

# Bayok in the Modern Era: A Study of Meranaw Youth Perceptions

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## Abstract

This study investigates the perceptions of *bayok*, a traditional Meranaw folksong performed by *onor* (folk singers), among selected Meranaw students of Mindanao State University–Main Campus. Rooted in the *Darangen* epic, *bayok* functions not only as entertainment but also as a communicative medium and a cultural mechanism for reinforcing kinship ties during weddings, enthronements, and funerals. Historically integral to Meranaw cultural identity, *bayok* has experienced a decline in popularity among younger generations, increasingly overshadowed by mainstream music. Guided by cultural preservation theory and the sociocultural transmission framework, this study examines how awareness, participation, and intergenerational transmission influence the sustainability of intangible heritage. Employing a mixed-methods design, data were collected through surveys, focus group discussions, and interviews. Results indicate that while the majority of respondents acknowledge *bayok* as a significant cultural heritage and advocate for its inclusion in school curricula, formation of cultural organizations, and systematic documentation, modern music remains more prevalent in their preferences. The findings reveal a persistent tension between tradition and modernity, underscoring the urgency of proactive cultural preservation strategies to safeguard *bayok* in contemporary society.

**Keywords:** Meranaw culture; *bayok*; cultural preservation; intangible heritage; sociocultural transmission; traditional music; cultural sustainability.

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## **1. Introduction**

The Meranaw people—also referred to as M'ranao, Maranao, or M'ranao, Meranaw—are among the most prominent conservative Muslim ethnolinguistic groups in the Philippines and one of the largest cultural minorities in the country. Predominantly residing in Lanao del Sur and parts of Lanao del Norte in Mindanao, they have preserved their rich cultural heritage up to the present [1]. As part of the Moro identity in the southern Philippines, the Meranaws share biological, social, and cultural origins with other Filipino and Malay peoples. Yet, historical developments since the fifteenth century—shaped by Indian, Arab, Chinese, Spanish, and American influences—have forged a distinct cultural synthesis reflected in their history, social structure, and arts [2].

Music occupies a central place in Meranaw culture, serving as artistic expression, social binder, and historical vessel. Traditionally integrated into life-cycle events and community rituals—such as weddings, enthronements, funerals, healing ceremonies, and agricultural rites [3] Meranaw music functions beyond entertainment. It is a repository of values, beliefs, and oral traditions, reinforcing kinship ties and communal identity. Among the most significant genres of Meranaw oral literature is the *bayok*, a traditional folksong performed without instrumental accompaniment. The author [4] describes *bayok* as orally transmitted songs performed by *onor*—traditional singers skilled in the Meranaw language, *ijma* (consensus), and *taritib* (customary laws). Characterized by rhythmic, sonorous chanting, *bayok* is featured in significant gatherings, functioning as both art and communication. It can narrate genealogies, convey social messages, and strengthen familial and social bonds.

In traditional contexts, *bayok* holds an esteemed place in ceremonies. During weddings, *onor* recount the ancestry of the bride and groom, legitimizing the union within the community. These performances, often lasting through the night, draw people together in shared cultural experience. At enthronements, *bayok* both entertains and anchors the ceremony in tradition, symbolizing the continuity of Meranaw heritage. Thematically, *bayok* spans narratives of tradition, social values, history, and moral lessons, mirroring the Meranaw worldview. As the author [1] notes, such oral traditions provide deep insight into lived realities, spiritual beliefs, and social systems. This aligns with the authors' [5] view that oral literature is both art and a cultural resource for transmitting history and identity.

Despite its significance, concerns have emerged about the waning engagement of younger Meranaws with *bayok*. While it is still performed at some events, many youth perceive it as outdated or irrelevant, reflecting broader challenges of cultural preservation amid globalization, technological change, and shifting values [1,3]. This tension between continuity and generational change raises questions for scholars and cultural advocates. The author [6] emphasizes that intangible heritage survives not through archiving alone, but through active practice. The sustainability of *bayok* depends on the willingness of younger Meranaws to engage with it—whether as performers, audiences, or custodians. Rapid social changes, however, create uncertainty about how deeply the youth understand and value the form. The study rests on the observation that oral traditions are vulnerable when younger generations view them as obsolete. Ethnographic accounts suggest that forms like *bayok* endure when they remain socially functional and emotionally resonant [5]. Without such relevance, they risk becoming mere historical artifacts. Understanding contemporary youth perceptions of *bayok* is thus critical to gauging its future role. This research also draws on [7] concept of cultural capital, which frames cultural knowledge and practices as forms of social power. Familiarity with *bayok* can be seen as embodied cultural capital, reflecting immersion

in Meranaw tradition. A decline in its appreciation could indicate both cultural shift and changes in how cultural capital is distributed within the community.

The study aims to document not only the functions of *bayok* but also the meanings attributed to it by Meranaw youth. It will explore whether *bayok* is still seen as relevant, whether it maintains its role in cultural bonding, and how younger generations negotiate its place within their identities. The findings will contribute to discourses on intangible heritage preservation, intergenerational transmission, and the adaptation of traditional art forms in evolving socio-cultural contexts. Ultimately, the central question is whether *bayok* can sustain its vitality in the twenty-first century or whether it will become a symbolic relic of the past. Addressing this will shed light on the challenges of safeguarding indigenous musical traditions in the Philippines and may inform preservation strategies, promote intergenerational dialogue, and encourage renewed appreciation for *bayok* as a lasting emblem of Meranaw identity.

## **2. Theoretical Framework**

This study is anchored on three complementary theories that illuminate the cultural, communicative, and performative dimensions of *bayok* as a Meranaw oral tradition: the Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) framework of UNESCO, Finnegan's oral literature theory, and Bauman's performance theory.

First, the Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) framework as defined by the UNESCO [8] views traditions, expressions, and knowledge systems as living heritage that communities recognize as part of their cultural identity. ICH is transmitted across generations and continually recreated in response to the environment, historical conditions, and social changes. Within this perspective, *bayok* is understood as a vital cultural expression that embodies Meranaw history, values, and identity. The ICH framework emphasizes that safeguarding such traditions requires active participation and transmission within the community rather than passive documentation. This means that for *bayok* to remain culturally vibrant, it must continue to be performed, taught, and appreciated in its social context, especially among younger generations.

Second, the author [5] oral literature theory situates *bayok* within a broader tradition of verbal arts that function as repositories of communal memory. According to Finnegan, oral literature is not a static relic but an active cultural process that conveys narratives, social norms, and collective histories. It is both an art form and a social practice, deeply embedded in the cultural life of the community. In the case of *bayok*, its oral transmission by onor (traditional singers) reinforces kinship ties, recounts genealogies, and instills moral lessons. This perspective highlights the risk that when oral traditions are no longer actively transmitted, they risk fading from cultural consciousness, losing not only their artistic form but also their embedded social meanings.

Third, the authors' [9] performance theory provides a lens for understanding *bayok* as a socially situated communicative act. Bauman defines performance as a mode of communication in which the act of expression is foregrounded, drawing attention to the artistry and skill of the performer. In *bayok* performances, the onor engages the audience through stylized language, rhythm, and melody, creating a shared cultural experience. These performances are not merely entertainment; they are acts of social affirmation that legitimize community events,

such as weddings and enthronements, and reinforce the social order. Performance theory also draws attention to the interactive nature of *bayok*, where meaning is co-created between performer and audience, and where cultural identity is enacted in real time.

Integrating these three perspectives, *bayok* is conceptualized as a living tradition (ICH), an oral literature with deep cultural functions [5] and a dynamic social performance [9]. Together, these theories provide a framework for exploring the central research questions: How do contemporary Meranaw youth perceive *bayok* in relation to their identity? What factors influence its continued transmission or decline? And how does performance context shape its relevance in modern Meranaw society? By combining heritage preservation, oral literature, and performance perspectives, this theoretical framework underscores the complex nature of *bayok*—as a form of cultural expression, a vessel of communal memory, and a social act that reaffirms Meranaw identity. This integrated approach offers a robust foundation for analyzing both the cultural significance and the contemporary challenges faced by this traditional art form.

### **3. Review of Related Literature**

The Meranaw, identified as one of the largest ethnolinguistic Muslim groups in the Philippines, have preserved their distinct religious and cultural traditions for centuries [10]. Their cultural heritage encompasses music, dance, oral literature, architecture, handicrafts, and weaponry—considered among the most intricate art forms in Southeast Asia. The richness of their artistic heritage has been deeply influenced, yet also preserved, by the Islamic faith. The etymology of the term *Maranao* (or *Meranaw*) is rooted in the word *ranao*, meaning “lake.” This reflects their identity as the “people of the lake” or “lake dwellers,” referring to those who reside along Lake Lanao [11]. The author [12] affirms this definition, noting that Lake Lanao is the second-largest and deepest lake in the Philippines, and that the term “Meranaw” has passed into common usage to describe the ethnic identity of its people.

Long before the arrival of Spanish, American, and Japanese colonizers, the Meranaw already maintained their own sociopolitical structure, the *Pat a Pangampong ko Ranao* (Four Confederated States of Lanao), co-equal in authority. Governed by sultans, they adhered to traditional laws known as *Ijma* and *Taritib*. Their literary heritage, most notably the *Darangen* epic, preserves narratives of their origins and values [13]. Like other indigenous groups, the Meranaw are renowned for their ancient wood and metal crafts. These artistic skills—believed to have been passed down from mythical ancestors recounted in the *Darangen*—are evident in their *okir* carvings, which depict stylized plant and animal forms. These designs adorn houses, boats, furniture, utensils, instruments, and brassware, remaining relatively untouched by Western influence [10]. Music holds a central role in Meranaw cultural expression. Among its most distinct forms is the *bayok*, a traditional folksong considered an indispensable component of Meranaw literature long before colonial contact [14]. The *bayok* encompasses themes of romance, estrangement, death, merriment, and genealogy [11]. Traditionally performed during weddings, coronations, and other social gatherings, *bayok* singing involves community participation, with performers beginning with *podi* (praise) and often incorporating *taritib* (social arrangement or genealogy) into their performances [15]. Each Muslim ethnolinguistic group in Mindanao maintains its own corpus of folk literature, marked by unique traits yet unified under the cultural influence of Islam. Islam, being a comprehensive way of life, has permeated many

aspects of these literary traditions, contributing to a shared identity among the *Ummah* [13]. Folk literature in these communities appears in both prose and verse, varying in style and form due to linguistic diversity. Common genres include folktales, myths, legends, epics, poems, folksongs, riddles, and proverbs—transmitted orally from generation to generation. Such oral traditions depend on participatory audiences who listen, react, and retell narratives, ensuring cultural continuity [16].

Among the Meranaw, the *Darangen* epic and *bayok* remain emblematic of their literary heritage. However, these traditions are now rarely performed, largely due to the decline in cultural bearers and the deterioration of peace and order in some communities [4]. To date, three major Muslim groups have identified their epics: the Meranaw (*Darangen*), the Maguindanao (*Indarapatra at Solayman*), and the Tausug (*Parang Sabil hi Abdullah iban hi Isara*) [4]. Ballads, another prominent form, are narrative songs often performed with instruments such as the *gabbang*, *kulintang*, or *biyula*. In Muslim cultural communities, ballads tend to be historical rather than lyrical, celebrating the heroism of significant figures [16]. Many are religious or didactic in nature, reflecting the pervasive influence of Islam. Preservation of these oral traditions faces challenges, including the scarcity of cultural bearers and limited documentation efforts. While some research has been undertaken, it is often spearheaded by foreign scholars. Sustainable preservation calls for active participation by Filipino Muslim communities to safeguard their literary heritage from distortion and neglect [16].

#### **4. Origin of *Bayok* and *Onor***

The author [17] famously stated, “*All history is contemporary history*” (p. xx), meaning that the events of the past are inseparable from the present. To understand contemporary traditions, one must look back at their historical roots. This is particularly true for the Meranaw tradition of *bayok*, a lyrical poetic song performed by *onor* (traditional singers), whose origins are deeply intertwined with the cultural memory of the *Darangen* epic. Historically, the Meranaw people of Lanao have been selective in recording their past. As Tawagon explains, they do not maintain written historical accounts (*totolan*), and their genealogical narratives focus more on lineage and the names of ancestors rather than the precise dates or contexts of events. This approach reflects a worldview that emphasizes the prestige of descent over chronological accuracy. Consequently, theories in historiography that prioritize socio-political movements over individuals have limited application in Lanao, as the Meranaw perspective centers on personages rather than abstract historical forces. Music and oral literature have long played a vital role in Meranaw society. Dr. Frank Laubach, who lived among the Meranaws in the 1930s, observed their deep fondness for singing, storytelling, and various oral traditions, including the *Darangen* (epic), *bayok* (lyrical poems), *kisa* (heroic tales), and *lalag* (orations) [18]. Among these, *bayok* stands out as a distinctive form of poetic communication, historically used to express emotions—particularly love—through public poetic exchanges rather than private correspondence [19].

The *bayok* is part of a broader spectrum of Meranaw songs, each suited to specific occasions. The *Darangen* itself, now recognized by UNESCO as a Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity, recounts the adventures of the warrior-prince Paramata Bantugen and is performed over several nights during grand celebrations. Other forms include the *kandomana* and *kapanotol*, narrating communal adventures, and lullabies such as *kambong-bong* and *ida-ida ko mga wata* [4]. The origin of *bayok* is often linked to the legendary Kingdom

of Bumbaran—present-day Amai Manabilang—celebrated in the *Darangen* for its beauty and grandeur [20] According to the author [11] the *bayok* may have first been sung during the reign of Diwata Ndao Guibon, a royal ancestor of the Magalindai Bumbaran lineage. During his coronation, *onor* would perform *bayok* that included edicts outlining the sultan’s duties, reminding him to govern justly and uphold tradition.

Structurally, the *bayok* begins with *podì* (praise) and follows with *taritib* (social order), often recounting genealogies of the Lanao sultanates. A section known as *katupar* praises the venue and the host, sometimes with subtle romantic imagery—such as the metaphor, “fondness of the box for the trunk beside the cushion,” symbolizing male-female courtship [21]. Unlike modern songs, *bayok* employs formal and dignified language, avoiding triviality or mockery. The *onor* must be careful to maintain honor, as any error could prompt a *datu* to stop the performance. Judging a *bayok* involves evaluating vocal quality, poetic vocabulary, and adherence to *podì* and *taritib*. Performances may be original compositions or adaptations, but they require mastery of improvisation, often incorporating puzzles, metaphors, and ancient Meranaw poetic language [21].

The performance context varies: *bayok* is usually rendered solo, while *kambayoka* involves multiple *onor* in an improvised lyrical exchange tied to the event’s theme [22]. The skill of the *onor* lies in spontaneous composition, weaving personal knowledge, cultural memory, and thematic resonance. The tune is typically sentimental, inspired by the soft rustle of the wind, and the narrative often unfolds in a cause-and-effect sequence. Training to become an *onor* is rigorous. Potri Monabantog [23] recalls years of apprenticeship under a master, learning not only technical skills but also the deep cultural meanings embedded in the form. The art requires not only vocal ability but also cultural literacy, as the *onor* is both entertainer and custodian of tradition. Today, the *bayok* remains integral to royal occasions—such as enthronements, weddings, and reunions—serving both as entertainment and as a living vessel of Meranaw history, law, and values. As a cultural artifact, it embodies the fusion of music, poetry, and social order, connecting the Meranaw people to their ancestral heritage while continuing to shape their communal identity. The Meranaw are known for their strong sense of pride and cultural display, a characteristic evident in the way they celebrate special occasions. These events may be triggered by holidays, social visits, the fulfillment of vows, noteworthy achievements, or other milestones deemed worthy of commemoration through communal feasts [24]. Such gatherings serve as both a social obligation and a cultural expression, showcasing the community’s generosity, hospitality, and artistic heritage.

Feasts are not merely about the abundance of food but also the diverse performances and activities that accompany them. Traditional amusements include *kambayoka* (the singing of *bayok* love songs), *katáro sa lalag* (customary speeches), *kalelang* (the simultaneous playing of *kolintang*, gongs, and drums), and *kasipa* (kickball). These festivities are often enhanced by the sound of bamboo cannons, firecrackers, and celebratory gunfire, with attendees engaging in laughter, cheering, and spirited interaction [25]

#### **4.1. The Role of the Onor in Bayok Performance**

Central to many of these occasions is the *onor*—a traditional *bayok* performer. The *onor* adheres to specific performance protocols that structure the *bayok*. According to Nahara “Potri Monabantog” Casan, a professional *onor*, the performance begins with a four- to five-second hum to establish tonal control. This is followed by the

pamekasan (introduction), then the basmala ko kadnan (glorification of God), and subsequently the padaadat—an acknowledgment of the hosts and dignitaries present, especially the datu, sultan, and other esteemed members of the community. The performance proceeds with the kapanaritib, which recounts the ijma and taritib of Ranao, before finally delivering the thematic content of the *bayok* [25]. Physical appearance and personal charisma are also valued qualities in an onor. Traditionally, performers are expected to be beautiful, possess a pleasant voice, demonstrate familiarity with local genealogies, and wear elegant attire such as the landap. While male onors exist, many are women who sometimes use makeup to enhance their stage presence. Their attire and demeanor are integral to projecting the dignity and prestige of the performance [25].

#### **4.2 Types and Occasions of Bayok**

The *bayok* tradition encompasses various forms, each associated with specific social functions.

- *Bayok sa Kambitiara* (Wedding) – Weddings, often arranged to unite prominent families, are major cultural events where *bayok* plays a central role. Noble families host elaborate celebrations featuring kulintang and agong ensembles. *Bayok* performances during weddings often continue throughout the night until sunrise, especially when the couple belongs to the aristocracy [4]. The lyrics typically emphasize social prestige, unity between noble clans, and the reinforcement of customary laws.
- *Bayok sa Kandato* (Enthronement) – Enthronement ceremonies for a sultan or other high-ranking leader require *bayok* as part of the formalities. The Meranaw political structure is divided into the pat a pengampong ko Ranao (four principalities): Unayan, Masiu, Bayabao, and Baloi [26]. The *bayok* in this context praises leadership virtues, extols noble lineage, and offers moral guidance on governance, justice, and humility [24].
- *Bayok sa Kapapatay* (Death or Mourning) – Performed during the mourning period, particularly for respected individuals, this form of *bayok* blends lamentation with theological reflection. It often praises God, recalls the creation of the soul and body, and reflects on life's impermanence. Performed during the final day of kanggawii, it elevates the prestige of the bereaved family while honoring the deceased's legacy [4].
- *Rinao-Rinao* (Modernized *Bayok*) – In recent decades, *bayok* has evolved into a more contemporary form known as rinao-rinao, integrating modern instruments such as guitars and percussion sticks. This adaptation reflects the dynamic nature of Meranaw music while retaining traditional lyrical themes. Onors in this modern context often negotiate performance fees, with earnings ranging from ₱3,000 to ₱15,000 depending on the scale of the event [25].

#### **4.3 Cultural Significance**

The *bayok* tradition is far more than a form of musical or poetic expression—it is a living cultural repository that safeguards the Meranaw worldview, collective memory, and social values. Rooted in centuries-old oral tradition, *bayok* functions as both an artistic performance and an instrument of cultural continuity, ensuring that the wisdom, beliefs, and ideals of the community are passed down from one generation to the next.

The artistry of *bayok* lies not only in its melodic intonations and poetic structure but also in its thematic depth. Each performance often contains allegories, moral lessons, and historical references, which together serve to affirm the shared identity of the Meranaw people. Through carefully chosen words and rhythmic delivery, *bayok* reinforces values such as respect for elders, loyalty to kin, and the importance of honor and hospitality—virtues deeply embedded in Meranaw culture. Its social role extends beyond mere entertainment. Performed in diverse contexts—from joyous celebrations like weddings to solemn occasions such as enthronements and mourning rituals—*bayok* adapts to the emotional tone and cultural demands of the event. In weddings, it may recount ancestral love stories and blessings, inspiring harmony and unity in the newlyweds' lives together. During enthronements, it upholds political and genealogical legitimacy by recalling the lineage and noble deeds of leaders. In mourning ceremonies, it offers a dignified expression of grief, while simultaneously reaffirming the enduring bonds of community. Moreover, *bayok* serves as a medium of intergenerational dialogue. Elders, often the bearers of this tradition, transmit not only the performance techniques but also the nuanced meanings embedded in each verse. This process strengthens the link between the past and present, fostering a sense of belonging among younger Meranaws and encouraging them to value their heritage in a rapidly changing world.

In an era where globalization poses challenges to indigenous traditions, *bayok* stands as an emblem of cultural resilience. Its continued practice is a testament to the Meranaw people's commitment to preserving their identity amidst external influences. By sustaining *bayok*, the community safeguards a cultural treasure that is both historical and dynamic—an evolving art form that remains anchored in the values and experiences of the Meranaw. Ultimately, *bayok* is not merely remembered; it is lived. Every performance is an act of cultural affirmation, a reaffirmation of collective pride, and a reminder that heritage is most vibrant when it is actively shared and celebrated.

#### ***4.4 Perceptions About Onor***

The onor, a traditional artist tasked with performing *bayok*, occupies a significant yet somewhat varied place in the awareness of the respondents. Out of thirty participants, twenty demonstrated familiarity with the role and significance of the onor, while ten admitted to having no prior knowledge of the term. Gender distribution shows that nine male and eleven female participants were aware of what an onor is, whereas six males and four females were unfamiliar with the concept, indicating only a slight difference in awareness levels between genders.

For those knowledgeable about the onor, the role is often associated with cultural depth, linguistic richness, and a strong connection to Meranaw heritage. Traditionally, the onor was recognized for using deep, classical Meranaw vocabulary and for performing without the accompaniment of musical instruments. The art form relied solely on the strength of oral delivery, rhythm, and poetic structure, underscoring its refined and intellectual nature. However, perceptions also reflect an awareness of how the practice has evolved over time. Many respondents noted that contemporary *bayok* performances sometimes incorporate instruments such as sticks, wood, and guitars, with some rhythms adapted from popular Tagalog songs. While these innovations introduce new styles and accessibility, they also mark a departure from the purely oral and spontaneous tradition. In modern contexts, performers often prepare written scripts instead of composing verses extemporaneously, a shift that some view as a dilution of the original artistry.



The transformation of the onor's presentation style was also observed, with certain performers now focusing more on entertainment value. This includes the adoption of elaborate stage makeup and, in some cases, the abandonment of traditional veils, signaling a move toward more visually engaging but less conservative performances. Despite these changes, many respondents still regard onors as highly skilled cultural bearers. Their ability to improvise poetic narratives, describe current events, and adapt to diverse audiences without prior preparation remains a celebrated talent. This spontaneous composition not only entertains but also reinforces cultural pride, making the onor an enduring symbol of Meranaw creativity and identity. Overall, perceptions about the onor reveal both respect for its traditional form and acknowledgment of its adaptive evolution. While modernization has altered aspects of performance, the role continues to be valued as a vibrant link between past traditions and contemporary expression.

#### ***4.5 Meaning and Characteristics of Bayok and Onor***

From the collective responses, *bayok* emerges as a traditional Meranaw folk song deeply embedded in the community's cultural fabric. It is performed during a variety of social and ceremonial occasions, serving as both artistic expression and cultural preservation. Historically, *bayok* was rendered a cappella, relying solely on the power and skill of the performer's voice. Over time, however, it has adapted to contemporary sensibilities by incorporating musical accompaniment, adding depth and richness to its delivery while retaining its core traditional essence. At its heart, *bayok* is an artistic narration. Its themes range from epic tales rooted in Meranaw oral literature, to depictions of everyday life, to expressions of personal sentiments such as love, longing, or grief. The form's versatility allows it to be integrated into diverse settings—whether as part of courtship rituals, enthronement ceremonies, agricultural gatherings, or even solemn funeral rites. In each of these contexts, *bayok* functions not merely as entertainment but as a meaningful communicative act, reinforcing social bonds and affirming shared identity. Central to the life of *bayok* is the onor, a role that extends far beyond performance. The onor is regarded as a cultural custodian entrusted with preserving and transmitting the intricate knowledge that underpins the Meranaw worldview. This responsibility demands mastery over various domains: the genealogical records known as *salsila*, the codified customary laws (*Ijma* and *Taritib*), the narrative of Creation as understood in Meranaw tradition, Islamic teachings, and the refined art of oral delivery. The onor must also be adept in the sophisticated verbal artistry that gives *bayok* its distinctive cadence, metaphorical richness, and cultural resonance.

The educational dimension of *bayok* is equally significant. Beyond its lyrical beauty, it serves as a vehicle for passing down historical memory, ethical principles, and community values to younger generations. By embedding cultural lessons within poetic performance, *bayok* ensures that vital aspects of Meranaw identity remain alive and relevant, even in the face of modern change. A proper performance follows strict traditional protocols. These include the use of classical Meranaw language, adherence to established structural patterns, and the wearing of culturally appropriate attire. Such elements are not mere ornamentation; they embody respect for tradition and reinforce the performance's authenticity. In this way, *bayok* and its onor stand as living symbols of continuity, bridging the past and the present while safeguarding the cultural legacy for the future.

#### **4.6 Perceptions of Bayok in Kambitiara, Kandato, and Kapapatay**

When respondents were asked about their perceptions of specific types of *bayok*—namely *bayok sa Kambitiara*, *bayok sa Kandato*, and *bayok sa Kapapatay*—a clear divergence in appreciation emerged. Only three participants expressed genuine admiration for these forms, while the remaining twenty-seven did not share the same enthusiasm. This disparity in perception reflects broader challenges surrounding the preservation and transmission of traditional oral art forms in contemporary Meranaw society. Those who appreciated these specific types of *bayok* emphasized several qualities that, to them, made the art form worth preserving and celebrating. They valued the lyrical beauty embedded in the verses, where rhythm, tone, and cadence intertwined to produce an aesthetically pleasing performance. They also highlighted the richness of idiomatic expressions found in the verses, noting how these linguistic devices convey layered meanings that often go beyond literal interpretation. Furthermore, they appreciated the profound messages contained within the *bayok*, which often serve as moral lessons, reflections on life, or expressions of deep cultural values. For these respondents, *bayok* is not merely an art form but a vessel for cultural wisdom and poetic expression, embodying the intellectual and artistic heritage of the Meranaw people.

On the other hand, the majority of respondents found little personal engagement with these specific types of *bayok*. They described them as boring, lacking the dynamism that could hold the attention of modern audiences. Some perceived the verses as vague, making it difficult to discern the intended meaning without extensive cultural and linguistic knowledge. Interestingly, this sentiment was shared even among native Meranaws, suggesting that generational and experiential gaps have contributed to a decline in the accessibility of traditional oral literature. For many, the challenge lay not only in the complexity of the idiomatic expressions but also in the formal structure and delivery of *bayok*, which may appear slow-paced and less stimulating compared to contemporary entertainment mediums.

This divide in perception underscores a tension between the intrinsic cultural value of *bayok* and its relevance to present-day audiences. While a small group continues to admire and uphold the beauty of traditional *bayok*, a larger portion of the younger generation struggles to connect with it in its traditional form. The findings point to the need for innovative cultural preservation strategies—ones that honor the authenticity of *bayok* while making it more accessible and engaging for modern listeners.

#### **4.7 Why Meranaw Youth Should Learn and Appreciate Bayok**

*Bayok*, a traditional Meranaw form of poetic expression, occupies a central place in the cultural identity of the Meranaw people. It is not simply an art form but a vital element of the community's intangible heritage, encapsulating historical narratives, social values, and artistic ingenuity [27]. Several participants in the present study highlighted that *bayok* serves as a repository of ancestral wisdom and a reflection of the distinct artistry of the Meranaw—characterized by rhythm, metaphor, and oral eloquence refined over generations. The tradition is deeply intertwined with Meranaw identity, functioning both as a cultural expression and as a conduit of moral instruction. As the author [28] notes, oral traditions such as *bayok* often serve as vehicles for the transmission of ethics, social norms, and collective memory. Some respondents stressed that while religious education—particularly the study of the Holy Qur'an—remains paramount, learning *bayok* can complement rather than

compete with religious and academic pursuits. This reflects the view that cultural preservation and religious learning can coexist harmoniously when managed with discipline and intention.

Importantly, *bayok* functions as a bridge between generations, linking contemporary youth with the lived experiences of their ancestors. It conveys lessons about resilience, honor, and community cohesion—values that remain relevant in modern Meranaw society. Neglecting such traditions risks severing this intergenerational link, eroding cultural identity in the process. According to UNESCO, safeguarding intangible cultural heritage is essential for maintaining cultural diversity in an increasingly globalized world. By learning and appreciating *bayok*, the youth do not merely acquire a skill; they inherit a worldview and a sense of belonging that anchors them in their heritage. The preservation of *bayok* is therefore not only a matter of artistic pride but also a cultural necessity. As the author [27] emphasizes, sustaining traditional art forms in the face of modern influences requires active engagement from younger generations, who serve as both recipients and transmitters of tradition.

#### ***4.8 Youth Contribution to the Preservation of Bayok***

The preservation of *bayok* cannot be left solely to the elders; it demands the active participation of the youth, who hold the responsibility of carrying it forward. Respondents in the study suggested several practical approaches to ensure the survival of this cultural treasure. One proposed strategy is the establishment of youth-led organizations dedicated to promoting Meranaw culture, with a special focus on *bayok*. These groups could organize cultural workshops, performance festivals, and educational events that make *bayok* visible and engaging to the community. Such initiatives echo the findings of the author [30], who asserts that cultural revival efforts thrive when local youth are empowered to take leadership roles. Integrating *bayok* into the school curriculum was also identified as a critical measure. This could be implemented within subjects such as literature, music, or history, ensuring that students encounter *bayok* not merely as a historical artifact but as a living art form. Formal education can thus serve as a structured platform for cultural transmission, aligning with the recommendations of the National Commission for Culture and the Arts [31] regarding the inclusion of indigenous traditions in basic education.

Documentation emerged as another important preservation strategy. Written and digital archives of *bayok*—complete with translations, contextual explanations, and recordings—would make it more accessible to future generations. This approach aligns with the authors' [32] argument that the documentation of oral traditions in multiple media formats is essential for their survival in a rapidly digitizing world. However, respondents emphasized that preservation must go beyond passive listening or theoretical knowledge. Active practice is essential. Youth should be encouraged not only to memorize and perform traditional *bayok* but also to compose original verses that incorporate contemporary themes while maintaining the traditional structure. This creative engagement ensures that *bayok* remains dynamic rather than static. A significant concern is that if *bayok* remains confined to a small number of aging practitioners, it risks extinction. As UNESCO [8] warns, intangible heritage is particularly vulnerable when it is not actively practiced by younger generations. To address this, some suggested merging *bayok* instruction with more popular musical genres, making it more appealing and relatable. This hybridization—while respecting traditional forms—could attract broader youth interest without compromising cultural integrity.

Ultimately, the role of the Meranaw youth in preserving *bayok* is both practical and symbolic. By engaging with this art form, they affirm their identity, strengthen their cultural roots, and contribute to the continuity of a heritage that is uniquely theirs. In doing so, they fulfill the dual role of learners and cultural custodians, ensuring that *bayok* continues to thrive in the modern era.

#### ***4.9 Preference between Ethnic and Foreign Music***

When respondents were asked to indicate their preference between ethnic and foreign music, the results revealed a noticeable inclination toward foreign music. Out of the thirty participants, more than half expressed a preference for foreign songs, eleven respondents favored ethnic music, and five remained neutral. This distribution suggests that while ethnic music still retains a degree of cultural significance, the influence of globalization and mass media appears to shape the musical tastes of many young listeners.

Those who favored foreign music identified several key reasons for their choice. One of the most frequently mentioned factors was accessibility. Foreign music—whether Western pop, K-pop, or other internationally popular genres—is readily available through online platforms, radio stations, and television programs. In contrast, ethnic music such as *bayok* is less frequently broadcast and often confined to specific cultural events or community gatherings. The constant exposure to foreign music, coupled with the ease of accessing it through streaming services, has made it a dominant feature of many young people's daily listening habits [33].

Another reason cited was popularity. Foreign music often benefits from extensive marketing campaigns, social media trends, and global fan communities, which contribute to its strong appeal among youth. This trend reflects the findings of the authors [34], who argued that cultural products with high commercial visibility tend to overshadow local and traditional forms of expression, especially in urbanized and media-saturated environments. Respondents also mentioned the clarity of language as an advantage, particularly for those who understand English or other widely used foreign languages. Lyrics in these languages are often perceived as easier to comprehend than the traditional poetic structure and metaphor-rich vocabulary of *bayok*, which can be challenging for listeners unfamiliar with its cultural and historical context.

Entertainment value was another dominant theme in the responses. Many participants described foreign music as dynamic, emotionally engaging, and versatile in style, encompassing genres such as pop, rock, R&B, and electronic dance music. These styles often come with visually appealing music videos, energetic performances, and celebrity personas that contribute to their entertainment appeal. In comparison, some respondents found *bayok* to be too obscure, monotonous, or slow-paced. They described it as more ceremonial than recreational, often associated with formal or traditional gatherings rather than casual enjoyment. This aligns with the observations of the author [35], who noted that traditional music forms often serve specific cultural functions that may not cater to modern entertainment preferences.

However, it is worth noting that those who preferred ethnic music valued it for its authenticity, cultural heritage, and deep connection to identity. These respondents recognized *bayok* as an important cultural artifact that embodies the history, values, and artistry of the Meranaw people. Yet, their numbers were outpaced by those who

have grown accustomed to the globalized soundscape, where musical consumption is increasingly influenced by digital accessibility, peer trends, and international media exposure. The data underscores the ongoing tension between cultural preservation and the pressures of modernization. While foreign music currently dominates the preferences of the majority, the enduring appreciation for ethnic music among a significant minority suggests that traditional forms like *bayok* still hold a meaningful place in the cultural consciousness. Sustaining this appreciation, however, may require deliberate cultural education and more innovative approaches to making ethnic music accessible and engaging for younger generations.

## **5. Conclusion**

This study set out to explore the perceptions of Meranaw youth regarding *bayok*, a traditional folk song deeply rooted in the community's cultural and social life. Drawing from the frameworks of UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH), Finnegan's oral literature theory, and Bauman's performance theory, the research positioned *bayok* not merely as a musical form, but as a living tradition, a repository of historical memory, and a performative act that affirms Meranaw identity. The findings reveal a complex interplay between preservation and adaptation, tradition and modernity, and generational continuity and change. The unanimous positive regard expressed by the thirty respondents—fifteen males and fifteen females—underscores *bayok*'s enduring cultural value. This uniformity of perception, regardless of geographic origin or familial ties to an onor (traditional performer), suggests that *bayok* remains embedded in the collective Meranaw consciousness. However, the study also found that modern music exerts a stronger pull on the daily listening preferences of youth, highlighting a potential dissonance between cultural appreciation and actual cultural practice.

Awareness of the onor and its role varied among respondents. While most recognized the onor as a custodian of deep Meranaw linguistic and cultural knowledge, a significant portion admitted unfamiliarity with the term or its full significance. Those who were familiar tended to value the onor's mastery of classical Meranaw vocabulary, genealogical recitation, and improvisational skill. However, perceptions also reflected an awareness of changes in performance practice—such as the introduction of modern instruments, pre-written scripts, and more visually focused presentation styles—which, while increasing accessibility, may dilute the traditional essence of *bayok*. This duality points to a broader reality: adaptation can both preserve and transform heritage. The study's examination of *bayok* in its specific ceremonial forms—*bayok sa Kambitiara* (wedding), *bayok sa Kandato* (enthronement), and *bayok sa Kapapatay* (mourning)—revealed a divergence in appreciation. Only a small minority expressed strong admiration for these ceremonial variants, while the majority showed limited enthusiasm. This disparity suggests that while *bayok* as a general tradition remains valued, its more formal and ritualized expressions may be losing resonance among younger generations. Such a finding echoes broader global trends in which ceremonial heritage forms face a greater risk of obsolescence compared to more casual or entertainment-oriented adaptations.

From a theoretical perspective, these findings reaffirm Finnegan's assertion that oral literature survives not simply as a static record but as an active process. In the Meranaw context, the vitality of *bayok* depends on its social functionality and its capacity to evoke emotional and cultural engagement. UNESCO's ICH framework emphasizes that safeguarding intangible heritage requires active community participation and intergenerational

transmission—both of which are challenged when younger generations shift their daily practices toward globalized cultural products. Bauman's performance theory also reminds us that the meaning of *bayok* is co-created between performer and audience; without audiences who can fully decode its cultural and linguistic nuances, the form's impact diminishes.

The tension between tradition and modernity that emerged in this study does not necessarily signal an inevitable decline. Instead, it points to a critical juncture where deliberate cultural strategies could ensure *bayok*'s survival and renewed relevance. Respondents themselves suggested concrete measures: integrating *bayok* into school curricula, forming cultural organizations to promote it, and systematically documenting performances for archival and educational use. Such recommendations align with global best practices in heritage preservation, which stress both formal institutional support and grassroots community engagement. Importantly, the research highlights the role of adaptability in sustaining intangible heritage. The emergence of *rinao-rinao*, a modernized form of *bayok* incorporating contemporary instruments and styles, demonstrates that tradition can evolve without losing its core identity. However, maintaining the balance between innovation and authenticity will require cultural stewardship—ensuring that modern adaptations remain anchored in the values, narratives, and linguistic richness that define *bayok*. Another implication of this study is the need for mentorship structures to train new onors. The apprenticeship model, historically central to the transmission of performance knowledge, faces erosion as fewer young people see it as a viable or prestigious pursuit. Reviving this system, possibly through school-based cultural programs or community workshops, could ensure the survival of the intricate skills and deep cultural literacy required for authentic *bayok* performance.

Ultimately, *bayok* in the modern era stands at a crossroads. It continues to command respect as a symbol of Meranaw heritage, yet its active practice and deep understanding risk decline in the face of shifting cultural priorities. The findings of this study suggest that its preservation will depend on three interlinked strategies: (1) education—embedding *bayok* within formal and informal learning contexts to enhance cultural literacy; (2) adaptation—embracing creative evolutions of the form while safeguarding its essential characteristics; and (3) community engagement—ensuring that performances remain socially relevant and emotionally resonant for contemporary audiences. The survival of *bayok* will not rest solely on nostalgia or symbolic recognition. It will depend on the Meranaw community's collective decision to keep it alive as a lived practice—a form that continues to speak, sing, and resonate within the rhythms of daily life. As the author [6] reminds us, intangible heritage is sustained not in archives but in the hearts, voices, and shared experiences of those who live it. If *bayok* is to thrive in the twenty-first century, it must remain what it has always been: a bridge between past and present, an artistic vessel of communal memory, and a vibrant expression of Meranaw identity. In this way, *bayok* can transcend its role as a historical artifact and continue as a dynamic, evolving tradition—one that not only reflects the cultural soul of the Meranaw people but also inspires future generations to sing their heritage into being.

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