

# "The Fading Scribe: A Preliminary Analysis Behind the Decline of Kirim and the Transformation of Salsila in the 21st Century in Marantao, Lanao Del Sur."

Akisah Tago Yusoph <sup>1</sup>, Diamond N. Tawano-Macarimbang, PhD<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>MA History Student, Mindanao State University-Main Campus

<sup>2</sup>Associate Professor, Department of History, Mindanao State University-Main Campus

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## ABSTRACT

This paper examines the decline of the Kirim (Batang-Arab) scribe and the transformation of Salsila in the 21st century in Marantao, Lanao Del Sur amid the modernization and conflicts. Utilizing analysis of the Salsila copies and other kirim manuscripts, and the oral account from the elder---it unravels that this is not just a single case but a systematic driven by the following: the prevalence of secular education and the technology making the traditional scripts obsolete; the barriers in introducing kirim in MTB-MLE of the secular education and standard Islamic knowledge; the shift in the bureaucracy of the datus and the enthronement process; and the limited preservation initiatives.

The multiple conflicts within Lanao Del Sur from 1990-2010 affected the diffusion of this Scribal knowledge due to the loss of the manuscripts and the passing of the old practitioners. Some used digital platforms to compensate for this, but it didn't change the reality of cultural erosion. Findings highlight that digitization from various organizations and institutions can be a partial resistance act against the eroding knowledge and it should be paired with introductory lessons for the youth to strengthen Meranaw identity. This study bridges the Philippine heritage gaps, emphasizing the vital point of intangible losses in indigenous scripts.

**Keywords:** Kirim script, Salsila, Meranaw heritage, Cultural erosion, Preservation

## INTRODUCTION

### Background of the Study

To understand the Meranaw history is to look beyond the dates and legions of battles. Utilizing an exploration of their rich history viewed through the lens of socio-cultural context. It would show that they are not only known for their exquisite cuisines<sup>1</sup>, woven textiles, and woodcrafts.<sup>2</sup> But they also have their ways in keeping their compelling oral traditions; and that is through "Kirim" or Batang Arab. It has been part of Meranaw culture for generations. And this was possible because of a scribe that worked on the written transmission. A scribe showcasing the rich traditions of the "people of the lake" and the depth of legacy they inherited from their ancestors. Both a pride to behold and an identity to keep.

In Marantao local communities, early scribes of their ancestors included their mastery of transmitting words written in Kirim— a modified Arabic alphabet to write authentic Meranaw Language. It was influenced by early Muslim missionaries that brought Islam in the Southern part of the country.<sup>3</sup> Since Arabic is the official language of the Holy Quran, that inspired the early Meranaw to use this "modified Arabic alphabet" to record their words. Some used this to translate the Qur-an into their own words, to record healing chants, to write stories and more.

<sup>1</sup>Rebeca Mulok, Ryan Chandler Biscante, and Hazel Maree Juanillas, "Exploration of Food Knowledge Transmission of Ethnic Dishes of Muslim-Migrated Ethnic Groups." *International Journal of Management, Entrepreneurship, Social Science and Humanities* 8(2): (2025) p.34

<sup>2</sup>Jo Ann Sablad, "The Crafts of Maranaos," SunStar, (2018)

<sup>3</sup>Olomodin M. Mocsir, "The Significance of Kirim in Maguing, Lanao del Sur." \**International Journal of Social Sciences and Management Studies*\* 6, no. 3 (2023): 147



The use of Kirim made it easier to express thoughts, ideals, values, aspirations, of Meranaws. Henceforth, it is fundamental in understanding the Meranaw Culture and Traditions. Furthermore, most of the Meranaw datu who performed genealogy in oral forms (Salsila)<sup>4</sup> on different occasions wrote these records in Kirim,<sup>5</sup> because it compliments well. Unfortunately, most of them as well had passed away. Newcomers in this practice wrote these genealogies using the English alphabet. In which, there's a huge difference in expressing the correct pronunciation of Meranaw names using the English Alphabet compared to Kirim. On that matter, showing the concerning decline of the early practice of the Meranaw, specifically in Marantao, Lanao Del Sur.

### Statement of the Problem:

This study aims to probe the decline of Kirim scribe practitioners and the transformation of Salsila in Marantao, Lanao Del Sur by answering the following:

- A. How did modernization impact the transmission of Salsila in a form of Kirim script across generations?
- B. What were the challenges in introducing Kirim scribe into formal education system?
- C. How did the role and authority of the community Datus/ Elders shifted due to the written script of genealogies (Salsila) became less common, and oral accounts face challenges from modern bureaucracy which mostly requires written documentation?
- D. How did cultural organizations, academic institutions, or local communities responded to the problem of cultural erosion?

### Objectives of the Study

In this study, the researcher explores the factors on the decline of Kirim practitioners and the transformation of Salsila in Marantao, Lanao Del Sur by seeking the fundamental objectives; A. To analyze the impact of modernization on the transmission of Salsila using Kirim given by the post-1990 generation. B. To investigate and evaluate the historical and socio-technical challenges that hindered the formal introduction of Kirim scribe into the educational curriculum. C. To document the shifting roles of the datus and scribes in Marantao, Lanao Del Sur. D. To preserve through documentation the personal narratives of the remaining elderly Kirim practitioners and their perspectives on the cultural erosion with the concerning loss of Kirim script.

### Significance of the Study

This study on the declining number of Kirim "Batang-Arab" scribe in Marantao, Lanao Del Sur addresses the gaps in understanding the concerning cultural erosion of the local community due to globalization. This also explores the factors through documenting the transmission of Salsila, highlighting the challenges that hinders the diffusion of Kirim scribe, and the changes in the Maranao bureaucracy including the Kirim documents being less priority amid the modernization. This study employed Qualitative Historical case study by gathering published books, articles, and journals to contextualized the research. Also, oral history like interviews to support the primary documents like the Salsila and other Kirim manuscripts found in Inudaran, Campong. The relevance of this research is crucial in preserving the remaining heritage of the Meranaw people in Marantao in the globalized era where everything is adapted to modernity.

### Scope and Limitations

This study focused on the Kirim/ Batang-Arab scribes and the transformation of Salsila in Marantao, Lanao Del Sur. Particularly those practitioners of this Intangible heritage from Inudaran Campong Marantao who were

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<sup>4</sup> Sohayle M. Hadji Abdul Racman, "The Appointment of Pananalsilas (Syndics of the Nobility) of the Ruling Clans of the Lanao Sultanate, their Qualifications and Functions." Journal: The Lanao Sultanate Political Structure in the Century: Its Traditional Leaders Appointment Qualifications and Functions. Vol 2 no.1 (2022): 35

<sup>5</sup> Mocsir, "The Significance of Kirim," n.3, 146



active before. It delved into the evolution and changes of how Meranaw perceived Kirim practitioners, how Salsila and other manuscripts became scarce.

With regards to the effort to ascertain the data, this study has limitations due to the following reasons: limited archival data about Kirim artifacts, also because of the time-constraint, the accuracy of the information can be deficient because the field work only gathered in areas like Inudaran Campong, hence it may not represent the municipality of Marantao completely.

## REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

### The Global Perspectives on Scribes

Manuscripts meant to preserve the culture of ancient people have tremendously decreased in numbers. This is based on several studies conducted globally. In fact, recent studies show the loss of West African Timbuktu manuscripts because of war, burned libraries, and displacement of the people.<sup>6</sup> Another is the Highland Asian Manuscripts where the probability of its authenticity is low due to the flow of preservation being affected by social networks. Wherein interactions of culture are inevitable.<sup>7</sup> Especially those areas in Highland Asia share almost the same culture, practices, and beliefs. But it also caused the fear of possible modification of the manuscripts. Also, in Europe, an estimated 90% of the medieval manuscripts were lost.<sup>8</sup>

This only means that scribes from other cultures in different geographical areas are slowly diminishing as well. Similar to what happened to Kirim scribes. Because they are one of the reasons why these manuscripts were passed down. Hence, lost scriptures, declining numbers of practitioners of cultural scribes, and lack of proper enforcement in preserving the scriptures is a global phenomena.

### Regional Perspectives:

Subsequently, Kirim is under the Jawi script from other regions in the Philippines and apparently there was study conducted of its withering legacy because of the dominant language used in formal education. As a matter of fact, there are studies that tackle the Kirim manuscript and the Salsila, as well as its role in the Meranaw society. Based on Mocsir O. Macapodi (2023) paper, he delved on the Kirim manuscripts from lakam, katao (witchcraft), kakasi, bolong (healing chants), palimonan and more. He also discussed that salsila (genealogy) is an integral part of Kirim manuscripts as it traces the family and royal seats of Lanao.<sup>9</sup>

While Sohayle M. Hadji Abdul Racman (2022) expound on the concept of Salsila; that the Pananalsilas have qualifications such as they should be literate, wise and knowledgeable of Taritib and Igma.<sup>10</sup> These previous studies focused predominantly into the manuscripts and didn't dwell much on the significance of the role of Kirim scribe specifically in transmitting this literature. Their role as cultural medium—an agent that is fundamental in keeping and spreading the manuscripts throughout generations. Indeed, in Meranaw culture, scribes have that knowledge in Kirim script and the nuance it needs passed down from their ancestors to the next generations. They are not just there to replicate the texts of kirim, but a keeper of history and someone who can organize the social order of the community.

<sup>6</sup>Susana M. Lliteras, "The Dysfunctional Copy: 'Mali Magic', loss and the digital remake of the Timbuktu archive," *A Journal of African Studies* Volume 50, (2024)

<sup>7</sup>Asian Highland Manuscripts Working Group, "Manuscript Flows in Highland Asia: Social Networks and Material Culture," *Universitat Hamburg*, (2024)

<sup>8</sup>News, "More than 90% of medieval literature manuscripts have been lost," *University of Oxford*, (2022)

<sup>9</sup>Mocsir, "Significance of Kirim," n.3, 5, 147

<sup>10</sup>Hadji Abdul Racman, "The Appointment of Pananalsilas." n.4, 35



However, it is saddening that according to Macapodi (2023), these manuscripts are slowly fading at present due to several reasons: moist, fire, microorganisms and misplaced due to displacement of people who were keepers of these artifacts.<sup>11</sup> They are not only losing the manuscripts, but even the transmitters of this traditional knowledge. The key reason why they have these artifacts is that these practitioners have tried to preserve and diffused their knowledge to reached their modern generation. The carrier who passionately wrote every single “batang” with pride and vision to educate. Except for the fact that these generations may keep some of these manuscripts—not the act of transmitting. Either way, this study builds upon the work of Macapodi by introducing a new perspective on the scribes, and their role as cultural medium—an essential agent in transmitting Meranaw literature.

## METHODOLOGY

This study employed Qualitative Historical Case study, wherein the researcher utilized published books, articles, and journals for contextualization. There were primary sources used; a Salsila copy and other Kirim manuscripts from Inudaran, Campong Marantao, Lanao Del Sur. The owner of Salsila Tagoranao, had passed away but his daughter brought it for documentation. He was also a prominent “*patataro sa lalag*” and “*Pananalsila*” in Marantao. His family kins were mostly enthroned Sultans and Datus of the neighboring Barangay in the Municipality, and the researcher was able to interview his cousin who was a former Kirim practitioner but stopped due to the old age. This participant for the interview was aged 76 years old.

### Research Design

The study utilized qualitative historical research design that includes the archival research, that allows the researcher to analyze the information by going through archival records, available artifacts such as Kirim/ Salsila records, as primary sources and corroborating it with the existing published studies such as books, journals and articles about kirim scribes.

### Research Locale

The study was conducted in selected barangays in Marantao, Lanao Del Sur where Kirim/ Salsila copy was retrieved and former practitioners reside which is crucial in building the narrative of this declining living tradition.

### Data-Gathering Procedures

The data were acquired through the following approaches; a. analyzing the Kirim manuscripts, b. reviewed secondary sources like published materials to corroborate with the primary sources, c. field work like observations and oral history wherein the researcher conducted interview to a former kirim practitioner aged seventy six (76) years old in Marantao, Lanao Del Sur. Particularly in Inudaran Campong. The researcher interviewed one of the elders while analyzing the Kirim manuscripts they handed.

Using observations on the participant's narrative how their practice has evolved. This supported the analysis and interpretation conducted by the researcher.

### Data Analysis

The researcher utilized thematic analysis as it fits the methods used, also to familiarize the data, themes, patterns, insights and to produce comprehensive cultural narratives based on the study.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Conversely with the mentioned studies, from global perspective narrowing down to local narrative, this sets a comparative framework on how globalization have affected scribes in similar spectrum of themes and patterns

<sup>11</sup>Mocsir, “*Significance of Kirim.*” n.3, 5, 9. 159



such as; displacement of the people that affects the flow of preservation, eroding manuscripts, and lack of potential diffusion of skills. Thus, an investigation was conducted with regards to their emphasis about the role of the Batang Arab scribes were not just mere writers. It is said that they were practitioners of different intangible cultural heritage. This was according to old practitioners of Batang-Arab in Marantao where a copy of Kirim manuscripts were taken. A reputable traditional healer in Talob, Inudaran Campong named Alimoding "Muda" Punguinagina speaks about the tradition and how it was passed down from their great-grandparents. For instance, the copier of Salsila in Kirim was an active Pananalsila (transmitter of lineage).

Another was the scribe of healing, witchcrafts and other supernatural chants in Kirim. They were practitioners of Pamomolong (traditional healing)<sup>12</sup> and Pangengedong (whisperer).<sup>13</sup> Muda recalled how his late cousin, namely "Tagoranao", was a practitioner of both Salsila and kapamolong. Also there were the Darangen practitioners and the Qur-an translator as well. Last were the transcriber of stories and other literature.

In his statement:

*Gowani, na so kasorat sa Kirim na iphagayon ko galubuk o psoratun. Naba man anan mal'bod. Ka so kaphaganadi ko mga galubuk o lok's na geuto e totondogn a sorat. Sa kaibarat iyan, na sii ko b'tad o pamomolong, na so langowan a iphamotar odi na iphawar ko taw na ipsorat ko mona. So dii tharo sa lalag, lagid e Tagoranao, odi na so mga diimbayok. Lagid iyan mambo so mga p'd a galebek a mranaw. [Loose Translation: In early times, the practice should match on how they write it. It's not easy. Because learning the practice should be accompanied through writing. For example, in the case of traditional healing, chants are always written. Those who do speeches in ceremony like Tagoranao, or those who diimbayok (traditional song). Similar with any practice of a meranaw.]*<sup>14</sup>

Essentially, it was a living tradition because it was actively practiced and was once a sign of prestige in one's family. Suddenly, it evolved to scribe who copies the manuscripts without practicing the said traditions. This former Kirim practitioner in Marantao highlighted how the gradual domination of secular education and Islamic education in the area affected the scribes in different ways.

### A. The Modernization and its Impact

The era of change between the shift of the 20th to the 21st century made a tremendous impact on society, in terms of political, economic, and socio-cultural aspects.

Technology plays a big role in globalization. Different parts of the world gradually adapted to this change, but perhaps the sudden shift to globalization and modernization made everyone overlook that their very own culture and traditions are slowly eroding. The rapid development of technology and how people got attached to it reflects how the perceptions of the majority evolve. The interests, aspirations, goals, and life missions revolve around the future and what it holds while neglecting one of the primordial aspects of the society. As for Meranaw, this is rampant. Thus, the supposed diffusion of Salsila genealogies in a form of Kirim declined due to the gradual change of the youths' view that affected the intergenerational transmission of this knowledge. According to the interviewee:

*So miyamakasowa klas na miyatomo iran oto a galebek ka kiyababayaanan iran so kapaghanad sa eskolaan. Mlagid mambo sa kapangadi na kagiyaa adn a di khapakay sa Islam a galebek gowani. [Loose Translation: those who studied in secular education were so engrossed in its field that they became more driven in learning the subjects. While those who studied Islamic education were religiously following the system, and prohibited some traditions of Meranaw due to its contradictions with the Islamic belief.]*<sup>15</sup>

<sup>12</sup>Jamima P. Ampuan, and Alican M. Pandapatan, "Sanggar, Pelimbonen, Kaphaygo sa Ragat: Traversing the Pre-Islamic beliefs and traditions of the Meranaw in the Philippines," *Simulacra* 6 (1), (2023): 127

<sup>13</sup>Myrma Jean A. Mendoza. "Glimpses of Meranaw Local Knowledge in Health and Healing," *The Mindanao Forum* 32, no. 1 (2019): 92-93

<sup>14</sup> Alimoding Punguinagina, Interview, Inudaran Campong

<sup>15</sup>Punguinagina, Interview, n. 14



The contradictions that he mentioned were the traditional healing (kapamolong)<sup>16</sup>, because some healers don't just use herbal medicines to cure their patients but they involved incantation to call for spirits. Similar to whisperer (panggedong),<sup>17</sup> this is a special type of incantations that Meranaw healers had.

There is also the weight of intergenerational trauma from multiple conflicts within Lanao Del Sur,<sup>18</sup> which served as disruptor of the transmission of this knowledge. Under those circumstances, the history of conflict has inarguably affected the transmission due to displacement of people, loss of family heirlooms (this includes the manuscripts), destruction of property, and the intervals of these conflicts has made the environment unsecured for aspiring scribes. The experienced of the survivors possibly break the chain of transmission. Instead of cultural continuity, the societal trauma made the people and their offspring aimed to prioritize survival over tradition, specially with the skyrocketing economy of the 21st century.

Survival includes job, and the Kirim practitioners is not a viable vocation anymore. Contrast to what they can offer, as a cultural performer in various events, as a speaker, as a healer, as a writer and more. This is the consequence of the changing demands of the society which dictates the relevance of the occupation. Therefore, these were replaced by professionals from secular fields. A fact that economic reality corrode the cultural act.

On the other hand, the loss of specialized knowledge within the Era of globalization includes the ways of early Meranaws in arranging papers for Kirim writing. This paper was usually tied with thin ropes to attach each page and then used hard materials as covers.<sup>19</sup> These were showcased based on the early Qur'an copies discovered by early researchers from different areas in Lanao Del Sur.

It was a sign of how they effectively used the Batang a Arab, while utilizing practical materials around them. A wisdom that was once a reminder of how innovative they were. Somehow, this knowledge of crafting materials for their writing had swiftly changed due to the presence of modern production of Qur'an, and from scholars that studied in Middle East which brought the standardized Islamic knowledge.

Either way, from manuscript authority to digital mediation. The observable decline on how handwritten Kirim being replaced by digital documents, typed genealogies, or even those social media announcements for Royal enthronements of Meranaw implies how the modern era have shifted the establishment of historical truth and lineage legitimacy. Because ease of access is what digital era offers. Presumably, the preservation of the manuscripts is one of the favorable impacts of the 21st century.

## **B. The Challenges in Introducing Kirim scribe into the formal education system**

There were challenges in introducing Kirim scribe into the formal education system. The common knowledge about Kirim scribes is that they are just copying literature. But the depth of their role is profound in keeping the literature of the Meranaw people. So, the dynamics of Meranaw people, with Islam and their local practices were heavily intertwined and should be part of how Kirim scribe should be introduced in schools.

Anyhow, these are factors that needs to be considered in introducing the concept of scribe in schools. Firstly, Madrasah already teaches about the Arabic alphabet. Next is the pilot-madaris/integrated schools have already fused secular and Islamic curriculum. Meaning, they are already teaching the Arabic alphabet which is the foundation of Kirim writing system. Another was the MTB or the Mother-Tongue Based subject where educators teach about indigenous languages,<sup>20</sup> such as the Meranaw language in Lanao Del Sur, which is under DepEd Order No. 74 of 2009 and the DepEd Order No.16 of 2012.<sup>21</sup> On the positive note, it actualizes the goal to

<sup>16</sup>Ampuan, and Pandapatan, "Pre-Islamic beliefs and traditions of the Meranaw," n.12, 128

<sup>17</sup>M. J. A. Mendoza, "Meranaw Local Knowledge in Health and Healing," n.13. 93

<sup>18</sup>Yasmin Busran-Lao, "Human Development, Economic and Social Costs, and Spillover of Conflict: The Case of Province of Lanao Del Sur," Background Paper, Human Development Network Foundation, Philippine Human Development Report (2005), 2

<sup>19</sup>Tirmizy E. Abdullah, "Dibolodan: The Qur'an of Bacong, Marantao, in Midori Kawashima (ed). *The Qur'an and Islamic Manuscripts of Mindanao*." Monograph Series No. 10. Tokyo: Institute of Asian Cultures, Sophia University, (2012), 27



revitalize the language and prevent it from potentially vanishing. Although, in terms of Intangible culture the core of Kirim practitioners is overlooked. Since the Kirim system uses the Arabic Alphabet, therefore they did not incorporate much about it. The Mother-Tongue Based subject nurtured the "Meranaw" language, especially within the youth. Upon strengthening the implementation of the k to 12 MTB-MLE in 2012-2013,<sup>22</sup> the immense growth of Meranaw language appreciation from the learners was astounding.

Students who dived into MTB-MLE subjects have familiarize some of the authentic Meranaw words that are not usually used in the daily basis of the globalized era. However, regardless of this appreciation, it did not change the fact that the objective to introduce the declining practice of Kirim scribes was not stressed enough. As was previously stated, the core of Kirim scribe includes the dynamic of the people, their local practices and the religion. It isn't just about learning Arabic alphabet or the Meranaw language, but it includes the daily lifestyle of the Meranaw. Highlighting the use of this tradition of early Meranaw on how they live, on how they communicate, on how they record important events or document narratives should have a proper recognition. It can elevate the core of this practice on the foreground of regional learning.

This will build a solid foundation for the youth to systematically examine the essence of this Meranaw living tradition and the threat of its extinction. While, there are also growing preference on the globalized standard Islamic Texts brought by Muslim scholars in the Philippines. In which it may create a conflict because the Madrasah Curriculum pushes for the standard Islamic texts that may see Kirim with its pre-Islamic elements and local scripts as distraction from the fundamentals of Islamic Faith. It can prevail competition instead of promoting cultural act. So, what are these forbidden beliefs under pre-Islamic elements? For instance, the healing chants that calls for spirits of the ancestors, the witchcraft chants that seeks for destruction of others, written chants in calling the unseen creatures of the environment and the likes. These are some of the examples of why there would be a possible collision if Kirim scribal traditions will be taught together with the Universal Islamic knowledge. As they think that Kirim manuscripts were obsolete tool. This tension can downgrade the goal to introduce the said tradition.

### C. The Impact of the Decline of Salsila in Kirim form within the Community

It is visible that the role and authority of the community Datus/ Elders shifted due to the written script of genealogies (Salsila) becoming less common, and oral accounts facing challenges from modern bureaucracy which mostly requires written documentation. In Marantao, it is rare to see a royal family that still has the Salsila copy. Fortunately, the researcher got the remaining copy of the Salsila from Marantao.<sup>23</sup>

This was also based on the testament of Muda:

*Imanto na maregen Matoon giya mga Salsila ko mga pamilya a phamakauntod. Nago aya kalalayaman Imanto na kasalilyob ko pamilya. Lagid iyan na sakn e phakauntod na kagiya katawan ko sa ginawa ko a di akn khagaga na dako kowaa. Ino aya miyaka solot ko grar na si Anuar. Loose translation: Nowadays, it's tough to find a genealogy copy to the seated family. And also the enthroning process runs by handing it to the next family. So, when it was my turn, I declined because I knew I cannot fulfill the duty, that's why Anuar was able to take the seat.*<sup>24</sup>

His brother "Anuar" was the former Sultan a Phitiilan of Inudaran and he knew about the genealogy of their place. But what if these elders passed, what would happen? Does the lineage of each family enthronement end there? Because sadly, the concern on memorizing and having a copy of Salsila is not urgent anymore. Perhaps,

<sup>20</sup>Louward Allen Zubiri, et al., "Chapter 18 Developing Materials for Endangered Indigenous Scripts in the Philippines: Lessons from Mindoro." (2009)

<sup>21</sup>Department of Education, Republic of the Philippines. "Do 16, s. 2012 -- Guidelines on the implementation of the Mother-Tongue Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE)." February 17, 2012.

<sup>22</sup>DepEd, "Do 16, s. 2012," n. 16

<sup>23</sup>Salsila manuscript by the Late Tagoranao Punguinagina, retrieved in Marantao. 2025



some think that so long as one of the elders memorized the Salsila, they know and are familiar with the descendants of each enthroned datus, and memorized the different kapasadan (agreement),<sup>25</sup> then they were accepting with these changes.

The obvious change in the social structure of the Meranaw society is evident. The significance of Kirim manuscripts and the transmission of knowledge in keeping the Salsila became less of a priority. It was said that in the immemorial time, the practice was that the enthroned leaders in the community should have enough knowledge when it comes to Salsila.

But nowadays, there were youths who got enthroned because they were descendants of the previously seated leaders with no sufficient knowledge about the Salsila. Still they got recognized by the community. This situation signifies how the current process of enthroning leaders in the community reshape and redefine the context of prestige and identity. Because the attributes before for recognizing a new leader have changed.

However, Meranaw have their “Maratabat” (pride), which is significant in terms of strengthening the ties of Kinsmen, tracing lineage and choosing the next leader. This is one of the important things that they uphold. A behavior that shaped the structure of their society.<sup>26</sup> So, despite the importance of the kirim manuscripts, acknowledgement the enthronement of the leaders that came from a royal lineage by the elders of the community is more substantial.

Moreover, it is notable that the tradition of genealogy diffusion is commonly gendered dimension. The knowledge transmission is predominantly male. This is inherent in the Meranaw social organization rooted from both pre-Islamic and Islamic hierarchy. Because males are always seen as wise leaders, datus, sultans, and head of the households.<sup>27</sup> That's probably the reason why the people in Marantao take the words of their datus on who should take the seats in their enthronements selection with or without the presence of the Salsila manuscripts. Although, there are avenues of question that arise in the 21st century such as; if there are opportunities for women to participate in this intellectual tradition?

Since Meranaw are technically following the traditions of the patriarchal hierarchy, the answer precisely would be no. In fact, even if the 21st century equates the position of women in different fields to men. It won't change the reality that Meranaw society values the respect and leadership of men. It is a tradition that became the norm. The custom is that females can be part of keeping the Salsila manuscripts but cannot participate in performing Speeches and delivering genealogies in various occasions. Though, what happened is the opposite because there are less keeper of manuscripts, and few existing genealogy copies. This situation should convey that the embodiment of wisdom is fading---manuscripts, keepers, and essentially the practitioners. For this reason, preventing this to happen is the key.

Technology is the best tool for preservation, and there are examples that made used of technology like Salsila that are preserved and accessible in its digital forms. For instance, the Maguindanao Salsila was digitalized by the researcher Datu Ontay Acmad M. Abdulmadid.<sup>28</sup> Though, it is obvious that the digitalized version used the English alphabet which may raise contradiction on the authenticity of manuscripts. That being the case, it is still urgent if the handwritten Kirim Manuscripts were preserved as it is.

#### **D. Preservation As An Act to Resist Cultural Erosion**

The Philippine Government supported various cultural preservations programs in provinces like Lanao Del Sur, which included Marantao during the timeframe of 1990-2010. One of its breakthrough projects was recognizing and inscribing Darangen in 2008.

<sup>24</sup>Punguinagina, Interview, n.14, 15

<sup>25</sup>Mocsir, “*Significance of Kirim.*” n.3, 5, 9. 158

<sup>26</sup>Alma G. Maranda, “*Awareness and Behavioral Indicators of Maratabat among Maranao-Muslim Children*” The Mindanao Forum 22, no.1 (2009): 180

<sup>27</sup>Sohayle M. Hadji Abdul Racman, “*The Islamicity of Lanao Sultanate, Philippines in the 17th Century as a State,*” International Journal of Sciences and Applied Research Vol 42, No3, (2018): 214



This was through the initiatives of local government of Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao and driven by the institution like the UNESCO for acknowledging this intangible cultural heritage from the Meranaw people.<sup>29</sup>

Moreover, with the recognition of Darangen in 2008 served as a good start for preservation programs. There have been actions as well from different institutions including local communities that preserve manuscripts by keeping the copies as a primary source and through digitalization. Some of these projects were; Mindanao State University (MSU)-Main Campus Meranaw Cultural Heritage Center (MCHC) in Marawi City,<sup>30</sup> The Grupo Kalinangan Inc. (GKI) that collected and preserved Meranaw Manuscripts from 17th to 19th Century,<sup>31</sup> and the National Historical Commission of the Philippines (NHCP).<sup>32</sup> These projects were able to preserve thousands of Meranaw Kirim manuscripts. One step ahead to avoid cultural erosion.

These preservation projects aims the digitalization to avoid the possible diminishing of the manuscripts content as most of the Kirim scripts were written in a paper which can be possibly destroyed by termites, moist or fire. But the current model for preservation revolves around saving and protecting the artifacts (such as copies of genealogy, healing chants, darangen, speeches, Qur'an, and more). It could have been great to approach this preservation in a holistic way, including the living process of scribal art and the contextual knowledge behind it.

For there are no actions or support for the aspiring scribes for Kirim. No compulsory teachings on the factors that were needed to learn in order to be a Kirim scribe for Meranaw Literature. No future plans for the possible continuity of the texts. Currently, there's no attention with this living process. No new epistemology on how to make the genealogy practice relevant in the digital world. Because people are so focused on preserving the manuscripts—and refuse the decline of practitioners.

## CONCLUSION

Finally, as years passed and with the extreme pace of technology and globalization. The possible end of Kirim “Batang-Arab” production is not a myth—rather a visible strand of reality that many locals refute. The fundamental values of their tradition as Meranaw, may cease to exist. It is not a holistic prediction, but a possible outcome from the actions of the current Meranaw society. The rejection of newer generations to the core of Meranaw identity is apparent. But one must instill in mind that losing culture and tradition equates to losing identity. Because this declining knowledge is not a singular episode but a systematic shifts of several events. These are characterize by the crisis of transmission from the impact of globalization, following the standard religious curricula, and the lowering number of manuscripts, keepers and practitioners in the community due to devaluation of this specialized knowledge.

Kirim scribal and its underlying living tradition should be given attention to be treasured. Not just for fancy but for the enlivenment of the wisdom behind it; of how sacred it is as part of Meranaw social construct, which was preserved for many generations by their predecessors.

Learning about the past is not to cater everyone's curiosity. It is to enrich and protect what was left by the previous generation. To enliven the Meranaw identity. Hence, understanding the evolution of batang-arab scribe and how it declined can be a path for strengthening the Meranaw literature by raising awareness regarding the dwindle of Kirim practitioners over time. And understanding the factors may create a heeding caution to every Meranaw that they may keep Kirim artifacts, digitalize the manuscripts, but not the process of transmitting this knowledge.

<sup>28</sup>Datu Ontay Acmad M. Abdulmadid, “*Maguindanao Salsila*”.

<sup>29</sup>ICH. *Darangen Epic of the Maranao people of Lake Lanao*, UNESCO, (2008)

<sup>30</sup>Mindanao State University (MSU)- Meranaw Cultural Heritage Center (MCHC)

<sup>31</sup>Grupo Kalinangan Inc. (GKI): *Philippines The 17th to 19th Century Maranao Manuscripts Collections*. (January 2018).

<sup>32</sup>National Historical Commission of the Philippines (NHCP)



## RECOMMENDATION

Based on this study, the researcher humbly recommend the following to enrich the declining tradition: first, the Department of Education in BARMM (Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao) can add elective subjects in the curriculum of schools that introduces the Kirim/ batang-arab based on its practices. This will create an introductory lessons to the young learners of what Kirim is, and how Meranaw ancestors used it in their everyday lives. In which, it can be a leeway for them to dive more into the heritage as an appreciation for it. Second, the local organizations that aims to strengthen the community traditions can create programs that highlights veteran Batang-arab scribes, complimenting their contribution to the community and the importance of their role as cultural agent. Emphasizing that their impact enliven the Meranaw oral traditions.

For future studies, the researcher would like to recommend the following:

1. Conduct a comparative studies with the existing scribes from other ethnic groups in Mindanao. Synthesize the patterns, behaviors, similarities and differences with the Meranaw scribes.
2. Investigate the current enthronement process of the Meranaw. Analyze the impact of the declining existence of Salsila Manuscript and the withering legacy of the Salsila diffusion of knowledge from other areas in Lanao Del Sur.
3. Examine the intergenerational diffusion of knowledge from other scribes in different areas in Lanao Del Sur, highlighting the shared sentiment of this declining tradition.

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Figure 1



Figure 2

(Fig 1 and 2) The first 2 page of the Salsila (Genealogy manuscript) of the Late Tagoranao Punguinagina.



Figure 3

(Figure 3) Some of his other Kirim/ Batang-Arab manuscript.