
BOAT LUTES IN THE VISAYAS AND LUZON: TRACES OF A LOST TRADITION

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Abstract

The Spanish guitar is the most popular instrument in the Philippines today. But centuries before the arrival of the Spaniards it already had Asian prototypes on the numerous islands of the archipelago: long-necked lutes in many regional variations. This can be assumed on one hand from the wide variety of lute types still existing in Mindanao and Palawan today, at least 23 lute types used by at least 35 ethnic groups, and on the other hand from the occurrence of indigenous terms for these boat lutes in the languages of those regions, where no boat lutes can be found anymore, namely on the main island of Luzon in the northern Philippines and on the Visayan islands of the Central Philippines. However, no one can be sure if the same name for a boat lute in two different regions could mean the same instrument, a similar instrument or a totally different instrument at that.

The word *kudyapi*, the most important term for Philippine boat lutes, can still be found in the modern dictionaries of the languages Tagalog and Kapampangan (Central Luzon), Hiligaynon (Visayan islands of Panay and Negros) and Waray (Visayan islands of Samar and Leyte) as a term for an “ancient native guitar” or for an “old Filipino stringed instrument”. The two historians Teodoro A. Agoncillo and Oscar M. Alfonso represent a popular opinion when they write: »The *kudyapi*, which the later Tagalog adopted as the symbol of poetry, seemed to have been a popular instrument, for it was found almost throughout the country – from the north to the south« (1960: 54), as this statement implies that the *kudyapi* of the Tagalog must have been basically the same *kudyapi* as it is used in the Southern Philippines today. And the ethnomusicologist José Maceda adds: “The Negrito groups ... scattered all over Luzon in the provinces of Camarines Norte, Albay, Quezon, Bataan, Zambales, Isabela and Cagayan ... have adopted the musical instruments of their neighbours ... the *kuryapi* (two-string lute) is still remembered though it has long since disappeared from this region” (Maceda 1980: 637).

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