

A Preliminary Study on the Meranaw Traditional Balod "Tie-Dye" Technique in Weaving

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ABSTRACT

This paper is a historical narrative study documenting two of the most ancient living Meranaw cultural heritage: kapanga-awl (weaving) and kapamalod (tie-dyeing). These century-old surviving crafts serve as a testament to a very long-standing contacts and trade relations between the Philippines and her neighboring countries such as India, China and the Asian countries, more particularly Indonesia whose Ikat (from an ancient Indonesian word mengikat which means to tie or bind) weaving style closely resembles the Meranaw balod technique in weaving. What links the Philippines with these countries and what finds the Meranaw more similar to the weaving tribes in Northern Luzon and Southern Mindanao are their weaving culture. Highlights of this paper include the origin of the balod technique in weaving, their ingenuity with regards to the use of natural and indigenous raw materials for weaving and some mythical performances, ceremonies, and ritual offerings associated with the balod craftsmanship. Significantly, the research aimed to enable the readers to appreciate and understand the said weaving cultural heritage. It addresses the issues of saving this cultural heritage; otherwise, weaving may suffer the fate of other Meranaw indigenous arts that have diminished and faded into oblivion. This paper recommends preserving such weaving cultural heritage through continuous recording or documenting, archiving, preserving them in their living form, and ensuring its transmission to the next generation.

1. Introduction

This paper attempts to trace, describe and analyze two of the most ancient handicrafts that the *Meranaw* tried to integrate and use to make one of their traditional hand-woven fabrics, the so-called *balod*-inspired textiles: tie-dyeing (*balod*) and weaving (*ka-awl*).

As defined, *balod* is an ancient method of tie-dyeing or resist-dyeing that involves covering areas of thread to shield them from penetration of dyes; it is a skill-intensive process of marking, tying and dyeing the designs into the thread before it is woven. That wrapped thread that resisted the dyes emerge as the designs or patterns of the woven fabric. Though this cultural art of *balod* technique in weaving had long been existing, the researcher believes that quite a few educated *Meranaws* are interested in writing about this age-old weaving cultural heritage. Many cherish to wear it but rarely do they attempt to research its origin, the ingenuity of the *Meranaws* in using natural plant fibres and dye in their designs, the essential preparations in this *balod* hand-woven fabrics and the mythical performances and ritual offerings associated with such weaving artisanship.

The paper used three theoretical frameworks: functionalism, diffusion, and *innovation*. Based on the theory of *functionalism* (Linton, 1946). The *Meranaws* learned the weaving and *balod* handicrafts because they want to use such kind of handwoven fabrics for the purpose and value of satisfying some of their basic needs. These include bodily comfort (e.g. wearing handwoven *malong* for special occasions and as luxury textile), dowry exchanges (*sayat*), wedding gifts, household use such as blankets or bed sheets, for economic use as fishnets, wall decors, and sometimes for funeral purposes.

Another theory employed in this paper is the theory on *diffusion* as one of the sources of culture change. According to the proponent of this theory (Hunter, Copyright 1976)

"...diffusion means the process by which cultural elements are borrowed from another society and incorporated into the culture of the recipient group..."; ...it could also mean the transfer of cultural elements from one society to another with accompanying degree of reinterpretation and change in the element..."

The theory of *diffusion* answers the question as to how these *Meranaw* artisans were able to learn *balod* weaving or the tie-dye technique in weaving. This proposes that such skills must have been brought and borrowed from our migrating Asian ancestors and its diffusion in the *Meranaw* culture was the result of trade and social contacts between these *Meranaw* and those of their Asian ancestors. After its introduction, the *Meranaws* started to create their own innovations based on what they need, their capacity and capability to do it and the demands of their environment.

The third theory applied in this study is the theory of discovery and invention or innovation, of which according to Linton (1936),

"...discovery is any addition to knowledge while invention or innovation is a new application of knowledge...new ideas or traits originated either inside or outside caused some changes in their culture because the people accepted it and use it regularly...that if an invention or discovery is ignored, no change in culture results. It is only when society or people accepts an invention or discovery and uses it regularly that we can speak of cultural change which may originate from inside or outside a society, are ultimately sources of all cultural change..."

Hence, the theory of discovery and invention also answers the inquiry as to how the *Meranaws* were able to learn this weaving and tie-dye technique in weaving. Generally, since *invention* or *innovation* denotes a change that requires a significant amount of imagination, such theory supports this paper more significantly on the changes introduced in the *Meranaw balod* hand-woven fabrics. The *Meranaw* weaving artisans continued to adapt to the changing demands of their buying environment for their handicrafts to be more viable. They made some innovations or changes in their designs, colors, and functions of their handwoven fabrics in order to be more relevant to the demands of their market. They are now open to experimenting new product designs, and more usable items in response to the demands of those that buy their products. They are now birthing new in their traditional weaving that they have never done in their history; otherwise, their *balod* weaving industry will decline.

This paper, through narrative-descriptive historiography, provides the historical origin of the *Meranaw* traditional *balod* technique in weaving. Specifically, it examined the ingenuity of the *Meranaw* weaving artisans in the production and utilization of indigenous raw materials for weaving and dyeing; the essential steps in the preparation and process of the *Meranaw* traditional *balod* technique in weaving; the meanings, rituals, beliefs and practices associated to the *Meranaw* traditional *balod* art/technique in weaving; and some measures done in order to preserve and make their *balod* weaving industry more viable. The data collection particularly covered some communities in the Municipality of Bacolod Grande, Province of Lanao del Sur, Philippines, namely Barangay Ampao, Orong, Dilabayan, Pindolonan, Buadi-Awani, Tuca, and some barangays of Kalawi. Ethnographic techniques such as interviews, participant observation, focused group discussion, and frequent community visitation, fortified with library works, were employed in the data gathering. Only older participants, particularly 60-75 years old, who have been weaving were considered as participants. The succeeding parts of the paper will explicate previous works relevant to the study, the methodology employed, the results and the discussion of findings, and the conclusion of this paper.

2. Literature Review

This part elucidates selected literature and related studies that support the data presented and reveal facts about the craft and substantiate the antiquity of weaving and tie-dye craftsmanship that has been produced for centuries in many countries across the globe, including India and many other Asian and African countries.

According to an article entitled History of Weaving (http://wildtussah.com/history-weaving-2/#the_origin_of_fabric, 2018), the art of weaving has evolved over the course of thousands of years, through *discovery* and *experimentation*. The idea of interlacing materials together to create a weave was probably inspired by nature (e.g. observing bird's nests, spider webs). And this technique evolved through time, and the man eventually was able to stretch and dry fibres to produce more delicate threads.

In another book, Powell (1971) states that weaving was born of necessity in the pre-conscious period of our human history and weavers wove their fabrics in order to live using indigenous plants and raw fibers, spun these into yarn and woven into fabrics.

In the case of the Philippines, Jocano (1975), a renowned Filipino Anthropologist, pointed out that our century-old Philippine weaving culture must have taken its roots from the greater Malay-Polynesian civilization who had stepped on our shores very much earlier than the Europeans had. They must have brought with them some elements of their culture, then it was borrowed and integrated with the existing culture of our indigenous settlers. It was from them where we could attribute the *discovery* (addition to knowledge) and the *invention* (new application of knowledge) of our century-old weaving technology.

Similar to weaving, the concept of tie-dyeing was also born out of a perceived necessity. One source (History, 2018) reveals that the origin of tie and dye belongs to the category of pre-history, as countless dyers through the ages in many countries must have experimented with the use of binding to create patterns on cloth immersed in vats of dye (<http://groovyhistory.com/art-of-tie-die>, 2018).

Buhler (2018) substantiate the fact that the art of tie-dyeing is an ancient handicraft that has been practiced in the Indian subcontinent, in many other parts of Asia, America, African countries, China and Japan as early as 6th century A.D., about one and a half millennia ago (Sill, 1995). He also noted that the earliest surviving examples of *tie-dye* included a pre-Columbian alpaca found in Peru and silk from 4th-century Chinese tombs.

Among the different tie-dye weaving techniques that were reviewed in the course of this study, the one that nearly resembles the *balod* (tie-dye) weaving technique of the *Meranaws* is the *ikat* textile weaving style in Indonesia. The word *ikat* is derived from the ancient Malay word or Indonesian word *mengikat*, which is similar to the *Meranaw* word *miyangikut*, which means to tie or bind.

Scott (1992) cited that the early Spanish lexicographers were able to reconstruct the weaving techniques of our ancestry by collecting, recording and defining the names of the different parts of the loom. One finds it in Pedro de San Buenaventura's *Vocabulary of the Tagalog Language with Castilian*, the earliest Tagalog dictionary extant and one of the best during the Spanish period (Scott, 1984).

Some Filipino tribes made indigenous fabrics by weaving and creating patterns, designs, and motifs using the tie-dye techniques. These tribes include the *Tbolis* and *Blaans* of Southern Mindanao as well as the *Igorots*, *Bontocs* and *Kalingas* of Northern Luzon. However, concerning the *Meranaw balod* (tie-dye) weaving technique, the researcher failed to find related studies for review. There was no similar study conducted particularly on the ingenuity of the *Meranaws* in using native plants as fibers and raw dye. One can find it in Cayongcat (2018) book, but it only mentioned how weaving started among the *Meranaws*. In the book of Macarambon entitled *Art, Craft and Uses of Malong*, she seemingly touches on the striking similarity between the *andon* and the Indonesian *sarong* but not specifically on the *Meranaw balod* fabrics. Lastly, Bato (2011) cited more on another weaving technique called *sukip* but not on the *balod* weaving technique.

3. Methodology

This paper utilizes ethnography, a qualitative research procedure where a considerable amount of time is spent "in the field" interviewing, observing, gathering documents, describing, analyzing, interpreting and understanding the patterns of a culture-sharing group in order to understand their behaviors, beliefs, and language (Creswell, 2012).

The researcher used a narrative-descriptive historiography as a major technique in an ex-post facto design through the use of oral interviews on selected *Meranaw pangangawl* (weavers), *pamamalod* (*balod* designers) and *pangungusod*. The research study was conducted in the weaving villages of the Municipality of Bacolod Grande namely Barangay Ampao, Orong, Dilabayan, Pindolonan, Buadi-Awani, Tuca, and some barangays of Kalawi. The place is fairly situated and ensconced in between two wonders of nature---the panoramic Lake Lanao and the majestic Mount *Gurain*, a fabled mountain with the highest altitude and longest range in the entire Lanao Region. Based on the data obtained from the Office of the Municipal Mayor of Bacolod-Kalawi, the said municipality has a population of 20, 146 and a total land area of about 3, 978 hectares. Its northern border is bounded by *Mount Gurain* and the Province of Lanao del Norte; the southern brink is protruding upon Lake Lanao. The eastern frontier is connected with the Municipality of Tugaya, whereas its western edge is adjacent to the Municipality of *Madalum*, both of Lanao del Sur. Comprising its territory is about 2, 468 hectares of timberland and only about 1,500 hectares of alienable and disposable lands.

Bacolod Grande, a forty (40) minute-drive from *Marawi City*, is one of the municipalities in Lanao del Sur where people still practice the indigenous art of weaving the way they used to in the old times. The place is not only known for its best *balod* fabrics but also exceptionally hand woven luxury fabrics called *malong* such as *rawatun* and *andon*. But with the passing away of many of her weaver experts, we can hardly find an exceptionally handwoven *balod* fabric in the place. Her rich weaving cultural heritage had never made her a glorious traveling destination for tourists, culture lovers and enthusiasts.

Data gathered in this study are from the fifteen (15) key informants who are expert weavers in their respective communities. They belonged to the primary group of *Meranaw pangangawl/panganga-ol* (weavers), *pamamalod* (*balod* designers) and the *pangungusod* (beamers). The key informants possessed three different or distinct expertise but were interrelated because a *pangangawl* cannot weave without the *pamamalod*. Similarly, a *pangangawl* and a *pamamalod* cannot function without the *pangungusod*. Rarely can you find a *pangangawl* who knows how to make *balod* and who knows how to assemble all the essential paraphernalia in weaving.

This study used some data-gathering instruments that were tailored to probe avenues of exploration that can yield information relevant for the topic being studied. This includes interview schedule, participant observation, focused group discussion, native (*Meranaw*) dialect, frequent visitation, the use of modern technology, like a tape recorder and video-recording, and library works.

Three groups of participants who were identified to represent the groups involved in the production of finished hand-woven fabrics consisted of five (5) *pamamalod* or *balod* designers, who by virtue of their age and experience, are presumably experts in *balod* processing and designing; five (5) *pangungusod* with older ages, ranging from 60 – 75 years that perform the most delicate and strenuous part in the production of an woven material, and five (5) *pangangaol/pangangawl* or the weavers.

4. Results and Discussion

Based on the article entitled *The History of Weaving Part 1* (2018) and from a document retrieved from a web site (http://wildtussah.com/history-weaving-2/#the_origin_of_fabric, 2018), they reveal that the art of weaving and tie-dyeing have evolved over the course of thousands if not, millions of years in various parts of the globe. The use of different tie-dye terminologies in many archaeological findings lead scientists to conclude that tie-dyeing, similar to weaving is a century-old handicraft. This holds true with the tradition of weaving and tie-dyeing artisanship of the Filipinos, particularly the weaving tribes of Luzon such as the *Ifugaos*, *Bontoks*, *Kalingas* and the weaving artisans in Southern Mindanao like the *Meranaws*, *Maguindanao*, *Tausog*, *Jama Mapun*, *Tiboli* and *Bagobos*. Their art of weaving and tie-dye technique in weaving must have been introduced to them from outside or from our migrating ancestors like the Malays and Indonesians and it became an addition to their knowledge and applied to regularly.

In the Philippines, according to Scott (1984) the use of early Spanish dictionaries, one of which was that of Franciscan friar Pedro De San Buenaventura enable us to reconstruct the Filipino weaving techniques after knowing all the recorded names for the individual parts of the loom, plant fibers and dyestuffs used in weaving.

4.1. Origin of the Meranaw Traditional Balod Technique in Weaving

According to Omaira (Masacal, 1995) the term *kabalod* whose root word is *balod* is:

"giyangkotowa a ka -phu-li-bu-di-ron, odi na giyangkotowa ka-phu-ngi-khut-ti-ron, odi na giyangkotowa ka-phu-pha-mo-wa-ti-ron sa batuk ago so ka-phu-gi-lus-saon" (it is the process of wrapping with strings, the process of tying or the process of designing and dyeing)

This *Meranaw* traditional *balod* (a *Meranaw* word for *miyangikut*) weaving technique closely resembles the Indonesian *Ikat*, an ancient Malay or Indonesian word *mengikat* which means to tie or bind. Both handwoven fabrics are created using a skill-intensive process of marking, tying and dyeing the design into the yarn before it is woven. What differs is the design because while the *Ikat* employs very elaborate and intricate designs (e.g. human figures), the *Meranaws* employ geometrical, leaf forms and other *okir*-inspired designs in their *balod* fabrics.

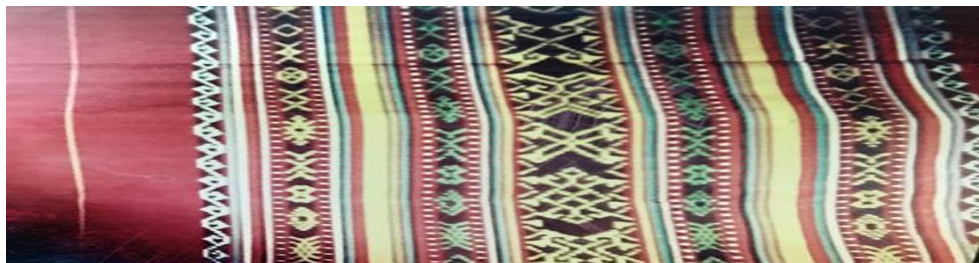


Figure 1. The *Meranaw* traditional *Balod* hand woven fabric with multiple designs and colors using the tie-dye technique in weaving. This is an example of a *Meranaw balod* bedsheet or bedcover usually used during special occasions because it is expensive and it takes a month to finish the fabric. It is made of cotton thread and measures a standard size of two yards wide and four yards long.



Figure 2. The Indonesian woman doing the *ikat*, a method of resist-dye technique to pattern textiles. This method involves tying or covering areas of the thread to shield specific parts from penetration of the dye. After dyeing, all resists are opened, and the yarns are woven. This *ikat* closely resembles the *Meranaw balod* technique, where both apply the same process of marking, tying and dyeing the design into the thread before it is woven. Due to the pandemic (covid-19) where health protocols are strictly implemented, the researcher failed to conduct actual or on-the-spot demonstrations on how to create *balod* designs or patterns

As to the origin of the *Meranaw balod* technique in weaving, there are no written accounts, if not evidence, that would sufficiently prove its beginnings. As one source says: "*being one of the oldest forms of textile production, knowing the exact origin of weaving is difficult...Since textile, and the wooden looms that they used, don't confront the passage of time very well, it is hard to place exactly where and when they first originated*" (The History of Weaving, 2018).

Research findings revealed that the *Meranaw* traditional *balod* technique in weaving is an indigenous skill that their ancestors developed out of perceived necessity. A 73-year old expert-weaver key informant Hadji Napsia (Pangcoga, 1995) revealed that their parents did not learn such weaving skills from other people or places, but it is their inherent talent. Implicitly, their ancestors learned the weaving skills on their own, proving their intelligence and creativity through their imagination and prowess in weaving. Their weaving skills and knowledge were all inherited from their ancestors. But the author is more convinced on the arguments (Saber, 1978) that the *Meranaw* weaving craft was introduced by the Indonesians who also learned it from India and the former introduced it to the *Meranaws*. Jocano (1975) added that such weaving heritage seems to be a confluence of Malayan-Indian-Chinese influences, conformably with the proximity of the Philippines, particularly Mindanao, to Malaysia, Indonesia and the ancient relations with India and China.

The late Hadji Hedjara, who had been weaving for more than fifty (50) years, said that she learned how to weave through her dreams and from her aunt Bae sa Bayabao. She was cautioned not to fail in learning such weaving skills otherwise she may end with an incurable illness, if not insanity.

However, the different revelation from an expert weaver named Hadji Racma Bayamba (Bayamba, 2002) traced her learning of the art from a supernatural way, such as through a more bizarre way like the appearance of an unknown-creature, teaching her, if not, coaching her the mechanics of such artistic skill. She said that she learned the art through *taginupun* or *taginupun a piyakamumusa* referring to a more frightening phenomenon called "*phiphayagan*," where supernatural creatures appearing before them are the ones coaching and guiding them. She confessed that she weaves so fast that somebody is holding the *barira*.

The following are testaments that bear witness to the antiquity of the *Meranaw* weaving craftsmanship, such as their weaving *lingo*, their various weaving styles and numerous names for their different hand woven fabrics, the discoveries of a century-old *iro-an* or *manga irowan* (sets of weaving paraphernalia) in the Municipalities of Taraka, Bacolod Grande and Marawi City, and the findings of an age-old living hand woven *malong* and *potal* (pouch bag made of waka) in Barangay Ampao, Bacolod Grande.



Figure 3. An age-old *iroan* or *manga iroan* that are required to be assembled before the weaving action takes place. This century-old living weaving paraphernalia, owned by Sakina Sarip Saber, a centenarian surviving wife of the *Meranao* hero *Datu Akader Saber* was retrieved in her house at Barangay Saber, Marawi City during the interview with the owner in 2019.



Figure 4. A century-old handwoven *malong* owned by the late Hadja Napsia Pangcoga, an expert weaver during her time. It is made of cotton and silk thread they bought from Chinese stores in Marawi City. It has only multiple colors with no designs because the *balod* technique in weaving was not yet popular and only a few knew and learned the *balod* weaving style. Besides, the owner favored silk and cotton thread as something more special and expensive.

Another proof on the antiquity of the Meranaw weaving artisanship was found in the unpublished memoirs of Pershing (Pershing, 1901) that mentioned the Moros he frequently saw during the market day in Iligan held every Saturday, fully draped with woven fabrics/cloth of different colors. Another article entitled Notes on the Maranaw Moros (Bowman, 1908) made mention about the cotton being spun into thread for weaving and the dress of the Moros to be like that of a *sarong*, presumably *malong*, measuring five (5) feet wide and nine (9) feet long. Both men and women weave and wear it using bright colored cotton obtained from the Chinese.

4.2. Indigenous Raw Materials in the Meranaw Traditional Balod Technique in Weaving

The *Meranaws* had also made use of natural and indigenous plants for their weaving handicrafts such as *waka* (abaca), which when processed produced abaca fibers they call *kakayon*, a rough fibrous fiber, of which, when hand-woven produces a fabric is made known as *kindang*.



Figure 5. Abaca fibre or *kakayon* to the *Meranaws* is obtained from the plant leaf stalks of the abaca plant (*waka* in *Meranaw*). *Binidayan*, Lanao del Sur was traditionally known for their large *waka* (abaca) plantation, of which, the fibers are sold to Cagayan de Oro City.

Another kind of banana plant is called *borongan*, which, when stripped from its trunks or *opas* also yields banana fibre, similarly called *kakayon* and when handwoven produces another fabric called *topo*. As narrated by Hadji Jiamellah (Muthung, 1995), after stripping the trunks of this *borongan*, they are being pounded until all the rough and fibrous contents of this plant will be removed and becomes very soft and fine. This banana, if sprinkled, rubbed and squeezed with the ashes of an *apog* will change its color texture into pure white. This *Meranaw* word *apog* is actually the ashes obtained from flamed seashells called *soso*. She continued that:

“the soso are placed on top of a bamboo-made board where they are to be heated by the flame of a fire beneath it... the ashes of these shells are covered with banana leaves overnight...then the apog is made on the following day”) its color is white, like a very fine powder. If this is mixed with kalawag (turmeric) and moist this with water, the color changes to red. The kakayon, if soaked with apog overnight, will turn very soft.

Another raw material used in their woven textile is a vegetable fiber stripped from the cotton plant which they call *gapas*. As explained by Hedjara (Pangcoga 1995) and Jiamellah (Muthung, 1995):

“the cotton hairs (after removing from the seeds) are piled and then paddled until it becomes very flat and thin in all edges; then, around its surface or edges, they roll it with their fingers, stripped and spun into a single strand fiber using the gilingan or a small wooden spindle turned by hand. As the spindle turns around, you will see how such fine and smooth fibers are coming out of the spindle”

These cotton fibers were used as their raw material in *balod* weaving probably because of the dye ability and softness of the cotton thread.

4.3. Kapangilus, the Meranaw Traditional Dyeing Technique Using Indigenous Raw Materials

Research findings revealed that the *Meranaws* had their own ingenuity of using natural or indigenous raw materials for their *kapangilus* or dyeing technique such as plants, fruits, leaves, and clay. One of which is the *lipao*, presumably a clay found near rivers, springs or rice paddies. According to *Sanaoray* (Balindong, 2019) the tied thread when soaked in a *lipao* can turn it into black yarn.

Another raw material is a grass-like plant called *tagom*, of which, when cooked, produces red color and is used to dye the *waka*. Both Hadji Jiamela (Muthung 1995) and Hadji Sinab (Kosain 1995) revealed to have used this *kalaloda*, whose fruits (*onga*), when cooked, produce orange color.



Figure 6. *Kalaloga* plant

Some of the respondents mentioned the leaves of this so-called *pisaya* which when processed, produces green and blue dyes. Tangko (Balindong, 1995) explained that:

“the leaves of pisaya... when mixed with apog , water and ferment it for two days produces blue dyes”



Figure 7. *Pisaya* plant

As mentioned by Hadja Hedjara (Pangcoga, 1995), another indigenous plant they utilize is *kayo a riya* which is also a source of black dye, whose leaves, when *mixed* with clay called *lipao* produce black dye. She said that:

"after pounding the leaves of the saging a riya...immerse the thread with its extracts...then cover this with lipao, a soft moist earth or clay found in springs... the thread turns black...but not pure black...unlike the newly introduced black thread "



Figure 8. *Kayo-a-Riya*

For yellow dye, they use the concoction of turmeric and the skin of mango fruit. Ina a Hedjara (Pangcoga 1995) explained that:

"the turmeric and the skin of a mango fruit are to be pounded or crushed... then soak the thread to the concoction or extracts until its fully absorbed/until the thread is fully colored with yellow dye"

Another natural dyestuff of ancient *Meranaw* weavers is the so-called *torsi* made from a mixture of an extract from *talambo* or *phuga* (pomelo-like fruit) and scratches from any steel-made cooking wares (e.g. *kara* or *kodun*), the result of which is the *torsi* which is also used in blackening their teeth.

4.4. Essential Steps in the *Meranaw* Traditional *Balod* Technique in Weaving

According to Omaira (Masacal,1995)), of which this was corroborated by her sister Apipa (Masacal, 2019) and other *pamamalod* respondent (Macadaag, 2019), the essential steps to be undertaken in order to produce the so-called *balod* designs include the *kasod*, which involves the hardest and tedious process of stretching and fastening the *tomadhung* in a wooden instrument known as *bidangan* for two days or more; the *Kapangikut/Kapamongkos* (tying or wrapping) where the fastened thread in the *bidangan* are tied with strings of rice sacks in line with the predetermined pattern or design. Before wrapping, they rub this first with either *taro* (beeswax) that comes from a waste of insects called *batiyokan* , or the *dukhut*, a waste of another insect known as *tamaing* or *tamosan* or the *gola a tunub* (honey bee) for the strings to stick together. Another expert *pamamalod* Sanaoray (Balindong, 2019) said that:

“if the nests of this insects called batiyokan are cooked, that waste substance they call taro separates from that nest...either they make this into ball-like form or store them in a can...and every ball-like form of taro costs fifty (50) pesos) ...these waste substances of tamaing and batiyokan are made after squeezing their nests to produce the taro”

The *tomadhung* is knotted or wrapped tight enough to resist the dye from penetrating it. The third step is the *Kapangi-lus* or *Kasayn* (Dyeing), where they immerse the thread wrapped with strings into three gallons of boiling water filled with dyes they call *Venus*. After washing, hanged and dried, the wrappings are carefully removed. The dyed thread, which is to become part of the *tomadhung*, is again stretched on the loom and rubbed with rice paste (smashed cooked rice) to harden and form patterns or designs. One can see the patterns or designs emerging, ready to be woven at this stage.

4.5. The *Meranaw* Traditional *Balod* Designs and Patterns

The *Meranaw* weaving artisans culled such designs from the legendary *okir* patterns, the generic term for scroll, geometric and flowering designs, often based on an elaborate leaf and vine pattern (Sakili, 2003). These elements of *okir* from where *Meranaw* traditional weaving artisans applied their designs are the *matilak*, *potyok*, *dapal* (raon), *pako*, *todi*, *pako longat*, *pako rai*, *naga* and *binitoon*. They favor two major colors such as yellow which stands for royalty and maroon red or alizarin crimson red, known to the *Meranaw* as *sutra* (Macarambon, October-December 1974). Below are samples of the old and traditional *Meranaw* traditional *balod* designs that present *Meranaw* weaving artisans no longer apply or include in their motifs or patterns.



Figure 9. One of the traditional *Meranaw* designs they call **Niyaga** whose root word is *naga* which means a serpent. The design is likened to a stylized snake or dragon and it takes several months for a weaver to finish such design.

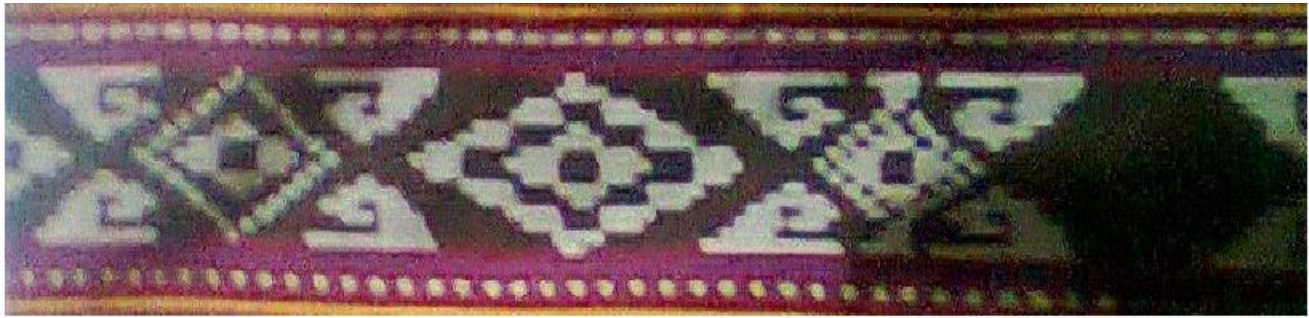


Figure 10. Meranaw Traditional balod design they call **Ongkop** depicting geometric patterns and design elements such as diamond or angular forms such as square and triangle that are expressive of arrested action attributed to the male. It is a very rare design that most of the present *pamamalod* refuses to make because of its intricacies.



Figure 11. Meranaw traditional *balod* design they call *Onsod*

4.6. The Meanings, Rituals, Beliefs and Practices Associated to the Meranaw Traditional *Balod* Technique in Weaving

Before the late expert weaver Hadji Hedjara (Pangcoga, 1995) passed away at the age of 90, she said that beginners are obliged to perform a very sacred series of rituals described by them as *di mbatonan* or *angay sa iroan*:

"...preparing two trays of foods consisting of yellow rice, cooked chicken, Meranaw sweetened pastries and cakes like dodol and amik, and two pieces of chicken eggs... The yellow rice is made into a crocodile-shaped figure, the two cooked chicken eggs as its eyes, the dodol as its arms and the amik as its scales...";

phurawatiban so Nabi Ibrahim: "... the two trays containing foods are with white cloth, followed by praying to Allah that the student shall be blessed with the blessings of knowledge upon Prophet Ibrahim and his descendant Fatima (the daughter of Prophet Mohammad) who are believed to be the originators of all male and female craftsmanship, respectively...";

and the kandori: "... the tuwan who performs the prayers, will receive dress, malong, P50.00 and one tray of foods...; those Meranaw sweetened pastrie will be given to neighborhood...; the remaining tray of foods will be eaten by the learner and not to offer this to anybody... The respondent added that these rituals are being kept secret because: ... if a lady or unmarried woman happens to witness the rituals, she may be impregnated...; and for a man to witness such rituals will cause his death... those that cannot learn such skills will suffer insanity or mental disorders, illnesses and difficulty in learning, especially if one refuses to perform such rituals

The respondent cited the case of her sister *Napsia*, who got sick when she declined to perform the rituals and the recovery of *Sanaoray* after she was smelling the scent of a burned scraps of an *iroa-an*.

4.7. Some Modifications and Innovations for the Preservation and Viability of the Meranaw Traditional *Balod* Technique in Weaving

Traditionally, the *Meranaws* are not open to new cultural elements. Their craftsmanship still remained original, very traditional or folkish and worst, neglected because of the remoteness, too warlike and too poor to attract people's interest from other places.

Research findings reveal that the *Meranaw* traditional *balod* technique in weaving is seemingly declining because of various reasons such as the dwindling number of skilled *Meranaw panganga-wl* and *pamamalod* due to deaths, old age, illness, loss of memory; the chain of passing down the traditional weaving craft through the generation was broken; many weaver artisans showed little interest in expanding their weaving industry; their children preferred to finish schooling and find new careers while others choose to venture into other businesses and shifted to other crafts ; a limited supply of essential raw materials like a thread; and the absence of capital and ready markets for their finished products.

But realizing the unavoidable decline of their weaving industry, the *Meranaws* weaving artisans made some changes and innovations in their weaving industry as reflected in their designs, colors, raw materials and usage of their *balod* hand woven fabrics. To save this seemingly diminishing weaving heritage, the *Meranaws* are now venturing into making innovative product designs with market relevance, as shown in Figure 13.



Functional Bags



Shoulder Bags



Organizers



Table Runners

Figure 12. Some of the new product designs using their hand-woven *balod* fabrics that can create new larger marketing opportunities for such products. The new generation of *Meranaw* weavers learned how to venture into products with market relevance.

New concept of converting these *balod* hand woven fabrics into more usable and functional items was accepted. Although the quality, texture and value of their products were affected by changing the kind of thread that are of low quality and cost, they have no choice otherwise their *balod* weaving industry would soon decline.

5. Conclusion

It can then be concluded that the *Meranaw balod* "tie-dye" weaving style is an ancient handicraft that has been practised for thousands, if not, millions of years in various parts of the globe like India, China and many parts of Asia, as evidenced by the use of different terminologies, all of which convey the same meaning which is the process of tying off areas or sections of the thread with strings, then immerse it with vats of dyes to make pattern or designs.

The *Meranaw* traditional *balod* technique in weaving must have been introduced by the Indonesians who learned it from India and the former introduced it to the *Meranaws*. This is supported by the similarity of meanings between *ikat* and *balod* which means to tie or bind (Charter, 2019). Although there are differences in the designs, motifs and colors but their weaving style and technique, the use of waist loom, the preparation and process are somewhat similar. However, whatever influences that the *Meranaws* got or borrowed from their neighboring countries, this was completely changed by their own artistic genius or ingenuity so that their masterpieces were something entirely new and different.

The *Meranaw* developed intricate and complicated designs out of their ingenuity, intelligence, creativity and they have been mastering this much-admired art form for a very long time. The *Meranaws* traditional weavers employ more or less the same universal principle of operation such as the beaming –on (*kasod*), shredding (*kapanongit*), picking step and the beating-up. As for the tie-dyeing aspect, the essential steps involved in the *Meranaw* traditional *balod* technique follow a common basic process like the stretching of the *tomadhung* into the *bidangan*; the wrapping/tying of these thread according to the

predetermined motifs or designs; tied thread is soaked into boiling water filled with dyes; when dried, the wrappings are removed and those that resisted the dyes emerged as the designs of the handwoven fabrics.

The *Meranaw* traditional weaving practices, in general, are accompanied by mythical performances, the ritual offerings to the spirits of all those women who may have originated weaving asking guidance to make the fingers nimble, the hands adroit and the mind creative, thus becoming a dexterous weaver. Descending from the originators of weaving is also considered otherwise, she will never learn the trade, suffer sickness, if not insanity for not finishing her weave, not interpret the designs correctly, or learn what does not pertain to her.

What contributed much to the viability of their weaving handicrafts were the passing down of such skill through the generations, the ingenuity, artistic genius, courage, tenacity of their culture bearers, and their venturing into new and innovative products for their market demands.

Reviving the *Meranaw* rich weaving tradition, including the *balod* weaving industry, can be realized if the following recommendations are considered. The chain of passing down such craftsmanship should not be broken. The village should encourage the weavers to branch out to new markets; the government and NGOs should provide assistance and support to the weavers on developing and brand-new product designs for larger market opportunities.

A cultural heritage center with advocacy of promoting and preserving Meranaw culture must be established. The setting-up of weaving centers or training centers where expert *Meranaw* weaving artisans are encouraged, with just compensation, teaches or trains beginners.

The *Meranaw pamamalod* has to be trained by product developers in order to innovate or develop new designs and motifs that can create new larger marketing opportunities for their finished products. Support and turn these women-weavers into economic assets, micro-entrepreneurs and micro-producers so that, in return, they can help lift other women up.

Finally, the researcher recommends a further study on other unexplored areas of the *Meranaw* weaving culture. The preservation of cultural heritage can be done by recording/documenting, archiving cultural materials, preserving it in living form, and ensuring its transmission to the next generation.

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