

ARTS AND CRAFTS OF MATIGSALUG-MANOBO: A SHOWCASE OF COMMUNAL UNITY AND ENVIRONMENTAL ACCOUNTABILITY

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ABSTRACT: *This study explores the arts and crafts of Manobo-Matigsalug Indigenous Cultural Community in Sinuda, Kitaotao, Bukidnon. The analysis is anchored to Covar's concept to analyze the meaning of Manobo-Matigsalug's arts and crafts in the context of loob (interior), labas (exterior), lalim (depth), and lawak (space/extent). The descriptive-qualitative research design was used to illustrate or present the arts and crafts of the indigenous cultural community. Indigenous research was used to gather the data in the community. The referral method was used to collect the data. Interviews and focus group discussions were conducted. The study recorded thirty-four (34) arts and crafts which were classified into decorative arts, clothing and jewellery, bagtuk-based craft, musical instruments, tools, and architecture. The study revealed that these arts/crafts represent traditional knowledge, a sense of community, unity, responsibility, and environmental preservation. The geometric designs, colors, and materials used represent the characteristics of the Matigsalug people in Sinuda. Further, the study revealed that the Matigsalug in Sinuda believed that their lives and nature have always connections. Lastly, the traditional arts of Manobo-Matigsalug are still present amidst the technological advancement of the community, but it is struggling. While the elders are helping in this context, strengthening the traditional knowledge of the community is vital to educating the youth for the next generation.*

Keywords: Manobo-Matigsalug Indigenous Cultural Community, arts, crafts, Covar, unity, environmental accountability

1. INTRODUCTION

Art and human experience are inextricably linked. According to Dewey [1], art demonstrates how each person has a unique experience. The artwork plays a significant part in understanding history, concepts, and daily life. The arts are used by and have shaped every culture and person on earth, offering modes of thought that are as rigorous as science or arithmetic and as diverse as philosophy or literature. The Manobo-Matigsalug Indigenous Cultural Community of Sinuda, Kitaotao, Bukidnon produced various arts and crafts, which were classified as visual arts and handicrafts, which are the scope of this study.

National Arts Education Association define visual arts include a wide range of creative disciplines, from traditional fine arts like drawing and painting to modern media arts, design fields, folk arts, and crafts made from various materials [2].

In 1989, the Indian Task Force defined handicrafts as objects that are produced by hand, with the use of device artistically [3]. These are distinctive expressions of one's culture through local craftsmanship or crafts experts in the community [4]. In addition, handicrafts are said to mirror the community's values, norms, environment, and social heritage [5].

Furthermore, in the case of the Manobo-Matigsalug in Sinuda, Kitaotao, Bukidnon, the visual arts and handicrafts are reflections of their values, norms, and social heritage. These works of art will continue as long the community will value the importance of their culture and tradition.

For a long time, the continuous work of various agencies and sectors has been noticeable in transmitting and revitalizing cultural heritage. The evolution in the way of life, brought by the influence of many phenomena, challenges the majority to participate in the collective

conscious effort to achieve such cultural preservation. Indigenous people are now being acknowledged as equal partners and active contributors in archaeology, rather than merely serving as sources of cultural knowledge or overseers of sites. Their expertise and perspectives are now valued in interpreting findings, making them active collaborators in the research process [6]. Indigenous people are considered keepers of indigenous knowledge and phenomena, people whose beliefs and living systems are deeply rooted in their surroundings. Smith [7] considered indigenous bits of knowledge as fundamentally holistic and integrative, stemming from sensory awareness and human experience of the intricate interactions between various organisms in distinct habitats. Significantly, more effort has been made to ensure community involvement and raise awareness of indigenous knowledge [8].

In a forum on indigenous issues, the United Nations [9] defines traditional knowledge as the knowledge, innovations, and practices that have evolved over centuries, shaped by local culture and environmental experiences. This traditional knowledge is typically passed down orally from one generation to the next. That being the case, the Philippines is no exception. Oral tradition has been pivotal in the continued existence of traditions, beliefs, and systems that are manifestations of Filipino culture. Although, at present, some of these traditions may no longer be practised or made and utilized in the context of material culture, their existence is still traceable because it has been stored in the memory of many and passed on through oral tradition.

Bruchac [10] states that indigenous oral traditions offer detailed insights into the world, including original stories tied to the landscape, descriptions of the beings within it, the relationships between those beings, and beliefs that shape how humans interact with their environment. These

traditions provide a deep understanding of the natural and cultural world. She emphasized that oral tradition is crucial for passing down knowledge, but it often blends storytelling and performance, making them both a final product and an evolving process, as well as something both tangible and experiential. These traditions are not only personal memories or hearsay, even though they may be deemed fragile or flexible; rather, they are shared community memories that are periodically verified by knowledgeable elders.

In a quarterly magazine issue highlighting the United Nations Permanent Forum [9], delegates expressed their views on indigenous issues, urging everyone to respect indigenous rights, which are crucial for biodiversity, and to advocate for future generations as well as for ourselves. The article also highlighted that the decline of traditional knowledge stems from insufficient documentation and that media is crucial for conveying indigenous knowledge [6]. Because of this, it is crucial to take advantage of the different forms of media in the preservation of culture after, of course, conducting thorough validation and verification. Everyone in the community must be involved in revitalizing the culture and traditions [11]. This conscious and collective move involves the state, researchers, people in the academe, documenters, media, and the indigenous people. The same is true in the context of the Philippines. As Catap-Lacson [12] puts it, Filipinos must keep and embody our words and pledge not to disregard our culture, language, or history because the good practices we acquired from our ancestors would perish with us if we stopped patronizing, valuing, and celebrating them. We should preserve our cultures because they are essential to maintaining our identity, unity, awareness, and future. It is, therefore, our job to pass them on to the next generation.

Further, Power [13] cited that art helps shape relationships, promote awareness, and know more about other cultures. Power also suggests that art can lift self-confidence and promote one's identity. Art is seen as an instrument to unify a community. This can be seen in the visual arts produced by a group of people that displays the group's identity like the color, shapes, patterns, and materials used. Their art tells a story and shows who they are as people. Power [13] also explains that the idea of "ownership, responsibility, and a common purpose" can promote unity in the community. It is evident in how a group of people shows respect for their works of art. The proper use of their clothing, for example, is given great importance. There is a proper way of wearing these items and who should wear them is specified, and these are agreed upon by the members of the community.

Similarly, Lynch [14] emphasized the importance of art in "bringing people together across boundaries." Lynch cited an event wherein a neighborhood produced small art projects. The activity showed the ability of art to act as a medium to tell the story of a group of people. Lynch further explained that integrating art within each enriches them and that taking part in the arts brings people together [14]. Thus, this fosters community.

Arts Victoria [15] posits that "the arts can help create social and cultural bonds within the community." The article explains that art-related activities can improve "cooperation, awareness of local issues, and the reduction of social isolation." With this, a sense of community exists, as well as pride and identity. Moreover, it suggests that communities that have learned to accept diversity and artistic expression are stronger and more flexible to cope with social issues.

This study aims to document and analyze the Manobo-Matigsalug visual arts and handicrafts in Sinuda, Kitaotao, Bukidnon with the following objectives: a) Identify the visual arts and handicrafts of the Manobo-Matigsalug in Sinuda, Kitaotao, Bukidnon; b) Analyze the visual arts and handicrafts of Manobo-Matigsalug according to Covar's interpretation; and c) Determine the meaning of the Manobo-Matigsalug's visual arts and handicrafts in Sinuda, Kitaotao, Bukidnon in the context of loob (interior), labas (exterior), lalim (depth, and lawak (space/extent). Moreover, visual art and handicrafts are significant mediums for tracing the origins, cultures, and traditions of the Manobo-Matigsalug people and communities, as well as how they transmit their wisdom, talents, and skills to new generations.

For the discourse that will be established in the ongoing development of visual arts and handicrafts of the Manobo-Matigsalug using their traditional knowledge, this research will draw on Prospero Covar's idea of jar [16] which comprises labas (exterior) or the form or materials of their visual arts and handicrafts, loob (interior) or the meanings, uses, and significance of the visual arts and handicrafts, lalim (depth) or the implications of the Indigenous knowledge in their visual arts and handicrafts, and lawak (extent or space) as the location where art is created.

2. MATERIAL AND METHODS

This study used a descriptive-qualitative research design to illustrate or present the visual arts and handicrafts of the Manobo-Matigsalug Indigenous Cultural Community in Sinuda, Kitaotao, Bukidnon. The Indigenous research method was used to gather the data in the community which include in-depth interviews, participant observation, focus-group discussion, and photo-video documentation. The study employed a purposive sampling procedure and referral method in selecting the eight (8) informants. There were parents/grandparents, visual artists, and craftsmen/women.

Before the data gathering, the researchers followed the entry protocol, asked for permission, and presented the project to the Office of the Municipal Mayor, the Barangay Council, and the members of the Council of Elders of Federation of Matigsalug-Manobo Tribal Councils (FEMMATRICS). A MOA was also forged between CMU researchers and the community. The researchers also communicated/ sent a letter of intent to the National Commission on Culture and Arts (NCIP) and requested a permit from the Institutional Ethics and Research Center (IERC) in Central Mindanao University (CMU). After the MOA signing, a PAMUHAT or ritual

was conducted. Before the actual data gathering, the researchers asked the council to identify the respondents to be interviewed during the data gathering. During the data gathering, the respondents signed the informed consent and respondents' profile forms which specified the provisions on data privacy.

Data validation and verification were conducted, and the results were presented to the informants and the community.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Dayan-Dayan/ Decorative art

Some of the Manobo-Matigsalug tribe's artistic creations are purely ornamental and made purely for aesthetic purposes, but others also carry traditional knowledge and significant cultural significance.

In Sinuda, Kitaotao, Bukidnon, these decorative arts are known as *dayan-dayan* in the Manobo-Matigsalug language. The tribal council's office, particularly the FEMMATRICS office, is where you can find the majority of the *Dayan-Dayan* made from wood that has been chopped to make decorative art. For their creations, the artisans employed a type of wood called *anutung* that is found in the *lasang* region (forest). With the use of social media, the artisans were able to add contemporary touches to their products while still using their traditional skills and resources. There are still some of their works at the office which were the result of their Department of Trade (DTI) training.

Some of the *Dayan-Dayan* are influenced by the *pinusong* design of the Manobo-Matigsalug tribe. For the tribe, the diamond shapes represent the heart. This, for them, signifies that the Federation is made out of love by the Manobo-Matigsalug to the people of the community. Some designs were particularly painted red, white, and yellow as influenced by the traditional knowledge of the indigenous people (see photo on *pinusong* design on the wall). These designs and colors are also expressed in their buildings like the *Tulugan*, their museum, the *Panubaran*, and even in the murals of their school walls.



Fig. 1. Dayan-dayan made out of Anutung

Clothing and jewelry

The colours red, white, and yellow are dominantly seen in the tribal attire of the Manobo-Matigsalug of Sinuda, Kitaotao in Bukidnon. The color red represents the strong images of the tribe. The white represents peace and the yellow represents harvest. Aside from *pinusong*, different

patterns are present such as zigzag and three lines. The mountain and teeth are pictured by the zigzag pattern. The mountain is represented by the top point of the zigzag, while the teeth are shown by the lower points.



Fig. 2. Pinusong design in a benekel

Men's traditional clothing is known as *binukad* (upper) and *buendera* (pants). The women in the tribe wear *binalaran* (upper) and *hamet* (skirt). The *pinusong* design is repeatedly present in the clothing and jewellery that both women and men wear such as *baliog*, *sol-oy*, *banda*, and bracelets. According to the craftsmen, they put so much value into their traditional clothes and jewellery that on certain occasions there are clothes and jewellery that are very important to wear. Moreover, they create clothing and jewellery for their protection such as necklaces or *baliog*, bracelets or *benekel*, and *tikos*. Children can be protected from the "*dili ingon nato*," or entities that they believe to be among us but cannot be seen, by wearing necklaces and bracelets. Because they must cross the river, older people typically wear *tikos* to help them move more quickly and avoid being easily fatigued from their farm work. They use *tikos* for anti-cramps and anti-colds.



Fig. 3. Buendera, men's lower garment or pants

Tangkulu is the name of the headdress worn by the tribe's elders. The horse mane is used to make the *pamalungpung*, the top piece of the male headpiece. *Pamupu* is the name for the attached and dangling balls in the headpiece. The *pamupu* stands for the responsibility that the male elders bear. Fewer *pamupu* in one's headdress denotes less responsibility than more *pamupu*. The person wearing the headpiece acknowledges the obligation he must bear. Lastly, a *sinilapid* is a belt worn

by men in the tribe to carry their *lipi* or *sakuban* (knife protector) and it is embellished with vibrant beads.



Fig. 4. *Tangkulu*, Matigsalug's headdress

Bagtuk-based craft

The Manobo-Matigsalugs generally use materials that they may find around, particularly in their forests, to produce their artwork. It exemplifies how they work the *bagtuk* into their creations. Their creations are utilized in everyday activities like farming. They use a range of designs in their crafts.

The Manobo-Matigsalug tribe produces a variety of *bagtuk*-based crafts, including animal traps and baskets. Their crafts are made from wild bamboos that grow in their forests known as *bagtuk*. One of their *bagtuk*-based crafts are small baskets called *luvan*. *Luvan* can be used as a belt for ladies and may be worn with slings. The *luvan* uses *bagtuk* to make the *talinga*, the horn-like projection on the basket designed to allow for the insertion of a sling. Similar to *talinga*, *kulambit* is a feature of a *luvan* whose function is to add structure or solidify the craft.



Fig. 5. *Luvan*, a small basket

When the basket is larger, it is referred to as a *liyang*, and more items, including clothing, tools, and other items, can be placed inside. Their primary reliance on their surroundings may be seen in the craft they call *bubu*, a trap that they use to catch fish in the streams. This shows that they access from their environment what they eat as well as the materials they utilize in their crafts.



Fig. 6. *Bubu*, a fish trap

The artisans use *bagtuk* and *uway* or rattan, a trailing plant that grows in forests, to create *bubu*. Each craft can be created with *supo* or a cover. Lastly, the tribesmen use the *soning*, a smaller basket, to store their jewellery, combs, food, and other minor items.

Musical instruments and tools

Tribal performances used musical instruments. These instruments are still present in the Manobo-Matigsalug Tribe of Sinuda, Kitaotao in Bukidnon. Elders are the ones crafting the instruments.

During tribal performances, the elders play the string instrument known as the *kuglung*. The elders acknowledge that the *paluus* (lizards) that live in the forest had an impact on the form and the creation of this instrument. *Pamalungpung*, which is from a horse mane, is found on the top of the *kuglung*. They use *pamalungpung* in the *kuglung* as homage to the *Tahulambung*, also known as the spirit that guides the horse. The name of the string used for the *kuglung* is *bislig*, the tree's root. The lower part, known as *subung*, serves as a handle or a support. The lengthy portion of the *kuglung's* neck is known as the *dulrug*. Meanwhile, the knob of the instrument is called a *damalan* which adjusts the quality of sound to match the chant. For tuning, the other knob called *kulungan* is used. To hang the *kuglung*, the *sanggat* can be used. The whole body of the *kuglung* is called *lawa*.

Performers also use another string instrument called *saluroy* which is made out of bamboo. They also have *tambol* displayed in Datu Brigs office in Sinuda.

The Manobo-Matigsalugs also displayed their *kalasag*, a shield used as protection in wars or combat. The *lipi* is a knife they made that can be attached to the belt called *sinalapid*.

Lastly, the furniture displayed in the office of the FEMMATRICS is made out of *anutong*, a tree that can be found in their forests.



Fig. 7. Different sizes and forms of kuglung

Architecture

There is a rich architecture of Manobo-Matigsalug which needs to be documented. There are different types of knots used in their houses. Also, there are different types of houses in the community that are still present to this day.

In the tribe, knots are generally referred to as *guus*. They use *pinusong* designs in knots, just like in their other crafts, to support the foundation of buildings like houses and storage. One of these buildings is the *Panubaran*, a spiritual location for the tribe with *binanua*-style structures where prayers and celebrations are held. Due to the short lifespan of the materials utilized, a family's *kubkub* is regarded as a temporary residence. Last but not least, *lilyungan* is a triangular architectural element of a house that functions as a smoke-emitting chimney.



Fig. 8. Binanua type Panubaran

The Manobo-Matigsalug tribe's visual arts and handicrafts are a reflection of their rich culture, history, and traditions. Traditional wisdom still has relevance for their community today. Given that the local schools are multilingual, it is important to educate the young people in the community to preserve their heritage as this could lead to language extinction, endangering the tribe's traditional knowledge. The significance, challenges, and purpose of their visual arts are amply demonstrated by Covar's concept of a jar [16]. Like a jar, a craft has various layers and is produced as a result of culture, tradition, and a never-ending battle against the advancement of time.

Labas, Loob, Lalim, at Lawak as Lenses

As the labas, the Manobo-Matigsalug people are using their community materials to craft their tools, instruments, clothing and jewellery, architecture, and decorative arts.

Some of the materials can be found in the forest area of the community. They purchase materials like paint, and beads used in their jewellery. The main colors used in their creation are red, white, and yellow. In the loob, looking at the interior, there are meanings, significance, and indigenous knowledge. The main color used in their creation are red (represents *kaisug* or bravery), white (represents *kaayo* or goodness), and yellow (represents *ani* or harvest). There are meanings and cultures embedded in the arts of Manobo-Matigsalug. One must understand the value of culture, especially when using garments, jewellery, and crafts from the Manobo-Matigsalug to prevent misunderstanding, just like any other Indigenous People. In the lalim, depth in the visual arts of the Manobo-Matigsalug is demonstrated by the importance of their nature, the sense of community and responsibility, and the fading and surviving culture presented in the visual arts and handicrafts. Further, the same result was found in the research conducted by Pontemayor et. al [17] that there is always a connection between the lives of the people and nature focusing on the body arts (*pangatab/pang-o-tub*) of the Manobo-Matigsalug people in Sinuda, Kitaotao, Bukidnon. Only a few elders continue to preserve the Manobo-Matigsalug's traditional knowledge through art creation. Strengthening and valuing the respect for the traditional knowledge of the youth in the tribe is integral to the preservation of their arts. Lastly, the lawak presented the scope of the visual arts and the need to revitalize the cultural knowledge on the creation of their arts especially when it is keeping up with modern technologies and knowledge.

Sustaining Traditional Knowledge: Symbols and Meanings

For the artisans and craft experts among the Manobo-Matigsalug in Sinuda, Kitaotao, Bukidnon, preserving traditional knowledge has been extremely difficult. The community's older members who serve as the elders make up the majority of the creators, if not the entirety. The evolution in the way of life, brought by the influence of many phenomena, challenges the majority to participate in the collective conscious effort to achieve such cultural preservation. For a long time, the continuous work of various agencies and sectors has been noticeable in transmitting and revitalizing cultural heritage. Indigenous people are increasingly recognized as active intellectual partners in archaeology, reflecting a shift from their previous roles as cultural informants or site overseers [6]. Indigenous people are considered keepers of indigenous knowledge and phenomena, people whose beliefs and living systems are deeply rooted in their surroundings. Smith [7] considered indigenous knowledge as fundamentally holistic and integrative, stemming from sensory awareness and the human experience of the intricate interactions between various organisms in distinct habitats. Significantly, more effort has been made to ensure community involvement and raise awareness of indigenous knowledge [8].

Significantly, skilled storytellers can elicit deep insights through oral traditions by drawing on their connections to

nature and consciousness. Gerald Vizenor [18] notes that native storytellers are inspired by their experiences in the natural world, enhancing the depth and significance of their narratives. This relationship underscores the vital role of nature in shaping meaningful stories.

By integrating and strengthening indigenous knowledge into the curriculum, we might spark a discourse about cultural awareness and preservation. In the Manobo-Matigsalug community, parents begin reciting historical tales to their young children even before they can walk or talk. However, if growing children forget about it, this history or customary wisdom will be lost forever. This is why it is essential to integrate visual arts into their education to safeguard their cultural knowledge for "survivance," which goes beyond mere survival. This approach involves actively maintaining customs that reinforce the awareness of these connections, such as engaging in ongoing dialogues with the deceased to foster a deliberate "sense of presence despite absences [18].

Creating a Sense of Community and Responsibilities

The Manobo-Matigsalugs build unity and understanding by producing a range of visual art, which, therefore, promotes harmony within their society. A sense of community develops when members feel a sense of belonging, appreciate each other's value, and collaborate towards shared objectives [19]. Mcmillan and Chavis [19] added that this interconnectedness is built on four essential elements. First, membership fosters a sense of identity and belonging among individuals. Second, influence allows members to have a voice and impact group decisions, reinforcing their value within the community. Third, integration and fulfillment of needs ensure that the community provides support and resources to address both individual and collective needs, promoting cooperation. Finally, shared emotional connection deepens ties among members through shared experiences and emotions. Together, these elements create a supportive environment where individuals can thrive, highlighting the significance of collaboration and mutual respect in building a strong community. The decorative arts, *bagtuk*-based crafts, musical instruments, tools, and architecture created by the Manobo-Matigsalug are symbolic representations of their acceptance of their responsibilities. As their primary source of materials for their creativity, their utilization of natural resources or their forest demonstrates greater responsibility for nature.

In visual arts, a sense of community is developed through the actual process of creating art. In the research, Shun [20], he explains that in community art, for example, people gather to participate and this increases "social satisfaction and enrichment." In Sinuda, Kitaotao, Bukidnon, indigenous people are drawn together via the creation of art. All community members receive support from the family as they work to create their visual arts. In addition, this kind of system in the community goes beyond the actual manufacturing process and entails activities like performing with their musical instruments whenever there are visitors in their community, sharing the

last of the fish and pork using *bagtuk*-based crafts, among others.

4. CONCLUSION

The study revealed that the labas (exterior) represent the design/appearance of Manobo-Matigsalug's crafts which include: *dayan-dayan*, *bagtuk*-based, clothing and jewellery, musical tools and instruments, and architecture. The loob comprises the meanings and symbols of their garments and crafts. The lalim demonstrated the importance of nature, a sense of community, unity, responsibility, and sustaining the traditional knowledge of the community. Lastly, lawak represents the lives of nature that they want to emulate and their cultural identity.

5. RECOMMENDATION

Understanding the culture of Indigenous Communities helps one to overcome their ignorance-based prejudices. Therefore, it is essential to strengthening the IP education's integration into the curriculum. Furthermore, it must be emphasized that, in addition to teaching visual arts at different schools in the Philippines, it must also be intensified in indigenous communities because the future of their visual arts for the next generation is uncertain. The inclusion of indigenous visual arts in the curriculum of the indigenous community is strongly recommended because of the significant impact that visual arts make on a person's social development.

Lastly, livelihood training on visual arts and handicrafts is also recommended to help the artisans to develop their skills and help the community with additional income.

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