

Cultural Narratives of *Susong Dalaga*: Community Perspectives and Historical Insights

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the cultural narratives of *Susong Dalaga*, a natural heritage in Cabarroguis, Quirino, examining its historical, ecological, and socio-cultural significance. Using qualitative methods such as semi-structured interviews, snowball sampling, and document analysis, the research uncovers diverse community perspectives and historical insights. Findings reveal that the legend's name originates from the mountain's breast-like shape, with two distinct versions of the tale—one highlighting theme of love, tragedy, and social isolation, and another emphasizing violence and respect for women. Historical accounts connect the site to World War II, spiritual practices, and ecological importance as a karst landscape. The study concludes that

Susong Dalaga embodies cultural identity, oral tradition, and environmental consciousness, underscoring the need for preservation. Recommendations include digitizing cultural archives, enhancing research, promoting conservation, and fostering community engagement through cultural programs. Ultimately, the legend illustrates the enduring power of folklore in shaping collective identity and heritage.

Keywords: *Susong Dalaga legend, Cabarroguis cultural heritage, Quirino folklore and identity, Philippine oral traditions, Karst landscape conservation*

INTRODUCTION

The legend of *Susong Dalaga* stands as a vibrant thread in the rich tapestry of Philippine folklore, particularly in the community of Cabarroguis, Quirino. This cultural narrative not only encapsulates the imaginative spirit of the local populace but also serves as a crucial lens through which we can examine the interplay between myth and reality in shaping community identity.

This study aimed to delve deeply into the multifaceted narratives surrounding *Susong Dalaga*, exploring its origins, the etymology of its name, and the historical documents that pertain to this enchanting tale. By understanding these narratives, we seek to illuminate the legend's significant role in the local culture, its relationship with the environment, and its implications in the socio-political landscape.

Through a comprehensive examination of community perspectives and historical insights, we aspire to uncover the layers of meaning embedded in the *Susong Dalaga* legend, highlighting how folklore not only reflects the values and beliefs of a community but also influences its social dynamics and environmental consciousness. Ultimately, this exploration will contribute to a deeper appreciation of the cultural heritage of Cabarroguis and the enduring power of storytelling in shaping collective identity.

METHODS

Research Design

The research design for "Cultural Narratives of Susong Dalaga: Community Perspectives and Historical Insights" employs a qualitative approach to deeply explore the rich cultural narratives surrounding the Susong Dalaga, a significant folklore figure in the community. By utilizing qualitative methods, the study has captured the perspectives and lived experiences of community members, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of how these narratives shape cultural identity and historical consciousness. The research is grounded in the belief that qualitative inquiry provides a more contextualized and in-depth exploration of cultural phenomena, facilitating the uncovering of meanings and interpretations that quantitative methods may overlook.

In gathering of the data, the study used a semi-structured interview method, which allows for flexible and open-ended conversations with participants. This approach encourages participants to share their insights and personal stories related to Susong Dalaga, fostering a rich dialogue that reveals the multifaceted nature of these cultural narratives.

Research Locale

The research was undertaken in Cabarroguis, the capital municipality of Quirino Province situated in the Cagayan Valley Region of the Philippines. As the administrative center of the province, Cabarroguis is both a hub of governance and a community deeply rooted in agricultural livelihoods. Its socio-economic profile is characterized by farming and local trade, yet it is equally distinguished by its cultural heritage and ecological landscapes. Central to this study is Susong Dalaga, a mountain formation whose breast-like contour has long inspired oral traditions and folklore among the residents. The site functions not only as a geographical landmark but also as a cultural symbol, embodying narratives of love, tragedy, violence, and respect for women that have been transmitted across generations.

Historically, Susong Dalaga has been associated with World War II accounts and spiritual practices, serving as a repository of collective memory and identity. Ecologically, the mountain forms part of a karst landscape marked by limestone formations, caves, and forest ecosystems that contribute to biodiversity and environmental sustainability in the region. The community continues to engage with the site through cultural programs, heritage preservation initiatives, and everyday practices that reinforce its relevance to local identity.

By situating the research in Cabarroguis, the study underscores the intersection of natural heritage, oral tradition, and socio-cultural life. The locale provides a fertile ground for examining how folklore, historical consciousness, and ecological awareness converge to shape collective identity, while also emphasizing the importance of preserving Susong Dalaga as both a cultural treasure and an environmental landmark.

Sampling Technique

The sampling technique utilized is snowball sampling, which enables the researcher to connect with key informants who possess valuable knowledge about folklore, subsequently leading to further participants within their networks. Additionally, document analysis is incorporated to examine historical texts, community records, and existing literature related to Susong Dalaga, providing a complementary perspective that enriches the interview findings. This combination of methods creates a holistic view of the cultural significance and historical context of Susong Dalaga within the community.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Profile of the Respondents

A total of three respondents were selected in the study. These respondents are located near the subject of the study. Two of the respondents were retired educators, a resident in the area and a performer. They were selected based on snowball sampling wherein they were referred by credible informants and even the respondents themselves.

Four valuable documents were gathered from various sources that were used in the study. The Socio-Economic Profile (2017 Update) where the historical background of Cabarroguis was presented. Another is the Case study of the Municipal Tourism office- Cabarroguis, Quirino on Susong Dalaga. The original copy of the story text of the “Ang Alamat ng Susong Dalaga” written by Virginia Gundayao, a former Education Program Supervisor of SDO-Quirino in Araling Panlipunan. Lastly, the research study conducted by the scholars in University of the Philippines on Ecological Management

2. Summary of Findings and Discussion

2.a. The origin of the name was derived from its natural geophysical structure that resembles a panoramic view of Maiden’s Breast-like shape. This twin conical mountain is locally named as “Susong Dalaga”. Also, its name has been popularized through stories of some educators written as legend and used as a tool for educational purposes. Both stories described it as a young lady with 3 breast that died tragically on the area where the mountains are located.

In one of the legends, the area was named before the rising of the mountain as “Kanuwangan”- from the collective noun for the herd of “Nuwang” (Ilocano term for Carabao).

Moreover, based on historical records it was named by the early settler from Nueva Vizcaya and Isabela in the Year 1959. Today, it is officially named Susong Dalaga Ecopark.

2.b There are two versions of the legends that have been gathered from the respondents. Each of the stories has different conflicts and perspectives.

2.b.1 The “Ang Alamat of Susong Dalaga” written in Filipino by Mrs. Virginia S. Gundayao, a former EPS for Araling Panlipinan in SDO-Quirino. There were no written or printed copies of story in any of the libraries in the province or any publication materials. However, this story was kept by one of her colleagues and the editor Mrs. Jane B. Ibasco, former EPS in English of SDO- Quirino. The researcher found it by exploring social media post of a facebook user asking for a copy of the legend. The printed material was given to her by the author before leaving the Philippines and live abroad. The copy was kept along with SDO-Quirino Anniversary and Compilations of Songs of Quirino. This story was dedicated to granddaughters of the author.

The setting of the story reflects the real scenery of Cabarroguis, Quirino in old times. Its lush forest and mountainous area as well as flora and fauna found in the area since the Author's home is very near to “Susong Dalaga”. The characters in the story are also parallel to the first occupants in Cabarroguis, the Aeta and the Ilongot as written in the Historical Background of Cabarroguis. Their daily living and occupations are also described in the story which reveals the rich agricultural land in the area.

The story focuses on a young lady’s unfortunate and miserable living condition. She has a body defect, 3 breasts and had been secretly kept by her father due to its condition. She wanted to live a normal life and when an opportunity came, a time when she met the love of her life whom she secretly met. She was reprimanded by her father since the man is from the other group. They plan to live far from their own family but unluckily the man was killed during his journey. This unfortunate event leads the lady to grief and lives with sadness that has been witnessed by her grandmother. Later, the lady died, and her grandmother grant her dying wish, to be buried in the spot where the lovers first met. This leads the father of the lady into anger due to disrespecting their traditions. He wanted to destroy the area, but this leads to an earthquake and chaos causing its group to leave the area. Then, a mountain rises from the area, and the grandmother named it as Susong Dalaga, commemorating the life of her granddaughter.

The epilogue describes the actual setting of the Susong Dalaga, the sounds from the creeks that are being heard from the area are associated with the music produced by the unfortunate lovers. This sound may be heard as air passes through the caves and caverns in mountains.

It can be seen on the story some of the Filipino cultures, traditions and values such as simple living, respect, care, and love. Social issues such as mental health, social isolation, and close-mindedness are pictured on the story can be used as tool in finding solutions to a problem.

A strong supporting study is Edgar R. Eslit's (2023) *Resilience of Philippine Folklore: An Enduring Heritage and Legacy for the 21st Century*, which demonstrates how Filipino folk narratives embody values such as respect, care, and love, while also reflecting social issues like isolation and resilience. This research validates your claim that folklore can serve as a tool for addressing contemporary challenges, including mental health and social cohesion.

2.b.2 Another version was written by Mrs. Edy Dollaga Madriaga, a former School Principal of SDO-Quirino. Her version was written in English to be used in a Dance Drama Contest in SDO-Quirino. She is also residing in the area. The version is like the first one, however her version is more tragic. The conflict was in the form of cannibalism where gangsters removed the woman's breast, grilled and served as a meal. The woman was buried and soon a breast-like shape mountain arises from where it was buried and named "Susong Dalaga". This story is less detailed compared to the first one since her copy was destroyed. Some of the copies cannot be found in her previous schools since their libraries were transferred from one building to another. However, since it was interpreted in a performing art, this story was recalled and remembered. The performer, Ruby Robert Seculles, a former student of the teacher facilitated the drama recalls her experience and shares the story of this version. The story is like how Mrs. Dollaga narrates and added that the woman was raped and murdered, she also added that the Girl's residents is in Gundaway, one of the Barangay that claims territory of the place. She added that this story plays a vital role respecting a woman and valuing the nature.

The former student who performed the dance-drama provides oral testimony that preserves and transmits Madriaga's version. Her recollection demonstrates how folklore survives through performance and memory, even when written copies are lost. This oral transmission ensures continuity of the narrative within the community, reinforcing its cultural legitimacy.

Furthermore, In *Folklore in the Philippine Literary Canon: History, Politics, and Poetics*, Alamon (2017) argues that Philippine folklore often encodes political and social conflicts into cultural narratives, including themes of violence, tragedy, and moral dilemmas. This aligns with Madriaga's version, where cannibalism and gender-based violence are central conflicts. Alamon's analysis validates that such tragic elements are not anomalies but part of the broader function of folklore in reflecting societal struggles and moral lessons.

2.b.3 For its historical narratives, The National Commission for Culture and Arts PRECUP data for Immoveable Property of the Municipal Tourism Office- Cabarroguis reveals some significant historical narratives.

Two mountains with caves where vandalisms are seen on the first peek. Stalagmites and stalactites are present on the second peek evidence of undisturbed area.

Also, it is a place of spiritual gatherings by the Union Espiritista Independiente. A place of spiritual meetings and healing rituals of the members seeking help from the spirits or ghosts.

Moreover, it is believed that it was a haven of the Japanese soldiers who fought during the World War II as well as location of some buried Yamashita Treasures.

Lastly, it is declared as cultural property of the LGU Cabarroguis and Barangay Zamora, Villamor, and Gundaway.

2.b.4 The study conducted Fore Karst: A Biotype-focused planning approach for the ecological management of Susong Dalaga, Quirino last October 2021 by D. Lavilla N Navarra, and N Palarca from the University of the Philippines emphasize that grave importance of the Susong Dalaga. It is

considered as one of the Philippines with Karst Environment and Susong Dalaga is lesser to be known. This kind of landscape of the Ecopark will provide services to benefit the world on existing study on Karst landscapes and will also solves on mysteries of the landscapes, bountiful flora and fauna, the culture and history, among others.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and discussions regarding Susong Dalaga, the following conclusions can be made:

a. Cultural Significance of Legends: The legends associated with Susong Dalaga serve as vital cultural narratives that encapsulate local history, social issues, and values. The stories not only provide an understanding of the region's identity but also highlight the importance of preserving oral traditions as a means of cultural education, particularly in the context of community storytelling and folklore.

b. Diverse Perspectives and Social Aspect: The two versions of the Susong Dalaga legend reflect differing perspectives on societal norms and conflicts, such as love, tragedy, and even violence. This diversity in storytelling showcases how local narratives can address complex themes, offering insights into the historical and social dynamics of the community while also engaging with contemporary issues faced by its inhabitants.

c. Historical and Spiritual Relevance: The findings indicate that Susong Dalaga is not only a geographical landmark but also a site of historical significance and spiritual practice. The connection of the area to various historical events, including its use by Japanese soldiers during WWII and its role in local spiritual gatherings, underscores its multifaceted importance to the community, blending history, spirituality, and cultural identity.

d. Ecological and Environmental Importance: The ecological assessment of Susong Dalaga highlights its value as a karst landscape, which is crucial for biodiversity and environmental management. The recognition of its ecological significance not only calls for conservation efforts but also promotes the idea that protecting cultural heritage and natural environments can go hand in hand, benefiting both the local community and the broader ecosystem.

Based from the findings, the following are recommendations for future research and developmental plans:

a. Digitization and Preservation of Cultural Archives

To ensure the safeguarding and accessibility of vital cultural documents, it is recommended that all significant materials be digitized. This process will not only protect them from physical degradation but also facilitate easier access for educational purposes. Additionally, a comprehensive repository of these digital archives should be established, accessible through local libraries and educational institutions. Publishing hard copies in school libraries and community centers will further enhance cultural appreciation and documentation, allowing students and residents to engage with their heritage.

b. Enhanced Research and Documentation Initiatives

Educational institutions should prioritize conducting in-depth studies on the narratives associated with Susong Dalaga. This should include expanding the pool of interview subjects to capture a wider range of perspectives, as well as consulting historians and cultural experts for accurate documentation. Collaborative research projects can also be developed, encouraging students to engage with local history while contributing to the enhancement of current documents. This approach can foster a deeper understanding of cultural significance and aid in crafting informed developmental plans for the community.

c. Prioritized Environmental Management and Conservation

It is essential that local authorities implement robust environmental management strategies to protect the Susong Dalaga area from potential damage. This includes regular assessments of the ecosystem, establishing protective regulations, and promoting sustainable tourism practices that respect the natural and cultural heritage. Engaging the community in conservation efforts, such as clean-up drives and educational

workshops about ecological preservation, can help foster a sense of stewardship and responsibility towards this significant site.

d. Community Engagement and Cultural Programs

To promote cultural appreciation and awareness, it is recommended that community engagement initiatives be organized. This could include cultural festivals, storytelling sessions, and workshops that celebrate the legends of Susong Dalaga. Collaborating with local artists and performers to bring these narratives to life through art and performance can enhance community bonds and attract visitors, thereby promoting both cultural heritage and sustainable tourism. Such programs can serve as platforms for sharing knowledge and encouraging active participation in preserving local traditions.

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