

Flying Without Wings: The Philippines' Binanog Dance

Binanog is an indigenous dance from the Philippines that features the movement of an eagle/hawk to the symbolic beating of bamboo and gong that synchronizes the pulsating movements of the feet and the hands of the lead and follow dancers. This specific type of Binanog dance comes from the Panay-Bukidnon indigenous community in Panay Island, Western Visayas, Philippines.

The Panay Bukidnon, also known as Suludnon, Tumandok or Panayanon Sulud is usually the identified indigenous group associated with the region and whose territory cover the mountains connecting the provinces of Iloilo, Capiz and Aklan in the island of Panay, one of the main Visayan islands of the Philippines. Aside from the Aetas living in Aklan and Capiz, this indigenous group is known to be the only ethnic Visayan language-speaking community in Western Visayas. They were once associated culturally as speakers of the island's languages namely Kinaray-a, Akeanon and Hiligaynon, most speakers of which reside in the lowlands of Panay and their geographical remoteness from Spanish conquest, the US invasion of the country, and the hairline exposure they had with the Japanese attacks resulted in a continuation of a pre-Hispanic culture and tradition. The Suludnon is believed to have descended from the migrating Indonesians



SMILE. A pair of Binanog dancers take a pose after a performance in a public space.



LEAD. Leopoldo "Paino" Caballero and his wife, the late Rosita Caballero, as elders of the Panay-Bukidnon Community.

coming from Mainland Asia. The women have developed a passion for beauty wearing jewelry made from Spanish coins strung together called biningkit, a waistband of coins called a wakus, and a headdress of coins known as a pundong. Like some tribes in Central Africa and some parts of the Philippines, they also adorn their bodies with tattoos and file their teeth. They are most popularly known among the people of the lowlands for their Binanog which mimics the flight of the hawk eagle; although it can also be any other bird depending on the community one would ask information from.

Every activity, whether in agriculture, fishing, hunting, and so on, is influenced by the environmental spirits and deified umalagad (souls) of the departed ancestors. Their economic life is largely dependent on ka'ingin agriculture,



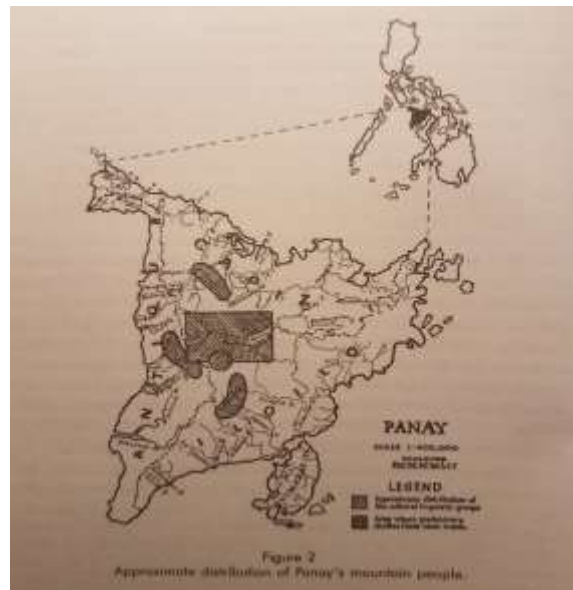
VIEWPOINT. A map of the Philippine archipelago with Panay Island (encircled) as the area where Panay-Bukidnons live.

supplemented with hunting and fishing. They also make bolos with elaborately carved handles, knives, and spears and weave baskets, mats, and headwear - items which they exchange for lowland goods such as cloth, salt, and other household necessities brought into the mountains by Christian traders with whom they carry on seasonal commercial relations.

In the 13th Century during the height of the Sri-Vishayan Empire's power, a group of Borneans headed by Datu Puti escaped the tyrannical rule of Sultan Makatunaw and sailed northward until they reached Panay. The group was composed of ten chieftains, their wives, and some slaves, and they are collectively known in historic documents as "the ten datus of Borneo." They were Datu Puti and his wife, Pinangpangan; Datu Bangkaya and his wife, Katarung; Datu Paiburong and his wife, Pabulanon; Datu Sumakwel and his wife, Kapinangan; Datu

Paduhinog and his wife, Ribongsapaw; Datu Dumangsol and his wife, Kahiling; Datu Lubay, Datu Dumangsil, Datu Dumalogdog, and Datu Balensuela. The Atis, under the rulership of King Marikudo and Queen Maniwangtiwang, obliged to the trade of their flatlands for a saduk (golden hat), a manangyad (long golden necklace), and other assorted items. The Atis then went further inland and the Borneo people populated the flatlands. In 1566, the Spaniards, having come from Cebu, arrived at the place called Irong-Irong/Ilong-Ilong (so called because of the nose-like shape of the land), which they then contracted into Iloilo.

The Panay Bukidnon are believed to be descendants of those datus. They were once coastal dwellers by the relative similarity of their social organization with that of the lowland dwellers and by the general theme of their folk stories - especially their epic, the Sugidanon - which deal largely with the sea rather than the mountains. F. Landa Jocano, in his seminal work *Sulod Society: A Study in the Kinship System and Social Organization of a Mountain People of Central Panay*, wrote that some of his older informants "still remember their childhood days in the lower section of the Panay River valley and how they had moved upstream because their parents 'sold our clearings to the lowland settlers.' Their interior mountain barangays began many generations ago as minuro, small settlements of blood-related families who intermarried through the years.



ZOOMED. An enlarged Panay ethnographic map provided by F. Landa Jocano in his book; the shaded area is the specific dwelling area of Panay-Bukidnons.



PASS IT ON. The younger generation of the Panay-Bukidnon community learns their culture and tradition from their families or the School of Living Tradition that is also established as one of the community's programs.

Later, the minuro enlarged and were renamed as barangays in the 1960s, during the ascendancy of President Ferdinand E. Marcos. Many of the families in the far interior barangays of Siya, Buri, Takayan, and Nayawan moved down to safer areas like Masaroy, Garangan, and Passi (now a city) during Martial Law (1972-1984). Some even went to places far outside Panay Island, such as Palawan and Mindanao, and never returned. Houses of these mountain dwellers are traditionally scattered far apart, some located near the river and some on the mountain slopes where they can see approaching people. To distinguish themselves from each other, those who get their sustenance from the Halawod River and are politically differentiated as belonging to Iloilo Province are called Halawodnon - like the embroiderer we collaborate with, Regina Villanueva. Pan-ayanon (taga Pan-ay) refers to mountain dwellers who inhabit the majority of the barangays of the town of Tapaz, Capiz; while from the Antique side, the interior town of Valderrama have Bukidnon or Iraynun dwellers and are nearest to the mountain people of Calinog and Lambunao, both of Iloilo province. They are united by a common historical tradition, and all believe that they came from the same ancestors. This belief reinforces the powerful kinship ties that link all their settlements with one another.

In Panay Bukidnon society, all members tend to care deeply about the welfare of one's community. Community gathering strengthens group integration by requiring intensive participation of non-family members in drinkfests, weddings, religious celebrations, etc., where interaction involves patterned socio-ritualistic formalities as in the offering of food to the spirits before starting the feast, and in having the older men drink or eat first. During such social gatherings, wine jars become the focus of interacting subgroups of competitive drinkers which are structured by sex and age, not by family affiliation. Labor among the members of the community is a universally shared activity. There are no hired laborers among them nor is there

any concept of compensation, monetary or in kind, for any kind of work rendered. Approaching the neighbors for help is called baheg, and labor is reciprocal and accompanied by drinking and feasting, which further reinforces the kinship ties within the community.

The most striking feature of Panay Bukidnon culture is the persistence of ceremonies in every facet of life. These ceremonies are associated with the belief that the relationships between the living and the spirits of the dead continue, and that environmental spirits have influence over daily affairs. The world is not only inhabited by humans, but also by deities and ancestors who inhabit the upper layer of the world above us, the langitnon, and the world below called idalmunon. They believe in an hierarchy of good and evil spirits called diwata with whom communication is held through the mediation of the baylan or medium. Sacrifices are given to the spirits for their good graces. Because of the importance of connecting to the unseen world to communicate with deceased ancestors, ceremonies and rituals play an important role in day-to-day life for interacting with the unseen world or with the forces around--- one of which is the Binanog.

Class Instruction:

Sample Motivations-

1. WHOLE CLASS WARM-UP- Using the theme of birds, explore what students know about birds (ex. Birds that exist in California), their body movements, appearance, color, etc.
2. CHARADE- Prepare names of familiar birds on cut-out paper and put it in a packet/bowl. Divide the students into groups and request them to select someone to represent the team to pick out a name from the container and allow the person to act it out without mentioning the name for 30 seconds. Explore other options like making the sound, showing other ways that the bird does (like laying an egg, flightless birds' running action, etc.)

Sources:

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