

Calabanga: Retelling Heritage and History in Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Oral narratives and history implicate human experience, serving as channels for cultural transmission and preserving shared memory. The Philippines' rich oral narratives are integral to revitalizing cultural memory and transmitting communal knowledge. While the importance of retelling oral narratives is recognized, more examination has yet to be done to explore the retelling process. This research paper attempts to provide additional empirical evidence from qualitative inquiry while addressing the aim of exploring the retelling process of oral narratives about the heritage and history of Calabanga and examining the literary piece for possible staging and dissemination. Involving the marginalized voices of senior citizens as cultural bearers through interviews and focus group discussion and supplementing archives and documentary evidence as sources for the retelling process, the author thematically analyzed data to write a script on heritage and history creatively. The implication of retelling history and heritage through the script "Calabanga" has two significant impacts. Firstly, it helps preserve the history and culture of Calabanga for future generations. By capturing the town's history and traditions engagingly and memorably, younger generations are more likely to be interested in and appreciate their heritage. Not only in formal education, the results of this research are recommended for sharing through extension among communities perpetuating cultural heritage promotion, preservation, and protection, such as the Department of Education. By engagingly presenting local history and heritage, this approach can enhance lifelong learners' enjoyment of learning while providing them with a meaningful understanding of their community and the broader historical context of their country. This research highlights the importance of incorporating multiple sources of information and perspectives, such as oral narratives and interviews with local historians, into teaching history and cultural heritage. The approach fosters the development of critical thinking skills among students and promotes a more nuanced comprehension of historical events.

Keywords: Calabanga, heritage preservation, oral narratives, retelling process

INTRODUCTION

Oral narratives and history have been intrinsic to the human experience, serving as conduits for cultural transmission and preserving collective memory [1], [2]. Their role in shaping cultural identities, transmitting historical knowledge, and preserving traditions across generations have been pivotal [3], [4]. Retelling these narratives is paramount in safeguarding cultural heritage and fostering a deeper understanding of the past. Oral narratives embody the essence of cultural heritage, encapsulating myths, legends, folktales, and historical accounts that carry the ethos of communities [5], [6]. These narratives serve as cultural artifacts that encode the collective experiences, beliefs, and values of generations [7]. Retelling these narratives is indispensable in ensuring the continuity of cultural memory, thereby bridging the temporal gap between the past and the present [8]. Moreover, retelling oral narratives permits the reinterpretation and adaptation of stories, making them relevant to contemporary contexts [9]. This adaptability ensures the narratives' resonance with evolving societal norms and facilitates intergenerational communication [10]. Oral

narratives are instrumental in preserving cultural heritage and ensuring its continuity. They encapsulate the collective memory of a community, embedding historical events, moral lessons, and societal norms within compelling stories [11]. Through storytelling, cultural knowledge is not only preserved but also adapted and reinterpreted to remain relevant to contemporary audiences. This dynamic process allows cultures to maintain their core values while evolving to meet new challenges [12]. In many societies, oral narratives function as an educational tool. They are employed to teach younger generations about their cultural heritage, instilling a sense of identity and belonging [13]. For instance, among the Indigenous communities, stories often include lessons about the natural world, survival skills, and social conduct [14]. These narratives provide contextualized knowledge that is crucial for the community's way of life, fostering a deep understanding of their environment and their role within it. Oral narratives also play a pivotal role in fostering social cohesion and collective identity. By sharing stories, communities create a shared history and common values that bind individuals together [6]. This shared cultural fabric is particularly important in times of crisis or change, as it reinforces group solidarity and resilience. For example, the retelling of epic tales and historical events often serves to remind community members of their shared past and common goals [15]. While oral narratives are traditional, they are not static. Storytellers often adapt stories to reflect current realities and challenges, thus ensuring that the narratives remain relevant and engaging [16]. This adaptability allows oral traditions to incorporate new ideas and innovations while maintaining a connection to the past. The ability to evolve ensures that cultural transmission through oral narratives is a dynamic process that responds to changing social and environmental contexts [17]. Despite their importance, oral narratives face challenges in the modern world, particularly with the dominance of written and digital media. Efforts to document and preserve these narratives are crucial to ensure that they are not lost [3]. Ethnographic research and audio-visual recordings are among the methods used to capture these stories, making them accessible to future generations and researchers. These preservation efforts highlight the need for a balanced approach that respects the oral tradition's performative nature while utilizing modern technology to safeguard it.

Oral narratives serve as living repositories of historical knowledge, capturing communities' experiences, beliefs, and values [18]. These narratives often contain information not found in written records, offering unique insights into the past [19]. They enable the transmission of cultural memory from elders to younger generations, ensuring that ancestral wisdom remains accessible and relevant [20]. By recounting stories of triumphs, challenges, and traditions, oral narratives provide a bridge to the past, fostering a sense of continuity and identity [2]. Oral narratives are pivotal in promoting cultural diversity and raising awareness about distinct cultural practices [21]. They offer a platform for communities to showcase their traditions, values, and unique ways of life to a broader audience [10]. Through oral storytelling events, festivals, and workshops, communities can engage members and outsiders, fostering cross-cultural understanding [22]. These narratives encourage dialogue and mutual respect, enhancing intercultural communication and reducing cultural stereotypes [23]. In contexts where cultural practices have declined, oral narratives hold the potential to revitalize traditions. They can catalyze cultural renewal, inspiring communities to reconnect with their heritage [24]. By reintroducing traditional stories and practices, oral narratives facilitate the transmission of tacit knowledge integral to cultural practices [25]. This revitalization process extends beyond the narratives, often leading to a resurgence of related activities, such as traditional ceremonies, music, and arts [26].

The Philippines, with its rich and diverse expressions of cultures and traditions, has a longstanding tradition of retelling oral narratives and history to preserve its wide-ranging heritage. In the Philippines, oral narratives have been integral to preserving cultural memory and transmitting historical knowledge [27]. These narratives, encompassing myths, legends, epics, and folktales, encapsulate various indigenous groups and communities' collective experiences, values, and worldviews [27]. Retelling these narratives is a vital link between generations, ensuring the continuity of cultural heritage and historical consciousness. Retelling oral narratives in the Philippines is an essential part of cultural continuity. These narratives often reflect

indigenous belief systems, cosmologies, and relationships with the environment [29]. They provide insights into traditional social structures, rituals, and practices that have shaped Filipino identity over centuries [30]. By retelling these narratives, communities reaffirm their cultural roots, fostering a sense of pride and belonging. However, retelling oral narratives in the Philippines faces challenges stemming from historical marginalization, globalization, and changing lifestyles [31].

Moreover, cultural appropriation and misrepresentation are risky when retelling narratives for commercial or entertainment purposes [32]. Sensitivity to indigenous perspectives and ethical considerations is crucial in the retelling process. Furthermore, retelling oral narratives and history presents inherent challenges rooted in the fluidity of oral tradition. The dynamic nature of oral narratives results in variations with each retelling, complicating determining the “authentic” version [33]. Balancing authenticity, and adaptation is a nuanced endeavor, as excessive emphasis on accuracy may stifle the narratives’ natural evolution [34]. Cultural sensitivity is a paramount consideration in retelling narratives. The retelling process must be approached with profound respect for the originating community’s context, beliefs, and values [35]. Misinterpretations or insensitive adaptations can lead to misrepresentations and the erosion of cultural integrity [36]. While the importance of retelling oral narratives is recognized, more examination has yet to be done to explore the retelling process.

Various theories, such as anthropology, sociology, and cultural studies, support the significance of retelling oral narratives in exploring history and heritage. One prominent theory is the concept of collective memory, which suggests that oral narratives play a crucial role in shaping how communities remember and interpret their past. Reference [37] proposed the theory of collective memory, which emphasizes the social and cultural aspects of memory. According to this theory, memories are not simply individual recollections but are shaped and reinforced through social interactions within a community. Oral narratives serve as a mechanism for transmitting and preserving collective memories across generations, allowing communities to construct a shared understanding of their history and heritage.

Furthermore, cultural anthropologists such as References [38] and [39] have highlighted the importance of oral tradition in preserving cultural knowledge and values. Through the retelling of oral narratives, cultural traditions, customs, and beliefs are passed down from one generation to another, contributing to the continuity and identity of a community. In the context of heritage studies, scholars such as [40] have emphasized the role of storytelling in heritage interpretation. According to reference [20], storytelling is a powerful tool for engaging with the past, as it allows individuals to connect emotionally and intellectually with historical events and experiences. By retelling oral narratives, communities can actively participate in interpreting and preserving their heritage. These theories underscore the significance of retelling oral narratives in exploring history and heritage, highlighting how storytelling shapes collective memory, preserves cultural knowledge, and facilitates engagement with the past.

Meanwhile, current research on retelling oral narratives to explore history and heritage has made significant strides, but several gaps still need to be addressed. One notable research gap is the need for further investigation into the intersectionality of oral narratives with diverse perspectives within communities. For instance, while much research has focused on the dominant narratives within societies, more attention must be paid to marginalized voices and alternative histories within oral traditions [41]. Understanding the perspectives of minority groups, indigenous communities, and other marginalized voices is crucial for achieving a more inclusive and comprehensive understanding of history and heritage. Furthermore, there is a need for more interdisciplinary research that integrates approaches from fields such as anthropology, history, cultural studies, and oral tradition studies. By combining methodologies and perspectives from different disciplines, researchers can better understand how oral narratives shape collective memory and cultural identity [42]. Addressing these research gaps will contribute to a more inclusive and comprehensive exploration of history and heritage through retelling oral narratives, allowing for a richer understanding of

diverse cultural experiences and perspectives.

This investigation, therefore, delves into the marginal voices of the senior citizens of Calabanga, explores the lenses of oral traditions, history, and cultural studies, and further inquires on the following research questions: (a) what are oral narratives about history and heritage of Calabanga? (b) How are narratives translated into a form that creatively presents history and heritage for this generation and the next? After examining the retelling process from oral narratives of Calabanga, researchers explored the potential of converting it into a literary piece (script) for theater production.

METHODOLOGY

In exploring history and heritage through oral narratives, researchers implemented a case study approach, focusing on a specific community, event, and cultural tradition while employing multiple data collection methods to gather diverse perspectives and insights. Researchers conducted in-depth interviews with community members and followed up with a focus group discussion (FGD) of 11 senior citizens from various barangays in Calabanga as research participants. These interviews, supplemented with participant observation, archival research, and document analysis, provided additional context and depth to the data [43]. Data gathering tools such as audio and video recording equipment and field notes were used to collect data during interviews, FGD, and participant observation. Data analysis involves qualitative methods such as content and narrative analysis to identify patterns, themes, and meanings in oral narratives [44].

Key informants from Calabanga were initially identified through active cultural bearers – individuals or groups within a community who play a significant role in preserving, transmitting, and perpetuating cultural traditions, knowledge, and practices from one generation to another. In cases where key informants can identify other potential research participants, the ‘snowball’ principle was utilized until data saturation. Archival artifacts were supported in-depth and further triangulated through focus group discussion, expert-guided sessions, and consultation. The composite of all data collected was analyzed thematically. Written literature in the script was subjected to a series of critiquing from experts and data sources. Retelling oral narratives includes wide-ranging stakeholders – key informants, resource persons, authors of local books, theater actors, production staff, and community members. To lessen vulnerability to ethical problems (such as social and cultural sensitivities, privacy and confidentiality, and risk to participants and researchers) and to guarantee ethical demeanor in the research project, participants were provided an information sheet and briefing regarding the nature of their participation. They were only asked to proceed after confirming their participation through informed consent. After data analysis, the script draft was prepared and sent to participants for validation, writing the final version of the result and literary piece.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Creatively retelling history and heritage can be a challenging yet rewarding endeavor. The project aimed to include marginal voices in the process of retelling history and heritage prior to the creation of a script that would capture the history and traditions of Calabanga, a municipality in the Bicol region of the Philippines, and present it in a way that would engage and educate audiences, particularly younger generations. With narratives from selected vital informants who are prolific senior citizens of the municipality, the script, titled “Calabanga,” was inspired by the book of Jaime Malanyaon and other oral narratives of the town. It was written in a poetic form, which was hoped to be more attractive to read and more accessible to remember. The literary piece was divided into five parts, each focusing on a different aspect of Calabanga’s history and culture, which represented the themes drawn from the data collected and analyzed:

1. “*An Kapinunan*” (*The beginning*) The first part focused on how the name of the town Calabanga originated and how it became an established municipality having Quipayo as one of its barangays.

The name has several origins based on oral narratives. It included, *calabangan* – which mean plenty of ‘*labang*’ or wild animal traps; *cacabalangan* – denoting the predominance of monkeys (*cabalang*) and *calagbangan*– denote the lengthy roads and shorelines spanning up to 10 kilometers.

2. “*An Impluwensya kan mga Dayuhan*” (*The Influences of Invaders*). The second part focused on the influences made by the other countries who went to the Philippines, such as Spaniards and Americans, that affected the beliefs of the ancient people, specifically their conversion to the Catholic faith and their recognition of the importance of education. This transformation is evident across most parts of the country. Colonization allowed specific changes in the cultures and traditions of the people of Calabanga. With the presence of Spaniards and Americans, names of specific places also evolved akin to the baptism of natives to new names and renewed identity.
3. “*An Kultura*” (*The Culture*) The third part focused on the traditions and practices of the people, which most of them are still familiar with and are observed in the place, from the indigenous traditions to the practices that the country’s colonizers influence. Despite this change, there remains a distinct local tradition shaped through time.
4. “*An Pinagkukuanan Nin Pagbuhay*” (*The Source of their Living*) The fourth part focused on how people survived or earned their living, the rich natural resources found in the different barangays of the municipality, and how the people nurtured these resources until the present. This part also outlined the development of the place.
5. “*Si Nuestra Señora de la Porteria Asin an Saiyang Kapistahan*” (*The Feast of Nuestra Señora de la Porteria*). The fifth part focused on recognizing Nuestra Senora de la Porteria, the Patron Saint of the Municipality. It narrated the miracle stories that saved the place from calamity and famine. Likewise, it describes how the people celebrated the town fiesta in honor of the Blessed Virgen. Feasts are common celebrations among places in the Philippines attributed to the Catholic faith, as each place has a dedicated titular or patron saint.

After submitting the first draft of the script to one of the project’s consultants, the writer received feedback that helped the team improve the script. The expert validator appreciated how the creative output “Calabanga” was written. When the writer asked the consultant if it was good enough that she did not observe measures and rhymes in each line and each paragraph, the consultant told the writer that what she did was another form of writing a poem (free verse) and it was acceptable. However, he suggested the removal of the title of each part; instead, write it continuously, emphasizing the beginning, middle, and end to complete the story. Hence, it will look like a long poem about Calabanga. When the script’s initial draft was shared with another consultant of the project and a native of Calabanga, he provided valuable input to the writer about other notable aspects of Calabanga’s history that should be included in the creative narrative. Being a writer and having researched the topic, the writer understood the significance of including such details in the story. In revising the script based on the suggestions of expert validators, it was decided to look for other sources, such as an interview with the people of Calabanga, such as senior citizens and a historian, to validate the content and deepen the script’s writings. The draft of Danilo Gerona’s book, “Calabanga,” in which the publication process was ongoing at that time, was also considered another reference. After the interview with the book’s author, the script’s re-writing phase was done following the consultant’s suggestions and integrating the information interviews. There was a re-organization of the way the facts or information was presented, such as the real meaning and origin of the town’s name, the specific dates of the establishment of the municipality, primary barangays, and parishes. The writer reorganized how the facts were presented and added information from the interview. The final version of the script included an original song that served as the play’s theme song, arranged by music enthusiasts from Calabanga. The current structure of the script is composed of 57 stanzas unraveling the discoveries from interviews, document reviews, and focus group discussions with senior citizens. Director’s guide and notes were provided to assist in the staging process.

Culture is the protagonist in the play, mirroring the faith and resiliency of Calabangueños. The written text

was filled with significant figures and information about the actual dates, persons, and places portraying long years of historic past and recent development. The way the script was organized is akin to the seemingly vast and unexplored artistry in Calabanga – the poetic rendition in the script, the music, and the song, as well as the dramatic interpretation embellished in the retelling process and final output, represent the respect of the structural presentation of the script to the cultural context of Calabanga. The script underwent a validation staging where it was presented to a diverse audience comprising young and old, men and women. The audience feedback was overwhelmingly positive, with only minor technical aspects of the performance, such as lighting, that required improvement. While these were not the main focus of the validation, the team noted the suggestions for future reference and improvement.

Consequently, the written script highlighted history and heritage of Calabanga through voices from marginalized groups and renowned authors, as well as observed practices from the key informants of this research. Five themes representing the structure of the written script are based on the oral narratives of the key informants and other sources, including chronology, origins, colonial influences, culture, resources, and faith. The study showed that creatively retelling history and heritage has the potential to engage and educate audiences effectively. The script, likewise, has an opportunity to aid the preservation of the heritage and culture of Calabanga for future generations and inspire others to do similar endeavors in their communities. Transformation of oral narratives to text and then to theater productions positively implicates theater-in-education conceptions owing to the absence of original practitioners and cultural bearers over time [45]. Calabanga, written as a script for staging purposes, presents an opportunity for broader and creative dissemination of history and heritage.

The translation of oral narratives into written scripts offers a unique opportunity to creatively disseminate traditional stories through various mediums. This process not only preserves cultural heritage but also introduces these narratives to new audiences in innovative and engaging ways. One of the most powerful ways to disseminate oral narratives translated into scripts is through theater and performance arts. By transforming these stories into plays, performers can bring the history and heritage from oral traditions to life on stage. This approach allows for a dynamic interaction between the audience and the narrative, creating an immersive experience that can evoke deep emotional responses [13]. The use of visual and auditory elements in theater, such as costumes, music, and lighting, can enhance the storytelling and make the cultural context more vivid [46]. For example, the adaptation of African folk tales into theatrical performances has proven to be an effective way of preserving and sharing these stories. Playwrights and directors can collaborate with local communities to ensure authenticity and cultural sensitivity, thereby honoring the original narratives while making them accessible to broader audiences [47]. Film and digital media offer another compelling avenue for the creative dissemination of oral narratives. By translating these stories into screenplays, filmmakers can reach a global audience and utilize the visual power of cinema to convey complex cultural themes and emotions [48]. Documentaries and animated films, in particular, can effectively capture the essence of oral traditions and present them in engaging formats suitable for all age groups. Digital platforms such as YouTube, podcasts, and social media also provide innovative ways to share these narratives. Creating video or audio recordings of oral stories and making them available online can ensure that they are accessible to a wider audience, including younger generations who are more attuned to digital content [49]. Interactive websites and mobile applications can also offer immersive experiences, where users can explore oral narratives through multimedia elements like audio clips, illustrations, and interactive storytelling. Integrating translated oral narratives into educational programs can foster a deeper understanding and appreciation of cultural heritage among students. Schools and universities can incorporate these scripts into their curricula, allowing students to study and perform these stories as part of their learning process [13]. This not only enriches the educational experience but also helps in the preservation of these narratives. Workshops and community programs can further promote the dissemination of oral narratives. By organizing storytelling sessions, scriptwriting workshops, and performance classes, educators and cultural practitioners can engage community members in the creative

process of adapting and sharing their own stories [50]. Such initiatives can empower individuals to take ownership of their cultural heritage and contribute to its transmission.

While the translation and dissemination of oral narratives offer many benefits, it is crucial to approach this process with sensitivity and respect for the source material. Maintaining the authenticity of the original narratives and ensuring that the cultural context is accurately represented are essential [3]. Collaborating with community elders and tradition bearers can provide valuable insights and guidance, ensuring that the translated scripts honor the spirit of the original stories. Furthermore, addressing issues of intellectual property and ethical considerations is important. Ensuring that the communities from which these narratives originate receive recognition and, where appropriate, financial benefits from their dissemination is crucial [51].

CONCLUSION

The implication of creatively retelling history and heritage through the script “Calabanga” has two significant impacts. Firstly, it helps preserve the history and culture of Calabanga for future generations. In capturing the town’s history and traditions engagingly and memorably, younger generations are more likely to be interested in and appreciate their heritage. As a result, individuals may develop a stronger sense of attachment and appreciation for their town or municipality, leading to increased pride and a deeper connection to their community. This may also result in a more profound understanding and appreciation of their cultural heritage and history. Secondly, retelling has educational implications, particularly in teaching and learning. Using an imaginative and captivating strategy, the script empowers educators to integrate regional history and culture into their syllabus. Not only in formal education, the results of this research are recommended for sharing through extension among communities perpetuating cultural heritage promotion, preservation, and protection through the Department of Education, especially in Calabanga. Transforming the oral narratives into a literary piece as a script for theater production is further recommended as transformation from text to theater so that the community may assist in the cultural preservation and revitalization of the place. By engagingly presenting local history and heritage, this approach can enhance lifelong learners’ enjoyment of learning while providing them with a meaningful understanding of their community and the broader historical context of their country. Additionally, the project highlights the importance of incorporating multiple sources of information and perspectives, such as oral narratives and interviews with local historians, into teaching history and cultural heritage. The approach can foster the development of critical thinking skills among students and promote a more nuanced comprehension of historical events.

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