

# “Temple of Dance?”: Interrogating the *Sanskritization of Pangalay*

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## **Abstract**

This paper interrogates the idea that pangalay, a Southern Philippine dance tradition of the Tausug (a.k.a. Suluk) people, means “temple of dance” in Sanskrit, arguing on the contrary that it is mainly Austronesian in origin. In the works of Ligaya Fernando-Amilbangsa, pangalay is presented as a pre-Christian and pre-Islamic dance tradition, and that the dance label means “temple of dance” in Sanskrit. This process of Sanskritization of what I argue is an Austronesian cultural artifact warrants a close review. To deconstruct this discourse on pangalay, I situate it within the scholarship on the Indianization of Southeast Asia, and on India-Philippine cultural relations. I also conduct a linguistic analysis of the phrase, “Temple of Dance” to show the pangalay does not carry that meaning. Part 1 gives a brief introduction to pangalay and related traditions in the southern Philippines. Part 2 discusses the frameworks of “Indianization.” Part 3 features the linguistic analysis of the phrase, “temple of dance.” The paper concludes by discussing alternative views culture and dance in the Philippines.

Keywords: Pangalay dance tradition, Sanskritization, Indianization, Invention of Tradition, Philippine Dance Studies, Amilbangsa

### **Introduction: *Pangalay*, *Igal* and *Pamansak* in Philippine Dance Literature**

PRIOR TO DISCUSSING THE PROBLEM of extreme Indianization of the *pangalay* dance tradition, it would be most informative to review the literature on the dance form in order to find out how it is portrayed in relation to other dances found in the Sulu and Tawi-Tawi archipelagoes. This section traces the appearance of *pangalay* in Philippine scholarship and provides information on its relationship with *igal* and *pamansak*, the two other dance traditions found in the region.

The Tausug *pangalay* dance tradition appears for the first time in Philippine scholarly literature in a Bureau of Public Schools publication instructional book, *Philippine Folk Dances and Songs*. The preparation of the material for the book is attributed to a team headed by Francisca Reyes Aquino (1966) who, later on, was named Philippine National Artist in Dance. The dance label appears together with *igal*, a dance label associated, among others, with the Sama Sitangkai, Sama Kubang and Sama Tabawan, and *pamansak*, a dance label associated with the Yakan, Sama Bangingi, and Sama Siasi. Aquino (1966) further notes that she observed *pangalay* in Jolo, *pamansak* in Siasi, and *igal* in Sitangkai. Without distinguishing across ethnolinguistic lines, she states that “these three dances are performed in these three different places with slight variations and combinations of steps and arm movements, but with the same basic steps, arm and hand movements” (136). It should be emphasized that Aquino’s text mentioned “three dances.” Therefore, by implication, she differentiates among the three forms while acknowledging a shared vocabulary of “basic steps, arm and hand movements.” This highly nuanced relational distinction, as will be shown later in this piece, appears to have been unappreciated or lost in the works of subsequent generations of scholars.

*Pangalay*, later on, reappears in an updated tome by Sixto Y. Orosa (1970), the former District Health Officer of Sulu Province who served during the early American colonial period. He is also the father of writers

Rosalinda Orosa and Leonor Orosa Goquingco, who persuaded him to republish his book, which was originally released in 1923. Goquingco eventually became National Artist in Dance in 1976. Pangalay does not appear in the original text of the book. Instead, it is contained in a supplementary chapter titled “Muslim Filipinos: They are made up of ten distinct groups.” While insisting on the “distinction” of identity among ten Muslim Filipino groups, Orosa negates this with a blanket description of commonality in dance.

All of the Muslim dances, like those of Java, are characterized by strict attention to posture and the position of hands and arms. Some of these are the Magsayaw or spear dance, the magpanhaly tauti, representing a man fishing; the magpanhaly, a posture dance performed by men and women; and the magdoonsy, or dance of love. This last one is performed by girls and boys in equal number in the light of the moon. (164–65)

It is interesting to point out that Orosa uses Tausug labels for mostly Sama dances. *Magsayaw* is most likely *Igal Tumbak* (literally “spear dance” among the Sama Tabawan) or *Igal Sayau* (“warrior dance” among the Sama Kubang). *Magpanhaly tauti* (a.k.a. *pangalay tauti-tauti*) is most probably *igal baki-baki* (dance of the fishers of sea catfish among the Sama Sitangkai). Beyond doubt, *magpanhaly* is *magpangalay* (Tausug, verb infinitive: to dance), while *magdoonsy* is the *lunsay* (a.k.a. *lunsai* among the Jama Mapun and *runsai* among the Sama Kota Belud). This Tausug-centric point-of-view is understandable, as Orosa worked in Jolo, a predominantly Tausug area in the Sulu Archipelago. Orosa’s 1923 text, however, provides a very informative glimpse of intercultural encounter in Sulu.

The Samals, who are fond of dancing, are usually employed to perform at Sulu feasts. The dancing is done by men or women, seldom by both together, and each dancer performs separately. The dancing consists in taking a series of postures, the feet keeping time to the music. The body is swayed slowly, and the hands, with fingers extended, are bent stiffly from the wrist... (83)

This text clearly indicates that the Samal (a.k.a. Sama) indeed shares the same cultural space with the Tausug. Like many other cultural artifacts or expressions, the Tausug *pangalay* and the Sama *igal*, as well as the *pamansak* of the Sama Siasi—although remaining distinct and autonomous—would most probably have influenced each other.

Seven years after her earlier publication, Aquino (1973) drops *pamansak* and *igal* in her anthology of Philippine folk dances, retaining only the Tausug *pangalay* (76). This act of omission appears to have set in motion the marginalization of the two other dance traditions, which in the later works of other scholars would be subsumed under the label “*pangalay*.” For instance, Alejandro (1978) mentions that various versions of *pangalay* can be found among the “Badjao’s, Samals, and Tausug groups” (183). While referring to *pangalay* as the “festival dance of the Tausugs,” Orosa Goquingco (1980, 165) also states that it is performed by both the “Samals and Tausugs” (173). Intriguingly, she documents the opinion put forward by Ambassador Yusup Abu Bakar and Edward Kuder that “the *Pangalay* was invented by Albani” (173). She also says that the *pangalay* and the *darling-darling* (a.k.a. *dalling-dalling*) are “dances of relatively-recent origin” (173).

In a seminal work,<sup>1</sup> Ligaya Fernando-Amilbangsa strengthens the position of *pangalay* vis-a-vis the other dance traditions of the region by presenting it as “the premier dance prototype since it embodies the postures and gestures basic to most of the traditional dances in Sulu and Tawi-Tawi” (1983, 14). And in an undated syllabus titled “The *Pangalay* Dance Style,” Fernando-Amilbangsa characterizes the tradition as follows:

The *Pangalay*, a dance style in the classical tradition, is the dominant indigenous dance form of the Tau Sug, Samal, Badjao, and Jama Mapun. This little-known dance style from the southern part of the country has the richest movement vocabulary of all ethnic dances in the Philippines. The intricate movements require strong technique, and demonstrate the same degree of artistry and sophistication parallel, if not superior, to other Asian dance forms. *Pangalay* is a “living” link

to traditional dance cultures in the Asian region where sensitivity is the key to learning and gaining mastery of the many nuances of traditional dances.

Fernando-Amilbangsa (1983) also equates Tausug pangalay and Sama igan as alternate dance terms that “connotes dance (n.) or a piece of dancing regardless of function or form” (13).<sup>2</sup> Many scholars have echoed her opinion about the sameness of igan and pangalay (Villaruz and Obusan 1992, 13–14; Lucero 1994a, 80; Lucero 1994b, 278–79) and about its dominant position or general use as a label across ethnic groups in the Sulu Archipelago (Abubakar and Cheng 1994, 391; Matilac 1994, 477; Alejandro and Santos-Chua 2002, 95; Peterson 2003, 44).

However, I do not agree with this perspective on the grounds that similarity is not synonymous with sameness. Indeed, other works on Philippine dance have underscored the importance of differentiating along ethnolinguistic lines and treating the Tausug pangalay as a separate tradition from the other dances in the Sulu and Tawi-Tawi archipelagoes (Santamaria 2012; Hafzan Zannie Hamza 2013; Jacinto 2015). Hamza (2013), for instance, espouses a view that negotiates the lines between sameness and difference.

While *igan* dance forms feature unique Bajau Laut characteristics, the nuances, however, show strong relationships with the neighboring Tausug form, known as the *Pangalay*. Similarities are most evident in the curling and flexing of fingers and palms, while differences can only be traced by those who understand the aesthetics of the dance... Similarities in these dance styles reflect the subtle cultural nuances of the Sulu Sea, and, in turn, indicate uniquely shared regional identities of traditional art forms. (54)

Other scholarly works on dance therefore travels a full circle and returns to Aquino’s highly nuanced relational distinction in describing different dance forms linked by shared characteristics.

## The Indianization of Southeast Asia

Following the introduction about the pangalay dance tradition, this section presents basic ideas and threads of thought that constitute the “Indianization,” a discourse and process within which I situate and critique the Sanskritization of pangalay.

“Indianization” may be defined as the process of the expansion of Indian civilization into Southeast Asia. As this process of expansion or diffusion is accompanied by the Sanskrit language as well as classical Indian literature such as, among others, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, it is also referred to as “Sanskritization” (Coedes 1968, 16). There are three major “hypotheses” concerning the transmission of Indian culture to Southeast Asia. The first is called the *kshatriya* (warrior) hypothesis (Mookerji 1912; Mujumdar 1927). It attributes transmission to conquest or colonization. The hypothesis has been largely discredited due to lack of evidence. The second perspective is called the *vaishya* (trader/merchant) hypothesis (Krom 1927; Coedes 1968). This hypothesis espouses a view of peaceful penetration of Southeast Asia through trade. Critics of this view cast doubt over the fact that traders were persons of low caste and therefore also had little knowledge about Indian culture. Their ability to transmit culture is therefore questionable. As such, a third perspective—the *Brahman* hypothesis (Kulke and Rothermund 1998)—has been put forward. It advances the view that Indianization was propelled by the work of a priestly caste of missionaries, and was mainly instigated by Southeast Asian royal courts.

Apart from the mode of transmission of Indian culture, scholars of the Indianization of Southeast Asia can further be divided according to how much importance they accord to India as a donor culture and to the societies of Southeast Asia as recipient cultures. The works of the early generation of scholars such as Majumdar and Coedes tend to give most of the credit for the development and transformation of indigenous societies in Southeast Asia to Indian culture. As such, it may be said that they held India-centric views or essentialist Indianization perspectives. In contrast, the works of a later generation of scholars such as, among others,

Mus (1975), Van Leur (1955), Wolters (1999), and Mabbet (1977) give importance to local autonomy, indigenization, or localization.

Mabbet (1977) presents a critique of essentialist views on Indianization by casting doubt over the necessity of the condition of a superior donor civilization (India) and a subordinate recipient culture (Southeast Asian societies). Citing the works of Solheim, he introduces the idea of the possibility of the opposite condition.

The question of the chronology of appearance of plant domestication, rice culture, and other technical advances introduces a set of recent claims advanced especially by Wilhelm Solheim II and his colleagues, claims which uncompromisingly assert the primacy of Southeast Asians in all major Asian technical innovations and thus deny the region's dependence upon diffusion from China, India, the far West or anywhere else. On the contrary, many things are held to have been transmitted to parts of China, Japan, and the coasts of the Indian Ocean by Southeast Asian sailors and trades... (6)

Mabbet (1977) describes the “character of Indian influences” in Southeast Asia as a “complex matter of dubiety and debate” (1). He calls the relationship between the two regions as a “complex pattern of cultural interaction” (9). He dismisses the salience of positionality in terms of superiority, equivalence or inferiority of cultures and states that

If one is to influence the other, this need not be because one is superior and is automatically preferred, or because the other is on a similar level of culture and therefore equipped to absorb the first. It will be because the two acted more than incidentally, the possessors of the second participating in a network of interdependence... (14)

In the Philippines, the study of Indian influence finds a most prestigious pioneer in the person of Trinidad H. Pardo de Tavera. In his study of Sanskrit loan words in the Tagalog language, Pardo de Tavera (1887) comes to the conclusion that the Hindus did not come to the islands

“with a simple role as traders” (*un simple papel de comerciantes*); that they “ruled different parts of the archipelago” (*dominaron en diferentes puntos del archipelago*); and that, referring to Tagalog, Bisaya, Kapampangan and Ilocano, the “best of the culture of the languages comes precisely from the influence of the Hindu race on the Filipinos (*la mayor cultura de estas lenguas proviene precisamente de la influencia de aquello raza de hindus sobre los Filipinos*)” (10). This rather essentialist Indianization perspective is picked up by Beyer (1921), Alip (1954; 1958), Zaide (1961), Agoncillo and Alfonso (1960), and Kroeber (1943).

Francisco (1968) critiques the above mentioned works—saying that they imply that “the Indians were present in the Philippines in person” (224). He espouses a more circumscribed view of Indian influence in the Philippines.

The whole perspective of Indian influences in the Philippines may be interpreted only in relation to the *Hinduized* culture of the Malays and the Indonesians whose part in the “Hinduization” of the Islands preponderates over that of any of the other peoples of Southeast Asia. While there may have been influences introduced directly (?) from India, the part contributed by the Hinduized Malaysians, in so far as these influences are concerned, is far more dominant, with the result that their elucidation is not without difficulty (owing to the changes that Hindu cultural elements had undergone, sometimes beyond recognition, when through this intermediate regions. (Francisco 1965, 267)

His critique of Pardo de Tavera’s seminal work, therefore, rejects the idea of direct Indian influence. Instead, Francisco (1968) proposes that cognates or forms from “intervening languages” hold the key to understanding how Sanskrit loanwords came to the Philippines (227). He raises doubts on some of the purportedly Sanskrit-derived words in Pardo de Tavera’s list, observing that “they seem to have no intermediate forms in either Malay or Javanese or both” (227). This being the case, he suggests that “they may yet turn out to be Austronesian (Malayo-Polynesian)” (227). Salazar (1998) takes his cue from Francisco and deepens the linguistic analysis of Pardo de Tavera’s purportedly Sanskrit-derived Tagalog words

by including a wider sample of words or cognates from several Philippine languages as well as from several other languages of the Austronesian world. He convincingly illustrates that many of the words in Pardo de Tavera’s list are most probably Austronesian, and not Sanskrit, in origin. His bold conclusion is stated as follows:

...The study of *known* Sanskrit loan words in Philippine languages cannot therefore yield anything meaningful in linguistics, except so far as they relate individually to the recipient languages. Moreover, the *known* Sanskrit loan words are taken to be so because they are West Indonesian forms previously considered to have derived from Sanskrit. It is quite evident that the recipient Philippine languages may individually or collectively have as donor or donors any of the West Indonesian languages—if, indeed, not one or several of themselves. The recipient languages would therefore be reacting to these West Indonesian or local languages. The most probable “intermediary language” for Tagalog and other Philippine languages is of course Malay, the *lingua franca* of the region in the sixteenth and earlier centuries. In this sense, Sanskrit is quite irrelevant to the problem of linguistic borrowing in Philippine languages. [emphasis added] (53)

Francisco (1994; 1995) parallels his study of linguistics in his work on the *Maharadia Lawana*, the Philippine (Maranao) version of Valmiki’s classic *Ramayana* epic. Again giving due importance to “intermediate forms,” he concludes that the narrative “must have reached the [Lanao] lake area via the Malay version, namely the Fairy Tale—Sri Rama” (1995, 117). In this manner, he strengthens the viewpoint that favors the idea of indirect borrowing from India. Echoing Salazar’s strong contention about the irrelevance of Sanskrit in “linguistic borrowing in Philippine languages” (1998, 53), one can say that the ideas of purity of Indian forms and direct borrowing from India are not germane to the discussions concerning the transformation of other Philippine cultural artifacts such as those found in the realm of music or dance. The veracity of such ideas has been subjected to serious doubt by both Francisco and Salazar. My

line of argument—that the term pangalay does not mean ‘Temple of Dance,’ but is, on the contrary, of Austronesian origin—takes off from this critique of direct Indianization.

### **Temple of Dance: The Sanskritization of Pangalay**

Ligaya Fernando-Amilbangsa’s characterization of pangalay in her seminal tome published in 1983 hews closely to Francisco’s view of indirect influence from India through the intervening cultures of Southeast Asia. She notes that the dance “...in a restricted sense, connotes a traditional dance form or style which...bears closest affinity to the Thai (Siamese) and Balinese modes of dancing. This observation lends credence to the hypothesis that the *pangalay* is a Balinese legacy to the Southern Philippines...” (Amilbangsa 1983, 13). The “Balinese legacy” hypothesis may be traced back to Ronaldo Bautista as noted by Goqingco (1980, 165).

However, the “Balinese link” is less apparent in the Tausug pangalay than in the Sama *igal* dance tradition (Santamaria 2012). The Balinese word for dance is *igel* and not pangalay or any of its close cognates (de Zoete and Spies 1938, 22–23, 52; Bandem and de Boer 1981, 147; and Santamaria 2012, 131). Common use of a term can either mean a common or shared origin and/or cultural contact. *Igal* and its cognates are well distributed in the Malay world. As such, it is most likely to be an Austronesian word. As for cultural contact, the Balinese are not a sea-oriented people, and the idea of their reaching the southern Philippines and leaving a legacy is highly improbable. On the other, the Sama, and more particularly the Sama Dilaut (a.k.a. Bajau laut), are known to populate certain areas of Bali and may be encountered all the way down to Flores Island (Clifton and Majors 2012, 718). Cultural contact between the Balinese and the Sama Dilaut is therefore well-established. This makes the idea of the link between the Balinese *igel* and the Sama *igal* more probable.

Later on, Amilbangsa refers to pangalay as “temple of dance in Sanskrit,” further stating that it literally means “a gift offering,” and

that it “antedates Christianity and Islam in the Philippines” (1). And in a more recent article, “Pangalay: Ancient Dance Heritage of Sulu,” Amilbansa (2012) connects the pangalay to other dance traditions in Asia. In this article, she substitutes the word “affinity” with the more cautious “similarity” in linking the pangalay with “Cambodian, Burmese, Thai, Javanese and Balinese” dance traditions. She also reformulates her Indianized characterization of the dance, saying that “in Sanskrit or the holy language of much of India, pangalay means ‘temple of dance’ or ‘temple dancing.’” As Mariel N. Francisco (2011) writes

...In ancient times it was probably danced in temples in India, where it originated before spreading throughout Asia. It is therefore a sacred dance, a dance celebrating nature by mimicking the waves of the sea, the wind, the birds, the coconut trees, and so on... If you will allow me to enter the sacred space (indicating the circle around which our chairs were arranged, in the center of which a big vase of flowers stood), may I step gently on the earth on behalf of us all...

But is pangalay “temple of dance” in Sanskrit? To answer this query, I undertake a linguistic analysis of the phrase.

Table 1 provides a review of several Sanskrit dictionaries which reveal no entry for pangalay. The most proximate words are the distantly homophonous terms of “paiGgalya” and “piGgalajya,” which may both be associated with the color “brown” (spokensanskrit.de). Lexical consultation, therefore, establishes that pangalay is not “temple of dance” or “temple dancing” in Sanskrit. A further interrogation of the phrasal construction has to be done. This can be done by looking at the components of the phrase.

It is true that there is a homophony between the Sanskrit word for “house” or “dwelling place” and pangalay. In Table 2, *Alaya* (Sanskrit word for house, place or receptacle) sounds very much like *alay*, the second-half component of the word “pangalay.” One of the Sanskrit terms for temple literally reads as god (*deva*) + house (*alaya*) or “devAlaya.” Alternately, being the abode of the gods, a temple can also

TABLE 1: Entries for Pangalay and Homophonous Sanskrit Terms

Entry/Transliteration	Sanskrit Word	Meaning
pangalay	(no entry)	(no entry)
paiGgalya	पैङ्गल्य	n. brown or tawny color
piGgalajya	पिङ्गलज्य	adj. having a brown string

Source: entries retrieved from: <http://spokensanskrit.de/>

TABLE 2: Entries for Temple Homophonous to Pangalay

Entry/Transliteration	Sanskrit Word	Meaning
alaya	आलय	m. house, place; m.n. receptacle
devAlaya	देवालय	m. temple; residence of gods
mahAlaya	महालय	m. great temple; sanctuary
maGgalAya	मङ्गलाय	m. temple

Source: entries retrieved from: <http://spokensanskrit.de/>

be referred to as a great (*maha*) + house (*alaya*) or “mahAlaya.” A cognate of this Sanskrit word can be found in “maGgalAya.” As “Gga” and “nga” are often substitutable sounds in many Asian and Austronesian languages, the Sanskrit “maGgalAya” becomes quite homophonous to the Tausug (and Iranun) *mangalay* or *mangalai* (also, *mengalai*).

However, homophony (same sounds) is not the same as homology. Similarity in sounds or spelling, most especially in comparing words from different language groups, does not mean sameness in terms of origin or meaning.

As for dance, several cognates of “naTa” or “nRtya” can be observed in Sanskrit (Refer to Table 3). This root word or cognates of such roots cannot be discerned, even via the most liberal of readings, in the word “pangalay.” After pointing out which root words correspond to “temple” and “dance” in Sanskrit, a comparison with similar words found in other Indianized Southeast Asian cultures can be done. This act of comparison comprises a “test of intervening languages,” as derived from Francisco’s earlier work on Sanskrit loanwords in Philippine languages. If “pangalay” is “temple of dance” or “temple dancing” in Sanskrit, then similar words or cognates ought to be found in the languages of Indianized cultures of Southeast Asia. In terms of proximity to the Philippines, Malay, Balinese and Javanese would comprise the most appropriate language sampling.

Table 4 shows that there appears to be no root words from Malay, Indonesian, Balinese and Javanese which bear any similarity to components of “pangalay” that purportedly refer to “temple” or “dance” in Sanskrit. The term *kuil* in Bahasa Indonesia and Bahasa Melayu specifically refer to a Hindu temple (Wojowasito and Wasito 1987, 152; Tan, Musa and Seaton 2005; Sheppard 2011, 810). The Balinese popular term for “temple” is *pura* (Picard 1996, 207), while the Javanese is *candi* or *candhi* (Soekmono 1995, 100). Words for dance in the region are *tari* or *tarian*,

TABLE 3: Entries for Dance, Dancer and Homophonous Sanskrit Terms

Entry/Transliteration	Sanskrit Word	Meaning
[pa]ngalai[y]; [pa]ngelai[y]	(no entry)	(no entry)
naTa; nATa	नट	m. dancer; m.n. dancing
nRtta	नृत्त	n. dance, dancing
nRtya	नृत्य	n. dance, dancing
nATya	नाट्य	n. dance, dancing

Source: entries retrieved from: <http://spokensanskrit.de/>

TABLE 4: Temple and Dance in Malay, Balinese and Javanese

Austronesian Language	Temple	Dance
Malay (Bahasa Melayu)	kuil	tarian, igel, tandak
Indonesia (Bahasa Indonesia)	kuil	tari, igal
Balinese	pura	igel
Javanese	candi or candhi	tarian, igel

Sources: Wojowasito and Wasito (1987); Tan, Musa and Seaton (2005); Sheppard (2011) and others.

*igel* and *tandak*; referring to, respectively graceful hand or arm movements, posturing, and footwork (Sheppard 2005, 95). As no intermediate forms for “temple” or “dance” resembling or cognatic or pangalay exist in the region, the link between ‘temple of dance’ and pangalay is problematic.

If it is not Sanskrit, what then is the etymology of pangalay? Table 5 shows that it is with little doubt Austronesian in origin, sharing with other words for dance in the region, such as *t(al)ic* = *t(ar)ik* and *ig(al)* = *ig(el)*, the core sound of *al*. *Alai* is a Brunei Malay, Belait, Dusun, Iranun and Murut word for dance observed by scholars in the North Borneo or Sabah region (Cavendish 2008, 1202; Gunn 1997, 34; Pugh-Kitingan 2004, 29, 174 and 214; Rubin et. al., 1998, 91; Abdul Latif Hadji Ibrahim 1969, 10–14). This is obviously a cognate of “ngalay,” noted by Panganiban (1972, 891) as the Tausug (also known as Suluk) word for dance. The same may be said of *kalay* as observed by Asmah Haji Omar (1983, 422) among the Suluk (also known as Tausug) in Sabah, Malaysia. She further reconstructs the prefix-noun-suffix form of *pa(N)-an* as one that “denotes ‘result’ or ‘place of action’” (422). As such, pangalay may be treated as a shortened form of *pangalayan* which may mean “(a) dance” (ibid.) or, alternately, as an event or place where dancing occurs. Scholars like Abdul Latif Hadji Ibrahim (1969) characterize *alai* as a “tribal dance.” It is also clear that an examination of Bornean cognates to the word pangalay point to *alai* as “dance” and not as “offering.”

TABLE 5: Pangalay and its Cognates in the Sulu-Borneo Area

Label/Cognate Term	Ethnic Group/Origin	Source
alai	(Belait and Brunei Malay) Brunei and (Belait, Dusun, Iranun and Murut) Sabah, Malaysia	Cavendish (2008); Gunn (1997); Pugh- Kitingan (2004); Rubin and others (1998); Sidhu (2010); and, Abdul Latif Haji Ibrahim (1969)
Ngalay	Tausug (Jolo, Sulu), Iranun	Panganiban (1972)
kalay	Suluk (aka Tausug in Sabah)	Asmah Haji Omar (1983)

Source: Table created by author using various publications.

If indeed *pangalay* is not “temple of dance” or “temple dancing” in Sanskrit, is it still possible to link it to Indianized states of Southeast Asia and older civilizations beyond? In terms of possibility, the answer is a qualified “yes.” The process of linking will, however, be more circumscribed or indirect. The link starts with the Sultanate of Brunei, the most proximate royal court to the Sulu Sultanate (Refer to Table 6). It comes in the form of the *Alai Ashik*, a highly formalized dance performed by young girls in traditional court attire made of *kain tenunan* or Bruneian hand-woven brocade replete with *gandi* or Malay style tiaras (Brunei Times, 2014). This dance may very well be related to the *Asyik* or *Ashék* of the Court of Kelantan in the northeastern region of the Malaysian Peninsula. Its oldest form is traced back to the Court of Raja Kuning, the Queen of Patani who ruled sometime in 1644 (Mohd. Anis Md. Nor 1998). The Sultanate of Patani is a Malay Sultanate whose center is located in what is now a southern Province of the Kingdom of Thailand (Teew and Wyatt, 1970). The ancient form of the dance is called *Asyiq* in the *Hikayat Patani* (Sheppard 2011, 96). The Kelantan version as noted by Sheppard (2011) is danced by ten girls with the lead dancer wearing

TABLE 6: Pangalay and Asyik

Label/Cognate Term	Ethnic Group/Origin	Source
Asyiq	(Malay) Patani [now South Thailand]	<i>Hikayat Patani</i> as discussed in Teeuw and Wyatt (1970)
Asyik/Ashek	(Malay) Kelantan	Mohd Anis Md Nor (2000); Sheppard (2011)
Alai Ashik/Alai	(Belait and Brunei Malay) Brunei and (Belait, Dusun, Iranun, and Murut) Sabah, Malaysia	Brunei Times (2014); Cavendish (2008); Gunn (1997); Pugh-Kitingan (2004); Rubin and others (1998); Sidhu (2010); and, Abdul Latif Haji Ibrahim (1969)
Pangalay and Pangasik	Tausug (aka Suluk), Sulu Archipelago, Philippines	Amilbangsa (1983)
Mag-asik	Tiruray (aka Teduray)	Tolentino (1946)
Asik	Maguindanao, Mindanao, Philippines	Goqingco (1980)

Source: Table created by author using various publications.

“long up-curving silver finger tip covers” called *changgai* (98). This property is obviously the same as the *janggalay* worn by pangalay dancers in the Sulu Archipelago. Most unfortunately, the year 1644 as a high point of cultural history in Patani does not correspond to a “pre-Islamic” period in the Philippines. Islam is supposed to have been introduced into the Philippines in the 14th century. The oldest mosque in the Philippines, which is found in the Island of Siminul, dates back to around 1380. Alas, no record of the existence of the *Asyik* exists beyond the Patani Sultanate period. Its existence

during the periods of Ayutthayan and Sukhothai suzerainty, the period of its incorporation into the Sri Vijayan Empire and the period of the even earlier Hindu-Buddhist Kingdom of Langkasuka is problematic, as is the pre-Islamic origins of pangalay as “temple dancing,” “temple of dance,” or in whatever form in the Philippines or elsewhere.

The movement of artifacts across time and space offers a valuable lesson in linguistic reversal of meanings and splitting of labels. As noted by Amilbangsa (1983), in the Sulu Archipelago, the *pangasik* “complements a female dancer’s Pangalay performance whenever a male dancing partner is desired for the occasion” (28). A gender division in performance therefore becomes apparent in the Sulu region. This gender division reverts to its original form as *mag-asik*, a dance for girls among the Tiruray [also known as Teduray] (Tolentino 1946, 169) and *asik*, “a dance of dolls for girls” among the Maguindanaon (Goquingco 1980, 178). This diaspora of *asik* warrants further investigation in future dance research. At this juncture, however, a very brief inquiry into the origins of the word proves to be quite interesting. *Ashek* means “lover” (Sheppard 2011, 96). It comes from the Arabic and Urdu word, *Aashiq*, which may mean “exceeding the limit of love” (Madenah.com). Pangalay’s “affinity” to *asyik* or *asyiq*, therefore ironically, brings it back to an Islamic provenance either through Arabic or through Urdu, an *Islamized* language and culture of the Indian subcontinent. This view runs contrary to the notion of pangalay as a pre-Islamic artifact.

### **Culture: Between Preservation and Dynamism**

The first passage below is Amilbangsa’s comments on a festival parade in Bongao on 25 September 2011.

...It was hard to believe that I was in the midst of such display of pomp and color in the capital of Tawi-tawi; the *ati-atihan* percussive rhythm assailed my ears, instead of the familiar instrumental and vocal music I heard all over the place four decades ago...Such was the contrast that seemingly transported me to an entirely different

world in the past: the call to prayer at daybreak from a distant mosque; the tantalizing cadence of kulintang music that waft unexpectedly anytime from somewhere; the engaging lilt of lelling sung passionately after sundown by a neighbourhood boy with a captivating voice; the hypnotic sound of lugo earnestly intoned from afar; the lullaby hummed by a solicitous mother to pacify a baby in a makeshift cradle on a boat. The memory is [sic] too numerous to enumerate... The garish colors, fabrics and decorations of the costumes and props in the parade jolted me. What has the festival done to the community? And what has the community done to itself? I cringe at the destructive effects of such an expensive and frivolous activity to the cultural well-being of Tawi-Tawi—identified as one of the poorest provinces in the country, but certainly very rich culturally and historically. What a pity that all these go to waste due to misdirection at all levels. (Amilbangsa 2011)

In an earlier, separate passage, she writes:

...Are the schools asleep? Are the people sleeping? Are the government institutions snoring in a deep slumber? Is everyone oblivious, or simply ignorant of what is true, beautiful, real, and functional in their particular environment? The natives owe it to themselves to wake up fast enough to preserve and conserve and harness their cultural uniqueness to reap the economic benefits of tourism, but above all to assert their ethnic identity. [*emphasis added*] (Padilla and Amilbangsa ca. 2009)

Lastly, below is a passage from the website of AlunAlun Dance Circle, a Amilbangsa's dance company.

...The ultimate dream is for the AlunAlun Dance Circle to, one day, reintroduce the dance as preserved by Ligaya Amilbangsa, back to where it originally sprung, in the remote islands of the Sulu Archipelago. When that happens, it would be an event worthy of an even larger festivity for us... Helping to restore a treasure back to

where it once was a healthy and living tradition is a goal that the AlunAlun Dance Circle wants to achieve with other cultural workers in the Sulu Archipelago. Furthermore, it would be a crime against humanity if the oppressed indigenous people of Southern Philippines like the Sama Dilaut are forever deprived of their cultural heritage. They have the birthright to dance and claim their freedom back in their homeland, as refugees no more. (Marciada 2010)

There is undeniable value in preserving pangalay, and the efforts to do so, including those of Amilbangsa, are essential and laudable. All the same, these statements in my view present a static, essentialist view of culture, one that appears to be rooted in the past and posited at the expense of the present. One of the passages above insists on what is “unique, true, beautiful, real, and functional.” But what counts as such? By what standards do we define these matters? This is by no means a call for relativism or a denial that pangalay is a fine cultural tradition, but a recognition that cultures are changing, dynamic entities. In this sense, it may be unfair to depict the people as sleeping, oblivious to or ignorant of “the true, beautiful, real and functional.” One can also view the Bongao festival as a form of cultural dynamism in its own right, which is no less unique, true, or beautiful. It need not necessarily be seen as loss or frivolity, but as a manifestation of a people’s agency to express and transform their culture; a contemporary assertion and ownership of their traditions and identity, which they can define and express in different ways.

### **Conclusion**

This article has presented a survey of the literature on the pangalay dance tradition. It has also situated its argument within the processes of “Indianization” (a.k.a. Sanskritization) and undertaken a linguistic analysis to interrogate the notion that pangalay means “Temple of Dance” in Sanskrit, and that the pangalay dance tradition has a pre-Christian, pre-Islamic, ancient Indian lineage. On the contrary, this paper has argued that the label pangalay is of Austronesian origin.

Taking off from the penultimate section of the paper, some reflection can be done on the relationship among notions of ancient provenance, prestige, and authenticity. Does a tradition need to be extremely old in order to be considered prestigious and authentic? Does it have to be linked to a “great civilization” in order to be considered worthy of preservation? The answer to these questions could only be a resounding “no.” Prestige and authenticity can come without age. Worthy examples can be seen in the case of a traditional Japanese dance (*Nihon Buyoh*) and *Kabuki*. The origins of traditional Japanese dance only dates back to the early decade of the 20th century, yet its prestige among its practitioners and audiences is beyond doubt. *Kabuki*, on the other hand, started as a popular form performed by a band of female performers headed by the legendary dancer, Okuni, during the early Edo period. It was derided as a crass form during the early stages of its development. Compared to the much older *Noh* theatre, it initially did not get much support from the samurai class. After only seven decades of its existence, much of its conventions have been standardized and it started to gain patronage from the samurai class, expanding its traditional support base from the merchant class. Today, it is considered one of the classical performance theatrical forms of Japan. As these two Japanese cases show, prestige and authenticity have nothing to do with “ancient provenance.” The values, meanings and functions attached to the tradition by its creators and consumers matter more than notions of antiquity.

Philippine traditions ought to be appreciated for what they are. There is no need to argue for an ancient provenance or present an association with “high civilization.” Fernando Nakpil Zialcita (2005) expresses this thought most eloquently.

...As recently as the 1960s, Southeast Asian arts were classified as either “Farther Indian” or Chinese; these labels have since been dropped and the unique features of each style appreciated. May we expect that the same will eventually be accorded our Filipino arts, specifically those created in the Christianized, Hispanized lowlands? (1)

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> The publication of Amilbanga’s tome, *Pangalay*, in 1983 is considered a trailblazing work on the little-known performance traditions from a highly problematic part of the Republic of the Philippines. Even before the publication of her seminal book, National Artist Leonor Orosa Goquingco (1980) already acknowledges her contribution to the field, saying that “No study of the dances of Morolandia, and specifically of those of the Sulu Archipelago, would be complete without mention of the findings of Ligaya Fernando-Amilbanga...” (117)
- <sup>2</sup> It should be noted that it is not clear how, why and to what extent pangalay has “the richest movement vocabulary of all ethnic dance in the Philippines.”

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