

# The *Tudbulol*: Narrative and Time in T'boli Epic Song Performance

Manolte Mora

The University of Hong Kong

The *Tudbulol*, an epic song consisting of eight episodes each of which may vary in length between 30 minutes and one hour, is the most important genre of T'boli oral literature. The T'boli are one of the largest pre-literate, ethno-linguistic groups in southern Mindanao and the *Tudbulol* is their principal means of preserving and transmitting customary law. It is normally sung in its entirety only during the *moninum*, a grand ceremonial complex which may be completed only every seven years.

This paper describes and analyzes the epic's basic structure, which is iterative and cyclical, and relates it to T'boli patterns of affective experience, rhetoric, instrumental music, and ideologies of narrative and time. The narrative unfolds through an organizational sequence that involves a cyclic recurrence between two sections. In one section, called *k'wahelen*, the epic singer builds up the narrative tension through a blow-by-blow commentary of the conflict between the hero *Semgulang* and his adversary. The following section, called *hebalingen*, discloses the outcome of the conflict and identifies the victor. During the *k'wahelen*, feelings of anticipation are expressed by listeners through excited shouts [*kelele...* ], and cries of delighted satisfaction [*yo-de... yo-de...* ] are voiced at the dramatic resolution of the narrative, which occurs during the *hebalingen* section. The singer's subsequent return to the *k'wahelen* section then quietens the audience until their expectations are again raised for the outcome of the next dramatic phase of the tale.