



RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Philippine Creation Stories: Ecological Significance and Ecological Wisdom

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**ABSTRACT**

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This study determines the ecocritical significance embedded in the formalistic elements and the man's treatment to nature in selected Philippine Creation Stories. Specifically, it investigates the formalistic elements in the aspects of metaphor and themes; the ways human treat nature through attitudes, values, and behaviors; and ecological wisdom expressed in the stories. This is a qualitative study using content analysis. Results revealed that ecocritical significance such as space consciousness, Earth's minerals, season/climate, plantation, animals, natural landscapes, land and sea creatures, cosmic elements, supernatural beliefs on cosmic characters, supreme deities/ spirits, and primordality are revealed in the formalistic elements of the stories. Treatment of nature in the stories reveal the attitude of ecocentrism; values of respect or reverence for nature; and behaviors of taking vengeance, worshipping nature, honoring seasonal changes, and respecting natural landscapes or spaces. Ecological wisdom on interdependence of nature and humanity, importance of diversity in nature to ensure stability, the balance of nature, and man's role as nature's steward are reflected in the stories. The study concludes that ecocritical significance are embedded in the formalistic elements and the man's treatment to nature in the selected Philippine creation stories.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Nature and literature have always shared a close relationship as is evidenced in the works of poets and other writers down the ages in almost all cultures of the world (Kumar, 2017). In fact, the world of literature throngs with works dealing with the beauty and power of nature because the relationship of people and environment is reciprocal. The natural habitat can provide abundantly what the dwellers need. However, the natural endowments of a place may not always come in forms of finished products. By looking closely into nature's gifts around, people, who are innately artistic and appreciative, find it insufficient to simply deal with their environment in its physical utilization. They go beyond mere existence of nature to the extent of putting what they feel, hear, touch, taste and see around them (Wakit & Aguila, 2021).

Among the questions people in the past were curious about in relation to their environment, is on how the world is created. Nearly ancestors of every culture had explained how the wonders of the earth came to be orally from generation to generation. These stories have an immense influence on people's frame of reference. They influence the way people think about the world and their place in relation to their surroundings (Murtagh, n.d.). Similarly, H. Otley Beyer (as cited in Eugenio, 2007) observed that the Philippines has a rich and varied mythology which are preserved chiefly as folktales among the Christianized peoples of the plain but preserved only through oral traditions in the mountains.

Like myths in general, Philippine myths explain the creation of the universe, the origin of the celestial bodies, the creation of first man and woman and the origin of social classes (Eugenio, 2007). Philippine myths have varying account of creation from different ethnic groups due to a wide array of diverse culture flourishing in the islands. These myths were transmitted orally, resulting in variations even within the same region. Consequently, a single ethnic group may have multiple versions of their creation myth, influenced by localities and sub-cultures within a broader mother culture.

Today, a great number of writers have come up expressing their awareness, studies, and interpretations of the environment and from these, many theories concerning nature were crafted. The intimate relationship between the natural and social world is being analyzed and emphasized in all departments of knowledge and development. Literary critic tries to study how this has been textualized by the writers in their works (Kumar, 2017).

In the literature review there had been studies conducted on Philippine creation myths. These studies focus on the structural aspect of the myths using the analytical approach of Claude Levi-Strauss (D'Aprix, 1991). Mercader (2007) also studied structuralism on Philippine creational myth using the same approach. This present study uses the Philippine creational myths but employ the ecocritical perspective.

The value of myths, particularly myths of origin, to students of Filipino society and culture cannot be overemphasized. These narratives are basic to their social tradition and heritage. Yet the study of Filipino mythology has not apparently attracted the attention of many educators and students. Anyone who reads old accounts about the Philippines will certainly note that their forefathers believed in many divinities. These deities inhabited their surrounding world and maintained continued social and ritual interactions with them. Aside from these relationships, these supernatural beings were believed to have control over all phenomena basic to man's survival- e.g., weather, diseases, success of crops, and so forth-such that every phase of the daily activity had to follow the wishes of these controlling powers. The farmer, the hunter, or the wayfarer venturing into the fields, hills, and forests should first seek the permission of the spirits living in the vicinity or else he would meet with misfortunes on his way (Jocano, 1969).

Viewed from this perspective, this inquiry is conducted to provide a wider understanding and keener appreciation of the way nature is represented in the writing. This will also find out the way humans relate with nature as reflected in their attitudes, values, and behaviors. It also endeavors to bolster the idea that Philippine creation myths contains ecological wisdom that has significant influence on the country's local wisdom and culture.

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

This is a qualitative study using content analysis. Qualitative research is an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. The process of research involves emerging questions and procedures, data typically collected in the participant's setting, data analysis inductively building from particulars to general themes, and the researcher making interpretations of the meaning of the data. The final written report has a flexible structure. Those who engage in this form of inquiry support a way of looking at research that honors an inductive style, a focus on individual meaning, and the importance of reporting the complexity of a situation (Creswell, 2010). Content analysis is a set of techniques for the systematic analysis of texts of many kinds, addressing not only manifest content but also the themes and core ideas found in texts as primary content (Drisko & Maschi, 2016). This study utilized qualitative content analysis type of research to analyze the ecological wisdom reflected in the selected Philippine Creation Stories using formalism and ecocriticism perspectives.

The primary source of this study is Damiana Eugenio's book *Philippine Folk Literature: An Anthology* (Second Edition). The creation stories taken are *The Story of Creation*, *The Creation of the World*, *Tungkung-Langit and Alunsina*, *The Peopling of the World*, *Cosmogony*, and *the Origin of the World*. The secondary sources of the data are online sources such as articles and journals and printed text as cited.

This research used a published book titled *Philippine Folk Literature: An Anthology* (Second Edition) compiled by Damiana L. Eugenio. Since the material is already published, the researcher can use it without requiring permission from the copyright owner based on the fair dealing provisions on the use of copyright material.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The first problem presented in this study is the culling out of the formalistic elements: metaphor and themes that are present in the stories. These formalistic elements are interpreted to reveal the ecocritical significance and the extraction of ecological wisdom.

The metaphors in the Creation Story of the Tinguian reveal an ecocritical element of space consciousness. It is reflected in the sentence below:

*It is said that those who fled to the hidden rooms are the chiefs of these islands; those who remained nearer the outside are the timaguas; those who hid themselves within the walls are the slaves; those who hid themselves in the fireplace are the blacks; and those who fled out to the sea through the open door are the Spaniards, and that they had no news of us (Spaniards) until they beheld us return through the sea.*

#### Metaphor analysis

Hidden rooms, nearer the outside, within the walls, in the fireplace, and the open door are metaphors used to reflect the different early class social structure among the Tinguians such as the chiefs, timaguas, slaves, the blacks, and lastly the Spaniards. Before the coming of the Spaniards, the early Filipino society had four social classes: the chiefs, nobles, freemen, and the slaves. The chief headed a barangay or community. His family, relatives and elders belonged to the group of nobles. The freemen or middle class belong to the timawa or maharlika group. Slaves were of two kinds: aliping namamahay and aliping saguigulid. Each class performs their varying roles in society in their own spheres of influence.

These different class social structure and functions show the ecocritical significance of space consciousness. Space consciousness in ecocriticism refers to man's acknowledgment that nature's physical terrain has its own purposes and have intrinsic value of their own. This idea is supported by Evernden's *The Social Creation of Nature* which explains that nature is as much a social entity as a physical one. In addition to its physical resources, it also consists of a domain of norms that may be called upon in defense of certain social ideals (Khan, 2019).

From this, the ecological wisdom of man as nature's steward comes to surface. Humans are parts of nature. They are not masters but stewards to everything in it. This means that man is only God's caretaker of nature. Just as the people in each class social structure of the early Tinguians performed their specific roles and duties, so does man towards nature.

In the Creation Story from Bikol, metaphors being used reveal Earth's minerals such as rock, copper, gold and silver. It is reflected in the sentence below.

*Daga, a strong man, possessed a body of rock; Aldao, a jolly fellow, had a body of gold; Bulan, a copper-made man, was a weakling; while the beautiful Bitoon was made of pure silver.*

Rock, gold, copper, and silver are metaphors used to describe the bodies of the siblings produced by the union of the god Paros and goddess Dagat. This is supported by Allison B. Wallace who observes that ecocriticism is used to writing that examines and invites intimate human experience of place's myriad ingredients: weather, climate, flora, fauna, soil, air, water, rocks, minerals, fire, and ice, as well as all the marks there of human history (Khan, 2019).

Earth's minerals express the ecological wisdom of diversity and stability of natural resources. This means that the earth is rich in natural resources. Diversity of natural resources is essential for it promotes stability in our ecosystem (Pardo, 2012).

The third Creation story is from the Visayas Region about Tungkung Langit and Alunsina. The metaphors used in this story reveal seasons particularly the rainy season which is accompanied by the sound of thunder. This is expressed in the sentences below:

*The people in Panay today say that rain is Tungkung Langit's tears. Incidentally, when it thunders hard, the old folk also say that it is Tungkung Langit sobbing, calling for his beloved Alunsina to come back---- entreating her so hard that his voice reverberates across the fields and countrysides.*

The rainy season is used in the story as the tears of the god Tungkung Langit in the heavenly because of his loneliness caused by Alunsina's absence. Also, sound of thunder was used to be the god's sobbing to entice his wife to come back. According to Wallace, climate or season is one of the place myriad's ingredients (Khan, 2019).

Metaphor on climate or season led to the ecological wisdom of nature's balance. This means that nature has its own laws and processes to maintain its equilibrium (Pardo, 2012). Earth's seasonal variation is necessary for both man's and nature's survival. Thus, balance is a must.

The fourth creation story is still from Visayas titled as the Peopling of the Earth. This story is from the Yliguenes people also known as the Hiligaynon or the Ilonggo. In this story, metaphors used are creatures from land (pig) and from the sea (shark). These living creatures were used to represent death and festivity as reflected below:

*Pandaguan was the first to invent a net for fishing at sea; and the first time he used it, he caught a shark and brought it on shore, thinking that it would not die. But the shark died when brought ashore; and Pandaguan, when he saw this, began to mourn and weep over it---complaining against the gods for having allowed the shark to die, when no one had died before that time. It is said that the god Captan sent the weevil, who brought back the news of the shark's death. The god Captan was displeased at these obsequies to a fish.*

When Pandaguan returned, he did not find his wife at home because she had been invited by her friend to feast upon a pig that had been stolen; and the natives say that this was the first theft committed in the world.

Pig and shark are land and sea creatures. According to Scheese, landscape includes the non-human elements of place--the rocks, soil, trees, plants, rivers, animals, air--as well as human perceptions and modifications (Khan, 2019).

These ecocritical elements on land and sea creatures express the ecosophy on man's stewardship of nature. In the story, Pandaguan took the shark out of the sea and brought it to the shore thinking that it would not die. However, the shark died and was said to be the first death that ever happened among living things, and this angered the god Captan. This incident leads to Pandaguan's death as punishment from his negligent action towards the shark. On the other hand, the pig was also used for festivity. However, the way the pig was caught was by stealing it. This action towards this creature was also considered in the story as the first theft committed by humanity. This also reflects man's failure to steward nature responsively.

The last two Creation stories are from Mindanao. The fifth one is titled Cosmogony from the Bagobo ethnic group. The metaphor in this story reveals the cosmic seasons particularly the rainy and sunny seasons. This is reflected in the sentences below:

*When the rain falls, it is Diwata throwing out water from the sky. When Diwata spits, the showers fall. The sun makes yellow clouds, and the yellow clouds make the colors of the rainbow. But the white clouds are smoke from the fire of the gods.*

As stated, climate or season is included in the study of ecocriticism. The metaphors here refer to the action of the supreme deity Diwata, among the Bagobo. His throwing of water in the sky causes rainfall and the appearance of white clouds (sunny weather) is produced by her making of fire.

Again, this ecocritical element leads to the ecosophy on the balance of nature which refers to nature's own laws and processes to maintain its harmony.

Lastly is the story of The Origin of the World by the Maranao people in Lanao del Sur. The Maranao are Muslim people. In this story, the ecocritical element revealed is also space consciousness. This can be gleaned from the lines below:

*This world is divided into seven layers. The earth has also seven layers. Each layer is inhabited by a different kind of being. The uppermost layer, for example, is the place we are inhabiting. The second layer is being inhabited by dwarfs. These dwarfs are short, plump, and long-haired. They are locally known as Karibanga. The Karibanga are said to possess magical powers. They are usually invisible to the human eye. The third layer of the earth which is found under the sea or lake is inhabited by nymphs. These nymphs also possess certain magical powers. It is stated in the story of Rajah Indarapatra that he met and fell in love with the princess-nymph with whom he had a child.*

The sky also consists of seven layers. Each layer has a door which is guarded day and night by a huge mythical bird called garoda. The seventh layer of the sky is the seat of heaven which is also divided into seven layers. Every layer in the sky is inhabited by angels.

The metaphors used here refer to the different layers of the earth and sky. These layers are inhabited by different kinds of creatures. In the study of Koje (2020) on Ramo folksongs in India using ecocriticism shows observable ecocritical elements in the form of culture, society, life-force, spirits, supernatural beliefs, human-nature relationship, and human-animals relationship.

This story through its metaphor reveals the ecological wisdom of man's stewardship towards nature. This is man's conscious effort to acknowledge the existence of other beings in nature aside from himself. This stewardship of nature means dominion and not domination (Abun, 2017).

These findings are supported by Wakit et al. (2021) who also analyzed the selected municipal hymns and folk songs of Nueva Vizcaya imploring ecocritism perspective of Cheryll Glotfelty. The study found out that the array of agricultural towns of the province arranged from the southern to northern part and their natural landscape and agri-industrial descriptions, the vastness of nature-related terms in the municipal hymns and selected folk songs presented and elucidated space consciousness, ecological themes and metaphors of nature. She concluded that there is literature in the physical landscape of the province. Literature and the environment have a perfect blend into the municipal hymns and selected folk songs.

Through the stories' metaphors the ecocritical significance of space consciousness, earth minerals, seasons, and sea and land creatures are revealed. From these elements, ecological wisdom on man's stewardship of nature, balance of nature, and the importance of diversity and stability in nature are drawn.

### **Themes analysis**

The creation stories from Luzon and Visayas have the theme of Dualism and Antagonism. Dualism and antagonism are the belief in two supreme opposed powers or gods, or sets of divine or demonic beings, that caused the world to exist (Long, n.d.). In the creation story of the Tinguian, the conflict was between sky and sea, then followed by the conflict of the father and his children; for the Creation of Bikol, the conflict was between the grandparent gods; Languit and Tubigan vs. the grandchildren; Daga, Aldao, Bulan, and Bitoon; husband vs. wife conflict in Tungkung Langit and Alunsina; and in the Peopling of the Word was god; Captan and Maguayen vs. man; Pandaguan.

This common theme reveals the ecocritical significance of supernatural beliefs in supreme beings which also lead to the ecological wisdom of balance of nature. As mentioned in previous analyses, misplaced conflict leads to chaos and imbalance in a relationship, in this context between man and nature.

For the creation stories in Mindanao, the theme on creation by supreme being is revealed. Though the precise nature and characteristics of the supreme creator deity may differ from culture to culture, a specific and pervasive structure of this type of deity can be discerned. Charles Long lists the following common characteristics: (1) he is all wise and all powerful. The world comes into being because of his wisdom, and he is able to actualize the world because of his power. (2) The deity exists

alone prior to the creation of the world. There is no being or thing prior to his existence. No explanation can therefore be given of his existence before which one confronts the ultimate mystery. (3) The mode of creation is conscious, deliberate, and orderly. This again is an aspect of the creator's wisdom and power. Creation comes about because the deity seems to have a definite plan in mind and does not create on a trial-and-error basis.

This theme again reveals the belief in supernatural being. However, unlike the first four creation myths from Luzon and Mindanao, these stories have the ecological wisdom on man's stewardship towards nature. These are reflected in these sentences:

*Then he took two lumps of earth and shaped them like human figures; then he spat on them, and they became man and woman. The old man was called Tuglay and the old woman Tuglibung. The two were married and lived together. Tuglay made a great house and planted seeds of different kinds that Diwata gave him.*

Heaven which is found on the seventh layer of the sky is where good people's spirits go after death. Saints are assigned to the seventh layer while persons who "barely made it" are confined to the lower most layer which is found at the bottom of heaven.

It is in heaven where we find the tree-of-life. On each leaf of the tree-of-life is written the name of every person living on earth. As soon as a leaf ripens or dries and falls, the person whose name it carries also dies.

The soul of every person is found in tightly covered jars kept in one section of heaven. This particular section of heaven is closely guarded by a monster with a thousand eyes, named Walo. Walo, in addition to his thousand eyes, has also eight hairy heads. The epic of Darangan speaks of Madale, Bantugan's brother and, Mabaning, husband of Lawanen, entering this section and retrieving the soul of Bantugan.

In the Bagobo myth, Diwata gave different kinds of seeds to Tuglay which implies that he is entrusted to domain the earth and increase its plantation. This is a gesture of giving man stewardship over the created things. In the Maranao creation myth, man after death is judged and placed in a particular layer in the sky based on his deeds on earth. This implies that man's eternal destiny is dependent on his carrying out of duty on earth given by this Supreme being, and that includes the proper treatment of nature and other created beings.

A study of Jewel Mercader on Structuralism in select Philippine Creational Mythology (2007) come up with binary oppositions and mediators. These are: 1) the homology between the relation of sky and earth as to the relation of gods and human beings; 2) recurring events of state of chaos leading to imposition of order; 3) creation as a contingent of conflict between two opposing characters or forces; and 4) water and earth as foundation elements of the composition of mankind.

Additionally, Gaverza's (2014) thesis deals with Philippine higher and lower mythology. Terms such as the Aswang were semantically deconstructed to delineate between the different aspects and connotations on what the Philippine idea of different types of halimaw can be represented by one lexical item. Themes and motifs of Philippine myths were extracted from different mythological stories. Philippine higher mythology was organized by ethnolinguistic group in terms of cosmogony, cosmology, the conceptualization of the soul and the deities associated. Philippine lower mythology and the creatures associated were given a new classification.

The stories' theme on dualism and antagonism reveals the ecocritical significance of supernatural belief in supreme beings and cosmic characters. Ecological wisdom on balance of nature and man's role as nature's steward are obtained.

### **Ecological wisdom expressed in the stories**

The last problem of this study is to identify the various ecological wisdom found in the six (6) creation stories from the three main island in the Philippines through the stories formalistic and ecocritical significance. All in all, there are four ecological wisdoms drawn from the analyses of the stories using the ecocritical approach. They are Interdependence, Diversity and Stability, Balance of Nature, and Stewardship.

Interdependence means that everything is related to everything. Nature here does not mean a mere fancy of its beautiful aspects like plants and animals. Nature here means the whole of the physical environment consisting of the human and the non-human. The interconnection between the two creates a bond which is the basis of Ecocriticism. If humans try to destroy nature, they will be paid back by their own coins. Our global crisis is not because of how ecosystems function. It is because of how our ethical systems function. Getting through the crisis requires understanding our impact on nature. It requires understanding those ethical systems and using that understanding to reform them. As long as there is a harmony between the living and the non-living, there prevails a healthy ecosystem for the benevolence of mankind as well as the earth. The modern ecological consciousness has a feeling that the balance between humans and the natural world must be maintained. A perfect ecology is one in which plants, animals, birds and human beings live in such harmony that none dominates or destroys the other (Jimmy, 2015).

Diversity is essential because it promotes stability. Understanding the relationship between diversity and stability requires a knowledge of how species interact with each other and how each is affected by the environment. A growing number of empirical studies demonstrate positive diversity-stability relationships. Because anthropogenic changes often affect stability and diversity simultaneously, diversity-stability relationships cannot be understood outside the context of the environmental drivers affecting both. This shifts attention away from diversity-stability relationships toward the multiple factors, including diversity, that dictate the stability of ecosystems (Carpenter, 2007).

Balance of nature means that nature has its own laws and processes to maintain its equilibrium. Ecocriticism advocates sustainable development for a better future of mankind in general. All organisms have their right to survive in their own way. The plants, the animals, the women, the marginal, the tribal - all have their role to play to keep up the earth's basic life support system. Limited use of resources will ensure the safe and secured future of the generations to come. The most common measure to tackle environmental crisis is sustainable development. This categorically means the required use of natural resources without endangering the whole environment and the well-being of all human beings (Jimmy, 2015).

Lastly, stewardship means that humans are part of nature. They are not masters, but stewards of the earth. Stewardship means dominion and not domination. Human nature is essentially anthropocentric which positions humans on top. As earth's only literary being, man considers himself as superior to every other organism. But ecocriticism decenters humanity's importance to every object of environment. In ecology, man's tragic flaw is his anthropocentric as opposed to biocentric vision, and his compulsion to conquer, harmonize, domesticate, violate and exploit every natural thing. Anthropocentric assumes the primacy of humans, who either sentimentalize or dominate the environment. On the other hand, Biocentric decenters humanities importance and explores the complex interrelationships between the human and the nonhuman (Balmaceda, 2008).

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings. Eco critical significance are embedded in the formalistic elements and the man's treatment to nature in the selected Philippine creation stories.

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