "body" of the instrument. It has a large hole at the back and a smaller hole on the front between the *pinonodu* (wedge) or bridge, and the stringholder, the comparatively short *todung sundatang* or "nose" of the *sundatang*. The base of the *tinan* extends into a large thick *tikiu* or "tail" that supports the instrument under her right thigh during performance.<sup>5</sup>

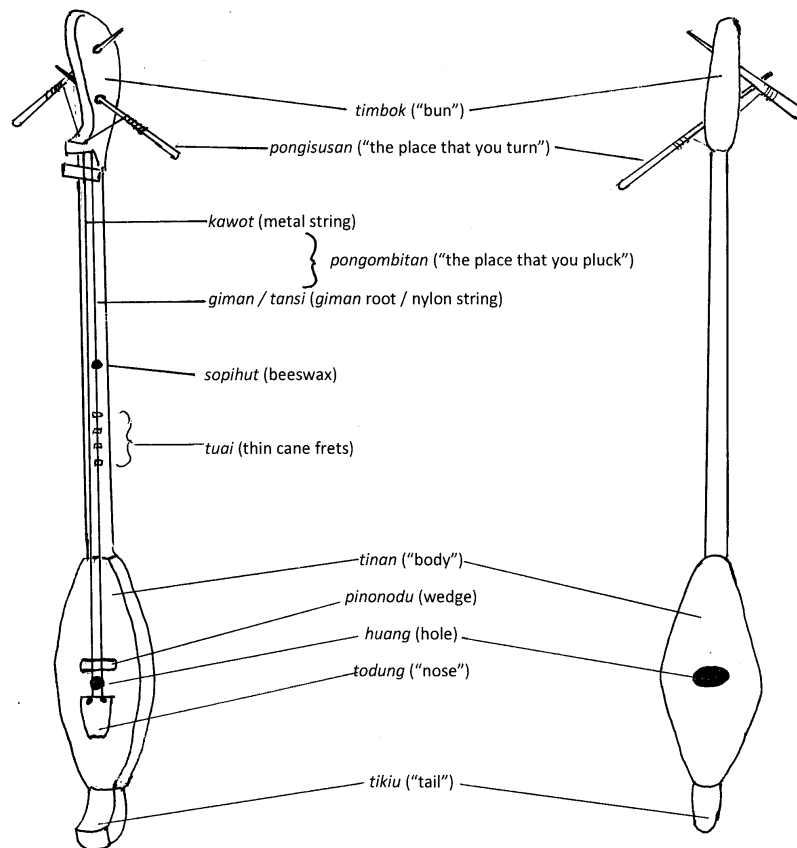


Figure 4. The Kadazan Dusun *sundatang* from Tambunan with Kimoi's labels. (Source: Jacqueline Pugh-Kitingan, 30 November 2020)



During 1987, I was able to interview the late Unsud bin Masigi of Kg. Karanaan, a *sundatang* player then around 63 years old, who had inherited his instrument from his ancestors as far back as six generations before. This had a similar structure to that of Kimoi's *sundatang*, but it had a long neck measuring 122 centimetres. The instrument was made from a single trunk of dark-coloured sturdy *lugu timadang* or core of the *timadang* (Malay: *tarap*) a jackfruit tree from the forest. The body had been hollowed out from the front, and the front face was made from lighter-coloured *nangko* wood. The original tuning pegs had disintegrated, so Unsud had replaced them with rectangular pieces of *nangko* wood (Figure 5).

Unsud labelled the parts of his *sundatang* using similar terminology to that of Kimoi. However, he called the pegbox at the top of the instrument *tuhu* or "head," and the tuning pegs were each named *pongiruson* "the place that you tune" referring to tuning the strings. He called the neck *tinggayan* "the place that can be held".

There were seven groups of six notches each cut along each side of the neck from just below the pegbox. Unsud explained that six of these groups were carved consecutively by his ancestors one after the other who had learned to play the instrument, and each notch represented one year that a particular ancestor took to practice playing the *sundatang* until they were proficient (a year was estimated according to one padi-planting and harvesting cycle). Unsud had also carved the last group of notches as a record of his years of practice. Each performer played the instrument throughout his life, then it would be taken up by one of his children when he was too old to play. This indicates that Unsud's *sundatang* may be around 300 hundred years old. According to local legend, the ancestor who originally made the *sundatang* is said to have used the instrument to bash and kill a large *bugang* or flying eagle-like monster that was attacking and eating the people in the longhouse.<sup>6</sup> Although Unsud knew who his ancestors were, he would not tell me their names in accordance with Tambunan traditional custom which forbids articulating the names of one's forebears in conversation.



Figure 5. The late Unsud Masigi, around 63 years, with the *sundatang* inherited from his ancestors. (Source: Jacqueline Pugh-Kitingan, 19 December 1987)

The Kadazan Dusun *sundatang* of Tambunan is traditionally performed for entertainment in the home. Its music imitates at a slower pace the patterns of *tinondot*, the music of the *sopogandangan* gong ensemble that consists of a hand-held gong called *koritikon* when it is played in the ensemble, seven hanging gongs of various kinds, and a single-headed drum. This ensemble accompanies dancing or *magarang*. Sometimes, the *sundatang* can be accompanied by another person beating the *koritikon*. This *sundatang* music accompanies the slow sedate *magarang sundatang* dance by a couple. In this case, the dancers move their feet flat on the floor; the man raises his arms and hands only to waist height, not shoulder height, and the woman raises her hands merely to hip height with her arms hanging outwards, not curved upwards. Although rarely performed today, the *magarang sundatang* is suited to dancing in a confined space such as a room, or private family apartment in a longhouse of the olden days.

An example from the start of a *sundatang* performance by Kimoi is shown in Figure 6. The syncopated rhythms are akin to the colotomic patterns of *tinondot*, but the pace of the music is much slower. The *kawot* sounds around a major 6<sup>th</sup> below the open nylon or *tansi* string. The *kawot* forms a drone below the melodic patterns played on the higher pitched string. These patterns freely imitate the composite melodic structures of the gong ensemble music, but the rhythms of the music for dancing can still be heard. Kimoi said that the *kawot* string provides a distinctive ringing metallic sound that enhances the music. Unsud explained that the *giman* string was the leader in the music while the *kawot* merely emphasized the beat.

♩ = 97 MM

(fragment = 23 seconds)

Pitches by ear

kawot      tansi : (open)      (stopped)      (rarely heard)

# = sounds tone lower than written       $\dashrightarrow$  = one melodic phrase

Figure 6. Excerpt from the start of a *sundatang* performance by Kimoi. (Source: Jacqueline Pugh-Kitingan, 1 March 1986)

Figure 7 shows the basic colotomic pattern of *tinondot* by the *sopogandangan* ensemble from Kg. Timbou and Kg. Karanaan. The *koritikon* is the small hand-held knobbed gong, while the *karatung* is a single-headed native drum with tuning pegs around its head. The other instruments are various kinds of hanging gongs, and each of these names denotes the rhythmic pattern that each instrument plays. Each part combines to form vibrant rhythmic music that accompanies dancing in both social ceremonial contexts (Pugh-Kitingan, 1988, pp. 26-27, 35, 43-45, 54-56; 2003, pp. 4-11, 35-37).

Here, the pitches shown beside the instrument names indicate the most audible frequencies in the timbre of each instrument, while the time signatures provide an approximation of the basic beat. The gongs labelled *koritikon*, *bobogon*, *kuribadon*, and *kutoukutowon* are generically called *sanang* in Kadazan Dusun. They are smallish thick brass gongs of various sizes, each with a flat face around the boss and a back diameter that is much smaller than the front. The *tagung tatahis* (“high-pitched *tagung*”) and *tagung tohombou* (“low-pitched *tagung*”) are large, thin, narrow-sided, brass gongs, generically called *tagung*, each with a raised ridge around the boss and back and front diameters of the same size. The *tongtoongon* and *tawag* are generically labelled *tawag* and are large, heavy, deep-sided brass or bronze gongs, each with a raised ridge around its large boss, and a back diameter that is much smaller than the front. Here, the instruments are shown in order of their physical position in the ensemble. Musically, however, the instruments enter *koritikon*, *karatung*, *bobogon*, *kuribadon*, *kutoukutowon*, then the two interlocking *tagung*, followed by the two *tawag*. An individual gong is known by its generic name until it is included in the ensemble. Then it takes on the specific musical name of the part that it plays.

♩ = 123 MM

Figure 7. Basic colotomic pattern of *tinondot* or music of the *sopogandangan* ensemble. (Source: Jacqueline Pugh-Kitingan, 23 March 2012)

A comparison between Figures 6 and 7 shows that although the pace of the *sundatang* music is much slower than *tinondot*, its syncopated beat reflects that of the gong ensemble performance. The rhythmic patterns of the drone string recall the dominant beat of the *koritikon* and *karatung*, while the melodic patterns of the upper string somewhat resemble the colotomic patterns of the hanging gongs.



### The Rungus *Sundatang* from Kudat

Unlike the lute from Tambunan, the *sundatang* of the Rungus of Kudat District is always a man's solo instrument played for personal expression or to entertain children and others in the longhouse. Rungus women prefer to play the *turali* nose flute. As shown previously in the *turali* example from Kg. Bavanggazo, Kudat, young women who were novice *bobolizan* (priestesses) in the traditional Rungus religion used the *turali* to help them memorise *rinait*, the long sacred ritual poetry (Pugh-Kitingan, 2017, pp. 15-28). Although they were prohibited from chanting *rinait* outside of ritual contexts, they could softly blow the tunes of the chants with the *turali*. Over time, women developed secular *turali* performance that freely imitates the melodies of chants. The *turali* is thus a woman's instrument among the Rungus, while men prefer *sundatang*.

An example of a Rungus *sundatang* is that of Mogowan bin Malis, now around 64 years, from Kg. Gombizau, Kudat, located not far from Kg. Bavanggazo. It is made from *nangko* wood (Figure 8). Structurally this instrument has a deeper somewhat squarish soundbox, compared to the *sundatang* from Tambunan, and has a comparatively shorter neck. Mogowan refers to this neck in the Rungus language as *randagan* ("handle"), which conveys a similar meaning to *tinggayan* in Kadazan Dusun. The front face of the body has a pattern of small holes above the stringholder, but there is no bridge. The stringholder is longer and narrower than that of the Tambunan *sundatang*, and extends down to the end of the front. This *sundatang* sometimes has a small thin carving at its lower end, but lacks the large protruding tail at the base of the body that is part of the Tambunan *sundatang*.

When making a Rungus *sundatang*, the body of the instrument is hollowed out from the back. Its strings are inserted into the two holes in the stringholder on the front, and also through two holes in the pegbox. Each then exits through a hole in the pegbox to be wound onto a tuning peg. After the strings are inserted, the back is covered by two thin layers of wood that are stitched with string or wire at one end and gummed to the body (Figure 9). Both strings or *hontol* are made from wire (formerly brass). Unlike the *sundatang* from Tambunan, each tuning peg is inserted at right angles into the pegbox and then its short protruding end winds up the string. Its frets or *ulob* are chips of bamboo or cane, each mounted vertically under the higher-pitched string in a mound of beeswax. This higher-pitched string, on the lower front side of the neck when played, is stuck to the neck by a *lapazan* or fixed fret. Below this there are five *ulob*, two (or sometimes three) on the upper part of the body, and the others along the lower part of the neck.

In addition to functional terms in the Rungus language, Mogowan uses anthropomorphic body parts terminology for most the sections of his *sundatang* (Figure 10). Thus, the soundbox is labelled *inan* ("body"), its tiny tail at the end end is *busul* ("bottom" or "buttocks"), the front face is *kangkab* ("chest"), and the sections at the top of the *inan* on either side of the *randagan* are its *kazab* ("shoulders"). Its inner back layer is called *likud* ("back"), and this is covered by the outer *atob* or cover. The long stringholder on the front of the *kangkab* is called the *todung* ("nose") of the *sundatang*, while the pegbox below the carving at the other end of the *randagan* is the *ulu* ("head") and the two tuning pegs are its *tohingo* ("ears"). The *ulu* or pegbox extends into a carved decoration or *biningkoko*.



*Figure 8.* Mogowan from Kg. Gombizau, Kudat playing *sundatang*. (Source: Jacqueline Pugh-Kitingan, 23 May 1992)



*Figure 9.* Rear view of Mogowan playing the *sundatang* showing its back and tuning pegs. (Source: Jacqueline Pugh-Kitingan, 23 May 1992)

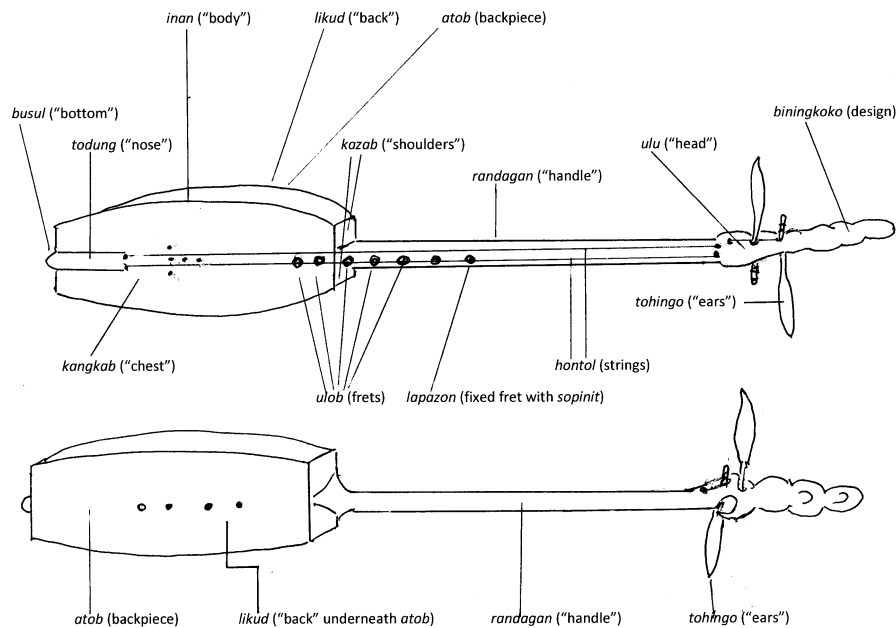


Figure 10. The Rungus *sundatang* using Mogowan's labels. (Source: Jacqueline Pugh-Kitingan, 30 November 2020)

Unlike the *sundatang* from Tambunan, however, this instrument is held horizontally in the lap with the neck pointing to the player's left like a guitar, and the fretted string is plucked with the nail of the little finger of the right hand while the thumb plays the unfretted string as shown in Figure 8. The soft-sounding music of the *sundatang* can imitate various Rungus songs, and also the Rungus *pongigalan* or gong ensemble music for accompanying *mongigol* (Rungus dancing). In pieces that imitate *pongigalan*, the performer will periodically knock his right forefinger on the *kangkab* above the strings to freely suggest the *tontog* or single-headed drum that is played with the hanging gongs. This performance is to entertain children and others in the longhouse.

There is not room here to give a detailed discussion of Rungus *sundatang* music. A fragment of a performance by Mogowan, then aged around 36 years, is transcribed in Figure 11. The music in this example freely imitates the traditional Rungus song called "*Mamaranggi*".

♩ = 103 MM (Very Soft)

(Extract = 28.4 Seconds)

Pitches by ear

Fretted String Open String

Unfretted String

Figure 11. Excerpt from the start of a *sundatang* performance imitating a song *Mamaranggi*, by Mogowan (Source: Jacqueline Pugh-Kitingan, 2 July 2020)

As shown here, the pitch of the unfretted string sounds an octave below that of the open fretted string. This music is very soft, and its overall sound is dominated by the sonorous drone of the unfretted string that is played with the right thumb. In this short excerpt, the performer does not use the two highest pitches of the fretted string. The music is characterised by recurring grace notes and occasional semiquaver and demisemiquaver-like motifs. The latter are extremely soft, and are produced as the performer rapidly plucks the higher-pitched string, with the nail of the little finger of the right hand.

The soft but penetrating sound of the Rungus *sundatang* can be heard throughout the longhouse, even in private family apartments at the farthest end of the building. When played at night, it has a soothing effect that is said to help children settle down to sleep.

### The Lotud *Gagayan* from Tuaran

Like the Rungus *sundatang*, the *gagayan* lute of the Lotud from Tuaran District of Sabah is traditionally a man's instrument, while women prefer to play the *turali*. As shown previously in the discussion of *turali* from Kg. Dungang, Tuaran, women play two sizes of nose flute to copy the tunes of secular songs for entertainment (Pugh-Kitingan, 2017, pp. 19-22). The *gagayan*, however, is a large, loud instrument that was considered too heavy and cumbersome for a woman to comfortably play. It is much larger than the Kadazan Dusun and Rungus lutes, and is held horizontally in the lap pointing to the player's left like the Rungus *sundatang*, but is supported by a cord worn around the performer's neck. Traditionally, *gagayan* were often played in duets (*batangkung*).

The late Liput bin Enah and the late Tombung bin Ambing of Kg. Tutu often played their *gagayan* together in *batangkung* (Figure 12). Each instrument was made from *nangko*, described as *kulipapo* or softwood, but *timadang* could also be used for making a *gagayan*. Tombung's instrument had a dark brown colour and appeared to be much older than that of Liput.

Like the Rungus *sundatang* but unlike the *sundatang* from Tambunan, each *gagayan* lacked a bridge on their fronts. They had been hollowed out from the back during construction, and the open back was covered by two layers of thin wood as *tutub* ("covers"). The outer layer of the *tutub* had a large carved hole or *ruang* ("space") in the middle. The *ruang* on Tombung's *gagayan* was heart-shaped, while that of Liput was oval-shaped. These two layers of thin wood were gummed into the frame of the hollowed out back of the *gagayan*. They were not stitched to the body with metal wire, like the Rungus *sundatang* (Figure 13).

Both musicians used similar terminology for the parts of their *gagayan* (Figure 14). The large, deep, somewhat rectangular soundbox is called *inan* ("body"), while the long stringholder is the *odung* ("nose"). The two brass strings or *obuk* enter this at the front of the body, as on the Kadazan Dusun and Rungus *sundatang*, but are wound across the front of the *odung* through a series of small holes on either side. Above the *odung*, the front of the *inan* features a series of tiny resonance holes or *lobu* that form a triangular shape. At the end of the *inan*, each instrument has the carving of the shape of an animal head. Liput's very large *gagayan* has the head of a horse or *kuda*, while that of Tombung's has the head of a deer or *binanjou*.





*Figure 12.* Liput (left, 60 years) and Tombung (55 years) playing their *gagayan* in *batangkung* (duet). (Source: Jacqueline Pugh-Kitingan, 8 August 1985)



*Figure 13.* A rear view of three *gagayan* showing their double-layered back covers (Source: Jacqueline Pugh-Kitingan, 6 August 1985)



The long, thick neck of the *gagayan* is named *tonok* or “calf” (leg), and the pegbox extends into carved design called a *kuku* or “tail”. The *kuku* on Tombung’s *gagayan* is carved into the shape of a deer’s tail, while that of Liput has a curled shape like a horse’s tail. A decorative cloth or *wiriwiri* is hung from the *kuku*.

These *gagayan* have two metal strings called *obuk*, and the string on the bottom, when held in a playing position, is stuck halfway along the *tonok* with a piece of beeswax gum or *tukod*. Six thin cane frets or *soludon* are stuck flat against its long neck under the inner string below the *tukod*, like the frets on the Tambunan *sundatang*. There is a cut-out section on the front of the pegbox where the strings enter. Each tuning peg turns the strings inside the pegbox. The tuning pegs are called *simbong* (“earrings”), because they stick out perpendicular to the pegbox like a pair of woman’s earrings.

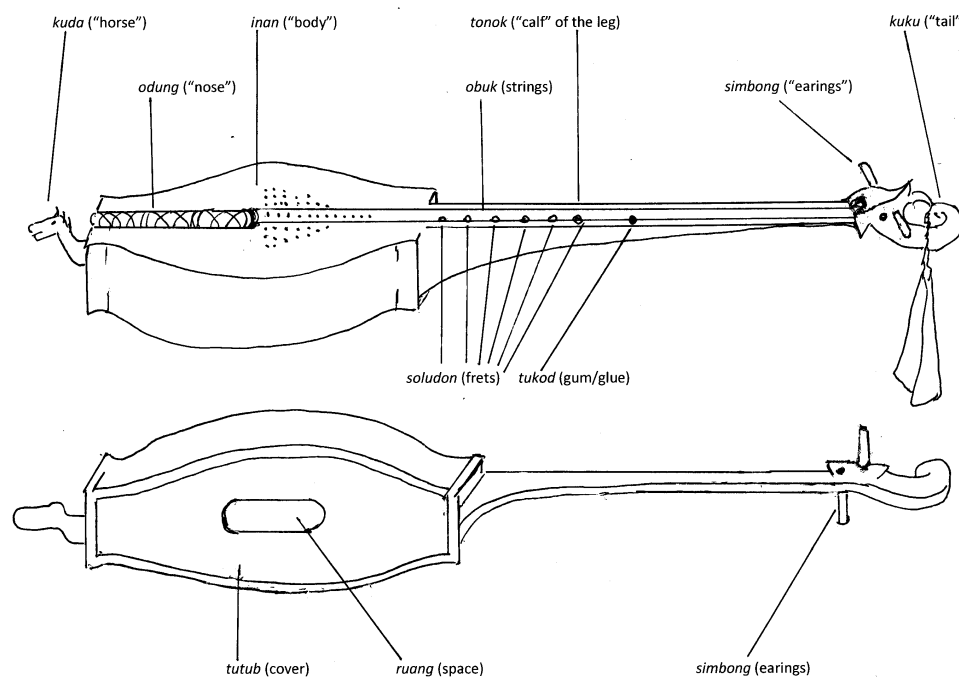


Figure 14. The structure of Liput’s *gagayan* (Source: Jacqueline Pugh-Kitingan, 30 November 2020)

Essentially the same terminology for the parts of their instruments was used by the late Reja bin Ambayang of Kg. Dungang and the late KK Lintar bin Ugau (then both in their late 50s) whom I recorded playing their *gagayan* duet at Kg. Tutu Solupuh in January 1996. Reja and Lintar, however, used the term *kinuda* for the pegbox and distinguished it from the *kuku*. The strings of their *gagayan* were also made from wire, but Lintar explained that in former times both strings were made from *giman*. Guitar wire has a louder, more brassy sound than *giman* root, and is more durable.

*Gagayan* performance was traditionally regarded as a highly esteemed art form, and was played in secular social contexts. The music produced was usually a free imitation of old traditional songs. These may be discerned from the recorded performances, but the melodic notation of *batangkung* defies detailed transcription. The instruments are deep-sounding, very loud, and each performer has his own particular tuning that produces a combined discordant texture in the duet. Figure 15 shows two recurring rhythmic motifs from the performance by Liput and Tombung. Strident variations of the first motif, alternated with overlapping triplet-like figures of the second. As in Reja’s and Lintar’s duet, the sounding of the two instruments was not always synchronous. Some passages are drowned out, especially in episodes with rapid ornamental motifs that are not played together in time. The lower-pitched strings also dominate the timbre, making frequency differentiation difficult.

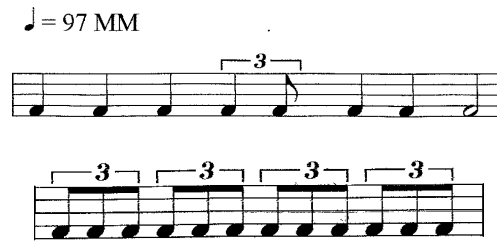


Figure 15. Recurring motifs in *gagayan* music

### Relationships with Boat Lutes from Surrounding Areas

The Tobilung Dusun who inhabit the hilly area between northern Kota Belud and Kota Marudu Districts also play *sundatang*, as do the west coastal Kadazan of Penampang and Kinarut. The Kimaragang Dusun of Kota Marudu formerly played *sundatang*, but it appears that this instrument is no longer extant. These instruments were said to resemble the *sundatang* of the Rungus, being hollowed out from the back of the soundbox. The Tobilung instrument, however, had cane frets stuck flat against its neck and body. This instrument today has been modified with a guitar pegbox and six strings, of which four sound sympathetically below the two main strings. The rare coastal Kadazan *sundatang* has frets mounted in beeswax and tuning pegs inserted perpendicular to the pegbox. The *sundatang* is also found in a couple of villages among the Dusun in Ranau District in the interior of Sabah to the northeast of Tambunan District (Johan Adam Kitingan, personal communication, 30 June 2020).

The Labuk Dusun (also known as Labuk-Kinabatangan Kadazan or Eastern Kadazan) of Beluran District also have a lute called *sundatang*. This instrument, however, resembles a long *gambus* lute with a large bulbous soundbox that is hollowed out from the front and covered with thin wood or goat skin. It has six strings. Although this instrument indicates diffusion from contact with east coastal Muslim communities, it plays music in the same social contexts as the older *sundatang* instruments of Sabah (Alut, 1991, pp. 26,102).

Apart from the Dusunic instruments discussed above, boat lutes were also found among other cultures in Sabah. The Iranun of Kota Belud District (formerly Tempasuk) on the west coast of Sabah, a former maritime people of the Danao Language Family, also played a *kudiapi* that is no longer extant but is said to have resembled some of the Maranao *kutiyapi* from Mindanao (Brandeis, 2012; 2019, pp. 27-28). The Iranun and Maranao speak related Danao languages and have close historical connections. As mentioned above, Sabah's boat lutes are quite different from the *sape* types of Sarawak and Kalimantan further south in Borneo that have short necks, larger rectangular bodies and varying numbers of strings (Matusky, 1986, pp. 188-189; Matusky & Tan, 2017, pp. 286-287). It is possible that Dusunic lutes in Sabah may have either developed through coastal trade with the Iranun, or that the Iranun may have acquired indigenous lutes from Dusunic peoples in northern Borneo and spread them through trade into the wider southeast Asian region.

It is not known when the Iranun first settled in northern Borneo, but they were already present on the coast of Tempasuk before the arrival of Maranao refugees fleeing volcanic eruptions in Mindanao from before 1667 and around 1765 (Warren, 1981, pp. 149-150; 2002, pp. 45-47). Linguistically, Sabah Iranun predates Maranao (McKaughan, 1996; Smith, 2011, pp. 5-6). In previous centuries, Sabah's Iranun were metallurgists and major maritime traders of slaves, brassware, textiles, horses and other goods across southeast Asia under the Brunei Empire and later (Gowing, 1987, pp. 150-160; Pugh-Kitingan, 2007).

From the 15<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Brunei Empire controlled Sarawak, all the coastal areas of northern Borneo (today's Sabah), and parts of the Philippines as far north as Manila (Bala, 2005; Warren 2002, p. 20, pp. 33-34). The Iranun of northern Borneo formed important linkages between Brunei other peoples throughout the region. In Sabah, Iranun trading posts were located at river mouths along the west coast from Mengkabong in Tuaran up to Indarasan in Kudat and also at Marudu Bay in northern Sabah, as well as at Tungku in today's Lahad Datu District on the east coast (Warren, 2002, pp. 126-137).

The Iranun have historical trading relationships with the Rungus of Kudat, the Kimaragang of Kota Marudu, the Dusun Tindal of Kota Belud (a branch of the Kadazan Dusun), and also the Lotud of Tuaran. Iranun culture strongly influenced that of the west coast Bajau, a member of the Sama' Family of Languages who were traditionally fishing communities along the shores of Tuaran and Kota Belud Districts. It appears, however, that the Bajau did not play boat lutes.

Dusunic peoples from the interior also periodically trekked over the Crocker Range to the west coast to trade their rice for salt with coastal communities, as well as gongs, brassware, woven headcloths and ceremonial textiles. Although they differ in culture and religion, individual Iranun traders sometimes formed dyadic "blood brother" relationships with their longstanding indigenous trading partners, especially among the Rungus and Lotud. The Rungus also acquired a rare embroidered headcloth through trade with the Suluk (Taosug) from the Philippines.

Hence, it is possible that certain kinds of long-necked boat lutes may have either spread from northern Borneo into the southern Philippines, or come into Sabah's indigenous cultures through sporadic maritime trade. Brandeis (2019, p. 49) states that the small box-like *sundatang* of the Rungus is the origin of the large box-like boat lutes of the Pala'wan of Palawan and the Higaonon of Mindanao. He attributes the presence of such lutes among this in the Philippines to trade under the Brunei Empire. During a visit to Puerto Princesa, Palawan in 1995, I saw many such boat lutes for sale in handicraft shops. They closely resembled the Rungus *sundatang*, but came in three sizes. The smallest from base to pegbox was the same size as the Rungus instrument, while the largest was up to a metre longer than the height of a man.

It should also be noted that the Bonggi, the indigenous people of Banggi and Balambangan Islands to the north of the Kudat Peninsula, speak a language of from Palawan Family (*Ethnologue*<sup>®</sup>, 2016). It is not known whether they played boat lutes, however, nor how much traditional contact they had with the Rungus.

Brandeis' extensive research on the Philippine boat lutes has identified and mapped 23 different types played in 37 indigenous cultures, encompassing the islands of Mindanao, Palawan and parts of Mindoro (Brandeis, 2017, pp. 36-37; 2019, pp. 17-24). Apart from connections with the Rungus *sundatang*, there are other structural similarities and differences between the Philippine boat lutes and the Sabah instruments. Brandeis notes that Philippine boat lutes are each carved from a solid log of wood and the body is usually hollowed out from the back then covered with a thin wooden board. This single board is often tied to the body by wire or string, or just nailed or glued, and has a sound hole or a pattern of little holes. Some lutes have carved animal heads at the ends of their bodies. Most have two strings—the fretted one plays melodies and is held fixed by a "zero fret", while the unfretted one plays a drone and provides rhythmic emphasis in the music. The two tuning pegs are round sticks with handles, inserted laterally into both sides of the pegbox. The Manobo lute, however, has obliquely-inserted tuning pegs that cross inside the pegbox. The stringholder on a Mindanao lute is very long and also functions as a bridge. On large boat lutes, the frets are chips of wood mounted in gum under the melodic string, and some frets may be glued to the front of the soundbox. The two strings are usually of the same material, either metal or formerly root. Mindanao lutes have a cut-out nut section at the peg box to support the strings (Brandeis, 2012, pp. 6-7; 2019, p. 8-10).

The Rungus *sundatang* and Lotud *gagayan* are somewhat similar to these, except that they have two layers of wood covering their backs. The two Rungus *sundatang* back boards are usually stitched at one end and glued to the body, while the *gagayan* resonance boards are both glued into the back of the instrument. The *gagayan* also has a horse or deer head carved at the end of the body and a carving of the animal's tail at the end of the pegbox. Horses are not normally part of Lotud culture, but they were significant in Iranun culture. The body shape of the *gagayan*, however, is different from most of the Philippine boat lutes. Both the Rungus *sundatang* and *gagayan* have somewhat box-like soundboxes, but the *gagayan* sides are more rounded than the Rungus *sundatang*. Apart from the Pala'wan and Higaonon instruments observed by Brandeis, it appears that the Philippine instruments lack the distinct shape demarcation between body and neck of the Sabah lutes (Rungus *kazab* or "shoulders").

Like the Philippine instruments, however, both lutes have two metal strings, and tuning pegs inserted at right angles to their pegboxes. The stringholders on the Rungus *sundatang* and Lotud

*gagayan* each function as a bridge. The frets of the Rungus instrument are mounted vertically in beeswax, and the fretted string is held in place by a lump of beeswax (a “zero fret” in Brandeis’ terminology). The strings on a Rungus *sundatang* enter the top of the neck through two small holes in the wood, and exit to be wound by the tuning pegs. The *gagayan*, however, has a cut-out nut section at the base of the pegbox that Brandeis noted on Philippine lutes, and the strings are turned for tuning inside the pegbox.

The Tambunan *sundatang* shares some similarities with these other lutes. The body, however, is hollowed out from the front. The instrument has a bridge on the front face, a short stringholder, two strings of different materials and diagonally inserted tuning pegs. The holes in its pegbox are unconnected, and the tuning pegs do not actually cross each other. During performance, it is held in an upright position, unlike the other two types that are held horizontally.

There are some similarities, however, in performance technique between the Sabah lutes and Philippine boat lutes. It appears that most of the Philippine instruments are held somewhat horizontally, like the Rungus *sundatang* and *gagayan*. While most Philippine instruments are played with a plectrum tied to the index finger of the strumming hand, the Pala’wan, Agusan Monobo and Subanen use their bare fingers (Brandeis, 2019, p. 61), as do the Kadazan Dusun and Lotud musicians. The Pala’wan use the fingernail of little finger of their right hand to pluck the fretted string (Ibid.) like the Rungus. In some Philippine performances, the musician may hit their thumb on the front of the body to copy the sound of a drum (Ibid.). As mentioned above, Rungus musicians also do this to imitate the *tontog* drum in pieces based on their gong ensemble music. These characteristics also support Brandeis belief that the Rungus *sundatang* is probably the origin of the Pala’wan and Higaonon instruments.

In terms of performance practice, the Philippine instruments are sometimes played solo for personal entertainment, while some may accompany dancing and others may be played with a tube zither or a drum (Brandeis, 2019, pp. 64-67). As shown above, the *sundatang* from Tambunan formerly accompanied the *magarang sundatang* dance and was occasionally played with a hand-held *koritikon* gong. *Gagayan*, however, were usually played in duet, while the Rungus *sundatang* was always solo.

Boat lutes are also played in Central and South Sulawesi. With the recent diaspora of Bugis people from southern Sulawesi into Tawau, especially from the 1960s onwards, the Bugis *kecapi* has come to Sabah. Like other boat lutes, this instrument has a long sleek body and two strings, but has a short neck. It is comparatively small and is held more or less horizontally, but its neck can point left or right according to preference, and is played with a plectrum. It is often performed in a group of two or three. It has become a significant feature of Bugis culture in Sabah, and is played solo or with other instruments during important social events (Daud, 2011).

### Current Status of the Sabah Genres

In Tambunan, Kimoi has continued to perform her father’s *sundatang* over the years. Recently while she was away on a short trip, however, some children playing around in her house found the *sundatang*, broke the strings, smashing its face, and losing its bridge and one of its tuning pegs in the process. This has caused considerable distress for Kimoi, and attempts are underway to repair the instrument.

Unsud passed away some decades ago. His brother Muja faithfully kept the old *sundatang* that was handed down over generations in their family, but the instrument is no longer played. It is believed that there is a spirit guarding the instrument, due to its great age.<sup>7</sup>

Meanwhile further south in Tambunan, Thadius Yongut, a renowned *sompoton* (mouthorgan) and *suling* (mouth flute) performer from Kg. Tikolod, has slowly been making a *sundatang* and intends to learn to play the instrument. The body of this instrument is also cut out from the front, like those of Unsud and Kimoi. Hopefully he will pass on this skill to younger generations.

The Rungus *sundatang* is still extant and continues to be played by middle-aged and elderly men as a pastime in many longhouses. The comparative continuing popularity of the *sundatang* among the Rungus may be largely due to the homestay tourism that has developed in several villages among the Rungus of Kudat, such as Kg. Bavanggazo where tourists come to experience Rungus culture and music.

Lotud *gagayan* performance was very common up to fifteen years ago, but today most performers have passed away. Only one very elderly musician remains, and he no longer plays the instrument. The rapid decline of the *gagayan* is largely due to a lack of interest by younger men, and

the invasive presence of new digital media among youths, especially cellular telephones with games. Younger men who often work away from their home villages, lack the time and patience to develop the skill of *gagayan* performance.

### Conclusions

Sabah's long-necked boat lutes are traditionally found in many Dusunic cultures, and constitute skilled artistic genres, being played in non-ritual contexts for entertainment. All three instruments discussed above are made from varieties of jackfruit tree wood, and have two strings with the lower-pitched string on the viewer's left and the higher-pitched one, that is affixed to the neck and has frets below, on the viewer's right.

The *sundatang* from Tambunan differs markedly from the other two boat lutes examined here. During construction, its body is hollowed out from the front, not the back like the other instruments. It has a bridge on the front of its body, and its frets are pieces of thin cane affixed flat against its neck. Its two strings are made from different materials—the deeper sounding one from wire (formerly brass), and the higher pitched from nylon string (formerly *giman* root). The tuning pegs are inserted into its pegbox at an angle, rather than at right angles to the neck like the other instruments. During performance, this *sundatang* is held upright, with its “tail” supported under the musician's right thigh. In Tambunan, both men and women can be *sundatang* players. This suggests that the *sundatang* genre from Tambunan represents a different tradition from those of the other two lutes, one that developed relatively independently in the interior of Sabah.

The Rungus *sundatang* and the Lotud *gagayan* are normally men's instruments. They are each constructed with the back hollowed out and covered by two layers of thin wood. While the *gagayan* has small cane frets stuck against its neck, the Rungus *sundatang* has its bamboo frets inserted vertically into mounds of beeswax under the higher-pitched string. The Rungus *sundatang* has a somewhat box-like body, while the *gagayan* has more rounded sides. Both of these lutes are held horizontally in the lap like a guitar unlike the Tambunan instrument. Although the structures of their pegboxes are different, both lutes have their tuning pegs inserted at right angles to the pegboxes.

All three of the instruments discussed here use some anthropomorphic body parts terminology in labelling sections of their instruments. The two *sundatang* instruments identify the pegbox with head or parts of the head, and the base of the soundbox with a tail or buttocks. The *gagayan*, however, has the carving of the head of a deer or a horse at the end of its soundbox with the corresponding zoomorphic tail carved at the end of the pegbox. The neck is described as a calf (leg), however, and the tuning pegs as a woman's earrings.

It is clear from the indigenous nomenclature for the parts of these instruments that the western organological description of these lutes as “boat lutes” is culturally invalid. From indigenous perspectives, these lutes have nothing to do with boats. For the Kadazan Dusun and Rungus, the lutes are akin to a human form with the pegbox as the head, and the soundbox as the body. Apart from the designation of tuning pegs as “earrings”, the Lotud *gagayan* presents a reversal of this form with the carved animal head at the end of the body, its carved tail and the end of the pegbox and a leg between body and tail. The three instruments vary in terms of their sound dynamics. The Rungus *sundatang* is very soft, while the *gagayan* is very loud especially when played in pairs.

The origins of these lutes in northern Borneo can only be postulated here. Clearly, they are part of a regional complex of such instruments throughout Borneo, the southern Philippines and parts of Sulawesi. The Sabah instruments, however, are structurally very different from the *sape* types of Sarawak and Kalimantan as documented by Matusky, and even the Bugis *kecapi* from Tawau, Sabah, studied by Daud (2011).

The age of Unsud's *sundatang*, suggests that distinctive boat lutes were being made and played hundreds of years ago in Tambunan which was then a remote interior area of Sabah. Brandeis recognises the Rungus *sundatang* as the forebear of similar box-shaped lutes in Palawan and Mindanao. On the other hand, the horse or deer head carvings on the *gagayan* and the cut-out nut section on its pegbox are somewhat similar to those on boat lutes documented in by Brandeis in the Philippines. It is possible that the local Lotud *gagayan* may have developed under influence from Philippine boat lutes

through coastal trade generations ago. But this is speculative and this requires more research. It appears, nevertheless, that northern Borneo may have been a source for diverse kinds of long-necked boat lutes from different cultures in previous eras.

More research needs to be done specifically on long-necked lutes from other Dusunic groups, and any such instruments among other indigenous cultures in Sabah. It would also be providential if any surviving Iranun *kudiapi* from Sabah was found, so that structural linkages to the either the Sabah lutes, such as *gagayan*, or else to the Maranao *kutiyapi* of the Philippines could be determined. With the sudden cessation of *gagayan* performance in Tuaran and the gradual decline of the *sundatang* from Tambunan, these worthwhile performance traditions will become lost as new digital media takes the place of traditional entertainment.

### Acknowledgements

I wish to acknowledge all the *sundatang* and *gagayan* performers who have allowed me to record their music over the years. I also want to thank Dr. Paul Porodong, Research Associate, Institute of Borneo Studies, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS) for checking my spelling of Rungus terms and providing information about *sundatang* players from Kudat, Miss Judeth John Baptist, Operations Manager, Koisaan Cultural Village, Penampang, and also En. Frankie (son-in-law of Madam Kimoi) for checking my *gagayan* information and spelling of Lotud terms, and from Tambunan, En. Julius Kulip, Ethnobotanist, Institute of Tropical Biology and Conservation and Fellow of Borneo Institute for Indigenous Studies (BorIIS), Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS), for botanical information, my nephew Johan Adam Kitingan, and my husband Laurentius Kitingan for checking my information on the Kadazan Dusun *sundatang*. I also wish to thank Dr. Oliver Valentine Eboy, Senior Lecturer, Geography Programme, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, and Research Fellow, BorIIS, UMS, for preparing the map, and especially Miss Fifiana Christin Morie for taking the time to convert my musical transcriptions into digital format.

### Glossary

- atob* – “cover” (Rungus), the outer layer of wood that covers the of the inner back layer of a Rungus *sundatang* soundbox
- batangkung* – a duet by Lotud *gagayan* performers
- binanjou* – “deer” (Lotud), the deer-head carving at the end of a *gagayan* soundbox
- biningkoko* – decorative carving at the end of a Rungus *sundatang* pegbox
- bobolizan* – priestess of the traditional Rungus religion
- bugang* – a legendary eagle-like monster that attacked people in longhouses on the Tambunan plain
- busul* – “buttocks” (Rungus), the base of the soundbox of a Rungus *sundatang*
- gagayan* - the large long-necked lute played by Lotud men
- gambus* – a multi-stringed, pear-shaped lute of middle eastern origins, found in certain coastal communities of Sabah
- giman* – a plant with long roots traditionally used for the fretted string on a Kadazan Dusun *sundatang*, and also formerly used for *gagayan* strings
- hontol* – brass or wire strings on a Rungus *sundatang*
- inan* – “body” (Rungus; Lotud), the soundbox on a boat lute
- kangkab* – “chest”, the front of a Rungus *sundatang*
- kawot* – brass or metal wire (Kadazan Dusun) used for the unfretted string on a *sundatang*
- kazab* – “shoulders” (Rungus), the top of the soundbox of a Rungus *sundatang*, around its neck
- kecapi* – the boat lute played among the Bugis community
- kucapi* – a common term for boat lutes in the Philippines
- kuda* – “horse” (Lotud; Malay), the horse-head carving at the end of a Lotud *gagayan*
- kudiapi* – the boat lute formerly played among the Iranun of Sabah; no longer extant
- kuku* – “tail” (Lotud), the carving of an animal’s tail at the end of a *gagayan* pegbox
- kulipapo* – “softwood” (Lotud)
- kutiyapi* – the boat lute of the Maranao of Mindanao



- lapazan* – the ‘fixed fret’ or piece of *sopinit* that fastens the melodic string on a Rungus *sundatang* to its neck
- likud* – “back” (Rungus), the inner back cover of a Rungus *sundatang*
- lobu* – tiny resonance holes on the front of a Lotud *gagayan*
- magarang* – Kadazan Dusun dance from Tambunan
- magarang sundatang* – rare sedate dance by a couple accompanied by the *sundatang* from Tambunan
- mongigol* – general term for Rungus dancing
- nangko* – common jackfruit tree (*Artocarpus integer*; Malay *nangka*)
- obuk* – the strings on a *gagayan*
- odung* – “nose” (Lotud), the string-holder on the front of a *gagayan*
- pinonodu* – “wedge” (Kadazan Dusun), the bridge on the front of a *sundatang*
- pongigalan* – music played by the Rungus gong ensemble
- pongiruson* – “the place that you tune” (Kadazan Dusun) for tuning pegs on a *sundatang*
- pongisusan* – “the place that you turn” (Kadazan Dusun) another term for tuning pegs on a *sundatang*
- pongombitan* – “the place that you pluck” (Kadazan Dusun) for the strings on a *sundatang*
- randangan* – “handle”, the neck on a Rungus *sundatang*
- rinait* – sacred ritual poetry memorised and chanted by priestesses in traditional Dusunic religions
- ruang* – “space” (Lotud), the large resonance hole in the outer layer of the back cover of a *gagayan* soundbox
- sape* – the long rectangular boat lute of Sarawak and Kalimantan; also called *sapeh*, *sampe*, according to dialect and location
- simbong* – “earrings” (Lotud), the tuning pegs on a *gagayan*
- soludon* – the frets on a Lotud *gagayan*
- sopihut* – beeswax (Tambunan dialect, Kadazan Dusun) also called *sopilut*, *sopinit* in other dialects and languages
- sopogandangan* – gong ensemble from Tambunan consisting of a hand-held gong, and single-headed drum and seven hanging gongs of various types
- sundatang* – different kinds of double-stringed boat lutes played in various Dusunic cultures in Sabah
- tansi* – nylon fishing line used nowadays for the fretted string on a *sundatang* from Tambunan (also called *tangsi*)
- tikiu* – “tail” (Kadazan Dusun), the support at the base of a *sundatang* from Tambunan
- timadang* – a forest jackfruit tree (*Artocarpus odoratissimus*; Malay *tarap*) among the Kadazan Dusun
- timbok* – a lady’s bun (Kadazan Dusun) used for the pegbox on a *sundatang* from Tambunan
- tinan* – “body” (Kadazan Dusun), the soundbox of a *sundatang*
- tinggayan* – “the place that you hold” (Kadazan Dusun), the neck of a *sundatang* from Tambunan
- tinondot* – gong ensemble music from Tambunan
- todung* – “nose” (Kadazan Dusun, and also Rungus), the stringholder on the front of a *sundatang*
- tohinggo* – “ears” (Rungus), refers to the tuning pegs on a Rungus *sundatang*
- tonok* – “calf of a leg” (Lotud), referring to the neck of a *gagayan*
- tontog* – single-headed drum played in the Rungus gong ensemble
- tuhu* – “head” (Kadazan Dusun) also used for the pegbox on a *sundatang* from Tambunan
- tukod* – “gum/glue” (Lotud), referring to the beeswax that sticks the *gagayan* melodic string to its neck
- turali* – noseflute played in Dusunic cultures
- tutub* – “cover” (Lotud), two layers of thin wood that cover the back of a *gagayan* soundbox
- ulob* – frets on a Rungus *sundatang*, mounted in beeswax under the melodic string
- ulu* – “head” (Rungus), the pegbox on a *sundatang*
- wiriwiri* – decorative cloth or tassel hung from the end of a *gagayan* pegbox

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> This article has been adapted and updated from my paper entitled “The Long-Necked Lutes *Sundatang* and *Gagayan* of Sabah and Their Performance: Disappearing Traditions” that was presented at the 12<sup>th</sup> International Borneo Research Council Conference that was held at Universiti Malaysian Sabah from 5-7 July 2014.

<sup>2</sup> Sabah has approximately 60 Austronesian languages of whom around 33 are indigenous to the state itself and mostly comprise the indigenous Dusunic, Paitanic and Murutic Families of Languages. Previously, I have sometimes used the ambiguous term isoglot to describe speakers of these indigenous languages. Since some scholars apply this to dialects, however, I no longer the term for distinct language groups.

<sup>3</sup> Kg. is an abbreviation of *Kampung* (village), the official designation of a village in Malaysia.

<sup>4</sup> I have deliberately avoided using the term “tail piece” and instead have used “stringholder” for the ‘nose’ on the front of these lutes, so as to avoid confusion with the *tikiu* or “tail” at the base of the body of a *sundatang* from Tambunan and the *kuku* or “tail” carved at the end of the pegbox of a Lotud *gagayan*.

<sup>5</sup> When I originally recorded Kimoi playing *sundatang* in 1985, I was not yet familiar with the nuances of the Dusun language nor of the local usage of the Sabah Malay dialect. Hence, some of these terms have been corrected here from my earlier publications (Pugh-Kitingan, 1988, p. 42; 2003, 29). Recently, I asked her the name for the neck of the instrument, but she could not recall it.

<sup>6</sup> In ancient times, the Dusun of today’s Tambunan District (that takes its name from the Tambunan dialect spoken in Kg. Karanaan and nearby villages) lived in longhouses. Kg. Karanaan itself had three longhouses. According to legend, at one time this village was attacked by a large, eagle-like, monster who regularly flew into a longhouse at night through the open space between the eaves and the wall, and killed or carried off sleeping children and small adults to eat. People say streaks of flames were emitted from its tail as it flew. One night, Unsud’s ancestor who had made the *sundatang* hid near the wall where the creature flew in under the eaves, holding the instrument. As the creature entered, he clubbed it to death with the *sundatang*, thus saving the people from being killed. There are variations on this legend today throughout villages in Tambunan District.

<sup>7</sup> Unsud said that whenever he took out the instrument to show and play for visitors, it would suddenly rain heavily. Indeed, my recording of his performance was spoiled by heavy rain on the zinc roof of his bamboo house. Yet, I also observed him carrying the *sundatang* to local *Kaamatan* harvest festivals during fine weather

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