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UNVEILING TRADITIONS AND IDENTITIES IN BAGOBO-KLATA'S FOLK NARRATIVES

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Abstract: Folk narratives are important stores of Indigenous knowledge, cultural memory and community identity, especially where the history of the people is mostly oral. This qualitative study explored selected Bagobo-Klata folk narratives such as stories, songs, chants, poems, and accounts of material culture told by five Datus, cultural knowledge bearers. The study was based on the framework of the folktale and its three-dimensional character theory, as outlined by Egri (1997), and the cultural identity theory by Hall (1996), which represent the recurring role and functions of characters, symbols, cultural values, spiritual beliefs and social practices in the articulation of Bagobo-Klata identity. Field visits, audio-recorded storytelling sessions, semi-structured elicitation tasks, transcription, meaning-based translation, and iterative thematic coding were used to collect data. Results showed that Bagobo-Klata stories of identity are built around linked discourses of heroism, spiritual leadership, eco-responsibility, kinship, communal exchange, the authority of elders, and continuity of ancestors. As narrative characters, they are also cultural symbols representing resistance to cultural erosion, environmental stewardship, moral discipline, resilience, and sacred leadership, among other qualities. Some practices are also highlighted in the stories, like Magdasa, Domsat, Moggong, and Gindaya, which are life expressions of faith, reciprocity, memory, and culture. Based on the study, the Bagobo-Klata folk narratives are found to be not simply folklore artifacts but living knowledge systems among the Bagobo-Klata communities, which serve to maintain the Bagobo-Klata identity, pass on values, and contest the colonial and modernizing forces that are eroding the importance of oral stories. These results are valuable for the field of Indigenous literatures, culturally responsive pedagogy, and community-based cultural preservation programs.

Keywords: *Bagobo-Klata, folk narratives, cultural identity, indigenous literature, oral tradition*

Introduction

Folk tales, songs and poems are all forms of folk literature that convey the values, beliefs, and histories of a group or community, particularly one that has not been well documented in writing. They are transmitted orally, including in the form of myths, legends and verses, which house

worldview, moral codes and social norms, serving as “vessels for cultural transmission and expression” that reveal not only collective identities, but also collective histories and experiences (Asamoah-Poku, 2024; Niez, 2024; Makgabo & Quintero, 2024). Research in various settings (Ghana, the Philippines, Indonesia, South Africa, Vietnam) reveals that folklore is not only for entertainment but a means of educating values such as honesty, empathy, communal solidarity, and respect for nature (Quý & Phương, 2023; Trocio et al., 2023; Asamoah-Poku, 2024).

The study of folk literature in the Philippines is considered a major component of the country's heritage because it contains folk tales, speech and songs which embody the way of life, fears, hopes and traditions of various ethnolinguistic communities (Niez, 2024). The documentation of provincial and indigenous oral traditions, including Biliran stories and Blaan flalok, has highlighted how the myth, folktale or legend can contain a culture's customs, religious practices, environmental ethics, kinship relations and positive, as well as negative, traits, thus preserving the community's worldview and value system (Niez, 2024; Trocio et al., 2023). The scholars emphasize that modernization, transformation of lifestyles and mass media are threatening the existence of these oral traditions, while there is a need to be urgent in collecting, analyzing and publishing them for their protection for future generations (Tuban, 2021).

Just like other Philippine or indigenous communities, the folk narratives of the Bagobo-Klata can be considered as a cultural memory of the Bagobo-Klata indigenous people, a repository of their cultural memory, cultural identity, and moral values. Bagobo Klata stories, like other oral traditions, may contain codes that establish the pattern of kinship, spirit, respect for land and heroism as a means to maintain a sense of belonging and heritage for the community (Firdaus, 2025; Niez, 2024; Trocio et al., 2023; Tuban, 2021). Like many indigenous oral literatures, however, these stories are at risk due to colonialism, missionaryism, cultural assimilation, and globalization.

In light of this background, a study of the Bagobo-Klata folk narratives, namely stories, songs and poems, is a very important study that needs to be done. Many of the available scholarships tend to homogenize indigenous peoples or focus on other indigenous sub-groups and do not adequately examine them as Bagobo-Klata, or as the people they are today, because of their thematic patterns and contemporary transformations. This study records these narratives and offers a local analysis of the persistence of oral narratives in the face of globalization and cultural loss.

To fill this void, the research identifies the central characters in the Bagobo-Klata oral traditions and examines the images of these characters to uncover the core values and identities behind them. In addition, it explores the association of these stories with community traditions, beliefs and practices as a source of identity and moral education for the community. Finally, this work fits the wider efforts to place the indigenous knowledge systems at the heart of the setting, so that they can continue to be a valuable asset for future generations.

1.1. Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative research is to gain insight into the Bagobo-Klata folk narratives as a means to express cultural identity, values and social life. The key elements of Propp's

theory of the narrative structure were used as a basis for this study to identify the main character roles within the indigenous narrative, Egri's three-dimensional theory of the character to analyze the physiological, sociological and psychological character traits of the characters in the selected narratives, and Hall's theory of cultural identity, as well as the related literature, were used as a basis to gain insight into the indigenous narrative as a process of co-construction and transmission of cultural norms, beliefs and lifestyles from one generation to another. The aim is to identify the key roles, their symbolic values as projections of community aspirations, issues and beliefs and the social messages and functions of the stories in the context of the challenges of modernization and globalization.

1.2. Research questions

1. Who are the key characters in Bagobo-Klata folk narratives, and how do they embody the Bagobo-Klata's core values and identity?
2. How do these narratives reflect Bagobo-Klata norms, beliefs, and lifestyle?

1.3. Theoretical Lens

The three-dimensional theory of the character (Egri, 1946) and the cultural identity theory (Hall, 1990), in addition to Propp's morphology of the folktale, are applied in an integrated theoretical approach (Propp, 1968). These frameworks are not considered independent interpreters; each adds another layer of interpretation. The propp model offers a structural approach to entering the narratives by observing the roles, functions and relation positions that are common to all tales. The framework created by Egri extends this structural mapping by looking at the development of characters in terms of physical, social and psychological dimensions. Hall then puts these patterns of story and character into the larger structures and dynamics of identity formation, cultural memory, representation and continuity.

The characters of Propp's morphology are useful in the identification of the recurring roles, which are the heroes, helpers, donors, dispatchers and opposing characters (Propp, 1968). These types in this study, however, are not used as strictly defined categories. This implies that Proppian labels are analytical tools for understanding the function of the narrative, but are not templates of the Western tradition that should be applied to the oral tradition of the Bagobo-Klata. Other figures like the ancestors, spirits, and the collective community can be placed in more than one category of the folktale, as they perform multiple roles as characters, sacred presences, moral authorities and cultural symbols. Acknowledging this restriction will help to avoid imposing external classifications on indigenous meanings.

Along with Propp's character theory, Egri's three-dimensional theory includes a description not only of the function of a story's characters, but also of the moral, social and psychological nature of those characters (Egri, 1946; Propp, 1968). For example, a Datu can be a dispatcher or guide, but also be a leader, a person with ancestral responsibility and a person of trust to the people. Finally, Hall's cultural identity theory helps to understand such roles and characterizations as representations of identity-in-process (Hall, 1990). This perspective on Bagobo-Klata narratives is

not a mere relic of the past but a life-long cultural practice that allows the community to remember, negotiate and maintain its peoplehood.

Methodologies

2.1. Research Design

The folk stories were analyzed using qualitative textual analysis method in this research. These stories are short stories, songs, and poems, and are seen not just as a means of cultural identity, but also a means of moral education and history. Since there is little written record of the Bagobo-Klata, this research aims to explore the nature of the oral traditions in light of their social norms and worldview. These narratives are broken down by means of thematic coding, which is used in an iterative fashion, and are placed in a larger cultural context. Through this approach, it examines the role of storytelling as a means of cultural documentation and reaffirmation of the community's cultural uniqueness amidst the world of modernity and the danger of cultural annihilation due to globalization.

2.2. Corpora

The oral narratives, songs, chants, poems, and accounts of material culture presented by five Datus, the ones recognized by the community as knowledge bearers, were selected for the corpus. A purposive, criterion-based sampling technique was used to select the participants. The inclusion criteria were: (1) recognized as Datu or culture bearer in the Bagobo-Klata community; (2) knowledgeable in oral narratives, rituals, songs, chants, and/or material culture; (3) willing to participate in recorded narratives and/or interviews; and (4) consent of relevant community authorities and adherence to the NCIP-related protocols. The narratives and cultural accounts that were collected in the field during February 2025 formed the corpus. The resulting audio recording ranges between 10 and 45 minutes, with a total of approximately 125 minutes of audio data transcribed and analyzed.

2.3. Data Collection and Analysis

The data were collected by conducting field visits, recording storytelling activities, and conducting semi-structured elicitation tasks. Each Datu was asked to: (1) give a self-introduction to set the cultural scene and roles, (2) perform a folk narrative, song, chant, poem, or culturally meaningful story, and (3) provide an explanation of a material culture object or activity that would relate to a Bagobo-Klata identity. Audio recordings were made with permission to ensure that the content of the stories is captured in speech, tone, pacing, gesture and performance. Field notes were also created to record information beyond the scope of transcription that was important to the context.

All narratives were recorded and transcribed verbatim in the participants' language. If the narratives were presented in Bagobo-Klata or a combination of the local languages, they were translated into English using a meaning-based translation approach. Culturally specific words like Magdasa, Domsat, Moggong, Gindaya, Namma, and Apo Sandawa were also kept in the text and explained within the context of the text instead of using an equivalent English word. Translation accuracy

and the ability to maintain the tone, meaning, spirit, and cultural nuance were tested with community members.

Data for analysis were collected during three cycles of coding. During the first cycle, narratives were read and coded descriptively to highlight characters, events, setting, cultural practices, spiritual references, and motifs. The codes were clustered into analytical categories that were related to the research questions in the second cycle: roles in the story, character values, spiritual leadership, social cohesion, ecology, and continuity with ancestors. In cycle three, the categories were read theoretically in an integrated manner. The peer de-briefing of the five Datus and members of the community and language experts further validated coding and interpretation decisions and processes.

2.4. Ethical Consideration

The study was carried out in accordance with the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP) in Davao City. Formal permissions and certifications were obtained to ensure that the study is respectful to community protocols and in keeping with indigenous values. The primary principle was informed consent, where participants were adequately informed regarding the study's purpose, the possibility of their withdrawal at any time and without any incursions, and the procedures to ensure that they would not be identified in the data. Any recordings and transcripts are kept securely so that they cannot be accessed by anyone other than the student. In addition, some of the Bagobo-Klata traditions are spiritual and sacred in nature; the researcher approached the content with a great sense of sensitivity. Sacred stories were not watered down or misrepresented, and were kept spiritually alive throughout the academic process, through consultation with elders.

2.5. Trustworthiness of the Study

The procedures of credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability have been used to establish the trustworthiness. Elementary steps involved in building credibility were extended involvement with the narratives, multiple readings of the transcripts, and discussions with culture bearers about culturally appropriate interpretations. To ensure dependability, an audit trail of recordings, transcripts, translations, codes and analytical decisions was retained. Grounding in the direct excerpts of the narrative and the distinction between the meanings of the participants and those of the researcher were used to address confirmability. Support for transferability was provided by the detailed description of the Bagobo-Klata context, quotes from the story, and the cultural practices to allow evaluation of the applicability of the results with similar indigenous literary contexts.

3. Results and Discussion

Characters in Bagobo-Klata Folk Narratives

Heroes

The character types listed below are intended to be descriptive and approximate equivalents of the traditional characters of the Russian folklore in the sense of Propp, not literal equivalents. The narratives of Bagobo-Klata have overlapping roles for the figures. A Datu can be a leader, a dispatcher, a moral model, a memory bearer, and more; land can be a place, a sacrament, a giver and a place of identity; and the community can be a whole, not a single individual hero. Thus, the use of Proppian categories can be used to categorise the roles of narrative, and it concludes with a Bagobo-Klata interpretation that is grounded in the meanings and cultural logic of the Bagobo-Klata people.

Table 1. *Heroes in Bagobo-Klata folk narratives*

Character	Portrayal	Characterization (Values & Identity)
Bayao	A slave who earns freedom	Quiet, noble, compassionate; proves status comes from virtue and resilience.
Datu Saundod	Cultural bridge; brave face to spirits	Courageous and wise messenger; honors ancestral song and tradition.
Datu Iddung	Tribal leader and devoted lover	Strong and loyal; models fidelity, emotional depth, and spiritual commitment.
Tuwaang	Mythical traveler seeking knowledge	Culture-bearing hero; protects Bagobo-Klata knowledge and cosmology.
Young Boy (Domsat)	Curious learner of traditions	Symbol of the future; eager to learn barter, ritual, and communal ethics.
Curious Boy (Boloy)	Questioning; later a spiritual savior	Becomes a healer through traditional knowledge; shows the value of guided curiosity.
Bagobo-Klata People	Collective heroes in ritual	Embody solidarity, shared responsibility, and ritual-centered identity.
Warriors	Guardians of land and culture	Defenders of territory; express the sacred duty to protect ancestral land.
Narrators	Voices of pride and devotion	Assert dignity against shame; embody intense loyalty and emotional honesty.

The heroes of the Bagobo-Klata folk narratives, in total, embody the essential values, beliefs, and identity of the Bagobo-Klata people. The characters of Bayao, Datu Saundod, Datu Iddung, and Tuwaang, for instance, exemplify heroism, loyalty, endurance, wisdom, and dedication to tradition, among other heroic ideals. Bayao, for one, exemplifies how dignity and freedom can be achieved through hard work and good moral character, while Datu Saundod and Datu Iddung exemplify responsible leadership and spiritual and emotional commitment to their culture and tradition. Tuwaang, on the other hand, exemplifies the mythical culture-bearing hero who guards traditional

knowledge and represents the power of Bagobo-Klata cosmology and heritage. This heroic function is clearly seen in the narrative of Tuwaang:

> "Diyyat kalangita ing bi koya nayang, hu Tuwaang asta king niyang kaliwatta nommo ning kahibulunga nong labaw po… to sinalimba o kapangadura, hila nayang pinaagi ning on-nos."
>
> *Tuwaang and his kin seek knowledge and more. On sinalimba or clouds, they glide through the air… With hearts full of hope and dreams to unfold, they cherish their culture, a treasure untold.*

The excerpt demonstrates that Tuwaang's journey is multifaceted, encompassing supernatural elements, as well as a quest for knowledge and cultural identity. Tuwaang and his family is riding on the sinalimba, which will likely conjure images of travel between earth and spirit. This reinforces the idea that Bagobo-Klata heroes are guardians of tradition. In this sense, heroism is related to the duty of passing on the knowledge of the tribe.

The stories also depict the community as the hero. Bagobo-Klata warriors and storytellers represent unity, unity in responsibility, and cultural pride. These warriors are not just warriors; they are keepers of the land and cultural heritage. This is illustrated in the following excerpt:

> "To karaan no kay-yo asta lapad ngu katubiga, Kusgan keng esperito nila, asta keng kinaiyaha nila bo uban." *Through ancient trees and rivers wide… Their spirits strong, in nature they abide."*
>
> "Dit-to dalong to lasang hila nagbantay… Nag-amping to kinabuhi, anda katapusa." *Protectors of life, ever on guard… A people bound to earth and sun, in battles fought, they are never undone.*

Here the warriors are seen as connected to nature, and their strength is derived from it. Their courage is not apart from the land, but rather is engrained in forest, river, earth and sun. This reiterates the talk on the Bagobo-Klata heroism being ecological and communal. Preserving the land means preserving the people's memory, their identity and their future. There are also narrators and speakers who can say "I am proud of who I am" and are affirming their identity when they might be embarrassed about it or encountered by others who condemn them:

> "Eyy... ngal-lo keng daet to, Ehhh…. Indi ang-nga neng dala, ang-nga neng bol-loy neto… Eyy indi o moyo-yo."
> *"Hey... and they called my name… Eh... I'm not ashamed; I am also a child of the Bagobo, born in Davao."*

This passage is an example of the power of naming, belonging and self-recognition. Not to be ashamed proves cultural dignity. It also demonstrates that community recognition helps to reinforce identity. In addition, other characters, like Domsat, Boloy, Bagobo-Klata, warriors, and the narrators, emphasize the significance of community, learning, and culture. The young characters, like Domsat and Boloy, embody the new generations who need to learn and continue their ancestors' traditions, and the warriors embody the sacred responsibility to defend their ancestors' lands and culture. The community, in its

turn, plays the role of the hero, bringing together the power of unity and ritual, and the narrators embody the cultural pride of their nations. All of them, in turn, reveal how the Bagobo-Klata folk narratives embody the values of the Bagobo-Klata tribe, including their solidarity, respect for their traditions, courage, and passing on of their cultural knowledge to their descendants.

Villains

These figures represent spiritual challenges, moral discipline, or external threats to the culture.

Table 2. *Villains in Bagobo-Klata folk narratives*

Character	Portrayal	Characterization (Values & Identity)
Tambala	Spirit of sickness and healing	Ambiguous punisher/healer; disciplines disrespect and rewards reverence.
Spirit / Buhaw	Corrupted spirit born from death	Disturbs peace; warns against unresolved violence and disrespect for the dead.
Outsiders / False Heroes	Those who misunderstand the tribe	Dismiss beliefs as superstition; symbolize colonial prejudice and spiritual ignorance.

The opposing characters in the folk narratives of the Bagobo-Klata tribe portray the forces that disrupt harmony, respect, and understanding within society. The characters like Tambala and Buhaw embody the spirituality and beliefs of the tribe regarding the outcomes of human actions. The character of Tambala, embodying the spirit of illness and healing, portrays the duality of spirituality that punishes those who demonstrate disrespect and favors those who demonstrate proper rituals and respect.

> "ho Tambala, matud po nila, hiya hutong esperito to sakit asta kaayuha, kin-na gahum niya mugamit to tagamali asta katalung-nga"
>
> *Tambala, they said, was a spirit of both illness and healing... It was neither good nor evil, only powerful."*

This excerpt supports the claim that villains or opposing forces in Bagobo-Klata narratives often function as moral and spiritual reminders. Tambala teaches the community that balance must be maintained between humans, nature, and the spirit world.

The other character, Buhaw, embodying the corrupted spirit born out of death, portrays the disruption caused by unresolved violence and disrespect for death and proper rituals. The two characters in the narratives emphasize the need to demonstrate spirituality in maintaining balance, respect for rituals, and harmony between the world of the living and the world of spirits.

Furthermore, the presence of outsiders or false heroes in the stories emphasizes the social and cultural problems that the Bagobo-Klata community has experienced in the past. The outsiders or false heroes in the stories failed to understand and appreciate the beliefs and practices of the Bagobo-Klata community, regarding them merely as superstition rather than understanding the cultural and spiritual value that the beliefs and practices carry in the community. Thus, the outsiders or false heroes in the stories symbolize the colonial prejudice and the ignorance that people exhibit towards the knowledge systems of the indigenous community.

Donors

These characters provide the heroes with the tools, knowledge, or spiritual backing necessary to succeed.

Table 3. *Donors in Bagobo-Klata folk narratives*

Character	Portrayal	Characterization (Values & Identity)
Kolina	Life-giving land	Land-as-hero provides livelihood and teaches respect for ecology.
Ancestors	Guides of moral ways	Source of law and memory; their songs bind the tribe to its past.
God / Namma	Ultimate spiritual authority	Creator/sustainer; anchors faith, humility, and salvation in songs.
Apo Sandawa	Mountain spirit of renewal	Blesses with rain/harvest; emphasizes reciprocity between man and nature.
Grandfather / Elders	Bearers of sacred knowledge	Provide healing lore and ritual guidance; personify education and care.

The donor characters of the Bagobo-Klata folk tales embody the sources of guidance, blessings, and knowledge that will enable the heroes and the Bagobo-Klata people to conquer their obstacles. The characters such as Kolina, ancestors, God or Namma, Apo Sandawa, and elders not only offer assistance but also promote values that will guide and shape the lives of the Bagobo-Klata tribe. Kolina, as life-giving land, also signifies the strong association of the Bagobo-Klata people with nature and the value they place on their environment as a key to survival and identity. Apo Sandawa, on the other hand, personifies the spirit of the sacred mountains that give life and rain, and this characterizes the Bagobo-Klata belief that harmony with nature results in a balanced and prosperous community.

The ancestors, God or Namma, and the elders act as spiritual/moral guides that hold cultural knowledge and ethical values. Namma, or God, appears as the highest spiritual authority. The following excerpt from the song "Namma" illustrates this belief:

> "Oh Namma gamhanan ko… An-da mil-ling tu nik-kung gahum."
> *"Oh God, You are powerful… There is none like your power."*
>
> "Hek-ko keng nag gali tu kalangitaa… Hek-ko keng nag gali tu uddow asta bula."
> *"You created the heavens… You created the sun and the moon."*

These lines show that Namma is understood as the creator and source of power. This supports the discussion that Bagobo-Klata spirituality is anchored in divine authority, humility, and dependence on God. The donor role of Namma is therefore not only to help but to sustain life itself.

The ancestors hold the memory of the tribe through songs and traditions. God is the highest spiritual authority that gives life, encourages belief in God, and humility, while the elders, including the grandfather figure, pass on spiritual knowledge, healing, and ritualistic practices to the younger

generation of the tribe. These donor characters embody the Bagobo-Klata belief that spiritual/moral values, as well as cultural knowledge, come from both the spiritual and natural worlds.

Dispatchers and Helpers

Dispatchers initiate the journey or change, while Helpers provide the support needed to navigate challenges.

Table 4. *Dispatchers and Helpers in Bagobo-Klata folk narratives*

Character	Role	Portrayal/Characterization
Datu Mangansa	Dispatcher	Recognizes Bayao's worth; initiates social change and justice.
Supremo	Dispatcher	Tribal unifier; convenes the people and symbolizes centralized wisdom.
Elders (Ubo/Others)	Dispatcher/Helper	Interpreters of the supernatural; ensure experiences fit the tribal meaning-system.
Kin / Relatives	Helper	Accompany the hero; show kinship-based solidarity and shared responsibility.
Bukiding	Helper	Brings humor and balance; highlights humility and shared struggle.
Abayon	Helper	Nurturing host; embodies hospitality and dignity despite scarcity.
Bae Idanga	Helper/Beloved	Spiritual match; completes Iddung's journey and resolves his grief.

The dispatcher and helper characters are significant in facilitating the hero's journey and helping the community in times of change and/or adversity. The characters, such as Datu Mangansa and the Supremo, are dispatchers who facilitate change and community action in the story. Datu Mangansa's recognition of Bayao as a worthy individual symbolizes justice and change, signifying a sense of justice within the tribe, where leaders value morality. On the other hand, the Supremo is a symbol of unity and collective knowledge, fostering the community and collective decision-making in crucial issues.

In contrast, the hero receives emotional, spiritual, and social support from helpers like elders, relatives, Bukiding, Abayon, and Bae Idanga. The elders, for instance, narrate what is going on spiritually, and make sure everything is going in accordance with the cultural values of the tribe. The relatives, however, demonstrate the importance of the kinship in the life of an individual. The characters Bukiding and Abayon, however, serve as reminders to the community of the importance of humility and kindness. All these characters represent and reflect the values of Bagobo-Klata, namely cooperation, mutual and communal help to each other in overcoming life's challenges.

> "Odding ko po Bukiding, Ma-a to neng dinoddug… Dinoddug no Abayon, Da po pungo nadoddug." *Near here, Bukiding, let's eat some mashed bananas. Mashed by my friend, but it's not done being mashed yet*

> "Allos ko po Bukiding, Minom to po neng kapi… Papait ngo kapi ke, Limong to neng dinoddug." *Come inside, Bukiding, let's drink some coffee. But the coffee tastes bitter, let's just mix it with the mashed bananas.*

These excerpts show that help may appear in ordinary acts of sharing. Even when the food is imperfect and the coffee is bitter, the characters still create a moment of companionship. The humor in the exchange reflects resilience and humility. This supports the discussion that Bagobo-Klata helpers embody generosity not through abundance but through willingness to share whatever is available.

The helpers also reveal the tribe's communal way of facing difficulty. Elders interpret supernatural events so that individual experiences are understood within the tribe's meaning system. Relatives accompany heroes and show kinship-based solidarity. Abayon's hospitality, Bukiding's humor, and Bae Idanga's emotional and spiritual presence all show that survival is collective. In Bagobo-Klata narratives, people endure hardship through shared responsibility and relational support.

The Princess

The figures represent the ultimate goal, spiritual unity, or the "ideal" state of being.

Table 5. *The Princess in Bagobo-Klata folk narratives*

Character	Portrayal	Characterization (Values & Identity)
Bae Idanga	Spiritual twin and love interest	Fair and enigmatic; symbolizes ideal unity of body, spirit, and community.
The Loved One	Object of deep affection	Represents fulfillment, emotional home, and mutual devotion.

The princess characters in the Bagobo-Klata tales represent the ultimate state of harmony, emotional contentment, and spiritual union. Characters such as Bae Idanga and the loved one represent the ideal state of harmony between relationships, spirituality, and society. Bae Idanga, as a spiritual twin and loved one, represents beauty, enigma, and emotional depth. Her character represents the hero's journey for the protagonist, helping alleviate grief and achieve inner peace, indicating that the hero's journey is not just about heroism but also about relationships.

> "Paya keng naw-wo ko nek-ko, peda oneng nama neng ottow miling nek-ko." *My love for you is so great. God has brought me a person just like you."*

> "metum-ma ko keng puhong ko, eba hetong mamayang." *I will fulfil, my heart, my heart so we can both be lifted up together."*

The excerpt shows that love is understood as both personal and divine. The line that God has brought the beloved into the speaker's life suggests that love is connected to providence. The desire

to be “lifted up together” emphasizes mutual growth and shared destiny. This strengthens the interpretation that the princess figure represents unity, devotion, and emotional home.

In the narrative of Datu Iddung and Bae Idanga, marriage is also connected to ritual and community recognition. The union is not only a private emotional relationship but a socially and spiritually meaningful bond. This indicates that relationships in Bagobo-Klata narratives are embedded in communal order, ancestral values, and sacred commitment.

Moreover, the idea of a loved one is a symbol of devotion, affection, and emotional connection. This character represents the idea of finding a home through love and commitment. In the Bagobo-Klata tales, these characters go beyond romantic affection and represent the value placed on unity within their society. Through these characters, the tales teach that fulfilment is found in unity between people, their loved ones, and the spiritual world.

Lifestyles, Beliefs, and Norms of Bagobo-Klata as Reflected in the Folk Narratives

Table 5. *Lifestyles, beliefs, and norms of Bagobo-Klata in the folk narratives*

Overarching Theme	Sub-Themes	Core Idea & Selected Excerpt
Spiritual Governance	**Faith in God & Spirits**	"Everything is the will of God; we can do nothing without Him. Our first responsibility is Magdasa (prayer)." (Datu Baguio)
	Rituals & Sanctified Practices	"Before planting... they offer prayers not to stones or trees, but to the spirit dwelling within, guided by the Almighty."
	Sacred Farewell & Succession	"When my father passed away, all the tribes came to pay respects... and they said I should take the place of my father." (Datu Mantawil)
	Mystical Spirit Relations	"We believe in God, but we don't erase the past... even those beings were made by God. Tambala can bring illness or healing."
Social Fabric	**Communal Exchange & Hospitality**	"We have no money here; only fair exchange... We do not just exchange products. We meet the feelings, the will, and the joy of sharing."
	Respect for Elders	"The elders do not just give [leadership] to anyone; it must be to someone they can trust... I follow them strictly." (Datu Mantawil)
	Arranged Marriage	"Don’t be surprised, son, because today is the day set for your wedding... a symbol of the tribe's union."
	Naming Traditions	"I am not a child of the street; I was born at home... from the moment I opened my eyes, they called my name."
Knowledge & Survival	**Farming & Hunting**	"Every family knew the way to the sacred sites... bringing offerings of farming tools and food from their harvest as symbols of their labor."
	Treehouse Living	"Their houses were built on branches made of bamboo and vines... Why do we live up high? Because up there, the people are safe."
	Seasonal Celebrations	"Once a year, they go to Apo Sandawa... to restore their responsibility in caring for the tribe." (Datu Daug)
	Woven Identity	"Being a leader is a huge responsibility—to bring back our origins as a tribe and maintain our identity." (Datu Daug)

Ancestral Continuity	**Cultural Legacy**	"Our customs, our dialect, and our traditions must not be forgotten... We must reclaim our roots for the next generation." (Datu Monoy)
	Oral Traditions & Language	"In the old days, nothing was written. It was all spoken. Verbal... this is the Moggong, a song passed from breath to breath."
	Dance & Courtship Music	"With every step upon the ground, the Bagobo's dance is nature-bound... a prayer in motion, where their feet tune with the earth's drum."

The culture of the Bagobo-Klata is a complex and interconnected network of norms, beliefs, and lifestyles, which are rooted in a sense of community and cultural identity over individualistic behavior. Their central paradigm of spiritual governance is that all human endeavours are seen as expressions of God's will. This governance is rooted in the deep faith in God (Namma), considered by the elders as the key source of leadership and community cohesion. The belief is translated to Magdasa (prayer) which has been seen as the first responsibility of a leader or any individual in the community. Their spiritual philosophy combines a monotheistic basis with a Mystical Spirit Relations element, which recognizes that spirits, such as Tambala, who controls the duality of illness and healing exist. This spiritual continuity is reinforced by Sacred Farewells, which establishes the continuance of leadership after death itself as an ancestral obligation to hold on to the mantle and spiritual heritage of the tribe.

The tribe's Social Fabric is sustained by certain norms which ensure social cohesion and inter-tribal peace within the tribe. They have a Communal Exchange system, known as Domsat, which is not a simple transaction of trading, but has the primary concerns of mutual trust, fairness and the "joy of sharing". This is reinforced by the dogma of Respect for Elders who are now the keepers of cultural heritage and who determine the rules of trust necessary for knowledge transmission. Bagobo-Klata traditionally have used Arranged Marriage as a complex political and cultural manoeuvre to peacefully settle inter-tribal conflicts and to maintain inter-tribal harmony and stability in the long term. These are supported by practices of Naming Traditions and Hospitality Practices, in which identity comes from nature and the sacred obligation to give generously to relatives and strangers.

The Bagobo-Klata Lifestyle is a combination of harmony and balance between ecology and spirituality, especially in the way of Knowledge and Survival. Farming (Galas) is not considered a purely economic activity but as a 'sacred economy' with the exchange of tools and products in return for the spirits at places such as Apo Sandawa, where they would be offered as prayers. Likewise, Hunting is practiced by the reverent balance as they are "guardians of the land" instead of exploiters. They further express their identity through their physical surroundings, such as Treehouse Living, which created a protective and symbolic environment for them in the forest. In turn, this Woven Identity is physically expressed in their beadwork and their clothing, all with significant social content and as a "culture of identity" that is still alive in the face of modern pressure.

Last, Ancestral Continuity is dependent on the preservation of Cultural Legacy and Oral Traditions, which are just as important to the preservation of the Bagobo-Klata way of life. Their

history and values are retained in Language and chants such as the Moggong, transmitted "from breath to breath" – there were no written records until then. These traditions are resurrectioned and rejoined to seasonal celebrations and dance rituals, including the Gindaya chant, which are 'living prayers' that coordinate the community with natural and spiritual rhythms. Courtship via Music, especially the Lantuy flute, is illustrative of the ways in which individual emotional expressions are mediated through culturally sanctioned channels to ensure the perpetuation of the spiritual and social unity of the tribe.

Implications

The results have implications for cultural preservation, education, and community-based research. First, a community-based digital archive could be created where the community's narratives recorded, chants, songs and material culture explanations are stored under culturally appropriate protocols to access them. A community-controlled archive would give the community control over not having sacred or restricted information being freely spread. Secondly, the results can be adopted by developing MTB-MLE materials and designing culturally responsive literature lessons that provide learners with an introduction to the values and ethics of the Baguianos of the Philippines, ecology, and the oral tradition. Thirdly, schools, local government agencies and cultural organizations can use the results to create cultural sensitivity programs to break down the attitude of considering indigenous knowledge as superstition. Lastly, the study shows that the indigenous narratives should not be seen as folklore resources but as knowledge systems which can inform the pedagogical process, the process of identity formation, the process of environmental ethos and cultural policy.

Conclusions

The results of this research reveal that the Bagobo-Klata folk narratives can be seen as a complex ethical and ecological model, with characters such as Bayao and Datu Saundod embodying the virtue, resilience, and spiritual faithfulness inherent in it. The narratives suggest that for the community, ecological sustainability isn't just a secular responsibility, but a sacred obligation, a responsibility that is shared with “donors” such as Kolina and Apo Sandawa. Moreover, the depiction of “villains,” as people outside, who reject indigenous knowledge, implies that the oral traditions are a conscious narrative resistance against the prejudice and cultural assimilation of the colonizers. Finally, the study suggests that the Bagobo-Klata identity is always a collective one, stemming from a “social fabric” of kinship and communal exchange (Domsat) that is an alternative to the pressures of globalization that are individualistic in nature today. To conclude, the Bagobo-Klata folk narratives are a "woven identity" in which spiritual governance, traditional norms and ancestral continuity are maintained by the rhythmic transmission of the Moggong and Gindaya chants. This research is reframing the stories as a lived epistemology, as a set of social practices in which abstract values such as Magdasa (prayer) and communal loyalty become manifest.

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