

## **Collecting and Contextualising *Sundait* (Riddles) among the Rungus People of Sabah**

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### **ABSTRACT**

A field exercise conducted among the Rungus people of Sabah, East Malaysia, yielded a total of seventy-eight riddles, together with valuable contextual information on the practice of riddling. The products of this research are herein recorded in both the Rungus and English languages, and it is hoped that the data will prove useful to researchers, who may be interested in pursuing scholarships on riddling in the Rungus society. A crucial discovery made during the research concerns the taboo aspects of riddling: riddles can only be posed during the paddy harvest period - and not at other times during daily life. Consequently, this paper sets out to investigate the reasons why the practice of riddling is restricted, while also examining the traditional, cultural and religious contexts associated with the activity.

*Keywords:* Harvest-time riddling, paddy-spirits, Rungus, *sundait* (riddles), taboo in riddling

### **INTRODUCTION**

To date, only five academic works have been published on the Kadazandusun<sup>1</sup> *sundait* (riddles) of Sabah, and these are by Evans (1951, 1954, 1955), Williams (1963), and Lokman (2004). Evans (1951) was the first researcher to conduct fieldwork on Kadazandusun riddles. In 1950, he managed

to collect fifty riddles from Kadaimain village, in Kota Belud district. Later in the same year, he documented seventy-four riddles from Tombulion, Kaung Saraiyoh and Tambatuon villages, which are located in the same district. Besides giving a brief account and making a full inventory of the riddles collected, Evans (1951, 1954, 1955) did little in the way of analysis.

In "The Form and Function of Tambunan Dusun Riddles", Williams (1963) stated that Dusun riddling is a fundamental part of the structure and functioning of the

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Dusun society. Focusing on the forms and social functions of the *sundait*, he concluded that riddling behaviour could not be categorized as a leisure time game or activity. Furthermore, Dusuns do not view riddles as tests of chance or luck (Williams, 1963). From another perspective, Lokman's (2004) study investigated the performance of Kadazandusun riddles as a unique oral skill.

The Rungus are acknowledged as one of several Kadazandusun subgroups, and like other Dusunic groups, they possess a rich riddling heritage. To date, no research on Rungus riddles in relation to paddy spirit beliefs has been published. In an attempt to bridge this research gap, the author collected riddles and contextual information about the practice during a field trip conducted in September 2009. The outcome of this research is a collection of seventy-eight Rungus riddles, together with their English translations. Also examined were the various contexts in which the riddling is typically carried out.

## THE RUNGUS

The Rungus are a group of indigenous people residing in Kudat District in the north of Sabah. They refer to themselves as being of Momogun ethnic stock<sup>2</sup>, and as hailing from one of sixteen or more different subgroups. Of these known subgroups - which include the Lingkabau, Nulu, Gonsomon, Sindapak, Garo, and the Marigang - the Rungus are the largest (Appell, 1963). As the language, culture and mythology of the Rungus are quite similar to

that of neighbouring Dusunic people, they are categorised as one of the Kadazandusun ethnic groups (Topin, 1996; Reid, 1997). Their language is categorised as belonging to the "Dusunic" family, i.e., a part of the Austronesia group from Northern Indonesia. Within the Rungus language itself, there are five language groups, namely, the Nulu, Gonsomon, Rungus, Pilapazan and Gandahon. The spoken language is tonal in nature (Prentice, 1970; Porodong, 2004). Well-defined social boundaries are a facet of the community life that distinguishes the Rungus from other Dusunic-speaking groups. These are delineated by differences in speech, customary law, the use of the autonym "Rungus" and dress (Appell, 1978).

The origins of the Rungus remain shrouded in mystery – no written records exist regarding their ancestry. Appell (1978) stated that the Kudat Peninsula is considered to be the original homeland of the Rungus; those occupying the Melabong Peninsula across Marudu Bay first moved there sometimes in the last century prior to the arrival of the British. The major social groupings are the domestic family, the long-house, and the village. Traditionally, the Rungus as a unit were politically acephalous, although regional leaders did arise in pre-British times. Their social organization is also egalitarian in that there are no hereditary leaders, nor is there a hereditary class system (Appell, 1978). Such social organization system has, in a way, contributed to the difficulty in tracing the origins of the Rungus. As such, one has to

refer to their oral tales to gather some hints as to their origins.

As with many other Kadazandusun subgroups, the Rungus generally believe that their forefathers originated from Nunuk Ragang (*nunuk* - banyan tree and *ragang* – red) – which is the sacred birthplace of all Dusunic-speaking peoples of Sabah (Topin, 1981).<sup>3</sup>

A migration legend gathered in 2001 from a Rungus informant revealed that the ancestors of the Rungus people originated from a faraway place known as “Hujung Dunia” (the furthest end of the world). There once lived two brothers named Lungguvai and Runsud. When their soils were no longer fertile, they decided to find a new place to live. Lungguvai asked Runsud to begin his search for the new land. Before Runsud started his journey, Lungguvai told him to leave behind trace marks using pieces of wood but unfortunately Runsud forgot to follow his request. As a result, the brothers were separated. Lungguvai reached a place known as Kamburaya and settled down there. His descendants formed the Dusun tribe. Meanwhile Runsud reached a place known as Pomipitan. He decided to stay there and thereafter formed the Rungus tribe (Low Kok On, 2005).

From the historical aspect, North Borneo was at one time ruled by the Brunei Sultanate. Fortunately the Brunei Sultanate at that time recognised the Rungus headman as the leader of the community. On the other hand, the Suluk Sultanate in the Southern Philippines encouraged slavery through the sanctioning of kidnapping of the

Rungus people who lived along the coast. As a result, many Rungus people shifted to the interior or the mountainous terrain (Porodong, 2004).

The Rungus are excellent farmers, probably the most proficient of all those residing in Borneo. Traditionally, their main crops are paddy, followed by maize and cassava (Appell, 1976). To date, the majority of the Rungus depend on swidden-cultivated rice (hill paddy). There exists a widespread myth that wet rice cultivation does not exist among the Rungus. Although this is untrue, a lack of predictable water supplies has prevented a more widespread adoption of the practice (Appell, 1986).

In their traditional planting practices, each year a field was cut, allowed to lie until the slash became dry, and then burned. This provided ash to help fertilize the crops. Maize was planted first, followed by paddy, and then a variety of vegetables. In addition, the Rungus maintained extensive groves of *langsat* (*Lansium domesticum*), *limau* (*Citrus hystrix*), *timadang* (*Artocarpus odoratissimus*) and other fruit trees. Since rice is the staple food for the Rungus and its yields are crucial to them, it is not surprising that this crop is endowed with cultural and religious significance. This is typified by the fact that riddling is closely associated with their belief in paddy-spirits.

### THE TERM *SUNDAIT*

Like most of the Kadazandusun subgroups, riddles are termed as *sundait* (pronounced as soon/da/it) among the Rungus. Typically, a Rungus villager may ask “*Monundait oku po*

[Let me ask you (a riddle)], *ikau mengarait* (you answer it)” [Informant: Manadas Mogiom]. According to Lokman (2004), the word *sundait* in Kadazandusun is the combination of two words, i.e. “sunundait” (to tell or to pose) and “karait” (to answer). However, the Rungus use “*monundait*” to mean asking a *sundait* and “*mengarait*” to mean answering the *sundait*. Naturally, the terms vary between the different Kadazandusun subgroups. For example, the Tambunan Dusun refer to their riddles as *sosundaiton* or *sunandait* (Williams, 1963), while the Dusun from Ulu Kaung, Kota Belud call riddles *susundoiton* and answers, *narait* (Evans, 1951). An answer to a riddle is also termed as *narait* by the Dusun from Tambunan (Williams, 1963). Evans (1951) also reported that in Kadaimaian, Kota Belud, riddles and their answers are called *sundait* and *araiton*, respectively (Evans, 1951). In Kadazandusun, *araiton* means answering. To sum up, the term *sundait* is closely related to words like *sosundaiton*, *susundoiton* and *sunundait* as used by other Kadazandusun subgroups to denote a riddle.

### LEGENDS ON THE ORIGIN OF THE RUNGUS SUNDAIT

Just as little is known about the origin of the Rungus people, equally little is known about their *sundait*. Consequently, the author turned to the Rungus elders for answers. When asked about the origin of the Rungus *sundait*s, Rundabang binti Linsapu [Informant 1] narrated the following legend:

Once, a girl was wandering from one place to another trying to find her life

partner. On the way, she met Rumolizan (one of the paddy spirits). At that time, Rumolizan was about to build a ladder for his *sulap* (rice storage hut). He tested the girl by uttering the phrase “*kazimipas sudorudun*” (*kazimipas* is a special type of wood and *sudorudun* refers to layers of things). To his surprise, the girl answered, “I know that you are going to build a *tukad* (ladder) for your hut”. As the girl had been able to answer his riddle, Rumolizan decided to marry her. “*Kazimipas sudorudun*” is one of the oldest *sundait* known to the Rungus. Rinjamal Montuduk [Informant 2] added that once this *sundait* was known, riddling became popular among the Rungus people.

Conversely, Limpot Majalu [Informant 8] had this to say, “*Ah, itu dulu-dulu ada orang Rungus pergi ke tempat Bambarazon, dari situ bah mereka bawa balik itu sundait.*” [“Ah, a long, long time ago, some Rungus went to the dwelling place of the Bambarazon (paddy-spirit); from there they brought back the *sundait* (riddles)”].

Thus, if the above accounts of Rungus legends are to be believed, the origin of the *sundait*s is closely linked to the paddy-spirit known as Bambarazon. Beliefs relating to the paddy spirits vary among the different Kadazandusun subgroups. According to Phelan (2005), the Kadazandusuns believe that there are seven types of paddy-spirit and that Bambarazon or Bambarayon (variously spelt) is a general term for them. Each of the seven categories of the paddy-spirit has a distinct role to fulfil. The special capability of the paddy-spirit known as Gontolobon, for example, is to give rice piled up in huge

quantities like boulders. Prosperous farmers were assisted by most of the seven paddy-spirits and these took residence in their paddy-fields and in their rice barns, whereas poor farmers were considered to have the help of one, or perhaps two spirits. Evans (1953) said, "I am told that at Kadamaian, the belief is that if a poor man has only one rice-spirit, it will be Sambilod, or if two, an Ohinopot and a Sambilod. Even the one spirit may desert him and go to a rich man's house, where there is plenty of paddy, only returning when the poor man has a little paddy in store" (Phelan, 2005).

In Rungus animistic beliefs, Bambarazon or Odu-odu (paddy spirits) are considered as good spirits. During his fieldwork, Yutaka Shimomoto (1979) gathered many myths from Rungus informants, including one about the relationship between Bambarazon and the Rungus rice cultivators. According to this particular tale, a Rungus once sailed across the sea until he arrived at a distant shore where he came upon a large red house in which many red men lived. However, they did not welcome him, so he went on with his journey to look for food and shelter. In all, he visited seven houses, but none of the inhabitants welcomed him. Finally, he arrived at a house and asked if he could stay there. The people in the house welcomed him and offered him food and accommodation. Later, the kind-hearted hosts told him that they were Bambarazon.

The man noticed that Bambarazon had body burns. He asked them the reason for this and they told him that a man had burned the *sulap* (rice storage hut) before

he finished the rice harvest, and they were burnt as a result. The man stayed with the Bambarazon for seven days and they gave him the directions to his homeland. On his way home, he re-crossed the sea. The crossing went well although he did not use the sail. When he arrived home, he met a farmer who complained of his long run of poor harvests. He asked the farmer for details of his methods, and the farmer replied that he had burned his *sulap* before he finished harvesting. Remembering the Bambarazon and their burns, the man advised the farmer to sacrifice some chickens to Bambarazon. As a consequence, the harvests got better each year.

Then one night, the farmer had a dream and heard voices telling him that for his final sacrifice, he must conduct the Magahau ceremony (the rite of sacrificing fowls and pigs to the spirits like Minamagun, Kinoingan and Bambarazon after the rice harvest). From this myth, we learn that the Rungus believe that the Bambarazon live in a distant land beyond the sea. They are good spirits and the protectors of rice. However, if people showed disrespect by, for example, burning the *sulap* before the rice harvest, the Bambarazon would take revenge by giving them poor yields. Thus, in order to sustain the good harvest, farmers must conduct certain rites.

In contrast, the first Rungus myth gathered by Yutaka Shimomoto (1979) explained how their forefathers had visited the dwelling place of the Bambarazon in the remote past. In the course of his visit, he learnt how to show them respect, thus

ensuring a bountiful harvest”. This is similar to the myth recounted by another informant in this research, who stated that “some Rungus went to the dwelling place of the Bambarazon; from there they brought back the *sundait* (riddles).” Both Rungus myths reveal that the beliefs about the Bambarazon, paddy yield, and *sundait* are closely related.

### FIELD TRIP AND OUTCOME

A field trip designed for the purposes of collecting, transcribing and archiving Rungus *sundait* (as well as gathering information on riddling contexts) was carried out in September 2009. The team comprised the author and two assistant researchers, Mr. Janathan Kandok and Mr. Romzi Abdullah. With the help of Mr. Azlan Shafie, a Rungus from Matunggong village in Kudat, nine Rungus informants were identified and interviewed by the author. The location of Kudat is indicated in Map 1 below, while details about the informants are listed in Table 1.

All the informants cited in this research are small-scale farmers who plant hill paddy, maize, cassava, vegetables, and fruit trees. Besides being a farmer, Rundabang Linsapu from Matunggong village, Kudat, is also a well-known female *bobolizan* (ritual specialist). Listed below are the verbatim texts of *sundait* collected from the field trips. They were transcribed from the spoken language of the Rungus informants. In doing so, the author has retained the textural aspect of the Rungus *sundait*.

In verbal forms of folklore, the texture

is the language, the specific phonemes and morphemes employed. In other words, textural features are equally linguistic features. The failure to collect folklore in the original native language results in the loss of texture. Texture is, on the whole, untranslatable; whereas text may be translated (Dundes, 1980). In other words, the *sundait* verbatim texts may, in theory, be translated into any language, but the chances of the textural features of rhyme surviving the translation are virtually nil. Of course, in order to let non-native readers understand them, the *sundait* must be translated into an accessible language.

Some translated versions of the *sundait* are written in colloquial English as the author tried to keep as close to the meaning of the original Rungus as possible. Terms or words with no equivalents in English such as the name of certain trees, birds and flowers have been retained and explained (in brackets), where necessary. The majority of the Rungus words starting with the letters “B”, “D” and “L” are spelt with a double consonant (Bb or bb, Dd or dd and Ll or ll). According to the translator, this reflects the way the Rungus pronounce words with these initials.

### THE RIDDLING CONTEXT AMONG THE RUNGUS

In general, there are three levels of analysis in studying various forms of folklore. With respect to any given item of folklore, one may analyze its texture, its text and its context. The context of an item of folklore is the specific social situation in which

## Informant 1: Rundabang Linsapu

Rungus Sundait	Pragmatic Translation*
1. <i>Togod ku ddo rokizan, A-millo soromo, Pallad oku rokizan, Llid noko bbinonduk. (It rogon ddot rusod monuhu moginum.)</i>	I am disappointed, Because you are not well behaved, If I were you, I'd give the feast. (A house ghost asking for a ritual feast.)
2. <i>Sanggung surip ddi Sogondoï, Sinuripan ddi ombura, Duwo ddara pogombiton, Sontiga-tiga dazang. (Potizukan)</i>	How nice are the patterns of Sogondoï's (a name) weave, Like the scales of the <i>ombura</i> fish (a kind of white fish), Two of them stretching out their arms, Three of them are maidens. ( <i>Potizukan</i> – a type of bee.)
3. <i>Apui-apui ddi bbaging, Kotitiw om kabbabbang, Roun kaka ddi pagung, Kallapik om kasaniw, Kokun kotikai, Kundago kanagi. (Saai - ello modtitiw ddot saai)</i>	The fire of Bbaging (a name), It can shine and brighten up, You are like a nipah leaf, You can function like a base and are able to shine, One has to be skilful in order to catch you. ( <i>Saai</i> – a kind of edible frog. One has to be very skilful to catch it.)
4. <i>Lungui ddi uriposon, Sangadau ddo tollungui, Kondom turu naku - Vusak ddot bbonsisiaan. (Olungui tu kohondom ddi ondu sovoon dau.)</i>	Uriposon (a kind of bird) is feeling sad, The whole day it looks sorrowful, May be it is missing – thinking about the <i>bbonsisiaan</i> flower. (A man missed his lover.)
5. <i>Mogom-ogom monsimong, Kobburuon rinibba. (It ullun ddot mangagama ddot ongo saging.)</i>	<i>Monsimong</i> (an animal) is sitting around, making work for people. (People sitting around making a type of traditional basket known as <i>saging</i> and <i>barazit</i> ).
6. <i>Arug-arug kud savat, Monondot kud llibbabbou, Magandak apui-apui, Kallu ong kopongintallang. (Ong kaboros elo osukod, avallang onong no ddit osukod.)</i>	The wheel in the air, Landed on the <i>llibbabbou</i> (world), Dance and dance the fire, Trying to show something clearly. (A headman's words will settle a dispute)**
7. <i>llosing no mang llazo, Potizukan sumagou. (llumohong ko no nga kakal-I avasi ko.)</i>	The ginger has turned rough; the bee fetches water. (An elderly woman who still looks beautiful)
8. <i>Kisigal okon ko ullun, Kisisi okon ko sada. (Paranggi)</i>	It has head gear but not a man; it has scales but not a fish. (Pineapple)
9. <i>Guol inimborutan, Popinukol. (Aakanon ddot ginovullan ddot guol.)</i>	Yam was spreading around, and found in between too. (A type of food mixed with yam.)

Notes

\*Brislin (1976) stated that pragmatic translation is the translation of a message with an interest in the accurate duplication of information in the target language form. In translating the Rungus *sundait* from its spoken language to English, the author aimed to accurately convey the meanings of the *sundait* and their answers to those who do not understand Rungus. The language style and linguistic aspects of the *sundait* are not taken into account in the translation as the language is tonal in nature. Porodong (2004) reported that the meaning of the Rungus words can only be identified through the way the words are spoken, although the spelling of the words may be the same. Hence, it is the accurate conveyance of the meaning of the *sundait* and their answers in English that concerns the author. The name of certain trees, birds

and flowers have been retained and explained (in brackets), where necessary. Two words in *Sundait* 13 are unknown to the translator and the informant as they are old Rungus words which the informant learnt from their forefathers without ever knowing the meaning. The author refers to these words as “unknown”.

<sup>2</sup>One of the principal duties of a village headman among the indigenous peoples in Sabah is to act as a judge in disputes that arise in the village. The villagers follow traditional law which was handed down orally from one generation to the next. In other words, the role of headman in settling disputes is that of arbitrator. The headman’s power rests on his ability to bring about conciliation and compliance with his decisions, and on his ability to explain and recall the details of the traditional law (Phelan, 2005).

Informant 2: Addek Riupa

<p>10. <i>Kulli no pitamangan,</i> <i>Apo nokulli ong it momitamong.</i> <i>(Momuhau ddot pirit - it pirit tumullud</i> <i>mulli, it pinongindorosi, sino-i.)</i></p>	<p>The ones who are taken care of have gone home but the caretaker remains there. (Guarding the paddy field (scarecrow) –when the sparrows have flown away from the paddy field, the scarecrow remains)</p>
<p>11. <i>Kodongon i-kikuk, monginsisiro.</i> <i>(Monigup)</i></p>	<p>When inhaled, the fire lights up. (Smoking)</p>
<p>12. <i>Monduk nopi sinsillog,</i> <i>Garaon ahis-ahis,</i> <i>Matai nopi bborillit,</i> <i>Olluvas o bbinorun.</i> <i>(Tumutud - ovuvuon po olluvas no it</i> <i>tagad.)</i></p>	<p>When <i>sinsillog</i> (a type of insect) is singing, <i>ahis-ahis</i> (a type of insect) clamours. When the <i>bborillit</i> (name of a plant) are dead, the surrounding is clear. (<i>Tumutud</i> – burning and clearing the field for planting paddy)</p>
<p>13. <i>Sollitanad ddi gana,</i> <i>Sinimpul ddi kudumai,</i> <i>Kiavau ddo kalanung,</i> <i>Songkologkong tunan,</i> <i>Songkilad kulasaian,</i> <i>Kosimpun potungan.</i> <i>(Tuvo - llakaton tu kiavau, oviton sid rahat</i> <i>yaampallang.)</i></p>	<p>The situation of the plants, Jerks by <i>Kudumai</i> ( name of a person ), Got the smell of <i>kalanung</i> ( unknown ), The noise of <i>tamu</i> (weekly local open market) Shines the <i>kulasaian</i> ( unknown ) Surrounding the place where they placed them. (Fish caught by using <i>tuba</i> - a type of poison made from various roots - and brought home to cook.)</p>
<p>14. <i>Ong imot nu yama nu ddot mokud-okud,</i> <i>a-ko unsopot, bang emot no yama nu ddot</i> <i>mahi-llahis, unsopot ko.</i> <i>(Modsubbol)</i></p>	<p>When you father is bending; you won’t feel thankful. But when your father’s body is straightened then you will feel thankful. (Trapping squirrel)</p>

15. <i>Tumullud i-nganingani, Piopitan ddi ngani. (lilinggaman om mongomot)</i>	<i>I-nganingani</i> (just a sound) is flying, <i>Ngani</i> (another sound rhyme with <i>I-nganingani</i> ) has landed. (Harvesting paddy with a <i>lilinggaman</i> - a tool used for the purpose. It has a small blade which fits into the palm of the hand and its wooden handle protrudes between the little finger and the ring finger.)
16. <i>Sompidding ulan-ulan, Pingansak ddo siou. (Tapai)</i>	A piece of the “moon” gives rise to courage. ( <i>Tapai</i> – Rice wine. A small amount of yeast is used to turn rice into rice wine.)
17. <i>Ullu kara akanon, iku kara ikana. (Guol - it onsi, ikana; it tullang toddukon.)</i>	The Monkey’s head is being eaten, its tail turned into a dish. (A type of local yam – Its flesh can be cooked as a main dish; its young stem can be cooked as vegetable)

## Informant 3: Rinjamal Montuduk

18. <i>Addi sanggong ddit tinanku, Addi vasi ddiriku, Kinan okud tinondugu, Kiddiri okud tinandagas, Minongogom ddot tanapu, Moinodtuddung ddo tarantai, Kiobbuk sangrabboi-rabboi, Kitungkui songbbiris-bbiris, Tillibbon nopod tillibbon, Tadjaron nopod tadjaron, Millintazuk-tazukno, Millinggonoi-gonoino, Ahabba sid kotonobbon, Apangging sid kosillahon. (Korumanggallang)</i>	Just imagine how pretty I am, My body looks great, It’s slim, It’s tall and straight, I am sitting on flat land, Cross-legged in a valley, My hair is hanging loose, It will be stroked gently, When a light breeze is blowing, My arms are swinging, My body is shaking, Tilting towards sun set, To glance sideways towards sun rise. ( <i>Korumanggallang</i> – a type of tall jungle tree)
19. <i>Rollibu ddi rumbovos, ikorosi rinibba. (Potizukan)</i>	It’s Rumbovos’ (a name) tray that people are frightened of. ( <i>Potizukan</i> – a type of bee that stings People.)
20. <i>Podtullud po llinggata, pandai bbokullintangan. (Ombollog llogundi)</i>	<i>Llinggata</i> (insect) is flying, good at playing <i>kulintangan</i> (a type of traditional musical instrument) ( <i>Ombollog llogundi</i> – a type of bird)
21. <i>Tumolong siti, mimbulai silo. (Monombil jarum)</i>	Entering the river from this side, coming out of the water surface from the other side (Sewing with a needle.)
22. <i>Inddallanon nu ogi ot ralan dot ullun ko rallan nu kondiri. (Ngaran)</i>	You are moving along other people’s path rather than your own. ( <i>Ngaran</i> – a person’s name. We used to call other people’s name more often than our own name).

23. <i>Monsoronsot mizut, kiavau tinompuri.</i> (Mompiri)	The act of making love, and it smells like a paddy husk has just been peeled off (Making fire using wood.)
24. <i>Tongkud do mangazou, Tangkus ot azohon.</i> (Using om tikus)	Bending the head-hunter, the prey keeps on running. (Cat and rat.)
25. <i>Opoddok asin-asin, kuru ddo sovollok.</i> (Ladda)	So small is the salt, it satisfies one's appetite. (Small hot chilli.)

## Informant 4: Kinindangang Masani

26. <i>Adi sangggong ddi inanku, addi vasi ddi ddiri, kinan ddo tinonodugu, kiddiri ddo tinandagas, bbaraton nopod bbaraton, hibbuton nopod hibbuton, illumpingoi-llumpingoi no, illintazuk-tazuk no</i> (Ombirog)	Just imagine how beautiful I am, Just imagine how attractive my body is, I am having a body of a tree's core, I am slim, When the wind is blowing lightly, When the breeze is touching me, I'll be swinging, I'll be swaying. (Ombirog – a type of tree.)
27. <i>Mongkoruddu tinagad, mogkorovolloi untu.</i> (Allud)	The part that has been cut is crying while its stem is moving further and further away. (Boat – a boat being rowed)
28. <i>Gozuvon om kungkung, okanon om onggiput.</i> (Ahapak)	The pig's skin is being cooked but the small prawns are being eaten. (Ahapak - small bees that are still in the hive)
29. <i>Ikorosi ot iddi, ikahari ot anak.</i> (Potizukan)	People are scared of her, but not her children. (Bee)
30. <i>Isiso torigi, hatu s panding.</i> (Pazas)	A pole with hundreds of jars hanging there. (A papaya tree with papayas)
31. <i>Makan siti, sori ot mumuk.</i> (Ilallatu)	Eating over here but the remains are over there. (Ash – After burning, the ash will be blown away)
32. <i>Matai tullun tagayo, soribu tulang.</i> (Bbinatang)	A big man dies with hundred of bones. (Long house)
33. <i>Ohun kinoringan, tumokin sid kiruzou.</i> (Bbonging)	Charcoal of Kinoringan (Chief god of the Rungus) marrying a dry thing. (Bbonging – a type of black beetle)
34. <i>Sadda ddi bbarakavan, sangadau monginsisi.</i> (Manansag ddot mallapi)	A <i>bbarakavan</i> fish throwing off its scales each day. (An act of cutting a big tree's bark for making <i>llingkut</i> for rice storage) * <i>Bbarakavan</i> is a big, tall tree. In this riddle, it symbolises "big" in size.

35. <i>Bbokolluvon ddot vallai, origi ot aakanon.</i> ( <i>Bbubbulan</i> )	<i>Bbokolluvon</i> stays in the house, <i>origi</i> becomes its food. ( <i>Bbubbulan</i> – a tool used to make threads out of the cottons.) * <i>Bbokolluvon</i> is a long, round-shaped fish. <i>Origi</i> is the support for a long house.
36. <i>Mamadsul sid gullu, mamampang sid tohuddi.</i> ( <i>Vogok</i> )	The front part is roving here and there, while its back keeps on shaking. (A pig – while walking, its head keeps on shaking and its tail is wagging all the time)
37. <i>Uva ddi ondurungin, sodduvon om Koddop.</i> ( <i>Korijongkom</i> )	The ondurungin fruit (a type of plant) will sleep whenever it is stumbled upon. ( <i>Korijongkom</i> – an insect which will curl up its body whenever it is discovered by someone)

## Informant 5: Manandas Mogiom

38. <i>Anak ddatu ogimba, tumulud om kumawad, misambbataian cina, aki ambun bulawan.</i> ( <i>Potizukan</i> )	Rich man's children are coming, flying and clinging to each other, lining the way, with smoke that looks like gold. (Collecting honey from beehive hanging on a tree)
39. <i>Tangga tanggaron, tangga tingguon savat, orongou nu bbirion, bbirion mollu-kollu.</i> ( <i>Tambang om bbilok</i> )	The <i>tangga</i> (a bamboo container) on one's shoulder is slipping and pointing upwards, someone heard the noise while observing with sorrow. [Deer and <i>bbilok</i> (a type of spear) – The informant indicates that when a deer notices a hunter carrying a spear, it feels sad for fear of being the next victim]
40. <i>Timpanon nu raja, rikotonnu rogon.</i> ( <i>Rovuw</i> )	From afar, it looks like a king but when you approach it, it is evil. ( <i>Rovud</i> – a type of mangrove plant. It looks nice from faraway but the plant is full of thorns)
41. <i>Misangai-sangai kito, kapatai koddoho.</i> ( <i>Tambang om bbarambang</i> )	We are having the same name but you will kill me. [ <i>Tambang</i> (Deer) and <i>bbarambang</i> (steel spikes on the fence which may kill a deer) both sound alike in Rungus]
42. <i>Misangai-sangai kito, kollomu koddoho.</i> ( <i>Vogok om kombogok</i> )	We are having the same name but you will make me fat. [ <i>Vogok</i> and <i>kombogok</i> - <i>Vogok</i> (pig) and <i>kombogok</i> (pig's food) both sound alike in Rungus]

43. <i>Tub kaza</i> ( <i>Tutub om raza</i> )	<i>Tub kaza</i> (Cover of a rice container and a round tray) * <i>Tub kaza</i> is a combination of two sounds i.e. "tub" which is rhyme with the word "tutub" (cover of a rice container) and the second sound "kaza" is rhyme with the word "raza" (a round tray).
44. <i>Impit-impit aratu ko.</i> ( <i>Pirit om ratu</i> )	A little push and you will fall. ( <i>Pipit</i> and durian.) *The word <i>impit-impit</i> sounds like "pipit" (a kind of bird) and "aratu" sounds like "ratu" which in Rungus means durian.
45. <i>Modop-odop ko, suhakon do ddo gurai.</i> ( <i>Tumpok</i> )	You are lying down, poked by someone with a hare-lip. ( <i>Tumpok</i> – a long house stand.)
46. <i>Ukul-ukul po, ukul-ukul po, ukul-ukul po, ukul-ukul po.</i> ( <i>Bbakul, ongkukul, tinukul, pukul</i> )	<i>Ukul-ukul po, ukul-ukul po, ukul-ukul po, ukul-ukul po.</i> ( <i>Bbakul</i> (basket), <i>ongkukul</i> (spotted dove), <i>tinukul</i> (a kind of gong) and <i>pukul</i> (the stem of a maize) – These four things are having the same rhyming suffix, i.e. "kul" in Rungus)
47. <i>Ontut ddi omburongo, inturu llobbu tavan.</i> ( <i>Kombburongo</i> )	Omburongo's fart passing through seven layers of sky. ( <i>Kombburongo</i> – a type of plant with a very bad smell to the extent that the locals believe it will scare away ghosts)
48. <i>Vullanut ddot himbaan, korijongkom ddot tagad.</i> ( <i>llingkut</i> )	The snake is in the jungle, <i>korijongkom</i> (a type of insect) is in the field. ( <i>llingkut</i> - rice barn)

#### Informant 6: Bunou Masipman

49. <i>Mitimpan-timpan kito, a-kito kopirikot.</i> ( <i>Timbang vaig</i> )	We are facing each other but we can't touch each other. (River banks – separated by water.)
50. <i>Mirompit-rompit kito nga a-kopimot.</i> ( <i>Adsip</i> )	We are next to each other but we can't see each other. ( <i>Adsip</i> – battens retaining a Rungus house wall. They are one external, one internal, therefore, near but do not meet.)
51. <i>Momusak om hambaron, munongol om giring.</i> ( <i>Mambarambat</i> )	Small plates are its flowers, small bells are its fruits. ( <i>Mambarambat</i> – a type of plant with flowers that look like small plates and with bell-shape fruits.)
52. <i>Iso no tinan, apat ot tullu.</i> ( <i>Kikizop</i> )	It has one body and four heads. ( <i>Kikizob</i> – a traditional Rungus fan used for fanning a cooking fire. It consists of a flat body and a four-layered end for holding purposes. See Appendix 1, Photo 1)

53. <i>Llingallinggahon ddallid, timubburullai pallang.</i> ( <i>Tumutu</i> )	A length of stick keep on knocking and a white substance appears later. (The act of pounding paddy – when a rice pounder hits the paddy, the husk comes off, revealing the white rice.)
54. <i>Momusak om tutuntung, munongol om karis.</i> ( <i>Uva ddot kupang</i> )	Bearing a striking gong's stick flowers and with hard fruit. ( <i>Kupang</i> tree – the shape of the flowers look like a stick used for striking a gong, whereas the fruit is hard).
55. <i>Vaig ullak-ullakan, vaig ihm-ihimon.</i> ( <i>Rahat</i> )	Stepping on this water, looking for another type of water. (Sea water – after swimming in the sea, one has to look for plain water to drink)
56. <i>Pallanuk togurolluw, vaig togunonomon.</i> ( <i>Rongisan</i> )	Sound like a deer eating, but it is the that we enjoy. ( <i>Rongisan</i> – a type of sweet fruit.)
57. <i>Llontugi mitongisan, lliotong millintanga.</i> ( <i>Bbidai</i> )	Its side looks like the <i>llontugi</i> (a type of insect) and its centre looks like the surface of water. ( <i>Bbidai</i> – a type of mat. The pattern on its side looks like the <i>llontugi</i> and its centre portion is flat).
58. <i>Momusak om bbulavan, munongol om llonguvai.</i> ( <i>Uva llabbuk</i> )	It produces golden flowers and <i>lengguai</i> -shape fruit. (Pumpkin plant – Its flowers are yellowish and the shape of a pumpkin looks like a Rungus' <i>lengguai</i> (Appendix 1, Photo 2).

## Informant 7: Mongulintip Momgimbal

59. <i>Miniginin yindinu, ihad-ihaddannu.</i> ( <i>Vogok om susumaddan</i> )	Your mother is hanging there while you all keep on crying. (Pig's food tray and the pigs – A hanging pig's food tray is surrounded by many hungry pigs that make lots of noise.)
60. <i>Opoddok po agarang ot bbusulnu, agazo po, amuno aragang ot bbusul.</i> ( <i>Lliposu</i> )	When young, your buttocks were red but not so after you have grown up. ( <i>Lliposu</i> – a type of wild plant which is red in colour when young but not so after it has grown up.)
61. <i>Timpanonnu minatai, rikotonnu mizau.</i> ( <i>Kazu ddaat</i> )	When you look from afar, it is death, but when you go near, it is alive. ( <i>Kazu ddaat</i> – a type of tree with brownish leaves)
62. <i>Tollu kou songopinai, aragang koviai.</i> ( <i>Oddon</i> )	There are three brothers, all of them are red. ( <i>Oddon</i> – Rungus traditional stove supports made of mud. Appendix 1, Photo 3)
63. <i>Kara monuvang bbotung, kara avanit.</i> ( <i>Kinomol miinum.</i> )	A Monkey fills up the pond and gets poisoned. (A person drinking rice wine.)

64. "Pok" palampag, guli odung. ( <i>Mongontut</i> )	A "pok" sound hits the ground and returns back to the nose. (A fart)
65. <i>Sangadau managad, amu inning ot llopok.</i> ( <i>Mongomot</i> )	Cutting trees throughout the day without making any sound. (Harvesting paddy)
66. <i>Mogkomuddi ot tii.</i> ( <i>Ku-kukon tollutu</i> )	It is the lice that steers a boat. ( <i>Ku-kukon</i> – flower of the <i>tollutu</i> tree. Its shape looks like a boat and its inner part looks like lice)
67. <i>Sangallud ot llaga.</i> ( <i>Pagung</i> )	A boat of ants. (Nipah palm - its leaves looks like ants lining up)
68. <i>Isunsud no ogi ot ullu no ko tinan nu</i> ( <i>Tukad</i> )	You give shelter to your head but not your body. (A ladder to the house)

### Informant 8: Limpot Majalu

69. <i>Mimputul ddo kakang om uddungon.</i> ( <i>Subbol</i> )	A piglet is riding on top of a piece of wood ( <i>Subbol</i> – a squirrel trap)
70. <i>Ddunguan nu ogi ot minatai, ko mizau.</i> ( <i>Monimpus ddot udtul</i> )	You kiss the dead thing rather than the one alive. (The act of eating a type of cooked snail. A person sucks the flesh of the snail which has been cooked)
71. <i>Tumollong om kibbaddu, mimbbulai om kikaris.</i> ( <i>Tobbu</i> )	It enters the water with a shirt and comes out later with a <i>keris</i> (Malay dagger). [Sugar cane – when planting sugar cane, the portion of sugar cane which is planted will be wrapped with leaf (symbolised shirt). When the sugar cane plant is growing its leaves look like a <i>keris</i> ]
72. <i>Ombbollong ddot bburunai, mulli siti moninduk.</i> ( <i>Jarum</i> )	A bird from Brunei comes back here to peck. (Sewing needle – One will buy it from the shop - owned by the Brunei people – and brings it home for sewing)
73. <i>Rumatu ogi ot raan ko roun.</i> ( <i>Sangau tambang</i> )	Its branches will drop off before its leaves. (Deer's horns – the horns of a deer will drop off when it is old but not its ears)
74. <i>Kisangau ogi ot pallanuk ko kallasiw.</i> ( <i>Sangit om tangga</i> )	Deers have horns as compared to wild oxes. ( <i>Sangit</i> and <i>tangga</i> – a <i>sangit</i> is a type of tool used for fetching water which is equipped with a horn-shaped handle, whereas <i>tangga</i> is also a type of fetching water tool made from bamboo)

75. <i>Mokilloki monudtul, potingaha monopuk.</i> ( <i>Pitik, llundunan om monigup</i> )	With a long, loud noise, he breaks a snail's shell and focuses on blowing a blowing pipe. [ <i>Pitik</i> (a stone used to ignite fire), <i>llundunan</i> (strip leaves) and <i>monigup</i> (Smoking)]
76. Tumollong om gurondu, mimbullai om llangan. ( <i>Minggat</i> )	The one who enters the water is <i>gurondu</i> (a greenish female <i>uripos</i> bird) but the one who comes out is <i>llangan</i> (a reddish male <i>uripos</i> bird). (Eating betel nut. When put into the mouth, the nut, which is wrapped with betel, is green in colour. By the time the eater spits it out, it is red in colour)
77. <i>Pallampang tosundu, ponimbang pitunan.</i> ( <i>Llinazang</i> )	The floor of a supernatural being that balances the season. (A toy fan)
78. <i>Sogo ginollung-gollung, kotitiw ddo hamaddon.</i> ( <i>Vulan</i> )	The rattan-roll that brighten up the surroundings. (The Moon)

that particular item is actually employed. It is necessary to distinguish context and function. Usually, function is an analyst's statement of what (he thinks) the use or purpose of a given genre of folklore is. It is not the same as the actual social situation, in which a particular folklore genre is used. One reason for collecting context is that only if such data is provided can any serious attempt be made to explain why a particular text is used in a particular situation (Dundes, 1980).

Kaivola-Bregghenjoj (2001) stressed that riddles have in most cases been published without any contextual information whatsoever. Even the best accounts of riddling fail to give any information on what the riddles are actually posed. It is, however, clear that the social context imposes and provides divergent levels ignored when riddles are analysed only as texts. Besides, in dealing with tradition, we must also examine

the cultural context, referring on one hand, to the tradition bearer's background (occupation, educational background etc.), and on the other, to the culture in which he operates and the world of which he is speaking (Kaivola-Bregghenjoj, 2001). The discussions that follow focus on the situational and cultural contexts associated with Rungus riddling. Prior to this, it is important to point out that the Rungus, as well as being fluent in their mother tongue are equally fluent in Malay. When gathering information on context, the author interviewed informants in Malay in order to remove one stage of the translation process into English. Besides, when researching context specifically, language texture is of lesser importance.

Before examining the context of Rungus riddles in relation to their beliefs about paddy spirits, it is necessary to explain the basic function of riddling and the Rungus

traditional animistic beliefs. Just as with any other riddling culture in the world, one of the primary functions of the Rungus riddle is to entertain. During the in-depth interviews, many informants told the author that searching for the correct answer to riddles during the harvest distracts them from the heat and makes them forget their physical discomfort. In addition, they are amused by the wrong answers given by friends or relatives, as well as humorous correct answers.

Traditionally, the Rungus are animists. They believe in Minamangun, the Creator who inhabits the seventh layer of heaven and decides the fate of humans from the very instant of their birth (Appell, 1976). The Rungus also believe in the existence of various good and evil spirits. Evil spirits are referred to as *rogon*. According to Appell (1976), there are two classes of *rogon* in the belief system of the Rungus. The first class of *rogon* lives in a specific place in the world, while the second class wanders about, not staying put in any one place. Both classes of *rogon* are capable of stealing the spirits of human beings and making them sick.

Furthermore, there are many different types of *rogon* that harm people in different contexts. According to some informants, if *rogon* are offended by farmers, they are likely to ruin their rice harvests by bringing diseases, pests, unnecessary rain, and other calamities to the paddy fields. Many more malevolent spirits can be found in the Rungus' animistic beliefs. Porodong (2001) further divided them into two groups; the

violent and the less violent spirits. The most violent are those of the air, house, water, sea, soil and the swidden, while the spirits of the trees, holes, forests and longhouse structures among others, are considered to be less violent.

Good spirits are known as *osundu*, on account of the fact that they help people when they are sick or have had bad things happen to them. All the rituals connected with the world of spirits are carried out by ritual specialists known as *bobolizan*, the majority of whom are women (Appell, 1986). Porodong (2001) stated that a man could also be a *bobolizan* although he would be considered inferior to a woman with the same qualities. The role of the *bobolizan* covers matters like the future of newlyweds, fertility of the cosmos, safety of the village from the threat of supernatural powers and healing (Porodong, 2001).

Of the good spirits, the Bambarazon (paddy spirits) are viewed as particularly important. All the informants said that if the Bambarazon are treated well, they will protect the paddy from natural disasters and pests, and ensure a bountiful harvest. The Rungus praise Bambarazon by sacrificing fowls and pigs in order to receive good yields. If the Rungus neglect the ceremonies, they can expect a poor harvest (Yutaka Shimomoto, 1979). In addition to Bambarazon, Rinjamal Montuduk (Informant 3) mentioned two more significant spirit-beings, namely, Mongulungung and Mongintanau. According to Rinjamal, Mongulungung lives in the sky and his role is to monitor things happening on earth. He looks after

the sun, the rain and the wind and helps at times of natural disaster. Mogintonau, on the other hand, lives on earth and presides in the plant world.

Based on the above evidence, one can say that the Rungus are rich in spirits related to the natural surroundings. It is also clear that the Bambarazon are just one of many types of spirit in the Rungus animistic belief system. With this background information in view, the author focuses on the relationship between the paddy spirits and the custom of riddling. When questioned, all eight of the hill paddy planting informants said that they are prohibited from riddling outside the paddy harvesting period. Kinindangang Masani (i) and Mongulintip Momgimbal (ii) commented as follows:

i. *Ah, hanya pada pesta, ah, musim menuai baru boleh "bersundait". Kita tidak boleh "bersundait" kalau bukan musim menuai, musim menuai saja, ah.*

(Ah, only during the harvest, ah the harvest time then only we can carry out riddling. We do not allow riddling if it is not harvesting season, only during the harvesting time, ah.)

ii. *Ah, sekarang musim menanam padi, sepatutnya tidak "bersundait". Ah, musim dia, pabila sudah musim padi berbuah. Ah, jadi yang betul-betul masa mau mengetamlah.*

(Ah, now is planting paddy time, by right we shouldn't do riddling. Ah, the right season is, when harvesting paddy.

Ah, the correct timing is when we start harvesting...)

When asked about why the Rungus can only carry out their riddling activities during harvest season, the above-mentioned informants replied thus:

i. *Em... sebab sundait ini, dia berkaitan dengan, dengan itu semangat padi bah, itu Odu-odu. Semangat padi itu nama Odu-odu. Ah, yang Odu-odu itu hanya muncul semasa musim menuai padi. Ah, itu sundait ada kaitan sama Odu-odu, ah Bambarazon* (Informant: Kinindangang Masani).

(Er... because this *sundait* (riddle), it is connected with the paddy-spirits. It is Odu-odu. The name of that paddy-spirit is Odu-odu. Ah, Odu-odu will appear when we harvest paddy. Ah, *sundait* have connection with Odu-odu, ah Bambarazon (paddy-spirit).

ii. *Sebab kalau "bersundait", dia boleh mengakibatkan tanaman itu tidak menjadi. Ah, dia jadi rosak* (Informant: Mongulintip Momgimbal).

(If we do riddling, the paddy plants may not grow well. Ah, they will be destroyed).

Due to such beliefs, any villager uttering *sundait* outside the harvest season is liable to be scolded by their parents or other elders in the village. As rice is the staple food for the Rungus, no breaking of the taboo associated with the paddy-spirits is tolerated. Furthermore, the Rungus believe that the paddy-spirits will only appear

during the paddy planting and harvesting seasons. Consequently, riddling at other times will not benefit them but may only offend the paddy-spirits. According to Appell (1986), the Rungus believe that if the rice spirits are treated well and not frightened away during the paddy growing season, they will ensure a plentiful harvest. According to the various taboos, the farmers are not allowed to cut paddy plants during weeding season, or to shout or make noise in the paddy field; the heads of the rice must also be treated with care. Furthermore, the farmers are forbidden from posing riddles other than during harvesting time.

One of the reports published by Sabah Museum in 1993 stated that Kadazandusun farmers believe that if they practice riddling at inappropriate times (such as when clearing weeds from the paddy field), their work will take longer than usual. Hence, they avoid riddling at such times (Lokman, 2004, p, 44). This belief is endorsed by Williams (1963, p. 110), who in his research on Tambunan Dusun riddles observed, "Thus, one is told, it is bad luck to say riddles any time but harvest".

According to the religious beliefs of the Rungus, the Bambarazon are a group of benevolent rice spirits. They live in a country beyond the sea, although no one can explain its whereabouts. One villager reported that the Bambarayon live at the edge of the Piromitan<sup>1</sup> layer, where good spirits reside. Above the Piromitan layer is the Monkulun layer, where the most powerful spirits (or Gods) - Sambavon<sup>2</sup>, Kinoringan, and Minamangun - live. These

spirits on the Piromitan and Monkulun planes protect human beings from sickness, death, and other misfortunes, but they do not take care of rice. Only the Bambarayon can do this. The Rungus believe that rice was first brought to them by the Bambarayon in the remote past (Yutaka Shimomoto, 1979).

On the other hand, a Rungus ritual specialist said that the Bambarazon live in a very distant land called Surung Rumuvab. Nobody knows where Surung Rumuvab exactly is, but the priest said it was in Pintigavan do Tavang (the place where the sky reaches the horizon). At this place, there is a wide river, on the banks where the Bambarazon live. The Bambarazon's family consists of parents and seven sons and seven daughters. It is said that every rice season the Bambarazon come to the rice field by sail boat, and when the rice season is over, the Bambarazon will then return to Surung Rumuvab, also by sail boat. This is why the Rungus make a small sailboat (3 inches in size) and place it on the rice container known as *lingkut* after harvest (Yutaka Shimomoto, 1979). Similarly, Appell (1976) wrote that the rice-spirits are called back to the location where hill paddy is to be planted on an annual basis, only to be sent home at the end of the year.

Conversely, the Rungus believe that reciting *sundait* at harvest period, attracts the paddy-spirits, who will then be more likely to stay around to protect their paddy. Use of the terms "*menundait*" (to tell a riddle) and "*mengarait*" (to answer a riddle) reinforce this belief. In the legend recounted by Rundabang [Informant 1], the marriage

of the paddy spirit, Rumolizan and the Clever Girl came about because of a *sundait*. Hence, any reference to, or performance of “*menundait*” and “*mengarait*”, alludes to the realm of the paddy spirits. It is interesting to note that many other traditional paddy planters across the Southeast Asian region also limit riddling to the harvest period. Vanoverbergh (1941) studied the context of riddling in the Philippines and reported that for the Isneg people, the harvest period is the time for proposing riddles, a pastime that is considered a taboo in any other season (quoted by Hart, 1964). This taboo is even clarified in a riddle: “We cannot say it except at the time of harvest” has “riddle” as its answer (Hart, 1964). The Toraja paddy planters living in central Sulawesi also restrict riddling to the time when their rice matures through to its harvest. According to Huizinga (1949),

*The “coming out” of the riddles naturally promotes the coming out of the rice-ears. As often as a riddle is solved the chorus chimes in: “Come out, rice come out! You “fat ears” high up in the mountains or low down in the valleys!” During the season immediately preceding the above period, all literary activities are forbidden, as they might endanger the growth of the rice (quoted by Hart, 1964).*

Evans (1951), in his study of the context of riddling among the Tindal Dusun group in North Borneo (Sabah), states that riddling

occurs only at harvest, either in the field or in the house, or at marriages. Evans’ informants told him that if riddles were asked at other times of the year, they would be answered by evil spirits and those responsible for asking them would have bad dreams. Williams (1963), in his study of the riddling behaviour among the Dusuns in Tambunan district of North Borneo (Sabah), states that “There is some evidence, based on observation and interviews, that Dusun riddling behaviour is associated with and functions as part of religious behaviour patterns related to harvest activities.” Back to the Rungus of Sabah, they believe that paddy-spirits will appear during the harvest period and the riddling activities will please them. Thus, riddles are posed at this time, but not at others.

The Rungus like to exploit our “fears of the unknown” when riddling, too. If the respondent fails to answer the initiator will say, “You must answer the *sundait* or else someone (a spirit) will sleep with you tonight.” Such a threat inevitably intimidates children, who are then motivated to find the answer to the *sundait* by asking their parents, friends, or other villagers.

One *sundait*, in particular, is closely associated with the paddy harvest taboo:

Flying *si i-nganingani*,  
*Si ngani* landed.  
 [Informant: Addek Riupa]

The answer to the above riddle is a *llinggaman* - a traditional tool used for harvesting paddy. It comprises a small blade which fits into the palm of the hand and a

wooden handle which protrudes between the little finger and the ring finger. Most of the paddy farmers in Sabah use a sickle to harvest paddy, but not the Rungus. The use of the *llinggaman* reflects the respect of the farmers for the rice-spirits; they do not wish the Bambarazon to see the blade of the *llinggaman* as the paddy stalks are being cut (Phelan, 2005).

According to all the informants, riddles are asked throughout the day during harvest season - on meeting family members or friends, during feasting and drinking sessions. Even though this is done primarily for their own enjoyment, those who have studied the Rungus culture know that it is connected to their traditional beliefs.

*Ah, itu sundait, memeriahkan itu musim. Ah, itu masa memuji itu semangat padi, itu Odu-odu, menjadikan itu tahun, tahun yang meriah. Ah, kalau dulu siang malam, sampai subuh pun orang kampung "bersundait", tengah malam begitu, semasa musim menuai padi. Di sawah padi pun "bersundait", orang mengetam padi pun "bersundait", em... sehingga berlalulah musim mengetam* [Informant: Kinindangan Masani].

(Ah, riddling used to make that season (harvesting paddy) merry. Ah, that was the time to praise the paddy-spirits, so that Odu-odu, would make the year merrier. Ah, in those days, the villagers would carry out riddling from early morning until night time in the paddy

harvesting season. They performed "bersundait" (riddling) in the paddy field while harvesting, um...until the harvest season was over).

*Ah, orang sedang mengetam pun bersundait. Di waktu berehat di pondok pun "bersundait", di rumah pun "bersundait". Em... di mana-mana dan bila-bila masa pun "bersundait". Ah, orangnya, tua-muda, lelaki-perempuan, ah, satu rumah panjang... Ah, biasanya, di rumah panjang, orang "bersundait" di sini. Ah, kadang kala dia panggil orang di luar rumah panjang. Jauh-jauh dia orang datang. Ramai orang datang, jauh-jauh mereka* [Informant: Kinindangan Masani].

(Ah, people do "bersundait" (riddling) while harvesting paddy. At break times, they practice "bersundait" under the trees. In their house they are also doing "bersundait". Um...anywhere and at any time people do "bersundait". It doesn't matter whether they are old or young people, men or women, ah, the whole long house...Ah, normally people staying in this long house start a riddling session, and sometimes they will call passers-by to join them. From far, they come and join in the riddling sessions. A lot of people come from far away villages).

From the riddle answers given in this research, it is clear that many Rungus *sundait* creators were inspired by paddy-

related activities. This is evident in the *sundait* answers:

- i. Informat 2: *Sundait* 10 - Guarding a paddy field from sparrows (scarecrow).
- ii. Informat 2: *Sundait* 12 - *Tumutud* - Burning and clearing land for planting paddy.
- iii. Informat 2: *Sundait* 15 - Harvesting paddy with a *llinggaman* (tool).
- iv. Informat 2: *Sundait* 16 - *Tapai* - Fermented glutinous rice or rice wine.
- v. Informat 4: *Sundait* 34 - The act of removing the bark of a tree to make *llingkut* for keeping rice.
- vi. Informat 5: *Sundait* 43 - *Tutub* (cover of a rice container) and *raza* (a round tray).
- vii. Informat 5: *Sundait* 48 - Rice barn.
- viii. Informat 6: *Sundait* 53 - The act of pounding paddy.
- ix. Informat 7: *Sundait* 63 - A person drinking rice wine.
- x. Informat 7: *Sundait* 65 - Harvesting paddy.

According to the informants for this research, when a person is engaged in “mengarait” (answering a riddle), he is indirectly calling a paddy spirit to protect his paddy: specific references to “paddy” in the answer (as featured in all the above *sundait*s) only serve to reinforce the request. In addition to that, Hart (1964) in *Riddles in*

*Filipino Folklore* stated that in a basically agricultural nation, one might expect that economically important, widely distributed, and indigenous agricultural plants and products would receive emphasis in a riddle corpus. He also assumed rice to be a common subject for the riddles in a Southeast Asian country, where its animistic nature is accepted by most of the people. Hart (1964) also stated that scholars like Archer Taylor imply the existence of a selective process in the choice of the riddle subjects as portrayed in their riddle answers. With regard to selection, Hart has identified four factors. Firstly, riddle subjects are familiar subjects. Secondly, riddles usually deal with concrete objects, occasionally with processes, and rarely with abstractions. Thirdly, selection of riddle subjects is influenced by people’s value systems. Finally, selection of subjects is determined by their inherent riddle potentialities. Hart’s (1964) statements verify why so many Rungus *sundait* subjects are related to paddy and paddy related activities.

None of the Rungus *sundait* images or *sundait* answers collected in this research have any connection with the paddy-spirits themselves. The author would say that the sacred aspects endowed to the paddy-spirits have made them a less appropriate riddle subject among the Rungus. However, there is a *sundait* answer found to have connection to the Rungus’ belief in spiritual beings:

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<i>Togod ku ddo rokizan,</i>	I am disappointed,
<i>A-millo soromo,</i>	You are not well behaved,
<i>Pallad oku rokizan,</i>	If I were you,
<i>Llid noko bbinonduk.</i>	I'd do the feast.
( <i>It rogon ddot rusod monuhu moginum</i> )	(A house ghost asking for a ritual feast)
[Informant: Rundabang Linsapu]	

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The supplier of this *sundait*, Rundabang Linsapu, is a high-ranked and well-respected priestess of the Matunggong village. Her use of this riddle illustrates the Rungus belief in panoply of spirits (including the house ghost), which need to be appeased. In this context, *sundait* can be considered as one of the several techniques utilised by the Rungus for dealing with the supernatural. When Williams (1963) explained in length about the magical function of the Dusun riddles in his research, he stated that riddling provides for a purgation of fears of the unknown through affording a means for expression of fears. At the same time, nonetheless, he admitted that the riddles recorded by him at that time do not convey meanings of magical function; nor do such riddles convey a sense of imitative or homeopathic magic. However, the above-mentioned *sundait* does manage to convey a 'meaning of magical function' in relation to the Rungus' belief in the supernatural world.

Moreover, it is important to note that in the social context of the Rungus, people are prohibited from engaging in leisure activities like dancing, singing, storytelling, and riddling before the harvest. According to Rinjamal Montuduk<sup>4</sup>, a senior Rungus informant in the Matunggong village of Kudat, if one engages in any of these leisure

activities, it is considered disrespectful to the other workers in the paddy field. Besides, the Rungus believe that enjoying oneself in this way before the paddy bears its grains constitutes a premature celebration which may well offend both the Odu-odu (paddy spirits) and the *rogon* (evil spirits). As a result, the *rogon* may punish the farmers by creating problems to jeopardise their harvests. From this, it is clear that the prohibition of riddling before harvest-time is closely linked with the Rungus' belief in paddy spirits, as well as with their social and cultural considerations. The reason for this is obvious; of all the plants, paddy is their most important crop.

## CONCLUSION

To sum up, riddling is closely linked to the Rungus belief that paddy-spirits will appear during the paddy harvesting season. When the villagers "*monundait*" (pose a riddle) and "*mengarait*" (answer a riddle), the paddy-spirits are thought to be pleased and to protect their paddy as well as providing a bountiful harvest. On the other hand, it is considered taboo for the Rungus to perform riddles outside the harvesting season, as such an action will offend the paddy-spirits and may negatively affect the paddy yields. The

belief in paddy-spirits so important to the Rungus that riddling activity during harvest-time proliferates. As a result, the industrious Rungus farmers have amassed more and more *sundait* with the passing of time. As pointed out by Abrahams (1972), "It is the riddling process and the riddling occasion and the presence of riddlers that produce riddles..." (as cited in Kaivola-Bregthenhoj, 2001). Besides the situational context (i.e., the situation of the oral performance), this paper has highlighted the cultural context of the Rungus riddling; namely, the informants in this research are hill paddy planters; they participated in riddling at harvest-time when they were young, and they share the belief that riddling will increase their paddy yields. It should also not be forgotten that the riddling activities of the Rungus are inseparable from their society and culture.

Finally, all the informants in this research revealed that the practice of riddling at harvest-time is no longer popular among the Rungus farmers in Kudat. In fact, it was only widely practiced up to the 1950s. The author believes that the seventy-eight *sundait* listed in this paper represent just a small proportion of the total number of the *sundait*s created by the Rungus farmers over the generations. Hence, further fieldwork is required so that the remaining of the Rungus *sundait* can be collected and preserved for the future generations.

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>The term Kadazandusun - officially coined in the 1990s - is a combination of the words Kadazan and Dusun, devised with the aim of uniting all the sub-ethnic groups encompassed by these two major ethnic groups. The official Kadazandusun language was first taught in schools in 1997 (Reid, 1997).

<sup>2</sup>The ethnic terminology of the Dusunic-speaking peoples of Sabah is a highly problematic area. Some researchers refer to those of Rungus ethnic stock as Dusun, while others refer to them as Momogun. Appell (1978), for example, used the term Rungus Dusun in his article but conceded that the title Rungus Momogun was more appropriate. Porodong (2001) stated that although it is right to include the Rungus under the Dusunic language family, they do not regard themselves as Dusun. They prefer to be called Rungus or Momogun.

<sup>3</sup>According to Low Kok On (2006), the Tambunan Dusuns associate their ancestors with Nunuk Ragang as revealed in the "Tambunan Dusun Origin Myth" published by Williams in 1960. According to the myth, Muhgumbul (an early Tambunan Dusun) and his family decided to run away from Saroh, the evil spirit fearing his revenge. After leaving Nunuk Ragang, the family broke up and went on their separate ways and made a hut. The first person made his hut from the leaves of Tuwon tree, hence, his descendants are known as the Tuwawon. The second hut was built under the Tagahas tree; consequently, the descendants are called the Tagahas. The third hut was built at the intersection of two tracks. The descendants

of the builder are called the Tibabar, i.e., people who build in a cross-wise way. The fourth hut was built under the Bundu tree. The heirs are, not surprisingly, referred to as the Bundu. The fifth hut was made on a great plain on level ground. Today, the offspring of this person are called the Gunnah, which means plain. The sixth hut was made in the shade of the Palupuh tree and the builder's descendants are referred to as the Palupuh. The seventh person did not build a hut. He made a thick cooking pot to cook his food. Today, the descendents of this person

are called the Kohub. Later, some of the Kohub people went another way, and made a hut from Nuhreoh (dead wood) tree. The offspring of these people are known as the Kureo. Evidently, natural objects (trees), the landscape (the plain and the crossroads) and household utensils (cooking pot) were all mythologized by the Tambunan Dusun to account for the origins of the seven Tambunan Dusun sub-tribes.

<sup>4</sup>Telephone interview on 16 November 2011, 1.30 – 2.30 pm.

## APPENDICES



Photo 1: A *Kikizob* (a Rungus traditional fan used for fencng cooking fire)



Photo 2: A *lengguai* (a Rungus traditional container)



Photo 3: *Oddon* (Rungus traditional stove supports made of mud)