

# SPAAA JOURNAL

## Appropriating Igorot Dances

*The Philippines*



A Publication of the SEAMEO Regional Centre for Archaeology and Fine Arts  
Volume 23 Number 2 July - December 2013 • ISSN 0858-1975





## SEAMEO SPAFA Regional Centre for Archaeology and Fine Arts

SPAFA Journal is published by the SEAMEO SPAFA Regional Centre for Archaeology and Fine Arts. It is a forum for scholars, researchers, professionals, and those interested in archaeology, performing arts, visual arts, and cultural activities in Southeast Asia to share views, ideas, and experiences. The opinions expressed in this journal are those of the contributors, and do not necessarily reflect the views of SEAMEO SPAFA.

### **SEAMEO SPAFA's objectives :**

- ▶ Promote awareness and appreciation of the cultural heritage of Southeast Asian countries;
- ▶ Help enrich cultural activities in the region;
- ▶ Strengthen professional competence in the fields of archaeology and fine arts through sharing of resources and experiences on a regional basis;
- ▶ Increase understanding among the countries of Southeast Asia through collaboration in archaeological and fine arts programmes.



### **Editorial**

M.R. Rujaya Abhakorn

### **Assistants**

John Paul Nino Itao

Nawarat Saengwat

### **Publication Co-ordinator**

Ean Lee

### **Cover Image**

Je An Salas, the medicine woman in Agnes Locsin's Igorot. Photo courtesy of Agnes Locsin.

### **Photographic Services**

Nipon Sud-Ngam

### **Printers**



Amarin Printing and Publishing  
Public Company Limited  
376 Chaiyaphruk Road,  
Taling Chan, Bangkok 10170, Thailand  
Tel. (662) 882-1010 (30 Lines)  
Fax. (662) 433-2742, 434-1385  
E-Mail: info@amarin.co.th  
Homepage: <http://www.amarin.co.th>

### **Publisher**

SEAMEO SPAFA Regional Centre  
SPAFA Building  
81/1 Sri Ayutthaya Road, Samsen, Theves  
Bangkok 10300, Thailand  
Tel. (662) 280-4022-29  
Fax. (662) 280-4030  
E-mail: ean@seameo-spafa.org  
spafa03@yahoo.com  
Website: [www.seameo-spafa.org](http://www.seameo-spafa.org)

The SEAMEO Regional Centre for Archaeology and Fine Arts (SPAFA) promotes professional competence, awareness and preservation of cultural heritage in the fields of archaeology and fine arts in Southeast Asia. It is a regional centre constituted in 1985 from the SEAMEO Project in Archaeology and Fine Arts, which provided the acronym SPAFA. The Centre is under the aegis of the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO).



SEAMEO SPAFA Regional Centre  
for Archaeology and Fine Arts

### **SEAMEO SPAFA member-countries:**

- Brunei
- Cambodia
- East Timor
- Indonesia
- Laos
- Malaysia
- Myanmar
- Philippines
- Singapore
- Thailand
- Vietnam

### **Associate member-countries:**

- Australia
- Canada
- Germany
- France
- New Zealand
- Netherlands
- Spain

SEAMEO SPAFA collaborates with governmental agencies, international organisations and academic institutions to achieve common goals and objectives.

# SPAFA Journal

Volume 23 Number 2 (July - December 2013)

## CONTENTS

---

- Jennifer Goodlander 1 **Wayang Tantri in Bali**  
"Inventing"  
Tradition in  
a Changing World



- Joelle Jacinto 23 **The Appropriation of the Dances of the Igorots**  
From Traditional  
to Transnational



- Paul Cornelius 47 **Connecting the Past and the Future**  
Disaster Relief  
Action for Wat  
Pa Klang Thung  
(temple)





# Wayang Tantri in Bali

## “Inventing” Tradition in a Changing World

In this paper, **Jennifer Goodlander** draws on her experience of learning and performing *wayang tantri* to examine it as an example of the kind of “invented tradition” that has appeared in response to various changes in Balinese society.

**T**raditions, such as *wayang kulit* (shadow puppetry), provide powerful anchors for Balinese cultural identity in a rapidly changing modern world because of their perceived permanency. However, it has also been observed that traditions are constantly transforming in order to adapt to changing societies, even as they appear static. *Wayang tantri*, which features animal puppets, is an example of this kind of innovation. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger assert that such “invented traditions” are especially prevalent during times of rapid social change as a means to promote social cohesion, legitimize hierarchy, and promote certain beliefs or value systems.

“*Wayang tantri* must be different [to] other kinds of *wayang*, so that the audience clearly knows what you are doing. If the voices and action are the same, the audience will just think it is a story from the *Mahabharata*. The audience needs to understand that the puppets and the story are different, so that they will think ‘oh, it is the Tantri story. That is a special story that uses animals.’” – I Wayan Tunjung

The term “tradition” suggests an object or practice has come, unchanged, from some mythical past into the present. *Wayang kulit*, or shadow puppetry, is often considered one of the oldest and most important performance traditions in Bali. The performance features flat, two-dimensional puppets, made out of carved leather that are manipulated against a screen by a single puppeteer, and is an integral and entertaining part of a ceremony or ritual. The *dalang*, or puppeteer, is the central figure in this performance genre and is revered in Balinese society as a teacher and spiritual leader. The primary story sources are the Hindu epics of *The Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*, and the method of performance has been handed down from teacher to student for generations. *Wayang tantri*, a new genre of shadow puppetry, which features animal puppets, complicates the idea of “tradition” because difference and innovation is what makes it popular with both Balinese and international audiences. The dynamic puppets and new story material are performed not only at temple ceremonies, but also recorded and available on DVDs and cassette tapes, making the performances widespread (sometimes *wayang tantri* performances are broadcast on television). *Wayang tantri* seems to stand in contradiction to the idea of *wayang kulit* as a traditional art form in Bali – a categorization that denies it change. How might *wayang tantri* be understood as “tradition” in Balinese society and what is the relationship, therefore, between tradition and innovation?

Traditional arts and culture in Bali are noted for their resilience and adaptability in spite of the many outside pressures such as tourism and global modernism. Unlike many others who seem to be in danger of losing their traditional art forms, the Balinese “have been readily praised for their ability to borrow whatever foreign influence suits them while nevertheless maintaining their identity over the centuries” (Picard, 1990, p.37). Much of this research focuses on Balinese cultural performance as reaction to and in relation with the large influx of tourists and other foreigners who have visited or moved to the island in the

last century or so.<sup>1</sup> Others, such as Philip Yampolsky, a prominent ethnomusicologist, complain that tourism is but one of a number of forces, including “television, the cassette industry, and, above all, the cultural policies of the Indonesian government” that are working together to impoverish regional arts around Indonesia (1995, p. 700). Against these two narratives of traditional arts versus innovations that will impoverish these traditions, emerges a third voice, which argues that innovation is necessary to the endurance and well-being of those very traditions. Balinese artist and scholar I Made Bandem advocates: “It is high time that Bali moved forward from simply revitalizing its arts and culture to also inventing contemporary creations” (Bali Daily, 2012). In the same interview, Bandem explains that maintaining the spiritual integrity of Balinese performance must be a primary concern while also exploring new creations that balance local, national, and global influences. *Wayang kulit* provides a useful case to examine the role of the many different influences on traditional performance in Bali within the context of Bandem’s “preservation with innovation.”

The idea that traditions change in response to social and political influences is not new. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger name these kind of innovations as “invented traditions” and note that they are accepted uncritically by the society as “traditions,” which reflect that society’s changing social and religious values while providing a key marker of identity in relation to others. Matthew Issac Cohen, writing about contemporary *wayang*, concludes that local artists in Bali were, and are, too embedded within their traditions to make *wayang* a “modern” art form that speaks to a contemporary audience, both during the colonial period in Indonesia and beyond (2007, p. 340). Cohen worries that the once great “diversity in local artistic life is threatened by corporate-driven culture and the standardization of artistic traditions by government agencies, educational institutions, media bodies, professional associations

---

<sup>1</sup> For more on this, see Picard (1990), Howe (2005), or Vickers (1989).



and diverse market forces” (2007, p. 339). These same forces can also foster creativity and provide an environment that allows for new forms such as *wayang tantri* to thrive alongside the established traditions – thus resulting in an increase of diversity. Even though *wayang tantri* is not an “invented tradition” per se, I find Hobsbawm and Ranger’s language useful because it speaks to how new or changing traditions, such as *wayang tantri*, are prevalent during times of rapid social change as a means of legitimizing hierarchy, and promoting social cohesion and certain beliefs or value systems (Hobsbawm 1983, p. 1). Through an examination of *wayang tantri* as “invented tradition” I hope to open up a dialogue about what tradition means and how it functions within a Balinese context that might prove useful in understanding tradition and change within Southeast Asian performing arts more generally. First I will give a brief overview of the discourse on tradition and the arts within an Indonesian and Balinese context, which will provide a basis for understanding how the arts have been used as both a political and social force. Next I will examine the origins of *wayang tantri* and provide parameters for understanding it as invented tradition within the larger practice of *wayang kulit*. Then I will analyze my own experience learning *wayang tantri* and the story I performed in order to demonstrate how *wayang tantri* functions as a contemporary, or invented tradition.

## **Situating Tradition: Bali and Indonesia**

The idea of “tradition” is key for understanding the relationships between arts and culture in Bali and the greater Indonesian nation in both the historical and present moment. In this paper, I use the term tradition to designate objects and practices that are given a special status within Balinese culture because of their perceived authentic connection to the past. Traditions form the backbone of Indonesia’s motto “unity in diversity” or what Benedict Anderson describes as the “imagined community” of the nation (2006, p. 6). To create a cohesive nation, Indonesia’s early leaders had to devise a method to unify many different people; Indonesia is made up of over 6,000 inhabited islands and over 230 million

people, with vast geographic differences and a dozen major and hundreds of minor ethnic groups each with its own distinct language and culture. The national motto “*bhinneka tunggal ika*,” or “unity in diversity,” or more literally “many but one,” derives from old Javanese and expresses the Javanese ideal that there is an essential unity in all things. This motto became a way for Indonesians to recognize their differences, but to also come together. The arts and other markers of difference such as local dress and architecture, “traditions,” became the preferred symbols of Indonesia’s diversity. Political scientist Ian Chalmers, in an excellent introduction to Indonesian culture and politics, notes that:

[. . .] traditions collectively become an instrument used to maintain social and political dominance; traditions are ‘invented’, constructed so as to legitimize the power of ruling social groups. However, tradition can also be understood as the set of cultural forms that gives meaning to everyday political and social practice, sometimes in conflict with – or beyond the knowledge of – the dominant social group. [. . .] tradition-creation is understood as a dynamic social process involving interaction between political elites and societal forces. (2006, p. 1)

Chalmers recognizes that the central government prefers material and aesthetic traditional expressions as a way to celebrate diversity while legitimizing the dominant ideologies of the Indonesian government because people are encouraged to express local identity through dance and dress rather than through a bid for political power. Examples of how tradition and the arts are negotiated as national culture can be seen at the National Museum in Jakarta and Taman Mini Indonesia. This museum and amusement park respectively demonstrate that Indonesian culture is many things: traditional food, customs, language, dress, and architecture. All of these are on display so that visitors might be able to better understand the culture of Indonesia. Many of the exhibits are of musical instruments, local clothes, puppets, masks, and pictures of dance or other performances (Figure 1), rather than on historical,

linguistic, or religious differences. In Indonesia, culture often finds meaning and expression in the arts, so much so that these two often seem synonymous. Chalmers also recognizes that tradition can also function as a counter-hegemonic form of cultural expression in contrast to their use as part of the national narrative. *Wayang tantri* demonstrates how Balinese arts function as traditions that can both uphold and subvert the national status quo.



Figure 1: A display depicting differences in traditional regional clothes around Indonesia at the museum at Taman Mini.

## Inventing the Tradition of *Tantri*

*Wayang tantri* stands apart from the many innovative forms of *wayang* described by Cohen (2007, p. 356-362), because it evolved within Balinese culture without direct influence outside of Indonesia. *Wayang tantri* has endured as an independent genre of puppet performance, with different stories that can be suited to specific performance situations, much like the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* are used, and with its own distinctive characters. *Wayang tantri* has survived as a genre outside the realm of one master artist and is being performed by other *dalang* (puppeteers) on a more frequent basis.

*Wayang tantri* is one kind of several new genres of *wayang kulit* in Bali. It was first created in 1981 by I Made Persib, a student in the *pedalangan*, or puppetry, programme at the Akademi Seni Tari Indonesia Denpasar (ASTI),<sup>2</sup> for a performance at a university arts festival in Bandung. This new kind of *wayang kulit* tells stories from *Ni Diah Tantri*, an Indian story, also known in India as the *Pancatantra* (Cohen, 2007, p. 356) or *Tantri Kamandaka* (Sedana, 2002 p. 28). Persib only performed the new genre a couple of times. The name most often associated with *wayang tantri* is that of I Wayan Wija, a respected *dalang* from Sukowati, because he popularized *wayang tantri* through his use of dynamic animal puppets and the larger *gamelan* ensemble, *batel Semar Pagulingan*, such as that used in *wayang Ramayana* (2000, Yayasan Bali Galang). Wija has performed *wayang tantri* frequently in Bali and around the world; he performed *wayang tantri* in August 2011 as part of an exhibition, 'Balinese Art and Culture' at the San Francisco Asian Art Museum. My teacher, I Wayan Tunjung, was a student of Wija's and now regularly performs *tantri*.

*Wayang tantri* purposefully brings the tradition of *wayang* to a larger audience, in a time when traditional arts must compete with the draw of movies and television. In a film produced by the Asian Art Museum, Wija explains that after learning the tradition of *wayang* from his father, he desired to develop his own style and to create new characters so that he "could find ways for the tradition to be accepted by modern audiences" (Chu, 2012). Many Balinese artists share Wija's concern that *wayang kulit* will not continue as a dynamic performance in Bali and that audiences will dwindle because they do not find it relevant or interesting.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> Akademi Seni Tari Indonesia (ASTI, Indonesian Academy of the Arts) is now the Institut Seni Indonesia (ISI, Indonesian Institute for the Arts) and offers S1 and S2 (BA and MA degrees) in puppetry, dance, theatre, and music. Previously it was also the Sekolah Tinggi Seni Indonesia (STSI, Indonesian University of the Arts).

<sup>3</sup> For example, Emiko Saraswati Susilo, one of the founders of the Balinese performance group Çudamani, recently posted on Facebook about this concern and the group's efforts to introduce and excite a young audience.

To be successful in both religious and secular contexts, *wayang tantri* must negotiate a balance between innovation and tradition. Balinese professor and *dalang* I Nyoman Sedana describes several criteria for understanding a contemporary *wayang* performance or as he terms it: *wayang kontemporer*. Sedana's criteria help situate the relationship between tradition and innovation that is happening within Balinese *wayang kulit*. The first type of change that Sedana notes is altering the technical requirements of the performance, for example using an electrical light instead of the traditional oil lamp or *blencong*, or instead of a single *dalang* manipulating all of the puppets, many different performers might manipulate and voice the puppet characters. The next feature of *wayang kontemporer* are inventive designs in puppets that might include new characters, puppets capable of special effects, or puppets that create a coloured shadow. The performance might also include puppets that serve as scenery or multi-media projections together with videos of other performances or actors using their bodies to cast a shadow on the screen. All of these elements together create visual spectacle that excites the audience, even in the opening descriptive scene, which in traditional *wayang kulit*, often "puts children in the audience to sleep" (Sedana, 2005, p. 78). In spite of all of these innovations, the "story and philosophy" of the performance "holds to tradition" (Sedana, 2005, p. 79).

Sedana describes the technical advances with the context of a kind of rupture to the fabric of Balinese society. The performance was part of a response to the 2002 Bali bombings, which was meant "to release inhabitants of Kuta and Bali from the psychic damage of the blast and to restore a sense of harmonious well-being. While the performance was theatrically innovative and technologically experimental, it rose from the traditional root of theatre in Balinese culture. *Wayang's* exorcist potential merged with modern artistic innovation to help make a shattered world whole" (Sedana, 2005, p. 74).

As the *pedalangan* programme often uses technology and other similar innovations in its *wayang* performances, ISI creates

these elements of performances as tradition through repetition. “Inventing traditions, it is assumed here, is essentially a process of formalization and ritualization, characterized by reference to the past, if only by imposing repetition” (Hobsbawm, 1983, p. 4).

In a separate publication, Sedana also describes the criteria used for judging a *wayang kulit* as tradition – including in what ways and how drastically the *dalang* can apply his creativity in the performance. This creative element in *wayang kulit* is called *kawi dalang*: “the creativity (*kawi*) of the puppet master (*dalang*)” (Leon and Sedana, 2007, p. 17). The primary aim of *kawi dalang* is that each performance must be new or different from the previous performance; a *dalang* cannot just give the same performance over and over or the audience would become bored. This requires a *dalang* to know enough stories, philosophy, and all other aspects of his art to please many different audiences in many different circumstances: “*Kawi dalang* demands that each performance changes in accordance with the fluctuating place-time-circumstances, *desa-kala-patra*” (Leon and Sedana, 2007, p. 17). Genre or form, which includes the set structure and various apparatus of performance, story, and character form the three primary elements that a *dalang* manipulates within a single performance (Leon and Sedana, 2007, pp. 25-27). Even though the *dalang* has quite a bit of leeway within each of these, the three elements must work together in harmony according to tradition in order for the performance to find favour with the audience.

*Wayang tantri*, according to these two different frameworks proposed by Sedana, negotiates a tenacious balance between contemporary and traditional *wayang* because it features technical innovations along with the traditions contained within *kawi dalang*. The next section builds upon Sedana’s frameworks to analyse the performance through my experience of learning a particular story in exploring the ways *wayang tantri* negotiates the familiar and strange so as to both reify and expand the notions of tradition in Bali.

## Elements of Tradition and Innovation

*Wayang tantri* is based on a story cycle originally from India that recounts the story about a girl named Diah Tantri who tells the king Iswaryadala stories about animals. Like *The Arabian Nights*, “*Tantri* encompasses a wide range of continuously superimposed stories within stories” (Sedana, 2002, pp. 28-29). The origins of the story appearing in Bali are unclear, but the Balinese have changed it to make it their own; Sedana notes, “local poets in Bali have superimposed numerous other tales in addition to and on top of the source material” (2002, p. 55).<sup>4</sup> This kind of transformation is not unlike how the Balinese use *The Mahabharata* or *Ramayana*, also important religious texts in India, and have added or changed numerous characters and plots. The many elements of a performance of *wayang tantri* reflect current discourses of globalization and local and national identity that are negotiated within Balinese arts and culture.

The opening of the performance follows the same structure as other genres of *wayang kulit*, but also marks this performance as “different.” The musical ensemble plays while the *dalang* prepares for the performance by giving offerings, reciting incantations, ensuring a good performance as well as protection from the gods, and readying the puppets. The *kayonan*, or “tree of life” puppet begins the performance by “dancing” on the screen – the movement summons the world of the play, like a god creating Earth out of nothing. The *kayonan* used in *wayang tantri* is different to the one used in other genres of *wayang kulit* (Figure 2). Pak Tunjung explained that he designed his *kayonan* so that it would be distinct from Wija’s, and that the one he designed for me to use would be different from the other two. The basic shape is similar, but the details demonstrate

---

<sup>4</sup> More definitive research on the origin of the story and how and why it gained popularity in Bali is needed, but outside the scope of this paper. For my purposes, it is enough that the story originated in India and was manipulated by the Balinese to make it theirs.

the originality of the performance and the identity of the *dalang* performing the story. The design, music, and movements at the beginning of the performance create a greater emphasis on individuality and artistic voice than in other genres and performances of *wayang kulit*.



Figure 2: Pak Tunjung holds the kayonan for wayang tantri.

The opening of the performance establishes the sacred context of a *wayang kulit* performance. After the two dances of the *kayonan*, the *dalang* sings the *Alus Arum* (which accompanies the entry of the first puppet characters on the screen).



*bujangga anom kemalingan*

“a young priest is confused”

*genta hilang muang pustaka*

“[he forgot his] bell and [his] scripture disappeared”

*apan masaning mamuja*

“since he is praying/worshiping”

*sangkania karia menangis*

“that’s why he is still embarrassed”<sup>5</sup>

The text invokes a performance or ritual mishap, the priest does not have or has forgotten the scripture he is supposed to recite. Such an incident would be disastrous for a Balinese person because great importance is given to language both written and spoken. Leo Howe comments that, in Bali, language provides the means to connect the mortal and ancestral worlds, and that “maintaining correct linguistic usage in relation to deities and ancestors is vital to safety and prosperity, since inappropriate words can bring misfortune” (2001, p. 92). The performance thus begins in uncertainty; the ritual might go wrong; and the priest is embarrassed. Compare that with the *Alus Arum* at the opening of *Arjuna Tapa*, a popular *wayang parwa* story:

*rahina tatas kemantian humuni*

“Every morning the *gamelan* music begins to play”

*mredanga kala sangka gurnitan tara*

“The voices of the instruments are beautiful to hear.”

*gumuruh ikang gubar bala samuha*

“The sound of the crashing cymbals brings everyone together.”

---

<sup>5</sup> Translation by I Nyoman Sedana.

*mangkata pada nguwuh seruh rumuhun*

“And the one with the thunderous voice progresses to the front of the line.”

*para ratu sampun ahyas asalin*

“The kings change into their grand clothes.”

*lumanpaha pada hawan rata parimita*

“He who drives the chariot that is without compare.”

Rather than ritual mishap, this opening describes how ritual performance, expressed through the *gamelan* music, brings people together. The text also reinforces hierarchical social order because it is the kings who come to the front in “grand clothes” and a chariot “without compare.” The opening of *wayang tantri* suggests that the old social order might be changing, and rather than the stories of heroes and gods, a young girl tells stories to a priest. The audience, however, is made to feel on edge; will change bring about disaster?

The “correct” performance of ritual remains a prominent theme throughout the story that Pak Tunjung taught. In the opening scene Sri Ajidharma, the king who lives in Malawa Palace, tells his servant Patih Madri that his people are miserable; a large ritual celebration must be planned to bring happiness and prosperity back to the land. The king commands Patih Madri to lead an army into the forest to collect plants, flowers, roots, and animals to use for food, decoration, and ritual sacrifice. The servants, or *panasar*, Pengalasan and Pangkur, will accompany Patih Madri on his quest. They are excited about contributing to what they believe will be the “celebration of the century.”

The second part of the performance begins with Pondol and Klenceng, the servants of the ogre king, Suramaya, talking about the work they do helping their king take care of the animals of the forest. They must feed, wash, and protect these valuable resources of the forest – hard and often thankless work. Pondol devises a plan to try and sell some of the cows from the forest to

have money for a vacation, but Suramaya warns that it is important to nurture the resources of nature and not squander them on something temporary like a vacation. “If you sell the cow now, what will you do in the future? A vacation only lasts a brief moment,” Suramaya warns. Pondol reluctantly agrees, and he and Klenceng head to the forest. The next scene shows the many animals living in the forest: frogs, birds, tigers, cows, giraffes, elephants, monkeys, and many more. Several of the puppets are of animals that would not normally appear in Bali, like kangaroos, demonstrating the influences that frequent contact with people from many different countries has on the imagination of the Balinese. They incorporate these outsiders in their stories and their world. Finally, the scene returns to Pondol and Klenceng, but while they are talking, several animals dart past them, as if they are running from some danger. They hurry to warn their king of a possible threat.

The final scene of a *wayang kulit* often features a battle between the two opposing sides. Suramaya is angry that the neighbouring king is taking so much from the forest; he complains that it is wasteful. A long battle ensues between the soldiers and animals before Suramaya and Patih Madri finally meet to fight. At this moment, each says an invocation and their bodies change shapes. Suramaya becomes Rangda, a troubled witch from Balinese mythology, and Patih Madri becomes the Barong, or protector of the forest. Barong and Rangda battle, but there is no clear victor. At this point, a puppet representing the Buddha appears, floating high on the screen upon the *kayonan*, which is representing a cloud. Patih Madri appears, and after a short conversation with the Buddha, he is taken up and rides away in the cloud.

The main part of the story is over, but because much of the final action happens in Kawi, an ancient Javanese court language, the two *panasar* from the beginning of the story explain to the audience what happened. The final actions of the play serve to restore the ritual imbalance that is suggested by the opening lyrics used in the *Alas Arum*. The Barong is a central figure in the ritual

performance of *Calonarang* where the Barong does battle with the evil witch Rangda. There is no winner; rather the purpose is to bring conflicting sacred forces into balance. The Barong and Rangda even sit side by side in the temple and share the prayers and offerings of the Balinese people (Figure 3). Their appearance at the end of the story invokes a restoration to balance within a specifically Balinese context. The story no longer belongs to India, or some other, but contains dominant symbols of Balinese spirituality.



*Figure 3: Masks for Barong and Rangda sit side by side in a temple in Ubud.*

At the end of the play, the Buddha warns Patih Madri that the resources of the world are limited, and that it is preferable for people to express religious devotion in their heart rather than through the accumulation of things and animals for lavish meals or sacrifice. The scene of the Buddha together with the Barong and Rangda reflect how “tradition” is viewed after the bombings in a Kuta nightclub on October 12, 2002.

Many felt that the Balinese suffered this calamity because they had wandered too far from traditional values, religion, and culture and that in order to both heal and move forward, the Balinese must look to the past. This return to the past has been dubbed *ajeg*, a word that is difficult to translate directly, but emphasizes

a balanced harmony between all things, articulated in the Balinese concept *Tri Hita Karana*. The term has been invoked to justify architectural styles, religious imperatives, gender relations, political movements, and recently in actions against the large number of immigrants from other parts of Indonesia who are looking to share in Bali's thriving economy. It is not so much a longing to return to the past, but rather a desire for stability in an era of much change; and tradition becomes a litmus test and marker of that stability. These elements of the play express how Balinese society struggles to maintain a "Balinese" identity and values against many different forces including tourism, Indonesian nationalism, globalization, and modernization.

## **Tradition and Innovation – Learning to Perform**

Puppet movement and vocal intonation work to differentiate *wayang tantri* while serving to relate the play to a specific Balinese worldview. Howe explains that this happens most clearly through the voices and actions of the *panasar* characters, "while the [main] characters 'speak in Kawi' via the interventions of the servants 'they *mean* in Balinese", and are thus in a Balinese social and cultural world" (2001, pp. 92-93). Pak Tunjung taught me to negotiate Balinese aesthetics and tradition as I learned to give voice to these four characters. Examining this process reveals how Balinese artists negotiate tradition and innovation in creating a performance that is contemporary for their audience.

The ideal of balance, or that the existence of two opposite yet complementary halves compose a whole, is a pervasive and longstanding aesthetic for Balinese culture and cosmology. Stephen Davies asserts that balance is the primary criteria for judging whether something is beautiful, pleasing, or good, or in Balinese *becik* (2007, p. 21). Balance in Balinese art forms is not just a matter of symmetry, but rather it is how the proportions relate to both the human body and the cosmological configuration of the island. Balance, rather than finding expression through opposites, also recognizes a middle position between the two extremes, and much of Balinese ritual and

performance strives to bring these extremes together in equilibrium. For example, temples are placed and designed in orientation to the ocean, mountains, and cardinal directions, linking sacred elements through position and proportion (James, 1973, pp. 145-148).

The aesthetic realization of balance within the puppets is better understood within the categories of *alus* and *kasar*. *Alus* roughly translates into “refined,” and *kasar* is “unrefined.” Many different features of the puppets communicate the personality of their characters to the audience. Characteristics of an *alus* puppet include a smaller, slim body, a head that is tilted downward, small or narrow eyes, a small mouth, and a small nose. The puppets’ kinesthetic sphere of movement will also be smaller and more delicate. A *kasar* puppet is often much larger, has big, bulging eyes, a large open mouth with teeth and/or a tongue showing, is looking straight ahead or upwards, and has a side stance. *Kasar* puppets move much more vigorously on the screen with large sweeping motions.

Pak Tunjung emphasized that it is important for the voices of the characters to match the puppet. The puppeteer must pay attention to the mouth of the puppet and how the puppet moves. This would determine the best way for developing the voice to create balance with the puppet. These puppets reveal how tradition and innovation work tangentially because these are new characters, and the voices do not depend as much on convention as the other voices for the *panasars*, or clowns, of the *Mahabharata*: Twalen, Merdah, Delem, and Sangut. When I learned the voices for those four, it was much more important to copy the quality and timbre of the voice that Pak Tunjung used as closely as possible. When learning the voices for the clowns in *wayang tantri*, he spent a lot more time explaining how to use the characteristics of the puppets to determine the voice. The character of Pengalasam (Figure 4) has a small head with a tiny nose sitting high above the mouth, therefore his voice sounds quite nasal and thin. In contrast, Pondal (Figure 5), his brother, has a very large, round, mouth area and his head is tilted up. Pak Tunjung explained that his voice should be deeper and come from the throat.



Figure 4: Pengalasan.



Figure 5: Pondol.



Figure 6: Pangkur.



Figure 7: Klenceng.

The leader of the two *panasar* who work for Suramaya is Pangkur (Figure 6), a surly character who dreams of a day when he does not have to work and can take a vacation. He has a very large face, and therefore has a deep kind of voice that sounds like he might have

been a smoker at one point in his life. His counterpart, Klenceng (Figure 7) is probably the most extreme example of how a voice should match the physical characteristics of the puppet. His leg kicks when he talks, making him appear unstable, and it is important that the rhythm of the voice is consistent with the movement, a kind of stutter. Klenceng's voice and movement match the personality of his character, which is shy and uncertain in contrast to the confident Pangkur.

Suramaya (Figure 8), the king of the forest, breaks with convention, and even though he is not a *panasar*, he has an articulated mouth, and speaks the language of the audience. His nose is small but his mouth is so big that it dominates his face. Suramaya's voice is high and gravelly. When Pak Tunjung first heard my voice for Suramaya, he broke out into a big smile. "Perfect," he exclaimed, "just like Patrick from Sponge Bob Square Pants™. Don't change that!"

Pondal, Klenceng, and Suramaya are all puppets from the left side, or the *kasar* side, and often appear on the screen together, which means that another important part of the vocal performance is making sure they are easily discernable between one character and the other. Pak Tunjung criticized one well-known *dalang* with regard to the similarity of the voices for his *panasar* characters. He felt that the audience would not always be sure who was talking unless they could visually see the character moving on the screen.



*Figure 8: Suramaya.*



## Contemporary Traditions – Conclusions

*Wayang tantri* demonstrates a kind of preservation and maintenance of culture that moves beyond Picard's "resilience" because it shows how the Balinese use the past to speak to the present in a kind of "invented tradition." The story and structure reflect many values and a return-to-tradition, as represented in the *ajeg* Bali movement. Suramaya could be working to protect the land from those who would sell it to make rice fields into villas. Through language and mythic figures (such as the Barong and Rangda, and the Buddha), the performance promotes a hierarchy based on religious values rather than old kingdoms. Balinese musicians Ida Wayan Ngurh and his brother Ida Wayan Oka Granoka, both renowned for their creativity and compositions, remark that new forms of music and performance only come from exploring "the music's roots in ritual and spirituality" (Gray, 2011, p. 233). Locally, nationally, and globally, *wayang tantri* embodies that kind of invention – making a modern *wayang* for a modern Balinese audience.

## References

- Allen, P and Palermo, C (2005) *Ajeg Bali: Multiple Meanings, Diverse Agendas. Indonesia and the Malay World* 33(97): 239-255.
- Anderson, B (2006) *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London:Verso.
- Bali Daily. (2012) I Made Bandem: Encouraging the Birth of Balinese Contemporary Arts. Available at: <http://www2.thejakartapost.com/bali-daily/2012-06-06/i-made-bandem-encouraging-birth-balinese-contemporary-arts.html> accessed on 2 September 2012.
- Bhabba, H K (1990) *Nation and Narration*. New York: Routledge.
- Chalmers, I (2006) *Indonesia: An Introduction to Contemporary Traditions*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Chu, J (2012) *Bali – Shadow Puppets – I Wayan Wija – for Asian Art Museum SF*. Available at: <http://vimeo.com/30008012>.
- Cohen, M I (2007) Contemporary Wayang in Global Contexts. *Asian Theatre Journal* 24(2): 338-369.

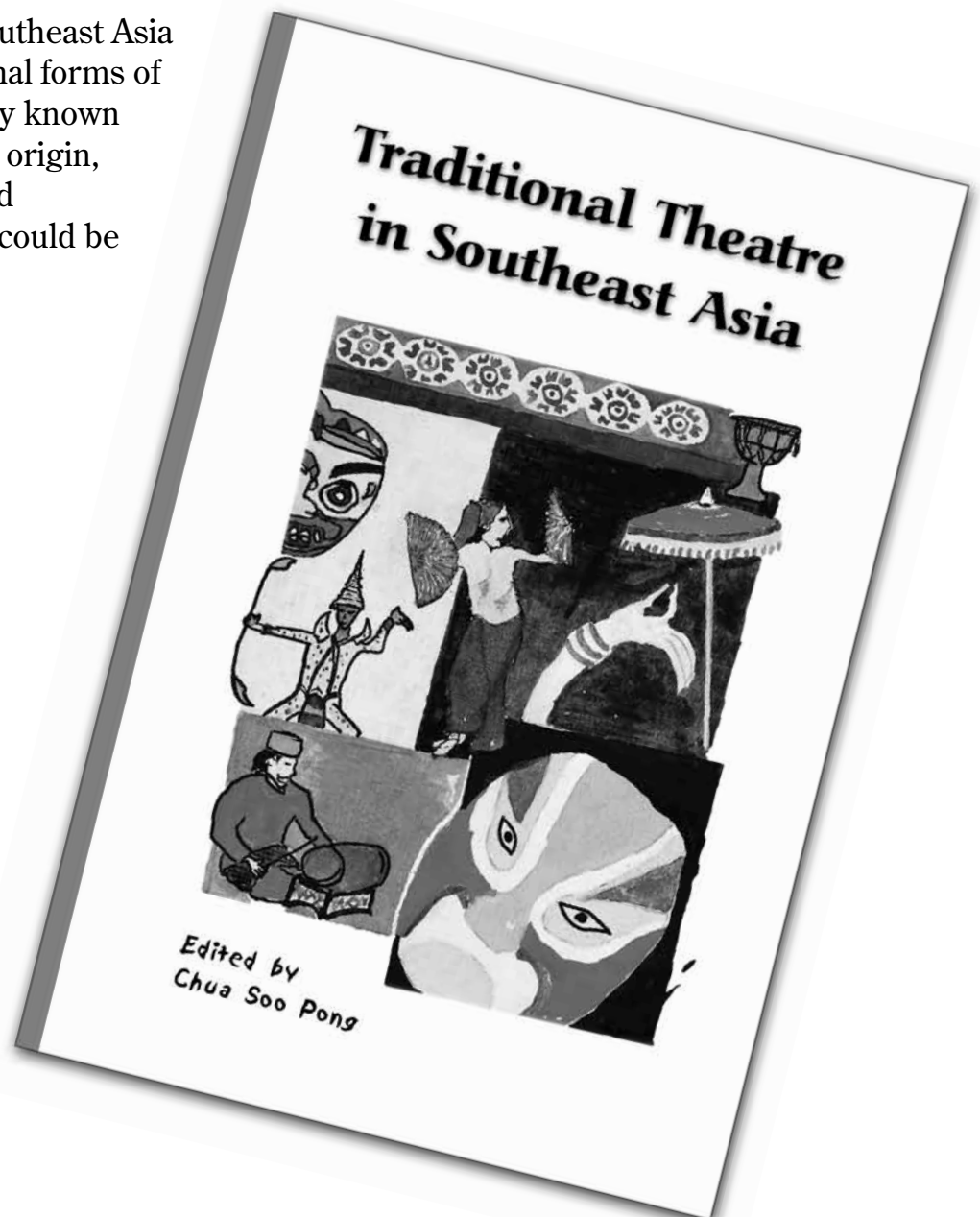
- Davies, S (2007) Balinese Aesthetics. *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 65(1): 21-29.
- Gray, N (2011) *Improvisation and Composition in Balinese Gender Wayang*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate.
- Hobsbawm, E (1989) Introduction: Inventing Traditions. In: Hobsbawm E and Ranger T (eds) *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge: University Press: 1-14.
- Howe, L (2001) *Hinduism and Hierarchy in Bali*. Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research Press.
- Howe, L (2005) *The Changing World of Bali: Religion, Society, and Tourism*. New York: Routledge.
- James, J (1973) Sacred Geometry on the Island of Bali. *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* 2: 141-154.
- Jenkins, R (2010) *Rua Bineda in Bali: Counterfeit Justice in the Trial of Nyoman Gunarsa*. Jogjakarta: Indonesian Institute of the Arts.
- Picard, M (1990) "Cultural Tourism" in Bali: Cultural Performance as Tourist Attraction. *Indonesia* 49: 37-74.
- Rubin, L and N Sedana (2007) *Performance in Bali*. New York: Routledge.
- Sedana, I N (2002) *Kawi Dalang: Creativity in Wayang Theatre*. Ph.D. University of Georgia.
- Sedana, I N (2005) Theatre in a Time of Terrorism: Renewing Natural Harmony after the Bali Bombing Via Wayang Kontemporer. *Asian Theatre Journal* 22(1): 73-86.
- Vickers, A (1989) *Bali: A Paradise Created*. Singapore: Periplus.
- Yayasan Bali Galang (2000) *Wayang Penting: Wayang Tantri*. Available at: <http://www.babadbali.com/seni/wayang/wayang-tantri.htm>

Images courtesy of Jennifer Goodlander

**Jennifer Goodlander** is an Assistant Professor at Indiana University. She has presented and published her research on Southeast Asian performance, especially puppetry, focusing on intersections of gender, tradition, material culture, and national identity. Her book, tentatively called: *Women in the Shadows: Gender, Puppets, and the Power of Tradition in Bali*, is under contract to be published in 2016.

# Traditional Theatre in Southeast Asia

Traditional Theatre in Southeast Asia focuses on many traditional forms of theatre that are not widely known outside their countries of origin, and provides analyses and discussions on how they could be revitalized.



For free copies,

Contact:

Publication Manager

SEAMEO Regional Centre for Archaeology and Fine Arts

SPAFA Building, 81/1 Sri Ayutthaya Road

Samsen, Theves, Bangkok 10300 THAILAND

Tel (662) 280 4022-9 ext 109

Fax (662) 280 4030

[www.seameo-spafo.org](http://www.seameo-spafo.org)

[spafo03@yahoo.com](mailto:spafo03@yahoo.com)

[spafo@seameo-spafo.org](mailto:spafo@seameo-spafo.org)

# **The Appropriation of the Dances of the Igorots From Traditional to Transnational**

---

The Igorot dances and culture of the Philippines have been used to create ballets in service of a number of purposes, and in heralding an introduced art form in Philippine culture. **Joelle Jacinto** asks whether the agenda of establishing a national identity through the appropriation of Igorot culture in balletic form addresses the needs of a Philippine audience as well.

## **The Igorot People and Appropriating Igorot Culture**

**E**arly in the development of dance as an art form in the Philippines, appropriations such as those of the Igorot culture were used to represent a national identity to an international audience, in tandem with the nationalist agenda of cultural funding agencies, in this case, the Cultural Center of the Philippines and the ballet companies in residence. The author looks at the dance, Igorot, and its legacy, and the works that were created with this legacy in place, to further understand the need to establish this nationalist identity, for what purposes and for which audiences, and if this need is still relevant today.

The Igorot people is a collective reference to five ethnic communities that reside in the Northern highlands of the Philippines, the Bontoc, Isneg, Kalinga, Ibaloi and the Kankanaey. Prior to the arrival of foreign colonial forces, they did not refer to themselves as Igorot, much less think of themselves as belonging to one tribe or ethnolinguistic classification.<sup>1</sup> However, as they live within the Cordillera

---

<sup>1</sup> For more detailed information on each community, there are entries on each in the volumes of the CCP Encyclopedia of Philippine Art.

mountain range, they are referred to as Igorot, which roughly translates as “from the mountain.” The Igorots first entered global consciousness when the people and recreations of their native villages were featured at the St. Louis World’s Fair in 1904 as controversial “Living Exhibits,” performing rituals and ceremonies for audiences to get intimately acquainted with the Philippine indigenous culture.<sup>2</sup> (Vergara 1995:111, 121)

The Igorots remain identifiable with Filipino culture, largely because this pre-colonial civilization is still alive today. Although modernized, they still wear the traditional cloths on occasion, and continue to practise their rituals and traditions. Many of these rituals involving dance were popularized in the Philippines by the Bayanihan Philippine National Folk Dance Company, whose repertoire includes a suite made up entirely of the “dances of the Cordillera people.” Most recognizable of these dances is “*Sayaw sa Banga*,” wherein an Igorot maiden balances several clay pots on her head while whirling like a dervish. According to Reynaldo Alejandro (2002), the folk dance is inspired by Cordilleran lasses fetching water from the river.

The proficiency in a prestigious art form has been a source of pride for the Philippines, and now boasts of two major ballet companies supported by the government, namely Ballet Philippines, which was established in 1970, coinciding with the inauguration of the Cultural Center of the Philippines, and Philippine Ballet Theatre, which was formed in 1987. A third major ballet company is Ballet Manila, established in 1995, at first as an independent touring company, then operating under a private sponsor. Each company

---

<sup>2</sup>The uprooted 1,100 Filipino natives were not all from the Cordilleras; there were also Moros, Visayans, Tingguians, and Bagobos, among others. All were treated inhumanely, starting from the boat journey where some froze to death, and throughout their stay at the exposition. The Igorots were forced to wear their native loincloths in freezing temperatures and to perform their sacred rituals and ceremonies every hour. Particularly memorable was how the Bontoc people were made to slaughter dogs and consume them for show, as if this was the people’s only source of nourishment, completing the illusion of the savagery that the Americans had discovered in their newly acquired territory, the savagery that they promised to civilize, modernize, and educate.

has developed a repertoire that presents standards from Classical ballet alongside choreographed works that have Philippine themes.



Figure 1: Je An Salas as the medicine woman in Agnes Locsin's *Igorot*. Photo courtesy of Agnes Locsin.

The works of these companies discussed in this article include Agnes Locsin's *Igorot*, debuted in Amsterdam in 1987 and mounted on Ballet Philippines a year later; Jojo Lucila's *Banbantay* and *Sari't Bahag*, which were choreographed for Philippine Ballet Theatre in 1995 and Ballet Manila in 1996, respectively; and Novy Bereber's *Angel of the Morning*, which was choreographed for Philippine Ballet Theatre in 2010. In analyzing these works, the development of a Filipinized/Filipino ballet tradition can also be seen, and the transformative theories behind this development may help address the questions raised regarding cultural responsibility.

Locsin's *Igorot* has actually been extensively discussed in Sally Ann Ness' "Originality in the Postcolony: Choreographing the Neo-ethnic Body of Philippine Ballet" (1997) wherein she analyzes the choreographic structure of *Igorot* to address issues of cultural responsibility that will arise from "marrying" movements created

by an existing ethno-linguistic community with ballet, and using the resulting form to “produc(e) a developing country’s national identity for international consumption, at least in part.”

Validating the Philippine investment of developing a Philippine ballet tradition, Ness states that ballet “commands transnational prestige,” and is an “ideal vehicle for objectifications of nationalist identity that seek to achieve approval and affirmation at international and cosmopolitan venues.” Ness questions what local audiences take away from a performance directed to an international one, and particularly the very community whose traditions these works derive from and allude to.

## **Igorot Dances as Folk Dance**

Since Francisca Reyes-Aquino codified dances from the mountain provinces in 1935, and before Agnes Locsin created her *Igorot*, there has been a wealth of choreographed Igorot “dances” in the repertoires of Philippine folk dance troupes performing in and outside the country. The most popular of these is the repertoire of the Bayanihan, who also produced the music recordings that accompany their dances, and were subsequently used by Locsin and Lucila for their choreographies. Even before ballet companies used Igorot culture to perpetuate national identity, folk dance companies have already been doing so for several years. The Bayanihan National Folk Dance Company have toured internationally with a repertoire that reflects many aspects of Philippine life and lore, and have been celebrated for their exhilarating performances that showcase a colourful, energetic and diverse nation, whose people exhibit a strong sense of spirituality and passion.

These choreographed dances are often mistaken as the actual dances performed by each Cordilleran community, as the folk dance groups market their repertoire as “authentic.” The dances of the Cordilleran peoples are, however, not structured as they are codified in Francisca Reyes-Aquino’s notation system; they neither

follow a sequence of steps nor specify a number of repetitions. A lot of these dances are spontaneous improvisations, using predefined dance movements that were taught at rituals and celebrations over generations.

Aquino's research collected and documented the folk dances of the different regions, and allowed them to be taught throughout the country. It represented an attempt to make tangible an intangible cultural heritage, and to add the needed structure to the Cordilleran dances for inclusion in the instructional volumes of her *Philippine Folk Dances*. This structuring was aided by the recording of her fellow scholar, Antonino Buenaventura, of the live music played during performance of these dances.

The codification of these dances inadvertently led to a sort of heritagization of culture that is rampant in Philippine folk dance, and has sparked countless debates on authentic portrayals of culture. Nevertheless, this invention of tradition helped establish the concept of a national identity for the Philippines, and therefore a sense of nationalism among its constituents. Eric Hobsbawm has recommended the invention of tradition as necessary to "legitimize institutions and (regulate) beliefs, value systems and conventions of behavior", for members of an emerging nation to feel a "sense of identification" for that would-be nation, and for a nation to be formed (Hobsbawm 1983:7-14).

Folk researcher and anthropologist, Ramon Obusan, who had been both a dancer and researcher of the Bayanihan, has opined that once folk dance is removed from its natural environment and put onstage, it has lost all its authenticity and is transformed into a new form. For his own Ramon Obusan Folkloric Group, which he formed in 1972, he staged dances that he had researched on his own, that do not appear in Aquino's instructional volumes.

Obusan choreographed *Kayaw*, translated as "Headhunt," in 1974 for the Larawan Dancing Group; it was premiered at the Cultural Center of the Philippines (CCP) as a full theatrical performance. The work narrates proceedings of a traditional



headhunt, wedding, and peace pact in the Kalinga community, using the dances of the Kalinga, and in the peace pact, some dances of the Ibaloi and Isneg, to move the story along (Villaruz 1994:154-155). In later years, he choreographed *Kailihan*, which presented ten different groups to emphasize their differences from one another, in dress, weaponry, body ornamentation, musical instruments, and dance styles and movements. Each community would step up to centre stage, where a representative will proclaim which group they belong to (“*Ako ay Ifugao....*” or “I am of the Ifugao...””) and briefly describe their group to identify themselves apart from the other groups. Then, the other members of their group start dancing with their spokesperson, and each group’s dancing, while identifiable as Igorot movement, displays the differences of their dances and, ultimately, culture. *Kailihan* is usually used as an introduction to a longer suite of dances from the Cordillera groups, as seen in the folk dance festival *Sari-saring Sayaw, Sama-samang Galaw* (Varied Dances, Moving Together) in February 2006.

The Ramon Obusan Folkloric Group became a resident folk dance company in 1987, after President Ferdinand Marcos was deposed and new policies in all aspects of government were instigated. Before this time, there were only two resident dance companies subsidized by the CCP, the Bayanihan as resident folk dance company, and CCP Dance Company as resident ballet company. The latter would later become Ballet Philippines (BP).<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> Initially called the Alice Reyes + Modern Dance Company, it was renamed the CCP Dance Company to establish its status as the resident dance company in the national institution. As such, theatrical dance at the CCP became exclusive to the resident ballet company, and the other groups felt ignored and unsupported. The CCP Dance Company was later renamed again to Ballet Philippines. This second renaming was meant to widen the scope of the company – from Reyes’ original choreographies to full-evening classical ballets – and its reach, aiming for an international audience. As explained by Reyes’ sister Denisa, who was also an artistic director of BP (1991-1994 and 1996-1998), when the CCP Dance Company went on tour, the name had to be explained: what the acronym CCP stood for, and what the institution was, as well as what kind of dance they performed. The name ‘Ballet Philippines’ spoke for itself, including genre, and hinted at the repertoire.

The Bayanihan's musical director and artistic director of the CCP, Lucrecia Kasilag, was an important adviser to BP founder and artistic director, Alice Reyes, and would naturally recommend including Filipino-themed works in the new company's repertoire. Most of these works were done in the modern style, rather than ballet. It would take the company several years before becoming fully proficient in classical ballet, and more before Agnes Locsin would choreograph for the company and establish her neo-ethnic style.

## **Ballet and Other Post-colonial Effects**

There is a tendency for post-colonial countries to assert an identifiable culture that existed before colonization. Folk dance troupes are expected to assert this national identity, and the Bayanihan, and several smaller groups all over the country, are able to accomplish this. Although ballet companies are not expected to make this assertion, Ballet Philippines, Philippine Ballet Theatre, and Ballet Manila were seen to contribute to establishing this identifiable national culture as well.

Introduced at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, ballet quickly became an art form that Filipinos aspired to. Before modernization, early in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Filipinos did not practise art in the Western sense; creative impulses and artistic inclinations were instead woven into regular activities and everyday implements. Dance in particular had a purpose to fulfill; some groups used dance to mark milestones, some danced to pray for a good harvest, others danced to prepare themselves for war or to grieve their dead, their bodies so full of anxiety and upheaval that they needed a very physical outlet for this tension. When ballet arrived in the country by way of the circus and vaudeville entertainments brought in by American colonial rule, with the earlier establishment of other theatre forms, dance added spectacle and entertainment to its list of functionalities. Beyond activity or ritual, dance became a form of art.

Although many Filipinos loved ballet, and the genre had been practised well enough through the years to merit legitimate professionalism and international consideration, ballet is not universally accepted as a Philippine art form, being European and incongruous to the short, stocky Filipino body, and may only serve to entertain the bourgeoisie. Until recently, ballet was commonly associated with the CCP, where it is usually seen, and the CCP was commonly associated with Imelda Marcos, who had the entire CCP complex built to fulfill part of her husband's presidential agenda for the Philippines to appear as a prosperous emerging nation (Jacinto 2007: 2-5, 49-51).

This would explain why ballet companies were compelled to produce a repertoire that is Filipino. Imelda Marcos' programme for the CCP was for folk art and so-called "high" art to co-exist. "High" art forms, including ballet, opera, symphonic/orchestral music, furthered the reputation of the Philippines as a progressive nation, while folk art forms established that this progressive nation had its own identity even before its discovery by colonial forces. In this way, high art and folk art were made to be complementary, and it is particularly seen in the repertoires of the dance companies. Post-Martial Law, the sense of nationalism heightened. Following the new democracy, people power made people more nationalistic, and the repertoire continued to include "Filipinized" ballets.

The desire to stage a "Filipinized" ballet was not a new concept pushed by the political agenda of the Marcoses and the CCP. Filipinizing ballet began as early as 1927, the year Polish emigre Luva Adameit returned to the Philippines and set up a ballet school; her recitals included her own choreographies such as *Planting Rice*, *Cariñosa* and *Maria Clara*, all with Filipino themes (Villaruz 1994). In the same manner that Marius Petipa's orientalizing of ballet produced the Indian-themed *La Bayadere*, Adameit adapted balletic movement to make a foreign dance form familiar to her local, would-be dance students (Jacinto 2007: 26-27).

Adameit's contemporaries developed the same mixed repertoire – European classics and original choreographies with Filipino themes

– although it is unclear if they all had the same impulse as dictated by Filipino culture, or if they were just copying Adameit’s style. In any case, the strategy worked and ballet became a very popular activity in the country, so much so that a Ballet Ban was eventually imposed in 1950, by conservative Catholic schools who were outraged to see their prim and proper students expose themselves in tights and leotards onstage. Despite the threat of expulsion from these esteemed *colegios*, ballet fanatics still found ways to continue their ballet classes, and with its popularity, ballet successfully became part of Philippine upper-middle class culture.

## **Filipinizing Ballet**

When Agnes Locsin choreographed *Igorot* in 1987, the CCP was already in operation for 18 years, as was BP, which had by then amassed several ballets with Philippine themes in its repertoire (the most popular being Alice Reyes’ *Amada*, Gener Caringal’s *Ang Sultan*, and Denisa Reyes’ *For the Gods*).

The Filipino repertoire of BP suited the agenda of the CCP to preserve, develop, and promote Philippine arts and culture, and although ballet was an introduced form and not indigenous to the Philippines, it was welcomed by the CCP for its potential for international prestige. BP credits Imelda Marcos herself for envisioning a ballet school at the cultural center (Fernandez 1981:10). The former first lady had intended to establish the CCP as an icon of progressive development in an emerging nation state, its purpose more for an external, international view, as much as, if not more than for local beneficiaries.

While performing a classical European repertoire, Filipino choreographers were also developing their own choreographies, with Filipino themes, to Filipino stories, using Filipino music, and even borrowing from Filipino dances. Most early Philippine-themed work were mostly neo-classic ballets or modern dance works that used a rural or pre-colonial royal backdrop to appear Filipino, and based on stories written by Filipino authors, or myths handed down through generations.

However, “Filipinizing” ballet steps was still a choreographic device that had yet to be thoroughly explored. Most of the Filipino ballets of this time were still set against a rural or imagined-royal-in-a-pre-colonial backdrop, and the main indication in the movement for it to be Filipino was to incorporate flexed hands in the choreography to orientalize the work.

Over time, folk dance research expanded the material that local choreographers could use in their work. While there are many examples of translations of folk dance into balletic movement, there was none quite as stark and revolutionary as Agnes Locsin’s *Igorot*.

## Igorot

*Igorot* begins with the lone figure of an Igorot priestess kneeling downstage. The recorded chant of a shaman is heard over the speakers, and she starts to move her head, as if the chanting is coming from her. As a gong punctuates the chanting, the priestess raises herself up on her knees, and in one swift motion kicks



Figure 2: Igorot maidens in 5<sup>th</sup> position, and in their g-strings. Photo courtesy of Agnes Locsin.

her leg out and punctures her pointe shoe-clad foot onto the floor in front of her, as if puncturing the earth. She is then joined by five maidens, and the suite of dances commence: a maidens dance, a war dance for two male dancers, and a courtship pas de deux.

When *Igorot* premiered in the Philippines in 1988, the ballet community was electrified with this revolutionary approach to the Filipino ballet. Agnes Locsin found favour with not just BP, which appointed her as director of the junior company BP2, and commissioned more work, but also with the CCP upper management. Although there were criticisms, especially from the folk dance community, *Igorot* branded Locsin as one of the most important choreographers in Philippine history.

Sally Ann Ness' main criticism of Agnes Locsin's *Igorot* is that there is the danger of the work being culturally irresponsible. Ness tries to validate the work by seeking the accounts of others with "varying stakes in the ballet and the peoples it claims to represent," interviewing senior Philippine dance scholars, Basilio Esteban Villaruz and Ramon Obusan, as well as the dancers of *Igorot* to source out their own opinions on the work's cultural negotiations. The dancers themselves felt that they were doing important work with regard to identifying themselves as Filipino, but some were wary about how the work would be received by the Igorot community. One of the dancers informed that there used to be a native of the Cordillera who danced for a time with BP, but they did not know if that dancer was with the company when *Igorot* was created and staged (Ness 1997: 64-108).

Villaruz opines that *Igorot* was an abstraction, thereby absolving the work from misrepresentation as it was not representing the cultural communities in any specific detail. Obusan describes the work as a collage of the cultural communities, not specifying one community in particular, and supports Villaruz in the view of *Igorot* as an abstraction.

Touting the work as an abstraction then shows where the work will fail in how Ness believes it would "empower" the "peoples it

claims to represent.” On the one hand, Ness concedes that the ballet, *Igorot*, is able to “restor(e) dignity” to the people of the Cordillera mountain range, given that these communities maintain a negative colonial stigma, not only internationally but also locally, as evidenced by documented domestic conflict in this region. She writes that Igorot “asserts a positive, respectful appreciation” of the cultural communities whose culture it appropriates, but mostly because it is an “idealized depiction” of their culture. However, she points out that this idealization of the Igorot communities only exists at this “level of aesthetic discourse,” and did not change the reality of the status of these communities, mentioning how development programmes in the region are still met with opposition. This outsider viewpoint of Ms. Ness is curiously idealistic as well, given the complicated history of the Cordilleran pursuit of autonomy, and the shifting priorities of the different governments that were inducted throughout time.

Despite the concern for the responsibility of cultural appropriation, Ness declares that Locsin’s *Igorot* successfully Filipinizes classical ballet. She describes the choreography as divided at the waist, pointing out that the top half of the dancers’ bodies emulate Igorot dancing movement and gestures, as “identified and codified by the Bayanihan,” while the lower half perform ballet steps, slightly reoriented to go against classical ballet impulses and accents. She asserts that this combination of styles only works because although they appear on the same body, they are assigned to different body parts, with each divided half able to fulfill its purpose. Unlike other previous “Filipino” ballets, which are neo-classical choreography set to a Filipino libretto and/or music, in Filipino costumes and against Filipino sets, the steps themselves in *Igorot* successfully reclassifies the genre to generate a new Philippine dance style.

Revising choreographic structure to integrate gestures and intricacies that would make ballet “Filipino” is now known as “neo-ethnic” dance, a term coined by Locsin’s collaborator, musician

Joey Ayala, that was adopted by the CCP to classify Locsin's succeeding body of work (Locsin 2012:62-63). Aside from Locsin, not many choreographers adopted neo-ethnic dance as their genre, perhaps in part because of the cultural responsibility tied to it, and perhaps also to avoid comparisons to Locsin as initiator of the genre.

### ***Banbantay and Sari't Bahag***

Jojo Lucila danced for BP before he started to choreograph in 1983, eventually founding his own independent dance group, Chameleon Dance Theater, in 1989. His choreographic style is modern dance with some experimentations on what he calls "traditional transformations" in an email shared on November 2012. His dance background has foundations in folk dance, being part of the University of the East dance troupe early in his career. For Chameleon, he choreographed *Tagabanbantay*, which impressed Ramon Obusan, who started to share his research with Lucila to authenticate his upcoming "transformations."

In 1994, Philippine Ballet Theatre invited Lucila to choreograph a new work for them. For this commission, Lucila created *Banbantay*, a different work from *Tagabanbantay*, as a longer, fuller work that played out as a story ballet, with the fire tree as its central theme, after a Cordilleran tribe that used the tree's seasonal activity to determine their life cycles, including when to hunt, when to go to war, and so on.

The word "*Banbantay*" is Ilocano for "mountain," while "*Tagabanbantay*" translates to "From the mountain," which is also the loose translation of the word "Igorot." *Banbantay* has a broader scope as it tells the story of life on this mountain, rather than an individual character or group of people. An example of life being depicted is a section for the female corps de ballet, where they walk across the stage en pointe with clay pots on their heads. This is also seen in the aforementioned *Sayaw sa Banga (Dance of the Pots)*. A technical showcase piece, it is difficult enough to balance



several clay pots on their heads; the level of difficulty is doubled when they walk and whirl swiftly around the stage *en pointe*.

In 1995, dancers from Philippine Ballet Theatre broke away from the company and formed an independent group christened Ballet Manila. It started out as a touring company, and therefore the repertoire that was built accommodated the number of dancers in its roster, as well as the audience they wished to attract. For a performance in the U.S., they asked Lucila to choreograph a work built on Igorot culture, since *Banbantay* proved to be so successful. For Ballet Manila, Lucila choreographed *Sari't Bahag*.

There are inevitable similarities between the works, although *Sari't Bahag* is based on a different Igorot mythology from another tribe, with the Kalinga tradition of looking at the idaw bird replacing the fire tree to symbolize the outcome of a headhunt, and therefore dictate what rituals to perform next. It was also very much simplified given the parameters for intended performances. The similarities partly come from the fact that the dancers of Ballet Manila were also the dancers on whom *Banbantay* was mounted on, when they were still with the Philippine Ballet Theatre, and were dancing both works the same way.

Philippine Ballet Theatre and Ballet Manila were both classical ballet companies. It was rare for their dancers to have any training in modern dance or any other style of dance besides ballet, unlike BP, which has always enabled their dancers to perform a more diverse repertoire, and provided training in other genres. When Lucila choreographed *Banbantay* in 1994, he was met with resistance from the company's younger dancers, who could not grasp the concept of "grounded" dancing, nor of performative "attack," and had difficulty moving in a non-balletic style *en pointe*. They also had to overcome their natural tendency to look "pretty".

Lucila did not intend for his work to look like classical ballet nor ethnic dance, nor an amalgam of the two as Ness describes Locsin's *Igorot*, though perhaps *Banbantay* may indeed appear

as a hybrid of the two styles, but different from Locsin's in that Lucila sequenced his work to tell his story. The way the dancers finally executed the choreography was what finally determined the choreographic style of *Banbantay*, and subsequently, Ballet Manila's *Sari't Bahag*.

Although both works were commissioned to fulfill the agenda of national identity, and were consequently brought on national and international tours of both companies, Lucila himself did not intend for these works to fulfill this purpose. While it is an honor to have his work performed at international venues to represent the country, it is his personal interest in Igorot culture that led to these "traditional transformations," from his mother's affinity with the people, from having been raised in that region, and from his own impressions of the people and culture during his own youth.

This illustrates how Filipinos are their own audience. As a country of very diverse multiple cultures, there is a curiosity about "other" cultures within the same nation that is seemingly omnipresent through time. In a way, although Lucila is not born of the mountains he is fascinated with, his appropriation of their culture for his choreography allows him to participate in this culture. In a similar way, Filipinos feel a strong emotional sense of belonging when they see such work, which is the same affinity and pride felt by an entire nation when Manny Pacquiao wins or loses a boxing match.

## **Angel of the Morning**

A former member of BP with a strong folk dance background, Novy Bereber was commissioned to choreograph for Philippine Ballet Theater's 2010 choreographer's showcase with the theme *Romance*. He presented *Angel of the Morning*, coming down from heaven to "love the daughters of men." The angel is harnessed and hovers over the stage, watching a stageful of Igorot maidens planting rice on the mountain.

When the angel walks the earth, his “wings,” made of four other male dancers, spread out behind him. This enables a series of pas de deux where the angel dances with each of the maidens (the actual angel with the first and last maiden, and his “wing feathers” with the maidens in between). At the end of the work, he sheds his wings and commits himself to his chosen maiden. The style of the work is more contemporary than ballet, which only acts as a technical springboard for the more complicated choreography. The angel and his wings, for example, dance in the contemporary style throughout, punctuated with an explosive ballet trick every now and then.



Figure 3: *The angel finds a mate: Lucas Jacinto and the maidens in Novy Bereber’s Angel of the Morning. Photo courtesy of Ador Pamintuan.*

The women were *en pointe*. Twenty-three years after *Igorot*, dancing en pointe while physically grounded was no longer a Herculean task to Filipino ballerinas. Given that these works were mounted on bodies that were purely classically trained, *Banbantay* and *Sari’t Bahag* definitely contributed to the renewed sensibilities for dance technique that grew within the local dance scene. By the time Bereber choreographed *Angel of the Morning*, the dancers of the Philippine Ballet

Theatre were not so resistant to the challenging choreography, and the dance developed more in the way the choreographer wanted it to, rather than having to follow the limitations of its dancers.

Bereber's decision to use Igorot culture in his work was connected with his concept of the fallen angels. In an email received on 23<sup>rd</sup> November, 2012, Bereber explained that his exposure to Igorot culture and dance in folkloric ballet has "always inspired me, especially the way Igorot culture combines the joy of dance and music with their everyday life and work. They seemed to be the perfect models for the 'Daughters of Men' – people of such joy and beauty they tempted the angels out of the sky."

On the subject of cultural responsibility, *Angel of the Morning* ran the risk of misrepresentation as the Igorot maidens are dressed in flesh colored unitards with bands of Igorot cloth draped strategically on their bodies, appearing as the traditional g-string worn by the males. While the costuming could also be seen as an abstraction of the traditional Cordilleran attire, being basically a unitard with traditional trimmings, the placement of the *bahag* was still recognizable as male. *Igorot* was first to stir this controversy, as the maidens and warriors wore the traditional jackets and the male g-string. According to Locsin in interview, her costuming arose of necessity. She had few dancers who had to take on both male and female roles, and could not quickly change costumes between dances. This clearly misrepresents the Igorot maiden, who is quite conservative in nature, as does the courtship pas de deux, because it is taboo for men and women to touch each other in public.

Bereber assures in his email that he meant no disrespect with the costuming. "On the contrary, I think locking the Igorot into a staid folkloric costume that borders on the touristic is to disrespect the vibrant, living nature of Igorot culture. And that's also why I dressed the Angel of the Morning in jeans: if Lucifer were to come to earth today he would be contemporary, and very sexy. I was actually very happy that the costuming choices raised these questions, even

controversy. After all, what is the point of contemporary dance if it doesn't address contemporary issues?" Still, it felt that the costuming could have been given better consideration, and not simply serve to shock the audience.

## **An Igorot's view of Igorot and Appropriating Igorot Dances**

Sally Ness wondered how the native Igorot would find Agnes Locsin's appropriation of their culture, but was unable to speak to any before she completed her paper. When the journal was published in 1997, a young Kankanaey named Biag Gaongen was enrolled at the Philippine High School for the Arts. There, he saw a ballet based on Igorot culture, most likely inspired by *Igorot*, and was appalled by how high the girls kicked their legs in their short skirts. While at the high school, he was "discovered" by Agnes Locsin, who convinced him to train in ballet, and later, join BP.

While at BP, Gaongen was never able to dance *Igorot*, but he did see it in rehearsal, and was able to discuss it lengthily with Locsin. "Ladies in *bahag* bothered me at first but then I forgot about it as the dance progressed because the dance was very intense and spiritual." In contrast, his reaction to *Angel of the Morning* was not as accepting, even if he was good friends with choreographer Bereber, having danced together in BP. Gaongen felt that Bereber was unable to justify the women's use of the *bahag*, and that the pyrotechnical duets, though beautiful, had nothing to do with the culture.

Gaongen understands that *Igorot* is not trying to appear as an "Igorot dance," but rather a "representation of this culture." What Gaongen appreciated was how the dancers treated the work with respect, how they had their own perception of the purpose of the work and what it represented. In his opinion, this is how Locsin's *Igorot* achieves cultural responsibility. "One has not only have the technique in both the classical and modern styles to be able to do it genuinely but one should always take into consideration that this

was not just a dance for performance's sake. One has to understand and respect the culture that inspired it.”

According to him, if his community might see *Igorot*, there would be “mixed reactions,” referring to the dual nature of the contemporary Cordilleran, modernized yet still practising ancient traditions. “The world is constantly changing and so does a culture. It evolves. As long as the core values remain, then one must not be afraid to alter some of these pre-existing practices and traditions.”

## Conclusions

Agnes Locsin's *Igorot* was first composed in Europe, on European dancers, to a European audience. The transformation of the movements of an indigenous tribal culture into a balletic theatrical choreography sought to identify the choreographer as Filipino in an international setting. Similarly, when the work is brought by BP to international performances, the decision to include *Igorot* in the touring repertoire is tied to the work's ability to identify the dance and the dancers as Filipino. The exoticism of the movements informed international audiences that the Philippines has a strong and definitive culture prior to modernization/colonization, while the use of ballet as the language to present this culture impresses with the capacity of Filipinos to be proficient in a complex international art form.

To Philippine audiences, *Igorot* is considered an important representative of their culture for the same reasons, but is also appreciated on its own. The dances appropriated from the Igorot peoples are lively, energetic, high-spirited, and very compelling to watch, and remain so whether they appear in their choreographed folk dance form or stylized balletic form. Perhaps the reason why these choreographed appropriations exist is that Filipino choreographers wish to recreate this spirit and energy, identifying with a cultural minority through a shared activity: dance. In her Philippine Neo-Ethnic Choreography, Locsin writes that she had always been impressed by the Igorots' “admirable dancing in

unison,” and had gone to the mountain ranges to research Bontoc culture, hoping to eventually create a modern dance narrative (Locsin 2012:65-66).

As already mentioned, Jojo Lucila’s appropriation of Igorot dancing in his work allows him to participate in a culture that is not his own, while Novy Bereber has always admired the Igorot people for their celebration of everyday life. Locsin, Lucila, and Bereber are not from the Cordillera mountain range, but all of them are choreographers who are able to use contemporary ballet as a medium to express their creativity and their interest in the dances of the Igorot peoples.

It is also worthwhile to point out that they are only three of many choreographers in the Philippines who use ballet and contemporary dance as the medium to express their creativity. Many of these choreographers were conditioned by the agenda of the cultural center to create works that represented the Philippines in hopes of promoting a national identity, or at least the ongoing pursuit of one. Work created today, however, is not driven by political agenda as it was used to. The impulse to present Filipino works is no longer tied to the need to prove that our country has a strong and progressive culture. It has only been conditioned to aim towards this, with national funding institutions demanding such for the last few decades.

The desire for acceptance of the introduced genre by the Filipino audience led to a transformative tradition that goes beyond the establishment of national identity, seeing as the audience being addressed is local, and not international. As the archipelagic Philippines manages its plural cultures, establishing a national identity seems to serve Filipinos living within the Philippines as much as it hopes to present the nation to a foreign point of view.

Bereber had no encouragement to use Igorot movement in his work; it was not dictated by the artistic director or the company that hired him. His decision to use Igorot dancing in his work arose from his own admiration for the people, similar to Lucila’s own

impetus to create his “traditional transformations.” In similar fashion, additional examples of appropriation of Igorot culture for choreography found in Flordeliza Fernandez’s *Ang Kasal* and Elena Laniog’s *Woman Warrior* show that using Igorot dance movements transformatively has itself become a choreographic device, rather than a tentative experimentation. When asked why she used Igorot movement in *Woman Warrior*, in an email correspondence in March 2013, Laniog shared that Igorot movement seemed to be the easiest to appropriate into contemporary dance, because it was already well defined, from the appropriations that came before. In this way, the appropriation of Igorot dance had become part of Philippine dance tradition.

Novy Bereber is of the position of a transnational artist; he is based in Sydney, Australia, and manages to get commissions to choreograph work there and in other countries. Where his work is performed is of little consequence to him, but he draws on the desire to be identified as a Filipino choreographer, even to Filipino audiences. *Angel of the Morning* was for the Philippine Ballet Theatre; the performance was in the Little Theater of the CCP, implying that it will be performed for a smaller audience, and no promise that it will become part of the repertoire, much less part of the repertoire that would tour internationally.

Although the Philippine Ballet Theatre found that *Banbantay*, on international tours, was an audience pleaser, it was retired when Gener Caringal’s *Andres*, based on the life of revolutionary hero, Andres Bonifacio, entered the repertoire. Current Philippine Ballet Theatre artistic director Ron Jaynario, in a conversation on November 9, 2012, informed that *Banbantay* has not been resurrected since. It is also interesting to note that most of these tours are for the Filipino communities in these foreign cities, and the task of the touring company is to bring a bit of home for overseas Filipinos, rather than presenting a local culture to an international audience.

How do we negotiate these dances with the cultures they are representing? In 1904, exposure of Igorot culture at the St. Louis



exposition was inhumane and damaging to the people of the Cordilleras, as they were not only represented in the wrong contexts, but physically and psychologically abused as well. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the people of the Cordilleras themselves have adapted to modernity while protectively maintaining the indigenous culture that has defined them over generations. As Biag Gaongen explains it, there are many rules that they still follow when performing traditional rituals and community activities, but it depends on the individual person how strictly they wish to follow these traditions.

Gaongen's perspective of a constantly evolving culture echoes Bereber's own view of the Igorots. Bereber opines that "the Igorot are as much a part of the modern world as they are proud representatives of thousands of years of a native Filipino culture." Given that this is still a living tradition, and the appropriation of their culture has become part of creating dance in the Philippines, there should be more time invested in fully understanding the culture for presentation and representation.

Gaongen views the appropriation of Igorot culture in dance to be the general acceptance of his culture as Filipino. Non-Igorots performing Igorot dance is not Igorot dance, but "it is possible for one to dance someone's culture as long as it is revered and given enough time to understand it." He compares this with classical ballet, in that it has become universal, that any nationality may perfect the art form so long as the form is treated respectfully and learned and understood. This is what the Filipinos have successfully achieved with classical ballet, so there should be more potential to learn and understand a culture that is indigenously their own.

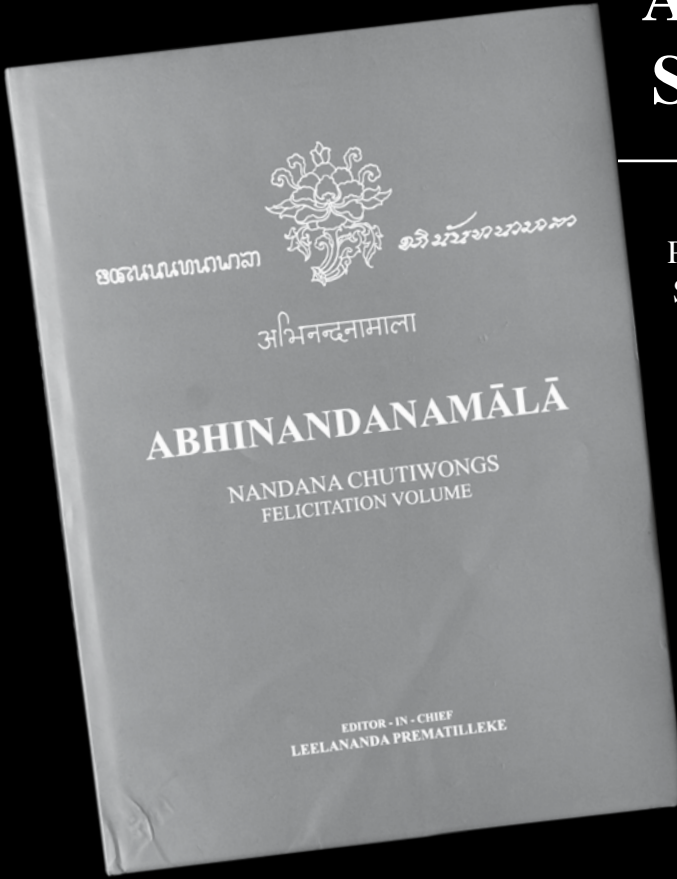
## Bibliography

- Alejandro, R. (2002). *Sayaw: Philippine Dances*. Manila: National Bookstore and Anvil Publishing.
- Programme notes for *Sari-saring Sayaw, Sama-samang Galaw* [Performance]. (2006). Philippines: Cultural Center of the Philippines.
- Fernandez, D. (1981). *In Performance*. Manila: Vera-Reyes.
- Jacinto, J. (2007). MA Thesis. In *The Ballet Company: A Philippine Experience Through Repertoire*. Quezon City: University of the Philippines.
- Jacinto, J. (2008). The Methods of Heritagization of the National Artists for Dance in the Philippines. In *Proceedings of the 2008 ICTM Symposium of the Sub Study Group on Ethnochoreology* (pp. 92-96). Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya.
- Locsin, A. (2012). *Philippine Neo-Ethnic Choreography: A Creative Process*. Manila: University of Santo Tomas Publishing House.
- Ness, S. (1997). Originality in the Postcolony: Choreographing the Neoethnic Body of Philippine Ballet. *Cultural Anthropology*, 12(1), 64-108.
- Reyes-Aquino, F. (1953). Philippine Folk Dances. In *Philippine Folk Dances Vols I-VI* (Vol. I-IV). Quezon City: Kayumanggi Press.
- Vergara, B. (1995). *Displaying Filipinos: Photography and Colonialism in Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century*. Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press.
- Villaruz, B. (1994). *The CCP Encyclopedia of Philippine Art* (N. Tiongson, Ed.). Manila: Cultural Center of the Philippines.

---

**Joelle Jacinto** is a dance lecturer at the University of Malaya (UM), Kuala Lumpur. She has a BM in Dance and an MA in Art Studies from the University of the Philippines. Ms Jacinto was a lecturer in Dance Studies at De La Salle College of St Benilde, and a soloist for Philippine Ballet Theatre and TEAM Dance Studio. Currently, she is working on her PhD at UM, engaging in research on contemporary dance and cultural identity.

# Abhinandanamala and Supplementum



Published in 2010 under the joint auspices of SEAMEO SPAFA and the Abhinandanamala Committees in Colombo and Bangkok, Abhinandanamala and Abhinandanamala Supplementum constitute a felicitation volume dedicated to Dr. Nandana Chutiwongs by her colleagues and friends. The volume was compiled under the editorship of Professor Leelananda Prematilleke (Peradeniya and Colombo), Professor Pisit Charoenwongsa (Bangkok), Professor Kalpakam Sankarnarayan (Mumbai) and Professor Timbul Haryono (Yogyakarta).

The volume contains 57 significant research articles covering countries of Buddhist and Hinduist Asia. Divided into sections on prehistory and cultural history, art and archaeology, religion, iconography, museology and heritage, the articles were contributed by scholars of established international repute, and young researchers. Serious readers will find many topics which are both unique and inspiring in these richly illustrated publications that were splendidly designed by Gunaratna Printing of Colombo and the Museum Press of Bangkok.

The Abhinandanamala and its Supplementum are available for free, but are in limited number. Research institutions and scholars may apply for printed copies at:

SEAMEO Regional Centre for Archaeology and Fine Arts

SPAFA Building, 81/1 Sri Ayutthaya Road,  
Samsen, Theves, Bangkok 10300, Thailand.

Tel (662) 280 4022-9 ext. 109

Fax (662) 280 4030

[www.seameo-spafa.org](http://www.seameo-spafa.org)

E-mail:

[spafa03@yahoo.com](mailto:spafa03@yahoo.com)

[nandanach@gmail.com](mailto:nandanach@gmail.com)

# **Connecting the Past and the Future**

## ***Disaster Relief Action for Wat Pa Klang Thung (temple)***

---

**Paul Cornelius** reports on the making of the documentary on the conservation work done in 2012-2013 at Wat Pa Klang Thung (temple) in Pathum Thani, Bangkok, Thailand. The footage includes the opening ceremonies, a step-by-step recording of the condition of the ordination hall before conservation, the cleaning and stabilization efforts, mural preservation, laboratory processes, and interviews with experts and local residents of the area.

**T**he genesis for this film project was the great flood that hit Bangkok and Thailand during the monsoon season of 2011. Much of central Thailand and the Bangkok region had been swallowed up in a massive sea of water that stood for several months. The temple that is the subject of this film was under one metre of water from October of 2011 through much of December of the same year, and the almost 200-year-old Mon ordination hall faced near ruin.

It was the aftermath of this event, and restoration projects that ensued in its wake, that brought the film production to Wat Pa Klang Thung in Pathum Thani, 50 km north of Bangkok. The passage of time, erosion, other floods and catastrophes, not to mention the holes in the roof, were combining to erase an all-but-forgotten artefact of the heritage of the Mon people in Thailand. Bats and other animals nested in the ceiling. Rain poured through holes in the roof towards the front of the hall. And, now, the most recent floods had helped chip away at what remained of the murals.

When first built, it must have been a quite a different site: the only stone structure in the middle of a forest; a few Thai houses perched on stilts some distance away; maybe three monks or



*Floating in Bangkok (Pathum Thani), 2011*

fewer residing there; and an absolutely stunning display of Mon murals of the finest quality. Today, only bits and pieces remain, along with the rear wall that contains the most complete mural.

The selection of Wat Pa Klang Thung as the subject of this half-hour documentary came after consultations with Dr. M. R. Rujaya Abhakorn and the staff of the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization's Regional Centre for Archaeology and Fine Arts (SEAMEO SPAFA). Dr. Rujaya himself had earlier been in discussions with Mon civic and cultural leaders about the particular interest and importance of this temple to their community. At first, SEAMEO SPAFA expressed the desire for a linear visual record of the day-to-day restoration and conservation efforts. As the producer and writer, as well as co-director of the project, I met with Dr. Rujaya and we both determined that it was possible to make a more substantial documentary. This would be a documentary that not only recorded the step-by-step procedures of the restoration and

conservancy but a film that also brings to light elements of Mon culture as well as provides a visual “text” that could be used as a template for future similar projects in Thailand and throughout Southeast Asia. This is precisely what the film achieves. It is not an “art film” or fictional narrative film that requires interpretation or explanation. Instead, it serves as a substantial effort to bring the interdisciplinary nature of film-making to bear on complex issues of culture, history, community identity as well as questions regarding the value, need, and degree of permanency of historical architectural conservation and restoration.

Disaster relief action for ordination hall of Wat Pa Klang Thung is a restoration project of an old 18-19<sup>th</sup> century Theravada Buddhist Ordination Hall that was flooded in 2011. The building is a good example of Ayutthayan wall-bearing architecture still standing with rare stucco decorations outside and mural paintings in the inner walls. The project cleaned up the building, repaired the damages to the paintings, and studied ways to mitigate the damage from future flooding. The site has been revived as a cultural learning centre.

These latter issues in particular inform the film in virtually every scene. It was clear that the devastation on the temple was widespread and whatever efforts made would be “a series of battles in a war that must eventually be lost.” However, questions regarding the loss of culture and heritage are so fundamental in the modern world that the conservators of Wat Pa Klang Thung thought it necessary to fight these battles nonetheless. Such battles may even be more important for nations such as Thailand and other Southeast Asian states, especially because as emerging economies and cultures that have only recently “modernized,” these

countries still possess vivid and tangible living connections to their heritage and history. Where elsewhere in the world these connections have already been broken, they persist, even just barely, in Southeast Asia. Thus the conservation of the temple would be important in maintaining that connection as long as possible. A filmic record, especially one focused on documenting the culture and heritage of the Mon community, would enable that connection to last in one fashion or another as long as the film itself endures – which could easily surpass the time left for the structure of the temple.

On 13 June 2012, the production first brought its cameras to Wat Pa Klang Thung to record the dedication ceremony, which was held in the newer section of the temple grounds. The two-centuries-old ordination hall had just been opened for the first time in over a decade. The production documented the damage on film for the first time, as well as the lingering beauty in the dim, worn murals, especially those on the back wall of the hall. The contrast between the new buildings and the small, isolated ordination hall could not have been greater. The glitter, size, and magnificence of the current structures dwarfed the hall. Yet a large crowd of people from the local community had attended the restoration dedication. The appreciative recollections of community members as they moved between the two sites inspired the creation of the film's original title: *Preserving the Past and Connecting with the Future: Pathum Thani's Wat Pa Klang Thung Conservation Project*.



*Exterior of temple (Wat Pa Klang Thung) prior to conservation efforts*

With partial funding from the Prince Claus Fund of the Netherlands, the film production team also benefitted from the invaluable contributions of its members. Dorn Ratanathatsanee worked for but a fraction of

his normal fee as the project's co-director and cinematographer. He has more than 30 years of experience in producing and directing documentary films and television programming in Thailand, as well as working as a cinematographer on feature films.

A recent MUIC graduate from the Fine and Applied Arts (FAA) division's television major, Ornvera Assawaterakiat, was brought

on as an associate producer and production co-ordinator. He has experience in post-production, scripting, and planning for documentary filmmaking in such places as Ayutthaya, Thailand, and ethnographic documentary projects in Bangkok's Chinatown area.

Included in the production chronology and footage are the following:

- Dedication ceremony and interviews with major participants from SEAMEO SPAFA and Mon community leaders.
- Pre-conservation video survey outside and inside of the ordination hall at Wat Pa Klang Thung.
- Video documentation of the recording of still photographs (in detail) of murals as well as an interview with a former monk and life-time resident of the nearby community.
- Video documentation of sampling from the murals and preparation for content analyses.
- Video footage of the preservation work in detail, including the salt removal process, wall panel cleaning, and stabilization efforts for the murals.
- Continuation of preservation work as it proceeded.
- Interviews with project experts and Mon cultural leaders.
- Interviews with local residents.
- A video documentation of the final project inside the temple.

As with any medium-to-large-scale production, no single person could possibly be responsible for every venue. It is not possible to be in two or three places simultaneously. Without a committed core production team, the project could never have been completed. Specialists from SEAMEO SPAFA and conservationists from Chiang Mai University, Silpakorn University, and the Thai Ministry of Culture's Department of Fine Arts also contributed to the conservation and restoration efforts at the ordination hall.

With professional background in film as well as experience in historical preservation in the United States, I produced the film by integrating and applying directions and perspectives of someone who had conserved and restored historical buildings and structures personally.

The film production dealt with a structure whose original builders possessed the skills and knowledge to ensure that their ever-so-impermanent constructions managed to last in good form for close to two centuries in humid and tropical environments. No direct

documentary history existed, at least as far as something as old as the ordination hall was concerned. While this did eliminate the ability to bring paper documentation to the film, it did not interfere with the next stage of the visual documentation.





*Conservation efforts begin*

The documentary captures the initial assessment of the damage to, and structural integrity of, the hall. Probably, nothing – short of a tidal wave – erodes the traces of human activity faster than the atmosphere of the tropics. At the Wat Pa Klang Thung’s ordination hall, cracks in the foundation, combined with humidity, and the assault of several floods over the past two hundred years, have taken much lustre out of the building. What was also damaging – that the assessment also discovered – was a surprise. The ordination hall had undergone earlier attempts at restoration and stabilization, but those efforts, in some respects, had made things worse – they created humidity and water pockets in the roof trusses through concrete “repairs.” The original builders understood their climate better and had provided for a “breathing” building that would allow easier evaporation of problematic sources of water infiltration – a lesson from the ancestors that was ignored by their descendants.

The film production made at least twenty visits to the site of the ordination hall. It also made a visit to Silpakorn University’s chemistry department, where their specialists were applying the latest techniques in assessing salt absorption in the walls –



*Fine arts specialist cleans interior wall painting*

measured by examining samples of Sa paper used in the cleaning process – which caused the wall murals to crumble and fall away. Along the way, camera teams documented the cleaning of the murals; it was an especially painstaking task that took months. Through it all, however, the film also documented not only the resurrection of an aging ordination hall but the cooperative spirit of specialists, interested outside conservators, such as the Prince Claus Fund, and most importantly the engagement of the local community in a project that rightfully owes its existence to them and their ancestors.

The film also documented not only the resurrection of an aging ordination hall but the cooperative spirit of specialists, interested outside conservators, such as the Prince Claus Fund, and most importantly the engagement of the local community in a project that rightfully owes its existence to them and their ancestors.

On two occasions, the production made a significant contribution not only to the ordination hall's history but to the understanding of the importance of the hall for the Mon and for Thailand's artistic history, in general. In the first instance, on the first day of filming,



*Temple exterior as work nears its end*

a middle-aged woman looked in on the ordination hall and mentioned that her father had been a monk at the temple. Less than an hour later, she returned with him and he explained what life was like in the vicinity almost 45 years ago. Then, it was a place for about 70 families, almost all Mon, who lived in coconut and mango fields, surrounded by a forest. Three monks inhabited the temple. Sometimes, just one monk lived there. Today, the area is developed and crowded. Trucks, scooters, and cars pass down the street in a continual flow. Not a trace of that former life exists, except for the ordination hall itself. In its interview of this former monk, the film intercuts historical footage, and recreates that sense of isolation and the loss of a way of life on the verge of disappearing permanently.

A second interview was even more important. During the year-long filming, the production discovered a contemporary Mon artist at work on a new temple in the Pak Kret area of Bangkok. The camera teams visited Thepneramit Chitrakumkrai at his workplace, and brought him to Wat Pa Klang Thung. He identified the work of the original



*Rear wall mural after conservation work*

artist as that of a master, probably a royal artist, and described the challenging conditions under which that person must have worked: drawing in freehand, using only candles, in heat and humidity, wearing a sarong, and climbing in and out of bamboo scaffolding. Not only does the contemporary artist seen in this film directly connect with the other artist who had been lost through the passage of time, he also presents an intimate understanding of the philosophy and religious and cultural motivations of his unknown and anonymous predecessor that enabled him to make something that speaks so directly to someone in the twenty-first century. Since that encounter with Thepneramit Chitrakumkrai, SEAMEO SPAFA invited him to Wat Pa Klang Thung on a regular basis to help cement the cultural heritage of today's Mon people with that of their ancestors.

These latter two examples of people whom the production found and incorporated in the story of the ordination hall exemplify the unique contribution that filmmaking can bring to the history and cultural

understanding of these type of projects. In the space of almost thirty minutes, the viewer becomes aware not only of the rich history of the Mon and the importance of retaining their cultural legacy, but also realizes the intricacies and overwhelming hardship in maintaining a living presence of the past in the present. This is one of the themes of the film, along with the direct knowledge it tries to impart to its audience. Additionally, SEAMEO SPAFA asked that the film provides a template, a visual text that could be used as practical tool to assist in archaeological preservation in Thailand and in the rest of Southeast Asia. This is not an insignificant task: to provide something that many people would expect to be dry, academic, and technical but instead manages to engage the interest and imagination of those affected by restoration and conservancy. After all, the film proposes the idea that this work is important and, in its own way, exciting. Ultimately, the film does this by demonstrating the importance of a wide variety of people and groups of people involved, from specialists in the chemistry labs to former monks still living their everyday lives in the shadow of a past that has begun to dim around the edges and eventually disappear.

---

**Paul Cornelius** (Fine and Applied Arts Division, Mahidol University International College, Thailand) is a co-producer and writer, with over 20 years experience in teaching film, history, and humanities at university level. He also has experience in historical conservation work in the United States.

