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## THE PORTRAIT OF FILIPINAS IN SELECTED PHILIPPINE FOLK SONGS

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### **Abstract:**

This study aimed to draw the portrait of the Filipinas through folksongs from the different regions of the Philippines. Specifically, this study was conducted to answer the questions: (1) What are the characteristics of Filipinas based on the folksongs? (2) Why was Filipina defined as maid in the 1990s? This study utilized retrieval process, Functional-Flexible translation approach (Sabio, 2016) and Reflexive-Refracton Theory (Hosillo, 2006), textual, extra-textual and textual-historical analyses of the folksongs. Five (5) folksongs retrieved from different parts of the Philippines were used in the analysis. The folksongs represented five indigenous and ethnic groups from Southern Tagalog, Nueva Ecija, Bohol, Antique and Echague. They were chosen for their themes and topics focusing on women characteristics. The Functional-Flexible approach of translation used to translate the folksongs has six (6) steps, namely, source language, the texts, transferring, transposition, restructuring and target language. The lyrics of the folksongs were analyzed and common themes were extracted. It was gleaned from the study that Filipinas possessed the same general characteristics regardless of ethnicity. Simplicity, honesty, integrity, industry, hard-work, sincerity among other virtues worthy of emulation were the general descriptions of Filipinas based on the results of the study. These innate nature of Filipinas were also the qualifications that made them in demand as maids during the influx of domestic helpers abroad in the 1990s which led to the definition of the word Filipina as maid by an Italian dictionary.

**Introduction:**

Cabanban (1999) described the Filipinas (Filipino women) during the Spanish colonial rule in the Philippines through the eyes of Doctor Antonio de Morga, a royal official of Spain stationed in Manila, ‘as good-looking and graceful with light brown complexion, hair usually long and drawn at the back of the head. They had dignified carriage. The women of the upper class walked slowly, attended by their servants. Their costume was made of either cotton or silk. They were fond of jewelry and wore different kinds – gold necklaces, rings, earrings, and bracelets. They were very clean and neat in their persons and clothing, and of pleasing address and grace. If they were fastidious about their personal cleanliness, the Filipinas were even more so about their homes, which were clean and orderly. Chastity was highly prized and any man who was caught violating a woman was punished cruelly (p.7).’

This description of de Morga was reiterated and confirmed in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century by a certain Fray Gaspar de San Agustin, a prominent Agustinian friar and historian, assigned to the islands who spoke highly of the character of the Filipino women. He wrote that ‘they were pure and honorable, and that they abhorred obscene talk. Insulting a woman of rank was considered a crime and the culprit was condemned to slavery. The friar was equally impressed by their industry. He further wrote that ‘the women are very devout, and in every way of good habit. The cause for this is that they are kept so subject and so closely occupied; for they do not lift their hands from their work (p. 7).’

Another Spanish writer, Sinibaldo de Mas by name, observed that Filipino women were highly respected by men, because they were modest and reserved. Native custom and tradition also assigned to the mother the teaching of her children.

‘The ancient Filipinos apparently recognized the equality of man and woman. Even in their folklore about the origin of man – among which is a popular tale where the first male and the first female emerged simultaneously from the split halves of a bamboo pole – this idea could be discerned (Cabanban, 1999).’

Women played a vital role in economic life and in the society as a whole. In addition to their daily chores, ‘they carried on such household industries as weaving, poultry and hog raising, as well as heavy work of pounding rice. On the farm, women were partners with the menfolk in planting and harvesting (p.8).’

Despite the widely-held image of the Filipino women as docile and subservient, they occupied a high social position. They enjoyed a large measure of freedom, enabling them to participate in social economic and political activities. They commanded the respect of the men, they were amply protected by indigenous laws, and they possessed civil and political rights (p. 8).’

In 1998, a Greek dictionary defined Filipina as maid. Filipinos all over the world complained about this and the Philippine government demanded the publisher to delete and rectify the definition as it was degrading and demeaning (New Straits Times, August 12, 1998).

During this time, there was a demand for Filipinas to work as domestic helpers abroad, especially in Hongkong. Young Filipinas, educated or not, were hired as house helps. Employers abroad

prefer Filipinas because they are trustworthy, hardworking, industrious, honest, and conscientious with their work.

### **Objectives of the Study:**

This study threshed out the characteristics of the Filipina maidens in the Philippines through their folksongs. It also intended to promote and celebrate regional folk literature through the study of folksongs.

Consequently, the folksongs were translated into English for comprehension and appreciation using a Functional-Flexible Approach (Sabio, 2016).

This study also aimed to create a unique story of women as belonging to different tribal and indigenous groups to draw a national portrait of a Filipina. Specifically, this study was conducted to answer the questions: (1) What are the characteristics of Filipinas based on the folksongs? (2) Why was Filipina defined as maid in the 1990s?

### **Materials and Methods:**

This study is comprised of five (5) folksongs from different parts of the Philippines. These folksongs represent five indigenous and ethnic groups that abound the Philippine Archipelago. They came from Southern Tagalog, Nueva Ecija, Bohol, Antique and Echague. The songs were so chosen for their themes and topics focused on women.

Four of the folksongs used for this study were taken from the ‘Himig A Collection of Philippine Folksongs Volume 4 published in 1999. All these folksongs were already translated into English. These include AngDalagangPilipina (The Filipina Maiden), Ilocana (An Ilocano Speaking Woman), DalagangTagabukid (The Country Maiden), and AngMgaDalaga (These Maidens).

The Yogad folksong titled Yu Lappao (The Flower) was retrieved and translated by the researchers as part of a dissertation. The process of translation resulted in building a Functional-Flexible approach of translating the indigenous language, Yogad (Source Language) into English (Target Language) following six (6) steps namely: Source Language, The Texts, Transferring, Transposition, Restructuring and Target Language.

The Reflexive-Refraction Theory of Hosillo (2006) which proposed for the retrieval, preservation and development of the ethnic/tribal/vernacular literature that should be the criteria of national literature was utilized for textual, extra-textual and textual-historical analyses of the folksongs.

### **Results and Discussion:**

When there is gap and discrepancy in historical information, the best source of facts that prove the claims of historians could be the folklore of the nation. Through folk studies, gaps could be bridged, discrepancies could be counter-checked, information could be obtained to establish and to straighten historical facts and information. Folksongs as big part of the oral lore bear customs and traditions that mirror the milieu, the people and the cultural heritage of a nation.

The corpus in this study was taken as “cultural texts”. Geertz’s semiotic approach to ethnographic analysis construes culture as a “text, something to be read and interpreted. Also present in this

rendering of social action as a document is the primordial meaning of ‘text’ as something woven, the idea of culture as an intricate ‘fabric of meaning’(Makaryk, I. 1993, p. 331).

Each of the folksongs in this study was read, analyzed and interpreted individually threshing out the characteristics of Filipino woman as pictured in the texts. These images and depictions of a Filipino woman were used to draw the portrait of Filipinas – plural of Filipino woman – which could also be taken as the country, the Philippines.

Filipinas has more than 150 indigenous tribes with distinct customs and traditions, cultural practices and customary laws governed by a respected leader. Each of these ethnic/tribal groups has their own indigenous language, most of which are now rapidly vanishing because of social and economic development. Some were already assimilated by more dominant indigenous communities.

Here are the folksongs and the stories they tell:

AngDalagangPilipina (The Filipina Maiden)  
A Folksong from the Southern Tagalog Region

AngdalagangPilipina  
Mahinhingmahinhin at maganda  
Makahiyaangkapara,  
Mahiyainsiya.

The Filipina maiden  
So very demure and lovely  
Like the makahiya  
She is bashful.

Hm, ‘di agad-agadmapasasagot  
Angpag-ibigmo’ysinisubok  
At pagkaika’y nakitangtapat  
Mamahalinkahanggangwakas.

She cannot be easily won  
Your love she first tests  
And when you are proven true  
She will love you till the end.

This Tagalog folksong tells a story of a young, lovely, and demure woman who is compared to a makahiya (bashful) plant whose leaves instantly fold in seeming modesty when touched. In this folksong, Filipinas are shy-type maidens but are very loyal, sincere and honest.

Ilocana (Ilocano Speaking Woman)  
A Folksong from Nueva Ecija)

Awan ngatantibabae a naidumduma,  
Kinagagetkinasingpet ken kina emma.  
Awan ngatannadalaluspanagpuspusona  
No saan a niIlocana a daydayawenda.

No woman can compare  
Hardworking, virtuous, and modest.  
No one is purer in heart  
Than the Ilocana who is respected.

Ta Ilocanatinatarnaw a pagsarmingan,  
Dagitiisuamin, a babaedito’ypagilian,  
Ta naimbag a galadtiindasin alimetmetan.  
Tarnawurna a uonglakettiindanagtuladan,

Because the Ilocana is a clear image  
Of all women in the land,  
Because of the good traits that they uphold  
(Like) a treasure chest that they emulate,

Ta Ilocanatuladan.

The Ilocana is to be emulated.

This Ilocano folksong declares with pride the incomparable traits of Ilocana: hardworking, virtuous, modest and pure of heart. They are often emulated due to these positive character traits.

DalagangTagabukid (The Country Maiden)  
A Folksong from Bohol

Angdalagangtagabukid,  
Dili mahibalongmamisti,  
Angilangpanyougtapis  
Kanunayibilikis.

The country maiden  
Is modest in her dress  
She wears her kerchief and an overskirt  
Tied to her skirt.

Konsila ay manglakaw  
Walangkutsougsinilas,  
Angilangtiil way hapin  
Nag untas s aka pobrehon.

When she goes walking  
She is without kutsoor slippers  
She goes barefoot  
Suffering in poverty.

Ay, pagkapaitgayud  
Sa kahintangniadtong  
Dalagangatagabukid  
Hubosakalipay,  
Hubosapamisti,  
Apankonsiya'y mobati,  
Matuodgayud.

Oh, how bitter indeed  
Is the life of  
The country maiden  
Deprived of joy,  
Deprived of ornaments to wear.  
But when she smiles,  
How sincere and true.

Angdalagangbukid  
Dili paghingkalimtan  
Matamismobati  
Hangtudsalubnganan.

The country maiden  
You cannot forget  
Her sweet smile  
Lingers until her dying day

This folksong spins the tale of a selfless woman from the countryside. This maiden's life is deprived of material wealth, but is true and sincere. Although life for her is bitter, she suffers in silence and never without her sweetest smile which perseveres until death.

AngMgaDalaga (These Maidens)  
A Folksong from Antique

Ang manga dalaga  
konmagpakaulay  
Mabuotkagsampaton  
Sa hilikutonsabalay

These maidens of our land  
May remain single till the end  
They do household work faithfully  
And choose their errands wisely.

Bisinsiyaimot  
Maitomkagmalaway  
Mataasngabulawan

They may be humble and poor  
Dark in complexion, of short stature  
But like genuine gold we value

## Angimokaangay

Apangkonalabilabihonhayas-hayas  
 Kagmalalison  
 Bisannaputikagmaambongacoro  
 Guidngamanabaangiyakasubong.

And give a worth that is due.

Though one may be fair and beautiful  
 If she is aloof and not cheerful  
 I would not exchange myself with her  
 Although I may be poor and shorter.

Pictured in this folksong are maidens who are faithful to their household work. Although they lack fairness on physical attributes, their worth is that of pure gold, genuine and true.

## Yu Lappao (The Flower)

A Yogad Folksong from the Cagayan Valley

Dyesaw, O Nenang  
 Futucumattangi-tangit  
 Bangung-nguyalappao  
 Acurugamaquemmemmi  
 SimannukaddaNenang  
 Yu daguiraguing nu futu  
 Bigadyamepatay  
 Sicalammunyumacabannay

Here I am, Oh Nenang  
 My heart constantly bleeds  
 Your fragrance as flower  
 Is truly very sweet  
 Listen, would you Nenang  
 The miseries of my heart  
 A wound that is fatal  
 Only you could heal

Mabelingyuagguyuguyuan nu  
 Nicanmaguimamat  
 Neyarigtubalsamo  
 Ammalibroyaoyugacocu  
 Caddaallannaneturac ay yungagan nu  
 Ay yungagan nu

Prim are your ways  
 To me that sees you  
 You're likened to a balm  
 If my chest were a book  
 On all its pages  
 Your name would be written

Kadakwerdas nu gitarako  
 Ay kallat pa nu pobregaco cu  
 Yu tannongngayasiman nu  
 Ay ngaral pa nu pobreyafutu cu  
 Bulunna nu luakosilasigakkanna no  
 digatko  
 Yamangibuladtuallangan nu  
 Tusiggaimfunyaanggamcu

Every string of my guitar  
 Is vein of my poor throat  
 Its sound that you hear  
 Is the voice of my poor heart  
 Accompanied by tears and sobs of my  
 heartaches  
 Laying all cards in front of you  
 The love I always carry for you

Ammanidomatyuassisim cu  
 Tukattuaggalallak nu  
 Sotudigarigakko  
 Gloria awantugindana  
 Lappawtuagideddan nu  
 Ay sumigasigam – sumigasigam.

When would I ever hear you  
 Declare that you pity me  
 My deepest longings for you  
 Would see through glorious eternity  
 The fragrant flowers where you lay  
 Continuously pervades my senses.

This Yogad folksong tells about the story of Nenang through the eyes of her suitor. Nenang is described as a beautiful and prim maiden, fragrant as flower. A person to be called beautiful possesses cleanliness inside and out.

Filipinas, women from the Philippines or Filipino women, was defined as maids in a Greek dictionary in 1998. This became a big controversy where the Philippine government had to demand that the definition be rectified or the entry be removed from the dictionary. The then Philippine Education Minister Andrew Gonzalez said that the definition is linguistically accurate no matter how much it hurts because it captures social reality. Gonzalez explained that the exodus of millions of Filipinas especially to Hongkong to become maids or domestic helpers caused the definition to be socially relevant. 'Dictionaries are not prescriptive, they describe the natural uses of what the people think of certain words. It is not what is fitting. It's what actually exists,' (New Straits Times, August 12, 1998).

Employers abroad hire Filipinas because of their positive attributes and dependable qualities. Filipinas are hardworking, industrious, prim, beautiful, fragrant, sincere, genuine, honest and productive. They take care of their houses, keep them clean and orderly. These are the very attributes of maidens and maids in general. The Filipina maids overseas are in demand due to these very characteristics the Filipina maidens also possess.

However, the Greek dictionary's basis of defining Filipina as maid is incomplete and not comprehensive. It failed to look into the whole and complete social scenario that although there are quite a number of Filipinas serving or working as maids, there are also quite a number of Filipinas who hold top political positions, head huge business conglomerates and multi-national corporations both in and outside of the Philippines.

Looking at the descriptions of Filipinas as maidens from the point-of-view of the Spaniards in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the images sung by our forefathers of the young Filipino maidens through their folksongs and the short-lived definition of a Greek dictionary of the Filipinas seemed to be consistent only in their innate nature. It is inappropriate, degrading and illogical to define Filipina as maid because not all Filipinas are maid.

### **Conclusion and Implications:**

Folksongs reflect the lore, culture and history of a tribe or a group where they belong. As part of oral tradition, folksongs were handed down from one generation to another. It is inevitable that the words of the folksongs may have been changed over time and that some variants could have been produced. However, the essence and the main topics and subjects of the folksongs remain the same.

The folksongs used in this study were from different regional tribes and indigenous groups. The portrayal of the Filipinas as maidens was almost the same. The consistency of the image, description and characterization of the Filipina maidens is evident. These attributes and behaviors emphasized by the folk singers in the olden times are the same attributes and behavior that the colonizers had observed during the Spanish Occupation in the country.

Due to the influx of Filipina domestic helpers overseas, Filipina was defined as maid in a Greek dictionary. It is a social fact that Filipinas are known to be the best maids in the world as attested by the demand of Filipina domestic helpers abroad.

Based on the above discussions, there is a parallel truth and consistency in the definition, description and portrayal of Filipinas as maidens and maids. Filipinas as maidens are hardworking, trustworthy, sincere, dependable, industrious, honest, prim, clean, patient, nurturing, and beautiful in their ways and their behavior as described by the Spaniards and celebrated in Philippine folksongs. Filipinas as maids possess the same characteristics as the maidens. It is because of these positive traits and attributes that they are in demand as domestic helpers abroad.

Filipinas is a powerhouse of maidens and “maids”. The definition of Filipinas as maids, although inappropriate and illogical, should not be taken negatively for it is not only based on social reality, but also on the innate nature of Filipinas in general. It should be taken as an accolade to the true meaning of Filipinas as maidens, that of simplicity, honesty, integrity, industry, hard-work, sincerity among other virtues worthy of emulation.

### **Recommendations:**

Folklore and women studies in the Philippines are sparse. Government agencies should encourage researchers to explore this field by funding them.

A follow-up study on this should be made to explore other materials where Filipina is defined as maid such as textbooks in Hongkong, news articles that discussed this issue and other documents online and include interview of informants as data-gathering tool.

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