

# THE SABAH ORAL LITERATURE PROJECT: THEORY AND METHODS

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and

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Only by knowing how peoples in other times, other places, and other cultures have experienced and interpreted the human condition can we truly understand what it means to be human and our place in the universe.

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## Prologue\*

The original research among the Rungus was by my wife, Laura, and myself from 1959-1963. The Rungus are a Dusunic speaking people of the Kudat District of Sabah, Malaysia. At the time of this research, they were longhouse dwelling, swidden agriculturalists practicing their traditional religion. They raised hill rice, maize, and cassava and domestic animals including pigs, chickens and water buffalo. They were the most traditional Dusunic speakers in all of Sabah. During this period of research I focused on the social structure of the Rungus, the language, and the swidden economy. Laura focused on the language and the religion.

As the traditional religion and language of the Rungus people was exceedingly complex, we had always planned to return to them to continue our study after I had completed writing my Ph.D. dissertation.

However, by 1966 the new Chief Minister of Sabah, Malaysia, prohibited all anthropological research. In 1980 we tried to return for a short visit but we were turned away at the airport. I had been declared *persona non grata*.

In 1985 I met Datuk Joseph Pairin Kitingan at a conference in Boston and told him of our plight. He assured me that when he became the Chief Minister he would have my status as *persona non grata* removed.

In 1986 we then returned to continue our study. But much to our surprise, during that period of 23 years, Rungus society had had major changes.

Christianity had largely replaced the original religion. One of the major genres of oral literature was the religious performance for illness, for success in agricultural activities, and for fecundity of the village and families. Previously, these were preformed by priestesses who were also spirit mediums. These ritual ceremonies were by then seldom being held.

In the past, when there was a death, friends and neighbors would come and spend the night sitting with the body of the deceased retelling myths and legends to keep people awake and to hold the predatory spirits at bay. This was seldom done any longer.

The old adat of marriage had largely disappeared. Where before the Rungus culture stated that extramarital sexual relations were prohibited, there were now unmarried women with children and some Rungus women had become prostitutes. In 1987 one headman asked if he could see our data on the old adat of marriage and weddings as he could not remember what the rules were.

The Rungus language was also being rapidly eroded and lost. In some families, children were now being talked to in Malay as infants so that they would be prepared for their schooling. Most of the young men and women had had a primary education and many had some experience with secondary education.

## The Traditional Oral Literature of the Rungus and Related Ethnic Groups

Every society, in its own unique way, responds to the challenges of the human spirit through oral literature in its various forms. This literature arises from universal creative impulses as refracted through a particular culture. And by it the meaning of life is organized, the uses of the environment and how to live in it is explained, the causes of human suffering are justified and its mitigation suggested, the spirit world is populated and its relationship to humans detailed, the reasons for social injustice are argued, warfare and its reasons are glorified, how the nature of love, beauty and companionship is experienced, and how one is to be in the world.

Thus, the traditional oral literature of the Rungus and the related Dusunic speakers has developed over long periods of time to interpret and explain the human condition as viewed through their cultural window, to symbolize their experience with the environment, and their place in history. Such literature gives us insight into the human condition during those times in human history when small communities existed on subsistence agriculture and came into conflict with other such societies. It has great aesthetic value, resonating with all of us, as it deals with the universal challenges of the human spirit.

As a result, there is a vast inventory of poetry, prayers, songs, hymns, and word pictures of the life that they have led, their relation with the absolute, and with each other. This accumulation of oral literature, winnowed through the ages, is exquisite in beauty and depth of wisdom. It provides a unique portrait of life as lived in a different time and place by individuals who share the human spirit with us. To me and Laura, my wife, the loss of this oral literature would impoverish all of us. This was our reason for establishing the Sabah Oral Literature Project.

The Rungus oral literature thus encodes the basic cultural themes, values, and propositions of the society. And it contains the creative voice of the people. The poetry of the ritual texts is exquisitely beautiful. This volatile library will disappear shortly to the great loss to the world of cultural data and art forms which have considerable aesthetic value. Thus, there was and is considerable urgency in collecting as much of the traditional oral literature as possible to develop a full understanding of the Rungus way of life and to prevent this well developed linguistic art from being lost forever. These concerns led to the creation of the Sabah Oral Literature Project to collect not only the oral literature of the Rungus but also that of other related Dusunic speakers in the Kudat District.

This oral literature of the Rungus is their major form of artistic expression. As a result, it contains a number of genres. The most aesthetic is the rina'it.

Ritual Texts - *rina'it*

Throughout the Kudat District among the Rungus and related ethnolinguistic groups there is a chanted form of poetry called *rina'it*. We will focus on the Rungus forms here as our collection is most complete for the Rungus. *Rina'it* carries the meaning from its stem */ra'it/* - to speak, and can be translated as "that which was spoken". These chanted poems are lengthy and are performed by priestesses. They are used for curing illness and to renew goodwill with the gods and spirits. In both instances they are accompanied by the sacrifice of multiple pigs.



Priestess/Spirit Medium in Trance Dance

Priestess/Spirit Medium at an Offering to the Spirits of the Domestic Family of a Pig, which she kicks to mark it.



These epic poems, the *rina'it*, are formed in couplets. The first line is in the standard vocabulary, and the second line, reiterating the first, is in a ritual lexicon. For example:

Interlinear Translation

**Sizong kad Morolongoi<sup>1</sup>**

Gongo kad Morologung  
Flute note speaks Morolongoi  
Flute note speaks Morologung

**Asi ku di kiaka**

**Ara ku di kiudung**

Salute my to older sibling  
Greetings my to elder brother

Free Translation

In a voice like the clear note  
of the nose flute spoke  
Murmuring Water.

With musical tones spoke  
Falling Water.

My salutations, older sibling.  
My greetings to elder brother.

These couplets appear most frequently in seven syllables although there are ritual texts in which the couplets have eight syllables.

As Fox (1971, 1988, 2005) points out, this form of semantic parallelism is common to the Austronesian languages. Yet the cultural content of the texts are reflective only of the specific culture where they were created. <sup>2</sup>

An epic ritual text may take up to two or three days to perform and are chanted by priestesses. And there are sections that are sung in chorus by female attendants with a

beautiful melody. The music of the chants can be played on the nose flute and it is often done for entertainment. The experience of the performance of these ritual texts is extraordinarily moving.



Young Priestesses/Spirit Mediums Chanting over a Pig Sacrifice at an Altar Situated Outside the Longhouse Apartment.

Priestess/Spirit Medium Chanting a Ritual Text in a Longhouse Apartment for the Spirits of Its Domestic Family.



For illness, a priestess (acting as a spirit medium), will consult with her spirit familiar to find out what spirits have been offended by the sick person and have stolen his or her soul. This then determines which of the poetic chants will be used. Has the individual offended the various spirits that dwell in the longhouse apartment? Or have they offended the spirits that inhabit the sacred groves found throughout the village (see Appell 1997, n.d.)? Illness is thus perceived as the loss of one of the individual's souls to an inhabitant of the spirit world who punishes or tortures the soul to retaliate for the ritual delict.



Priestess/Spirit Medium Chanting Over a Pig Offering to the Spirits in the Upper World being held on a platform on the roof of the longhouse.

The Priestess/Spirit Medium on the Elevated Platform is accompanied by a Young Man with a Spear or Blowpipe to Protect the Priestess.



These epic chants are used in marriage ceremonies to sanctify the marriage and prevent the ill effects from a possible incestuous union. These chants in various forms are also used to renew the vitality and fertility of the domestic family, its fields, its domestic animals and to increase its success in accumulating items of wealth such as gongs, jars, and brassware. Also there are texts used to renew the fertility of the village as it is perceived to decline over time following a ceremony.



A Rungus Man performing a sacrifice of chickens to the rice spirits of the domestic family in their swidden. This is performed in front of the ritual plot where the rice spirits reside during the agricultural year.

In the epic poems the priestess recounts her travels to the lands of the spirits and gods in order to negotiate with them. Alternatively, she may recruit a spirit helper to travel throughout the spirit world. In either case, on arrival at the abode of a spirit or god, the priestess or spirit helpers negotiate with those spirits who have caused illness to return the lost souls in exchange for pigs. For those epic poems that are restorative in nature, the priestess or the spirit helper goes to those spirits and gods who can bring back the fertility of the family and village with the offering of a pig or pigs to establish goodwill between the spirits and the family or village. These epic poems are thus the narrative of the travels of the spirit helper or spirit familiar and the meeting up with the various spirits, the negotiations entered into and even a description of the spirits' abodes and personae.

These travel narratives contain a number of repetitive phrases that indicate a meeting with a spirit or a travel on to another spirit. For example, when the priestess greets a spirit the standard phrase is:

**Asi ku di komburongo**  
**Ara ku di Rinokizan**

**My Greetings to you Komburongo**  
My salutations to you Spirit of the Sweet  
Flag

When a spirit answers there is always a couplet indicating the beauty of the voice:

<b>Sizong ka dilo sumandak</b>	With a voice like the clear first note of the nose flute, the Spirit maiden (speaks)
<b>Gongo ka dilo dinazang</b>	With a flute-like tone, the spirit maiden opens (the conversation)

To indicate the supernatural like qualities of the spirit helper the following phases are used repeatedly:

<b>Mozo pompod di barat</b>	Following the tail of the wind
<b>Milit timpak di ribut</b>	Going on top of the wind
<b>Momozo di goniton</b>	Following the lightening flash
<b>Momulod di podohon</b>	Following the path of the lightening
<b>Monorumbali yaddaw</b>	Crossing over the sun
<b>Mongorivalod runat</b>	Overtaking the path of the day

Another repetitive device is duplicating the list of the family members in each of the different spirit households that are visited.

These formulae in the *rina'it* facilitates memorization of the lengthy texts, as does the use of a series of couplets that are repeated in similar contexts. This provides one explanation of how these texts are memorized and passed on to the next generation of priestesses.

This problem of continuity in oral literature was first addressed by Milman Parry in his study of Yugoslavian epic poetry. He developed the idea of the formulaic character of the diction in oral literature. He compared the forms of formulaic diction found in these texts to those found in the Homeric Epics. He concluded that the Homeric Epics arose originally as oral literature and were not composed as written texts, as we know them today. This conclusion was developed and refined by Albert Lord in his study of oral literature. In essence the formula is a "group of words which is regularly employed under the same metrical conditions to express a given essential idea" (Stolz and Shannon 1976:ix). Examples of these are: "Achilles swift of foot," or "Hector of the flashing helmet," but there are other forms as well, such as the repetition of phrases and whole sequences of lines (Lloyd-Jones 1992:52; also see Foley 1990).

There is also the use of couplets in the ritual poetry which aids memorization. The first line is in the standard language and the second line, amplifying the first, is in an esoteric, ritual lexicon. This use provides a means to enhance memorization. This is similar to what has been reported for the Berawan in Sarawak by Metcalf (1989) and what is found in Sulawesi and Eastern Indonesia (see Fox 1988).

The interesting aspect of the ritual lexicon is that it contains lexemes that are part of the standard lexicon of other languages in Borneo. For example, the longhouse apartment in Rungus is *ongkob*. In the Rungus ritual language it is *lamin*, which is the standard term for longhouse apartment among the Bulusu', who live far away in Kalimantan Timur up river from Tarakan. In 1980-81 we worked with them during the period we were excluded from visiting the Rungus. Other ritual terms that we found part of the standard lexicon of the Bulusu' are:

<u>English</u>	<u>Rungus Std.</u>	<u>Rungus Ritual</u>	<u>Bulusu' Std.</u>
soul	hatod	lingu	lingu
water	va'ig	timog	timog
rice	parai	bilod	bilod
maiden	modsuni	samandak	samandak

The explanation for these lexemes in the ritual language from far away ethnic groups, only distantly related to the Rungus, is far from clear.

The phonemes, the morphemes, the morphology, and the syntax of this ritual language are identical with the standard Rungus language.

#### Other Genres of Oral Literature

Next there are the prayers and exhortations that accompany sacrifices to the rice spirits to bring them to the fields at planting and to send them safely home after the harvest. There are long prayers and sacrifices to appease the spirits that can destroy one's fields and plantings, such as mice, birds, and rust. These are in the form of narratives and do not have the poetic formula of the *rina'it*. These tell of the work of the various agricultural gods and spirits protecting the fields.

There are the historical narratives. These tell of Rungus life and the human condition, of warfare and relations between various groups before the arrival of the British. Then there are the historical narratives of the arrival of the British and how they established their rule. These are extraordinarily interesting and important for the history of Sabah. And they include important information and detail about leading figures both before and after the arrival of the British.

In addition there are narratives about the tragedies and conflicts in the human condition and about the achievements of individuals in overcoming obstacles.

There are the myths and legends that tell how the world was formed, how it was populated, and how it came to be as it is. This includes stories of the flood, how it came about, who survived. These myths and legends also explain how the landscape came into being, and they point out important and symbolically significant topographic features, many with religious connotations. I can remember one old woman pleading with me in 1962 to go to the British and ask them not to destroy the stone figurines of the hunter and his prey

overcome by the flood. These figures were not recognized by the road contractors when they started to build roads in the Kudat District, and of course they were destroyed. They would have been important tourist sights had they not been destroyed.

### Philosophy of The Sabah Oral Literature Project

The philosophy behind establishing the Sabah Oral Literature Project has been to encourage and train local personnel to collect and preserve the oral traditions of their own ethnic group.

This project was also designed to provide a model for the rapid collection and preservation of the oral literature of other regions of Sabah and other areas of the world. It was hoped that this project would demonstrate to local people how they can rapidly move to collect and preserve their oral heritages before they are lost.

In addition to the preservation of this important oral literature, there are certain theoretical questions on the development of oral literatures that we are bringing to the collection: what are the processes by which they are preserved, how are they memorized, how are they passed on from generation to generation, and how are creative modifications made. To answer these questions, we have aimed to get recordings of the same text at different times from the same priestess, with several years intervening. And we have sought priestesses from different villages to record the same texts. This gives us some idea of the variance between priestesses.

### Organization of the Project

It was clear that my wife and I, given our limited time in the field, could not ourselves complete the work of collecting the vast body of oral literature from the various Rungus villages, as well as the related ethnic groups. Second, a local team could do a better job of recording since they would know who were major repositories of oral literature. Furthermore, a local team could also get access to certain texts that would not be available to outsiders because they accompanied rituals that the government had forbidden.

Therefore, during our frequent visits to the Rungus we trained a local team for the collection of oral literature. We also collected a number of texts ourselves as part of the training. Through trial and error the composition of our team evolved to:

- 1) A man who would oversee the project and communicate with us as to its progress. This person also held a permanent job as a government employee.
- 2) A young man who was familiar with recording equipment who would do the actual recording of texts. He also would be the person doing the transcribing of the texts.

- 3) One or two elders to accompany the man doing the recording. These elders provide leads to who controlled the major ritual texts. They also listen to the recording of texts to ensure that the reciter did not leave anything out. Some priestesses thought that by leaving out some verses it would prevent the ritual text from losing its power.

A young man was crucial for the recording and transcribing as women would not travel from village to village as was necessary at that time. Second, we needed a man who had some primary education. Older men had none and had settled into their own yearly agricultural round to support their families.

In addition, four times over the two and a half decades of this project, we have brought different members of this team to our offices here in the states to give them further training. And they in turn helped us with our Rungus Cultural Dictionary. We found out this procedure was extremely productive as here at our office in the States there were few distractions to deep enquiries into certain subjects.

It took several years of hiring different people for the team to settle down as to who would stay with it and do the best job. By the mid 1990s the team had solidified to its current members.

### Field Recording of the Ritual Texts and Other Narratives

Talented and well known priestesses and older men known for their story telling powers were and are being sought out. The ritual chants and hymns (*rina'it*) are particularly beautiful and moving. They recount the work of the gods and the spirits. In these the priestess

approaches the various spirits that have caused illness and negotiate with them to return the souls of the ill to their bodies.

In the beginning, when ceremonies with these ritual texts were being performed, recordings were made of the actual performances to cure the illness and renew the domestic family's goodwill with the gods and spirits. These recordings included the priestess going into trance to communicate with the spirits. While these are important texts, it was found that they were hard to transcribe. This is because there was the usual noise of the longhouse: chickens cackling, hogs grunting, children yelling, gongs playing, etc. Also, the priestess would sometimes have helpers taking a section of the ritual to chant while the major priestess at the same time did another section. Furthermore the priestess would frequently mumble her ritual text (please see photographic section for examples on the difficulty of making recordings of ceremonies). Consequently, recordings then were made of these ritual chants being recited without the singing in the same manner as a priestess would be training an initiate.

This procedure is the current method as in the last decade actual performances have all but ceased. The drawback of this procedure is that the music of the chants is not recorded.

And it is impossible for the priestess to chant these texts as it would call down the very spirits that steal souls and cause illness. Therefore, as this music is copied on nose flutes and native guitars, we have recorded the various musical forms that accompany each different ritual text on these instruments.

But even this procedure of recording the priestess reciting the ritual text without singing it has had its difficulties. Several ritual texts were considered to be so potent that the priestesses would only agree to be recorded in the recently built church.

The recording of other texts such as historical narratives, myths, legends, stories, etc., presented no such problems. Furthermore, we did not have to spend much effort locating those who knew the best version of these. These usually came from men, and they would present themselves to our recording team to be recorded once the project became well known.



Itolina and Mabok listening to their tape recordings in the office of the research station (1962). Itolina, a highly talented Priestess/Spirit Medium, was the major source for Laura W.R. Appell's study of Rungus religion and recordings of texts. Mabok, her husband and a highly skilled farmer, provided recordings of the major religious texts for sacrifices to the rice spirits.

### Equipment used

Until recently, the recording of oral texts was done with a Sony Pro Walkman Portable Cassette tape Recorder with Shur Dynamic Microphone and type II 60 or 90 minute tape cassettes.

There still are villages without power so a battery powered recorder is necessary. Furthermore, we found that the Sony Walkman being rather small was easier to carry on the foot paths to the various villages and was rugged enough to stand the rough handling that it got as well as withstanding the high humidity and temperature. We have had to replace two of these since we began in 1986.

The Sony Cassette Transcriber is the type used in offices for transcribing dictation. It has a foot pedal which permits the individual doing the transcribing to return the tape to several words previously to follow the text. This, however, required power. And so in the beginning, all transcriptions were done at the district headquarters where there was electricity. This was an hour and a half away by bus.

The last two years, we have been using an Olympus LS-10 Linear PCM Recorder with an additional microphone that can be put near the individual being recorded .

The MP-3 recordings are then entered into a computer for transcription. To aid transcription we use a Start-Stop Universal Transcription system 3-pedal USB interface. This permits the transcriber to quickly go back two or three lexemes to review the recording. Recordings are returned to the office by audio CDs.

The collection team also keeps a field journal in which they list the tape number, where the recording is being made, what type of text, who is narrating the text, and the ethnic group of the narrator. This is then collated with the catalog of oral literature collected.

### Payment of Performers

No payment is made for recording myths, legends, historical narratives, word play, songs, life histories, etc.

However, the texts that include ritual chants and hymns (*rina'it*) require payment for the priestess to perform them or to teach them to the next generation of aspiring spirit mediums. These payments usually include ritual items that shield the priestess from harm. We have generally paid these priestesses with beads purchased in the United States. But some priestesses wanted beads and in addition, a small payment of cash.

### Archiving The Recordings

All original tape recording of oral texts are returned to the office here in the United States. These are marked with a red strip and archived in a fireproof filing cabinet. They are copied in two ways: first to a second tape cassette (marked with a green strip) and an audio CD. The second tape cassette is returned to the field team for transcriptions. The reason original tapes are not used in this is that they can be stretched or torn in the machine used for transcriptions. The audio CDs are duplicated and stored in two different buildings to prevent catastrophic loss.

Originally the archiving of recordings was done on audio CDs. But as all recordings degrade over time, these audio CDs are being converted to MP-3 formats and copied on to two separate hard drives to be stored in different locations.

It has been impossible so far to archive any of the oral literature material in Sabah itself. There are no archives there that are capable of giving these materials the proper treatment given the heat and humidity. And certainly in the Rungus area there is no interest in archiving these materials nor are there facilities to do so.

### Transcribing the Tape Recordings and the Digital Recordings

The transcriptions of the texts could not take place until a phonemic alphabet was devised. This was done in our original field work with modifications of it as we worked with the oral literature team. The symbols used were selected and tested to make sure they fit with what the Rungus were getting accustomed to from the Malay language, the official language of the country. However, there were certain phonemes that did not occur or were not recognized in the Malay language. This was particularly the case with the glottal stop. While in the Philippines languages the glottal stop is rendered as /q/, in Borneo it has been rendered as an apostrophe, and we continued to use that symbol, believing that the /q/ would be hard for the Rungus to deal with.

The transcriptions of the texts originally were returned to the office by mail. Now they are returned to us by email. These are entered into our Catalog and are duplicated so that they can be filed in two separate locations.

### Cataloging the Texts Recorded

The collected texts and songs are cataloged according to the social entity that they pertain to as charter, protecting, managing transitions, relieving suffering, providing fecundity:

- 1) Individual Life Passages
- 2) Domestic Family, including assets, domestic animals, swiddens
- 3) Longhouse

- 4) Village
- 5) Sacred Groves
- 6) Singing and Music
- 7) Myths, Legends, Historical Narratives, and Stories
- 8) Miscellaneous Prayers
- 9) Word Games

Each entry of a text or song is coded as to: whether or not its tape has been copied; whether or not it has been transcribed; whether or not it has been entered into the computer; and the status of its translation.

Oral literature has been collected from the following ethnic groups in the Kudat District: Rungus, Nuluw, Kimaragang, and Tobilung. By far the majority of texts have been collected from the Rungus. We currently have archived 245 audio CDs and have inventoried over 1500 different texts. The transcription of these texts is nearing completion and the translation of them is in the early stage. New texts are constantly coming in.

However, the focus has always been with the Rungus, as having worked with them for 50 years we have an intimate understanding of their culture as it was in the 1960s and as it appears in their traditional oral texts.

#### Translation, Exegesis, and the Rungus Cultural Dictionary

The tape recording of texts and their transcriptions is only half the story. Certainly this preserves this important literature. But unless it is translated, commented upon, interpreted, and explained, the work is only half done.

Without this exegesis, the simple translations of these texts lose much of their beauty and power. For example, certain plants are found in the sacred texts, and without further inquiry there would be little understanding of these. But they are indicators of fertile land. A particularly beautiful maiden is described in terms of being so beautiful and translucent that you can see her intestines. Thus, we need the exegesis of metaphors by those who know them to unravel them and explain them so that we can understand their true depth of meaning. And it is important to note that this effort is not just for those strangers to the society. The society's own younger generation also does not understand many of these metaphors, so that in the future, unless we make an exegesis, the next generation will find such texts opaque and inexplicable with a loss of beauty and power.

For example, we have been working with a 55 year-old man who had experienced traditional Rungus culture. Yet with certain texts he does not understand the metaphor, he does not understand what is going on or being said, and even some of the words are an anachronism to him.

Over 13 years ago I wrote that the time is running out on getting the proper exegesis of the ritual texts. And this loss of time has not improved the situation.

Let me give you an example. A young warrior on his way to go out to meet the champion of another village dashes down the longhouse ladder, and knocks head over heels a young maiden, who is at first angry with him but then praises him for his bravery and offers to marry him. The critical aspect of this text which we do not understand is that when she is knocked head over heels the text states that you can see her ceramic bowl. Her pininggan. A *pinggan* is glossed as a plate used for eating. *Pininggan* is a past tense that could be roughly translated as “to have been a plate.” What does this mean? No one knows what this is a metaphor for. One can only imagine, and that would probably be wrong.

In order to do a proper translation and bring to it a full understanding of the metaphorical language, we have been working over the years on a Rungus Cultural Dictionary. This started out as a simple dictionary, but it is now more than that. It includes explanations for words to put them in their cultural context. It explains briefly beliefs, the uses of tools, the rituals that are required for ceremonies, and so forth. The Cultural Dictionary also lists in what ritual texts the gods and spirits appear, their characteristics, and where they live. This enables the translator to be able to enlarge on the translation. I say will, as this work is still far from complete. We are adding to it each year from the oral literature material we have been collecting.

The Rungus Cultural Dictionary we have been building now is in three volumes. It serves a number of functions. As we have noted, the Rungus ritual texts are in couplets, with the first line in the standard lexicon while the second line is in a ritual lexicon. These items from the ritual lexicon are important as they also appear in the standard lexicon as substituted for words that the speaker cannot say because the standard word sounds like the name of his/her parent-in-law. When recording historical texts and other forms of narratives, this can present a problem if there is no list of these ritual terms.

The Cultural Dictionary is arranged on the basis of word roots, with the various forms appearing both in the alphabetization and also under the root. Working out from the root of a lexeme frequently gives greater meaning to translating a word.

### Making the Texts Public

When should the collected texts with translations be made public? In the early stages of our work we made it clear that we would not make public for a generation or two the *rina'it* from certain ceremonies. This was for two reasons. The Rungus were afraid that if the ritual texts accompanying human sacrifice were made public, the government would cause them trouble as these sacrifices were forbidden long ago. Second, priestesses have been paid to perform these ritual texts in various ceremonies and also were paid to teach them to a new group of priestesses. If we published them, we would take away their source of livelihood.

However, now that the social change has resulted in these texts being occasionally if at all performed, that concern has slowly diminished but not completely. There is now the problem of lack of interest by the Rungus themselves in this material. Hopefully in several generations there will be a swing back to interest in their historical roots, and this archive will be of considerable interest to them.

## Conclusion

It is important to make one thing clear. Tape recording this literature is only half the story. While important and critical, just as important is to have someone knowledgeable in the culture from which the oral literature comes to provide the exegesis of it and build a cultural dictionary for that group. The Rungus in this sense are lucky to have had this done for them by my wife and myself. Where will other such ethnographers come from to do other cultural dictionaries? There seems to be little interest in this problem. However, something is better than nothing. So we are going to continue to support our Rungus field team to expand their activities into the other linguistic groups in the Kudat Division. There are approximately 16 other groups. And to collect this literature will take years of work. Perhaps we can train the Rungus team to pick up some of the cultural contexts in which this literature is performed and some of its complex metaphors and references. Perhaps they will discover local individuals in other groups who would also like to take on this work for their society.

But it should be realized that exegesis must be done from outside the culture, by those who are trained to ask the critical questions, to elicit the proper explanation, and to provide a full understanding of this literature.

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> "Sizong" sounds like the first clear note of the nose flute. In Rungus epic poetry it indicates the opening up of conversation with a pleasing, refined voice by a principal character, god, or spirit. Morolongoi is the name of a dangerous water spirit, and Morolongung is her ritual name. They are onomatopoeic lexemes referring respectively to the sound of soughing or lapping of water and the sound of falling water.

<sup>2</sup> The form of parallelism found in Rungus tests, and also in many of the texts of other Dusunic speakers, is not found among all groups of the Austronesian speakers in Borneo. For example, the texts of the Iban of Sarawak, according to Sather (2001) and Masing (1997). Metcalf (1989) reports in his study of the texts of the Berawan, also of Sarawak, that while there is a certain amount of parallelism, its form is much less formal, less rigid in the coupling of semantic elements. It occurs in the coupling of words, not lines, and the performer has the opportunity to improvise on the text.

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