



PRESERVING HERITAGE: CULTURAL ORIGINS OF THE GI-OK DANCE OF CORTES, BOHOL

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to document and analyze the cultural origins of the Gi-ok dance of Cortes, Bohol as a basis for cultural preservation and scholarly documentation. Specifically, it examined how Gi-ok emerged from the agricultural, devotional, and communal life of the Cortesanon people. A descriptive-qualitative research design was employed through interviews, field observations, movement demonstrations, video-assisted clarification, and documentary analysis. Eight purposively selected participants, composed of one key informant, three cultural bearers and elders, and four practitioners, served as sources of community-based knowledge. Findings revealed that Gi-ok originated from the traditional agricultural act of feet-threshing, locally associated with pressing, twisting, grinding, and scraping the soles of the feet to separate harvested rice grains from their stalks. Participant responses connected the practice to farming, planting, harvesting, harvest thanksgiving, and communal labor. The findings also connected Gi-ok to rice-producing communities of old Cortes, particularly Camayaan, where harvest thanksgiving was remembered as part of communal life after a good yield. Over time, the agricultural thanksgiving practice became associated with devotion to the Niño and was integrated into the religious life of Cortes. Its movement identity is preserved through the Gi-ok step, which imitates the action of threshing rice, while its devotional function is expressed through thanksgiving, offering, prayer, and communal participation. The study concludes that Gi-ok is a distinct Cortesanon devotional-agricultural dance that preserves the community's memory of farming, faith, thanksgiving, and cultural identity.

KEYWORDS: Cultural Heritage, Gi-ok Dance, Cortes Bohol, Feet-Threshing, Devotional-Agricultural Dance

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Dance serves as a significant expression of cultural identity, especially in communities where traditions are transmitted through oral memory, embodied practice, and communal participation. Traditional dances are not merely performed for entertainment; they also preserve the history, livelihood, spirituality, and values of the people who continue to practice them. As Fides and Santos (2019) explain, Philippine folk dances serve as cultural narratives that reflect the life, identity, and collective memory of communities. Similarly, Foley (2016) emphasizes that documentation is essential in safeguarding dance traditions because embodied practices may be lost when they are not systematically recorded.

In the municipality of Cortes, Bohol, one meaningful yet under-documented tradition is the Gi-ok dance. The dance is connected to the religious and agricultural life of the Cortesanon community and is associated with devotion to the Niño. While the dance is performed in a devotional context today, its movement identity is rooted in feet-threshing, a traditional agricultural practice that uses the feet to press, twist, grind, and separate harvested rice grains from their stalks. This connection between everyday labor and sacred expression reflects how intangible cultural heritage is preserved through bodily movement, local memory, and communal performance.

Despite its cultural importance, the Gi-ok dance remains limited in scholarly documentation. Much of its origin, meaning, and performance practice has been preserved through oral accounts, community memory, and embodied knowledge rather than formal written records. This condition reflects the broader concern raised by Adeyemo and Adebayo (2017), who noted that indigenous and traditional knowledge systems are often under-documented despite their cultural value. In the Philippine context, Lobo (2023) also argues that education and cultural documentation are necessary in protecting local dance traditions from neglect and cultural displacement.

This study addresses the documentation gap by examining the cultural origins of the Gi-ok dance and analyzing how an agricultural practice became a devotional performance in Cortes, Bohol. In doing so, the study contributes to the preservation of Boholano intangible cultural heritage and supports the continuing transmission of Gi-ok as a distinct Cortesanon devotional-agricultural dance.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Cultural Heritage and Traditional Dance

Traditional dance functions as a vessel of cultural heritage because it reflects the ways of life, beliefs, and collective memory of a community. In many societies, dances are developed from local occupations, rituals, religious



practices, and communal celebrations. These dances serve as living archives that preserve cultural identity through bodily movement.

Fides and Santos (2019) describe Philippine folk dances as cultural expressions that embody the stories, values, and identity of the Filipino people. In this sense, dance becomes a form of historical and cultural narration. It allows communities to communicate their experiences through movement, gesture, music, costume, and ritual action. For communities where written records may be limited, traditional dance becomes an important means of remembering and transmitting knowledge.

As intangible cultural heritage, traditional dance must be documented and transmitted to ensure continuity. Foley (2016) emphasizes the importance of proactive archiving and applied ethnochoreology in preserving dance traditions. Documentation helps protect embodied knowledge from being forgotten, especially when the tradition is transmitted orally or through observation. Similarly, UNESCO (2003) recognizes the importance of safeguarding intangible cultural heritage, including performing arts, rituals, and traditional practices that communities identify as part of their cultural heritage.

In the case of Gi-ok, documentation is important because the dance remains largely preserved through oral memory, community practice, and devotional performance. Without systematic documentation, its agricultural origin, movement identity, and religious meaning may become vulnerable to misinterpretation or loss.

2.2 Agricultural Memory in Dance

Agricultural dances often develop from the daily activities of farming communities. Movements such as planting, harvesting, pounding, winnowing, carrying, and threshing may become stylized into choreographic patterns. These movements preserve the memory of labor while also expressing gratitude for abundance, survival, and divine blessing.

Titon (2015) explains that cultural performance and music are best understood as human actions situated within everyday life and community experience. This perspective supports the idea that traditional dances may emerge from work, ritual, and local ways of living. Agricultural movement, when transformed into dance, becomes more than imitation; it becomes an embodied memory of livelihood, cooperation, and thanksgiving.

In the case of Gi-ok, agricultural memory is central to the dance's origin. The term Gi-ok is associated with feet-threshing, particularly the act of using the feet to press, twist, grind, and detach rice grains from the stalks. This movement later became the basis of the Gi-ok step. Thus, the dance reflects how bodily actions from agricultural work can be transformed into cultural performance.

2.3 Devotional Dance and Niño Tradition

Devotional dances are performed as expressions of faith, prayer, offering, thanksgiving, and petition. In the Visayas, devotion to the Niño has inspired various forms of religious

performances, processions, dances, and ritual movements. These performances often combine local cultural practices with Catholic devotion, resulting in traditions that are both religious and community-based.

Mampandig et al. (2024) explain that Niño devotion is expressed through different devotional practices that reflect faith, thanksgiving, petition, and communal religious identity. This supports the interpretation of Gi-ok as a devotional act, since the dance is performed in honor of the Niño and expresses prayer, blessing, healing, gratitude, and fulfillment of faith.

The Gi-ok dance belongs to this broader devotional context but remains distinct because of its agricultural origin. It is not only an act of praise to the Niño; it is also a remembrance of farming, harvest thanksgiving, and Cortesanon communal life. Through the dance, the body becomes a medium of prayer and cultural memory.

2.4 Ethnochoreology and Embodied Knowledge

Ethnochoreology provides a useful approach in studying Gi-ok because it examines dance within its cultural, social, and historical context. Foley (2012) describes ethnochoreology as a field that studies dance as a meaningful cultural practice rather than as movement separated from community life. This approach is important because the Gi-ok dance cannot be understood only by analyzing its steps. Its meaning must be interpreted in relation to rice farming, Niño devotion, communal thanksgiving, and Cortesanon identity.

The Gi-ok step, for example, is not merely a technical foot movement. It carries the memory of rice-threshing and reflects the physical labor of the community. Through ethnochoreological analysis, the movement may be understood as an embodied form of agricultural knowledge. It shows how the body preserves memory even when the original agricultural context has changed.

2.5 Preservation of Local Dance Traditions

Documenting local dance traditions supports cultural education, heritage preservation, and intergenerational transmission. Written descriptions, movement analysis, interviews, and field observations help preserve dances that may otherwise remain known only to a small group of practitioners. For community-based traditions such as Gi-ok, documentation is especially important because it helps clarify the dance's origin, meaning, and identity.

Lobo (2023) emphasizes the role of education in protecting Philippine dance traditions, particularly by engaging future teachers and cultural workers in heritage preservation. This is relevant to the Gi-ok study because the documentation of the dance may later serve as instructional material for cultural education, MAPEH classes, dance literature, and local heritage programs.

Likewise, the National Commission for Culture and the Arts (2019) highlights the importance of protecting and promoting the country's cultural heritage under Republic Act No. 10066, also known as the National Cultural Heritage Act of 2009. This legal framework supports studies that document and



preserve local intangible cultural heritage, including traditional dances, rituals, and community-based cultural expressions.

This study contributes to local heritage documentation by focusing on the cultural origins of Gi-ok. By tracing its agricultural and devotional roots, the study supports the recognition of Gi-ok as a distinct Cortesanon tradition.

3.0 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This study aimed to document and analyze the cultural origins of the Gi-ok dance of Cortes, Bohol.

Specifically, it aimed to:

1. Describe the agricultural roots of the Gi-ok dance;
2. Explain the meaning of Gi-ok in relation to feet-threshing;
3. Determine how agricultural movements were transformed into devotional performance;
4. Identify the role of Niño devotion in the development of Gi-ok; and
5. Describe the cultural significance of Gi-ok as a Cortesanon devotional-agricultural dance.

4.0 METHODOLOGY

4.1 Research Design

This study employed a descriptive-qualitative research design, allowing an in-depth exploration of the cultural origins of the Gi-ok dance as remembered, practiced, and explained by members of the Cortesanon community. This design was appropriate because the study focused on oral narratives, community memory, movement demonstration, documentary references, and cultural interpretation rather than numerical measurement. Through this approach, the researcher was able to describe how Gi-ok developed from agricultural practice into a devotional performance.

4.2 Research Locale

The study was conducted in Cortes, Bohol, the community where the Gi-ok dance is known, remembered, and practiced. Cortes served as the research locale because the dance is associated with the town's agricultural past, religious devotion, and communal identity. The locale was also appropriate because participant accounts identified old Cortes, particularly Camayaan, as a rice-producing area where the act of Gi-ok or feet-threshing was practiced as part of harvest activity and thanksgiving.

4.3 Research Participants

The study involved eight purposively selected participants who had direct experience, knowledge, or cultural involvement in the Gi-ok tradition. These included one key informant, three cultural bearers and elders, and four practitioners. The key informant assisted in identifying the cultural bearers, elders, and practitioners who could provide meaningful information about the origin, performance context, movement identity, and devotional meaning of the dance.

For the inclusion criteria, the key informant and cultural bearers or elders were included if they were residents of Cortes,

Bohol or had recognized cultural affiliation with the Gi-ok tradition; were at least thirty-five years old; and had firsthand knowledge of the dance's cultural origin, religious context, community narratives, or historical memory. The practitioners were included if they had direct involvement in performing, teaching, demonstrating, or assisting in the movement practice of Gi-ok and were capable of describing or demonstrating movement patterns and performance practices.

Participants were excluded if they had no direct knowledge or lived experience of Gi-ok, relied only on secondhand information, had no recognized role or involvement in the tradition, were unable to provide informed consent, or could not meaningfully participate in interviews, cultural narration, or movement demonstration. Participants could withdraw at any time due to personal request, unavailability, discomfort in answering questions, discomfort in demonstrating movements, refusal to continue, or any ethical concern that emerged during the research process.

4.4 Sampling Design

Purposive sampling was used to select participants who were knowledgeable about the Gi-ok tradition. The participants were identified with the assistance of the key informant to ensure that the data came from individuals with direct cultural knowledge, lived experience, or performance involvement. Selection was based on the participants' familiarity with the origin of Gi-ok, connection to Cortes, participation in the dance or its transmission, and ability to explain its agricultural and devotional meanings.

4.5 Research Instrument

The study used a semi-structured interview guide, participant observation checklist, documentation checklist, field notes, reflective journal, audio-video recording devices, and movement demonstration records. The semi-structured interview guide was used to gather oral narratives on the origin, meaning, performance context, and devotional significance of Gi-ok. The participant observation checklist helped the researcher record visible movement features, especially the feet-threshing action, planting and harvesting gestures, posture, formation, and performance behavior.

The documentation checklist was used to organize the completeness of gathered materials, including interviews, observation notes, photographs, video clips, movement descriptions, and documentary references. Field notes and reflective journals recorded contextual details, emerging insights, and the researcher's observations during fieldwork. Audio-video recordings were used to preserve interviews and movement demonstrations for review and clarification. Movement demonstration records helped describe how the Gi-ok step was executed and how the agricultural action of threshing was translated into dance.

4.6 Data Gathering Procedure

Data gathering began with coordination and identification of participants through the key informant. After



securing consent, the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with the key informant, cultural bearers, elders, and practitioners. The interviews focused on how participants came to know Gi-ok, where and when it was performed, what stories were associated with it, and how its movements were connected to agricultural and devotional practices.

Field observations and movement demonstrations were then conducted to clarify how the Gi-ok step was remembered and performed. Particular attention was given to the pressing, twisting, grinding, and scraping of the soles, which reflected the traditional feet-threshing of harvested rice. The researcher also documented planting and harvesting gestures, performance setting, devotional orientation, and the participants' explanations of the dance's meaning.

Video-assisted clarification was used when certain movement details or oral accounts needed to be reviewed. Documentary materials related to Gi-ok were examined only as supporting sources to compare and contextualize participant responses. The gathered data were then organized according to recurring ideas related to agricultural origin, feet-threshing, harvest thanksgiving, oral transmission, devotional transformation, and Cortesanon identity.

4.7 Data Analysis

The data were analyzed through thematic analysis. Participant responses, field notes, movement descriptions, and documentary references were grouped according to recurring themes. Participant narratives served as the primary data source, while documentary references were used only to support, compare, and contextualize the themes. The major themes that emerged were agricultural origin, meaning of Gi-ok, feet-threshing movement identity, oral memory and generational transmission, devotional transformation, and Cortesanon cultural significance.

4.8 Ethical Considerations

The study observed informed consent, confidentiality, cultural sensitivity, and respect for local religious practices. Participants were informed of the purpose of the study and their right to withdraw at any time. Since the dance is connected to religious devotion and community identity, the researcher ensured that the documentation process was conducted respectfully and with sensitivity to the beliefs and practices of the Cortesanon community.

5.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

5.1 Agricultural Origin of the Gi-ok Dance

Findings from participant responses revealed that the Gi-ok dance originated from the agricultural life of the Cortesanon people. Participants associated the dance with rice farming, particularly planting, harvesting, feet-threshing, and harvest thanksgiving. They described Gi-ok as a practice connected to the work of farmers and to the communal act of giving thanks after a bountiful harvest.

The origin of Gi-ok is strongly connected to the act of feet-threshing. Participants explained that the movement came

from the action of using the feet to press, twist, grind, or scrape rice stalks in order to separate the grains. This practical agricultural movement was later remembered as the basic movement identity of the dance.

The findings further connected Gi-ok to rice-producing communities of old Cortes, particularly Camayaan, where harvest-related practices were remembered as part of communal life. In these accounts, harvested rice bunches were placed on raised surfaces, and the feet were used to separate the grains from the stalks. These narratives support the interpretation that the dance came from a functional agricultural activity before it became a cultural and devotional performance.

This agricultural action eventually became a movement identity. The practical act of threshing rice was remembered by the community and transformed into a dance step. Thus, the agricultural origin of Gi-ok shows how a work-related bodily action became a cultural performance. The movement of the feet, once used for separating grains, became a symbolic gesture of labor, thanksgiving, and identity.

5.2 Meaning of Gi-ok and Its Movement Identity

The word Gi-ok refers to the traditional act of feet-threshing to separate harvested rice grains from their stalks. In the context of the dance, it does not only refer to the agricultural process but also to the movement quality derived from that process. The dance preserves this meaning through the Gi-ok step.

Based on participant descriptions and movement demonstrations, the Gi-ok step is performed through grounded footwork, slight twisting, pressing, grinding, and scraping of the soles against the floor. The movement imitates the physical action of rice-threshing. The knees are slightly bent, the body remains close to the ground, and the weight of the dancer shifts from one side to another. This gives the movement a grounded, repetitive, and labor-like quality.

The participants' descriptions suggest that the movement was originally functional before it became stylized. The grounded stance, twisting of the soles, and body balance needed in the step reflect the physical demands of threshing rice. Because of this, the meaning of Gi-ok is both verbal and embodied. It is verbal because the word refers to feet-threshing. It is embodied because the dancer performs the memory of threshing through the feet.

5.3 Oral Memory and Generational Transmission

The exact year of origin of the Gi-ok dance has not been formally documented. However, participant responses suggest that the dance has been practiced for generations. Some participants recalled that the dance was already known when they were children and that older members of their families had also participated in it. Some oral narratives even associate the practice with the 1500s; however, this claim is treated in this study as part of oral historical memory rather than as a verified historical date.

These accounts show that Gi-ok has been transmitted through family memory, elder devotees, dancers, cultural



bearers, and community participation. The participants' responses suggest that the dance survived not through formal written notation but through repeated performance, remembrance, and transmission by people who were directly connected to the tradition.

The generational transmission of Gi-ok indicates that the dance was not created by a single choreographer in the modern sense. Rather, it was shaped by the collective memory and practice of the Cortesanon community, with one family remembered by participants as having led or sustained the practice through time. Its movements were preserved by those who danced, remembered, taught, and continued the tradition.

5.4 Devotional Transformation of Gi-ok

Participant responses revealed that Gi-ok became connected to religious devotion, particularly to the Niño. The agricultural act of thanksgiving was transformed into a devotional performance. The gratitude once associated with harvest became connected to prayer, blessing, healing, protection, and fulfillment of faith.

According to the participants, the dance became a form of offering and thanksgiving within the religious life of Cortes. The movements that once reflected planting, harvesting, and threshing were later interpreted as gestures of devotion, praise, and gratitude to the Niño. Through this process, Gi-ok became both agricultural and devotional.

The findings further suggest that the timing of the thanksgiving practice, remembered in relation to the harvest season and the January feast, contributed to its association with Niño devotion. As the thanksgiving practice became part of the religious life of Cortes, the dance gradually moved from an agricultural setting into a devotional performance connected with the church and the community's fiesta celebration.

As a devotional performance, Gi-ok expresses reverence, prayer, praise, petition, healing, child-blessing, farewell, and gratitude. It is performed in connection with the religious celebration of the community, particularly after the Fiesta High Pontifical Mass. This performance context supports the participants' description of Gi-ok as a bodily form of devotion rather than merely a cultural presentation.

5.5 Cultural Significance of Gi-ok in Cortes

The Gi-ok dance is culturally significant because it brings together three major aspects of Cortesanon life: agriculture, faith, and community. Its agricultural origin preserves the memory of rice farming and feet-threshing. Its devotional transformation reflects the people's faith in the Niño. Its communal practice affirms the shared identity of the Cortesanons.

Although Gi-ok exists within the broader context of Niño devotion in the Visayas, it should not be viewed simply as a version of other Niño-related dances. Its distinctiveness lies in its feet-threshing origin, grounded footwork, twisting and scraping action of the soles, planting and harvesting gestures, local rhythm, and devotional orientation. Unlike the familiar

Sinulog movement pattern, Gi-ok is grounded in the agricultural action of threshing rice.

The dance may therefore be classified as a religious, devotional, agricultural, and festival-oriented dance. It is religious because it is associated with the Niño. It is devotional because it expresses prayer, praise, offering, healing petition, child-blessing, thanksgiving, and farewell. It is agricultural because its fundamental movement is rooted in feet-threshing, planting, and harvesting. It is festival-oriented because it may be performed in religious, cultural, and community celebrations.

Gi-ok is also supported by a distinct sound environment. Participant responses identify the gimbow, brass gong, and bamboo tingko or kuratong-baleleng as instruments associated with the dance. The remembered rhythmic pattern of the music reinforces the agricultural and communal identity of the performance.

Through Gi-ok, the field, the church, and the community are symbolically connected. The dance remembers the labor of farming, gives thanks for blessings, and expresses the faith of the people. It is therefore a distinct Cortesanon devotional-agricultural tradition.

6.0 CONCLUSION

The Gi-ok dance of Cortes, Bohol is a culturally rooted tradition that originated from the agricultural life of the Cortesanon community. Its foundation is the traditional act of feet-threshing, where the feet are used to press, twist, grind, and separate rice grains from stalks. This action became stylized into the Gi-ok step, which serves as the fundamental movement identity of the dance.

The dance also developed from planting, harvesting, and harvest thanksgiving. Over time, these agricultural actions were transformed into devotional movements offered to the Niño. Through this transformation, Gi-ok became a religious, devotional, agricultural, and festival-oriented dance.

The cultural origins of Gi-ok reveal the close relationship between labor, faith, gratitude, and identity. The dance preserves the memory of rice farming while expressing prayer, thanksgiving, healing petition, child-blessing, and communal devotion. Thus, Gi-ok stands as a distinct Cortesanon devotional-agricultural dance that deserves continued documentation, validation, and transmission.

7.0 IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. For Cultural Preservation. Since this study focused on the cultural origins of Gi-ok, further documentation should continue by recording oral histories, movement demonstrations, performance settings, and community narratives related to its agricultural and devotional roots. These materials may help preserve the memory of feet-threshing, harvest thanksgiving, and the transformation of Gi-ok into a devotional performance.
2. For Cultural Education. The findings may be used as localized cultural material in MAPEH, Philippine folk dance, physical education, music, and heritage-related



courses. Teachers may use the documented origin of Gi-ok to help learners understand how agricultural labor, local memory, and religious devotion can shape traditional dance.

3. For Local Government and Cultural Institutions. The Local Government Unit of Cortes, parish representatives, cultural offices, and heritage councils may use the findings as a basis for strengthening the recognition and promotion of Gi-ok as a distinct Cortesanon devotional-agricultural tradition.
4. For Community Transmission. Cultural bearers, elders, practitioners, and families associated with the tradition may continue sharing the stories, meanings, and movement identity of Gi-ok with younger generations. This may help ensure that the dance remains connected to its original agricultural and devotional context.
5. For Future Researchers. Further studies may examine the historical development of Gi-ok, its relationship with Niño devotion, the role of the gimbar, brass gong, and tingko or kuratong-baleleng in its performance, and the broader connection between agricultural memory and religious dance traditions in Bohol.

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