

Early Craft Forms of the Philippines: A Source for Functional Design

by Jose T. Joya

Design in arts and crafts connotes a historical process. Visual forms or pictorial recordings of the development of a country's arts and crafts could provide its people a sense of pride. It is part of their historical and cultural development.

For this reason, a collection of representative visual forms in arts and crafts, from the earliest times to the present, must be done. In the Philippines, the systematic gathering of ancient specimens and artifacts was quite a problem. The process depended heavily on the anthropological and even ethnological findings of the early Philippine colonizers, especially Spanish friars, European and American field researchers and workers.

But chance also entered at times, uncovering superb pieces with outstanding design qualities. Among these discoveries are early ceramics, metal crafts from Mindanao, burial urns, some Igorot artifacts and personal ornaments belonging to non-Christian Filipinos.

A high degree of sophistication is evident in some of the early Filipino arts and crafts gathered, particularly in the potteries. There are some differences in the basic forms of Philippine potteries but the ancient ones found are mostly burial articles

or carry-to-the-next-life furnishings.

Several of these potteries have elegant and graceful forms, bearing patterns with Chinese influence. Incision of lines or applique rope patterns are incorporated as part of the ornamentation. But what is more striking is their structural forms which include the thickness of the ancient pottery pieces.

The relationship of the shapes and the gradation of thickness from the base to the lid is one striking feature of early Philippine pottery. This indicates the artisan's sound knowledge of structural design. Ornamentation was reduced to simple patterns, utilized merely to enhance the pottery pieces.

Design modification depended perhaps on the skills of the artisans. Inspiration for pottery-making designs, particularly the vessel forms, were mostly derived from fruits, such as the squash; stylized human forms such as a woman's bust; or even near abstract interpretations of the human body. Stylized animal shapes were also utilized as structural forms.

Popular ornamentations used in ancient pottery-making were incisions, parallel, zigzag patterns, or free flowing scroll shapes. However, overall ornaments, we note today, are



dots, short spike-like patterns and radical lines simulating sun rays or leaf hearts. Many of the early potteries served as ceremonial vessels, like chalice pieces and containers with supports bearing Roman-like crosses.

Pre-Hispanic potteries were, at times, very crude. But from the standpoint of design they outshine modern potteries in simplicity, elegance, and sheer beauty. Expanded trade with mainland Asia diminished the production of local potteries. Superior porcelain wares and other brown stonewares eventually became popular. Then extensive trade marked the decline of indigenous Philippine pottery types.



Left: An old Maranao royal house showing its rich decorative motifs. Niaga and floral patterns are intricately ornamented on both sides of the structure. Each central motif is symbolical and meaningful to the cultural life of the people of Marawi City, a Filipino Muslim land in Mindanao, Philippines.

The human figure, as a thematic focus, engaged the ancient Filipino artists and artisans. They used it mostly as religious or ceremonial symbols. This overriding consideration was evident in the plastic execution of sculptural figures as well as two-dimensional or graphic representations. A human figure was seldom made without any reference to a nonritual or religious experience. On the other hand, human or anthropomorphic forms were less frequently used than vegetal or geometric motifs.

One of the earliest and finest examples of the human sculptural form are the boatmen on the

Manunggul jar. The two boatmen figures are part of a burial jar cover found in the Tabon cave. The jar is dated some time from 890 to 710 B.C. The two sculptural forms represent boatmen sailing on the symbolic ship of the dead. The whole scene represents the ancient Filipino belief in man's passage to the afterworld.

The boatmen on the jar cover are archaic and crudely modelled with mere anatomical suggestions. Facial features are merely shallow excavations. And the treatment of these figures contrast sharply with the finer rendition of the decorative patterns found on the cover and jar shoulders.

Its ornamentation consists of simple perforations between cut leaf-like motifs which resemble okir motifs.

Other outstanding samples of stone sculptures are the prehistoric jars found during the 1960s. They were discovered in two ancient burial sites found in caves located in Southern Cotabato. These sites yielded, among other artifacts, jars made of limestone and clay. The lids of these jars contain a number of human and anthropomorphic figures.

The figures in the lids of the jars vary in size, stance, and expression. No distinct mark of stylization seem to have been followed. They are either in full or bust length. And their positions as well as their facial expressions vary. They represent the social status and the sexes of those buried.

Likewise, representative human figures on the jar covers exhibit similar plastic traits: crudeness in the anatomical rendering sometimes resulting to distortion. In spite of the apparent similarity in modelling or sculpting techniques, there seems to be no conscious attempt to stylize.

The jars are decorated at the lower sides with fluting, honeycomb designs and other wave-like motifs. These motifs are attributed to a group of Malayo-Polynesians, who passed through the southern islands sometime around the first half of the second millennium.



figure, when it occurs, is often stylized or conventionalized into patterns with pronounced geometric character.

Among the Mandayas the human form attains a highly abstracted form while retaining some recognizable body parts. They still proceed further into elaborate geometric configurations, obscuring the original anthropomorphic characteristics of the figures.

In these patterns there is a predominance of angular or rectilinear forms. The forms are punctuated by curvilinear shapes relieving the austerity of the lines. These are rhythmically repeated as found in most decorative designs on cloth materials, potteries, or basketries.

The Bukidnons, also people

Stone sculptures also appeared in other archaeological sites. For instance, in Calatagan, Batangas a number of stone figures known as *likha* were found. They perhaps represent a form of pre-Spanish Filipino god or deity. In technical quality, these figures are similar to those found in the Cotabato caves. Although the *likha* are crude with minimum anatomical details abstraction may not be the objective of these designs.

In the southern provinces of Mindanao, tribes like the Bagobos, Mandaya, Bilaon, and Manobo incorporate the human figure in their weavings, beadworks and embroideries. But the lack or absence of human sculptural forms is notable.

In the older times stone or wood carving, among these tribes, was not a developed craft. The human

Left : A newly discovered ancient clay water container showing the versatility of its form. Attached are four legs, allowing it to stand flatly on plain surface.



An ancient goblet made of baked but unglazed clay. It shows Philippine pre-historic pottery at its most graceful and at its most sensible utilitarianism.

from the south, seldom make use of the human figure. And when they do, they reduce this form to an animal-like motif. The tendency to make geometric and abstract forms may be due to the limitations set by tools available. For instance, in weaving, forms are limited to the angular or rectilinear motifs due to the very nature of weaving. Yarn woofs and warps form angles rather than circles.

The non-Christian tribes in the Philippines lived according to their distinctive life styles. A full understanding of their design approach may teach aesthetic concepts that may enrich artistic resources. Therefore, a record of the outstanding design qualities made by non-Christian tribes may be of great use. They may even improve the design of everyday articles and then, in this manner, reinforce the Philippines' national identity.

Designers of yesteryears had fully understood their needs. Their design solutions were direct answers to pressing problems. Forms directly followed the function of the articles in question. Their sophistication applied to the use of design according to function.

Basketry well represents the use of design according to function. Baskets, in the olden days, were for specific uses such as containers for fish catches and as cages. The use of thick delicate materials conformed to the parts of the basket.

Similarly, decorations and embellishments used in the early days were made according to the limitations and possibilities of the chosen materials. There was intelligent and judicious use of available materials, satisfying the inner need for expression.

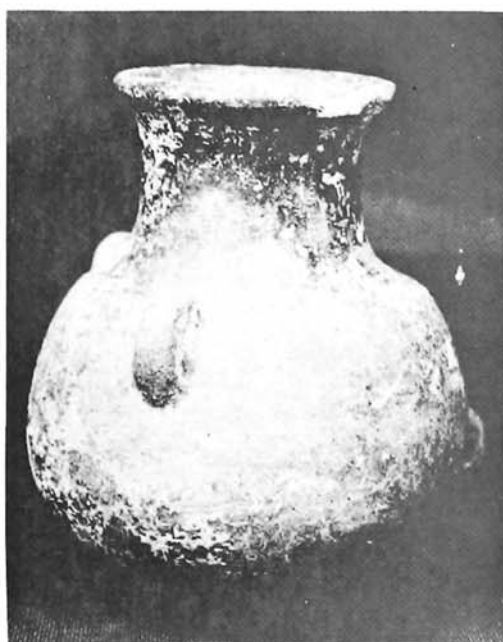
Filipino craftsmen today, particularly the lowlanders, suffer in

comparison. True enough, the skill is there. But cultural acclimatization to full western influences has not yet been accomplished. And the result is a kind of aesthetic dislocation.

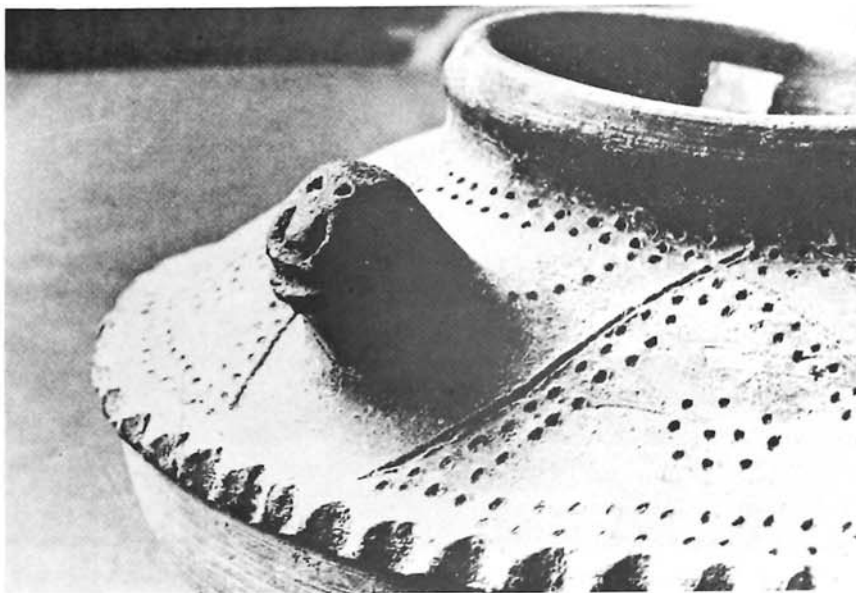
To remedy this aesthetic dislocation, it is necessary to expose contemporary Filipino craftsmen to the design sophistication of their earlier counterparts. They should know how the designs of earlier

craftsmen grew from the perfect symbiotic relationship of man and his environment, resulting to satisfactory design statements.

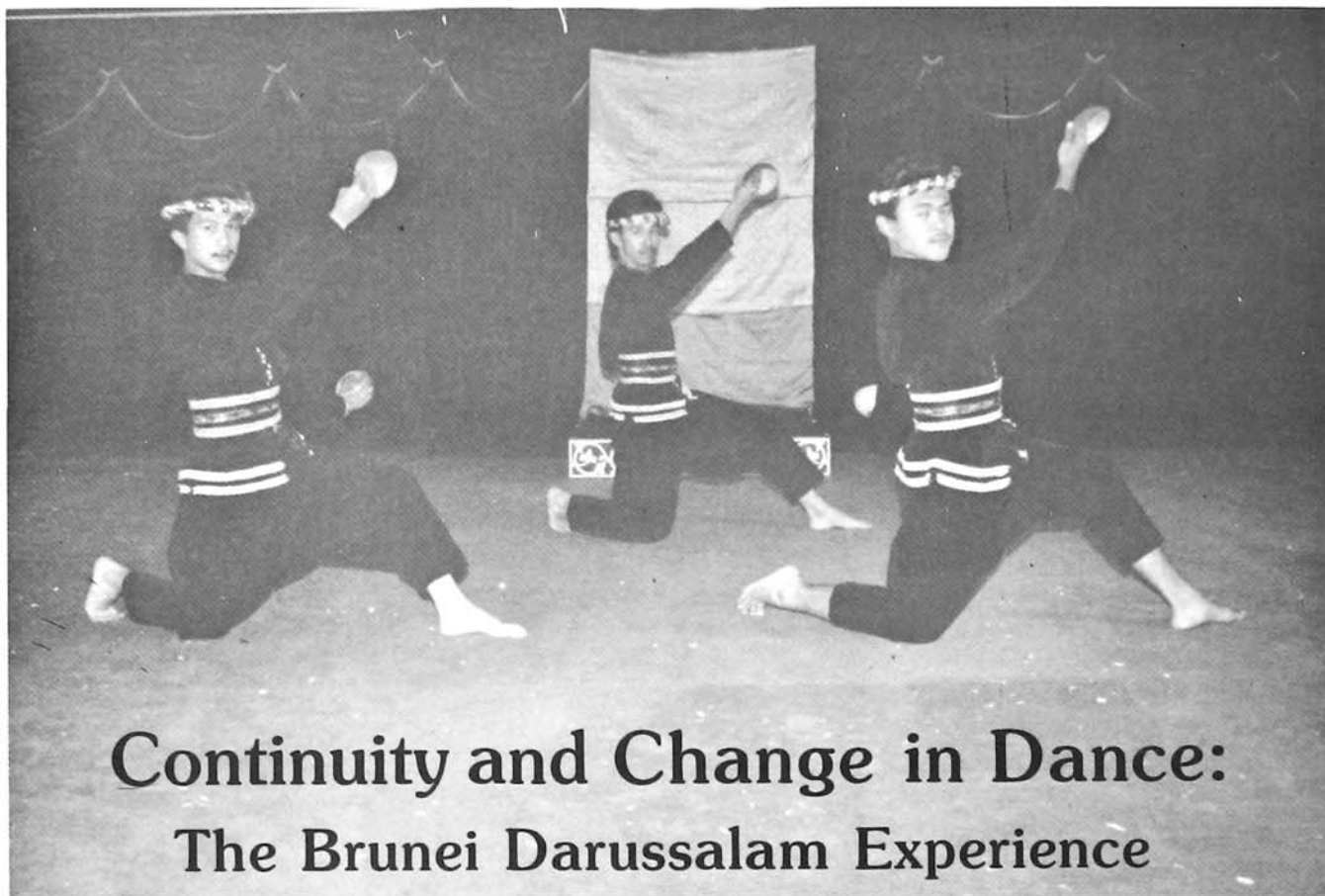
A collection of the various arts and crafts of the Philippines, from the past to the present, is certainly a source for functional design. Fully understood, such a collection could be used as a basis for a new era of aesthetic education and experience.



Left : An old clay water jar shaped manually. It shows a ring handle attached to each side.



Below : An early ceremonial pot showing incised dot and line designs. A protruding spout, with a facial form, is attached to the sides. Craftsmen, in the olden days, used a variety of forms to decorate the plain surfaces of clay containers.



Continuity and Change in Dance: The Brunei Darussalam Experience

by Awang Sumadi Sukaimi

Dance has been described by many writers who love the world of dancing as manifestation of many phenomena. For example, it could be a personal feeling about something, a desire and hope, or a more complex phenomena like living activities such as work or occupation, a process of history, religious experiences and lastly a manifestation of nationalism.

Briefly, dance is an action form resulting from people's selection and organization of human movement. Its intangible value appears to be in the actual participation. Dance is based mainly upon a conscious control of energy and rhythm, upon a planned

design in space and in relationship with others.

Similarly most Bruneians ideally see dances as an expression of a variety of feelings, experiences that one has gone through in one's life, or an expression of one's desires and hopes. Today, dance offers other opportunities besides just the fulfillment of one's personal satisfaction. And that is financial rewards, a form of livelihood.

Generally speaking, dance is a cultural heritage depicting many valuable life experiences. These experiences serve as a mirror of the past and a chain of continuity between the past

and the present. These functions played by dances could help us understand and appreciate a lot of the mysteries that have occurred before. Events left unexplained and could not be explained by other means could be expressed in dance.

Briefly, Brunei Darussalam has a long historical record of its traditional dances. Unfortunately the record is mainly in memory form. Most Brunei dances are derived mainly from songs. To mention a few, they are: "Alus Jua Dindang", "Samalindang",

Top photo shows dance called Tanan Aduk-Aduk.

"Indong Anak Indong Bunga ku", "Naindong", "Kayum Oya Kayum", "Dundang-Dundang", and "Jipin Laila Sambah".

Other dances are inspired by and created from the observation of nature and the surroundings. Such dances include "Alai Sekap" (bamboo dance), "Tarian Katak" (Frog Dance), "Adai-Adai", "Aduk-Aduk", "Anding Rimba", "Anding Mambang", "Dang Mengalai", "Mendayut" and farmers' dances like "Potong Padi" and "Mengamping".

Traditionally Brunei dances can be classified into three types: court dances, folk dances and religious dances. In some cases both folk and religious dances can also be identified as ceremonial dances, especially when they are performed during a yearly feast, after the harvest season, for the birth of a child, for curing the sick, for driving away the evil spirit, and so on.

Brunei dances, with a few exceptions, have started off from a few and simple ideas. As time went by they changed according to the time and places where they were usually performed.

In the olden days communication was very simple. Stories were told from one person to another, or from a person to a group. Some of these stories must have developed into communal recitations, with everyone knowing the characters, plot, sequence of events, and ending. So it was with movement expression that people performed for themselves or for others to see.

Some people even stepped out of the group to intercede with unknown powers as in the movement rites. This is evident in Brunei Folk dances like "Alai Bubu", "Anding

Rimba", "Tamarok", and "Joget Baju Putih or Joget Benari".

The desire to portray human motives or any conviction were some of the reasons why men formed movements into a pattern of play or action. It was simply fun to do it. Again this was basically simple and plain as far as Brunei traditional dance is concerned.

In the initial stage formation of Brunei traditional dances, where was neither any specific rule nor a code of law to base any dance for any movement, pattern or expression. Understandably, it is for this reason that the originality of a dance cannot be retained for a very long time. Owing to this, some of the Brunei traditional dances, to a certain extent, lack artistic and aesthetic values. Monotony in their movements, patterns, concepts of presentation, sounds and costumes is quite prevalent.

Nevertheless such a sweeping statement cannot be accepted without questions. Obviously, any creation in

the world of culture and arts must have, in its own way, some elements of artistic and aesthetic values. But for some, these values may take longer to realize. The intrinsic values of the dance may not have been clearly shown in the way other dances were presented. Or sometimes, differing cultural backgrounds become an obstacle for appreciating such values.

In dealing with the process of continuity in dance, one is really trying to pinpoint the aspects of a dance which have been utilized and still appears up to the present time. As far as Brunei dances are concerned, there are some dance aspects purposely preserved until the present. Brunei Darussalam is a country proud of her own cultural heritage. To preserve her sense of originality is a national wish, as long as it does not oppose the teachings of Islam.

It is quite difficult to mention which aspects of Brunei traditional dances are still preserved. So far, very little study and research has been



The Royal Voyage



Adai Adai Dance

done on traditional dances. One big problem is in the determination of the true origin of a dance. In the olden days, no proper documentations were made for dances. Therefore, it is now difficult to find written records describing the authenticity of a dance. One can only depend on the oral stories told by the older generation.

Perhaps it is wrong to say that some elements of dance basics, found in the spheres of movements, concepts of formations or patterns, costumes, motives and themes of presentations, rhythm and musical instruments have been preserved for certain purposes. And one of these purposes has something to do with national dignity. Simply, it is nice to have one's own creation and heritage.

One of a basic element of dance which has been preserved is in the field of costume. Almost all Brunei traditional dances use rather loose costumes.

Costumes for lady dancers cover all parts of the body except for the head, hands and feet. Lady dancers are normally expected to wear *baju kurung laboh* or *kebaya panjang*

(long kebaya). Male dancers, on the other hand, are expected to wear *baju cara Melayu* with their heads covered with either *dastar* or *songkok*.

In court dances or ceremonial dances, it is quite customary for the female dancers to wear *Kain Jong Sarat* a traditionally woven Brunei dress. It has also become the symbol of Brunei's rich and elite culture. The costume can be seen worn in dances like "Alus Jua Dindang" and "Samalindang".

In the area of movement, the slow, gentle and rhythmic manner of dances are still preserved. The movements of hands and fingers must not exceed the head.

Body bending must be done sideways rather than forward. In other words, the frontal part of the body must always be shown to the audience. The rear part of the body must not be shown to the audience in any circumstance. It is considered rude. This particular movement can be seen in dances like "Alus Jua Dindang", "Samalindang", "Asyik", "Duandang-Duandang" and Naindung.

Brunei traditional dances, as far as possible, should be accompanied by live Brunei traditional music, by engaging instruments like *guning-tangan*, *gendang labek*, *tambor*, *gong*, *tawak-tawak*, *ompong*, *canang violin* and *accordion*. To suit the gentle and rhythmic movements of the dancers, the melody played is rather soothing and melancholic.

Another important aspect of Brunei dance is the manifestation of respect. Normally to begin a performance, a dancer bends (more like bowing) her body to show respect. At the same time, one of his hands point to the floor while the other is placed at the back. This is almost true with all Brunei traditional dances.

In some cases, a dancer sits on one side of his hip with one hand on one of his knees and the other rested on the floor for body support. This is called *Dudok Bersimpoh* which appears in the "Samalindang" and the "Alus Jua Dindang" dances.

Next is the process of change in dance. Dance, as a part of culture, is mainly a human creation. Muslims believe that anything created by man is bound to change. Nothing stays forever except God (Allah).

The process of change in dance is rather inevitable. So long as men live, there is always the desire for change. Some changes are made out of necessity. As already mentioned, the origins of Brunei traditional dances are generally unclear and they have developed sophistication only through various stages of experiences.

Changes in many ways are brought about by the process of interaction. And there are many agents of interaction. One of the most prominent agents is modern education. Education has revolutionized men's

outlook and attitude towards life, and is thus creating a great impact in the field of dancing.

Historically speaking, Brunei culture is very much influenced by three cultures, namely: the Hindu, Islam and Western cultures. Brunei traditional dances, be they folk or religious, have traces of influence from the three cultures above. Brunei folk dances such as "Dang Mangalai", "Anding Rimba", "Anding Mambang" and "Tamarok" are very much characterized by rituals contacting the unknown. These dances express needs and fears, more particularly the search for magical aid to survive.

Today this kind of dances is no longer encouraged for public performances. Because some of the actions, movements, patterns of dancing, motives and costumes utilized contradict the Islamic faith. As is evident here, religion does change many aspects of Brunei dances.

For example, "Anding Rimba" is a dance about the curing of a sick person. Here, a village doctor (*Domoh*) and his five assistants, call spirits by uttering the word "menteras". This word has now been replaced by "doa" or prayer.

In "Dang Mangalai", a lady "Domoh" and her assistants, in their effort to cure the sick bend their bodies flat against the floor, their hands stretching forward. This movement pattern is no longer practised. It is against the Islamic faith that teaches "Bow to no other but God (Allah)". Today, dancers are asked to sit down (more or less like squatting) when they perform "Dang Mangalai".

Costumes also have changed tremendously in many Brunei traditional and folk dances, especially in the area of design and materials used.

Previously, dancers were quite happy to wear cotton dresses with buttons made of wood, sea shells or silver "kubamban". These were tight-fitting costumes, revealing the dancers' figures. Gold plated animal forms (cat, dragon, snake, and fowl) were used as ornaments and jewellery. Today one can hardly see such a costume. Again for the same reason, it is against the Islam religion and, to



Berdatang Sembah Dance



Lilin and Kiap Dance



Berdatang Seaibah Dance

a certain extent, it is nowadays considered unethical to wear them.

In some of Brunei's traditional and modern dances, changes are remarkably manifested in the way costumes are selected and made. The basis for selection is, among other things, to suit the message of the dance, the taste of the audience, the

venue for the performance, the time and also the occasion.

Dance is very much closely associated with sound and music. Initially, there was no specific musical composition for any dance. Music or the melody was composed simply for the song; not for the purpose of dancing. Then composing music changed slightly. But it is only today that traditional songs or music are recomposed and arranged for the purposes of dances.

Take the musical instrument *Gunlingtangan*, for example. It has only three keys or tunes, at the most. It was not properly tuned for any good piece of music. This posed a big problem for dancing. Today the *Gunlingtangan* tune has been improved like the other pieces of musical instruments. It is now producing beautiful sounds for any traditional music and dances.

Science and technology have contributed so much for the wellbeing of the people all over the world. Modern inventions, especially in the field of electronics and mass media, have given the world of dance a new perspective. This therefore tremendously changes the concepts and techniques of dance presentations. And there is now a fear that some dances tend to become commercialized and may lose their true meanings.

A culture built on a strong foundation could prevent some of the resulting negative elements of these influences from destroying the beauty of traditional dances, which form part of the cultural heritage. Many efforts have been carried out to preserve and promote dance as a cultural heritage. But this, more often than not, proves to be an expensive enterprise. And yet it must be done. ■

Dance and music were significant and integral elements in ritual worship during the period of animism. They were part and parcel of life then as they provided a means of communication and a means for placating the spirits, which the natives believed ruled every facet of their lives.

Then the advent of Hinduism and the setting up of Hinduised Malay courts introduced dance and musical troupes in the courts. Court dances as opposed to folk dances, which retained their rustic and ritualistic character, were refined since they catered for the entertainment of the nobility. But one could venture to suggest that there were interactions between the court and folk dances. And this is strongly manifested by folk dances tending to imitate the refined court dances.

The court and folk dances retained their character and functions through the Islamic period which also set the basis for later developments of performing arts, such as the Rodat, Hadrah and Dabus which were musical ensembles singing praises to Allah and the Prophet Muhamad (Peace Be on Him). Later, in the 20th century, dances were added. Islamic prayers and values were also infused into the ritualistic dance, especially in the opening ceremony.

Among the western colonialists, the British had the most impact on the culture of the country in general, dance and music in particular. The coming of the British and their eventual takeover of the economic and political functions of the Sultan adversely affected dance and



A modern dance using the environmental sounds of the forest.

The Changing Emphasis of Malay Dance

by Dr Mohamed Ghouse Nasuruddin

music. When the Sultans were in power they could maintain lavish dance and musical troupes in their respective courts. But these cultural activities slowly waned as their economic and political power eroded. And by the first quarter of the 20th century, most of them were in a

precarious position. The Sultans could no longer extend their patronage to them.

Consequently the dancers and musicians had to find alternative patronage, thus they turned to the commoners. In that process the court dances were adulterated. They had to

identify with their new audience while others receded into anonymity.

After independence in 1957, the government took over the patronage of cultural activities. And conscious efforts were made to promote traditional dances and music. Through the activities of the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports, old dances were revived and modified to suit the changing times, demands and aspirations of the society. It was in 1969, after the Conference of Traditional Dance and Drama, that the government realised the need to look seriously into the revitalisation and dissemination of the performing arts forms. Since then, the Ministry has set up the National Dance Complex and organised dance and drama competitions, besides conducting workshops in dance, music, and theatre. As a result of these activities and exposure to a variety of other dance idioms, a variety of old and new dance forms took shape.

Presently there are four levels of dance activities. One is the existing folk and court dances which are performed within their own traditional context. Most of these dances are usually based in the rural areas. Once in a while they are performed in the towns and cities during the Sultan's birthday celebrations or during a festival. Such dances are the Hadrah, Terinai, Dabus, Kuda Kepang, Barongan, and Rodat. Other dances such as the Joget Gamelan and Asyik are indigenous in the urban areas of Kuala Trengganu and Kota Bharu respectively. All of these are established traditional dances which have gone through the normal process of change since their inception.

The second level concerns the recreation of these traditional dances to suit the present gait and tempo of life. Led by the National Dance Company (KBN), these dances are refined with new movements and modern choreographic elements. For example, if the original traditional dances mainly employ vertical and linear patterns, the National Dance Company would add diagonals and circles to create a different and more varied pictorial composition.

Similarly, the National Dance Company explores new movements but still within the traditional mould. An example in point is Zapin Hanuman. In this dance fast, sharp, and precise movements are executed to the fast Zapin tempo which normally is moderato and the movements, quite sedate. However, with Joget Gamelan, Asyik, and Mengadap Rebab, the National Dance Company and other troupes have adhered to traditional choreography.

Still within the traditional context, yet moving away from its core are the experimental works of the National Dance Company and other local urban dance troupes. This constitutes the third level of dance development. Here we approach the realm of dance dramas, not in the traditional context but more in the western sense.

While traditional dance dramas contain the elements of dance, music, and dialogue, the modern ones only utilise dance and music more like a full length ballet. In the creation of these dance dramas, the choreographer usually uses whatever traditional movements that suit his style and will support the dramatic actions. For example the dance drama Petalawati,

by the National Dance Company, begins with the Mengadap Rebab dance. It progresses to Jeget Gamelan, Silat, Kuda Kepang, and back to Silat again. Essentially, it is a collection of several traditional dances to project the dramatic actions and to create the moods. Other dance troupes have also embarked on such endeavours; most prominent in terms of publicity are Putri Saadong and Jintayu.

The productions mentioned use movements and music within the traditional framework. They either piece together several stock dances or use the vocabulary of one form to project the dramatic actions. Music too is employed in a variety of ways. Petalawati combines that of Makyong, Joget Gamelan, Kuda Kepang, and Silat to accompany the dances. Jintayu, on the other hand, only employs the gamelan music, but with a difference. The music and style of playing in Jintayu is out of the traditional context - an experiment in creating new sounds and not adhering to the formal gamelan structure. Inversely, Petalawati while experimenting with the gamelan observes the formal structures of the musical forms it uses.

Eclectic and adventurous characterise the productions in the fourth level dance developments. In these productions Malay dance movements have been explored in a different setting which has taken them out of their traditional context. They look at movement per se. And they attempt at integrating these movements with other dance idioms such as Indian, Ballet, and Modern or Contemporary. Such works, Rama Sinta by Group Theatre Elite, Si Tanggang by Sri Tarinas, and Aluna Nyawa and Barong by USM, search



A traditional court dance choreographed to the music of the Shadow Theatre (Wayang Kelantan).

for a common denominator in these various dance idioms.

In the attempt at gelling movements from these idioms, their respective rules, etiquette, and decorum have to be broken. As a consequence these experiments have provoked negative responses from the purists and other lay parties. They are unwilling to see dance as a changing phenomena, identifying with the contemporary society and moving with the times. Nonetheless, there are some sections of the general public who are willing to view the works as experimental processes. More often than not these works put forth new ideas which challenge and provoke the audience.

In these experimental works non-traditional types of music are used. They range from the contemporary to the avant-garde which can be interpreted in a variety of ways, thus enabling the choreographer to work

freely. Traditional music too have been used, but they tend to hold down the choreography to the traditional mould.

All these four levels of dance developments influence and integrate with one another to a certain extent. The contemporary dance choreographers may have drawn their inspirations or materials from traditional dances. And the traditional choreographers may be influenced by the way movements are extended and improvised in contemporary dances.

Some of the modern works may only give glimpses of the traditional materials they employ. Likewise the more traditional works may only give a hint of contemporary influence, perhaps in spatial utilisation or movement improvisation. Dewa Muda is a fine example of the latter category which is basically traditional but is vibrant enough to incorporate contemporary choreographic elements.

Dewa Muda exhibits numerous examples of the changes that have taken place in traditional Malay dance. It has taken the concept of Malay dance to new heights without losing the traditional identity. Viewing it, one cannot help but feel its Malayness. Yet, at the same time, it is different from the traditional folk and court dances in its usage of choreographic elements. While traditional Malay dance observes definite choreographic delineations, Dewa Muda has broken this restrictive parameter. It is eclectic in its use of movements and portrayal of aesthetic precepts.

The dance drama Dewa Muda is an interpretation of a Makyong play of the same name. It combines the "angin" or energy element of Main Putri and depicts the love between an earthy prince, Dewa Muda and a Kayangan Princess, Puteri Rakna Emas, both of whom originate from the same source. Metaphysically it deals with the unity of the cosmos, that everything emanates from and returns to one source. It also explores the strengths and weaknesses of humans in relation to the cosmic power.

The dance drama begins with a scene in which Dewa Muda is lulled to sleep by the singing and dancing of the court maidens. In his sleep he dreams of an old woman who advises him to hunt a deer with gold and silver horns. Troubled with the dream he confides to his mother Puteri Selindungan Bulan who then instructs the court's shaman to interpret it. According to the court shaman if the dream is not heeded, misfortune will befall the nation. If, on the contrary it is followed, the nation will prosper and Dewa Muda will marry a beautiful wife.

Dewa Muda then prepares for the hunt by calling his advisers Wak Peran Tujuh, headed by Awang Jambul Lebat and several of his other subjects. During the hunt he and Awang Jambul Lebat are separated from the main hunting party. They soon discover that they are lost. In trying to find their way back they come across a stream. They wash themselves and admire the Bunga Teratai which grows near the stream. Eventually, they reach the palace.

Days later, Dewa Muda and his companions entertain themselves by flying a kite. It soars high up into the sky and the wind is so strong that Dewa Muda has to tie it down to the Gelang Samba. When it is secured he hears 12 different sounds emanating

from the kite. He decides to climb the kite and investigate. Awang Jambul Lebat follows him up.

On reaching the top they found themselves in a garden laden with fruit trees. They eat to their hearts, content. Feeling drowsy, they fall asleep.

Puteri Rakna Emas and Inang Bongsu enter and discover Dewa Muda and Awang Jambul Lebat asleep. When he wakes up and sets his eyes on the princess, Dewa Muda is at once enchanted and captivated by her beauty. It is a case of love at first sight.

They dance after which she leaves. The ogres enter and intimidate Dewa Muda. A fight ensues, and in the midst of the fight Puteri Rakna

Emas re-enters and orders the ogres to leave. The dance drama ends at this point when Dewa Muda and Puteri Rakna Emas dance to portray their love for each other.

The choreography of Dewa Muda is innovative in that it is not restricted to one traditional dance idiom. It uses movements from various traditional court dances as well as folk to create the moods and to propel the dramatic actions.

Four traditional dance idioms are utilised, namely: Joget Gamelan, Makyong, Barongan, and Silat. However, these movements are not used in their traditional context. But they have been extended and innovated to suit dramatic actions. In addition, new movements have been created in the absence of traditional one, for example, movements using the Selendang (Sashes) to portray a stream and a flower. The movements depicting the Bota (ogre) are derived from Barongan but are highly stylised.

The use of space has been extended to include asymmetrical balancing and vertical extension. Dances in the court scene are usually symmetrical to indicate stability and harmony. Elsewhere asymmetrical balancing is used to create tension and a sense of adventure. Vertical spatial extension is seen in the Bota scene where the dancers create a formation to indicate height.

The general aesthetics of Malay dance has been preserved. One could discern the stress on earthly elements, the general softness of the movements, symmetry in movements and floor patterns, and the emphasis on hand movements.



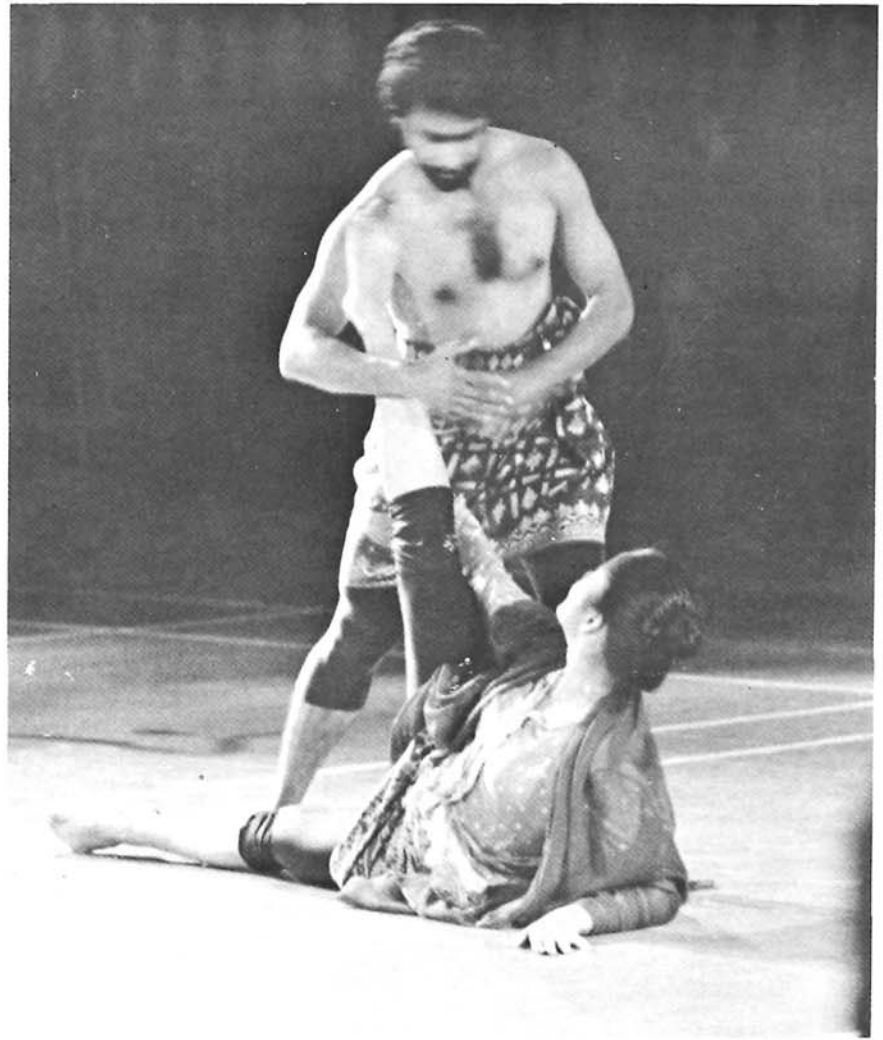
Left: A scene from the dance drama on the history of Penang.

However, certain parts of the dance drama tend to break away from this norm, for example, the *grande battement*, jumps (*tour jete*), and the wriggling of the bottom. This has to happen because of the nature of the choreography and the demands of the dramatic actions. It creates contrast and gives dynamism to the whole dance. The leaps, for example, give us a sense of imbalance and risk, thus creating tension.

Dewa Muda is an example of an on-going process of experimentation with traditional dance movements. It extends existing ones and searches for a new movement vocabulary. It has thus incorporated a variety of traditional movements and created new ones within the context of a series of dramatic actions. In this process it has to veer from certain traditional concepts such as overall symmetry and earth bound movements. And it has to incorporate new ones which are the extension of traditional movements. This is one of the ways of accommodating the creative talents of a choreographer and at the same time challenging the dancers.

Merely restaging traditional dance could be a chore to some choreographers. The dancers too may get bored doing the same thing year in, year out. A choreographer is continuously searching new ways and means to project his ideas. And he is constantly influenced by internal and external factors.

How a choreographer manifests his artistic ideas will depend on his command of the resources. If he is versed only in the traditional idioms he should focus on it, but at the same time he should be open to the concepts of the other idioms. Although a



The dance of death in the opening scene of the play "Nanamun Mentanan", written and choreographed by Mohamed Ghouse.

choreographer is limited by what he knows, he should always be searching and learning new skills to better his creative works.

A work of art will reflect its cultural environment to a lesser or greater degree, depending on the intention of its artist. The artist may reflect the past, the present, or the future. But whatever it is, it is work that must be in tune with the current society. This is the case with Dewa Muda which reflects Malay aesthetics and traditions in the context of the

1980s.

Music of Dewa Muda

Like the Malay dance, the accompanying musical ensemble is eclectic. It combines instruments from a variety of musical ensembles. They are the Gamelan Trengganu, Makyong, Wayang Kulit, Kuda Kepang, and the Silat. The core of the ensemble is the gamelan, which consists of the following musical instruments.

1. Saron Peking
2. Saron Burung

3. Bonang
4. Gambang Kayu
5. Kenong
6. a pair of Gong
7. a Cylindrical Drum

Added to the gamelan musical instruments are those of the Wayang Kulit Kelantan's which could also be used to accompany the silat. They consist of:

1. a Serunai
2. a pair of Cylindrical Drums
3. a pair of Geduk
4. Kesi, and
5. a pair of Knobbed Gongs

From Makyong and Main Puteri is the Rebab. While the Angklong comes from the Kuda Kepang and Barongan musical ensemble, the Rebana Ubi comes from Kelantan, the music of Wayang Kulit. Kelantan is normally used to herald the approach and entrances of kings or dignitaries, or the start of an auspicious ceremony, whether secular or spiritual.

Not all of the musical instruments are played simultaneously. Different combinations of instruments are used in different scenes. For example, during dances derived from Makyong: the Rebab, two drums, and a pair of gongs are used. Narration in the style of Tok Selampit or Main Puteri is only accompanied by the Rebab. In the kite flying scene, the Wayang Kulit ensemble consisting of a serunai, two drums, a pair of gongs, and a kesi provide the musical accompaniment. The Bota scene is accompanied by the Kuda Kepang music. This is played by the gamelan ensemble with the addition of the Angklong. Kebana Ubi accents the fighting scene.

With the exception of the gamelan music, the rest adhere closely

to the traditional musical structure. They are played exactly as they would be in the kampong. The gamelan music (Gamelan Trengganu) has incorporated several improvisations and variations. It exhibits a different kind of dynamics in terms of the melody and the accents and is composed to suit the dramatic actions.

The survival of any art form depends on its adaptability, that is, the ability to assimilate and integrate new elements, be it internal or external, while retaining its identity. Its vitality is reflected in the ability to fuse new developments with its traditional inheritance. When a society can no longer identify with an art form, it fades into oblivion.

Thus, changes in the societal matrix in respect of its norms and values, whether by the natural process of development or contrived by the authority, will affect the survival of the art forms. Therefore, for an art form to be categorised as a living tradition it must fulfill the needs of the society. This has been the case for Malay dance and music. ■

GLOSSARY

Barongan

A processional dance commonly performed in Johore. It originated from totemistic and religious animal worship. Basically, in this dance there are three dancers: one wearing a huge mask which is a hybrid of a tiger and a peacock or of a single animal such as the dragon. The second is a prince on a hobby horse (Kuda Kepang), and the third is a clown. The Indonesian counterpart of this dance is known as the Ryok.

Joget Gamelan

A court dance form which has its home in Trengganu. It features a variety of dances, some abstract and some narrative. One of the more dynamic forms of traditional Malay court dances, it is accompanied by the gamelan ensemble.

Makyong

A dance drama incorporating the elements of dance, music, and dialogue. Found in Kelantan, this dance portrays stories from local legends, one of which is Dewa Muda.

Main Puteri

A form of therapeutic medicine to treat a spiritually sick person. It uses the elements of Makyong, such as music, dance, and dialogue.

Silat

The Malay art of self defense whose movements can be extended and innovated into a dance form.

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