

Artcraft and Uses of the Malong

Mindamera S. Macarambon

The *malong* is the most colorful unisex dress of the Maranao. In one sense, it is simply a barrel or pillowcase-formed skirt with equal circumferential opening on both ends, either of which is the entrance or exit for the wearer. Yet, it is also a delicate garment involving great weaving skill and art. Expressive of the rich artistic tradition of the people, it is also probably the most versatile apparel in the world.

The *malong* was first popularized years ago in the Miss International tilt in the United States by the tall, stately Filipina beauty, Gemma Cruz, who won the contest. The present First Lady and Metro Manila Governor Imelda Romualdez Marcos, who is also a patroness of Filipino culture and art, takes pride in her collection of expensive *malongs* which she dons during some state receptions. Mrs. Marcos was once guided by a motorcade to a village in Marawi City where expert *malong* weavers displayed their crafts. After looking at the women demonstrating their weaving, the First Lady was asked by the guide whether she wanted some *malongs*. She gracefully said, "No, I already have many, but if it's that one worn by that woman, maybe I'll buy it." She was referring to a dignified Maranao lady in her *malong* and standing some distance on the roadside watching the visitor's entourage.

The guide approached the smiling lady and whispered, "*Ba'i* (Madam), will you go up your house? Mrs. Marcos would like to see your *malong*." Flattered, the lady went up followed by the guide and Mrs. Marcos' party. The lady who happened to be the wife of the Vice-Mayor of Marawi City, offered to give Mrs. Marcos her garment as a "souvenir for visiting our barrio." But the graceful First Lady courteously refused to receive the article for free. She asked an aide to pay five hundred pesos for it, not



Landap a birmoda and *landap a binaning* worn by (l to r) Zaalica Ibrahim, Noraida Sani and Sittie Naida Diron Sampaco.

exactly for its market price, but as a prize for the lady's artistic weaving of the *malong*.

However, the barrel-style garment, whether handwoven or from the textile factory, is not a cultural monopoly of the stylish Maranao and their Maguindanao sisters and brothers in Cotabato. It is equally a traditional costume among other Muslim groups—the Tausog, Samal, Yakan, and other small population groups in Borneo and Palawan. Hill tribes also wear the costume but called it by different names. The Maranao-Maguindanao term *malong* comes from the same linguistic matrix as the Tausog-Samal *tajong*, and Visayan-Luzon *patajong*. The

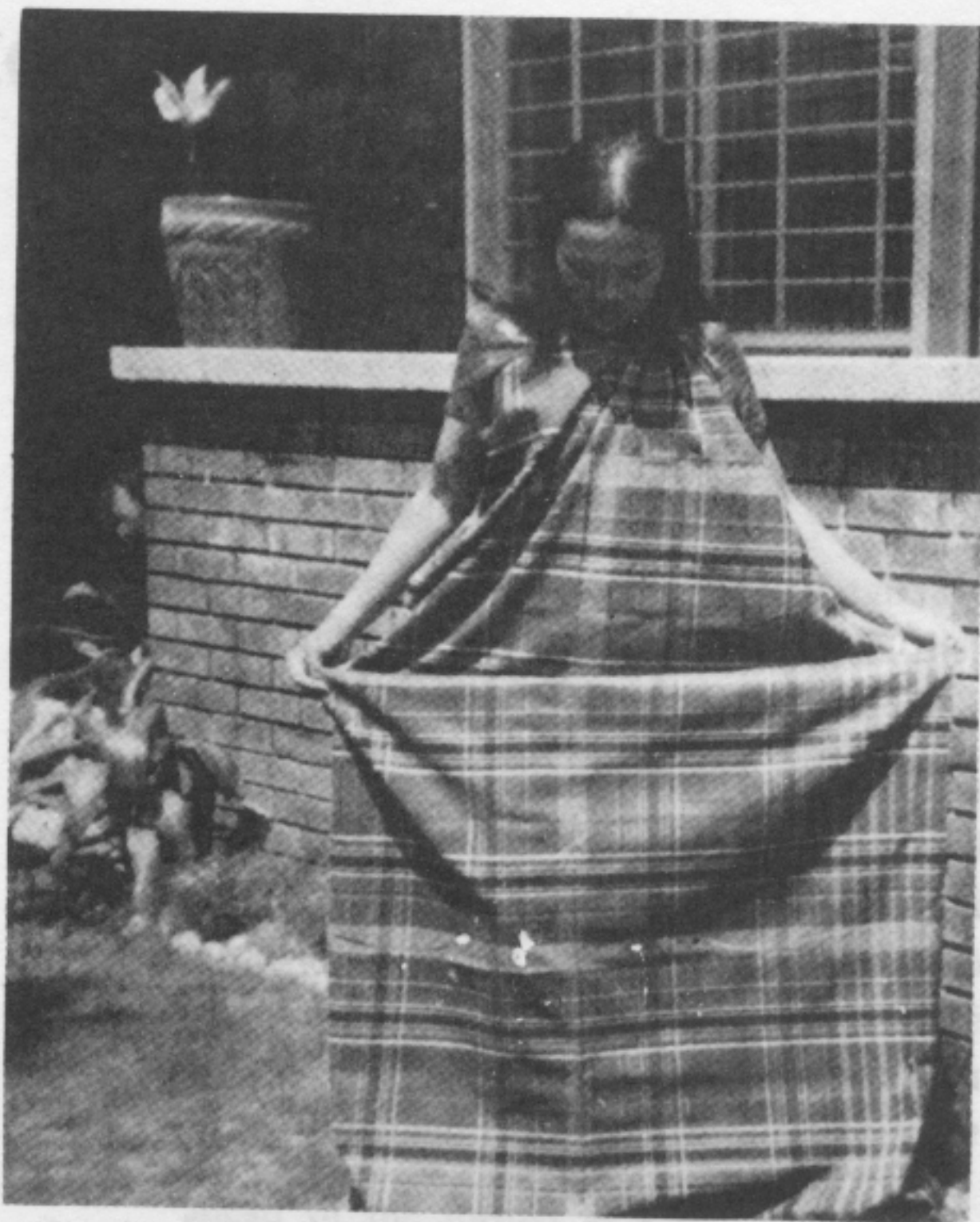
Ilongo women of Panay still weave and wear lineal-designed and multi-colored *patajong*—akin to one of the *malong* designs in Lanao, also resembling the woolen Scottish kilt.

The Indonesia-Malaysian *sarong* is culturally and linguistically related to the Philippine *malong*, *tajong*, or *patajong*, and Thai *ponong*. In Burma, the barrel dress, also unisex in utility, is called *loungi*. It is also found in India, Laos, Cambodia, and other parts of Southeast Asia. But while in most areas, barrel dresses are made of factory cloth, even painted or printed like the Indonesian *batik*, the Maranao and Maguindanao prefer weaving most of their *malongs* on back-loom. The love for their native art and dress results in the persistence of their indigenous technology and culture.

Besides being a unisex dress, the *malong* is worn by all classes and ages of people, although the variety of designs, colors, and materials are expressive of class and economic status among the Maranao. A *malong* for daily wear can be a very simple, single-color material made of local or imported factory cloth. But the one intended for attending festivities is of high class silk or cotton woven by expert craftswomen. Imported silk thread (*sotra*) from China has become very rare so that multi-colored cotton yarn is the only available supply nowadays. Anyway, using either silk or cotton, the Maranao maintain their weaving art and industry.

The process of preparing and weaving the cloth is complex, although the non-metallic equipments used in the process are simple. However, more technical and thorough description of the process is beyond the scope of this article. In any case, the knowledge of the weaving, therefore, is transmitted both horizontally and vertically within the village community from generation to generation. The girls from childhood to adolescence learn through indoctrination from the elderly women by starting with the simple parts of the jobs. Generally, the girls learn fast and shortly become experts. Incidentally, like accomplished goldsmiths or jewellers, skillful *malong* weavers are held in high esteem in Maranao society.

The entire weaving outfit is made of wood, bamboo, strings and rattan without any metallic materials. The native backstrap loom called *iroan* is the primitive type also used widely in the Igorotland,



The *ampik* design called the *mataragandang* ("darling maiden") resembles that of the Scottish kilt.



The *andon* design is the most complex, the most artistic and, quite naturally, the most expensive *malong*. (Model: Zenaida Pangandaman)



Visayas, and Mindanao. It is similar to those used in Indonesia and Malaysia—a resemblance that bespeaks of a common tradition among peoples of the Malay Archipelago. Although we call this weaving outfit “primitive,” the silk and cotton cloth produced from it are superb. They could compete with the finest textiles made in the power-loom factories of India, China, Japan, and our Southeast Asian neighbors. Before the war noted the craftsmanship of Maranao weavers, whom he described as the “finest weavers.” He suggested the introduction of the “silk tree” (mulberry) and ramie to make easily available to the local weavers materials for their art and industry. The idea would have been productive for “handwoven” fabrics which the visitors believed would command a tourist market in Europe and America.

The women of Cotabato, Lanao, and Iranon areas weave a very fine and colorful silk called *bayog-bayog* (flying) which ripples in the wind—and proves to be revealing when worn by pretty women. However, the cotton *malong* is more common. Lake Lanao weaving is relatively thicker, because of the cool weather, and longer, to cover the body from head to foot when used for sleeping at night.

Woven *malongs* come out in different styles and names. These styles are varied due to the sub-cultural difference among the villages or townships (*inged*) around Lake Lanao in the wetland (*basak*), and highland (*gilopa*) areas, and formerly due also to the dis-

The *batabor*, one of the *andon* malong designs. (Models, l to r: Noraida Sani, Sittie Naida Diron Sampaco, Zaalica Ibrahim)

tinction between urban and rural people.

The most common styles and sub-styles of the *malong* are called the *landap* (“beautiful to look at”), the *pandi* (flag or banner), the *ampik*, the *andon*, and the *bagadat*. The *landap* is distinguished by the widest strips of either red (*mariga*), yellow (*binaning*, a royal color), blue (*biro*), violet (*birmoda*), green (*gadong*), or abaca leaf green (*ombos a waka*). These woven stripes are generally of primary colors, dazzling in the sunlight. Vertically and horizontally sewn across the length and width of any *landap* style are other strips of cloth separately woven, each called a *langkit*, with intricate multicolor designs which make the garment really “beautiful to look at” according to Maranao perception.

The *pandi*, also in stripes, is distinguished by narrow lines of *balod*, a white thread partly dyed in black clay to form a variety of designs, hence a black and white contrast. This is an old style that also has red stripes. It is usually preferred by men.

The *ampik*, also called *kosta*, has more varied subtypes than either the *landap* or the *pandi*. It is of harmonious multi-colored narrow stripes. The more predominant color stripes and checkered spaces on it has given the *ampik* style its name. Some *ampik*



The *benelota* or rainbow design. (Models: Sittie Naida Diron Sampaco, Noraida Sani and Zaalica Ibrahim)

resemble the color scheme of the Scottish kilt. Sometimes the stripes are separated by the *balod* (dyed thread mentioned above). Some of its practical sub-styles are the *mataragandang* which, freely translated, means "darling maiden," and the *pakabimban* which means, "seductive or attractive." A simpler *ampik* is the *palikat*, woven in contrasting red and white stripes, and checkered with two colors.

The *bagadat* is an old style also woven with stripes and is preferred by elderly datos for its dignified look.

The most complex, artistic, and expensive *malong* is the *andon* with a variety of substyles. The *andon* has a red background (usually alizarene crimson red, close to maroon in Maranao taste); intricate geometrical and curvilinear designs (*okir*) in harmonious colors are woven into it. Usually, the most common color contrast with the red background is white and yellow for the designs, some of them depicting abstract figures of plant branches, stems and leaves. Some design figures called *batabor*, *onsod*, *pamorak* and *bombol a mera* have meanings to the weaver. The last one, for example means "peacock

feathers," although the graceful and proud bird is not found in Mindanao and is only frequently mentioned in folktales.

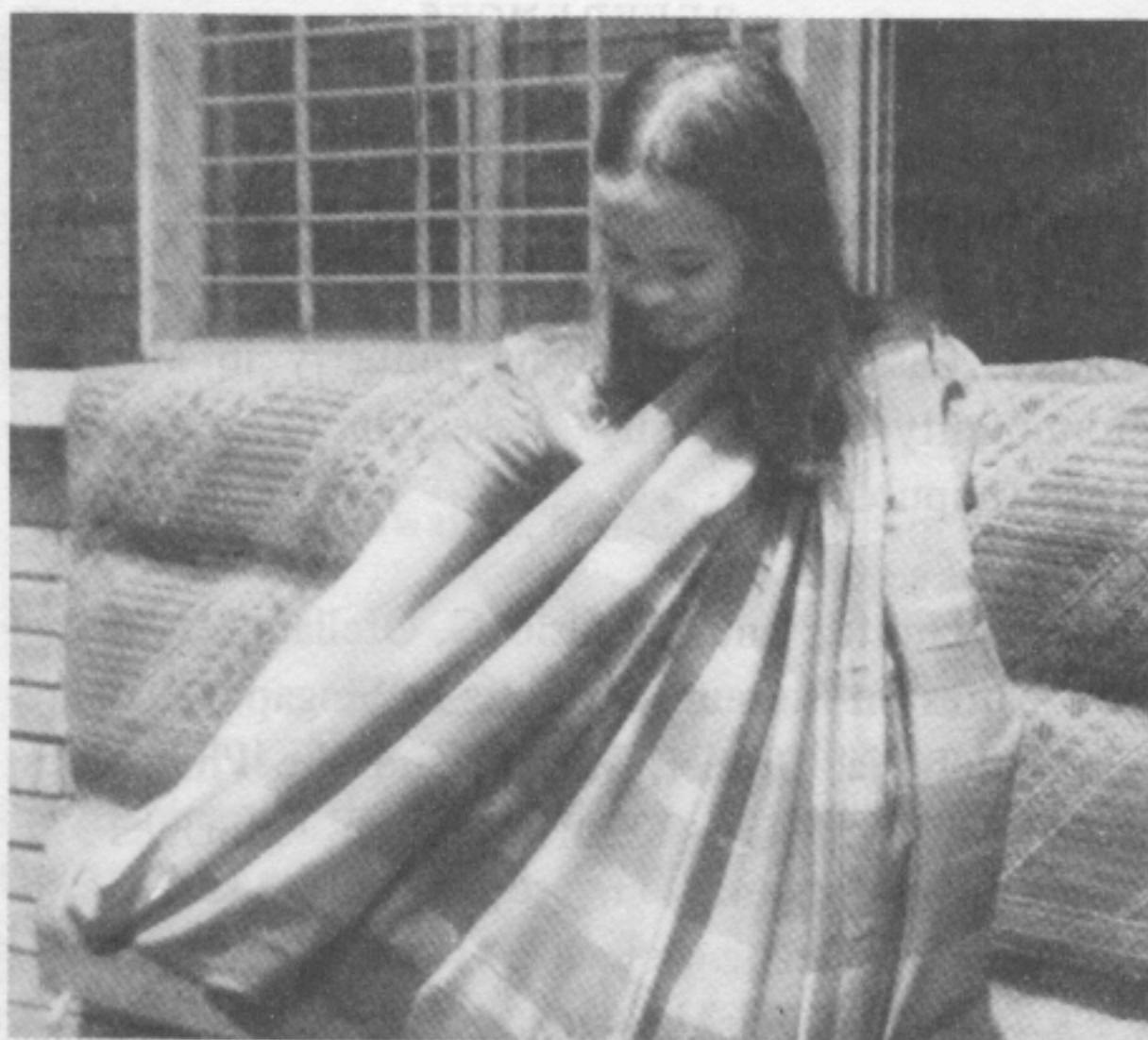
The *andon* is a feminine style especially worn by young unmarried girls. However, the material is also used to make a man's headdress (*tobaw*), which is wound artistically around the head, or as a kerchief (*mosala*), which is hung from the shoulder or held in the hand for decoration. The material is also used as a flag (*dapo*) which, among outdoor textile decors, marks a place or celebration or is carried on top of a bamboo pole to accompany a royal entourage.

Chemical or powder dye materials used for weaving of fast and bright colors in the *andon* are obtained from stores. They represent an improvement of the native dye extracted from local plants.

The *andon* is strikingly similar to the *ikat* cloth in Indonesia, especially in Bali, where the latter is also woven into *sarong* besides the *batik* material. The *ikat* (equivalent to Maranao *iket*, "to tie"), is the Indonesian tie-dye process of decorating yarn for weaving.



The colorful *landap* malong worn by the Pangandamans: the *landap a gadong* (left), the *landap a binaning* and the *landap a rambayong* (right).



Unlike the *andon*, the *ikat sarong* background comes out in red, yellow, blue, violet, and others. Similarly done on the backloom, the *ikat* and *andon* came from the same ancient dyeing and weaving tradition in the Malay Archipelago. Many other cultural minority groups in Mindanao and Sulu exhibit similar knowledge and application of this artistic technique of dye-

There are different ways of donning the *malong*. In fact, a stranger who is not used to wearing it would usually look clumsy when she puts it on. Yet, the manner of wearing has been learned by non-Maranaos attending parties, like the Pagana Maranao, an institutionalized form of reception at Mindanao State University.

Men walking or working tie the upper end of the *malong* around the waistline allowing it to fall somewhere between the knees and feet, like a skirt. A wearer may suspend it around the waistline with a belt or a kerchief (*mosala*) so it would not fall. This method of wearing the *malong* is called *katampi* for men and *katinambed* for women. For latter, the wearer may wind and tie it around her breast instead of at the waistline. Usually, a woman hangs one end of the *malong* over the left shoulder and holds it with the left hand in front of her left breast; the right hand is free to move while walking or working.

Besides being a fashionable garment and aside from its primary functions as a unisex skirt and a night gown, the *malong* has a variety of other uses. It is used as a blanket (over another *malong*), pajamas, headcover, raincoat, veil or bandanna on one end, travelling bag, sail for banca or fishnet (ordinary



Versatile, the *malong* can be used as a baby's hammock or a shopping bag (above left), as an umbrella, raincoat, tent or dressing room (above)— even as boxing gloves (below). . .



malong), baby's hammock, stretcher (called *dalagan*, with two poles ran through the cylindrically sewed cloth), swim-suit, G-string (*bilad*), beach "dressing room" for swimmers, beach mat, tent, mosquito bar, curtain or screen, tablecloth, and others. However, the royal and expensive *malongs* are not used as substitutes for sails or fishnets. A dignified *malong* is as respectable as its owner or wearer.

When young men and boys first saw western boxing and could not secure gloves, they discovered a method of forming four pieces of ordinary *malong*

and used them for the fistic sport, as it is occasionally done today.

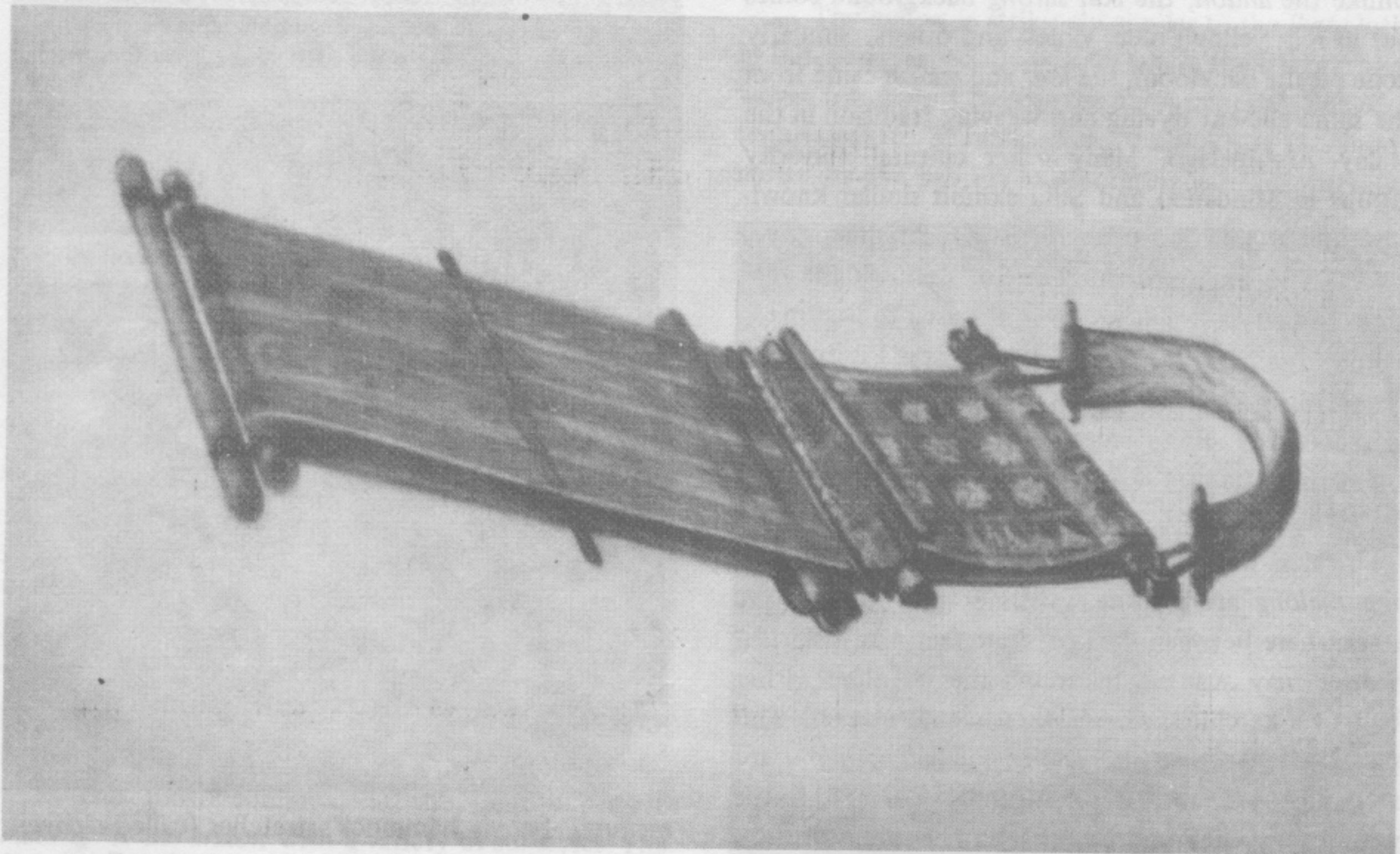
When asked what else are the *malong*'s practical uses, a joking datu smilingly replied, "Inside the *malong* is a dark cave. Wearers can secretly conceal under it anything or any act they wish to hide." There is no other form of garment—trousers, skirt, sari, or kimono—that can surpass the many decorative and practical uses of the *malong*. Can it pass as the world's most versatile garment?

REFERENCES

Arts and Crafts in Indonesia. Republic of Indonesia, Department of Public Information, July 1962.

Labay, Casan. "Clothweaving Industry in Maranao Community." University Research Center, MSU, 1976 (unpublished).

Saber, Mamitua and Dionisio G. Orellana. **Comparative Notes on Museum Exhibits in Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, Brunei, Macao, and the Philippines.** Marawi City: Aga Khan Museum, MSU, 1977, (mimeographed).



The backloom (*pegaolen*) used in traditional cloth-weaving. (From the Aga Khan Museum Brochure)