THE SOCIAL SYSTEMS IN EARLY BISAYAN MYTHOLOGY

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ABSTRACT

This is a descriptive study on literature using content analysis. It is based on the theory on literary research set by Altick and Fenstermaker (1993) for textual study and literary history. It aimed to examine the operating social systems within the texts of Early Bisayan mythology. The basic objectives of the study were to identify the components of power, kinship, territorial, proprietary, and value systems. Manuscripts of epics, myths, and legends were collected, read, and analyzed. Characters were identified and categorized. The Power system dominates Early Bisayan mythology. The concept of a supreme god and creator was consistently observed varying only in the names given to them. The supreme power is assigned to the elements of wind and water followed by deities called diwata in Hiligaynon. The kinship system permeates mythology, among the elements, deities, and mortals. The territorial system includes dominion over a certain element, part of nature, political division, or human host habitation by spirits. The proprietary system was moderately observed among mortals through the ownership of slaves and personal properties. The value system is dominant with a clear reference to right and wrong, reward and punishment. The highest value goes to obedience and industry being the ones that deities reward. The subjugation system, was also observed in the characters of monsters or creatures that a hero is expected to defeat to be worthy of his stature. On the whole, six social systems are active in Early Bisayan mythology involving deities, mortals and supernatural characters.

INTRODUCTION

Mythology appears to be a common literary experience in an era when nations were once disconnected from each other. In the western world, the Greeks (Hamilton, 1998; Buxton, 2004), Romans (Grueber, 1990; Fairbanks, 1907), and Egyptians (Hart, 1990) have extensive mythology systems. Greek Mythology is a set of diverse traditional tales about the exploits of gods and heroes and their relations with ordinary mortals in its pre-Christian era. Egyptian mythology is likewise a manifestation of ancient Egyptian religion, which is the succession of tentative beliefs held by the people of Egypt for over three thousand years, prior to major exposure to Christianity and Islam. Egyptian mythology is locality based wherein people of a certain area share the same beliefs like the Amun-Mut-Chons triad of Thebes, where the chief god was Amun Chons.

Roman mythology is a collection of various beliefs, rituals, and other observances concerning the practices by the ancient Romans from the legendary period until the arrival of Christianity. The original religion of the early Romans was so modified by the addition of numerous and conflicting beliefs in later times, and by the assimilation of a vast amount of Greek mythology (Rose, 1991)

Three cultures in Asia with known mythology systems are the Japanese (Azhkenazi, 2003), Chinese (Birrell,1999; Collier, 2003), and Hindu (Dimmit & Bernardus, 1978) Japanese mythology is a very complex system of beliefs arising from its two dominant religions, Shinto and Buddhism as well as some minority agriculture-based religion. Since China developed without a unifying religion, its mythology arose from a mixture of Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism to produce an uncertain mixture of gods for all occasions.

Hindu mythology details the lives and times of legendary personalities, deities and divine incarnations on earth interspersed with often large sections of philosophical and ethical discourse. It is heavily religion-based.

Ancient Philippine mythology varies among the many indigenous tribes and languages of the Philippines. Some tribes during the pre-Spanish conquest era believed in a single Supreme Being who created the world and everything in it, while others chose to worship a multitude of tree and forest deities (diwatas). The names of the Supreme Being vary with the languages in the regions.

Eugenio (2001, 2002) has anthologized most of the Philippine myths, legends and epics. Jocano (1958), on the other hand, made an extensive study of the mythology of the Sulod People of Central Panay. He identified three domains and a pantheon of deities headed by a male diwata known as Tungkung Langit. The most powerful of such deities had control over the elements of nature.

This study, which focuses on early Bisayan mythology is a continuing effort to systematize the characteristic features that are to be found in traditional Hiligaynon literature, a part of which is found in the Misajon anthology (2006) entitled Inventory of Extant and Extinct Traditional Literature In Western Visayas Area I (Iloilo, Antique, and Guimaras).

The framework of this research comes from the book The Art of Literary Research. Authors Altick and Fenstermaker (1993) say that literary research may develop into five areas. This study followed two of these namely, textual study and literary history. Textual study is purely on the meaning, structure and techniques of the text. No outside-of-the-text factors are considered to bring light into the text. It is content analysis involving only the manuscript. Literary history touches on the collection of ideas, arts, habits or the milieu of the literature at the time of its creation.

The body of manuscripts from which the study of Early Bisayan mythology was observed includes two parts of the epic Hinilawod. Hinilawod is a collection of epics of the Sulod People in central Panay as chanted by Ulang Udig and Hugan-an and recorded and translated into English by Felipe Landa Jocano. Of the vast collection of Hinilawod, only the adventures of Labaw Donggon and Humadapnon were included in this study. Hinilawod provided 10,630 verse lines for the study. The rest are myths and legends from the various areas of the pre-Spanish Bisayan region to include Panay, Negros, Cebu, Samar, Bohol and Leyte. A few categories and their respective titles are as follows: Cosmogony , The Story of Creation (Visayan) ; Origin of Mankind, The First Man and Woman (Panay - Yligueynes) ; Origin of the Early Bisayans , Ancient Panay and its Inhabitants ; and Origin of Land forms, Legend of Hari sa Boqued (Visayan). The finished research report provides a listing of all these categories and titles.

Several manuscripts were taken from secondary sources, (Magos, 1978;   Maxfield & Millington, 1906; Siscar, 1958; Buyser, 1916; & Narboneta, 1959) which are masters theses on Bisayan folktales and legends. Others, were translations (Robertson, undated) and studies of

translations (Ignacio, 1951) of the manuscripts of Jose Maria Pavon, a secular priest, who came to the Philippines in 1810 from Spain. Father Pavon was the cura insular for Himamaylan in 1849 and was believed to be a historian first and a priest next and thus had access to the works of Spanish historians Miguel de Loarca, Diego de Povedano, and Father Francisco Deza, a Jesuit stationed in Iloilog in the 17th century. Some were from the ethnographic works of Felipe Landa Jocano and the microfiche file of Henry Otley Beyer in the National Library.

The search for manuscripts from the above sources was limited to Bisayan mythology prior to the arrival of the Spaniards with priority on translations of Hiligaynon literature. Only legends, epics and narratives were chosen.

The conclusions of this study are with limitations as they are based on very specific literature. The further inclusion of a legend or epic may disprove this study's claims. English which is the language of all manuscripts also presented a limitation. Translation is a cause for error due to the changing of words and structure for the translator's desire to make the material more cogent. The works of the early Spanish chroniclers also had to go through multiple translations, from the original oral indigenous version to Spanish, from Spanish to Hiligaynon and finally to English. The use of educated or so called "university" or literary English for the folktale speaks of the corruption of the original.

On the whole, the findings on the social systems in mythology will contribute to new knowledge primarily in Philippine literature and secondarily, to the social sciences.

Objectives of the Study

This study was conducted to identify the social systems in Early Bisayan mythology.

Specifically, the study aimed
1. to identify the components of the following systems:
    a. power
    b. kinship
    c. proprietary
    d. territorial
    e. value
2. to document any other system that may be observed in the study.

METHODOLOGY

This research is primarily a descriptive study on literature and followed the process of content or information analysis. According Eisenberg and Berkowitz (1990) the "big skills" in solving information problems follow five steps: analysis, development of strategy, location of information, using the information and synthesizing the information.

The search for manuscripts for this study led to the internet and the libraries of Central Philippine University, University of San Agustin, Iloilo City, Iloilo Province, the National Library, National Archives. The available literature at the UP Visayas Center for Western Visayas Studies was also examined.

The manuscripts were read to determine whether or not they qualified as data source using period indicators (Misajon, 2006). The internal indicators like names of characters, and cultural references determined whether or not the manuscripts were classifiable as Early Bisayan. For example if the legend spoke about a datu, which is part of the Bornean culture, then it was included as part of the corpus.

Also, footnote citations from secondary sources clearly identified which manuscripts were taken from the translations of the collection of indigenous manuscripts of Pavon and de Povedano.

There were two rounds in the reading of the manuscripts for content comprehension. The third reading of the manuscript was to identify the characters of the manuscripts and their relationship with one another and observe the social systems set by the objectives.

RESULTS

The corpus of manuscripts is made up of one epic, 39 legends and one folktale. Hinilawod, the only epic studied yielded 10, 630 verse lines for study. From these the social systems as set in the objectives were observed.

The Power System was observed to dominate early Bisayan mythology. Perceived to have the highest power over the lives of all characters are the natural elements of air and water. They pre-existed all,

concept of power blends deity and elements, calling them as gods. From the collection of literature, the gender of gods were initially nebulous but eventually distinguished as male and female. Some legends describe them as elements of sea and land, air, some as land and sea and some as human in form and behavior. The pantheon of deities of Early Bisayan Mythology ascribes the highest power to Kaptan and Maguayen while the rest of the gods and goddesses exercise their elemental power over mortals. They are collectively referred to as "the gods of Madia-as".

The concept of diminishing elemental power cascades to the other characters of early Bisayan mythology. The concept of political power is introduced with the culture of datus and rulers. The attempt to tap on the elemental power dominates the lives of the babaylans or spirit media as they unite with spirits to do supernatural feats. Power is ascribed to certain animals to the point of deification like the bird Manaul, referred to as the King of the Air and Lord of the Birds who guided the destiny of space. Monsters and Giants are likewise perceived to be powerful necessitating sorcery to defeat them.

The Kinship System is the second system observed with three dominant veins:
1. Spousal Kinship which refers to the marriage between two parties or characters in mythology. The earliest reference to a spousal relationship is between the elements, the marriage of the sea breeze and the land breeze;
2. Parental Kinship which is the relationship between a parent and an offspring; and
3. Sibling Kinship which refers to relationships shared by two or more characters having the same parents.

The study of the parental kinship system revealed parenting categories and manners of reproductions. There are three parenting categories observed: among deities, among mortals and deities thus producing demigods, and across species, e.g., plants giving birth to mortals. The manners of procreation are through body parts, e.g., from the finger tips of the first man and woman, pigs and deer were born; through the genitals; and through supernatural means for example, Dumalapdap was born on a plate through a ritual.

The Territorial System pervades early Bisayan mythology in the lives and behavior of the characters. These territorial systems can be classified as: 1. Elemental Territory wherein deities are known for the elements that they control like the land or sea breezes or the part of nature that they dominate like the sky or plains or an expertise in human life, e.g., happy

homes; 2. Political Territory wherein a specific land area is assigned to a datu as a monarch with servants and slaves that belong to him. His identification is complete only with reference to his territory, e.g., Datu Maalam of Kalipayan; 3. Locational Territory wherein certain creatures, perceived as monsters, guard specified areas, e.g; Balanakon, a two-headed monster which guards a narrow ridge leading to Tarambuan-ka-banwa; and 4. Host Inhabitation Territory wherein spirit beings inhabit a host in the form of the babaylan to be able to do certain tasks.

Proprietary System or the ownership system was also observed especially among deities, mortals or across character categories. Among royalty, a daughter is dispensed with like property by giving her as a reward to someone who has successfully accomplished a difficult task. A very strong and irretractable Value System permeates early Bisayan mythology.

Starting with the original occupants of the world when it was just nothing but void, strong values determining what is right or wrong already existed. Obedience and industry are the traits that have supreme values. These are observable in the lives of deities and mortals. The opposite of these justify punishment and great personal tragedy like the supreme god Kaptan who punished his own children because of their rebellion against him.

Subjugation is another system observed to recur in mythology. It involves a hero in combat with a monster, wherein his conquest of the said creature elevates his status and worthiness as a hero. The observed manners of subjugation are 1. Exceptional human skills as in the killing of the monster Manalintad, and 2. Power of sorcery as in the use of magic daggers and strong charms. Subjugation merits a reward in mythology.

DISCUSSION

The existence of the six systems: power, kinship, territorial, proprietary, value, and subjugation point to the humanity of this body of literature. Man himself, as the story teller, the speaker of tales, or the recorder of legends, may have commented on the various facets of his milieu but has interpreted them from his perspective as a human being. Thus, the assignation of power to the elements and deities who ruled supreme are merely reflections of his own perception of his weaknesses at certain historical points of life. Family relationships are the main reference points of man outside of himself. Territorial and proprietary

systems point to an expanded concept of man to include space and objects related to him. A strong value system for a variety of aspects in life points to a clear feature that the Early Bisayans of the pre-Christian era had a strong concept of what is right or wrong, what is worthy of reward or punishment, and what merits emulation or destruction. It also supports the spiritual nature of man that is desirous of connecting with the spirit world to transcend the natural boundaries of his humanity. The subjugation system reveals a great dependence on sorcery in becoming a hero.

On the whole, this study reveals a very strong, even uncanny similarity to the power and territorial systems of Greek, Roman and Egyptian mythologies. This study aligns Early Bisayan mythology with the structure and characteristics of the mythologies identified by Hamilton (1998), Fairbanks (1907), and Hart (1990). This differs from the information provided by Eugenio (2001, 2002) with its content analysis of texts and Jocano (1958) by making generalizations beyond the mythology of the Sulod people alone to the greater Bisayan region.

CONCLUSIONS

This research on Early Bisayan mythology started with the investigation of the five social systems of power, kinship, territorial, proprietary and values. A sixth system, subjugation, was also observed to exist.

Of the six systems, power and kinship dominate both deities and mortal characters. The territorial system takes a variety of spatial occupation from elemental, localized area, to human host inhabitation. The subjugation system is task specific and observable in the many adventures of folk heroes. The value system permeates mythology establishing a clear standard for what is right or wrong, good or bad, and worthy of reward or punishment for the early Bisayans. Proprietary system is moderately observed in personal properties and among royalty.

The following can be concluded from the study:

1. There are six active social systems in the early Bisayan mythology namely: power, kinship, territorial, proprietary, values and subjugation.

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2. The power system is the most dominant of the systems.
3. Sorcery plays a key role in the practice of these systems.
4. The Early Bisayans had a strong sense of right and wrong.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this research, the following are recommended
1. Further research a similar study on the mythology of other Philippine languages;
2. Make a comparative study with Greek, Roman or Egyptian mythology; and,
3. Conduct further studies on the extent of sorcery on Early Bisayan culture.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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