

ARCHIVAL ANALYSIS OF AFI FESTIVAL

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Abstract

Festivals and special events play important roles in destination development, image makers, animators of static attractions, and catalysts for other developments . this study aimed to document the history of Afi Festival of Tuguegarao City, Cagayan in connection with the culture of Tuguegaraoños. This study used the descriptive-qualitative research design to have an in-depth cultural analysis about AFI festival. August 16th of each year marks the most important festival of the Ibanags in Tuguegarao City- the Afi Festival. It is in this festival that the people unite as one and experience a sense of belongingness, which is embodied in the meaning of Pavvurulun. Most notable events include awarding of the city's most outstanding citizens, a grand street dancing parade, cultural and sports events, and a Pancit Batil Patung (a unique Tuguegarao rendition of the pancit dish) eating contest which is freely participated by both natives and tourists alike. The festival allows all members of the community to join in the celebrations from the well applauded street dancing competitions, drum, bugle and lyre competitions, beauty pageant, agri-trade fairs and job fairs, among many others. In the history, it upholds the believes about Mengal chieftains where lightning of the torch was performed by the mayor. This scene combines the past and the present by telling a story of how the Ibanags looked highly to their leaders and still holds true until today. The fire of the torch represents the responsibility that the ancient Mengals is transferring to the leaders of the present generation.

Keyword: Afi festival, Mengal, Ibanag, Pavvurulun

Introduction

Holding of festivals is a worldwide activity as it has local, national, and international significance. In addition, it has social and economic impacts to the people and the locality. Festivals, according to Ferdinand & Williams (2013), once local celebrations of culture and heritage, can become international events spreading to countries outside their region of origin. However, the processes by which such festivals have become international have largely been ignored in existing literature According to Irshad (2011), festivals are one of the fastest growing forms of tourism. They are becoming increasingly popular in rural areas as a means to revitalize local economies. Festivals and special events play important roles in destination development, image makers, animators of static attractions, and catalysts for other developments .

The Philippines is known for having colorful and fun festivals showing the rich culture, tradition and beliefs of Filipinos. From time to time the celebration becomes more glamorous, adding twists that surely can attract tourists. The demand of the people most especially for the viewers for new acts is the reason why the producers are eager to create a magnificent show and celebration which also requires a big amount of funds. Our society is slowly and conterminously changing due to modernization, our cultural groups are also upgrading and getting modernized but still we should never forget the cultures and traditions that we inherited from our ancestors. Cultural traditions are the legacy of physical artifacts and intangible attributes of a group or society that are inherited from past generations, maintained in the present and bestowed for the

benefit of future generations.

Statement of the Problem

Generally, this study aimed to document the history of Afi Festival of Tuguegarao City, Cagayan in connection with the culture of Tuguegaraoños. Specifically, it sought to answer the following question:

1. How did the Afi Festival evolve through time?

Research Methodology

Research Design

This study used the descriptive-qualitative research design to have an in-depth cultural analysis about AFI festival. According to Sandelowski (2000), qualitative descriptive research is seen as a categorical, as opposed to a non-categorical, alternative for inquiry; is less interpretive than an 'interpretive description' approach because it does not require the researcher to move as far from or into the data; and, does not require a conceptual or highly abstract rendering of the data, compared to other qualitative designs.

As applied in the study, this design used key informant interviewing, focus group discussion, and documentary analysis to extract the aspects of Ibanag culture that are embedded in the AFI festival, as well as its educational implications. Through this approach, a straightforward comprehensive descriptive summaries and accurate details of the data collected would be presented. Tuguegarao City, Cagayan is the locale of this study, the organizer of the Afi Festival. It is, specifically, tertiary schools like universities, colleges and AFI Festival members and officials who participated in the overwhelming event. Cagayan State University is the main place where the data of this study was collected. The Afi festival is celebrated and was origin in Tuguegarao City. Tuguegarao City, long before it has become the premiere city it is today, traces its history on a small pueblo founded by Dominican priest, Fr. Jacinto Pardo on May 9, 1606. It became the Capital of Cagayan in 1841. Though, the years, its economy shifted from agriculture to secondary and even tertiary economic activities. The shift was ushered by Tuguegarao's role as the regional government center and business hub.

Discussion of Results and Findings

History and Evolution of the Afi Festival

August 16th of each year marks the most important festival of the Ibanags in Tuguegarao City- the Afi Festival. It is the chief festival of Tuguegarao City, the capital of Cagayan province, in which the feast day of the city's patron saint, Saint Hyacinth (San Jacinto), is commemorated. It is in this festival that the people unite as one and experience a sense of belongingness, which is embodied in the meaning of Pavvurulun.

Most notable events include awarding of the city's most outstanding citizens, a grand street dancing parade, cultural and sports events, and a Pancit Batil Patung (a unique Tuguegarao rendition of the pancit dish) eating contest which is freely participated by both natives and tourists alike. The festival allows all members of the community to join in the celebrations from the well applauded street dancing competitions, drum, bugle and lyre competitions, beauty pageant, agri-trade fairs and job fairs, among many others. One of the highlights of the event is the outdoor cooking and pancit eating contest of the pancit batil patung, a local noodle delicacy in the city.

In 2014, Mayor Jefferson P. Soriano who was also the General Director of Afi Festival, initiated and upheld the Afi Festival. He created a committee to conduct consultation from elders, historians, researchers and anthropologists to come up with the Afi Festival. The committee also

consulted the University of the Philippines through Professor Pedro Abraham Jr. and the National Historical Commission of the Philippines regarding the heritage and history of Tuguegarao City and the culture, rituals, traditions, beliefs and life of the Ibanag ethno-linguistic group. Soriano mentioned in his interview:

“It was actually a very long process of consultation with elders and of course [with] historians, Professor Edru, and Director Calagui, he was the one who first directed this in 2013-2014. So we came up with that based on the history of Tuguegarao, we even touched base with UP and the National Historical Commission pertaining to the real history of Tuguegarao and the final decision of the members of the team and the city was to go on a festival that pertain to the history of Tuguegarao. It was first called AFI because of the elements of life, fire is one of the elements. And second, we do not have any fire festival in the entire country, this is the only fire festival in the entire country. So that’s how it came to be reality.”

The committee headed by Soriano came up an idea to have a festival that showcases the cultural heritage and history of Tuguegarao City, how the Ibanag people and culture wove a tapestry of influence on the lives of every Tuguegaraoños. The team decided to conduct a festival which pertains to the history of Tuguegarao and came up with the Afi Festival. Soriano mentioned that his motivation of coming up with the Afi Festival is the seemingly dying Ibanag language. He described the language as endangered in his interview:

“Our main objective is to attract tourists... so because we do not have much to show in Tuguegarao... Just like what I’ve said if you look at the Ibanag culture and Ibanag dialect, we can classify it as endangered dialect if there is such, that’s why this is going back to the culture of the Ibanags and even our dialect, it will revive the culture of the people of Tuguegarao. That is one good thing that has happened here... people get to look back at the culture of the Ibanag.”

At first, for non-residents, the Afi Festival may reflect the climate of Tuguegarao. In fact, Tuguegarao has recorded the highest temperature in the country reaching a scorching 42.2 degrees Celsius on May 11, 1969. Because of this, the city has been dubbed as the hottest city in the country. Relatedly, old folks said Tuguegarao was once a vast forest and rolling grasslands but all these were gradually cleared by burning, thus, the words “tuggi” and “aggao” which mean fire and day respectively, are believed to be the origins of the city’s name.

However, the Afi has a deeper meaning for the Ibanag. Afi means fire and it considered as one element of life. The afi played a significant role during Ibanag rituals and traditions such as mappassup, maddalagan, monawa, mamalangun and makitagollu. These were revealed by Mr. Harold Dela Cruz, a cultural researcher. Meanwhile, in an interview, Soriano said that the Afi Festival is the conceptualization of fire as the main element because it pushes the people of Tuguegarao City to work hard for a bountiful crop and the fiery awakening of the community to realize individual and community goals (Manila times, 2018). He explained that such concepts are captured in a choreographed dance frenzy of thousands of students carrying torches, which depicts the origins of the people and Tuguegarao and portrays the historic past as the city moves towards its future.

After different consultations and conceptualizations, the city launched the Afi Festival in 2014. The initial concept of the venue of the festival was along the riverbank because the Ibanag are originally river people. However, the venue of the Afi Festival was held in front of the city hall

along Enrile Avenue. A year after, it was transferred to the Cagayan Sports Complex and some parts were performed in the main streets of the city of Tuguegarao. Dr. Chita C. Ramos, Dean of the College of Human Kinetics in CSU and a veteran choreographer and director, mentioned that the Afi Festival should reflect how Ibanag people of Tuguegarao are people of the river. She added that the dances in the festival must depict the life and culture of Ibanag. In fact, in the interview with Mayor Jefferson Soriano, he envisions that the next versions of the Afi Festival will be more festive by considering the location of the festival. He said:

“Actually the concept of Director Calagui, [it will be] the venue should have been at the riverbank because the Ibanags are river people and we highlight the Afi there along the river bank, but as it evolved because of the lessons learned from the first to the third, actually if you observed the locations of the Afi festival, have been transferred from one place to another. Here (referring to Enrile boulevard) then we go to Cagayan sports complex. We want the Afi festival to evolve like the Sinulog festival. So if it is a festive festival, it cannot be concentrated in only one place, it has to be in the streets but ... because of convenience and management of the crowd then we place it in a certain area, but hopefully later on, our vision is it goes around and lands in the sports complex so that people will be able to see the beauty of Afi festival.”

In the next sections, the Afi Festival will be associated to the lifeworld of the Ibanag. Looking at Table 1, the themes of the Afi Festival each year can tell a story of how Tuguegarao City has progressed as a modern city but still embracing its Ibanag heritage. It all started in 2014 when the festival opened with the burning of the supernatural creatures that the Ibanag has believed to exist. The burning of those effigies and the entrance of religious statues represents the transition of the Ibanag from folk religiosity to Christianity.



Figure 1. Conversion of the Ibanags to Christianity depicted in the Afi Festival

In 2015, the festival highlighted a scene where two chieftains called the Mengal, lit the torch of Mayor Jefferson Soriano and eventually lighting the main torch. This scene combines the past and the present by telling a story of how the Ibanags looked highly to their leaders and still holds true until today. The fire of the torch represents the responsibility that the ancient Mengals is transferring to the leaders of the present generation.



Figure 2. The Mengals, represented by the dancers, transferring the fire that represents the responsibility to lead the present generation of Ibanags

In the next two versions of the Afi Festival, Allan Samonte (choreographer of Afi Festival 2018) stressed that culture is one of the greatest factors to consider in presenting a production that resembles and that really showcases what is Afi festival in the Ibanag context. According to him, “When we speak of fire, there will always be the concept of life, and life is denoted by light. If we try to go to the biblical aspect, life before during the Pentecost was in the form of a tongue of fire. Since Ibanags are religious when it comes to culture, their religiosity runs into their way of life - that is why we have a lot of churches in Tuguegarao. One of the important elements that I did in the dance is the inclusion of some Ibanag culture movements, styles, costumes and colors.”

Conclusions

Based on the findings of the study, these conclusions can be drawn:

The Afi Dance, a major feature of the AFI Festival, is an authentic reflection of the Ibanag cultural heritage. Thru its choreography, costumes, props, and music throughout the years, it effectively told a story of the life of the Ibanags in the old and modern times. The dance evolved on the basis of some succession of events significant to the life of the Ibanags – from pre-colonial belief systems, religion, folk occupations and now that Tuguegarao is a modern city embracing its rich cultural heritage.

Recommendations

Based on the foregoing conclusions, the following recommendations are offered:

1. The Afi Dance should be maintained as a cultural event with educational and aesthetic value as an avenue to instill the rich life world of the Ibanags in Tuguegarao City among the people, especially the youth and the outsiders.
2. In line with DepEd’s localization and contextualization of lesson content, teachers should use the information derived about the life world of the Ibanags in developing or enriching their instructional materials and the content of their lessons as a way to preserve and promote local culture.

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