
Philippine Literature: Impact of Colonial History on Identity

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Abstract

This study investigates the intricate dynamics of character behavior, attitudes, and beliefs within the context of negotiating tensions between indigenous and colonial cultures. The study focuses on scrutinizing these elements to shed light on the profound impact of colonial history on identity in Philippine literature. Through a detailed examination of characters, this research aims to elucidate how individuals navigate and respond to the complex interplay between indigenous and colonial influences, contributing to a deeper understanding of the multifaceted implications of historical legacies on cultural identity within Philippine literature.

Keywords: Philippine Literature, Colonial, History, Sorrow, Identity

Introduction

Philippine literature has developed as it influences the colonization of Filipino identity and explores the Spanish and American colonial periods, notably as it marks the literary works (Abad, 1984). As they blend, the indigenous, Spanish, and American literary traditions become a reflection and are defined as a hybrid identity (Lumbera, 1986).

The powerful theme that the Filipino desires for sovereignty is to have a forged identity (let, 1979). Filipino identity saw the rising robustness of the postcolonial period as a redefining of the colonial past (San Juan, 2000).

In celebrating writers who delve into the impact of colonial history on Filipino identity, the story "The Sorrow of Don Joaquin" by Nick Joaquin, set in the Spanish colonial era, reveals the struggles of the Filipino elite (Joaquin, 1977). Don Joaquin's portrayal of identity reflects his sorrow and anguish (Pantoja-Hidalgo, 2004). The narrative highlights the hybridization of Filipino identity through the integration of indigenous and Spanish elements during the colonial period (Lumbera, 1986). The story further explores resistance, acceptance, and adaptation, depicting the complex dynamics of identity formation within the colonial history of the Philippines (San Juan, 2000).

In "The Sorrow of Don Joaquin", Joaquin emotionally remarks:

“He was the very pattern of the Filipino, who loved his country, with a fierce, brooding love but who could not- because he was civilized- cry out this love, this pain” (Joaquin, 1977, p. 102)

This quote encapsulates the predicament of the colonized Filipino elite – their love for their homeland is juxtaposed against their inability to express it, owing to the 'civilized' norms imposed by the colonizers (Pantoja-Hidalgo, 2004). The 'fierce, brooding love' signifies Filipinos' deeply rooted indigenous identity, while the restraint in expressing it symbolizes the influence of Spanish colonial rule (Lumbera, 1986). The 'Pain' in the quote could be interpreted as the collective suffering of a nation striving to maintain its distinct identity amidst prevailing colonial forces (San Juan, 2000).

Methodology

This research paper will employ Stuart Hall's Cultural Studies approach to examine Nick Joaquin's "The Sorrow of Don Joaquin". This paper will analyze and explore cultural hybridity, resistance and adaptation, symbolism and metaphor, reader interpretation, and postcolonial identity.

Results and Discussion

Cultural Hybridity

"The Sorrow of Don Joaquin" revolves around his dual cultural identity, encompassing Spanish and Filipino cultures. Don Joaquin wields significant influence in Spanish culture as the proprietor of vast and affluent land. Conversely, Doña Lupeng embodies a robust Filipino culture that defines her identity. Throughout their marriage, Don Joaquin steadfastly maintains his Spanish heritage, expressing disdain for Filipino traditions, even comparing his ancestral house unfavorably with a critical eye.

In contrast, Doña Lupeng is committed to her Filipino identity. She deliberately refrains from succumbing to the influence of Spanish traditions, pondering the distinctions in Filipino ways of grieving. This dynamic reflects Hall's concept of cultural hybridity, wherein identities are constantly in flux and negotiation (Hall, 1992, p. 392).

An illustrative example of cultural hybridity in the narrative is the characterization of Doña Lupeng's mother as a "half-caste" (Joaquin 1996, p. 4). This term denotes blending different heritages, representing a mixed and diverse cultural background. The story delves into the intricacies of cultural hybridity by highlighting the clash of cultures using Filipino-Spanish languages. Don Joaquin speaks in Spanish, emphasizing the cultural divide, while Doña Lupeng and her mother communicate in Filipino, symbolizing the intricate interplay of these two distinct cultural spheres.

Resistance and Adaptation

In the story, both Don Joaquin and Doña Lupeng exhibit resistance and adaptation to their respective cultural backgrounds. Don Joaquin clings to his Spanish heritage and refuses to embrace Filipino customs fully. He is described as "a Spaniard in his heart" (Joaquin, 1996, p. 3) and is deeply attached to the ancestral house, symbolizing his resistance to change and adaptation. He resents the encroachment of Filipino culture and traditions, viewing them as inferior to his Spanish heritage.

On the other hand, Doña Lupeng embraces her Filipino identity and resists Spanish influence. She rejects traditional Spanish mourning practices and insists on following Filipino customs. She challenges Don Joaquin's authority and asserts her agency, refusing to conform to his expectations. In Hall's cultural practice, the resistance and adaptation are still in progress, transforming the resistance (Hall, 1992, p. 393).

Symbolism and Metaphor

Figurative language plays a significant role in "The Sorrow of Don Joaquin." One example is the recurring image of the ancestral house, which symbolizes the legacy of Spanish colonialism and the burden of tradition. The house represents Don Joaquin's past experiences and is described as "a great stone monster" (Joaquin, 1996, p. 3), serving as a metaphor for a burdensome place. It becomes a powerful symbol of Spanish colonialism, suffocating Don Joaquin's life.

The image of the river represents the flow of time and change, connecting to Don Joaquin's ancestral house, described as a "living thing" (Joaquin, 1996, p. 5), implying growth and transformation. The symbols and metaphors present in the story align with Hall's contention on complex ideas (Hall, 1992, p. 396).

Reader Interpretation

"The Sorrow of Don Joaquin" invites readers to interpret and

engage with its cultural identity and colonialism themes. The story allows room for readers to bring their own experiences and cultural contexts to the interpretation of the characters' struggles. Readers can empathize with Don Joaquin's internal conflict between his Spanish heritage and the changing Filipino society. They can also resonate with Doña Lupeng's resistance to the oppressive Spanish influence and her embrace of her Filipino identity.

One aspect of the story that engages readers is the ending, where Don Joaquin is left alone in the ancestral house, reflecting on his sorrow and regret. Readers can interpret the story's ending in different ways, contemplating how the narrative changes and how it brings the past into focus as they cling or reminisce. The story allows readers to explore multiple cultural identities and complexities inherent in different cultures.

Readers can articulate their points of view, sharing their experiences with cultures as they interpret the story. As Hall argues, "Meaning is not something that resides in the text itself but is produced in the act of reading" (Hall, 1991, p. 398).

Postcolonial Identity

The story "The Sorrow of Don Joaquin" explores postcolonial identity through the perspectives of Don Joaquin and Doña Lupeng. Don Joaquin represents the colonial legacy and grapples with his identity as a Spanish landowner in Filipino society. His appreciation for Spanish culture and disdain for Filipino culture reflect the complexities of postcolonial identity, where legacies create tension as individuals navigate their colonial and indigenous cultures.

On the other hand, Don Joaquin's wives persistently resist and reject influence, with Doña Lupeng refusing to be influenced by Spanish culture and embracing her Filipino heritage. Her character is defined as "Hybrid" and "Diasporic," challenging her husband's authority and navigating the complexities of her mixed cultures in the context of postcolonial

identities.

Postcolonial identities highlight power relations, with Don Joaquin being entitled as a wealthy landowner, giving him superiority over his wife. However, the wife consistently resists these power dynamics, as seen in Hall's argument about postcolonial identities and the historical process (Hall, 1992, p. 401).

"The Sorrow of Don Joaquin" delves into the complexities of postcolonial identity and the ongoing negotiation of cultural identities in a postcolonial context. It explores the tensions, conflicts, and adaptations individuals undergo as they navigate their cultural heritage and the legacies of colonialism.

Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Summary

Cultural hybridity blends diverse elements, forming new cultural expressions. Marginalized communities employ resistance and adaptation to challenge oppression and adapt to change. Symbolism and metaphor intricately convey meaning and complex ideas. Reader interpretation underscores the active role in constructing meaning from texts. Postcolonial identity explores experiences and identities in the aftermath of colonialism.

Conclusions

The fluidity of cultural expression challenges fixed norms while marginalized communities navigate strategies to assert agency. Diverse interpretations underscore the significance of individual perspectives in understanding cultural text, revealing ongoing struggles for self-definition in the aftermath of colonialism.

Recommendations

Embrace cultural hybridity for creativity and inclusivity by supporting initiatives blending cultural elements. Prioritize resources and platforms for marginalized communities to resist oppression and adapt.

Promote critical engagement with symbolism and metaphor through developing critical thinking and media literacy. Foster inclusive postcolonial identities by creating spaces for dialogue, acknowledging complexities, and promoting diverse voices through educational and community initiatives.

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