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Epilogue

CHAPTER 10

The primary aim of this study has been to bring together a range of ethnographic material on a Kajang group, and to focus in particular on two types of oral narrative. These comprise one performed in sung verse and the other spoken in a complex prose form, both of which were recorded in May 1984. Such a project amounts to groundwork; and so this Epilogue is brief.

With the exception of the extensive work of Benedict Sandin and Bishop A.D. Galvin, ethnographic studies in Sarawak have touched on oral tradition mainly as a source of evidence for the historical background to current ideas of ethnic identity and inter-ethnic relations (e.g. Nicolaisen, 1977-78; Guerreiro, 1987; Maxwell, 1987; Sellato, 1989; 21-22 et passim; also Sandin, 1994). These studies have been valuable in lending an historical dimension to ethnographic material; and indeed the use of oral sources in historical reconstruction needs to proceed with due respect for the special nature of the material and the social context in which it is revealed (Vansina, 1961/1973: 18,186).

Where ethnography in Borneo has concerned the arts, it has focused its documentary efforts on pictorial or material representation (e.g. Hose and Shelford, 1906; King, 1985) as well as on folklore and poetry. The analytical treatment of verbal arts has, however, been less prominent, perhaps because careful investigation is linguistically demanding and periods of field study have been comparatively short. There is a need for more studies of the kind represented by Masing (1989) and Prentice (1981).

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The narratives presented, annotated and discussed in this book have posed, and continue to illustrate, many common problems. Identifying and defining such problems in a specific corpus of material are themselves a part of the analytical process. These are problems of orthography, where linguistically diverse sources have been tapped; of presentation, where appropriate punctuation and line structure are debatable; of translation, where properties of assonance and semantic nuance in the original are necessarily lost or compromised in English; of composition, where it is important to understand the nature of the process whereby the performer creates his work, sometimes with audience participation, and gives it its originality; of musicology, where the form and content of the sung performance are influenced by, and themselves influence, the properties of musical convention; of aesthetics, where formal relationships between distinct artistic media (visual, musical, phonological,