

The Metamorphosis of Selected Maranao Stories into Dances

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Abstract

This study was designed to select four Maranao folk dances and identify folk stories where the selected folk dances are to have originated from. Since folk tradition is best transmitted orally, this study probed into another element in preserving folk tradition and that is through dance. The researchers looked into the different folk perspectives to understand how the society values their folk tradition. The study aimed specifically to answer the following questions: (1) What is the common folk perspective translated into story and dance in Maranao literature? (2) Which between the story and the dance is more embedded in the society? And (3) What are the thematic elements in the stories?

The stories and dances collected were analyzed and observations of their transition and transformations were then used to generate the following findings: (1) the common folk perspective of the collected stories is about their concept of pride and conversely, their sense of shame; (2) between the stories and the dances, the dances are more embedded in society meaning they are more known and practiced by the younger generation; and, (3) the stories collected and dances examined were found to have similar themes of pride and honor and their thematic elements do not vary greatly from each other.

Keywords: Maranao, folk dance, folk tales, epic

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Introduction

Stories and dances are two distinct creative genres which are as old as time. Both serve to delight an audience. This is an exploratory study into the metamorphosis of stories into dances. The study discusses the audience's view about the story and the dance. It also shows their preference, whether the dance or the story. The themes emanating from the stories are also discussed.

The Maranao people originally occupied the regions surrounding Lake Lanao in the Northern Mindanao, particularly in the regions of Lanao del Norte and Lanao del Sur. However, the Maranao people today have settled in various places all over the Philippines. They constitute the wider Muslim ethnic group and constitute the sixth largest cultural minority in the Philippines. They are well-known for their sophisticated weaving, artwork, wood and metal craft, their epic "Darangen" and the dance "Singkil."

Comparative Study of the Stories and Dances

There are two stories reviewed in the study. The first is the epic, "Darangen," in the volumes focusing on "Paramata Gandingan" and "Prince Bantugan". The second story is "Potri Intantiyaya" taken from the "Agamaniyog" stories. The Maranao folk dances portrayed in the stories are Kappa Malong-Malong, Pagapir, Kinakulangan and Singkil.

Maranao dances originated from communal practices, rituals, or activities common to the Maranao people living in the province of Lanao in the northern part of Mindanao, Philippines. Interviews with a few directors, choreographers, and performers revealed that there is no authentic presentation of the Maranao dances.

The first dance that is reflected in the selected stories is "Kappa Malong-Malong". The story "Potri Intantiyaya" in the collection of "Agamaniyog Folk Tales" showed that the Sultan of Agamaniyog presented his daughters to Radiya Bagaram for his choice of bride. The daughters were all dressed in their colourful "malong", fashioning it in different ways while walking regally in front of their visitor.

Kappa Malong-Malong

The performer uses a tubular cloth called "Malong." The photos below show the different ways of wearing or using a "malong"



Photo 1. The “malong” worn as a long dress.



Photo 2. The “malong” used as a basket to store small fruits or objects.



Photo 3. The “malong” used as a coat to ward off the cold.



Photo 4. The “malong” used as a cover from the sun or a light rain.

Pagapir and Kinakulangan

Two dances, “Pagapir” and “Kinakulangan”, are popular folk dances. These are performed individually or as part of the royal dance, “Singkil.” “Pagapir” illustrates many ways of handling a fan or two fans.



Photo 5. The different ways of handling fans.



Photo 6. The ladies-in-waiting walking regally while handling the fans.

“Kinakulangan” showcases the royal walk or “kini-knini” of the Maranao women. According to Ele (1974), the steps show good upbringing among the Maranao women. Lines 214 -269 in the Maranao epic “Darangen” give the details on how Princess Gandingan’s lady attendants walked ahead of her with their colorful fans, umbrellas and betelnut cases.

²¹⁴Let us now shift our attention
And look at the royal ladies,
All magnificently dressed, who
Had gone down, all of them, themselves,
To the resplendent *torogan*...
²²²The first ones to lead the long line
Were the young maids and attendants
Numbering more than a hundred,
All carrying huge fans which seemed
To be made of gold which they moved
As they escorted their princess...
²³⁴Young maid servants, each one busy
At fanning and refreshing their
Lovely princes with golden fans...
²⁶⁰Another eye-catching object
Was the amazing number of
Flags used to screen and give cover
For the magnificent princess
Being held in several rows.
On each side was seen a pair of
Umbrellas with yellow pompons
Carried high above her head, in
Number, ten in all, the mark of
Authentic royal ancestry...

Singkil

The last dance in this study is “Singkil”. It is the most popular dance which is mastered by the Maranao young ladies and several institutional and professional dance troupes. By itself, Singkil is the most popular and admired among Maranao dances. The dance takes its name from the heavy rings worn by the female dancer around her ankles to keep time while she dances. She moves in and out of the bamboo poles that are arranged in a criss-cross formation and clacked together in a unique, syncopated rhythm as she manipulates two elaborately designed fans. She represents a Maranao princess. After a while, a male dancer, representing a Maranao prince, performs his dance round and through the bamboo poles clacked together bearing a shield and a sword. The dance ends with the princess going home with the prince.



Photo 7. Still picture of the entire cast in the dance, Singkil.

The dance steps are intricate and require swift movement so that the dancers' feet won't be crushed by the moving bamboos. Meanwhile, the clacking bamboos represent the evil forces which the two characters had to overcome.

The epic illustrates the abduction of Princess Gandingan by a supernatural creature and Prince Bantugan's successful rescue of the princess. Lines 718 - 887 describe Prince Bantugan's wonder at the brilliant rays coming off from the Inantara Legawan. He believes the place was enchanted by Diwata Makapanton, so he leaps to the mountain of Lakongan Minipantaw. He then sees Princess Gandingan and is mesmerized by her beauty. He approaches her respectfully, trying to win her trust. He convinces her to marry and be with him to his Kingdom in Bembaran. While she agrees to marry him, she refuses to tell him her real name and her origin for fear of being put to shame.

Both the dance and the stories are art forms that serve a great deal in preserving the Maranao culture while showcasing the beauty of the Maranao culture as well. The Maranaos have a reputation of holding to the highest degree prestige, pride and honor. They value self-dignity highly and fear being shamed. This is very much evident in the meeting of Princess Gandingan and Prince Bantugan in the story "Darangen" as well as in the dances described above.

However, while the dances are performed, the audience, unfamiliar with the stories, remain unaware of the stories. Meanwhile, students studying literature, particularly the epic "Darangen" and the "Agamaniyog stories", also are not aware of the connection of the stories with the dances. Further, young audiences are more familiar with the dances than with the stories. This is due to the fact that many cultural activities and institutional programs showcase the performing arts many times in a given year. Meanwhile, the study of the Maranao literature is dependent on the teacher's or professor's discretion teaching Philippine literature.

Literature and the performing arts face many challenges today. The epic "Darangen" is dubbed as a masterpiece of the oral and intangible heritage of humanity by UNESCO in 2005. However, it is studied only in parts and not as a whole. While the study of literature is very selective and tends to focus on the most popular stories

coming from the other regions, folk dances are diluted. While the stories retain its form, the dances are deformed.

The late Ramon Obusan, a National Artist for Dance in 2006, studied the Maranao folk dances and used his findings in presenting the folk dances close to its original form in his Ramon Obusan Folkloric Group.

While artistic directors argue that there is a need to enhance common steps to visually stimulate audience, so called cultural dance workshops have made the steps diluted. Fernandez (2007) illustrated the problem encountered in the transfer of knowledge about the dance. The source of the dance comes from the indigenous people. Researchers immerse themselves among the indigenous people to study the dances. Then, the researchers are tasked to demonstrate the dances during the workshops with about a hundred participants who are choreographers or Physical Education (PE) teachers. The problem is seen in the “interpretation” and “enhancements” of the dances made by the choreographers and PE teachers.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The stories and dances showcase the rich cultural heritage of the Maranaos. These art forms equal the beauty and richness of other cultural heritage in the world. The study also elucidates the need to study both forms together.

The paper recommends:

1. Thorough study of the history of the dances be included in the teaching of Maranao folk dances and literature;
2. A historical study should be conducted to trace the specific geographical areas where the Maranao stories and dances originated; and,
3. Further studies should be conducted on the literature and dance forms of other Muslim tribes in the Philippines.

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