

BATANGAS LITERATURE REFLECTING UNIQUE BATANGUENO TRAITS: BRIDGE TO CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

Batangas province in the Philippines is proud of its cultural heritage, particularly the Batangas literature which reflects the unique characteristics of the Batanguenos, their life and culture.

The cultural development of the people goes along with the development of Batangueno literature which places a tremendous emphasis especially in poetry songs, and folktales mostly drawn from real life. The writers have put themselves in the service of the society when they intend their works as agents of social change. Hence, this research seeks to identify from the people of different communities in Batangas the most common among the existing forms of Batangueno literature, and to find out what unique traits that contribute to the development of Batangas culture are transmitted to the younger Batanguenos.

Findings revealed that the most common forms of Batangas folk literature are folksongs as town hymns, poetry in forms of luwa (religious songs) and proverbs, also folktales. Unique Batangueno traits such as nationalism, religiosity, and positive attitude towards life stem from the town hymns and luwa. Proverbs capture the Batanguenos' honor and faithfulness, love and respect for parents and elders, social relationships, sacrifice and love for others and economic security, endurance and industry. These unique Batangueno traits are used to check human flaws in society and improve their spiritual and social relations and work together to achieve developmental goals. To further pursue cultural development specifically provincial progress, each family which is the basic unit of society, the local government, educational institutions and other sectors concerned with the improvement of society must continue to enrich the use of existing literature where values may be deduced, applied to their everyday life and passed on to the younger generations.

KEYWORDS: unique traits, literature, culture and development

Both cultural and historical identity of a community are important factors that determine its development. History records its past, the different events which it hurdled and as a result gave way to the rise and fall of its leaders. Culture, on the other hand, mirrors the experiences and aspirations of its town or province through language and literature, songs and dances or the practices and traditions which prevailed even after every generation.

Over the years, the province of Batangas is known as the "Cradle of Heroes and Nationalists." It is a title earned through the works of Batangueno revolutionary leaders, who contributed much to Philippine libertarian movement during the latter half of the 19th century. Among these

nationalists are Gen. Miguel Malvar, Felipe Agoncillo, Marcela M. Agoncillo, Gen. Nicolas Lantin Gonzales, Apolinario Mabini, Teodoro M. Kalaw and the families of Recto, Laurel and Leviste.

Batangas becomes proud of its cultural heritage, reflected in the host of historic structures and sites in the province that date back to the Spanish period.

And because of its rich history, Batangas literature flourished. Like all literature, Batangas literature expresses and transmits the characteristics of the Batanguenos and articulates their values, ideals and aspirations.

The most noticeable trend in the development of Batangueno literature is the tremendous shift of interests and emphasis especially in poetry, songs and folktales from the religious to the secular and from a literature drawn from fantasy and supernatural to a literature drawn from real life. The writers have put themselves in the service of society, and they look upon themselves and their works as agents of social change. Hence, the concern of the researchers is to trace how these Batangas literature appeal to our younger generation.

This research seeks therefore to identify from the people of different communities in Batangas the most common among the existing forms of Batangueno literature and how these common forms of literature are transmitted to the younger Batanguenos, to determine what unique Batangueno traits are reflected in their common forms of literature and, lastly, to propose measures that may be done to further develop the existing literature that will develop outstanding Batangueno traits necessary for cultural and community development.

Method

This study is phenomenological, and therefore qualitative, interpretive and explanatory. It employed content analysis of the selected forms of Batangueno literature such as folksongs, poetry specifically luwa and proverbs and folktales. The researchers used available library materials such as books, newspapers, magazines, theses and religious journals.

Interpersonal techniques such as oral interview was also employed in this study. This is an unwritten source of information consisting of verbal testimonies which are reported statements concerning the past (Gripaldo, 1999, p.10) In doing so, selected students and teachers of Regional Literature, old folks like church lay leaders and legionaries were interviewed and their answers and testimonies were analyzed and interpreted.

Overall, the proponents examined and analyzed 9 town hymns, 6 luwa poems and 12 proverbs and 2 folktales that are common. Town hymns include those from Batangas City and the municipalities of Tanauan, Lemery, Lipa, Bauan, Rosario, Taysan, Taal, and Lobo. These were collated by college students who also confirmed that they were able to memorize these songs and evidently transmitted to the younger Batanguenos through activities like morning exercises where the town hymns are sung after their school hymns. Government employees, public and private elementary and secondary institutions, likewise, are responsible to sing by heart and to teach students these songs. Folktales include "The Holy Cross of Bauan," and "Our Lady Mediatrix of all Graces." These literary pieces form part of the instructional materials in the literature subject among college students where after discussion, valuing and role playing and

other practical application activities are being done to ensure that values become part of the Batangueno way of life.

The authors also used actual observation. They assessed the present condition and the prevailing schools' hymn sung during their school activities.

Results and Discussion

Based on the findings, Batangas has a rich lore but only a few are preserved in writing. Many among these are in forms of folksongs like town hymns, poetry in forms of luwa and proverbs, and also folktales. Because some residents transfer from one town to another in Batangas, there are many instances that these folk literature have similarities in content yet difference in transcription and melody.

Batangas Literary Genre Reflecting Unique Batangueno Traits

1. Folksongs. Folksongs are balanced rhyming lines dealing with subjects reflective of the people's way of life and community beliefs. These are usually chanted or accompanied by music, so they become more appealing when residents use them in social gatherings, merry-making, bayanihan projects, wedding, barrio fiesta and in other festivities. Moreover, certain literary devices are employed by the parents and elders to transmit their messages with more depth and effectiveness: rhythmic pattern in the use of repetition and enumeration, parallelism, paradox, hyperbole and personification. In addition, the common values of in the island municipality closely relate to the DECS core values of human dignity and its related values of love, spirituality, social responsibility, nationalism and economic efficiency. They have direct implications to education and coincide with the objective of the Department of Education, culture and Sports (Garcia, 1998).

Up to now, these folksongs are still common among small barrios but rare in the city. But being standard bearers of essential values and virtues, they are still used in the homes to suggest standard and wise rules of conduct necessary to man's existence in a society. They reveal dominant values of the society; hence, one could see a universal pattern of struggle to survive through love and frustration, failure and success, and the people's expression of folk customs and beliefs as well as practices.

Musicologists identified Batangas as the origin of the *kumintang*, an ancient war song, (which showed the acts of bravery of the people) which later evolved into *kundiman* which according to Dr. Francisco Santiago, the Father of Filipino Musical Nationalism, "is the love song par excellence of the Filipinos, the plaintive song which goes deepest into their hearts, song which brings them untold emotions." Endowed with such power, the Kundiman naturally came to serve as a vehicle for veiled patriotism in times of colonial oppression, in which the undying love for a woman symbolized the love of country and desire for freedom. ("http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/kundiman" Retrieved 25 July 2009).

Batangas is also the origin of the *Balitao* (although Cebuanos may argue), which aside from being a form of vocal music, is also a form of dance music. The *Balitao*, together with the *Subli*, is the most famous form of dance native to Batangas. In the field of serious music, no one

can underestimate the contribution of Batangas. It is the birthplace of the famous Filipino soprano Conching Rosal, dubbed as the First Lady of the Philippine operatic stage. Lorenzo Ilustre, a local composer, also became famous for his wide array of religious and liturgical music. Maestro of Philippine music Ryan Cayabyab is also a Batangueño, whose mother Celerina Pujante was a sought-after operatic soprano in the 1950's, about the same time as Rosal. Ogie Alcasid, known to fans as Mr. Composer, also hails from this province.

The Batangueña is the subject of numerous traditional songs from Batangas. Perhaps the most famous of all is *Princesa ng Kumintang*, which tells about the pursuit of a very beautiful woman. In the song, the woman is adored as one who is as beautiful as the rose and whose love is pure. The song simply says that should a man want to find happiness, he would simply have to choose a Batangueña for a wife. This is because she is always dainty and would be always be with the partner no matter how hard life becomes. This shows the Batangueña perseverance and courage to face the challenges in life as exemplified by the form of government called gynococracy believed to be prevalent in Batangas during the ancient times. Women had equal rights to succession should there be no male to lead the clan. This practice is clearly seen until now, wherein strong family clans tend to be more matriarchal in character. In fact, today, the wife of the town or city mayor is called "mayora" who is equally competent and courageous as her male counterparts.

Religious Songs

These songs are sung during the last prayers in the Flores de Mayo, praying of the holy rosary and offering flowers while singing. Arriola (1990) claimed in her study that writers of luwa (religious songs) needed to be poets because he must be passionately equipped with verses and rhythm coupled with rhyme and meter to make it more interesting and appealing.

Before, recitation of luwa is solely devoted only for Blessed Virgin Mary, the popularly known model for devotees. However, as years pass by and because there was no such rule which hinders, this practice is also done in honor of different saints.

Town Hymns

The concept of love of country is reflected in certain lines of several town hymns. In the town hymn of Lipa, selflessness is being promised by a Lipeno, if only he can show how he can protect his hometown from intruders. He learns to be unselfish and give his earnest effort just to make sure that his city will still have its dignity. Lemery's town hymn, likewise reflects love of country which mean also courage and bravery in the face of invaders; this can also be concretized into nationalism if the need arises. This is clearly manifested by the heroic acts of Batangas national heroes and statesmen, namely, Laurel, Mabini, Malvar, Recto, etc.

2. Poetry

Batangas folk literature is rich also in poetry. Luwa and riddles still abound the province and survive many generations. From this oral literature were some truths about life and wisdom of the people. The following traits proved to be internalized and influenced the Batangueños:

Religiosity (Strong Faith in God) is one of the sterling qualities of Batangueños, so it is believed that the reason why everytime there are natural calamities, Batangas is spared from great

disaster. Batanguenos are religious people. Proofs of this are the numerous churches and parishes filled with worshippers in every local barangay and towns in the province. They believe that God is the creator of all things and the provider of all graces. Therefore, man should honor, thank and love God. Whatever is God's creation should be taken care, whether it is a fellow being, a plant or an animal. Batanguenos believe that mysteries of God can happen everywhere, They respect places of worship, things and persons which relate to God's divinity. As proof of their contention, the believers from Taysan, Taal, Lipa and Lemery have "luwa" reflecting their values such as reverence to gifts of nature and sacred places, obedience to God and positive attitude towards life.

The Batanguenos believe that to show love and respect for the guidance given by the patron saints, it is proper to offer poems affirming faith in his belief in God. The value of worship and adoration to God for unparalleled assistance.

To inculcate religious beliefs and values among children, the residents of Mabini, Taal and Lemery practice the use of "luwa" (religious songs). The poet expresses humble words of giving praises thus showing faith in God, thankfulness for being born, pleas for continued blessings, and worship and adoration.

Devotion to God and the Blessed Virgin Mary is the refuge of the family in times of difficulty and the lightness of heart after prayers is felt. Catholics in Batangas have learned since childhood the value of reverence to gifts of nature and sacred places shall be practiced.

Positive Attitude towards Life is a value reflected from this type of literature. Batanguenos take a positive way of looking at misfortunes. They take them as God's way to test their faith in Him. Whenever confronted with serious problems, the Batanguenos turn to God for assistance. They find alleviation from their sufferings in prayers. Constant communication with God through prayers can encourage a man to rise above all adversaries. The morals of the luwa inspire the people to be more optimistic towards life. When one is in great distress due to incessant life problems, his relatives and friends will encourage him to see life's beauty and to keep on going because of God, who loves him dearly and that the Lord is just giving him tests. It is hoped that through this advise, this person will become firmer and stronger in defying life's difficulties.

3. Proverbs. Proverbs are wise sayings or serious statements derived from common daily experiences and are centered from common daily experiences and on the people's value and belief system. People cast them as verses ranging from four to fourteen syllables. They are composed of maxims expressive of the people's customs and traditions. Since proverbs explain the righteous and honorable way of life, Batanguenos employ them to strengthen their training of the young and to develop them into upright and dignified members of the society.

In marriage and courtship, honor and faithfulness is the essence of a Batanguena. A proverb implied that before courting a lady, a man is advised to check on the character and family background of his lady. *A proverb which tells that "marriage cannot be like rice which when taken into the mouth can be spitted out"*, warns the young persons that married life is not so easy. They should discreetly choose their lifetime partner for marital discord cannot be solved by separation. Regret is always at the end but as decreed by God, the husband and wife would stay

together till death. Marriage is God's gift, therefore, it should be strengthened through years and years.

As a moral responsibility, parents should train their children to love and serve God by loving and serving their neighbors. They should know God fully well as their duties to mankind. They should therefore impart such knowledge to their children so that they will lead a life according to the highest code of morality. The foremost responsibility of the Batangueno parents is to educate their children at home. Though formal training is limited, they can teach their children to be morally upright individuals of society by their proverbs.

These proverbs warn also the parents to be righteous in the rearing of their children for the children's manner reflect the kind of breeding they have been exposed to at home. The community residents do not neglect their duties. Lessons such as respect for elders, obedience and love for parents and good social relations are taught mainly by examples. Children are made responsible and committed to loving and servicing their fellowmen. The interrelationship among family members is part of the mores of the people showing that their values are socially traditional.

Batanguenos as also symbols of a close knit society are taught how to love and respect their parents and elders through informal teaching of values reflected from their proverbs. Close family ties is learned as all family members are also expected to be around in case of emergency or in times of death or sickness of a relative. There is mutual protection among family members during trouble and distress, hence, they become very close to each other.

Loyalty and Good Human relations govern the social relationships of the residents. In Batangas, some proverbs mean that true friendship is valued most in the province. They consider a person a true friend if he can be depended upon in times of need, scarcity, poverty, despair, sorrow, sickness or death. A true friend even risks his life for the sake of his dear friends. True friendship does not exist only in times of joy and success but also during sorrow and frustration. Batanguenos are always reminded by their parents and elders of true friendship during trivial conversation when they discuss about human relations. What is important in friendship is the love, concern, and sacrifice for each other not only during good times but also in bad times. In the present times, true friendship really matters to Batanguenos, for if they found disloyalty in the midst, they try to break even with the traitors by teaching them lessons they will not forget.

Economic Security is shown by a popular adage among the Batanguenos which tells of being thrifty. This means that saving for the future is important. At an early age, children are taught to value money, to spend money wisely and to save for the future. However, this does not mean that they will ignore fellows who will be asking for their help. As moral and social responsibility calls, one is obliged strive for economic security and sufficiency.

Endurance and Industry are among the most notable qualities of the Batanguenos. Children are trained by parents to be industrious and to endure the hardship where proverbs telling of promptness and endurance and hard work / industry are emphasized. As a result, poverty is not really felt by the people as compared to other areas.

It is accepted by the inhabitants that everybody's daily activities are guided by the Supreme Being. But they know also that if they do not work, they will not receive tangible things to suffice their basic needs. If a person feels desperate to severe hardship in life, the proverbs pacify and inspire him to continue living and defy the adversaries of life. Finally, hope develops within him, and the zest for living keeps burning.

3. Folktales. Tales are the oldest form of literature handed down over thousands of years by word of mouth. Tales explain the ancient people's origin, culture, their beliefs and tradition. The common folktales are imbued with morals, religion and values to live by.

A study about Batangas folktales by Ilagan (1996) revealed that 34 folktales were classified into 18 fairytales, 10 legends, and 6 myths. The predominating themes drawn from the popular folktales are curses, fear, fantasy, friendliness and hatred. Enchantment, faith and perseverance are depicted in the myths while nationality, brotherhood, love and respect prevail in the legends. Among the customs, beliefs and practices reflected in the folktales that have been identified are belief in God, in the supernatural creatures, in the anting-anting, folk Catholicism, practice of magic, maytime festival, harana, marriage customs, burial, hiya or sense of shame, pakikisama or sense of togetherness, debt of gratitude, respect for elders, close family ties and hospitality.

In an excerpt from the myth "Holy Cross of Bauan" (Menez et. al., 2001), Faith in God in essence pointed out that a person must firmly believe that God can be of help in times of need. This may come in the form of miracles which in turn gives hope and converts a person towards an more optimistic outlook in life.

In the miracle of Holy Mediatrix of all Graces (Andal, 2003), the values of love, simplicity and humility are exemplified and emphasized by the Most Holy Virgin Mary to the people. The story of apparition of the Virgin Mary strengthens the peoples's belief in the divine intervention. Community residents become more religious and spiritual and more generous to people to demonstrate their love for God and fellowmen.

Proposed Measures to Enhance Batangueno literature as a bridge to cultural development

Batangueno literature proves to be a vital component of community life and culture, therefore it becomes a bridge to cultural development. Community cultural development is a form of sustainable development that promotes a self-reliant economy and locally based cultural policy (Duxbury and Gillette, 2007). Arts and culture are development tools that contribute to building networks and trust in the community, and help create a sense of place and occasions for sociability that draw people together to be engaged in constructive social activities. Culture as a development tool increases the level of civic discourse between artists, cultural groups, and community residents by providing opportunities and experiences that inspire, provoke, and facilitate discourse. This creates a collaborative atmosphere in which the arts sector can engage and forge stronger partnerships with others, including government, business, and the broader community, paving way to improvement on a larger scale towards community development. As Margaret Ledwith (2005) observes, "community development begins at the everyday lives of local people. This is the initial context of sustainable change". While sustainable development is often viewed as it is based on society's always changing worldviews and values (Williams, 2003), the art, the food, the music and the values that lie beneath these are of profound

importance in bringing people together” (cited in Borrup, 2003,) to work for the realization of common goals and objective.

Literature then, as form of cultural expression along with music, dance, sports and theatre, reveals and develops the values of Batanguenos necessary for progress, becomes a significant tool in cultural development. Several measures to consider include the following:

1. The study of common forms of folk literature must be continuously included in school subjects to perpetuate the sound values among the people. Improve human discussion thru literature and arts as an educational tool to improve human relationships and be part of a working and productive community. Creating a sense of place in the school and the community is central as it empowers people to become decision-makers over their own environment, resources, and future.
2. More scholarly studies on folk and existing literature must be undertaken by people of different localities to revive specific values that will direct the lives of the young generation. The stock of cultural capital, both tangible and intangible, is what we inherit from past generations and what we will pass onto future generations (*Roseland et al., 2005*). From a philosophical perspective, *Pilotti & Rinaldin (2004)* discuss how the “sustainability of cultural resources means an increase over time of a better quality of life [defined] as a better knowledge of ourselves”.
3. The existing literature should be enriched and transmitted through more appealing and meaningful styles and techniques for a better appreciation and internalization of the listeners and readers.
4. Educators should find means to inculcate values reflected in the literature among the learners to foster peace, harmony, love and respect among different classes of people. An important aspect of community cultural development is the concept of shared culture, which entails having a mutual respect for every culture in a community. Through this collective experience, communities gain respect for their own and others’ histories, resources, hopes, and dreams and develop their own identity and pride.
5. The provincial government should create social policy and goals to further foster cultural development along with the areas of community development. Using arts, literature and culture as a tool, community cultural development can help the community develop appropriate models of sustainability.
6. Cultural development sites should be established for education and information and social networking. It should be understood as a collective process involving creativity of different people that will “contribute to changes in people’s lives and long-term developmental benefits for a community(*Mills & Brown ,2004*). The sites will develop the youth awareness integrating customs, literature, crafts, and arts and culture activities into the educational arena. Involving youth in educational programs on cultural, social, environmental, and economic forms of sustainability can help provide them with a more optimistic and sustainable outlook on the future.

7. Batangas literature must be preserved and be part of the community cultural development (CCD), which is considered a vital component of the province emerging sustainability framework. The output is the production of a “ huge range of activities that give communities the opportunity to tell their stories, build their creative skills, and be active participants in the development of their culture” (O’Hara, 2002).
8. Promote the development of literature as part of cultural tourism and development to sustain tangible and intangible cultural heritage particularly the long term values and visions of Batanguenos necessary for sustainable development.

Conclusions

Based on the analysis made on the collected Batangas folk literature, the researchers derived the following:

1. Most common among the existing forms of Batangas folk literature are folksongs as town hymns, poetry in forms of luwa and proverbs and also folktales. These are transmitted to the younger generations through activities like morning exercises in schools and government offices. Likewise, local contests during foundations and fiesta celebrations help revive the values and virtues. Folktales are sometimes included in the secondary and tertiary course content .
2. Batangueno traits such as nationalism, religiosity, and positive attitude towards life stem from the town hymns and luwa. Proverbs are representations of Batanguenos’ honor and faithfulness, love and respect for parents and relatives, social relationships, sacrifice and love for others and economic security, also endurance and industry. Folktales are manifestations of trust in God and reverence in His name. These unique Batangueno traits are used to check human flaws in society and improve their spiritual and social relations.
3. To further develop the outstanding Batangueno traits, the local government in cooperation with the educational institutions continues to revive the values from the folklore of their ancestors and pass on these values to the younger generations. As bridge to the province’s cultural development , literature must be enriched and preserved being a vital component of the community’s tool for sustainable development.

Recommendations

Reserchers strongly recommend that the proposed measures by done and results be further recommended and that there should be more follow up studies in the future.

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