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Book Review

Kapandayan: Paradox of Indigenous People Wisdom

Nikodemus Niko

Post-Doctoral Researcher
Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, Thailand
nikodemusn@umrah.ac.id
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Kapandayan: A Journey to the Wisdom of the Selected IP Groups in the Davao Region is the product of a collaborative effort among academics, researchers, and Indigenous communities in the Davao Region of the Philippines. This book was collaboratively authored by researchers from the University of Southeastern Philippines, with support from the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP) and Indigenous community leaders, and was made possible through funding provided by Senator Loren Legarda.

This work documents the local knowledge, social systems, and cultural practices of eight Indigenous groups in the Davao Region. Employing both narrative and visual ethnographic approaches, the book captures their endangered heritage and serves as an advocacy platform, supporting the preservation of Indigenous identities and worldviews within sustainable development.

This book serves as a narrative and visual documentation of the traditional knowledge, histories, governance systems, ritual practices, and cultural expressions of eight Indigenous Peoples (IPs) communities in the Davao Region, Philippines. The eight Indigenous People groups featured in the book included Ata, Bagobo-Klata, Bagobo-Tagabawa, Kagan, Manobo, Mansaka, Matigsalug, and Sama. The term *Kapandayan*, derived from the Bagobo language and etymologically related to the Malay word *kepandaian* (wisdom or skill), emphasizes the intergenerational transmission of Indigenous wisdom. The concept of local genius in the Malay context is derived from the word “Kapandaian”, which refers to the type of wisdom or intelligence that results from the interaction of people with their environment. Comparatively, this concept is often applied in regional comparisons to illustrate how the oral tradition, indigenous beliefs, and cultural practices serve as adaptation, resistance, and innovation mechanisms among local people responding to societal changes.

Globalization has posed significant challenges to the continuity of local knowledge, particularly among Indigenous communities. The erosion of native languages, rituals, and value systems represents a tangible threat to the sustainability of collective identities. In response, *Kapandayan* emerges as a form of cultural resistance, serving to document, preserve, and transmit Indigenous wisdom across generations. It offers a counter-narrative to dominant forces of cultural homogenization, reinforcing the resilience and relevance of local knowledge in the face of global pressures. Such an inclination

may obscure the everyday lives of indigenous people, including their struggles, vitality, and special perception of tradition. Authors who come from indigenous communities serve as a means for decolonizing methodology (Denscombe, 2023; Thambinathan & Kinsella, 2021).

Furthermore, the text presents deficiencies in representation, especially concerning the ways in which indigenous communities understand their own traditions and adapt them to address modern-day challenges. By focusing on visual aesthetics and rich descriptive narratives, *Kapandayan* potentially prioritizes the preservation of cultural heritage instead of truly centering indigenous perspectives. This book transcends simple documentation and facilitates a platform for indigenous peoples to engage with their identities, articulate their political ambitions, and showcase methods for managing global homogenization.

To further contextualize its significance, this book explicitly aligns its objectives with Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 4 (Quality Education), 10 (Reduced Inequalities), and 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions). It adopts a strategic framework that situates indigenous knowledge and experiences within global development agendas, ensuring their relevance in addressing systemic inequities.

By doing so, *Kapandayan* functions not merely as a cultural archive but also as a form of socio-political intervention. It advocates for the recognition of indigenous rights and promotes sustainable practices, positioning the book as both a repository of tradition and a tool for transformative action. In the Philippine context, specifically in relation to the cultural preservation efforts strengthened through government policies, such as those promoted by the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP), the concept of local genius may be understood as an epistemological foundation for crafting cultural preservation strategies (Reginio et al., 2025). Additionally, the effort highlights the preservation of cultural heritage as more than just archival efforts, but as political and cultural acts that have tremendous implications for sustainable development and decolonizing knowledge in Southeast Asia (Acabado & Martin, 2020; Niko, 2025; Ugong, 2024;).

The *Kapandayan* book is remarkably exclusive; not only does it provide a rich narrative and visual account of the documented Indigenous communities, but it also offers a critical perspective on the threat of cultural homogenization that risks eroding Indigenous knowledge. This book serves as a meaningful model for advocating Indigenous identity in the Philippines and Southeast Asia. *Kapandayan* represents a significant contribution to the decolonization of knowledge and the preservation of the cultural heritage of Indigenous communities in the Philippines. It underscores that cultural preservation is not solely the responsibility of Indigenous groups but a shared duty that involves all stakeholders in shaping a more just, inclusive, and civil society.

In order to strengthen its impact, it is crucial that future scholarship and the practical application of Indigenous Knowledge be emphasized, so that the book may be more than just a repository of culture, but a foundation for more comprehensive and transformational scholarship. A practical strategy involves expanding the comparison to other indigenous societies in Mindanao, the Sulu Archipelago, and Palawan, thus highlighting both the diversity and the underlying relations within the indigenous system of knowledge across the Philippines.

Moreover, there is a necessity of promoting the integration of indigenous knowledge in the national curriculum through collaborative efforts with the academe and the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP), thus ensuring that local knowledge is both archived and systematically passed from one generation to the next. Emphasis on co-authorship with community leaders is equally critical, as this approach repositions indigenous people from being the subjects of research per se to being active co-players, thus enhancing academic legitimacy while diversifying insights.

Conflict of Interest Statement

I have no conflict of interest to disclose.

AI Disclosure

I declare that this manuscript was prepared without the assistance of artificial intelligence. Hence, the content of this paper is original.

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