



Creative Movement Imagery: *Sua-Ku-Sua*

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My name is jemuel jr. barrera. garcia and I am a 4th year Ph.D. student in Critical Dance Studies with a Designated Emphasis in Southeast Asian Studies at the University of California, Riverside. I have been a teacher of Philippine folk dance for more than 8 years before coming to the United States. I am excited to be your Gluck Classroom Fellow as we will all learn an introduction to a folk dance of Indigenous origin from the Philippine archipelago.

Before I begin, I would like to pay respect to the Tausug Indigenous peoples from whom the dance Sua-Ku-Sua came from and to the Indigenous peoples of the Philippines to whom I am indebted for the Indigenous dances that I have learned since I was 7.



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More than one hundred years ago, the influx of California citrus, most of which grew in Orange County, was considered the “second gold rush”. In 1889, the name Orange County became official and people started to plant oranges or citrus which became the county’s main crop.



Photo Credits: Sameera Madusanka, Spencer Selover, Nandhu Kumar, NastyaSensei - pexels.com

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But did you know what is considered the “King of Citrus Fruits” and is in fact the largest citrus fruit and the principal ancestor of the grapefruit? The answer is...Pomelo! Pomelo comes from Southeast Asia where most of its wild varieties have been growing in Malaysia. The first attempt to commercialize Pomelo started in the 1900s in Florida and California.



Did you also know that there is a place in the Philippines where they made a dance for the Pomelo tree? In particular, the Tausug Indigenous group in Southern Mindanao, Philippines made a dance for the Pomelo tree called Sua-Ku-Sua. Shall we try saying it again? Sua-Ku-Sua, literally means “My Pomelo Tree” or “My Pomelo Flower.” “Sua” is also a local term for Pomelo.

Sua-Ku-Sua is a Filipino Indigenous dance that is influenced by the culture of Indonesians, Malaysians, and Chinese.



Photo Credits: Lim, Ma. Eugenie. <https://tribesinthephilippines.wordpress.com/2018/03/24/the-tausug-tribe/>, cottonbro, <https://www.pexels.com/photo/person-holding-a-fruit-3943203/>, <http://johnfielder.blogspot.com/2010/10/>

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The Tausug lives in the capital municipality of Jolo, Sulu, in Southern Mindanao, Philippines. Aside from being known as fierce warriors, they are also noted for being remarkable seafarers and farmers. In this area, there are extensive orchards where Pomelo and Coconut are planted together with rice and some root crops. Due to the abundance of Pomelo in the area, it served as a vital source of income for the people of Sulu. Thus, their dependence on the Pomelo fruit as their source of livelihood prompted them to create Sua-Ku-Sua, a dance that celebrated Pomelo and their appreciation of it both economically and for its beauty.



Photo Credits: CEU Folk Dance Troupe, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_TGctrB9oiY

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Because of the abundance of Pomelo in Jolo, Sulu, the Tausug Indigenous peoples built a connection with them and made a dance in honor of the Pomelo tree. Sua-Ku-Sua is an Indigenous dance from the Philippines that compares the tree with people---the slender shape of the trunk and branches, gentle leaves, and beautiful flowers.

As a courtship dance, the dancers communicate with each other through the use of the fans and the movements of the dance. They make use of two white fans that are swayed, as if to signify the swaying of the leaves of the Sua tree while singing along with the music.

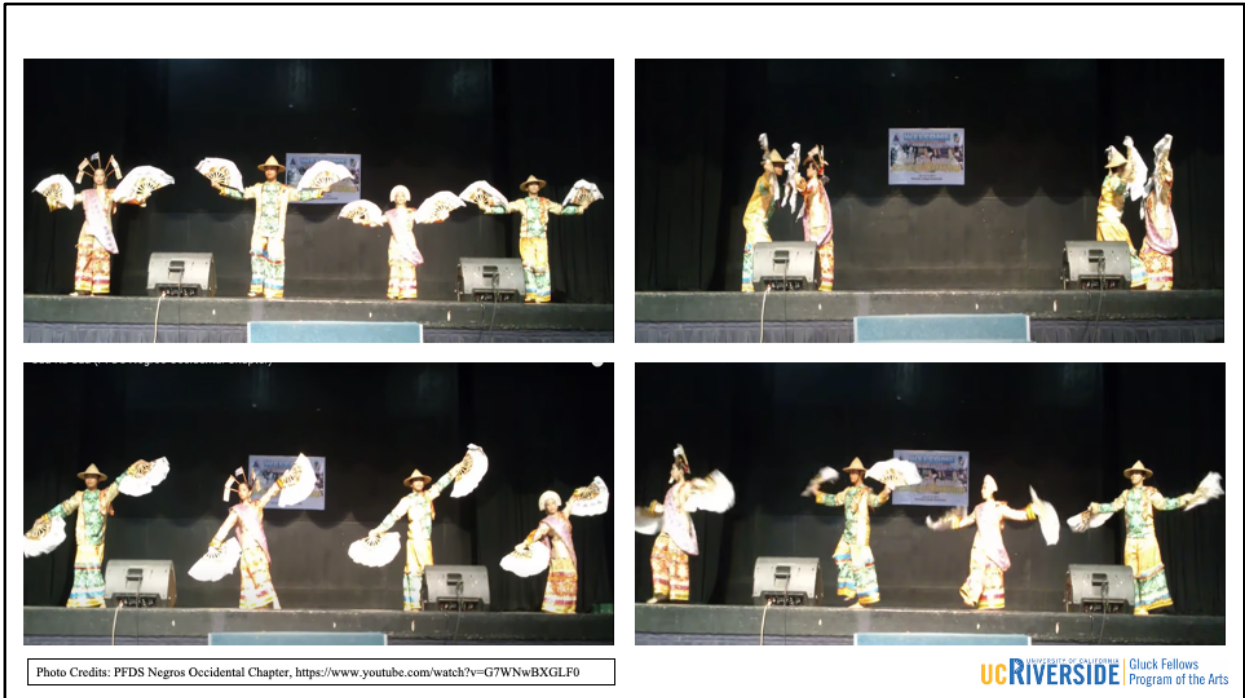


Photo Credits: PFDS Negros Occidental Chapter, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G7WNwBXGLF0>

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What you see here are screenshots of the dance Sua-Ku-Sua when done in pairs and onstage. Because of COVID-19 and in adherence to government protocols, we will be dancing Sua-Ku-Sua individually and virtually, but together. In other words, we will be performing the steps of the dance Sua-Ku-Sua alone together. Isn't that wonderful?



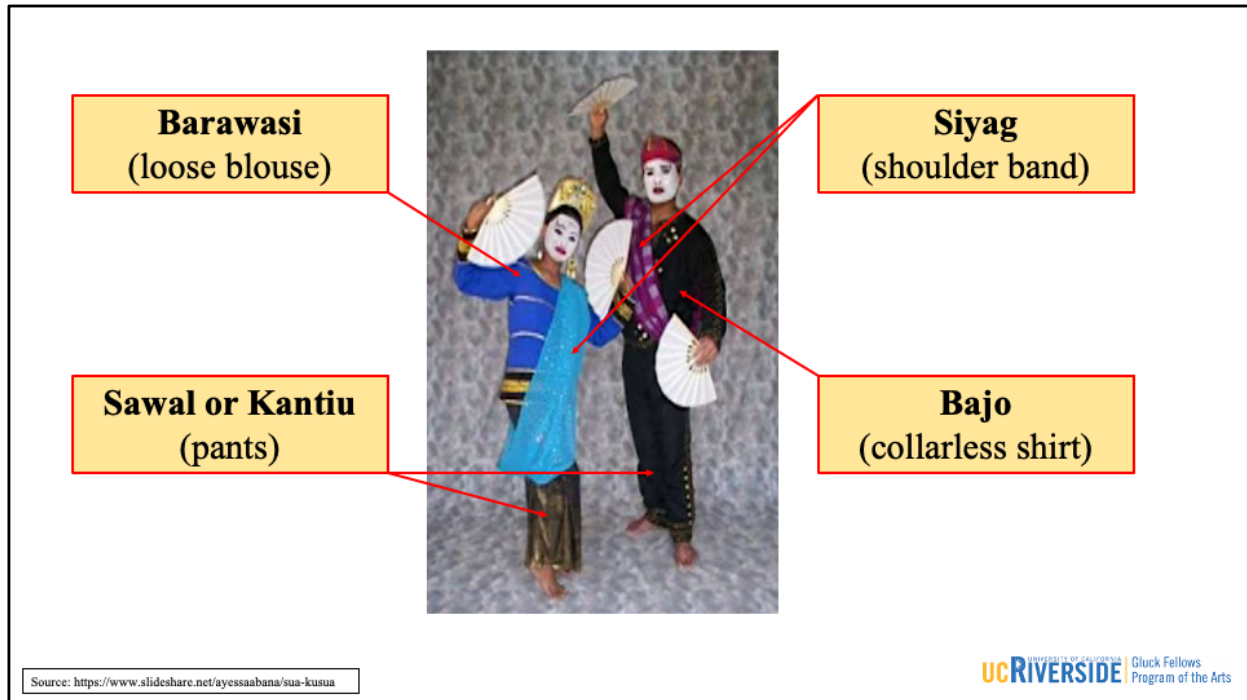
The Sua-Ku-Sua dancer makes use of two white fans that are usually swayed in a figure-of-eight motion, held in an L-position, or used while the wrists are flexing.

As an alternative to fans being held by both hands, you may use books, notebooks, or paper. If these materials are not available within your reach, you may use your hands/arms throughout the dance.

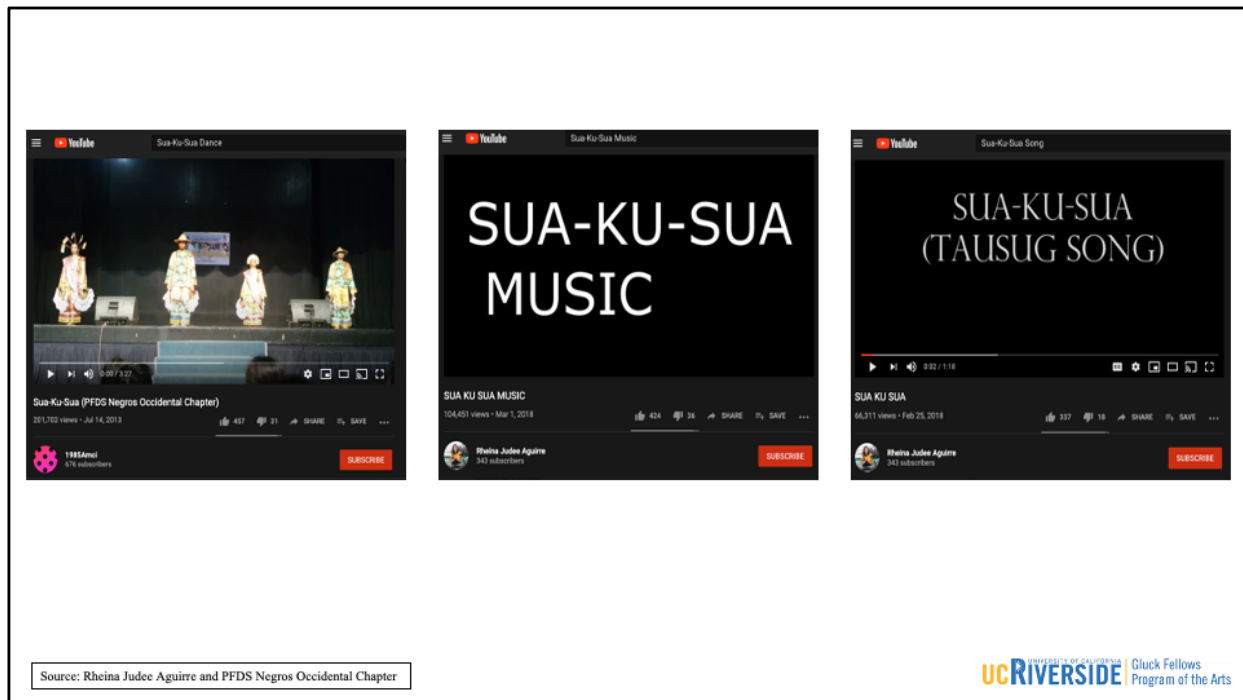


The dance features the movement of the fans (hands) that mimics the movement of the Pomelo (Sua) tree.

As the Tausugs tell their story through their movements, the choreographic use of the fan transform it into tiny sails, face mirrors, butterflies, shields, and leaves throughout the dance. The fans also resemble the rustling leaves of the Pomelo tree as it is blown by the wind.



Here is what the traditional Tausug costume looks like. The women wear a top called *barawasi*, a printed or plain Chinese silk or cotton material which serves as the traditional loose blouse used in the dance. It is a long sleeve top with deep keyhole neckline and extra panels attached to the right and left part of the chest which are decorated with tiny brass buttons. Their pants, also known as *sawal* or *kantiu* are loose Chinese pants with soft white band attached to a wide waist. The men wear a short waist collarless shirt (*bajo*) studded with tiny brass buttons which is also made up of a printed or plain Chinese silk or cotton material. Both dancers wear a *siyag* or shoulder band which is a separate wrap-around malong or tubular cloth.



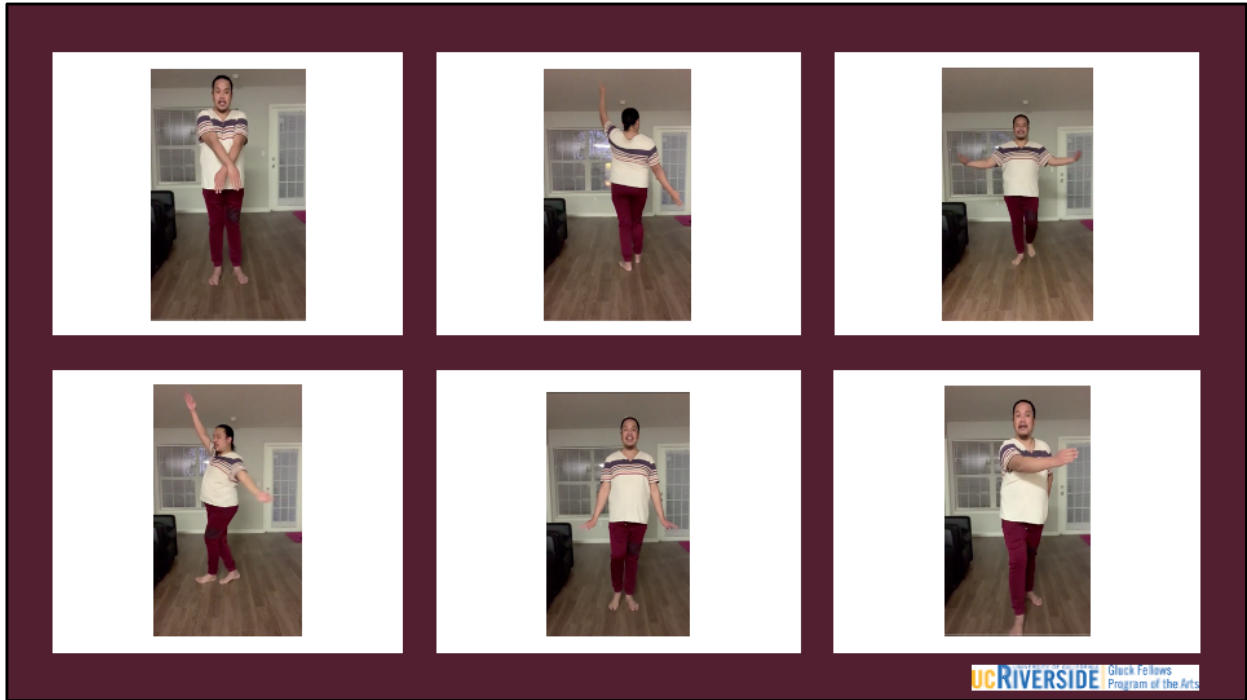
Source: Rheina Judee Aguirre and PFDS Negros Occidental Chapter

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For you to have an idea how Sua-Ku-Sua looks when performed onstage, here is the Youtube link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G7WNwBXGLF0&t=13s>.

For the lyrics of the song, here is another link to check: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3mMzxdzsTU4>.

If you just wanted to listen to the song's accompanying melody, here is the link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MLPbU7d8__I&t=35s.



This virtual dance class is intended to provide a productive space for the students to learn a particular dance form whose steps are easy to remember, where one would be able to have fun doing it individually and take their appreciation for Indigenous dance arts one step higher based on this immersive experience.

As we all face the threats of the global pandemic, the dance class is designed to encourage learners to move while staying-at-home, dance with social distancing, and allow the body to reconnect with nature and a specific Indigenous dance culture coming from the Philippines.



Ramon A. Obusan

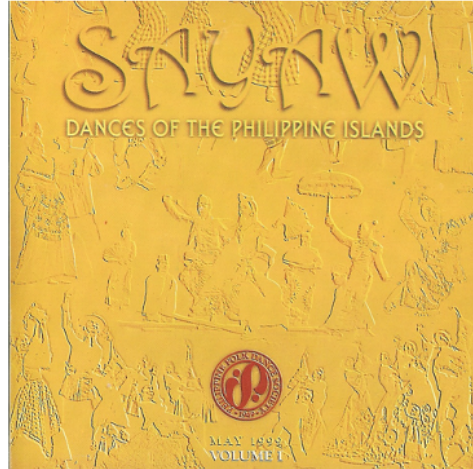


Photo Credits: Sayaw- <http://www.reflectionsofasia.com/Sayaw%20vol1.jpg>, Ramon-Obusan- <http://www.musicalplayphilippines.com/2011/03/national-artist-of-philippines-ramon.html>, Sua-Ku-Sua- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JMu31kl-5Ns>

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The modified version of Sua-Ku-Sua I will be sharing to you is inspired by the interpretation from the book called PFDS Sayaw: Dances of the Philippine Islands Volume 1 which features the dance Sua-Ku-Sua. This dance was researched by National Artist Ramon A. Obusan and was presented by Dr. Larry Gabao in the 1985 National Folk Dance Workshop and once again presented by Cherry Villanueva in 2018.

Additional Sources:

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For virtual classroom learning purposes, I have modified parts of the dance for a solo performance and arranged the figures using the documented steps of Sua-Ku-Sua as a guide. So, get ready and let us give tribute to the dance Sua-Ku-Sua and the Tausug Indigenous peoples of the Philippines by grabbing any book or paper, or just using your bare hands and let us learn Sua-Ku-Sua together.

Follow along with me in the next four videos where we will learn the hand movements while we use the fans and its corresponding feet movement. Let us dance Sua-Ku-Sua.

