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Research Article

Sisiye te Orodginge: Sustaining *Mangalay* as a Sangil Creative Process in Balut Island, Philippines

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Abstract

As an embodied heritage practice rooted in cultural aesthetics, *mangalay* functions as a vital marker of identity and continuity among the Sangil of Balut Island in Sarangani, Davao Occidental, Philippines. While Philippine dance scholarship has extensively documented other regional dance forms, this local practice remains largely underexamined in ethnographic literature. Thus, this study explores how Sangil performers sustain *mangalay* as a living heritage practice while negotiating creativity, continuity, and socio-cultural change. Adopting a qualitative ethnographic approach, the research draws on participant observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis with two recognized practitioners, Halim G. Tabi, Jr., and Roosevelt K. Atche, Jr. The findings reveal that *mangalay* is sustained through *Sisiye te Orodginge*—a culturally sanctioned individual style that enables creative extemporization within established Sangil aesthetic conventions of fluidity, groundedness, and grace. While practitioners actively adapt the form through environmental inspiration, musical dialogue, and embodied memory, challenges such as digitalization, limited performance venues, and shifting community priorities necessitate community-rooted strategies for transmission. The study highlights how *mangalay* operates not as a static tradition but as a dynamically sustained practice shaped by embodied agency and collective responsibility. By foregrounding the interplay between individual creativity and communal continuity, this research contributes to broader discussions in dance ethnology and cultural sustainability, particularly within indigenous performance practices in the southern Philippines.

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Dance is not merely a form of artistic expression; it also serves as a medium for sustaining cultural memory and identity. The gestures, movements, and performance conventions of a community reveal insights into its social structures, values, and heritage. Among the Sangil¹, an Islamized people currently settled in southern Mindanao, particularly the Balut Island in Sarangani, Davao Occidental, Philippines, *mangalay* functions as a living heritage practice. Tracing ancestral lineages to the Sangihe and Talaud Islands of northern Sulawesi, Indonesia, the Sangil maintain *mangalay* as both a repository of cultural memory and a site of creative agency (National Commission for Culture and the Arts [NCCA], 2021). Sustaining *mangalay* beyond the practitioners themselves requires community-rooted approaches to ensure that this heritage practice continues to be passed down across generations.

Among the Sangil, *mangalay* is performed in intimate community settings, such as weddings, where it serves as entertainment and a marker of kinship, respect, and cultural continuity. Unlike performative stage displays, these performance renditions during festive occasions are extemporaneous, situational, and involve reciprocity among beholder, community, and environment. Commonly performed during celebrations, weddings, and festivals, *mangalay* dancing involves intricate, flowing hand and arm movements executed with fluidity, control, and grace, reflecting Sangil cultural aesthetics and environmental place.

Mangalay dancing among the Sangil reinforces cultural identity. It strengthens communal bonds, a function also found in Sulu communities, where a related yet different heritage practice, *pangalay* and *igal*, is also perpetuated (Quintero, 2016, 2024, forthcoming). While *pangalay* in the context of the Tausug and *igal* among the Sama (Bajau) communities have been extensively studied, the related yet differentiated dancing of *mangalay* among the Sangil reflects a localization of dance practices believed to be influenced by contact with the Saméré, the Sangil referent for the Sama community in Mindanao (H. Tabi, personal communication, January 18, 2026). Sangil *mangalay* contributes to the broader spectrum of Philippine indigenous dance practices, particularly dance from the Sulu Zone, that reflects a multiplicitous cross-pollination of cultures of the region (Quintero, forthcoming), including dance and music. This sort of cultural osmosis is indicative of the historic movements of people and the sharing of cultures that comes when different communities come into contact with one another. Yet, *mangalay* is uniquely Sangil cultivated within an aesthetics that allows for creativity and adaptability.

The musical ensemble *kurintangan* plays as practitioners perform *mangalay*, typically featuring a set of small horizontally laid bossed gongs known as *kurintang*. In the Sangil context, *kurintang* (similar to or the same instrument as in other communities, which is called 'kulintang') serves as the melodic element of the ensemble, accompanied by *nanawngang* (agong/ large gong), *balabade* (drum), *karese* (kris, a bladed weapon that is used as a percussive implement), and *lata* (tin can used as a rhythmic timekeeper). *Mangalay* functions as a cultural medium for the preservation and transmission of cultural knowledge. Among the Tausug, for instance, *pangalay* is performed during religious and culturally significant events, including the *maligay pagtammam*—a ceremony marking the completion of Quranic studies (Ingilan & Abdurajak, 2021; Ladja & Ladja, 2024) or as part of *paglami-lami*, the program of entertainment held during festive occasions (Quintero, 2016, 2017, 2024, forthcoming; Quintero & Nor, 2016). Similarly, the Sangil have developed localized forms and meanings of *mangalay* that reflect their own social and cultural values, particularly since its practice is often a part of celebratory occasions.

It is believed that the Sangil migration from the Sangihe Islands around the 17th Century (Sontohot, 1994; Wiratri, 2023) to the southern Philippines was facilitated by trading routes, Islamization of Southeast Asia (Wiratri, 2023), and the presence of Spain in the region that prompted the need to evade the Christianity the new colonizers brought with them. The Sangil found religious

affinity with other Muslim groups in the southern Philippines and established communities in southern Mindanao, particularly on the Balut and Sarangani Islands. Many local elders still refer to the original Sangil name “Marulung” that was later ascribed the name Balut Island (H. Tabi, personal communication, January 25, 2026). While familial connections still exist between those in the southern Philippines and Sangihe Islands, the Sangil are considered an Indigenous Cultural Community (ICC) having settled and aligned with other Muslim ethnolinguistic groups of the southern Philippines. As a historically maritime people, the Sangil have sustained livelihoods through fishing, boat-making, and agriculture.

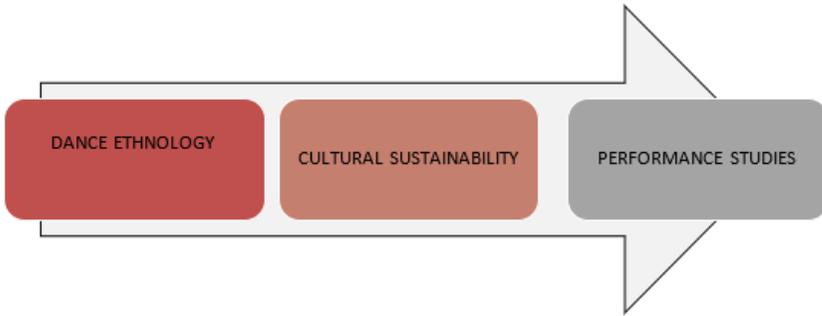
Extensive studies exist regarding the related dance form *pangalay* and its cultural and historical aspects (Fernando-Amilbansa, 1983, 2005; Quintero, 2016, 2017, 2024, forthcoming; Quintero & Nor, 2016); however, these studies primarily focus on the practice among Tausug and other Sulu peoples. Currently, there have been no written studies dedicated to the practice of *mangalay* by Sangil practitioners. This article addresses this gap by providing ethnographic documentation of how the Sangil people perform *mangalay* to perpetuate heritage and respond to shifting socio-technological landscapes. While there are currently limited ethnographic descriptions of how Sangil practice *mangalay*, this study views dance as a socio-cultural practice that is both bodily knowledge and a remembrance of culture (Bentley, 1987; Blacking, 1983; Klein, 2011). Farnell’s (1999) concept of “moving bodies, acting selves” frames embodiment as a culturally situated form of action, in which the body is symbolic and an agentive site of meaning-making. Dance, in this view, is a mode of social action through which individuals enact, negotiate, and reproduce cultural knowledge. This helps situate Sangil *mangalay* as an embodied practice in which dancers actively articulate identity and heritage-keeping as a process of perpetuating the dance form as Sangil.

In addition, Huschka’s (2013) work on dance aesthetics emphasizes that tradition is not fixed or static and is continuously reworked through performance. Huschka conceptualizes agency as emerging through dancers’ interpretive and aesthetic decisions within heritage forms. This concept helps frame the creative process of *mangalay* by Sangil practitioners as also being grounded in cultural conventions. Although there is limited scholarly literature examining how Sangil practitioners sustain *mangalay* amid aesthetic and cultural shifts, other studies have explored dance, as a broader field of study, as a site of political and social negotiation in other cultural contexts (Giurchescu, 2001; Hardt, 2011). This paper explores how Sangil performers perpetuate *mangalay* amid shifting values and changing communities, viewing it as a site for active cultural negotiation.

Methodology

Sisiye te Orodunge, a Sangil term denoting a dancer’s individual style or creative signature, functions as a culturally sanctioned mechanism that balances continuity of *mangalay* with personal creativity, particularly among male performers. The study examines the embodied practices of two recognized Sangil *mangalay* practitioners, Halim G. Tabi, Jr., and Roosevelt K. Atche, Jr.² At the same time, their insights provide rich, authoritative accounts; the findings are contextually situated and may not fully represent the broader Sangil community. Tabi and Atche navigate the interplay between continuity and change through *mangalay* as a bodily interpretive and creative framework that, through its practice, responds to shifting socio-techno-ecological changes. The study applies a formulated model, the Cultural Embodiment in Motion (CEM) framework, conceptualized by the authors and illustrated in Figure 1. This framework integrates insights from dance ethnology, cultural sustainability, and Performance Studies, offering a culturally grounded perspective on dance as both a living bodily archive and a medium for adaptive expression. It provides the analytical foundation for understanding *mangalay* as heritage, a fluid practice that continues to give meaning to Sangil identity across generations.

Figure 1

The Three Fields of Study in the Cultural Embodiment in Motion Framework

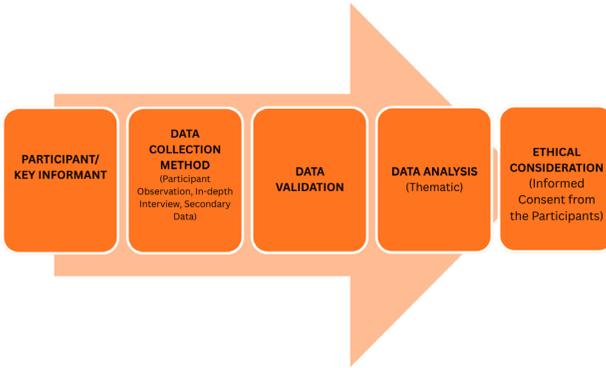
Note. Conceptualized by the authors.

The research adopts an ethnographic approach, with participant observation and in-depth interviews as its primary methods for data collection, enabling immersion in the dancers' lived experiences and cultural contexts. Data were triangulated through participant observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis to strengthen validity. The researcher's positionality as a cultural outsider may shape interpretation, and future studies could include female and younger practitioners to further contextualize *mangalay* practices. These elements reflect both individual agency and collective identity shaped by historical memory and community relevance. Stinson (1997) notes that "dance provides a context in which participants can explore who they are, make choices, and construct meanings through bodily action rather than verbal discourse" (p. 53). Stinson further emphasizes that dancers experience themselves as "active agents rather than passive recipients of cultural forms" (p. 55). Greer (2021) suggests that art is a communal and socially embedded practice that "functions as a social practice through which communities articulate shared values, histories, and identities, while simultaneously allowing for individual expression" (p. 31). This participatory heritage form strengthens community bonds by situating creativity within "lived social contexts and collective memory" (Greer, 2021, p. 32).

The CEM framework, developed in this study, provides the analytical lens for understanding *mangalay* as both a repository of cultural memory and a dynamic site for creative expression, empowering practitioner agency as sustainers of their own heritage practices. CEM emphasizes three interrelated approaches: (1) embodied cultural memory, Sangil *mangalay* practitioners operate as embodied repositories of history, values, and identity. In *mangalay*, conventional movements, pacing, balance, and spatial control transmit Sangil cultural knowledge across generations; (2) creative agency through extemporaneous performance, practitioners actively shape heritage forms informed by environment and personal experience. Creativity is embedded in cultural continuity; and (3) dynamic continuity, which refers to heritage practices and their transgenerational adaptability. Timmerman (2017) discusses creative continuity and transformation in performance traditions, particularly in how artistic forms sustain themselves through periods of innovation while remaining culturally grounded. Sangil *mangalay* is understood as a practice shaped by continuity, perpetuation, and change.

Figure 2

Ethnographic Research Question and Design



As illustrated in Figure 2, this study employs ethnography that involves direct engagement with two Sangil *mangalay* practitioners which aims to explore answers to the question: How do Sangil performers of Balut Island perceive and approach the creative process in performing *mangalay*, including influences, challenges, and future directions of their practice?

In an in-depth interview with the practitioners, as shown in Figure 3, both Tabi and Atche shared insights on navigating the dynamic interplay between heritage practice and innovation. Tabi and Atche are alumni of Kabpapagariya Ensemble, the official performing arm of Mindanao State University - General Santos City. Both of them navigate the dynamic interplay between a heritage practice and innovation, defined as the personal and contextual adaptations that emerge within performance. Similar to the generative processes of dancemaking that are innate in *pangalay* practices amongst the Tausug (Quintero 2024, forthcoming), in *mangalay*, the Sangil build upon movement conventions with their individual styles, referred to as *Sisiye te Orodinge*, characterizing Sangil *mangalay* as an emergent dance form.

Figure 3

Documentation of In-Depth Interviews with Key Informants (Source: Pantao, 2024)



Note. Interviews conducted with Halim G. Tabi, Jr. and Roosevelt K. Atche, Jr. at Tambilawan Kamayan Restaurant, Pres. Jose P. Laurel St., General Santos City.

Halim G. Tabi, Jr. was observed at the performance during the grand opening of the Kalilangan Festival of General Santos City on February 23, 2024, at the Plaza Heneral Santos, as exhibited in

Figure 4. This event featured various artists from different disciplines showcasing a rich tapestry of cultural expressions. As one of the performers, Tabi captivated the audience with his *mangalay*, making it one of the highlights of the evening. His fluid and graceful movements reflected the festival's spirit of unity, cultural pride, and intercommunal respect.

Figure 4

Performance of Mangalay at the Kalilangan Festival (Source: LGU-General Santos Kalilangan Festival 2024)



Note. Halim G. Tabi, Jr. performing *mangalay* during the Grand Opening.

Roosevelt K. Atche, Jr., often immerses himself in *mangalay* practice to explore his slow, sustained movements and connect with nature. During an impromptu dance observation, Atche practiced *mangalay* to deepen his connection to the environment (April 15, 2024). Staying sometimes in General Santos City, within the serene surroundings of Olaer Spring Resort, as depicted in Figure 5, Atche chose to explore the area for his heritage practice. The resort's natural beauty provided an ideal backdrop, enhancing his slow movements and enriching his spiritual experience.

Figure 5

Silhouette of Mangalay Practice at Olaer Spring Resort (Source: Pantao, 2024)



Both Tabi and Atche practice *mangalay* in their community on Balut Island. Thematic analysis was conducted to identify key themes and patterns, such as the following: (1) Personal style in *mangalay* referred to as *Sisiye te Orodinge* in Sangil; (2) Extemporization and creativity in the practice of *mangalay*; (3) Challenges in sustaining and transmitting the *mangalay*; and (4) Community-rooted approaches to nurturing *mangalay* among the Sangil of Balut Island. The analysis provides a comprehensive understanding of how Tabi and Atche navigate their personal expressions within the framework of *mangalay* as a heritage form that is both creative and expressive of Sangil identity.

This study adhered to ethical standards for ethnographic research. Informed consent was obtained from the key informants who were fully informed about the purpose, methods, and use of data, including their agreement to be identified in the study. Participation was voluntary and they were given the opinion to withdraw at anytime. Respect for the cultural significance of *mangalay* was upheld by ensuring accurate representation and avoiding misappropriation while recognizing the cultural ownership of the practitioners in their community. All documentation was used with permission. The researchers remained reflexive of their positionality as a cultural outsiders to ensure respectful and responsible interpretation of the data.

Results and Discussion

Sustaining *mangalay* in the community involves harmonizing its heritage forms, passed down from generation to generation, with the unique expressions of individual dancers. Personal expression is embedded in *mangalay*, upholding established movement conventions while allowing room for interpretive creativity. This helps *mangalay* remain meaningful, particularly for younger generations and contemporary audiences. By grounding Sangil's shared values and aesthetic sensibilities—such as fluidity of movement, grounded footwork, and emphasis on grace—dancers ensure that *mangalay* continues to resonate while shifting within culturally defined boundaries.

Fluidity of movement refers to the smooth modulation of energy and continuous motion, and, more specifically, to the absence of abruptness or mechanical segmentation of movement, so that the body appears continuously responsive. Grounded footwork prioritizes stability and balance, with the feet remaining close to the ground and weight shifts deliberate and controlled rather than lifted, placing the body's weight in the torso or pelvis. Groundedness here contributes to the overall restraint of *mangalay* and supports fluid upper-body movement, creating a balance between rootedness and flow. In the Sangil context, grace refers to the practitioner's ability to move without excess movement, perceived as appropriate, controlled, and socially attuned. Grace in *mangalay* is about maintaining restraint, composure, and sensitivity to social space. In Sangil cultural aesthetics, grace is evaluated through cultural judgment, in which movement aligns with Sangil values of humility, respect, and propriety.

Furthermore, sustaining *mangalay* involves a creative reciprocity between cultural memory and artistic creativity—an engagement that foregrounds the performer's agency by reimagining tradition through lived experience. In doing so, practitioners remain in “conversation” with the past in the present, as interrelated forces shaping identity and meaning-making transgenerationally. They honor the ethos of cultural continuity while embracing experimentation and self-expression, allowing *mangalay* to expand its expressive range while remaining culturally rooted. By doing so, the Sangil sustain the legacy of *mangalay* as a shared and continually emergent cultural practice.

Sisiye te Orodinge in Mangalay

Sisiye te Orodinge is a Sangil term that refers to “individual style” and is a part of *mangalay* dancing. It is an aspect of *mangalay* that allows for continuity, change, and perpetuation. *Sisiye te Orodinge* within cultural aesthetic parameters and movement conventions permits beholder agency

through expression and artistry. Practitioners, therefore, actively cultivate the heritage form itself as both a legacy and innovation, incorporating individual inspirations and intentionalities that shape motion and movement execution.

Halim G. Tabi, Jr.'s *mangalay* practice, as shown in Figure 6, is grounded in his physical environment. Tabi explains,

Tan-aw sa environment. Unsay makita nimo na mo fit sa imuhang movement, mga dahon sa puno na galihok. Combine tanan. Mao na e apply nimo sa sayaw. Isa pud sa magpangalay ka is balance... Panus a maglakaw ka sa dagat na dili mudagan ang isda. So, slow gyud ang movement, bisag muabot na ka sa kaisdaan, dili sila mudagan kay slow ilahangang lakaw.

[TRANSLATION]

Look at your environment. What can you incorporate into your movement? The leaves on the tree are in motion. Combine all. Apply this approach to your dancing. Another important aspect of pangalay² [mangalay] is maintaining balance... Imagine that you are walking in the sea, where the fish would not run. So, for slower movement, even if you reach fish, they won't run because you are moving slowly (H. Tabi, personal communication, April 15, 2024).

Figure 6

Halim G. Tabi, Jr. Performing a Mangalay Practice on Balut Island (Source: Calis, 2024)



The environment influences how Tabi embodies *mangalay* as Sangil, where attunement with nature becomes manifested in motion. Tabi shared,

"I remember as a child living in a strong coastal region, so the waves of the ocean inspired my dance movement. The ocean is calm and slow, and I mimic that in my pangalay [mangalay]. I also try to imitate the flight of kemba that flies with grace" (H. Tabi, personal communication, April 15, 2024).

The *kemba*, an indigenous seabird of Balut Island's coastal areas, is known for its smooth, elegant flight patterns—qualities that Tabi integrates and interprets in his movement. It is this deep connection with the natural environs, especially the sea, that informs Tabi's *Sisiye te Orodinge*, characterized by fluid and graceful movements. Tabi's artistry is reflected in his intimate relationship with the natural world, which demonstrates how personal history, environment, and movement become intertwined in the performance of Sangil *mangalay*.

For Atche, dance is a reenactment of inherited forms and a living and interactive dialogue between self and setting—between body and the coastal rhythms that surround him. His movements,

as exhibited in Figure 7, echo the calm of the sea and the flight of the *kemba*, translating ecological observation into embodied expression, a “sense ability” (Quintero, forthcoming). This interplay between the internal memory and external landscape highlights how *mangalay* serves not only as a cultural archive but also as a vessel for identity-making. Yet, while Tabi’s style emphasizes nature and fluidity, other practitioners articulate distinct approaches rooted in deliberate tempo and musical dialogue.

Figure 7

Roosevelt K. Atche, Jr. Performing a Mangalay Practice in Bitong, Balut Island (Source: Atche, 2024)



Roosevelt K. Atche, Jr. deepens his efforts to distinguish the Sangil *mangalay* from other regional forms. He elaborated,

“In [sic] Sangil, pangalay [mangalay] is performed in an extremely unique manner. It is done in a way that is very slow and calculated (by men). I try to mark the Sangil pangalay [mangalay] as distinct by emphasizing its slow pace” (R. Atche, personal communication, April 15, 2024).

While it is true that many *pangalay* forms across the Sulu archipelago, particularly among Tausug and Sama, are characterized by sustained, flowing movements, Atche’s emphasis lies in the intentional prolongation of each movement’s execution, which creates a heightened sense of precision and weight. Sangil *mangalay* is characteristically grounded, introspective, and deliberate. Simultaneously, Atche’s intention to contrast the temporal pacing as prolonged movement reinforces his *Sisiye te Orodinge* and, as such, uniquely Sangil male *mangalay* dancing.

Exploring Tabi’s and Atche’s *Sisiye te Orodinge* sheds light on the diverse cultural influences that have shaped *mangalay* within the Sangil community. Tabi’s movements echo the rhythm of water, reflecting a connection to the coastal environment and transposing it into fluid, sustained bodily motion. By integrating movements inspired by the flight of the *kemba* bird into his movements, Tabi crafts performances that are both captivating and deeply rooted in nature, making *mangalay* a place-based heritage form. Rooting to land, inspired by ecological elements, becomes an aesthetic and movement endeavor that reveals the localization of Sangil *mangalay* as an endemic dance form. Atche’s *mangalay* is characterized by movements arranged with care, showcasing the grace and diversity of movement in Sangil *mangalay*. Both Halim G. Tabi, Jr. and Roosevelt K. Atche Jr. showcase their *Sisiye te Orodinge* in their *mangalay* performances. Their unique approaches are

shaped by lived experiences, environmental influences, and inspirations drawn from daily life and cultural surroundings.

While Tabi and Atche did not undergo codified training that is associated with institutionalized dance education, their learning process—through observation, imitation, and mentorship from elders—is rooted in community and reflects a Sangil *mangalay* pedagogical structure. Similar to the practice in Sulu communities, *pangalay* within celebratory events, practitioners leave “their own traces on the dance-music practice” (Quintero, 2024, p. 187) through their individual style and “becoming a part of transgenerational memory” (Quintero, forthcoming). In Sangil *mangalay*, the experiences of Tabi and Atche demonstrate that active participation in communal and family-led cultural practices is a vital means of transmitting and mastering *mangalay* as a heritage form. The perpetuation of *mangalay* involves *Sisiye te Orodinge* as a necessary creative element that contributes to the form's perpetuation as a way of reinforcing its relevance in Sangil communities.

For both Tabi and Atche, creativity is a defining element of Sangil *mangalay*, differentiating it from the Tausug *pangalay* and the Sama *igal*. As Tabi articulates,

Creativity...my inspiration is the waves of the dagat. Ang dagat kay calm and slow. Magpangalay [mangalay] ko, murag ko ug wave. Maliban sa dagat naa pud sometimes naga imitate ko sa bird. Kanang bird kembra (bird), nagalupad, usahay mo dula sa bayabay. Hand movements are formed like ibon called kembra. Based gyud sa dagat. Lahe among pangalay [mangalay] kay naa me message ginapaabot...Kay dapat magpangalay [mangalay] me, mailhan me na sangil jud.

[TRANSLATION]

Creativity...my inspiration is the waves of the sea. The sea is calm and slow. When I perform pangalay [mangalay], I move like a wave. Aside from the sea, I sometimes imitate the bird. That kembra (bird) is flying; sometimes I am playing on the shore. Hand movements are similar to a bird called kembra. It's based on the sea. Our pangalay [mangalay] is different because we have a message to tell...Because if I do pangalay [mangalay], I will be known as Sangil (H. Tabi, personal communication, April 15, 2024).

Tabi clearly asserts the connection between *mangalay*, environment, and Sangil identity. Similarly, Atche mentions that,

Iba-iba ang way ng pangalay [mangalay] in the creativity. Wala gina copy ang style sa isa ka dancer. Kay tungod naa koy sariling version. Ang ginabuhay nako, gusto nako e show sa mga tao unsa ang kalahian sa pangalay [mangalay] sa ibang grupo. Like Tawi-tawi ug Sulo. For me, Sangil pangalay [mangalay] ay slow kaayo ang sa lalake. Para marecogize na lahe siya na atake. Gina display and gina slow nako siya para marecognized sa mag katawhan. The more na slow, the more paspas ang music.

[TRANSLATION]

Pangalay [mangalay] is known for its unique creative methods. Style is not copied by the dancer. It is because I have my version. What I did was to show people the differences between pangalay [mangalay] in different groups, like Tawi-Tawi and Sulu. For me, Sangil pangalay [mangalay] is very slow with us men. We should have different styles so that we can identify each other. I am displaying it and making it slow so that people can recognize it. The more it is slowed, the faster the music is (R. Atche, personal communication, April 15, 2024).

Asserting specific stylistic differences in movement qualities, such as motion in relationship to musical tempo and place/nature-based inspirations, such as the sea and the *kembra*, roots *mangalay* in a specific socio-ecological Sangil context, conjuring, with each performance of *mangalay*, the Sangil dancing body.

Tabi's and Atche's *Sisiye te Orodinge* and their methods in their *mangalay* performances deepen our understanding of how this dance reflects lived experience, identity, and cultural transmission. Their interpretations reveal that Sangil *mangalay* is an expressive heritage practice shaped by personal memory, natural surroundings, and assertion of Sangil identity. Tabi's evocation of ocean waves and

the *kemba* bird shows how movement becomes an extension of his “sense ability” (Quintero, 2026) of the environmental world, while Atche’s intentional slowing of tempo and contrast with other regional practices³ reflect an effort to mark a unique Sangil identity through movement. What makes Sangil *mangalay* a dynamic form is precisely this cooperation between inherited, culturally cultivated movement knowledge and individual creative agency embedded in the heritage form. Through their commitment to continuing and reimagining in *mangalay*, Tabi and Atche actively contribute to its vitality, ensuring that it is sustained as a Sangil cultural heritage practice.

Extemporization and Innovation

Both Tabi and Atche extemporize movements in their *mangalay* performances while remaining grounded in the conventional movements of Sangil *mangalay*. Atche emphasizes that each dancer should cultivate *Sisiye te Orodonge*, avoiding imitation that ensures the continuity of the movement form in the community. Atche’s use of markedly slower movements is characteristic of male dancing and serves to signify Sangil identity within *mangalay*. Tabi draws creative inspiration from his natural surroundings, particularly the coastal environment, allowing organic elements like the motion of waves and the flight of the *kemba* bird to shape his expressions. His extemporization of movement, though personal, is molded and guided within the conventions of Sangil aesthetics. Both practitioners demonstrate that creativity grounded in Sangil movements is permissible and is a part of the cultural foundations that contribute to the continuity of *mangalay*. In this context, maintaining cultural integrity means staying attuned to the values, meanings, and movement qualities recognized by the Sangil community, while culturally allowable individual interpretation becomes part of the perpetuation of dance forms.

Creativity is integral to *mangalay* performances, as practiced among Sangil communities. This approach allows performers to uphold the integrity of conventional *mangalay* structures while also expressing their individual agency through creativity. To bring out individuality in their performances, each performer must develop *Sisiye te Orodonge*, rather than duplicating other performers’ styles and ways of moving. Individuality plays a crucial role in interpreting *mangalay* movements and drawing from deeply rooted cultural experiences. According to Roosevelt K. Atche Jr, there is an integration of improvisation and personal artistic flair into your *pangalay* [*mangalay*] performances while honoring Sangil’s cultural norms and aesthetics:

Ginasayaw from time to time, para ma improve, para makita ang klase klase nga style sa pagsayaw. Naga evolve ang pagsayaw. Sa una pag bata, dili kaayo ta kabalo maminaw sa music. Pag teenager, pataka na lang. Pero karon, lahe na! The more na nindot ang music, the more na awareness sa gestures and body movement.

[TRANSLATION]

It is danced from time to time, so it can improve, so that different styles of dancing can be seen. Dancing evolves. When we were young, we didn't really know how to listen to music. As teenagers, we just moved however we wanted. But now, it's different! The better the music, the greater the awareness of gestures and body movement (R. Atche, personal communication, April 15, 2024).

What Atche points out is that extemporization and *Sisiye te Orodonge* develop over time as one becomes aware of the possibilities of musical and movement within the confines of Sangil aesthetics.

In the context of Sangil *mangalay*, extemporaneous aspects refer to the dancer’s spontaneous yet culturally-informed variations within the Sangil dancing. These moments of fluid adaptation allow dancers to respond to music, mood, and context, bringing a sense of freshness and vitality to each performance. Such spontaneity allows performers to express personal meanings and emotions while maintaining the integrity of *mangalay* movements. This permissibility illustrates how cultural practices like *mangalay* are not static and are continually shaped by individual expression, and are upheld, sustained, and encouraged through performances in community celebratory spaces. While

personal stories and experiences are present in many dance traditions, Sangil *mangalay* uniquely weaves these elements into its structure through the lived body in its movements and rhythms passed on through community collective memory. Tabi expresses this collectivity as representing Sangil identity in performance:

Pagsayaw nimo, ikaw ra baya isa. Imagine ikaw ra isa sa stage. The best strategy is mabutang sa isip na magsayaw sa pangalay, you are representing the tribe. Mao na imuhang isipin. Naa kay gina story. Mao ni imuhang identity. Kultura na ginarepresent.

[TRANSLATION]

When you're dancing, you're alone. Try to imagine you're alone on stage. The best strategy is to put in your mind that you're dancing pangalay; you are representing the tribe. You have to think that way. You have a story to tell (H. Tabi, personal communication, April 15, 2024).

Extemporization in *mangalay* encourages artists to collaborate and build a sense of togetherness as they respond to one another while dancing. This shared creative process deepens the bonds during performances and enhances the aesthetic cohesion of the *mangalay* performance. Through these creative moments, performers become attuned to a collective rhythm and establish mutual understanding in motion. *Mangalay* performances drawn from lived experience, memory, and cultural values become bodily manifestations of Sangil culture. Extemporization becomes a vital force sustaining the artistic vitality of *mangalay*, enabling it to remain meaningful and adaptable in contemporary contexts.

Challenges in Sustaining *Mangalay* in the Community

Tabi and Atche reveal the challenges to sustaining *mangalay*, including its adaptation to shifts within Sangil communities. They highlight how changing social conditions and cultural values influence the practice and transmission of Sangil *mangalay*. With the increasing use of smartphones, social media, and digital entertainment, younger generations are often less engaged with cultural practices such as *mangalay*. At the same time, community priorities have led to shifts in economic livelihood, education, and urban migration, making it more challenging to sustain cultural traditions.

Sangil practitioners highlight the need for ongoing practice and engagement with the community to maintain *mangalay* heritage practices. Lack of community members' interest makes it even more challenging to sustain *mangalay*. Tabi and Atche cited the lack of financial support and resources as the primary drawbacks in holding frequent practice sessions and performances. They call for increased support from cultural organizations and local governments to help them sustain *mangalay* as a valued heritage practice. Additionally, they suggest that *mangalay* be included in school curricula in order to increase the appreciation and understanding of the heritage practice among children. Through these collaborative efforts, Sangil *mangalay* practitioners seek to sustain *mangalay* amid changing social landscapes.

Atche states that there are limited opportunities to perform *mangalay*, with performances usually during weddings and community events:

There is a [sic] limited opportunities for the Sangil kids to perform the pangalay [mangalay]. Kung wala kasal, wala kaayo avenue para makaperform. Dako kaayo nga tabang ang mga cultural festivals for this kay favorite baya ang pangalay [mangalay] ipa perform sa stage lalo na sa opening numbers, however, selected ra pud. And also, naa pud naga conduct workshops and trainings pero selected ra apud. I hope mag increase ang pangalay [mangalay] trainings ug dapat sa community gyud

and dapat sa mga bata gyud magstart.

[TRANSLATION]

There are limited opportunities for the Sangil kids to perform the pangalay [mangalay]. If there's no wedding, there's no avenue to perform. Cultural festivals greatly benefit from pangalay's [mangalay] popularity as a stage performance, particularly during the opening numbers, regardless of their selection. Additionally, training programs should begin within the children's community (R. Atche, personal communication, April 15, 2024).

He stresses the necessity for continuous practice, cultural festivals, art exhibits, and the expansion of potential venues for *mangalay* performances. Increasing the number of venues for these performances benefits performers by providing additional opportunities to rehearse and perform, and benefit the general public by raising awareness of the heritage form. Atche seeks to support *mangalay*'s continued existence in different contexts by advocating for a variety of performance possibilities.

To promote the appreciation of the dance among younger generations, Atche further suggests partnering with local universities and colleges and organizing community-wide *mangalay* workshops and classes so that people of all ages might learn about and experience *mangalay* as heritage knowledge. Although these classes would use a different pedagogical approach than traditional learning in the community, they would help perpetuate transgenerational learning, allowing performers to demonstrate their practice to interested mentees. This would aid in *mangalay*'s survival and continuity, as well as contribute to a sense of belongingness as Sangil. Atche suggests that through these collaborative efforts, Sangil *mangalay* will prosper and become known as a valuable and integral part of Sangil's cultural heritage.

Another obstacle identified by Tabi and Atche in sustaining *mangalay* is the influence of rapid societal and lifestyle changes. Tabi expresses concern over the shifting interests of younger generations, who are increasingly drawn to digital technologies and contemporary entertainment rather than engaging with heritage traditions. This generational shift has contributed to the decline in the number of *mangalay* practitioners. While there is no institutional system for training, bodily knowledge of *mangalay* is traditionally passed on through the community. The perceived disinterest among youth has prompted efforts to introduce cultural education programs and create opportunities for younger Sangil community members to participate in cultural dance practices in order to ensure the continuity of *mangalay*. As stated by Tabi,

Sa Nakita nako, lahe lahe ang community. Ang nakita nako, busy ang tao sa gadgets. Kumbaga wala na kaayu masters na pwede motudlo sa sayaw. My self, ako na mismo nagapangita ug way paano nako e enhance akoang creativity. Ang mga bata karon lisod na kayo. Challenging. What if walay kasal? Dili lang na sa isa ka event. Kung dili nimo e practice permi, mawala man na. Another challenge, nakafocus na sa pamilya. Didto na matuon ang oras, how to survive in our daily lives. Dili siya priority, ang priority is how to survive.

[TRANSLATION]

What I see are differences in the community. What I see is people's busyness with their gadgets. It's as if there are no masters available to teach the dance. I, myself, am the only one who is finding ways to enhance my creativity. The children have become more resilient. Challenging. What if there's no wedding? That's not the only event. If you can't practice occasionally, it will vanish. Another challenge is maintaining a focus on the family. At that time, the primary focus was on ensuring our daily survival. It is not the priority; the priority is how to survive (H. Tabi, personal communication, April 15, 2024).

Atche also expresses similar concerns, highlighting the need to take aggressive steps to counter the community's shift towards technology and away from heritage practices. He recommends cultural education programs at the community centers and schools to foster appreciation for *mangalay* and other traditional arts. Atche feels that younger generations will be more likely to take part in maintaining and developing *mangalay* for future generations if they are encouraged to have a feeling of pride and connection to their cultural heritage. Atche states,

Pero, hopefully, maka conduct ta ug mga initiatives for this para mabuhi ug makabalo ang mga kabataan Sangil musayaw ug mangalay.

[TRANSLATION]

But, hopefully, we can conduct initiatives for this so that the Sangil children will know how to dance mangalay (R. Atche, personal communication, April 15, 2024).

Tabi and Atche recommend creating cultural exchange programs between the Sangil community and neighboring communities with diverse ethnolinguistic groups to foster understanding and appreciation of Sangil *mangalay*. These groups include Sama, Tausug, Maguindanao, and Lumad communities. They feel that such collaborations would enrich *mangalay* and enhance relationships among various cultural communities.

Atche and Tabi value sustaining the uniqueness of Sangil *mangalay* and developing it for contemporary audiences. Both practitioners believe that new elements could be brought into *mangalay* without compromising its integrity, finding a balance between the heritage practice and innovation. This would ensure the dance form's continuity despite socio-technological shifts confronting the community. Atche and Tabi suggest that recording and archiving *mangalay* performances and holding classes will maintain the legacy of *mangalay* for future generations. Digital media and technology could be used as tools for cultural sustainability rather than contributing to the erosion of heritage practice. *Mangalay* could therefore become more accessible to the Sangil community and beyond. Tabi and Atche, through their joint efforts and dedication, are determined to overcome the challenges posed by societal changes—such as shifting cultural values and reduced community engagement—to ensure the legacy of *mangalay* as a necessary cultural heritage practice.

Conclusion

The findings of this study demonstrate the resilience and adaptability of Sangil *mangalay* as a creative and heritage practice, grounded in both individual expression and community-centered tradition. By focusing on the lived experiences of Halim G. Tabi, Jr., and Roosevelt K. Atche, Jr., the study illustrates how Sangil practitioners sustain *mangalay* through a dynamic interplay of continuity and innovation. Central to this process is *Sisiye te Orodinge*, the cultivation of individual style, which allows dancers to assert personal agency while remaining faithful to Sangil movement conventions. Through extemporization and the integration of environmental inspirations—such as ocean waves and the flight of the *kemba* bird—practitioners demonstrate how personal creativity becomes a mechanism for sustaining cultural relevance and identity.

The study's qualitative, ethnographic approach ensures the conclusions are credible and culturally grounded. Direct quotes, detailed ethnographic observations, and thematic analysis substantiate the interpretations, particularly the connections between movement aesthetics, environmental attunement, and identity formation. While strict replication of this study is limited due to its ethnographic nature, the transparency of its methods—participant observation, interviews, and document analysis—enhances reliability and allows others to understand how the insights were generated. The focus on two expert practitioners is justified by the depth of cultural knowledge they provide, revealing the nuanced ways in which Sangil *mangalay* is perpetuated through *Sisiye te Orodinge* and community engagement.

The conclusions highlight the balance Sangil practitioners maintain between personal expression and collective heritage. Creativity within *mangalay* is not merely ornamental; it is a culturally sanctioned process that ensures the tradition remains dynamic and meaningful. Encouraging dancers to cultivate *Sisiye te Orodinge* strengthens the transmission of *mangalay*, making the heritage practice both personally fulfilling and socially cohesive. This perspective underscores that sustaining Sangil *mangalay* relies not only on community structures and institutional support but also on nurturing individual artistry within the heritage framework.

Contemporary challenges—such as digitalization, urban migration, and youth disengagement—require innovative strategies for cultural continuity. The study proposes actionable solutions, including workshops, community festivals, digital archiving, and integration of *mangalay* into school curricula.

These initiatives should explicitly encourage learners to explore *Sisiye te Orodinge*, balancing mastery of conventional forms with the cultivation of a personal artistic voice. By doing so, *mangalay* becomes a living practice that connects past and present, community and individual, ensuring its relevance across generations.

In sum, Sangil *mangalay* exemplifies a heritage practice that is both culturally anchored and creatively flexible. Through the deliberate cultivation of *Sisiye te Orodinge*, practitioners like Tabi and Atche sustain a living tradition that honors collective memory, adapts to contemporary contexts, and affirms Sangil identity. The study's conclusions offer a robust, culturally grounded framework for understanding how individual creativity and community support together foster the transgenerational vitality of *mangalay*.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest associated with this study.

AI Disclosure

The authors affirm that this manuscript was prepared without the use of artificial intelligence. All content presented in this paper is original and solely developed by the authors.

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Endnotes

¹It has been proffered that Sangil and Sangir are interchangeable terms referring to the same ethnolinguistic group (NCCA, 2021; Tiu, 2006). However, according to Wiratri (2023), these are two distinct groups with divergent histories and languages, though both originate from the Sangihe Islands in Sulawesi. “Sangir” refers to diasporic peoples who seasonally migrate between the southern Philippines and Sulawesi; they believe their ancestors were the first settlers on Balut and Sarangani Islands to clear and cultivate the land. Accordingly, the phrase, “perut di Filipina, kaki di Indonesia (stomach in the Philippines, feet in Indonesia)” (Wiratri, 2023, pp. 38–39) recognizes the Sangir’s bicultural identity. Conversely, the Sangil have settled in the southern Philippines, aligning themselves with other Muslim groups, and are recognized by the Philippine government as an Indigenous Cultural Community (Wiratri, 2023).

²*Mangalay* is a Sangil term referring to dancing performed within Sangil cultural aesthetics, accompanied by a *kuringtangan* musical ensemble. *Pangalay*, a Tausug term colloquially described as “dancing with the hands” (Quintero, 2016), involves sustained, curvilinear movements. While the verb form of *pangalay* is *mangalay* in Tausug—and is occasionally used in Sama communities to refer to a related dance form (though the Sama heritage form is called *igal*)—these practices have been cultivated in distinct ways by each ethnolinguistic group. Although *pangalay* has come to dominate dance discourses in the Philippines, Tabi and Atche clarified that *mangalay* is the specific Sangil term defined by aesthetics rooted in their respective communities.

³Sustained movement against the quickened tempo of a musical ensemble is also found in the *pangalay* of the Tausug and the *igal* of the Sama. Atche specifically noted the intentional, slow tempo of Sangil male dancing, which he identifies as a primary distinction between *mangalay* and other related dance forms.