

Revisiting the Dusunic boat lutes of Sabah: disappearing musical traditions

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.