



The Impact of Cultural Preservation on the *Mëranao* Identity: A Study of Tradition and Change

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the preservation of cultural heritage among selected *Mëranao* residents in Tubod, Lanao del Norte, with a focus on their roles as custodians of indigenous knowledge in the face of globalization. These residents serve as teachers, counselors, ceremony leaders, and dispute settlers, preserving and passing on vital cultural traditions and artisanal skills that are essential for community identity and sustainability. Employing a descriptive qualitative approach, data were gathered through purposive sampling of 100 *Mëranao* respondents using a modified survey questionnaire. The results highlight the interconnected roles of these residents in maintaining cultural continuity, while also addressing the challenges brought about by modernization and migration. The study underscores the importance of preserving cultural heritage to enhance community visibility, empowerment, and contribute to poverty alleviation. It advocates for the integration of traditional knowledge into modern initiatives to ensure the survival of cultural identity for future generations.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The preservation of indigenous knowledge is integral to the sustainability of indigenous societies, especially in an era shaped by globalization. As globalization expands, the migration of indigenous peoples and their exposure to modern influences present both challenges and opportunities. Indigenous cultures are often overwhelmed as they become assimilated into the dominant, mainstream cultures. Mass media, including social media, exacerbates this by gradually replacing indigenous values, beliefs, and practices. Furthermore, the allure of modern technologies increasingly distances individuals from their traditional connections with the natural world. As a result, the richness of indigenous cultural knowledge faces the risk of diminishing.

Despite these challenges, Mëranao residents remain pivotal in the preservation and transmission of cultural heritage. As custodians of indigenous knowledge, they are deeply respected within their communities. Mëranao elders serve as teachers, counselors, ceremony leaders, healers, and dispute settlers, passing down knowledge and traditions that are essential for cultural continuity. According to the Reliable Prosperity Project, “culture serves as the binding agent for communities and nations moving ahead, safeguarding language, folklore, music, dance, practical skills, sacred sites, and subsistence practices.” Their roles, interconnected and multifaceted, ensure that vital cultural traditions are passed on to future generations. The knowledge they impart is specific, deeply rooted in spirituality, and crucial for preserving a sense of identity and belonging within their communities.

The preservation of such cultural heritage not only strengthens the fabric of indigenous societies but also promotes empowerment and social cohesion. When communities preserve their cultural

heritage, they raise awareness of its significance, fostering pride and respect among both members and outsiders. Moreover, cultural conservation plays a role in alleviating poverty, as it enables communities to maintain their traditional crafts and practices, which can open pathways to economic opportunities. Preserving cultural knowledge, therefore, becomes not just a matter of safeguarding the past but also a means of building a more prosperous future for future generations.

This study focuses on cultural preservation among selected Mëranao residents in Tubod, Lanao del Norte. It aims to explore the roles of Mëranao in maintaining cultural traditions and examine how these practices help preserve the community's identity in the face of modernization and globalization. Through this research, the study seeks to illuminate the challenges and strategies involved in safeguarding indigenous heritage, while emphasizing its importance for both the present and future generations.

This study aims to explore the following key questions: What is the demographic profile of the respondents? How do selected residents evaluate the state of cultural preservation within their community? Finally, what are the implications of the study's findings for strengthening and advancing cultural preservation efforts?

This study highlights the vital role of Mëranao residents in preserving cultural heritage amidst modernization. Its findings will benefit cultural advocates, educators, and policymakers in strengthening preservation efforts and promoting cultural awareness and sustainability. The process of urban transformation is both a boon and a challenge for communities. While it brings economic opportunities, it also threatens to erode cultural identity, social connectivity, and environmental

integrity. According to Yeah and Huang (1996), physical change disrupts not just the built environment but also the intricate social interactions it fosters, posing risks to community cohesion and cultural preservation. The United Nations Task Force on Habit III (2015) observed an alarming global rise in threats to culture and heritage, primarily in rapidly urbanizing regions. This underscores the critical need for proactive measures to safeguard architectural heritage and prevent the loss of cultural foundations.

As globalization fuels aspirations for cities to become international hubs, the transformation often disregards heritage preservation. Henderson (2012) noted that such aspirations, while economically motivated, can marginalize historical and cultural contexts, considering them as inefficient utilizations of resources. In response, the National Cultural Heritage Act of 2009 (Republic Act No. 10066) in the Philippines provides a framework for preserving both tangible and intangible heritage. This legislation aligns with UNESCO's parameters, emphasizing that cultural heritage is integral to a nation's identity, bridging generations, and fostering a sense of belonging (Balco, 2011; Radzuan & Ahmad, 2015). Efforts to reconcile heritage conservation with urban development have highlighted innovative approaches. Veldpaus et al. (2013) proposed integrating urban development with heritage management to mitigate adverse socioeconomic impacts. Hiyari (2012) further argued for the economic feasibility of conservation, citing lower rehabilitation costs compared to new construction. Moreover, cultural tourism emerges as a potent driver of sustainable urban development, providing employment and attracting investments. Cases like Thailand's preserved temples, Indonesia's rice terraces, and the Philippines' Vigan serve as testaments to

the economic and cultural benefits of heritage preservation.

In particular, the Maranao people exemplify resilience in preserving their rich culture amidst modernization. Renowned for their distinctive artifacts, literature, and traditions, the Mëranao continue to uphold their heritage, as evidenced by the UNESCO recognition of the Darangen epic. Studies have highlighted the enduring significance of Maranao traditional leaders and artifacts in maintaining social harmony and fostering cultural pride (Hadji Abdul Racman, 2015; Abad Macabanding, 2017). These practices mirror broader global efforts to safeguard cultural identity while embracing modernization.

As societies advance, prioritizing cultural heritage conservation alongside urban development is essential. This dual focus ensures that communities can retain their unique identities and narratives while leveraging economic growth. In this light, cultural heritage is not merely a relic of the past but a dynamic resource that shapes the future of sustainable and inclusive development.

2. METHODS

This study aimed to assess cultural preservation among selected Mëranao residents, focusing on how various socio-demographic factors influence the preservation of their cultural identity. The research was structured around a schematic diagram that illustrates the relationship between the independent variables, the dependent variable, and the implications of the study.

2.1. Research Design

The study employed a descriptive research design, which is suitable for identifying and analyzing the relationship between the independent and dependent variables. A survey questionnaire was used as the primary data collection tool. The

questionnaire included sections on the respondents' demographic profiles, their involvement in cultural practices, and their views on the importance of preserving Mëranao traditions. It was designed to gather both quantitative data (e.g., age, income, education) and qualitative data (e.g., opinions on cultural preservation).

2.2. Research Instrument

To gather the necessary data for this study, a survey questionnaire was used as the primary research instrument. The questionnaire was modified to suit the study's objectives and consisted of two parts. The first section focused on the personal profile of the respondents, collecting data on their socio-demographic characteristics, such as the number of children. The second section included questions regarding the preservation of cultural heritage, specifically aimed at understanding the respondents' practices and views on cultural preservation. This type of instrument is commonly used by researcher due to its ability to efficiently collect data, allowing for a quicker response time and easier analysis compared to other methods.

2.3. Sampling Technique

A purposive sampling technique was used to select 100 Mëranao residents from six barangays in Tubod, Lanao del Norte. These participants were chosen based on their active participation in community life, ensuring they were familiar with cultural preservation efforts and could provide valuable insights into the study.

2.4. Procedure

In gathering the primary data for this study, the researcher utilized a constructed questionnaire. A letter was provided to the respondents to inform them of the study's purpose and obtain their consent. The researcher personally administered and facilitated the survey,

ensuring that the respondents understood the questions while completing the questionnaire. Once the data was collected, it was tabulated, analyzed, and interpreted. The survey was conducted through face-to-face interviews, with the support of local community leaders to help bridge communication gaps and ensure cultural sensitivity. The respondents were asked about their involvement in preserving Mëranao culture, focusing on traditional ceremonies, language, arts, and family customs. Special emphasis was placed on exploring how modernization and education have influenced these cultural practices.

2.5. Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, and means to summarize the respondents' demographic information and their views on cultural preservation. A correlation analysis was also conducted to examine the relationships between the independent variables (e.g., civil status, educational attainment, occupation) and cultural preservation. This analysis will help determine which factors significantly influence the preservation of Mëranao culture.

2.6. Ethical Considerations

Ethical guidelines were followed throughout the study. Participants were fully informed of the purpose of the research, and informed consent was obtained from all respondents. The confidentiality of their responses was ensured, and their participation was voluntary. Additionally, the study respected the cultural values of the Mëranao people, ensuring that sensitive topics were approached with care and respect.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. The Socio-Demographic Profile of the Respondents

The data reveal significant insights into the demographic characteristics and cultural preservation practices of the respondents, underscoring the enduring role of traditional values among the Mëranao people. Among the 100 participants, 80% were married, suggesting that familial structures remain central to the transmission of cultural knowledge and practices. This aligns with the findings of Hadji Abdul Racman (2015) and Abad Macabanding (2017), who emphasized the crucial role of traditional family units and elders in maintaining social harmony and safeguarding Mëranao heritage. Furthermore, 57% of the respondents were elementary graduates, which implies that the preservation of culture transcends educational attainment, supporting Balco's (2011) assertion that cultural identity is not bound by academic achievement but is deeply embedded in everyday practices. In terms of occupation, 67% had varied professions—ranging from farming to small-scale trade—indicating that diverse livelihoods may enhance cultural sensitivity, as exposure to various community contexts often strengthens one's connection to cultural roots.

Financially, 77% of the respondents earned below 8,000 pesos monthly, reflecting economic constraints that could limit active participation in cultural events or heritage conservation. Yet, as Hiyari (2012) argued, economic limitations do not preclude heritage preservation; in fact, low-cost community-based initiatives can be more sustainable and rooted in authentic practice. Notably, 52% of the respondents had four to seven children,

reinforcing the notion that larger families may play a vital role in intergenerational cultural transmission. This is consistent with the UNESCO-aligned principles within the National Cultural Heritage Act of 2009 (Republic Act No. 10066), which emphasize the importance of intangible heritage—such as oral traditions and community rituals—in maintaining national identity (Radzuan & Ahmad, 2015).

In a broader context, these findings highlight the relevance of grassroots cultural resilience in the face of urbanization and globalization. As noted by Yeah and Huang (1996), the transformation of physical and social environments poses risks to cultural cohesion, yet the Mëranao community exemplifies how traditional values persist despite these pressures. The respondents' continued engagement in cultural preservation amid financial and educational limitations reflects the community's collective effort to maintain identity, echoing global best practices in heritage conservation as seen in culturally rich cities like Vigan and the rice terraces of the Philippines. Thus, the data affirm the vital interplay of family, education, economic livelihood, and cultural consciousness in sustaining the rich heritage of the Mëranao people.

4.2. The Respondents' Responses on the Mëranao Culture Preservation among Selected Mëranao resident in Tubod, Lanao del Norte

The results reveal a strong consensus among respondents on the importance of preserving Mëranao culture and arts. Respondents strongly emphasized that preserving Mëranao art is crucial as it serves as both a symbol and instrument of their cultural identity. The

findings suggest that the age of individuals significantly influences their perspectives on cultural preservation, with older generations displaying greater knowledge and appreciation of Mëranao art compared to younger ones. This reflects their deeper exposure to and education in traditional arts.

However, the advancement of technology has been identified as a significant factor diminishing the younger generation's interest in traditional arts. The data suggests that technological innovation may overshadow cultural appreciation, causing younger individuals to pay less attention to their heritage. Despite this, it is evident that many residents of Marawi still recognize the value of preserving their cultural practices, though this appreciation varies across age groups.

Behavior and personal values also play a role in cultural preservation. Respondents acknowledged that a self-centered outlook often leads to neglect of cultural heritage, while a lack of understanding about one's culture can result in disinterest. On the other hand, religious beliefs have a profound impact, as practices deemed contrary to Islamic teachings are often abandoned. This reflects the significant influence of Islam on cultural practices in Marawi.

The findings also highlight that ambition among Mëranao individuals tends to focus more on professional achievements rather than cultural preservation. This shift in priorities indicates that modern aspirations may overshadow traditional values, particularly among the youth. However, it remains steadfast in their respect for customs, often prioritizing social status and community relationships as a way to uphold cultural traditions.

Customary practices remain vital for preserving the culture, with respondents agreeing that habitual observance of traditions helps sustain them. Gatherings, rituals, and the use of cultural symbols such as heirlooms continue to play a significant role in maintaining Mëranao heritage. Overall, the results underscore a need to balance modern influences with efforts to protect and promote traditional cultural values.

The study on Mëranao culture preservation among selected residents of Tubod, Lanao del Norte highlights the importance of safeguarding this cultural heritage as a vital symbol of identity. The research focused on understanding the socio-demographic profiles of respondents and their perspectives on preserving Mëranao culture in terms of arts, behavior, ambition, religion, and customs. A descriptive qualitative approach was utilized, with a self-constructed questionnaire to gather insights into the factors influencing cultural preservation. Findings reveal that older residents demonstrate greater knowledge and commitment to traditions, while younger generations, influenced by technological advancements and Western culture, show diminishing interest. Behavioral attitudes, such as self-centeredness and limited cultural understanding, also hinder preservation efforts, while personal ambitions often prioritize professional success over cultural traditions. Religion plays a significant role, with Islamic teachings discouraging certain practices deemed un-Islamic, leading to the abandonment of some customs. Despite these challenges, customs like cultural gatherings and rituals remain pivotal in sustaining Mëranao traditions.

The study emphasizes the need for collective efforts to harmonize cultural practices with modern aspirations and

religious values, fostering active involvement of younger generations to ensure the continuity of the Mëranao heritage. It provides meaningful insights for developing strategies to address the challenges posed by modernization while reinforcing the importance of cultural preservation within the community.

5. CONCLUSION

The *Mëranao* residents of Tubod, Lanao del Norte possess a rich understanding of their cultural arts and place great importance on preserving them, not only among the elders but across all generations. Personal values play a crucial role in recognizing and safeguarding cultural heritage, with many showing a strong commitment to its preservation. However, there is a growing disconnection, with some distancing themselves from their traditions. It is essential that the *Mëranao* people actively prioritize cultural preservation and work to instill these values in younger generations to ensure their continuity. The wearing of traditional clothing and the continuation of cultural practices are integral to maintaining their identity. Moreover, it is vital that *Mëranao* culture be taught to the youth to guarantee its enduring preservation. While Western cultural influences have led to the adoption of foreign practices, many still prioritize local values that are closely tied to their cultural identity and social standing. Religion also plays a complex role in cultural preservation, with some aspects of Islamic teachings creating confusion about certain practices. Nonetheless, Islam supports the preservation of cultural traditions that align with its core values, and it is important for the younger generation to

embrace and practice their cultural identity to assert their ethnic affiliation.

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