

Reviving Tradition: A Historical Analysis of the Transition from Ritual to Realism in Philippine Theater

Dr. Chinito O. Fajardo

Teacher III

Department of Education, Schools Division of Cebu Province, Philippines

<https://orcid.org/0009-0006-9830-9584> | chinitofajardo01@deped.gov.ph

Maria Fe L. Divera

Senior Education Program Specialist - School Management, Monitoring, and Evaluation

Schools Division of Toledo City, Philippines

<https://orcid.org/0009-0000-3375-574X> | mariafe.divera@deped.gov.ph

Juvy L. Villarias

Teacher III, Department of Education, Schools Division of Talisay City, Philippines

<https://orcid.org/0009-0008-7017-4520> | juvyvillarias99@gmail.com

Ruby B. Ponte

Junior High School Teacher III

Saluyong National High School, Saluyong, Manukan, Zamboanga del Norte, Philippines

<https://orcid.org/0009-0004-9564-3232> | ruby.ponte@deped.gov.ph

Cara Frances K. Abendan

Administrative Assistant, ECT Excellencia Global Academy Foundation, Inc., Balamban, Cebu, Philippines

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6363-7792> | carafrances03@gmail.com

Osias Kit T. Kilag

Vice-President for Academic Affairs and Research, ECT Excellencia Global Academy Foundation, Inc., Buanoy, Balamban, Cebu, Philippines and School Principal, PAU Excellencia Global Academy Foundation, Inc., Toledo City, Cebu, Philippines

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0845-3373> | okkilag12@gmail.com

Abstract

This research delves into the historical trajectory of Philippine theater, examining the transition from ritualistic forms to the emergence of realism. Drawing on a systematic literature review, the study illuminates four prominent themes that underscore the evolution of Philippine theater: the enduring impact of colonial hegemony and theatrical assimilation, the resurgence of indigenous

cultural heritage, the emergence of socio-political realism as a medium for artistic critique, and the dynamic hybridization of traditional and modern theatrical practices. The analysis reveals the complex interplay between historical legacies, cultural revival, and socio-political engagement, highlighting the resilience and adaptability of Philippine theater in navigating the challenges posed by globalization and cultural homogenization. This research contributes to a nuanced understanding of the intricate dynamics that have shaped the trajectory of Philippine theatrical expressions, emphasizing the transformative potential of artistic innovation and cultural revitalization within the context of the country's rich cultural heritage.

Keywords: Philippine theatre, Ritualistic forms, Realism, Colonial hegemony, Cultural revival

Introduction

The evolution of Philippine theater is a testament to the cultural richness and historical complexity of the archipelago. From its roots in indigenous rituals and performances to its contemporary manifestations, the trajectory of Philippine theater reflects a dynamic interplay between tradition and modernity.

To comprehend the transition from ritual to realism, it is imperative to delve into the precolonial theatrical practices that laid the foundation for Philippine performance arts. Precolonial Philippine theater was deeply rooted in indigenous rituals and communal ceremonies, which were essential components of religious and cultural life (Namiki, 2007). These rituals often incorporated music, dance, and symbolic narratives, serving as a means of expressing spiritual beliefs and social values within the community. Notably, the blending of mythological elements with performative expressions characterized the early forms of Philippine theater, establishing a close connection between artistic expressions and spiritual beliefs.

The arrival of Spanish colonizers in the 16th century marked a significant turning point in the trajectory of Philippine theater. The imposition of Spanish cultural influences and religious doctrines led to the suppression of indigenous practices, resulting in the gradual decline of traditional rituals (Stošić, et al., 2016). Consequently, European theatrical traditions, predominantly Spanish and later American, began to permeate the Philippine theatrical landscape. The introduction of Western dramatic techniques and narrative structures gradually supplanted indigenous performative forms, leading to the adoption of a more realistic and linear style of storytelling.

The 20th century witnessed a resurgence of interest in indigenous cultural heritage, sparking a revival of traditional performative practices within Philippine theater. This cultural revival, coupled with the influence of global theatrical movements, facilitated the integration of indigenous elements with contemporary theatrical techniques, resulting in a unique blend of tradition and modernity. As a response to the socio-political climate of the time, Filipino playwrights and directors began incorporating realistic narratives that reflected the struggles and aspirations of the Filipino people, thereby establishing a distinct form of Philippine theatrical realism (Domingo,n.d.).

Understanding the transition from ritual to realism in Philippine theater holds profound significance in the contemporary context. It not only illuminates the historical roots of Philippine performance arts but also sheds light on the intricate interplay between cultural heritage and artistic innovation. Moreover, this research provides valuable insights into the ways in which colonial encounters and socio-political movements have shaped the trajectory of Philippine theater, thereby contributing to a more nuanced understanding of the country's cultural identity and artistic expression.

The transition from ritual to realism in Philippine theater represents a multifaceted process that encapsulates the resilience of indigenous cultural traditions amidst the challenges posed by colonialism and modernization. By exploring this transition within its historical context, this research endeavors to contribute to the broader discourse on the interconnection between tradition, modernity, and artistic expression in the Philippine theatrical landscape.

Literature Review

The evolution of Philippine theater from its ritualistic origins to the emergence of realism represents a rich tapestry of cultural and historical influences that have shaped the country's theatrical landscape. This literature review aims to explore the existing scholarship on the transition from ritual to realism in Philippine theater, highlighting key themes, trends, and debates within the field.

Scholars such as McKenna and Bautista have extensively documented the precolonial theatrical practices in the Philippines, emphasizing the integral role of rituals and communal performances in indigenous societies. McKenna (2023) asserts that precolonial Philippine theater was deeply intertwined with spiritual beliefs and communal values, often serving as a medium for the transmission of cultural heritage and collective memory. Bautista (2019) further elaborates on the performative elements embedded in indigenous rituals, highlighting the significance of mythological narratives and symbolic gestures in early Philippine theatrical expressions.

Colonial Encounters and Theatrical Transformations

The impact of Spanish colonization on Philippine theater has been a subject of scholarly inquiry, with prominent works by scholars such as San Juan Jr (2013) delineates the colonial encounter as a pivotal juncture that reconfigured indigenous practices and imposed European theatrical norms onto the Philippine cultural fabric. He elucidates the hegemonic nature of colonial power dynamics, which not only suppressed indigenous forms of expression but also fostered a cultural hybridity that shaped the trajectory of Philippine performance arts. Hernandez (1975) contributes to this discourse by emphasizing the assimilation of Spanish dramatic forms into Philippine theater, laying the groundwork for the subsequent evolution towards realism.

The revival of traditional practices within Philippine theater has garnered considerable scholarly attention, reflecting the resurgence of interest in indigenous cultural heritage. Works by scholars such as Bautista, San Juan Jr, and Hernandez have highlighted the significance of this cultural renaissance in reshaping the trajectory of Philippine theater. Labador (2023) emphasizes the role of cultural activism and nationalist movements in reclaiming indigenous performative traditions,

fostering a renewed appreciation for the cultural roots of Philippine theater. Bautista (2017) further explores the intersection between traditional and contemporary theatrical practices, underscoring the hybrid nature of Philippine performance arts that emerged as a response to globalization and cultural homogenization.

Realism and Social Critique in Philippine Theater

Scholarly works that analyze the emergence of realism in Philippine theater often emphasize its role in reflecting and critiquing the socio-political landscape of the country. Skuse, et al. (2011) provides insights into the socio-political dimensions of Philippine theatrical realism, highlighting how playwrights and directors utilized realistic narratives as a medium to address pressing social issues and advocate for political change. Similarly, Macapagal (2017) delves into the thematic concerns of realism in Philippine theater, underscoring its capacity to depict the struggles and aspirations of the Filipino people, thereby fostering a collective consciousness and societal transformation.

Recent scholarship within the field of Philippine theater has engendered critical discussions regarding the intersectionality of traditional and contemporary forms of performance. Works by contemporary scholars such as Orticio and Perillo have focused on the incorporation of indigenous elements within modern theatrical productions, highlighting the evolving nature of Philippine performance arts in the digital age. Orticio (2013) emphasizes the role of technology in reshaping traditional theatrical practices, illustrating how digital platforms have become instrumental in preserving and disseminating indigenous performance traditions. Perillo (2013) explores the intersection between postcolonialism and performance, offering a nuanced analysis of how postcolonial theories inform contemporary approaches to Philippine theater, thereby engendering a reevaluation of the country's cultural heritage and artistic identity.

The literature reviewed here underscores the multifaceted nature of the transition from ritual to realism in Philippine theater, elucidating the historical, cultural, and socio-political dimensions that have shaped the trajectory of the country's performance arts. From the precolonial roots of indigenous rituals to the contemporary fusion of traditional and modern forms, Philippine theater embodies a dynamic narrative of resilience, cultural revival, and artistic innovation that continues to resonate within the global theatrical landscape.

Methodology

A systematic literature review was conducted to comprehensively investigate the historical transition from ritual to realism in Philippine theater. The research process involved a structured approach to identify, select, and analyze relevant scholarly articles, books, and academic publications. The methodology encompassed the following key steps:

A systematic search strategy was devised to identify pertinent literature from various academic databases, including JSTOR, Google Scholar, and specialized journals in theater studies and Philippine cultural history. The search strategy incorporated a combination of keywords such as "Philippine theater," "ritual performance," "theatrical evolution," and "realism in theater" to ensure the comprehensive retrieval of relevant scholarly sources.

Stringent selection criteria were established to ensure the inclusion of high-quality, peer-reviewed articles and scholarly publications that specifically addressed the historical transition from ritual to realism in Philippine theater. Publications with a focus on indigenous performance practices, colonial influences, and the socio-cultural dimensions of theatrical transformation were prioritized for inclusion in the systematic literature review.

The collected literature was meticulously analyzed, and pertinent data points were extracted to identify recurring themes, historical contexts, and theoretical frameworks related to the transition in Philippine theater. The analysis emphasized the interplay between cultural, historical, and socio-political factors that shaped the evolution of theatrical practices in the Philippines over time.

A synthesis of the findings from the literature review was undertaken to construct a coherent narrative that delineated the historical trajectory of Philippine theater, elucidating the intricate interconnections between ritualistic traditions, colonial influences, and the emergence of realism. The interpretation of the synthesized data facilitated a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted dynamics that contributed to the evolution of Philippine theatrical expressions.

Findings and Discussion

Through the systematic literature review on the transition from ritual to realism in Philippine theater, four prominent themes emerged, highlighting the multifaceted nature of this evolution within the country's theatrical landscape.

Theme 1: Colonial Hegemony and Theatrical Assimilation

The systematic literature review highlights the profound impact of Spanish colonization on the development of Philippine theater, as evidenced by the assimilation of European dramatic forms and the gradual marginalization of indigenous performative traditions. Research by Cosme (2022) emphasizes the dominance of colonial hegemony in reshaping the theatrical landscape, leading to the subjugation of precolonial practices and the imposition of foreign cultural norms. This assimilative process resulted in the complex intermingling of colonial and indigenous elements, giving rise to a hybrid theatrical framework that reflected the multifaceted nature of cultural appropriation and resistance within Philippine performance arts.

According to Villaraza (2017), the legacy of colonial hegemony within Philippine theater is characterized by a subtle negotiation between the dominant European theatrical conventions and the persistent survival of indigenous performance forms. This negotiation manifested as a creative synthesis of Spanish dramatic techniques with indigenous storytelling traditions, ultimately contributing to the emergence of a unique hybrid theatrical style that encapsulated the enduring tensions between cultural assimilation and indigenous resilience. The findings underscore the intricate dynamics of power and cultural agency that shaped the trajectory of Philippine theater, illustrating the complexities of colonial hegemony as a transformative force in the evolution of theatrical practices within the archipelago.

Moreover, the persistence of colonial legacies within the Philippine theatrical framework underscores the enduring complexities of cultural identity and artistic expression in a postcolonial

context. This persistent influence of colonial hegemony not only shaped the historical trajectory of Philippine theater but also continues to resonate within contemporary artistic expressions, prompting critical reflections on the intricate interplay between cultural appropriation, resistance, and the ongoing quest for cultural autonomy within the Philippine theatrical narrative.

Theme 2: Revival of Indigenous Cultural Heritage

A compelling resurgence of interest in indigenous cultural heritage within Philippine theater, serving as a powerful testament to the enduring resilience of traditional performative practices that were marginalized during the colonial era. Scholarly research by Garcia Jr (2021) accentuates the significance of this revival, emphasizing how cultural activism and nationalist movements played a pivotal role in revitalizing indigenous rituals, myths, and storytelling techniques within the Philippine theatrical landscape. This resurgence reflects a deliberate and conscious effort to reclaim and celebrate the cultural roots of Philippine theater, signaling a transformative shift towards cultural revitalization and preservation.

Garcia Jr (2021) exploration of cultural activism underscores the role of grassroots movements and artistic interventions in fostering a renewed appreciation for indigenous performative traditions, thus fostering a deeper understanding of the historical and cultural significance of these practices. The revival of indigenous cultural heritage not only signifies a reclamation of cultural identity but also serves as a poignant manifestation of the collective efforts to reconnect with the country's rich historical legacy, as elucidated by Villaver Jr (2023) in her seminal work on Philippine cultural heritage.

Furthermore, the revival of indigenous cultural heritage within Philippine theater has engendered a profound reevaluation of the country's cultural identity and artistic expression, highlighting the enduring resilience of indigenous narratives and performance aesthetics in the face of historical marginalization. This reevaluation has sparked critical conversations on the significance of cultural heritage preservation and the role of the arts in fostering a sense of cultural continuity and collective memory, underscoring the transformative potential of indigenous performative practices in shaping a nuanced understanding of Philippine cultural identity within the global context.

In essence, the resurgence of indigenous cultural heritage within Philippine theater not only underscores the enduring legacy of traditional performative practices but also signifies a transformative movement towards cultural revitalization, reaffirming the intrinsic value of indigenous rituals and storytelling traditions in preserving the rich historical legacy of the Philippines.

Theme 3: Socio-Political Realism and Artistic Critique

The pivotal emergence of socio-political realism within Philippine theater, revealing its profound resonance as a responsive artistic medium to the societal tumult and political upheavals experienced by the Filipino people. Villaraza, (2017) extensively delves into the thematic concerns of socio-political realism within Philippine theater, highlighting its role in critiquing systemic injustices, advocating for political transformation, and fostering a collective consciousness among audiences. The incorporation of realistic narratives and themes within theatrical productions served as a potent vehicle for amplifying the voices of marginalized communities and advocating for social change.

The findings further elucidate how the thematic concerns of realism within Philippine theater encapsulated a diverse array of socio-political issues prevalent in the country. Aguas (2007) emphasizes the multifaceted nature of socio-political realism, underscoring its capacity to address issues such as social inequality, political oppression, the struggle for national liberation, and the pursuit of cultural autonomy. The integration of these thematic concerns within Philippine theatrical productions not only catalyzed critical reflections on the sociopolitical landscape but also engendered a profound dialogue on the challenges and aspirations of the Filipino people.

Moreover, the emergence of socio-political realism within Philippine theater signifies a paradigmatic shift in the role of the arts as a catalyst for social change and collective empowerment. The incorporation of realistic narratives and artistic critiques of societal injustices within theatrical productions fostered a heightened sense of awareness and civic engagement among audiences, as underscored by the findings of Werkshage (2014). This heightened awareness stimulated active participation in socio-political discourses, thereby fostering a collective consciousness that transcended the boundaries of the theatrical space and resonated within broader societal contexts.

The emergence of socio-political realism within Philippine theater not only exemplifies the transformative power of the arts in catalyzing social change but also highlights the integral role of artistic critique in fostering a nuanced understanding of the sociopolitical complexities and aspirations of the Filipino people. By amplifying marginalized voices, advocating for social justice, and fostering collective consciousness, socio-political realism within Philippine theater continues to serve as a poignant testament to the enduring resilience and transformative potential of artistic expressions within the realm of social and political activism.

Theme 4: Hybridization of Traditional and Modern Theatrical Practices

Llana (2018) emphasizes the transformative impact of technology on traditional theatrical forms, underscoring the integration of digital platforms and multimedia elements within contemporary Philippine theater. This integration signifies the adaptability and resilience of Philippine theater in navigating the challenges posed by globalization and cultural homogenization, as it actively engages with diverse artistic forms and technological advancements.

Furthermore, the findings highlight the innovative approaches employed by Filipino playwrights, directors, and performers in reconciling traditional indigenous performance aesthetics with global theatrical movements. This creative fusion of traditional and modern theatrical practices not only transcends cultural boundaries but also fosters a dynamic and inclusive theatrical landscape that resonates with diverse audiences, as noted by Villaver Jr (2023). The incorporation of indigenous performance techniques alongside contemporary staging methods reflects the intrinsic capacity of Philippine theater to adapt and evolve, thus redefining the boundaries of artistic expression and cultural representation within a rapidly changing socio-cultural milieu.

The hybridization of traditional and modern theatrical practices within contemporary Philippine theater serves as a testament to the dynamic evolution of artistic forms and cultural expressions, highlighting the resilience and adaptability of Philippine theater in embracing diverse artistic influences and technological advancements. This creative fusion underscores the transformative

potential of artistic innovation in reshaping the theatrical landscape, as it continues to engender a vibrant and inclusive platform for cultural exchange and creative exploration within the realm of global theater.

These findings collectively underscore the intricate interplay between historical legacies, cultural revival, artistic innovation, and socio-political engagement within the trajectory of Philippine theater, reaffirming the resilience and dynamism of the country's rich theatrical heritage.

Conclusion

The analysis of the transition from ritual to realism in Philippine theater reveals a dynamic interplay between historical legacies, cultural revival, artistic innovation, and socio-political engagement. The enduring impact of colonial hegemony on Philippine theater is evident in the assimilation of European dramatic forms and the persistence of cultural hybridity, illustrating the complexities of cultural appropriation and resistance within the country's theatrical narrative. However, the resurgence of indigenous cultural heritage signifies a profound reclamation of cultural identity, emphasizing the role of cultural activism and nationalist movements in revitalizing marginalized indigenous performative traditions.

Furthermore, the emergence of socio-political realism within Philippine theater serves as a powerful catalyst for critiquing societal injustices, advocating for political change, and fostering collective consciousness among audiences. The thematic concerns of socio-political realism reflect the diverse socio-political issues prevalent in the country, encapsulating the struggles for social equality, national liberation, and cultural autonomy.

Moreover, the hybridization of traditional and modern theatrical practices within contemporary Philippine theater highlights the adaptability and resilience of the art form in responding to the challenges of globalization and cultural homogenization. The creative fusion of indigenous performance techniques with global theatrical movements and digital innovations underscores the transformative potential of artistic innovation in reshaping the theatrical landscape and fostering a vibrant platform for cultural exchange and creative exploration.

The transition from ritual to realism in Philippine theater embodies a narrative of resilience, cultural revival, and artistic dynamism, underscoring the profound significance of the theatrical medium in preserving the rich historical legacy and cultural identity of the Philippines. The multifaceted evolution of Philippine theater serves as a poignant testament to the enduring spirit of artistic expression and cultural resilience, perpetuating the legacy of the country's rich theatrical heritage within the global artistic landscape.

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