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回溯《薩滿祭司》舞作的編創過程

*Babaylan Reimagined:*

The Process of Choreographing BBYLN

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*Babaylan Reimagined: The Process of Choreographing BBYLN*

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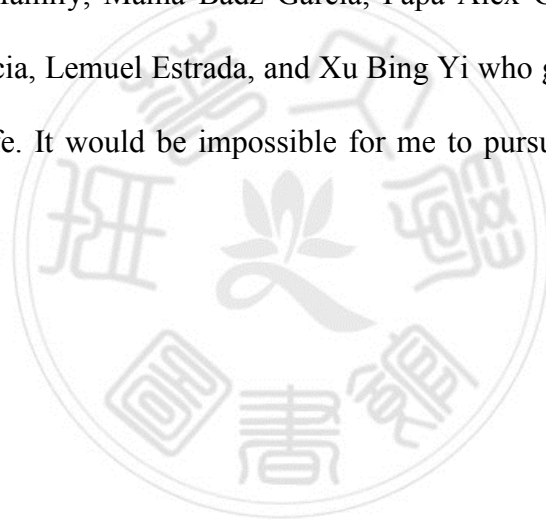
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## 摘要

*Babaylan* 是指菲律賓文化中具有靈性與智慧的人。本研究的主題是關於這些在菲律賓前殖民時期受人崇敬的領導人，並試圖向台灣及國外觀眾介紹與重述這部分的菲律賓文化。由於全球化與宗教原因，在菲律賓過去廿年之前，關於 *Babaylan* 的話題並沒有被廣泛討論，也幾乎在歷史的對話中消失。身為菲律賓少數年輕文化學者的目標，是在更大的表演藝術平台上，分享菲國豐富的傳統、文化與實踐，而我有責任透過我表達與藝術語言的媒介-舞蹈，來分享可聯繫當代與傳統間的故事。

在本研究當中，我分享了我作為編舞者創作名為「薩滿祭司(*BBYLN*)」舞作的過程。標題 *BBYLN* 讀成沒有母音的 *Babaylan*。菲律賓是屬於南島語系，其獨特的書寫系統稱為“*Baybayin*”，這是一種母音附標文字，表示母音會因符號而被標示或改變，因此，*Babaylan* 在“*Baybayin*”文字中，即 *Bby=ln+ (BBYLN)* 之意。

本研究從文化舞蹈實踐者的觀點，專注於介紹菲律賓的部分文化，而非呈現特定民族語言學的團體。創作本作品時，我必須了解我所做的所有決定，避免對特定社區的剝削及傳奇化，根據我所知所學來進行創作。利用傳統的手勢與表達方式來作為深入動作探索的靈感與動力，而非依原樣貌呈現。本作品為權衡於研究、體現與藝術自由的創作。

**關鍵詞：**薩滿祭司，創譯，菲律賓，現代舞

## Abstract

*Babaylan* is a spiritual or wise(wo)man in Philippine culture. As such, the *Babaylans* are considered among the respected leaders in pre-colonial Philippines, thus making them a central interest of this research study. This research attempts to introduce and retell a part of Philippine culture to Taiwan and foreign audiences. In the Philippines, due to religious reasons and globalization, topics about *Babaylans* were not widely discussed and rendered almost non-existent in history and conversations until about 20 years ago. As part of the few young cultural scholars in the Philippines whose goal is to bring back the country's rich traditions, cultures, and practices in the bigger performing arts platforms, the author has made it his personal responsibility to share stories that could link our history with the contemporary, perhaps through my medium of expression and language—dance.

In this research, I shared my journey as a choreographer in creating the work entitled “BBYLN”. The title reads as *Babaylan* without the vowels. The Philippines being part of the Austronesian language family has its unique writing system called “*Baybayin*”, an alpha syllabary script which means vowels are denoted and altered by symbols, thus, *Babaylan* is **Bby=ln** (BBYLN) in *Baybayin* script.

This research employs the point of view of a cultural dance practitioner, whose lens is focused on introducing a part of Philippine culture rather than representing the specific ethnolinguistic group. In creating this work, I had to carefully weigh all decisions that I make in order to avoid exploitation and romanticization of specific communities as applied to what I know and have learned. I used traditional gestures and expressions as inspirations and as an impetus to further movement explorations rather than presenting it as it is. This resulted in a balance of research, embodiment, and artistic freedom.

**Keywords:** Babaylan, Transcreation, Philippines, Contemporary Dance

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## Preface

My body of work in the Philippines prior to pursuing my MFA was mostly experience and culture-inspired choreographies which aided and lead me to this recent work. This research is a platform to further study, analyze, and create something new from years of working in the field of Philippine traditional and contemporary dance. Also, this study provided an opportunity not just to link history with the present, but for this time, to create new work in a foreign land for foreign viewers. Another first is the application of the new worldviews in performance-making and movement explorations made possible by my master's degree study here in Taiwan.

As earlier stated, Aboriginal Taiwan and the Philippines both belong to the Austronesian language family. They did not only share similar language but also culture, customs, and traditions. Staying in Taiwan for almost two years gave me an avenue to explore and learn about aboriginal cultures, and communities in the country. Having just an ample amount of time to come up with a concrete research study, I decided to focus on a topic that I am well-versed with and confident to tackle. Hence choosing *Babaylan*, to share this story to foreign viewers and to raise further discussions in finding out other similarities or differences to other cultures was the logical choice.

In learning about Taiwan's rich aboriginal cultures and communities, and by interacting with people who have a deeper knowledge about Taiwan's peoples, never have I encountered similar shamans as that of the Filipino *Babaylan*. And the people whom I shared the history of the *Babaylans* became curious about them. Thus, the urge of putting this idea to stage got stronger.

The final output of this research is a choreographic work dedicated to introducing Philippine pre-colonial *Babaylan*, whose gender is neither male nor female , to Taiwanese audiences. A work that re-tells of the mystical lives of the *Babaylan* and which also honors their great work in keeping the balance of life and death and keeping the peace between heaven and the earth. This piece also echoes and honors the artists who are striving to live their art in this time of pandemic. It seeks to bridge the *Babaylan* stories and beings to and in the contemporary as they live their lives as the keepers of our cultures and traditions through different media of expressions. They keep the balance of an introspective life and art itself - sharing our art as healing especially in this time of pandemic.



# Chapter 1

## **BABAYLAN'S HISTORY**

*“Shamanism is rooted in a worldview that believes in the transcendent being known as Heaven. All essential values exist only in Heaven, and Heaven exercises dominion over all the world by imparting its essential values to the Earth. In this epistemological system, the shaman, who mediates between Heaven and Earth, resides in a position of rulership over the Earth. As the representative of Heaven, the shaman therefore has absolute authority and embodies the ultimate values of the universe on behalf of Heaven.”*

*(Kizo, 2018)*

My curiosity about *Babaylans* began when I was studying at the Philippine High School for the Arts (PHSA) as a folk dance major. There, I learned various dances, music, and rituals from more than 175 ethnolinguistic groups in the Philippine archipelago consisting of some 7,107 islands. Indigenous cultures and beliefs are preserved in the intangible treasures of communities and are reflected in the form of dances, songs, rituals, and stories that are handed down from one generation to the next. By studying dances, I have gained so much knowledge of the lives of different groups of people in the Philippines their livelihood, environment, customs, food, and on how they value their lives and the lives around them.

As one of the key players in the community aside from the chieftain, the *Babaylans* are the most knowledgeable people in the community. They know how to use plants and herbs to heal the

sick, conduct rituals for birth, courtship, marriage, planting, harvesting, and even death. And the most interesting thing about them is that they are spiritual leaders that can communicate and interact with the nature spirits to seek guidance and protection.

The highest position a community healer can achieve is to become a *Babaylan*. However, one cannot choose or self-declare that one is a *Babaylan*. Rather, it is the spirit, the highest spiritual being sent to earth or God himself/herself who chooses the one who is to become a *Babaylan*, this spirit will be his spirit guide or others call ‘pet spirits’. (Jesus, 2021). To be a *Babaylan* requires much responsibility and accountability to God, his spirit guide and to his community as a healer and spiritual leader. They don’t need to be a warrior but a keeper of peace, through them, the spirits guide the community to live in peace and harmony.



Figure 1: Image: “*Babaylan*” by R. Aguilar at Negros Museum

*“They are significant not only because they crossed male and female gender lines, but they are respected leaders and figures of authority, they have religious functions, mediating both the earth and the spirit worlds.”*

*(Kizo, 2018).*

*“Babaylans* are called by other names in the rich dialects of Philippine indigenous communities: *Mombaki, Dawac, Balyan* or *Balian, Katalonan, Ma-Aram, Mangngallag, Mumbaki, Mambunong*” (Strobel, 2018) , are among them. One *Babaylan*, will be of particular interest and will be tackled in this research. It is the male gender-crossers specifically called *Katalonan* or *Asog*, which is referred to in this research. For purposes of this research I will refer to them as *Babaylan* in general.

Gender-crossing rather than Cross-dressing, is a condition where male *Babaylans* were not merely putting on women’s clothes, rather, their “gender-crossing” abilities were respected, and they were treated as women were in society. They do what women do, except childbearing. According to a Spanish chronicler, that *Babaylans* were married to men, to whom they had a sexual relationship. They were treated as partners or concubines, but their husbands can have other wives and can have children too.

*“Gender crossers enjoyed a comparatively esteemed status in pre-colonial Philippine society simply because women enjoyed a similar status. Women were priestesses and matriarchs who divorced their husbands if they wanted, chose their children’s names, owned property and accumulated wealth... “*

*“...To their native communities, they were Babaylan or Catalonan: religious functionaries and shamans; intermediaries between the visible and invisible worlds to whom even the local ruler (Datu) deferred. They please angry spirits, foretold the future, healed infirmities, and even reconciled warring couples and tribes. Also, apart from playing a great role in preserving ancient culture and tradition, they also led uprising revolts during 17<sup>th</sup> century, resisting conversion and colonial Spanish rule.”*

*(Garcia,2004)*



Figure 2: Image from The Soul Book

## 1.1. Related Works by Other Artists

Agnes Locsin's *Babaylan* (1993) and Ren-ar Padole's *Libulan* (2019) are two of the choreographic works that tackled the stories of *Babaylan* and *Libulan* (god of the moon). Agnes Locsin, a pioneer and ground-breaking Filipino choreographer, is one of the reasons why I am choreographing now. A former artistic director of Ballet Philippines, Locsin initiated the "neo-ethnic" movement, "a distinct choreographic style of weaving the classical ballet technique of Ballet Philippines dancers with the ethnic dances of the Philippines." (Ness, 1997).

*"Locsin's "neo-ethnic" ballets have in general drawn positive critical attention for the advances they have achieved in their creative, highly "original" mastery of representing and "re-presenting" the intersection of diverse cultural dance traditions and techniques in the Philippines context. Locsin's choreography seeks to provide new statements about such historically situated cultural intersections in international aesthetic discourse on Filipino identity, one in which the high art of ballet is wed in a reversal of colonial aesthetic values, to the ancient "crafts" of traditional Philippine dancing." (Ness, 1997).*

Due to some restrictions, I have not seen Locsin's *Babaylan* (1993) in theatre or film. It is difficult to get access to her work due to archival and copyright reasons. But I have been in her classes and learned some of her movement techniques and choreography. I have seen on stage her notable works in the Philippine dance scene which are *Pitong Alay* (2004), *La Revolucion Filipina* (1996) and *Labaw Donggon* (1997). I've looked up to her and closely followed her works since studying traditional dances at PHSA. Most of the works that I have seen are deeply rooted in traditional dances and are beautifully woven into modern dance. Her neo-ethnic style influenced

me as a student dance artist, her works still echo within me. Having the capacity to create works as valuable to the country as hers, I also dream of creating my own works with a touch of my own style. Due to globalization and the fast pace of technological advancement, my contemporaries are creating works that have kept up with what is done mostly around the globe and as seen on available media. Because I want to follow in the footsteps of Agnes Locsin, I am sticking to my roots and creating works that I can claim as being truly Filipino.

As dance transcends age, Ren-ar Padole a former student of mine in the Philippine High School for the Arts school year 2017-2018 has successfully explored the queer culture in the Philippines in his Grade 12 thesis recital. Entitled *LIBULAN: of Quiescence and Disturbance* (2019) the final theme was inspired by the moon god in the Visayan creation myth called, “*Libulan*.” But some myths associate the deity with the female, thus painting *Libulan* as somewhat a gay icon. On account of this myth, the *Libulan’s* cult had cross-dressing males who were revered for their power to heal and prophesize. These men were called *Babaylan* and were believed to have the ability to communicate between the physical and spiritual worlds. But when the colonizers came, they were demonized and erased from records of tradition (San Juan, 2020). As a young aspiring dance artist and a proud member of the LGBT community, Padole’s intentions are clear in using *Libulan’s* myth in reminding his audience about this lost history. In his creative output, he manages to inspire and create awareness to his contemporaries about the roots and history of his flight as an LGBT dance artist. Currently, the Philippines’ LGBT community and friends are lobbying for the passage of the SOGIE or Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Expression Equality Bill or Anti-Discrimination Bill (ADB) in the Senate and hoping that it



becomes a law. This bill does not only provide rights to the LGBT community but also to protect all the Filipino citizens from all forms of discrimination.



Figure 3 and 4: Padole's "Libulan", Philippine High School for the Arts, 2019,

Today, Padole is one of the youngest choreographers who aspires to share the *Babaylans* and *Libulan* stories with his generation. His work tackles the magical story of *Libulan* to resonate with current issues on LGBT rights in the Philippines at the time of creation. His vision of using his art and these narratives to express his views on the history of gender and societal roles in the pre-colonial Philippines seems to be working well. His work is composed of eleven (11) dancers to demonstrate his idea. As for my case, I will challenge myself to tell different characters and stories in a one-man performance with the help of some puppeteers, stage, and multimedia design.

## Chapter 2

# MOVEMENT EXPLORATION IN CHOREOGRAPHING BBYLN

*“Transcreation describes what artists usually do when they borrow expressions. They take from original sources and recreate these for another purpose in another form: the stage or the streets. As a consequence, what is reproduced is not authentic. Taken away from their original contexts, indigenous expressions lose their authenticity.”*

*(Fernandez)*

*Transcreation* for me is a constant journey or process in which an idea may evolve in an infinite way of possibilities. The prefix *trans-* refers to a process or movement from one point to another, to move through or across in a certain space and time. Everything is in constant progressive and may be seamless motion. From traditional to contemporary.

For the final output of this research, I used *Transcreation* to guide me in my processes of creation which are inspired by themes, gestures, movements, and narratives from traditional dances and cultures. This framework guided me back to my initial intentions and decisions I made in choreographing the steps. I developed movements based on the traditional dances and rituals in the Philippines to create gestures and motifs for the choreography. Through this process, I was able to carefully transcend the boundaries of time—the stories and its part in Philippine history and culture to Taiwan audiences.

*Trans-Trans-Trance*—Trans, referring to the process of creation rooted and inspired by cultures. Trans, describing the characteristic of the *Babaylan* who is gender-fluid and knowledgeable in both physical and metaphysical realms. And Trance, a higher state of being that *Babaylans* reach at the peak of their rituals to talk or appease spirits. These are the key points in developing this choreographic work using *Transcreation*.

## **2.1. Methodology**

### **Embodied Research**

My initial research for choreographing *BBYLN* started with my embodied dance history, from learning traditional dances and rituals during my high school and college years as a dance major. I also experienced first-hand dance embodiment from the indigenous communities that I visited in the Philippines during my field research. These years of movement history in my body affect how I move and choreograph today. This knowledge helped me ground my movements and add gestures in creating this piece of work with Filipino sensibilities, images, and flavours. Choosing gestures inspired by Philippine culture is not random. As a cultural dance practitioner, I have to be aware of the differences and choosing what movements and gestures are apt or needed as inspiration to this work.

### **Data Gathering from Written Documents**

Having a long-time interest in the *Babaylans*, I tried to present some of my works based on these spiritual leaders' importance. To go deeper into the history and facts about the *Babaylan*, I

have read books, journals, and other written documents. Though written documents about the *Babaylans* are very limited because most of the traditions and customs in the Philippines are passed on orally or embodied, scholars who have been documenting them were insightful and thorough. I have been studying dance and *Babaylan* rituals in school, but these texts helped me acquire better knowledge and understanding about their history and what they have been through.

## **Conversations and Collaborations**

I collaborated with Filipino performing artists Bunny Cadag and Katherine Sabate, who served as dramaturgs for this work. They helped me a lot during the entire process. Our weekly chats online helped in validating my work as well as translating the voice of the *Babaylans* into movement or choreography. Their own knowledge about *Babaylans* enriched what I already know.

## **2.2. Choreographer's Journey**

### **Phase 1**

The final output for our graduation performance was scheduled for the 3<sup>rd</sup> week of February 2021. I started this research sometime September 2020. Originally, I planned to create two (2) 15-minute pieces as my final production. A solo dance piece using the narrative of *Libulan* (a Philippine mythological character), and a group dance that will explore and showcase connections of Philippine and Taiwan Aboriginal communities at dance; e.g.: Cordillera people or mountain communities in northern Philippine and Taiwan's Atayal communities have similarities in clothing

(weaving, color palette, and style), community dances usually in circular formations, traditional instruments, and distinct tattoo culture.

I worked and conceptualized with Danica Somosa, MFA Directing major at NHU. Somosa's research is about gender and performance. I explored and talked her into doing a possible collaboration for *Libulan's* story. The primary reason being that *Libulan* is a two-spirited character. This way, we can both tackle gender issues in one production.

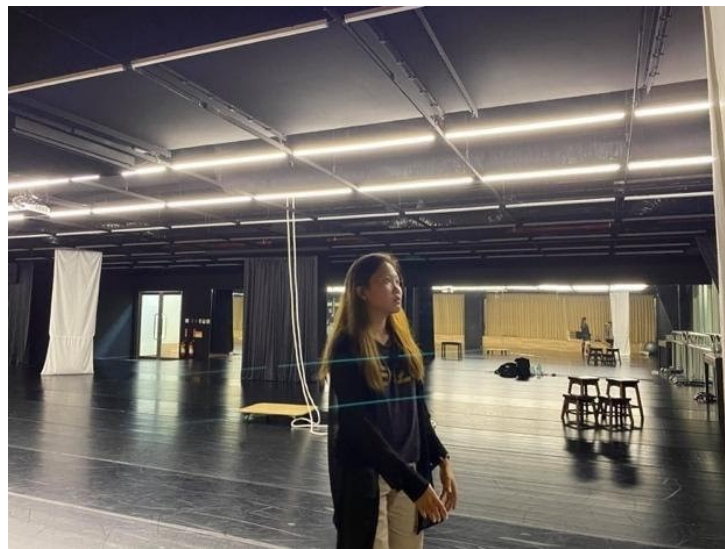


Figure 5: Rehearsals with co-director Danica Somosa, NHU Dance Studio, September 2020, Photo by Wynvel Anguren

Stories with gender variances are generally accepted by Philippine mythology enthusiasts and modern scholars. There are many examples of regional deities manifesting as different genders as well as interpretations. Some of Philippine creation mythology has no gender for the gods or creators, some are depicted as both male and female, and some being both male figures. The love story of *Libulan* (god of the moon) and *Sidapa* (god of Death), is one good example. This has led to *Libulan* being called “the patron god of Homosexuality”. (Chan, 2018)

To explore the possibilities of bringing to life *Libulan*'s character, I wanted to use a small platform with wheels. My vision was to create a movement study of a floating mythological character.



Figure 6 and 7: Initial studies for *Libulan*'s movements, NHU Dance Studio, September 2020, Photo by Danica Somosa.

I tried using ropes as a tool to help initiate movement while I am on the platform. As a tied the ropes horizontally on the walls and vertically from the ceiling, I found interesting images and movements but I needed more time to explore the possibilities of using this device. I can wrap the rope onto my body, glide through space by pulling the rope, using centripetal force to move spirally, as well as tying the rope in different parts of the body. It was hard to create movements while manipulating the platform because the motion , angle of the body, wheels of the platform, and the rope drastically affect the entire motion. Even though I choreographed set movements and floor patterns, there is always room for improvisation due to unexpected shifts of the momentum, energy, and direction of the platform. Nonetheless, I think it was a challenging and interesting exploration. I wanted to use this device because it can dictate the movement of the dancer rather than the other way around. It is a different way to understand movement, balance, space, and time.

## Phase 2

Danica and I exchanged some written documents about the story of *Libulan* so we may have a clearer vision of the project. I discovered that I can connect the story of *Libulan* to the stories of the pre-colonial Philippine male shamans who are two-spirited (male and female) or gender-crossers. They are highly regarded in the society at that time where non-binary genders were accepted. (Yarca, de Vela, Tan, 2019)

For the development of the movement study, I asked Wynvel Anguren, MFA Dance major at NHU to be an experimental body for this study. To see how the movements will be transposed to another body. He also had a hard time mastering the manipulation technique but we created enough materials to start the choreography. While he was dancing I saw the connection of the ropes tied d on the ceiling to the *Libulan* and *Babaylan*'s characters. It was the link between heaven and earth.

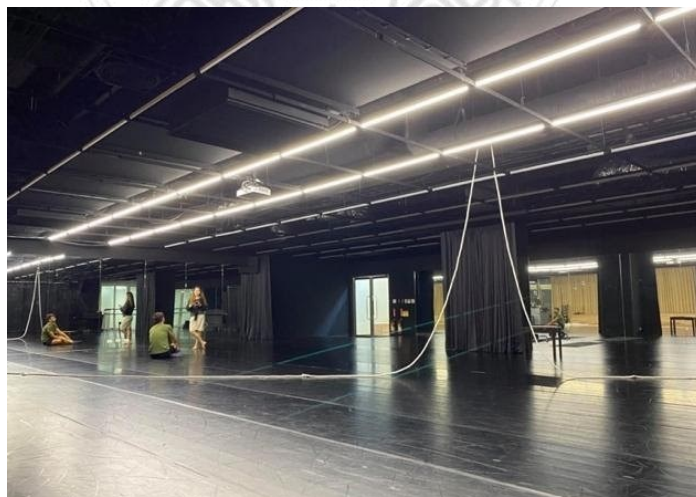


Figure 8: Experimenting with ropes, NHU Dance Studio, September 2020, Photo by Danica Somosa.



For this movement study, I used Kim Jae Duk's music. His music and vocals helped me find the certain atmosphere of the dance. I imagined it as the sound of a chanting shaman while doing a ritual. Though the language is foreign and gibberish to me, it did not affect the creation process. It helped me translate the characters and use movements inspired by Philippine rituals like the sudden flicking of arms, inward circular movements of fingers and arms, caressing the ground and the body—The image is as if a *Babaylan* is doing a ritual in a ceremonial platform or swing. At the same time moving as if *Libulan* gliding on the sky on his journey to the earth and back to the heavens.

In order convey the story, I also envisioned to use shadow puppetry in narrating *Libulan's* story. I learned shadow puppetry back in my high school days. It was one of the elective subjects that I took. So, I decided to use this to introduce not only Philippine narratives and dance in this piece, but also to showcase different media of expressions thus making the piece more interesting.

Shadow puppetry is one of the oldest forms of theatre and performance in most Asian countries. People know about Indonesia's *Wyang* and India's Shadow puppetry, the Philippines like most Asian countries also use puppetry to tell stories and to entertain. This is done by using two-dimensional cardboard puppets and light source, traditionally from candle or gas lamp.

Danica and I asked April Delgado, MFA in Stage Design at NHU to help us create two-dimensional puppets in this part of the performance. I bought cloth and sewn it into a big hanging square screen where the shadows from our puppets will be projected on.





Figure 9 and 10: April Delgado's puppets for *Libulan's* story, October 2020, Photo by April Delgado.

### Phase 3

I talked to Bunny Cadag and Katherine Sabatte, both performance artists in the Philippines about my concept. We discussed how we can narrate *Libulan* and *Babaylan's* stories to have a different voice to convey messages of gender and performance in contemporary art. It helps that most of the queer artists are fond of the new media, drag, and other new forms of performances to express gender. We concluded that we can ground this work in a cultural perspective while narrating topics about gender and performance.

As I am somewhat stuck in the creation process, talking to other people about my ideas helps me reassess how I think and understand other people's views and see different perspectives.

Letting myself have a creative pause and just verbalize my thoughts is a healthy and useful practice for me.

By this time I was just looking at photographs of *Babaylans* and the artist's rendition of *Libulan* to visualize a different view on creating his character.

During the preview of the studies with Prof. Wen-Chung, we saw different approaches in performing *Libulan* whenever Wynvel or I am on the stage. It was interesting but we had limitations in choreographing this. The choreography always changes whenever we perform this piece, it was a structure improvisation with the platform and the ropes.

#### **Phase 4**

Due to time constraints, I gave up on the second idea of creating a group dance that will explore the connections between the Philippines and Taiwan aboriginal cultures. I need a lot more time to research and deal with that topic. Thus, I tried to focus on creating and developing my *Babaylan* and *Libulan* stories. This time however, I decided to include the group dance in this current movement study.

From the previous studies, I imagined pluralizing the *Babaylan* as a character giving him different forms. From a solo dance into a group dance. This time, a trio, two male bodies, and one female body. I even thought of having seven different bodies onstage to reveal one after the other the seven phases of the moon through different characters. The group version of the study had five (5) ropes hanging from the ceiling and one (1) wheeled platform. We also developed duets and trios.

## Phase 5

Barely three months before the scheduled performance date, I have exhausted all the possibilities and decided to perform this piece with my own body. I think that this piece is very personal, and it resonates with my own embodied dance history. Some of the dancers were not delivering the soul of the movement choreography as I intended. The studies with the wheeled platform were not working, it will take me a longer time to fully develop and understand how the mechanism works. I have to restructure the dance and go back to my initial intentions.

I would like to offer this dance to all my fellow artists especially in this time of the pandemic. Most of the artists in the Philippines were displaced due to the pandemic and many shifted to new workspaces. I would like to honor them as I can by performing live on stage with a live audience here in Taiwan. I would like my Taiwan audience to witness this re-imagined storytelling using my own body as medium.

As advised by my Prof. Wen-Chung, I need to develop a movement study with just my body creating a vocabulary and thematic movement for the piece. I created a solo, based on the movements that I developed from my previous studies. Still using the translated movements from Philippine rituals and the quality of moving on the platform, I used the music of René Duéré's *O Makunde*. This musical piece includes a powerful chant from Cirque du Soleil's production entitled KA. The company's shows feature a made-up language originally referred to as "Saltimbanco Language," which is also the name of the production that originated it. Today, it is called as the "Cirque Language", others call it as "Cirquish".

I picked this music with an angelic female voice, chanting to accompany my first dance after dressing into a *Babaylan* because it gives a magical atmosphere and a perfect example on how music can be universal. Beyond language and understanding, music is rather felt than understood.

Still keeping the idea of ropes hanging from the ceiling, I made the second dance of ritual on a ceremonial platform or swing. This time, I used elastic ropes that are tied on my limbs and move with it throughout the ritual. I used Evangeline Recto, MFA in dance at NHU as an experimental body while developing this part. I use dancers to see my choreography from the outside because it is difficult sometimes to choreograph on your own body and rehearsing alone in the studio may be un motivating. My fellow dancers' company is helpful in making me focus and reflect more on the piece.

## **Phase 6**

Danica Somosa, who is collaborating with me while doing her research on gender and performance had to shift major from directing to acting and she also had to rehearse for different productions. I have to continue the direction and vision on this piece but still need to keep valuable ideas from our previous collaboration. I must restructure the piece and be able to finalize it as the performance date nears..

I started with the new solo dance to introduce the *Babaylan* character, followed by the ritual on the ceremonial swing. I added a rag doll on the ceremonial swing to stage the reason for the ritual. The doll was made from the excess ropes that I used in previous studies. It is the *Libulan*

doll to which the ritual is dedicated, asking for his permission to tell his story and to introduce his magical character. The shadow play will be performed after the ritual to narrate *Libulan's* story.

To make this piece more interesting, I decided to make it interdisciplinary. I already have the elements of dance, music, puppetry, now I am adding the element of theatre. I made a theatrical device to be able to start the piece. Breaking the fourth wall and entering the stage as the choreographer myself a recorded video of myself plays an introduction of the Philippines and the *Babaylans*. Through this lecture-performance approach, I was able to give basic information to the audience as I change into my creative rendition of *Babaylan* attire. This also signifies that I am bringing the audience to a different time and space.

During the shadow play, I will deliver a monologue narrating *Libulan's* story and other characters. This is the only time that the audience will hear my voice throughout the performance. But I will wear a veil to cover my face while I begin narrating orally, this is to give a mysterious character to the *Babaylan*. Wearing a veil when conducting rituals is also a usual practice of the *Babaylans*.

Knowing that my audience are foreigners and mostly Taiwanese, I have also decided to create supplementary videos or subtitles throughout the piece if needed. I created and edited video projections with images of the *Babaylans'* history and other important images that can help the performance move forward and the message to be understood. At this point, I must direct and orchestrate all the aspects of the performance. Aside from the videos and projections, I also had to edit the music that will be used. The performance is akin to doing a one-man show.

Professor Wen-Chung told me that my studies were too beautiful, what he really meant was that it needs to be more grounded or “earth-bound.” He noticed that the feminine character of

the *Babaylan* was prominent, I need to find the male-female balance in terms of moving and delivering the movements. I resolved this by using a different musical atmosphere for the first solo dance. Instead of using René Duéré's *O Makunde*, I used Datu Arellano's *Tahigami* music, in collaboration with Toni Muñoz—both composers were my seniors at Philippine High School for the Arts. This new music gave the perfect sound for the *Babaylan*. It had a balance of new electronic and traditional music which grounds the entire atmosphere and which also affected the movements that I was creating. And because the composers are both Filipinos, I can easily connect to their musical style and choices.

### **Phase 7**

The first part of the choreography was starting to work. This time, I had to continue the momentum of the narrative and creation process. The second part will take off from the continuation of *Libulan's* story. Because the wheeled platform did not work that well as a study for *Libulan's* movements I had to find a way to create the same effect with the existing working materials that I have. My old work which uses the shadow play's white cloth where *Libulan's* story was projected was the perfect idea. To imply that I was going to change character from *Babaylan* to *Libulan* I will be situated in the cloth where *Libulan's* story began. The four dancers that were manipulating the shadow puppets now become puppeteer of the cloth with me in it. The white cloth also signifies that I am the moon, and the movements are inspired by *Libulan* traversing between heaven and the earth.

Personally, this is a good image for the piece where I embody *Libulan's* character. It is as if I as a choreographer, *Babaylan* and *Libulan* are but in one body. As mirror in the part where the

set or the white shadow play cloth becomes part of my body. Everything seems to be all connected now. Using a strong imagery on this part and the line “*I am Babaylan, I am Libulan*” projected on the screen, tie the loose ends together

At this point, I wanted to show how the *Babaylans* were displaced when the Spanish colonized our country. So, I thought of using one of the mythological stories in the Philippines—the *Bakunawa* of the mythical giant serpent who ate the moon. There are many versions on the reasons why the *Bakunawa* ate the moon. But for me, it symbolizes the dark ages of Philippine history, where colonizers introduce new religion and customs to our country. *Libulan* then symbolizes the Philippines’ pre-colonial culture and the *Babaylans* being overshadowed by the *Bakunawa*. I wanted to juxtapose this scene with historical paintings of revolts and incidents in the Philippines during the Spanish rule. I want this scene to be the turning point of the narrative, to show how the *Babaylans* were defined as evil characters in the society because they were animists. Spanish priests even called them witches. I wanted to show pain and rejection at this part due to colonization and globalization that forced the *Babaylans* to hide and stop doing what they were supposed to do. Also, a scene where we can feel the struggle of fighting for their rights and how they revolted drive this point

Using the same cloth manipulated by the puppeteers, the *Babaylan* and *Libulan*’s struggles can be seen by creating images of huge waves, and me weaving through it and out of it. Movement and gestures of constricting my own body from moving are depicted in these scenes—dynamic and heavy in terms of feeling. I made a projected image of an eclipse on the same cloth that I was dancing on. But Professor Wen-Chung said that it is too explicit and heavy-a-load for the piece to show the Spanish colonization part and show paintings of historical incidents of Filipinos fighting against and struggling during the Spanish rule. So, I had to rethink how can I do this part without

being too explicit because the paintings that I have chosen were too realistic and do not suit the quality or feeling of the projected images and shadow play of the first part.

Instead of poignantly delivering the conflicts between Filipinos and Spanish colonizers, I focused more on the rebirth—having a new life amidst all the struggles that the Filipinos had been through. Performing a dance of rebirth accompanied by visual projections of Philippine mythological creators of the world or mothers. This created a scene of suffering in a more poetic way.

## **Phase 8**

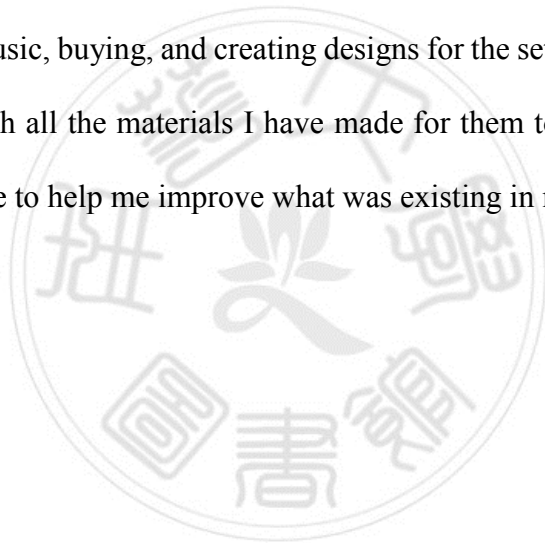
The last phase of this journey that would also show how I would like to conclude this piece is accomplished by going back to my initial idea which shall reflect on the current happening in society. This is a reflection as an artist creating this work and sending a strong message to the audience. A part where I shall showcase my fellow Filipino artists' time to be honored and where we move together in a new-normal collaboration set-up. The first draft of this scene was a live video conference call with my Filipino artist- friends around the world. They shall appear on screen while I interact with them on stage, they can do their own practices, dances or rituals and eventually end in a big communal ritual happening in both live stage and virtual space happening all at the same time in different parts of the world.

Very idealistic as an idea, but due to time constraints I have to rethink other ways to pull off this part. I haven't explored the technology of using live virtual performers on screen and managing both technical and live production could be a bit too much. I decided to let them record



their videos dancing in their own spaces and I will edit it for the screen. The final scene will start with the montage of videos of different artists dancing. At this point, I shall enter the stage in my regular clothing holding the *Libulan* doll. Showing both the history and the current *Babaylans*, and maybe to answer the questions, what happened to them next? Where are the *Babaylans* now? Are they real?

Before the actual performance, we collaborated with Taiwanese artists and designers for the set, lights, costume, and video. They were a big help to me throughout the process considering that I did all the things in the production, from putting together the choreograph, directing, designing the video and music, buying, and creating designs for the set, props, and costumes. They entered the production with all the materials I have made for them to see what I envision of the work. They were also there to help me improve what was existing in my production.



### 2.3. Final Output

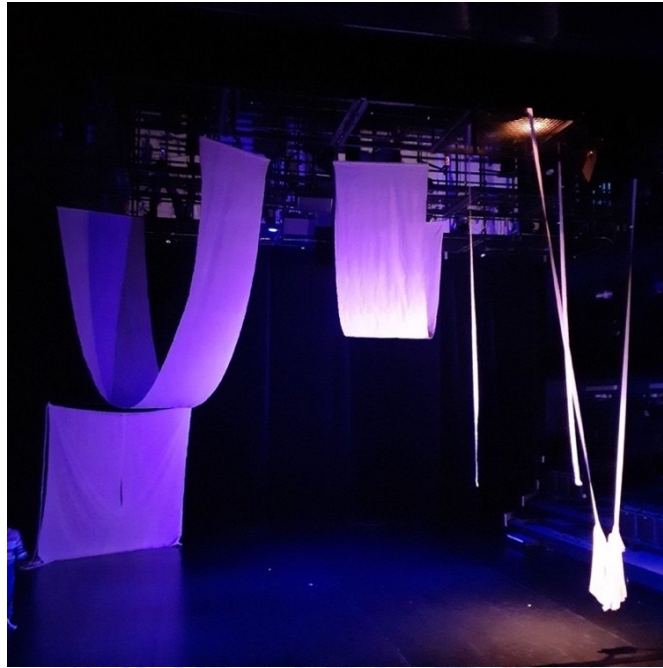


Figure 11: BBYLN Set Design, Chiayi Performing Arts Center, April 17, 2021, Photo by Al Garcia

To better engage with the audience, the concept of a thrust stage was used. Here, a big square white cloth will be draped down on the upstage right, garters and a rag doll will be hung on downstage left, two (2) long cloths hanging diagonally from the ceiling for projection, and a set of costume will be set up on center stage. I shall enter as myself—the choreographer, acknowledge the audience and space. A pre-recorded voice-over which introduces myself, where I came from, and the *Babaylans*—delivered in English, accompanied by projected Chinese subtitles, will be played as I situate myself on center stage. A faint Philippine *Panay* tribe (mountain tribe found in the Visayas region) chant follows.

Narration: *Hi! Thank you everyone, for your presence here in this space,*

*I am Al from the Philippines, I am Filipino.*

*The Philippines is located south of Taiwan*

*It has 7,107 Islands and 175 unique indigenous communities.*

*Taiwan and the Philippines are connected culturally, but tonight*

*I will be sharing stories from where I came from.*

*Stories that date back centuries ago, before the pre-Hispanic natives*

*Where visited by foreign explorers.*

*The story of ancient Philippine mythology*

*includes deities, creation stories,*

*Mythical creatures and beliefs.*

*These have been held by native “Filipinos” mostly originating from beliefs*

*During pre-Hispanic era and have been part of its culture and tradition.*

*Passed down from one generation to the next through oral tradition*

*And preserved through the aide of the community spiritual leaders*

*Known as the BABAYLANS.*

After the narration, I will acknowledge the new but familiar space, also acknowledging the wardrobe at the center. In a ritualistic manner, I will change my clothing from contemporary casual to a configuration of a *Babaylan* attire—a white square cut skirt with



Figure 12: *Babaylan's* First Dance, Chiayi Performing Arts Center, April 18, 2021, Photo by

accents and a brown net-like fabric as a veil. A dance follows, introducing myself as the *Babaylan*, and transcending into another character. Each movement flows from one body part to another, giving a light and airy vibe yet staying grounded. Gestures of sewing are highlighted as if sewing the new dress literally, sewing gestures through the body outward to the heavens signifying the connection of the *Babaylan's* soul to the heavens, sewing and keeping the traditions intact for generations and sewing stories to be told at the moment. While doing this ritual of invocation, images of different *Babaylans* in different forms will be projected on the long cloths.

After the invocation, the *Babaylan* acknowledges the full moon that is projected, signifying that it is the opportune time to conduct a ritual. He shuffles to downstage left, into the ceremonial

swing, which in this case, is depicted as garters. A dance of ritual and trance will happen on the ceremonial swing, a form of communication to the nature spirits for guidance and protection. In this case, a ritual to summon and tell the story of the moon. The rag doll will be taken out from the suspended garters to depict the character of the story, the god of the moon *Libulan*.

The *Babaylan* walks towards upstage right facing the draped big white cloth and starting to narrate orally the story of *Libulan*. Magically, live shadow puppetry will support the story as it visualizes all the characters and plot in the story through a play of handstick puppets, dance, and light.



Figure 13: BBYLN Run Through-1, NHU Dance Studio, March 2021, Photo by

*LIBULAN'S STORY Libulan 的故事*  
(Text by Danica Somosa)

*Thousands of years ago there was no land nor sun nor moon nor stars, and the world was only a great sea of water, above which stretched the sky*  
數千年前，世間沒有陸地、太陽、月亮、星星，天地僅是一片汪洋和無垠的蒼穹。

*The water was the kingdom of the god Maguayan*  
海洋是屬於 *Maguayan* 神的王國

*And the sky was ruled by the great god Kaptan*  
天空則是由偉大的 *Kaptan* 神治理

*Maguayan had a daughter called Lidagat, the sea*  
*Maguayan 的女兒叫作 Lidagat，為海洋之意*  
*And Kaptan had a son known as Lihangin, the Wind*  
*Kaptan 的兒子叫 Lihangin，意為風*

*The gods agreed to the marriage of their children, so the sea became the bride of the wind.*  
他們同意了孩子們的婚約，因此海洋成為了風的新娘

*They had three sons and a daughter*  
他們養育了 3 個兒子和 1 個女兒

*The sons were called Licalibutan (the Earth), Liadlao (the Sun)*  
其中 2 個兒子分別是 *Licalibutan* (大地) 和 *Liadlao* (太陽)

*The daughter received the name Lisuga (the Stars)*  
女兒則獲得了 *Lisuga* (星星) 這個名子

*The most special of them was called Libulan (the Moon)*  
他們之中最為特別的，則是名為 *Libulan* (月亮) 的兒子

*Libulan was soft-spoken and well-mannered of them all*  
*Libulan 是他們之中最為輕聲細語、舉止最彬彬有禮的人*

*He was more effeminate, and his body is made of copper*

他有更多的女性氣質，且他的身體是銅造的

*Unlike his brothers, he was depicted as slender, soft, and graceful*

與他的兄弟們不同，他被描述為纖細、柔軟和優雅

*There was nothing in the world to be compared to his beauty*

世界上沒有任何事物能與他的美麗相比

*Everyday Libulan descends the earth to take a bath*

*Libulan* 每天都來到大地洗浴

*A Pawikan or sea turtle would guide him in his journey*

海龜 *Pawikan* 會在旅程中指引他

*This mystical animal offers him flowers and perfume every day*

神秘的海龜每日奉上鮮花和香水給他

*So Libulan promised the sea turtles that he would bless them with boundless lives.*

因此 *Libulan* 承諾海龜們，將保佑牠們子孫繁盛，瓜瓞綿綿

*Legend says that Libulan fell in love with the god of death, Sidapa*

傳說中 *Libulan* 和死神 *Sidapa* 墜入了愛河

*His lover asks the flowers to bloom and make sweet perfumes that would reach Libulan in the heavens*

他的愛人 *Sidapa* 讓鮮花遍開，使甜蜜的花香能飄送至 *Libulan* 所在的天庭

*He asks the fireflies to light a way so the moon could always find his way to him.*

他讓螢火蟲點亮一條路，所以月亮總是能夠找到那條通向他的路



Figure 14: BBYLN Run Through-2, NHU Dance Studio, March 2021, Photo by Danica Somosa

At some point in the storytelling, the *Babaylan* together with the doll walks toward the white cloth. My character takes the *Libulan* doll through the cloth and a sort of “body exchange” happens. The *Babaylan* goes through the cloth as the dancers glide the cloth down and nestles the *Babaylan* in the middle. The *Babaylan* now becomes *Libulan* as he continues the story. *Libulan* glides on and through the cloth as if travelling through the heavens and to the earth until the *Bakunawa* enters the scene and swallows the moon whole (Buyser, 1913).

### *Bakuunawa*

*Bakunawa the legendary giant sea serpent*

傳說中的巨大海蛇 *Bakunawa*

*Would envy the moon's light and beauty*

嫉妒月亮的光明和美麗

*And swallows it whole*

因此將月亮一口吞下



This part is relevant because I wanted to use the *Bakunawa* as the symbol of the colonizers who cast darkness in the Philippine history and culture, including the *Babaylans*. The colonizers introduced a new religion to the people which divided the Filipinos. The *Babaylans* were called witches which gave negative connotations to the name. Hence, all my characters shall take part in what I call as a dance of displacement: AI as a choreographer, as the *Babaylan*, and as *Libulan*. Coming out from the square cloth undressed, just wearing beige underwear to mimic showing all flesh, a dance of rebirth shall take place. Showing or flashing images of different mythological creation characters from different regions in the Philippines, a scene where all heavenly gods birthed me again yet the memory of the history of my body remains. Everything will be empty. Darkness.

For the final scene, a montage video of my artist friends from the Philippines and other parts of the world will be projected on stage. Dancing in their personal spaces due to the limitations caused by the pandemic and the localized lockdowns. I shall enter as AI, the narrator, as in the beginning, wearing the same casual clothes. I shall hold the *Libulan* doll and enter from the audience area. I shall walk to the spotlight at the center of the stage and watch the videos of my friends. I shall then acknowledge the audience and play with the *Libulan* doll like a child with a play doll in hand. I shall then leave the doll on the floor and look at it as if saying goodbye. I turn my back and looked upward. Leaving the audience with the story--our story. Lights fade to black.

## Chapter 3

### USE OF MEDIA IN RESEARCH AND CHOREOGRAPHY

Doing this research has been a huge responsibility for me. The final output happens to be my first major creation and due to be presented in a foreign country. Presenting my identity in a foreign land while at the same time finding it along the way is a great opportunity. This process became even more meaningful due to the current global situation that we are facing---the Covid-19 pandemic. Everyone around the world is in constant battle with this invisible virus. People are losing jobs and changing lifestyles, the artists however were more displaced than others. Being virtual prisoners in their own houses due to lock downs many are finding it hard to thrive and continue their passions. Still others ended up quitting.

Being in Taiwan at a time where everything seems to be under control and things look and feel ‘normal’ is a blessing. . However, it is not a privilege to be able to keep doing art and things that we normally do here but more of an obligation to my fellow Filipino artists. To be able to create freely and get to perform live in a theatre with live audiences as the rest of the world’s artists are forced by the circumstance to transition their performances through the online platform is something to be thankful for. It is also a good reason to mount and narrate the story of the *Babaylan* to resonate their roles in society in times of trouble or in this time of pandemic.

The global pandemic has brought both negative and positive effects in all aspects of the life of every individual, especially for the artists and the process of art-making. In the progression of doing this research, I have met all sorts of problems and created all sorts of solutions by using all the possible resources available within my reach.

Collecting data, reading, and going over research materials were nonetheless limited to online access. Some of the important resources about this specific topic can only be found in library archives in the Philippines. But it did not hinder me from connecting to all possible human resources with whom I could exchange thoughts about *Babaylans*. Since everyone in the Philippines was in quarantine, I have more time to discuss with them online and their insights have guided me throughout this process. I see this though as more of a challenge rather than a restriction.

While doing this research I started creating movement studies for my piece. I felt that I needed a strong connection to the Philippines while I'm far away. I empathize with all the struggling Filipino artists, not just in my motherland, but artists around the globe. I envision, not only of connecting to my friends at home, but also to sharing the same sentiments with my artist-friends who are away from home. Being in a foreign environment is not easy, yet it makes us find our deeper sense of identities. Maximizing the use of advanced technology, I would gather all their videos about their rituals as artists during the lockdowns and share it on stage in my live performance here in Taiwan – rituals as they transcend structures and limitations brought about by the current situation also embody the return to the primal processes of creations, be it physically, metaphysically, and now, through transcreation, intertwined, betwixt virtually.

Aside from utilizing technology in the research process, I am fortunate to work with Taiwanese artists and designers who are well-versed in their specific fields of assignments, especially when it comes to using media and technology in art-making. Set Designer Chun-Wei Wang helped me improve the look of my original design, scaling it into a bigger space while

keeping the original configuration of the white square cloth for the shadow play. Instead of doing the usual projections at the back, he designed two (2) draped cloths hanging from the ceiling. This allows an interesting take of the visuals and subtitles. In collaboration with the video designer Ming-Chieh Chung who helped me improve my original design for the videos by animating some parts. Ming-hieh Chung also developed a more creative way to display subtitles that are applicable to the entire theme and atmosphere of the piece. She helped a lot during the process, from designing not only one but two simultaneous video designs for the two hanging cloths fabric. It was also a difficult task to map the video in the actual space, we rented a projector with higher lumens to project clearer images on a big space. The designer also had to fit the visuals exactly on the specs of the draped cloths.

For the costume design, Yi-Zhong Zhang helped me improve the basic white *Babaylan* skirt which I made. He added more colors and texture to it. To get the organic look, we had to distress the fabric to achieve a used-clothing effect and for it to look natural as well. Originally, I thought of incorporating tattoos on my body to complete the look. Traditional Philippine tattoo patterns would be a good choice, but he did not give it a go. In the end, I just had a new skirt. I kept the belt and ankle bells that I made.

Finally, and certainly not the least, is the collaboration with lighting designer Hsun-Yu Wang with generous assistance of technical director Che-Yu Lin who helped transform the stage into an entirely new world. They designed the lights for every scene and executed the transitions as seamless as possible, thus bringing the stories to leap to life. They also had to work closely

with the video designer to find the balance between the lighting design and video projection so as not to ruin each other's design.

With the help of my collaborators, we were able to bring to life this reimagining of the *Babaylan's* story into stage. We have successfully put together a performance with images and feelings beyond words to narrate BBYLN.



### 3.1. Images

#### AI as Narrator



Figure 15: BBYLN Performance-1, Chiayi Performing Arts Center, April 18, 2021, Photo by Xian-Zhi Yu

Aside from narrating the characters in the story, I would be situating myself as the choreographer—outside the story. This device allowed me an opportunity to see my piece from the outside and to start the

preparation from zero, no baggage, no worries, and intervening thoughts, just being in the present moment. I shall start my storytelling from this point.

#### Blessing and Acknowledge the Space and the Crowd



Figure 16: BBYLN Performance-2, Chiayi Performing Arts Center, April 18, 2021, Photo by Xian-Zhi Yu

*Babaylans* and other communal rituals in the Philippines always start with the blessing of the space and the people around it. This cleanses all unwanted energies that may disrupt the entire ritual. I

decided to be in the audience area

welcoming the guests and being as comfortable as possible. Then I entered the space/ stage with respect by acknowledging the space and the people around it before I start my storytelling.

## Dressing

Dressing from my casual clothes into the *Babaylan* attire is a special transition in order to introduce the new character and be able to slowly draw the attention of the audience into entering a new dimension—this signals the start of the story.

## First Ritual – Trance



In the first dance, several gestures of Philippine rituals can be seen; caressing the ground or soil, listening to the ground, shaking off my palms which originally are handheld palm leaves that are used in rituals, clinking of ceramic bowls imitated by my two hands, flicking of arms and feet as a gesture of driving away of evil spirits and energies. Washing the face, hands, and feet to cleanse the body. And finally, the most special gesture which I developed is the sewing hand movements.

Figure 17: BBYLN Performance-3, Chiayi Performing Arts Center, April 18, 2021, Photo by Xian-Zhi Yu

## Sewing

This specific gesture is not a movement for the rituals but to I have decided to give it an air of importance, in order to show that the movements do mean a lot. I used sewing—a job usually associated with the feminine, incorporated it into my body to create a distinct thematic movement for my representation of the *Babaylan* character. As earlier mentioned, the sewing gestures are highlighted as if sewing the new dress literally. The sewing gestures flows through the body outward to the heavens signifying the connection of the *Babaylan*'s soul to the heavens---sewing and keeping the traditions intact for generations and sewing stories to be told at the moment.

## The Moon



The moon is vital to the *Babaylan* as is significant in the world that we live in. This astronomical calendar shows the best time to plant which kind of crops, the time to harvest, it also signals changes in ocean tides. Rituals initiated by the *Babaylans* are mostly held when the moon is full, it when food is laid out at night as an offering to absorb energies from the moon. The moon is believed to have the power to cure diseases and prolong life. In performing these rituals, *Babaylans* come into a trance to communicate to the spirits or gods.

Figure 18: BBYLN Performance-4, Chiayi Performing Arts Center, April 18, 2021, Photo by Xian- Zhi Yu



## Second Ritual – Ceremonial Swing



Figure 19: BBYLN Performance-5, Chiayi Performing Arts Center, April 18, 2021, Photo by Xian-Zhi Yu

Different *Babaylans* use different ritual platforms, nonetheless they use swings or move while doing rituals. The platform serve as a place for offering to the spirits and invite them to partake before, during, and after the ritual. Offerings like rice, food, meat, raw or

animals, cigarettes, rice wine, money are just few of the variances of the objects you may see in a ceremonial platform depending on the location where it is being performed and the intention of the ritual.

In some parts of the Philippines, ceremonial swings are often used in rituals. In long rituals that may take several days and nights, this swing is a place where the *Babaylan* can rest or wait for other spirits that he wants to summon and talk to.

In my case, I used strings that are attached from above to use as a ceremonial platform and swing. In this part, the sewing movements were developed. The strings are attached to a rag doll that I am sewing. The strings are connected to my wrist to highlight the movement of sewing.

### Rag doll and Veil (Summoning *Libulan*)



Figure 20: BBYLN Performance-6, Chiayi Performing Arts Center, April 18, 2021, Photo by Xian-Zhi Yu

In the introduction of this new story and character, the *Babaylan* wears a veil to cover his face. *Babaylans* cover their faces while doing the ritual. After a couple of sips of rice wine, he comes into a trance in trying to reach and communicate to

spirits. While in trance, the spirits are likewise permitted to enter into the *Babaylan's* body to convey messages. *Babaylans* wear a veil because only female figures are allowed to communicate with spirits.

The rag doll symbolizes a new character in the new story that I shall tell the audience—*Libulan*. He is a special character because *Libulan* is not human. I have to perform another ritual to summon *Libulan* and tell his story. The rag doll is an instrument used to ask permission from *Libulan* to share his story.

### Shadow Play (*Libulan's* Story)

Shadow puppetry is one of the oldest forms of theater in most Southeast Asian countries including the Philippines. I used this magical theatre to convey a mythical story. In this case, the puppeteers who are also dancers did not just use the two-dimensional puppets but also their bodies

in creating images and narrating the story. Shadow puppets are magical since it only uses one light source, yet it can create infinite possibilities.

### **Being *Libulan*. Al is *Babaylan* is *Libulan***



Figure 21: BBYLN Run Through-3, NHU Dance Studio, June 2021, Photo by Wen-Chung Lin

cloth which shall slowly come down as manipulated by the puppeteers. At this point I have become *Libulan* who is being held and controlled by the puppeteers using the rope connected on the corners of the cloth.

After the shadow play, I shall act as if I have exchange or swap my body with the *Libulan* doll in order to summon him into my body. In the performance, this exchange happens when I offer the *Libulan* doll through the shadow play

I am Al the Narrator, *Babaylan*, and *Libulan*.

I used a powerful image in this part because all the characters are contained in the same body, space, and time.



Figure 22: BBYLN Performance-8, Chiayi Performing Arts Center, April 18, 2021, Photo by Xian-Zhi Yu

This image of the cloth is somehow similar to my old work *Pusod* (2018). This time however, the cloth is not merely tied on the trees throughout the performance. In this act, I was able to maximize the use of the cloth, from the set design to projection screen for the shadow puppets as entryway for the *Libulan* doll, dancing in and out of it whilst being manipulated by the four puppeteers. Also in the scene which projected the *Bakunawa* eating the moon (eclipse), the cloth likewise find its use during its transformation into a roof-like configuration to signify an area getting smaller and smaller room for movement or that of being trapped into a small space.

### ***Bakunawa* (Swallowing the Moon)**



Figure 23: BBYLN Performance-9, Chiayi Performing Arts Center, April 18, 2021, Photo by Xian-Zhi Yu

The tale of the eclipse or the story of the *Bakunawa* swallowing the moon is used here as a metaphor for colonization and globalization.

The *Bakunawa* is the foreign

cultural bomb, and the Moon is *Libulan/Babaylan*. I found this image very strong and significant. This is the turning point of the story. It is where everything winds down. Everything that I developed and the stories that I told the viewers are all gone now. Mimicking the real story of what happened to the *Babaylans*. They were displaced and a new religion flourished. Spanish friars even tainted the ancient beliefs and practices of early Filipinos by calling it evil.

### Darkness

The peak of an eclipse is darkness. When the *Bakunawa* ate the moon. The light of the moon was extinguished. This short and quiet part offers a breather for the audience to absorb what just happened.

### Rebirth



An eclipse happens in just a fraction of time after which everything will come back to its place soon. The moon's light will shine again. This is a silver lining during dark times. By this time, I shall come out of the same opening on the cloth

Figure 24: BBYLN Performance-9, Chiayi Performing Arts Center, April 18, 2021, Photo by Xian-Zhi Yu

but in “bare” flesh. As images of mythical creation characters (mothers) are projected on the screen. I am born again, but the history lives in the memory of my body—in my flesh. Everything seems

new but the feeling is heavy. I acknowledge the space and the memory of it. This is my rebirth.  
The stage will be empty. Blackout.

## Memory/ Present



Figure 25: BBYLN Performance-10, Chiayi Performing Arts Center, April 18, 2021, Photo by Xian-Zhi Yu

The stage is empty. Videos of my fellow Filipino artists from around the world are projected on screen doing their rituals and dances in their own spaces during the periods of lockdown due to the pandemic. They come from different islands in the Philippines, and countries like Singapore, Hong Kong-SAR, Brussels, Belgium, London, Australia, Vancouver Canada, British Columbia, Los Angeles, California in the United States. Rituals need not necessary be spiritual. Anything we do on a routinary bases could be considered a ritual--every personal practice in any field is a ritual. Thus we have our own personal rituals in our lives.

Now, I shall enter the stage wearing my casual clothes holding the *Libulan* doll, a reminder to the audience about the story that I have just told. I step in the spotlight playing with the *Libulan* doll, thinking about the vast history of the space and the doll's story while the current videos of my artists friends play. This final image is a deconstruction of time and space. As if everyone is in a trance at a place where time and space are blurred.

## 3.2 Music

### Rolinda Gibaliga's *Babaylan* Chant

Rolinda is a classmate of mine at the University of the Philippines College of Music. She is a *Binukot* or a local princess/ *Babaylan* in her community called *Panay Bukidnon* in *Panay Visayas*. This chant is an invocation of a *Babaylan* before a ritual is held. I used this chant as an invocation. It is the first chant that will be heard in the piece.

### Datu Arellano's *Tahigami* Music Collection

Datu Arellano's *Tahigami* music is a collection of experimental compositions based on stitching papers, discovering polygons, and forming interesting relationships, stimulated by touch thus creating sounds. The result is a creative, visual, and musical compositions. His work creates different sounds by touching metal parts that are attached to a device which transmits the impulse into sound. His latest innovation uses light as a stimulus to create sounds, rather than touch.

*Tahigami* music suited the atmosphere for *Babaylan's* first solo. To translate *Babaylan's* character as a two-spirited being into music, I fused two different *Tahigami* musics, and they blended smoothly. Similar to Arellano's idea of his music, *Tahigami* is a coined word from the Filipino word "*Tahi*" or to stitch or sew, and the Japanese word "*Gami*" means paper. This piece of music is also appropriate for *Babaylan's* solo since the thematic movement is also sewing or "*Tahi*".



### **Kim Jae Duk's Binari**

Kim Jae Duk is a Korean choreographer and the artistic director of Modern Table Dance Company. He does not only create dance works but compose his own music as well.

I used this music for the *Babaylan's* second ritual dance and in summoning the *Libulan* doll on the ceremonial swing because this music also has a chant but in a deep male voice. In contrast to the previous music, to pluralize the voice of the *Babaylan's* and to add to the mysticality and dynamism of the character as having both male and female voices.

### **Toni Muñoz' Wanderer in the Night of the World**

This piece of music was originally composed for my previous work at the University of the Philippines Dance Company together with colleagues Michael Que, Gebbville Selga, and Sarah Samaniego. Muñoz musical work tells a story on its own. This excerpt of the full-length music is apt to narrate *Libulan's* story on shadow puppetry which slowly changes into the eclipse and towards the peak as well as the end of the story of *BBYLN*.

I am positive in not just using a piece of music style to transcend the story of the *Babaylans*. I envision the echoing of a wider range of musical compositional styles for this work. Having performed this piece to foreign audiences, my true intentions for the work are expressed through different music and chants, beyond language. And as a student in the ethnomusicology department, I would also like to explore possibilities while also showcasing various composers around the world.



### 3.3. Costume and Props



Figure 26: Skirt , Belt (Rope),  
Anklet (Bells)



Figure 27: Veil



Figure 28: *Libulan* Rag Doll



Figure 29: Square Cloth for  
Shadow Play



Figure 30: Puppets

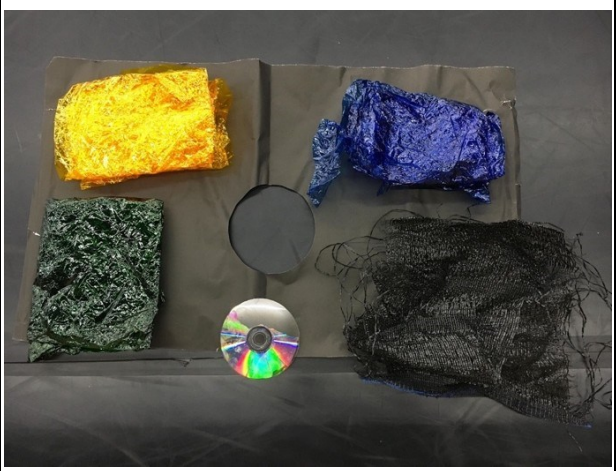
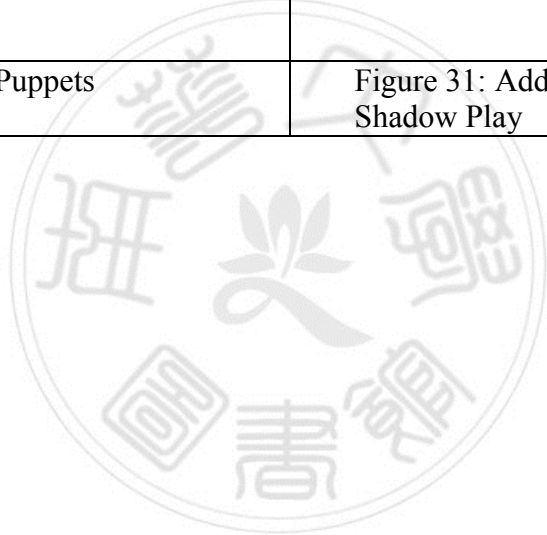


Figure 31: Additional Materials for Shadow Play



## Chapter 4

# REFLECTIONS ON CHOREOGRAPHING BBYLN AND FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

To further explore and develop BBYLN, I would like to focus on creating more specific choices as a choreographer and performer. To go back into practice, do more research and deepen the movement vocabulary which was inspired by Philippine dances and rituals, from there be able to transcreate. Now that I had introduced *Babaylans*, I can work on the research aspect and put more layers in the choreography rather than just transposing ideas in a creative manner.

This specific work needs a specific space. Professor Wen-Chung and I realized that BBYLN needs a more intimate space like a black box theatre. A small, confined space can help deliver the story better than a big theatre space. An on-site performance would also be interesting, this will introduce the fluidity of the stage, creation, artistry and life itself.

In terms of the visual aspect, the configuration from the original set design was much larger in scale. Hence, the effect of the videos projected in important segments did not have a strong impact when compared to smaller scale space such as a black box studio. In the future, I would like to use more organic materials to ground the design more. Bamboos are a good option to create floors and ceremonial platforms. In this way the images that will be conveyed to the audience will not be too fancy and abstract. The whole visual aspect of the current version of BBYLN has a dream-like quality—almost floating. I must ground this work more and take more risks.

One crucial part of this version that I wanted to develop more is the introduction of the four dancers. I must pay more attention to how I can introduce them in the space and during the storytelling. One idea is to research and develop movements from a specific communal ritual in the Philippines. In this way, the later part of the piece would be more meaningful. Another idea is to create different silhouettes from different *Babaylans* from various parts of the Philippines. Develop them into a communal ritual or dance toward the end part. The ensemble will embody different roles, silhouettes, even spaces and environments to help the narrative move forward.

As music also plays an important role in the storytelling, an originally composition by a Filipino musician would be a good option. To create not just music but also develop soundscapes and atmosphere for each part would be ideal. A piece of music that would share and showcase sounds, instruments and rhythmic patterns inspired and created for/with/by Philippine indigenous communities will definitely add more impact.

BBYLN is a piece that is very special to me. This work was staged during a crucial period of this age and time. At the time of creation and performance, the entire world of performing arts around the globe has shifted virtually. In Taiwan however, we were fortunate to be able to conduct live performances. I am truly lucky to be able to create this piece before Taiwan faced new challenges due to the rising COVID 19 cases in the country. A piece created and presented before Taiwan's life and arts scenes had to inevitably shift virtually like the rest of the world.

Having had to experience these unprecedented shifts in our lives, I have realized how this piece can become accessible to more collaborations and audiences. The current version of my

work is just the beginning of an exploration in employing multi-media and multi-dimensional spaces in choreographing. My original plan was to feature live online performers around the world simultaneously in my live performance here in Taiwan. But due to logistical reasons, I had to keep this idea as a reference in the future. Perhaps I can develop this idea better in future developments to achieve my vision of staging this piece with online performers in a live performance to creating entirely virtual presentation that transcend spaces, borders, platforms, and cultures. The ultimate goal is to break geographical boundaries and be able to create a more dynamic and interactive approach in using digital space, time, frames on the screen as a new platform for dance.

In general, I must be more specific when it comes to making decisions as a choreographer and at the same time grounding my work with rigorous research sufficient with relevant, reproducible, and replicable ethnographic data. Also, to be able to explore possibilities of using media and if given a chance, to dwell deeper into further developing, refining and performing this piece to more audiences and platform As artists, we can try new things in a constantly changing environment.. Having the ability to adapt and cope with the current situation makes us more driven, engaged, and innovative in creating and expressing our craft.

## CONCLUSION

Locsin and Padole's works has proven that the stories of the *Babaylan*, *Libulan*, and other historical and mythological folklores which were handed down orally from one generation to the next are worthy of revisiting and reflected on. "In 2014, the Philippine Department of Education removed the course Philippine History in both junior and senior high school curriculum." (Limos, 2021), and the Commission on Higher Education removed the Filipino Language/ Subjects for college education. As artists, cultural bearers, and *Babaylans*; it is our responsibility to always echo our history. Create something new while looking for its relevance as we dig deeper into our roots. As an adage say: For trees do not just grow sunward, but their roots dig deeper into the ground to hold themselves while developing.

This research project provided an experience of a lifetime. It stretched my capacity in terms of studying this specific topic. Creating, exploring, and experimenting with things which I have never tried before. With the guidance of our professor Lin Wen-Chung and the collaborations with my fellow Filipino scholars and Taiwanese artists; Pin-Hsuan Chen (Stage Manager), Hsuan-Yu Wang (Lighting Design), Che-Yu Lin (Technical Director), Chun-Wei Wang (Stage Design), Ming-Chieh Chung (Video Design), Yi-Zong Zhang (Costume Design), Xian-Zhi Yu and assistant Zhi-Yan Liao (Design and Photography), NHU MFA Dance students (puppeteers); Wynvel Anguren, Alexes Sandino, Cyril Valeriano, and Mary Evangelina Recto, I was able to present this BBYLN piece. Everything was made possible as imagined and planned. Though every process in research and art-making is never the same and never without a hitch, together we were able to

hurdle the bumps along the way. These problems challenged us to overcome every single one of them and find creative yet feasible solutions as soon as possible.

Through the aid of the *Transcreation* framework as applied in this choreography, I was grounded to my initial intentions as well as my roots which helped me in moving forward while exploring all possibilities in dance creation.

Realizing BBYLN was as interesting as the lives of the *Babaylans* are truly magical, every single step seems to unfold by itself. The *Babaylans* went through a difficult process and lifelong training from the elders, only the truly special and capable ones are chosen and groomed as *Babaylans*. I dedicate this work to my fellow artist-friends who are striving to live their art in this time of pandemic. Because artists are molded by the learnings of the generations before them as well as by interacting and engaging with the immediate society they live in. Artists create art that is reflective of the current situations of their immediate environment. That's what makes them special.

In this new normal setup, the world has shifted virtually, we have to embrace our new workspaces. Given all the adjustments that we are all going through, we also have to maximize and develop ways to make our new workspace transform into more dynamic and interactive one. With this journey, I would like to express the possibilities of artistic research and inquiries in different fields and online. Collaborators such as directors, dramaturges, critiques, and even our friends can see and help assess the process of our work, they are very helpful especially in this time of pandemic. Now, we can connect to anyone, anywhere. I envision this new work to become

a more dynamic one. It can also lead to new ways and level of performance. Because Taiwan can still hold live performances with live audiences, I will attempt to develop a new way of performance where I can collaborate with my Filipino colleagues who may be far away during the live performance here in Taiwan. The unique possibility of having live online performers seen on-screen during a live show here in Taiwan may open the possibility of interactions with the live performers and the virtual spaces and audiences while narrating the story of the *Babaylans*. As *Babaylans* are meant to mediate both earth and the heavens, maybe we can also connect artists, virtually anywhere in the world, creating works to shape this world into a better place, mediating new spaces for healing through our own practices in this time of the pandemic.

BBLYN does not represent or speak for the spiritual/sacred *Babaylans* in the Philippines. This work is a bridge that attempts to link history with the contemporary. Yet this work is well informed, inspired and respects the spiritual/sacred *Babaylans* whose presence and practices still exist today. Though individual practices may have shifted and blended with the new environment and progressive technological advancements, their huge role and contribution in the Philippine rural communities must be shared to more people. Thus, the staging of BBLYN.



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## APPENDIX

My vision as an emerging choreographer and dance educator is to encourage and empower young artists especially those who come from the provinces, like me, through creating contemporary works that are inspired and informed by their immediate culture, environment, and sensibilities. In my case right now as a foreign student, I am presenting my roots-- my homeland. Contemporary dance for me means being able to express one's own movements and language. When you study dance for a long time, it becomes part of the history of your body.

My first step in trying to achieve my personal goal was through my undergraduate thesis production at the University of the Philippines, a full-length narrative inspired by the Subanen community—the river-dwelling community in Mindanao, South of Philippines. Then, I read a volume of *Musika Journal*<sup>1</sup> where I came across the term *Transcreation* in a research by Mr. Steven Patrick Fernandez<sup>2</sup> where he was referred to the borrowing of themes from indigenous practices to the stage. This gave me a politically suitable term in the track of performance-making that I was going to develop.

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<sup>1</sup> *Musika Journal* is a publication of the University of the Philippines' College of music of research, articles, and journals of University music scholars on ethnomusicology and performance practices.

<sup>2</sup> Steven Patrick Fernandez is the founder and Artistic Director of Integrated Performing Arts Group (IPAG) of Mindanao State University in Iligan City, Mindanao, Philippines.

## Previous Related Research

The following works that will be mentioned are developed through my practice of integrating cultural aspects and perspectives with a clear vision of introducing and rooting my works to Philippine culture. The goal is to initiate curiosity to the current contemporary dance audience in the Philippines while using *Transcreation* as a model framework in developing these works. The following works are *Tau-Luwa*, *Haya*, *Pusod* and *Sama-sama*.

### *Tau-Luwa*<sup>3</sup> 2016



*Photos by Kurt Cupon and Eric Louie Bolante, Ballet Philippines 2 (Bagong Sayaw) 2016*

Coined from the Filipino words *Tao* (human) and *Kaluluwa* (soul). *Tau-luwa* explores a story of an imagined rural community, whose rituals are integral to community life as it signifies the cycle of life and passage of time. Narrated through Filipino-inspired movements and accents (*Malong* and *Siosay*) we witnessed the journey of one's soul in this earthly life.

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<sup>3</sup> For Ballet Philippines 2 Bagong Sayaw platform for emerging Filipino choreographers held at the Cultural Center of the Philippines Black Box Theatre.

I was aware of the risk that I am taking for this work. For this reason, my intention was not to represent specific cultures and communities, instead, I created an imagined community in narrating this work. I used the process of transcreation not just in the movements but also for props used in the piece; the *Malong* or a tubular cloth that is used in the daily lives of communities in Mindanao (*Maranao, Maguindanao, T'boli*) is originally made up of silk or designed with ornaments or weaved. But in this piece, I used monotoned cloth so as not to mislead the audience into inadvertently associating it with a specific tribe. *Siosay* is palm leaves used in conducting rituals in *Subanen* community, in this piece I used it not just for rituals but also to create scene changes throughout the dance.

After the premiere of this piece, some audiences appreciated my efforts and became more interested in Philippine traditional practices.

*Haya*<sup>4</sup>  
2017



<sup>4</sup> For CCP's Koryolab with Philippine High School for the Arts senior high dance majors.

*Photos by Marveen Lozano, Cultural Center of the Philippines' KoryoLab 2017*

*Haya*, Interment/wake (Bisaya) or to let be (Tagalog/Filipino) is a piece dedicated to echo one community's tradition which tends to fade and to lose. Hence, a rite of passage is depicted in the piece as a reminder of passing on the rituals and traditions of the community.

This piece attempted to show the death of the descendant of the Wiseman in a community—the chosen one who lived his life training and practicing the life of the next community's spiritual leader. When will the older generation pass on these practices, will it live on?

This piece reflects the slowly vanishing traditions in Philippine communities. Presenting and personifying traditions and their death, echoing its importance when it happens and not to be lost forever.

*Pusod*<sup>5</sup>  
2018



*Photo by Para Sa Sining, Design Week PH 2018*

Filipino artist Mark Justiniani's work *Pusod* is an installation buried on the grounds of the University of the Philippines. Using mirrors and glass, this work gives an illusion of a deep hole underground when it is lit at night, while at daytime it reflects the sky and clouds.

In response to his work, I depicted myself as a *Babaylan* with a big white cloth intercepting my body horizontally through my waist, installed in the middle of the university garden. An image of the *Babaylan* submerged halfway in the water, he becomes the *Pusod* (navel), a mediator connecting both earth and the heavens.

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<sup>5</sup> For the UP Arts month, a solo outdoor work, in conversation with visual artist mark Justiniani's work, entitled *Pusod* (navel).





*Photo by UP OICA, Pusod by Day, 2018*



*Photo by the Drawing Room, Pusod's Effect by night, 2018*

*“Animo’y sinasalo ang kalangitan  
 Ang pusod ay isang obrang inanyuang pinggan  
 Na nakalatag sa lupa at nagbibigay repleksyon  
 Sa langit sa itaas  
 Maihahalintulad sa isang orbitang nakatigil  
 Isang balon ng mga ulap na inilapit  
 sa paningin at pandama, sa araw  
 Samantalang isang malaim na hukay naman, sa gabi  
 Ang estruktura ay inihahalintulad sa isang pusod  
 Sa di nakikitang taling pusod sa pagitan ng langit at lupa “  
 -AL Garcia*

“Like a cradle that catches the sky,  
*Pusod* is a big plate on top of the land  
 Reflecting the skies above.  
 During the day, it is a mirror full of clouds  
 that touches our senses and sensibilities  
 While it seems to be a deep well, during the night.  
 This structure is like a navel  
 Connecting the heavens and the earth.”  
 -AL Garcia



*Sama-sama*<sup>6</sup>  
2018



*Photo by Guang Ming Dance Project, Mabuhay Temple, 2018*

Is a celebration of life. This piece was envisioned to depict the connection of the Philippines' *Bajau*<sup>7</sup> community with the *Bajau* people of Indonesia and Malaysia. *Sama-sama* means “you are welcome” in *Bahasa Melayu* and Indonesia and it means “together” in the Filipino language. This piece is a call to remembrance of how our togetherness should always be welcomed.

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<sup>6</sup> Guang Ming Dance Project entry for Sayaw Pinoy 2018, National Contemporary Dance Competition.

<sup>7</sup> The Bajau are a sea-dwelling tribe, often known as the “Sea Nomads”, who lived in stilt houses or “floating houses along the shores of Southeast Asia for centuries. As a nomadic tribe living in stilt huts or boathouses on shallow waters, they make their living from traditional free diving for fish and pearls.

An example of embodied research that I did before creating this work is to contact Ms. Radzmina Tanjili, a *Sama Bangingi*<sup>8</sup> women living in the *Bajau* community in San Andres, Maynila. She is a skilled performer and educator on *pansak/magpansak*<sup>9</sup> or dance in *Sama Bangingi* language. She shared her culture and creative practices with our dancers to have a deeper understanding of the piece that we are doing. Learning first-hand about one culture was a humbling and fruitful experience.

This was my first attempt to create a work that resonated with a wider aspect of culture. Discovering more possibilities and connections with the Philippines' neighboring countries. I tried to resonate a wider scope of diverse culture in one choreography. I used not only the shared movement expressions of the Philippines, Indonesia, and Malaysian *Bajau* communities but also used a piece of music that incorporates traditional and contemporary patterns.

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<sup>8</sup> The Bangingi Sama of the Philippines, numbering 60,500, are engaged yet unreached. They are part of the Filipino, Muslim people cluster within the Malay Peoples affinity bloc.

<sup>9</sup> The dance had similarity to classical Balinese and Thai dances, where it is also the most distinctively Asian of all the southern Philippine dances because dancers must have dexterity and flexibility of the shoulders, elbows, and wrists.