

*The Sultan/Datu Images in Maguindanaon Folktales as a means of Cultural Identity*

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**Abstract**

Basically, this study endeavored to ascertain the ideal attributes that could make an exemplary *Maguindanaon* ruler. It also aimed to probe what these reveal of *Maguindanaon* political organization and cultural identity through analytical criticism. The findings of this study were obtained through the use of Joseph Campbell's Heroic Archetypes as well as the socio-cultural approach in literary criticism. The folktales included were selected based on their apparent portrayal of the *Sultan/Datu* images. The vital analysis done on the selected folktales clearly showed that the *datu/sultan* (ruler) mostly portrayed were the noble ones who play superior or extreme concept of a leader who use their power in order to oppress people of lower rank in their kingdom. Nevertheless, there were also ruler character portrayed with generosity, openhandedness, humility and piety that are basically intended to serve as identities of ideality worth emulating.

Keywords: Sultan And Datu Images, Maguindanaon Political Organization, Maguindanaon Cultural Identity

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## Introduction

In societies like the Maguindanaon, the ancient *Datu* or *Sultan* reaped the benefits of superior political organization and some contacts with many Islamic kingdoms that blossomed in the archipelago in the wake of Majapahit's declines. The *Sultan* and *Datu* have normally been regarded by the *Maguindanaon* as their "heroes". The situation in which the "hero" at society finds himself is as important as his personality and his actions. The leader neither behaves in a vacuum, nor is he an entirely free individual. He acts in a milieu which has been shaped by the past and the success or failure of his career must, "to some extent, depend upon his individual response to historical and cultural forces which he encounters (Ileto, 1971).

The reflection of the *Datu/Sultan's* images and attributes in some selected *Maguindanaon* folktales can be of use in building better government administration and in the reconstruction of policies basing on the earlier experiences of our ancestors. These factors may possibly play a crucial role in the quest for lasting peace in Mindanao. Since these folktales portray their lifestyles and worldviews, these will provide cultural understanding and appreciation of our individual differences (Demetrio, 1975).

The following *Maguindanaon* folktales were strictly examined through the use of socio-cultural criticism and the Joseph Campbell's study on world myths. Through extensive analyses, the researcher looked into the facets of the folktales by answering guide questions such as the portrayal of the *datu/sultan* images, their inclusion to the measures of an exemplary ruler set forth and the disclosure that these *Maguindanaon* folktales reflect in *Maguindanaon* political organization and self-identity.

### I. *Abunawas, the Intelligent Farmer*

In the kingdom, there lived a farmer named *Abunawas*, who productively and patiently worked on his land to have a good harvest. Upon hearing it, the wicked *datu* plotted a story against *Abunawas* so he could confiscate and own the crops of *Abunawas*. The *datu* blatantly accused him of burning the house of his neighbor. During those times, people's submission to their ruler was so extreme that everything the *datu* said was believed without a need for any evidence. The accused man, of course, denied it knowing that the *datu* was trying to fabricate story against him, yet because it was the word of the *datu*, it was treated irrevocably true. In return, the oppressed man gathered strength to materialize his revenge through his wit.

The *datu's* attitude was clearly unjust but people had to submit blindly without questioning the words of the *datu* as they were regarded as the laws that people ought to follow whether against their will or not. This justified his lack of conscience. As a *datu*, he was understood to be belonging to the elite class, yet it was so ironical how he managed to oppress men of lower status in the society. He never seemed contented of his title and wealth entitled of a *datu*. He almost had everything yet he still wanted to deprive his people who experienced a kind of hand-to-mouth living.

The *datu* was clearly portrayed as someone wicked. However, it depicted the typical way the people ought to regard their *datu*. A ruler is a ruler, and no other *raison d'être* could rupture the truth. As a result, the poor *Abunawas* just accepted the providence.

However, he thought of a way to awaken the realization of the wicked *datu* in a more diplomatic manner. When the *datu* asked why was he tying the sacks of rice on just one side of the horse, he tended to draw similarities between himself and the horse who was unrightfully burdened of things with unbalanced weight, such as the *datu*'s accusation of him with a crime totally fabricated. He tried to do it in a more subtle way.

The image of the *datu* apparently fell on the category of archetypal fool hero. The images of *datu* portrayed to belong in this category all fell on their common denominator, and that was the matter-of-fact actions which were all centered to their fanaticism at seeking to enjoy life only for their own sake. They all dreaded the inability to survive and so they tended to play tricks and deprived their helpless and pitiful constituents, who by themselves aimed at improving their status through their own perseverance. An archetypal hero's virtues are joy and freedom. As observed in the story, the *datu* lacked this thing called conscience and was still able to enjoy while there was a man he knew to have been deprived unjustly by him. He only cared for himself which was a disgusting truth about this *datu* reflected in the story.

## II. *Abunawas, The Magician*

Sultan image is portrayed in an apparent manner, though the story actually focused on the protagonist, *Abunawas*. The king was treated here as the villain of the story because he was involved in so many actions which held up the triumph of the protagonist, *Abunawas*.

"*Abunawas, the Magician*" gave an insight of a *datu* who was at first deeply well-liked for his humility and word of honor. It was manifested in the scene where he went into the grave of the dead man, *Abunawas*, crying and announcing to the people that he was forgiving him for all his previous sins. Later on, he had known that the man played trick on him, for he was allowed a small hole for minimal breathing and so he did not really pass away. The *datu* could not do anything for he has already given his forgiveness and this manifested his regard for having a word of honor. When his daughter's ring was stolen, he announced that whoever could find it would be married to her daughter, and luckily, it was *Abunawas* who had garnered the proffer. Despite his being benevolent, there was also an instance where the *datu* had shown his wickedness, and that was when he knew that it was actually *Abunawas* who had stolen the ring. He became very mad and so ordered his men to burn down the house of *Abunawas*, with his daughter not being spared although she knew nothing about it. The *datu* punished without exception. From there we could conclude that he was, in one way or another, abusive of his power.

After knowing about it, *Abunawas* plan to outwit the *datu*. He plotted different stories in order to materialize his plans against the *datu*. The *datu* was given an identity full of pride. As shown in the story, it was a very pompous deal to him when someone attempted to step on his *maratabat* (pride). When he knew that the wealth of *Abunawas* came from his selling of the ashes of his burned house, the *datu* foolishly ordered his men to burn all the houses thinking that he could also gain wealth from it. Same as when he ordered all his men to kill all the carabaos and sell them to the market. *Abunawas* had successfully managed to manipulate him all throughout the story. It was the *datu* who appeared to have gone crazy in the minds of the people. His

insecurity reigned and so he did things stupidly just to assure *Abunawas* could not get on top of him.

The *datu*'s character absolutely fell on the category of archetypal magician hero. His being an archetype was determined by his responses to the circumstances in the story. His zeal of transforming himself led him to do silly and truly irrational things. He did not want *Abunawas* to be wealthy because it was truly a threat on his *malatabat* (pride) as a ruler. Therefore, he tried some ways to transform himself to a more sophisticated one. He idiotically imitated the fabricated stories of *Abunawas*. As an archetypal magician hero, his fear was assuming evil sorcery. His task was to align himself with the cosmos. He did not allow his ordinary people to destroy the certain status he played in the society. His personal virtue was personal power. As shown in the story, the people grew mad about the foolish decisions of the *datu*, however, due to his possession of personal power, the people were afraid to protest even if what the *datu* did was clearly unjust.

### III. *Baladek*

The story "*Baladek*" profoundly illustrated the social milieu of great peculiarity in one of the settings of the story. It was the unusual thing to hear in the olden days that a woman ruled the kingdom. As shown in the story, the ruler was *Putri Madanding*. Prior to her introduction in the story, the character of *Baladek* played a major role. Later in the story, he assumed the throne of this woman ruler. Hence, his character would be given more details in analysis.

The story revolved around the adventure of this man who believed that wisdom was a treasure that would make him good. Thus, he planned to leave for his quest for wisdom. On one of his journey, he met a man named *Angyas* who taught him the wisdom by which in the later part of the story brought him to the fulfillment of his quest.

His character's quest for wisdom was instigated by his aspiration for himself and his mother a life that was worth recognition in his society. As he left for his journey, he could already prophesize the good things that he could bring to his life and the good name that he could establish for his family. His being a typical son of a poor family wore out strong motivation in his mind to ameliorate their state. He persevered day and night to meet his fortune. The enthusiasm for wisdom flaming in the heart of *Baladek* became his sole impetus despite some odds. He decisively set out on a journey in pursuit of wisdom and self-discovery leaving behind his mother.

His willpower and assertive character had one day brought him to the place, a path that could soon develop his personality into a more dignified and prominent one. The story reached its climax when he arrived on a place where the ruler was an old maid.

This was a peculiar society that allowed a woman to govern. Among the other stories, this folktale had actually broken the societal dictate that only men can have the right to rule. As pictured in the story, he was beautiful but proud and remained unmarried because of her high standard. No one has ever yet fulfilled her promise which was that whoever wished to court her had to undergo an intricate task, a sort of all-or-nothing task. Whoever would survive would absolutely win her, if not, he would lose his life

in vain.

*Baladek*, upon hearing this, took all the risk to proclaim himself as a suitor. He must have to kill a snake as bulky as a coconut trunk. This trial did not tear his personality into pieces but rather helped him build more confidence in himself. *Baladek* faced such challenge bravely and eventually defeated the obstacle. This event turned him into a more sophisticated and eminent persona after proving his ability to those around him which made him win over the lady *sultan*. As a result, the lady *sultan*, after having him as his husband, relinquished her throne to him and *Baladek* became the sultan of the kingdom.

The road to wisdom he took attributed him a characterization that furthered his portrayal as a hero aiming to win. His character was observed from the very beginning of the story as someone who desired nothing but winning. He imposed firm discipline on himself and showed valor to run against weakness. This fact entailed Campbell's description of an archetypal warrior hero. His fervor for wisdom made him go over in search for wisdom and his fortune, due to his fear to be in line with the weak. This justified his actions like his leaving behind his beloved mother to avoid stagnation. When he was faced with his dragon or main obstacle, such as his challenge to kill a snake as large as a trunk of a coconut trunk, his courage had helped him to do it with all his might. He envisioned fighting for what matters. His archetypal warrior hero attributes strengthened his personality to reach his major goal. He triumphantly achieved valor and good reputation for himself and his mother by means of his being a strong-willed person.

#### **IV. How the Town of *Tacurong* Got its Name**

The story unambiguously presented a figure of a *datu*. In the story, the *datu* played a heavy role making the whole story revolve around his personality and experiences.

The *datu* depicted in the story was held to be very popular. He was told to be fond of women and so he had many wives. However, it was a tongue in cheek that despite his many wives, he only had one daughter who would be the major determinant of his providence and actions throughout the story. The story mainly revolved around the *datu's* treatment of her daughter. For him, the daughter was beyond any valuable thing he had and so he became exaggeratedly, excessively protective of the princess.

The *datu's* love for her daughter was tested when one day, he went on a journey, and her daughter was left behind her, yet he made it sure that everything would be under his control. His daughter was not allowed to go out her room or he would all punish the servants. His strong-willed character provided him confidence that nothing was going to happen to his daughter, and so he left for his journey. However, his daughter did otherwise neglecting what his father had ordered. When he came back, he discovered that the princess whom he dearly loved was drowned on the well. He got furious but he could not do anything because nothing could bring back the life of his daughter. This incident could have torn him into pieces; however, he tried to act sturdily.

The character of the *datu* apparently fell on the category of the archetypal lover hero. After all the travails and experiences he had, his character, in the end remained rigid

and passionate. He accepted his fate, the loss of his precious daughter without maiming or hurting others. As a lover hero, he strove to gain bliss through the series of action he performed in the story. His keenness of women was undeniably a revelation of his seeking for bliss that he could only have through taking many wives. Another was when he got only one daughter despite having many wives. This daughter eventually turned out to be the center of attraction in the *datu's* life; in short, she had become the love of his life after her wives. He valued this love more than anything else. When he was faced with major trial or obstacle such as the loss of her daughter, he accepted it resolutely without reprimanding the servants who were with the princess while he was away. He did things to solve his problems without putting tint into his figure as a ruler. He was truly zealous and dedicated to this commitment.

## V. *Subekat, The Philosopher*

The story showcased an emblem of a near-to-perfection image of a ruler. The story revolved around his encounter with a man named *Subekat*, and how this man tried to outwit him.

In the kingdom, a *datu* named *Abed* was absolutely influential. His words were treated as the law and so he had full control of his people. He attained a much idealized status in his career as a *datu*. He was sincerely loved and faithfully followed by his subjects after showing his ideal traits as a leader. He was an image of a fully authoritative *datu*. One thing that was very amiable about him was his concern for the needy. As a *datu*, he made it sure that he could attend to the needs of his kingdom's subjects. From time to time, he roamed around to check his people in their houses just to see if they have food to feed their hungry stomachs. Throughout the story, he had no other mission but the realization of his task. The needs of his people might not have been addressed to him directly, yet his character was always at their side to extend help. Another manifestation of his being an ideal ruler was his habit of leading the townspeople every day in prayers. He easily noticed when someone was absent and it so happened that one "*luhur*", he noticed the absence of someone and learned that it was *Subekat*, the Philosopher.

His character as a *datu* was put into the ideal. His people regarded him or looked up to him like someone who stood in a pedestal. This integrity the *datu* have shown seemed to be abused by *Subekat* when one day, he planned to outsmart the *datu*.

The character of the *datu* absolutely fell on the category of archetypal ruler hero. His actions were all motivated by his desire to create order. As a ruler, he did everything in order to sustain his kingdom and avoid chaos which unfortunately happened to be the greatest fear of an archetypal ruler hero like him. His devotion to his career enabled him to execute several actions such as attending to the needs of the people in his kingdom. His dedication was to the extent that his mind was very futuristic to worry about the few remaining lands for the next generation. To take full control in his kingdom was his main task, like he noticed when someone was absent every time he led his people in prayer. His character had shown total commitment to his accountability.

The story presented an ideal image of a *datu*. Among the other images in the other stories, his attitude stood out to be the emblem of a ruler worth emulating. He was the

best in such a way that he cared for the needy and he enjoined his kingdom to do good and forbid evil. As a result, he was highly regarded with reverence and became well-loved by his people.

## **VI. The Legend of the Narra Tree**

The story presented a life of a pitiable *datu*. Though the story contained some supernatural elements, however, it nevertheless portrayed a figure of a *datu* which played a major role in the story. The story revolved around this single character.

The story apparently narrated the personality and experience of *Datu Sidungan*. He was presented as a *datu* who had borne so many burdens for what he was. Physically he had two golden horns that grew in his forehead. Because of this, the people called him “*Sidungan datu*” instead of “*Datu Sidungan*”. This attitude of the people towards the *datu* manifested that they lacked reverence to their ruler. According to them, “*Sidungan datu*” was what fitting for him more because of his two horns. As his name suggested, the word “*sidung*” in Maguindanaon language means “a horn”. The two horns affected his career as a *datu*. He tended to withdraw from people in the society. This showed that despite the people’s bullying of him, he seemed to accept it as part of himself, apart from how a *datu* was expected to respond to this circumstance.

The character of *Datu Sidungan* was portrayed as something pathetic for though he was a ruler himself, he was slighted and avoided by the people, because of his appearance. It added to his misery not to gain the attitude the respect of the people who were supposed to regard him as a ruler.

These travails and experiences had developed his character being a recluse. It became his habit to wake up early and seclude himself. He often went into his favorite praying nook, stayed there all day, fasting and praying that his horn finally his horns were removed from his head. Because of his strong faith, God has granted his major wish. After his last bow, his horns were removed from his forehead.

The character of *Datu Sidungan* clearly fell on the typical category of an archetypal creator hero. From the onset of the story, it is discernible that the *datu* strove hard for his desire to gain identity. That is the main quest of an archetypal creator hero. His seclusion of himself was the manifestation that he lacked confidence and faith in his own identity. The presence of his horns which became the object of the people’s suspicion can be said as the major cause of it. He isolated himself and performed several worship acts to ask God to remove his cause of misery. All of these were done by him to self-create or gain identity. When he was faced with his “dragon”, he claimed it as a part of himself. His being an archetype is justified with his response. When he was oppressed because of his identity, he accepted it and act in a more diplomatic manner. This proved his self-acceptance. Though he had all the means to do so, he did not create a way to fight back against those people who treated him differently. He valued fully the essence of individuality and vocation such as going alone in his favorite praying nook.

The story portrayed the image of a *datu* who possessed a characteristic that cause people’s impertinence. Nonetheless, he played a kind of a ruler who knew how to compromise and sustain patience despite everything. He was an image of humility. He

did not use his power as a *datu* to maim or hurt other people who despised him.

## **VII. The Poor Man and The *Datu***

This story presented a wicked image of a *datu* who played trick on one of the poor men in his kingdom. The *datu* was presented as villainous, taking advantage of the people's regard of respect.

This *datu* started the story when he sent for a poor man to have a talk with him. The *datu* feigned affection into the condition of man, telling him that he was sent for to be asked how the *datu* could help him with his needs. This instance showed the character of the *datu* acting like a saint in front of the people, but having a hidden motive which was expected to be in favor of his own personal interest. His character was presented as someone who was an opportunist on his power and title. In a society, it is very rare to find a person refusing a *datu's* request especially something that is presented to be favorable on his part. The *datu*, as presented in the story, showed great confidence that the man could not gather any might to decline whatever he asked of him. To add spice to the plot devised carefully by the *datu*, he presented it in a way it could seem favorable on the part of the poor man. As a result, the poor man was easily persuaded and did not falter to accept the offer of the *datu*.

As a ruler, the *datu* was presented in a way that it went against the supposed attitude expected of him. In reality, he sheds crocodile tears to the condition of the poor and pretended to be extending help. Instead of alleviating his people's poor condition, as he was mandated to do, as part of his responsibility, he otherwise showed to be lacking of compassion. This added to the poor man's misery.

The character of the *datu* apparently fell on the category of archetypal fool hero. The *datu's* propensity to enjoy life had reached to the extent that he became selfish, and thinking only of his own benefit. He failed to realize his responsibility as a ruler. This is what an archetypal fool hero does in myth after myth as shown by Campbell. All his actions are triggered by his fear of being not alive. When faced with an obstacle, he plays trick on it, such as his outsmarting the poor, helpless man.

## **VIII. The Story of *Lindongan***

The story narrated was a very short one; however, it did not fail to portray a certain image of a *datu* who played a major role in the event of the story. It revolved around the people's response on his attitude as a ruler and the way he ruled his kingdom.

The *datu* portrayed ruled over the kingdom of *Dzapakan* somewhere in *Zamboanga del Sur*. His name was *Sultan Anwar Uddin*. He was described in the story to be a very sadist and totalitarian leader. His cruelty reached to the extent that he treated his people like animals. They were coerced to give and pursue everything he wanted. Because the *datu's* actions were horribly unbearable, the people were all obliged to submit fully out of their fear, however, some of his kingdom's subjects gradually vanished from his kingdom to run away from the cruelty and despise of the ruler. They ended secretly settling to another place where they could avoid the tyrannical ruler. These people decided to call the place "*Lindongan*" which means hide-out. His character clearly fell on the category of an archetypal fool hero, whose main



concern was to enjoy life for his own sake. In the story, it could be probable to think that he was just playing authoritative image or terrorizing his people in order to get what he wanted. He thought of it as some kind of a coping mechanism or a sort of over compensation, by which he as ruler found ways to have full control of his kingdom through having a sadist image and so the people would absolutely fear him. His being an unjust and spiteful leader might just be tolerated by his weakness as a ruler. He treated it as a cover to a hole in his personality. Deep inside, an archetypal fool hero fears of not being alive. He fears that he cannot gain the total submission of his men and so he tended to act in such a way he could exhaust forced reverence from his subjects.

## **Conclusions**

The selected *Maguindanaon* folktales revealed these archetypal characters. These archetypal characters basically match the folktales of other nations, both in their structures and the presence of archetypes based on the study of Campbell. Mostly, the typical *datu/sultan* (ruler) portrayed were the noble ones who played superior or extreme concept of a *datu* role by using their power in order to oppress people of lower rank in their kingdom. Nevertheless, there were also ruler character portrayed with generosity, openhandedness, righteousness, humility and piety which were basically intended to serve as identities or ideals worth emulating.

The following conclusions are further formulated after a close scrutiny of the texts:

1. Some impending values have been put by the Maguindanaons on their literature which profoundly serve as a means of bequeathing cultural values from generation to generation. These folktales were able to give insights on both positive and negative qualities of a *datu*. These positive qualities serve as measurements of the ideal by which their relevance can be evaluated in the present times. The negative qualities, on the other hand, could serve as a strong wakeup call and a lesson for the next generation.
2. Leaders are liberated individuals and they are compelled to act in a setting molded by the past.
3. Basically, the success and failure of the leaders' career, to some extent depend upon their individual reactions to cultural forces.
4. The portrayal of these *Sultan/Datu* images in the selected folktales can be of great use in building a better government administration and in the reconstruction of policies. The portrayal of the *Maguindanaon* lifestyles and worldviews in these folktales could provide cultural understanding and appreciation of our individual differences and cultural values that could play a crucial role in the quest for lasting peace in Mindanao.

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