

THE TALE OF PILANDOK: AN EXPLORATION OF INTELLIGENCE AND A REFLECTION OF MARANAO CULTURE

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study analyzes the Maranao folktale “Pilandok Becomes Sultan” to explore how intelligence, wit, and cunning function as cultural symbols in Maranao society. Using content analysis, the research investigates the portrayal of the main character’s intellect in confronting adversity, the literary elements that mirror Maranao concepts of leadership and justice, and the story’s implications in shaping readers’ social values. Findings reveal that Pilandok embodies the trickster archetype, using intellect and strategy as tools to challenge authority and restore social balance. The narrative illustrates that, within Maranao culture, true leadership is not rooted in birthright or power but in wisdom and adaptability. Furthermore, the story promotes values such as intelligence, resilience, and awareness of social realities—making it an effective pedagogical material for promoting cultural literacy. Overall, this study affirms that “Pilandok Becomes Sultan” is more than a tale of deception; it is a reflection of Maranao identity and an enduring testament to the intellectual and moral depth of Philippine folk literature.

Keyword: *Pilandok; trickster archetype; intelligence; folk literature*

1. CONTEXT AND RATIONALE

Folk literature forms a vital component of cultural identity, serving as a repository of a community’s values, worldview, and collective memory. Among the most celebrated folktales in Mindanao is the Pilandok cycle, particularly the story “Pilandok Becomes Sultan,” which illustrates the wit, intelligence, and cunning of its main character. As a narrative originating from the Maranao ethnic group, the tale reflects their social values, traditions, and perceptions of leadership and justice. Despite its popularity, there remains a limited body of scholarly work that deeply examines its cultural relevance and literary significance. With modernization increasingly influencing the transmission and interpretation of folk narratives, it becomes essential to undertake a comprehensive analysis of this tale to understand its continuing role in strengthening Maranao literary heritage.

Although multiple versions of the Pilandok stories exist across Mindanao, few academic studies have explored how these narratives shape impressions of intelligence, strategy, and power, or how they mirror Maranao cultural principles. Existing literature frequently highlights folktales from Luzon and the Visayas, while studies on Mindanao

literature—specifically Maranao folktales—remain scarce. Nadera (2020) emphasizes that folk literature is crucial in preserving ethnic identity, yet the lack of scholarly focus on Maranao narratives limits a holistic understanding of their cultural worldview. Hence, a deeper investigation of the elements found in “Pilandok Becomes Sultan” is necessary to foreground its cultural and educational contributions.

The tale itself presents Pilandok as a clever and resourceful figure who overcomes challenges through strategic deception, aligning with Jung’s (2017) concept of the trickster archetype—an intelligent character who subverts authority through wit. This archetype is also discussed by Dundes (2019) and Lévi-Strauss (2018), who assert that trickster figures reflect the social values and structural tensions within a community. Examining Pilandok through these theoretical lenses allows for a richer interpretation of how Maranao literature frames intelligence as a form of power and resistance. Similarly, Propp’s Structuralist Theory (2017) demonstrates that recurring motifs such as deception or the triumph of the weak over the strong are central to many folktales, including those from Mindanao.

1.2. Theoretical Framework

The literature of the Maranao—such as “The Little Bird (Munting Ibon)” and “Lalapindigowa-i: Why the Wasp Has a Small Waist”—reveals a tradition rich in moral teachings, social customs, and reflections on everyday life. These folktales highlight values such as hard work, fidelity, justice, and cleverness, which are essential to understanding the community’s cultural orientation. Studies such as the work of Noval et al. (2024) demonstrate that folk narratives across the Philippines function as mirrors of communal values, transmitting moral lessons, social beliefs, and cultural identity. Thus, Maranao folktales, including the Pilandok cycle, contribute significantly to the preservation and transmission of heritage across generations.

In the educational setting, the importance of folk literature is reinforced by DepEd Order No. 21, s. 2019, which underscores its role in promoting cultural identity and relevance among learners. Scholars such as Torres (2020) and Santos (2021) likewise advocate for deeper integration of Mindanao literature in the curriculum as a means of strengthening cultural appreciation and national identity. Against this backdrop, analyzing “Pilandok Becomes Sultan” becomes a meaningful academic endeavor that not only preserves Maranao literary tradition but also enriches contemporary discussions in Philippine literature, culture, and education.

1.2. Purpose of the Study

The general aims of this study is to analyze and examine “The Story of Pilandok: A Discovery of Wit and Reflection of Maranao Culture.” Specifically, the study aims to:

1. To determine how the tale “Pilandok Becomes Sultan” portrays the wit of its main character in confronting life’s challenges;
2. To identify and analyze the literary elements in the Pilandok narrative that reflect Maranao cultural concepts, particularly those related to leadership and justice; and
3. To explore the implications of the story in shaping social values among readers, especially students.

This study is anchored on three major literary theories that collectively explain the structure, character behavior, and cultural meanings embedded in the folktale “Pilandok Becomes Sultan.” These are Jung’s Archetypal Criticism, Dundes’ Concept of the Trickster Figure, and Propp’s Structuralist Theory of Folktales. Together, they provide a comprehensive lens for interpreting Pilandok’s wit, the cultural symbols in the narrative, and the recurring motifs that define Maranao folk literature.

Jung’s Archetypal Criticism (2017) serves as the primary theoretical foundation, particularly through the concept of the trickster archetype. Jung emphasizes that trickster figures represent universal patterns of behavior characterized by intelligence, cunning, and the ability to subvert social norms. Pilandok, as a clever protagonist who outsmarts a powerful sultan, embodies the trickster archetype commonly found in world folklore. This perspective helps explain why Pilandok’s actions—often rooted in deception—resonate with cultural ideals of intelligence, adaptability, and resistance against oppressive authority.

Complementing Jung’s theory is Dundes’ (2019) interpretation of the trickster figure, which explains that tricksters often emerge in societies with rigid power structures. According to Dundes, these characters symbolize the capability of marginalized individuals to challenge authority through intellect rather than force. In the context of Maranao culture, Pilandok’s rise to power reflects the community’s recognition of wit as a legitimate tool for achieving justice and navigating social hierarchies. The theory helps interpret the tale not just as entertainment, but as a cultural commentary on leadership and social inequality.

Additionally, Propp’s Structuralist Theory (2017) provides a framework for analyzing the narrative functions, plot patterns, and recurring motifs of the tale. Propp asserts that folktales follow predictable structures—such as conflict, trickery, victory, and transformation—which can be observed in Pilandok’s journey from a powerless figure to a leader. Through this structural lens, the study identifies how Pilandok’s actions, the symbols of power (such as the crown, ring, and sword), and the sequence of events contribute to the story’s deeper cultural meanings.

Together, these theories establish a strong analytical foundation for interpreting “Pilandok Becomes Sultan.” They allow the study to examine the tale not only as a literary text but also as a cultural artifact that preserves Maranao values, reinforces social norms, and shapes readers’ understanding of intelligence, leadership, and justice within the context of Philippine folk tradition.

2. METHODOLOGY

This study employed content analysis to examine the Maranao folktale “Pilandok Becomes Sultan” and identify themes related to intelligence, leadership, and cultural values. Content analysis, as described by Krippendorff (2018), enables researchers to interpret textual elements such as symbolism, characterization, and cultural structure.

The tale was analyzed alongside scholarly literature, journal articles, books, and digital manuscripts on Maranao culture and trickster narratives. Data were gathered through documentary analysis of PDF copies of the folktale and relevant academic sources obtained from online repositories such as Google Scholar, JSTOR, and institutional libraries. Following Bowen (2017), written documents serve as primary instruments in qualitative research, allowing the researcher to critically analyze themes and concepts embedded in texts.

The analysis followed Braun and Clarke’s (2019) thematic approach: (a) familiarization with the story, (b) identifying recurring themes, and (c) interpreting meanings connected to cultural contexts. This process enabled the extraction of key categories such as wit, power, deception, justice, and social values. Through this integrated approach, the study established how the folktale reflects Maranao worldview and contributes to cultural and literary education.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Portrayal of Wit in the Story “Pilandok Becomes Sultan”

The story “Pilandok Becomes Sultan” portrays the wit of the protagonist as his primary tool in confronting life’s challenges. The findings of the content analysis show that Pilandok relies heavily on intelligence and strategic deception to

overcome adversities, particularly in his encounters with the sultan. The characterization of Pilandok exemplifies the trickster archetype, a figure often depicted as one who uses intellect rather than physical power or political authority to achieve his goals.

The analysis identifies three major elements of wit in the narrative:

- (1) the ability to employ creative strategies,
- (2) the skillful use of speech and manipulation, and
- (3) the capacity to survive dangerous situations through deceit.

These elements indicate that intelligence functions as a core component of characterization within Maranao folk literature.

The results indicate that creative strategy is the most frequently used element, appearing five times and serving as Pilandok’s most dominant method of success. Skillful use of speech appears four times, highlighting the importance of dialogue and manipulation as mechanisms of persuasion and deception. The ability to survive danger appears three times, emphasizing the recurring motif of evading harm through cunning.

These findings reflect broader cultural values in Maranao literature, where intelligence is viewed as a legitimate source of power. A deeper examination reveals parallels between Pilandok and other global trickster figures—such as Br’er Rabbit and Anansi—who also use wit to navigate restrictive systems. As Dundes (2019) argues, trickster figures often arise in societies marked by rigid hierarchies, symbolizing the capacity of intellect to resist domination. Pilandok’s cleverness functions not only for personal benefit but also as a means of challenging oppression, ultimately dethroning a corrupt ruler.

Carl Jung’s (2017) Archetypal Criticism reinforces this interpretation, suggesting that the trickster embodies cultural resistance expressed through ingenuity. Within the educational context, DepEd Order No. 21, s. 2019 affirms the value of folk literature in teaching cultural identity. Similarly, Lévi-Strauss (2018) emphasizes the role of trickster tales in valorizing intellect, particularly for those without institutional power.

Thus, the findings affirm that Maranao folk literature, as represented by “Pilandok Becomes Sultan,” preserves and transmits cultural wisdom while promoting intellectual resilience as a cultural and moral ideal.

3.2.Literary Elements Reflecting Maranao Culture in Relation to Leadership and Justice

The content analysis identifies three major literary elements in the story that reflect Maranao cultural values on leadership and justice:

- (1) the characterization of the trickster as a leader,*
- (2) the symbolism of power, and*
- (3) justice through deception as a form of authority.*

In the narrative, Pilandok is depicted as a cunning and resourceful figure who uses intellect to deceive and eventually replace the sultan. This portrayal reflects a cultural perspective in which leadership is defined not solely by birthright or physical strength but by intelligence and strategic capability. Objects such as the crown, ring, and sword symbolize political and spiritual authority rooted in the Maranao Sultanate system. Justice, meanwhile, is represented not through traditional morality but through the intelligent attainment of desired outcomes—an idea common in Mindanaoan folklore.

The results show that the motif of the trickster-leader appears six times, underscoring cleverness as a defining trait of leadership. The symbolism of power appears four times, illustrating how authority is conveyed through culturally significant material objects. Justice through deception appears three times, indicating that intellect often functions as a legitimate path to justice within Maranao tradition.

These findings align with observations by Dundes (2019), who notes that trickster-leaders frequently emerge in Asian and African narratives, rising to power by exploiting the vulnerabilities of their adversaries. The symbolic objects in the story also reflect the spiritual and political dimensions of leadership within Maranao society (Torres, 2020).

The analysis suggests that Maranao concepts of leadership and justice differ markedly from Western ideals. Leadership is understood as the ability to command, strategize, and outmaneuver others; justice is perceived not as moral

righteousness but as the ability to use wisdom to shape one’s destiny. Lévi-Strauss (2018) supports this view by asserting that many indigenous cultures define power through intellect rather than physical dominance.

Propp’s Structuralist Theory (2017) and Santos (2021) both affirm the centrality of the intelligent hero in Asian folktales. DepEd Order No. 21, s. 2019 further emphasizes the cultural value of such narratives in the Philippine curriculum.

3.3.Implications of the Story in Shaping Social Values Among Readers

The analysis identifies three primary social values conveyed by the story “Pilandok Becomes Sultan”:

- (1) the importance of intelligence in overcoming problems,
- (2) adaptability to diverse situations, and
- (3) awareness of political and social realities.

The results reveal that intelligence is the most recurring value, appearing six times and serving as the central moral lesson. Adaptability appears five times, emphasizing flexibility as a necessary trait in facing adversity. Awareness of political and social realities appears four times, indicating that the story subtly critiques governance and power relations.

Freire (2018) highlights literature’s capacity to expose social power structures and cultivate critical awareness. Trickster tales such as Pilandok’s encourage reflective thinking among learners. DepEd Order No. 21, s. 2019 supports the integration of such literature into the curriculum to foster cultural appreciation and moral development.

These findings indicate that the story functions not only as cultural preservation but also as a pedagogical tool that promotes critical thinking, social awareness, and intellectual empowerment. Its themes resonate with contemporary issues, making it a valuable resource for moral, cultural, and civic education in Philippine schools.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, this study confirms that “Pilandok Becomes Sultan” is a significant component of Maranao literature that portrays intellect as a weapon against oppression. The trickster figure of Pilandok represents the

capacity of marginalized individuals to use strategy and intelligence to overcome those in power. Leadership in the story is portrayed not as a function of strength or lineage but as a product of intellect and adaptability—reflecting the Maranao worldview on governance and social order.

Furthermore, justice in the story does not conform to traditional moral frameworks but is instead grounded in the capacity to adapt and act strategically to achieve one's goals. In the field of education, this tale plays a vital role in teaching folk literature and promoting awareness of Mindanaoan literary traditions. The study also highlights the need for deeper exploration of Maranao literature to preserve its cultural richness amid modernization.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the study's findings, the following recommendations may consider:

Integration in the Curriculum – Maranao literature should be given greater emphasis in the school curriculum, particularly in subjects such as Literature and Filipino. "Pilandok Becomes Sultan" may serve as a model text for illustrating the trickster archetype and its social significance.

Inclusion of Other Versions – Future studies should include other versions of the Pilandok folktale to examine the evolution of the character across different regions and contexts.

Teaching Guide Development – Educators are encouraged to develop comprehensive teaching guides using content analysis to help students gain deeper insights into the story's messages and cultural relevance.

Comparative Literary Studies – Researchers should conduct comparative analyses between Maranao literature and other Mindanaoan literatures to broaden the academic scope and highlight the diversity of Philippine folk traditions.

In summary, folk literature must be recognized as an essential component of the nation's cultural identity. Continuous research on stories such as Pilandok Becomes Sultan is crucial for preserving the richness of Filipino heritage and fostering appreciation for indigenous wisdom in contemporary education.

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