

# “MISTERYO” ang Daygonsa Cebuano: An Ethnography

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**Abstract:** *This study is focused on the preservation of cultural heritage of Tudela in a form of carolling. The carolling, which is called “Mistryo”, happens from the month of December until the month of February where the predicament of Joseph and Mary is narrated until the birth of Jesus. It also depicts the history and the experiences of the carollers as they do their carolling from one house to another. To address the problems of this paper, Operational Conservation Theory, a theory which tells that all objects or artefacts which surround us contain information of various kinds, is used. The researchers interviewed the respondents in Barangay General where the old folks who knew the carols and the lyrics live. They were asked to sing both the minor and major keys of the carol. A music expert, Professor Darlane Yap, made the notations of the minor and major keys. The lyrics of each “mistryo” is long that is why carolling takes more minutes to finish making the household listeners give more money to the carollers. During the carolling, the carollers choose a song from among the 15 songs that will fit the occasion choosing also the right tune using the guitar and other instruments. Right now, only four old folks are knowledgeable of the lyrics of the “mistryo”. This implies that sooner, this carolling will fade and will come to an end. This makes the old folks sad because the young generation are not familiar with the “mistryo” anymore. A copy of the lyrics of all the 15 songs are put into writing and made into a booklet which will be given to the office of Barangay General and the Cebu Normal Library.*

**Keywords:** carolling, mistryo, culture

## 1. Introduction

In the verge of modernization, some of the traditional practices are now put aside by the new generation and is not being appreciated anymore. These cultural heritage are things that shaped a certain society. The preservation of these intangible cultural heritage are not being given special attention especially in a society who is not giving much importance on these. It is really a sad fact that the next generation will not and cannot experience such practices.

In a group of islands of the northern part of Cebu, which is called Camotes, in the town of Tudela, a certain barangay called General has a unique way of caroling. This was very popular in those days and started to dwindle down as most of the original carolers are either very old or had passed away. The new generation are not able to continue the legacy and the very reason why the unique caroling is not anymore in popular now-a-days.

This caroling is called Mistryo. It is a caroling that will last in almost an hour narrating the plight of Joseph and Mary until the birth of Jesus. The carolers are being led by a team leader who will recite lines where the carolers repeat in unison through a Gregorian-like singing. Sometimes, certain actors will act the narration. In this case, if there is an acting the household will usually give bigger amount as a monetary gift to the carolers. But even if without the acting the household will always give big amount because of the lengthy rendition of the Mistryo.

This beautiful scenario that the people in Tudela had seen and heard every Christmas had started to fade and maybe will lead to its extinction. The only way to salvage Mistryo is to preserve it through lyric transcription and notation so to give a concrete material that the next generation can follow.

It is through this premise that this study is conducted.

## 2. Literature Review

Punnya Mann said in her article *Why should we preserve our cultures, ethics and traditions?* that traditions represent a critical piece of our culture. They help form the structure and foundation of our families and our society. They remind us that we are part of a history that defines our past, shapes who we are today and who we are likely to become. Once we ignore the meaning of our traditions, we're in danger of damaging the underpinning of our identity. Tradition contributes a sense of comfort and belonging. It brings families together and enables people to reconnect with friends. Tradition reinforces values such as freedom, faith, integrity, a good education, personal responsibility, a strong work ethic, and the value of being selfless. Tradition provides a forum to showcase role models and celebrate the things that really matter in life. Tradition offers a chance to say “thank you” for the contribution that someone has made (2017). Thus it is but fitting to preserve our intangible cultural heritage.

There is already an alarming situation with what happened to the intangible cultural heritage not only in the Philippines but also in Asia-pacific regions. UNESCO is now convening the countries from this region to do something with the preservation of these practices and will even put this as a course in post-graduate levels in higher education. In a way, this will deepen the knowledge base on methodologies and resources pertinent to intangible cultural heritage and promote networking opportunities among them as well as with UNESCO (2015).

Michael F. Brown in his article titled *Heritage Trouble: Recent Work on the Protection of Intangible Cultural Property* wrote that a major factor driving contemporary concerns about the fate of intangible cultural property is the rise of the Information Society, which has proven adept at stripping information from the cultural contexts that give it

meaning. Efforts to preserve intangible heritage have tended to follow Information Society models by proposing that heritage be inventoried, then removed from the public domain and returned to the exclusive control of its putative creators (2005).

If these people around the globe started to do things to preserve intangible cultural heritage, the people from the Philippines should start doing this also. It is in this note that the research be made to be able to preserve as a start a decaying practice of a certain place. With the onset of this study more preservation of these kind will be done to ensure that these intangible cultural heritage be guarded and be archived for future generation.

### 3. Methodology

The study is anchored on Operational Conservation Theory by George Brock-Nannestad (2000). Operational Conservation Theory (a term coined by the present writer) is that all objects or artefacts which surround us contain information of various kinds. Obviously these artefacts were not all made just to provide information, but many - perhaps most - were made to have a function or useful purpose.

When their function has worn out they may be repaired, thereby regaining their function, but this changes the information. Or they may be retained in their worn out condition - this retains some information, and the function is now a different one, namely that of museum artefact or collector's item. One of the important functions is that of a symbol - the artefact symbolizes something which at some stage is or has been important to humans.

Some artefacts have the retaining of information as their function. This is the large group that the present writer has proposed to term representative artefacts or agents (figurative or nonfigurative images such as in drawings and paintings, photography, and their printed representation as well as sound recordings, films, video), in which there is intended or primary information and ancillary or secondary information. The secondary information may be very important indeed for evaluating the context of the artefact.

It appears that irrespective of the function, the key term of the present discussion is information, and we must get a grasp of this concept. Information is all that the individual may extract from the artefact, using any means available to him. This means that the extraction may indeed be apparatus assisted. It should be noted that some extraction may turn out to be destructive. One could say that it is the individual who defines what information to him is (and hence the relevance of a particular artefact, but the individual may form part of a group which agrees on this).

In order to structure information we apply classification, i.e. we decide that some aspects of particular types of information belong to one and the same category, while other aspects of the same information may belong to other categories. The categories are said to be broader than the aspects, because mentioning the categories means that all aspects are meant. It is extremely rare that aspects belong to one category only - it is usually a question of not having had

the need for more categories or the technical means to determine aspects within them. These category fields constitute a number of frames of reference - of context - of the information.

We may use the word property instead of category and similarly use the word variable instead of aspect. A variable may have a measurable value. In analysis the specific content or value may be useful or even necessary, but this presupposes that the category has been made available or accessible as such. This is all part of hierarchical classification.

It should be noted that to the degree that the information is embodied in some physical form, that physical form exists even if there is no human observer or classifier present. This fact is demonstrated in that an archaeologist may classify objects found in order to put them into a context of his liking - and only in the ideal case will this context be identical to contexts in use when the objects were created.

Whether we like it or not, even subjective experiences, such as the perception of art forms, rely on stimuli which may themselves be ascertained objectively. We shall ignore completely those subjective experiences which are stimulus-free generation of images of the mind (you could think of chemical stimuli, though). In the present discussion, items that have the potential of being used as an input for objective and subjective human perception will be called artefacts, even though they may be naturally occurring items. This means that a rock on a beach, a female of the species, or a cloud in the sky are all treated as an artefact when they act as an input to a human receiver, an individual. This also means that the artefact need not be present in a collection or an archive, it may occur in its "natural" surroundings.

There is no need to evade this issue; there is in principle as much potential for input for human perception in sitting under the very oak of a famous poet as there's in reading a manuscript from that poet's hand. It is hence reasonable to use the term information for both intellectual and sensorial/aesthetic stimuli.

In the case of purely subjective experience it is a matter of definition whether an artefact will be considered an input by one or several individuals. The decision to categorize an artefact as the provider of an input may be made at any time, but it is obvious that any exchange of opinion relating to the input and its importance to one or several individuals is absolutely dependent on this decision being communicated.

In the case of objective experiences, only the abnormal lack of certain senses or of certain interpretative functions for the stimuli (color blindness, tone deafness) will disable the stimulus of an artefact. However, the term "abnormal" does indicate that the norm would be that the objective experience occurs whenever the individual is subjected to the stimulus. It should be clear by now that the positivistic model used by the present writer is reminiscent of that of Skinner who introduced the stimulus-response (SR) model into psychology.

Ethics of preservation or restoration has been a very vague concept in all areas, the essence of which has been that the

object (or in the case of representative artefacts, such as sound recordings: the intended content) shall be preserved in its entirety. This vagueness has given rise to expressions such as "preserving the whole" or "any restorative activity must be reversible". However, if we look at the whole field from a stimulus-response point-of-view, we discover that what we need is a utilitarian ethic: positive decisions of what we want to do with our object.

## 4. Results and Discussion

### 4.1 Historical Background of Misteryo

The practice of misteryo can be traced back even to the times when the carolers were still very young. Most of the respondents claim that even their great grandparents were carolers of misteryo. According to one of the respondents, it was not an organized caroling still. It was not for any purpose or whatsoever.

The caroling of misteryo was organized when the barangay needed a permanent chapel. It was mentioned that the chapel during their fiesta was just a makeshift hut that is made out of weaved coconut leaves and some branches of ipil-ipil. To be able to construct a permanent building for the chapel, the chapel leader decided to organize the young folks of the barangay to create a group for caroling.

So in 1955, the first organized misteryo was done. The members of the carolers are mostly relatives and a few who are not that served as instrumentalists. The group was divided into the following: the singers, the instrumentalists, the reader and the collectors. The singers are the vocal prowess of the group who should possess good, loud and shrilling voices. The instrumentalists consist of guitarists, bass, and some wind instruments which they call "kumparsa". The reader's ultimate job is to dictate the lyrics to the singers because it is impossible to memorize the lengthy lyrics. The reader should possess a very loud voice that can be heard over the instruments and should be a good reader. Meanwhile, the collector's main duty is to receive the donation from the household.

Misteryo is done from December until February in time of the Candelaria, a Catholic church celebration on the ----- The assignment of songs to be sung depends on the time of the season and the occasion celebrated during the season; e.g. Three Kings or Birth of Jesus.

Since misteryo is lengthy and it is fully orchestrated, people will not give a meager amount as donation. Making misteryo as one of a kind caroling. Most of the time, only the rich households in Tudela are being caroled. Sometimes the carolers are requested for a "pa-misteryo" if a person's birthday fall on the advent season and they are paid a hefty amount of money.

The amount to be given to the carolers will depend on the completeness of the number of stanzas that the carolers were singing. A copy of the misteryo will be given to the household as a guide and if there are some stanzas that will be omitted, the household will also give lesser amount. The

We have had to go into the very basics of the input to the individual because the present discussion considers the input to be information in a very general sense. In fact, one may suspect that one type of preservation is that of preserving information from and about the artefact, and indeed this is so. This is precisely what happens when we microfilm documents and discard the originals. The intended content is preserved, and information about the provenance is added to it.

carolers will always see to it that they can complete every mystery they carol. Sometimes the lack of stanzas is attributed to tiredness because of the lengthy lyrics. Sometimes the reader can skip also because they were only using "petromax" or "hasag" as their light and the copy is not very clear because of the light.

During that time when they just started the misteryo, the carolers went on a house to house basis. They do not require big amount but the households out of pity and compassion share bigger amount. They do this activity of house to house engagement in the households in the town of Tudela, Cebu. Sometimes some households will deliberately close the windows and the doors to signal that caroling is not allowed because they cannot afford the payment. Some will let the carolers sing more than one misteryo and cry over it especially when it comes to the story of Mary and Joseph on the search for a place to stay for Jesus' birth.

Even with these odds the chapel of barangay General of Tudela, Camotes, Cebu was constructed. Over the years they use misteryo to continue construction and finished the chapel. Mainly, the misteryo is used for religious purposes and not for personal use.

### The Lyrics

Misteryo evolved in the story of the advent season. It has 15 different mysteries that has different numbers of "PI" as they call it or stanza in English. The longest "PI" is 48 and the shortest is 10. Making it very difficult to memorize. Not only of the length but also the lyrics are not so much familiar with the inclusion of some words that are not Cebuano-Visayan in origin. This the very reason why the lyrics are being dictated to the carolers for easy access. The carolers should be sharp in listening and the reader should have a loud voice or else the lyrics will be wrong. There are already some instances that the reader was bitten by an ant or the page is flipped by the wind while reading and dictating the lyrics and said some bad words that the carolers also sang.

The misteryo is opened with a greetings song entitled "Daygon". This is the exchange of utterance in a song of the carolers who asked for permission to carol and the response of the household to be caroled or not. Below is the utterance of the opening.

*Ang pangatahuransa Mananaygon: Ma-ayong pascucaninyu O tagbalay*

*Ang itubagsatagbalay: Si camo man sig maayong pascu*

*Mananaygon: Perdonassa among pagdayegtagbalay.*

*Ang ipamolongmoug*

*bendecion,*

*hinautuntangacamopadangatonsamgatuigngaingonniaron*

.

Mananaygon:

*Salamatcongtagbalaymodapitsapagpasaca.*

*Angtagbalaymoingon:*

*Dayoncamomgadahunyagsaharagdanwalay*

*macabalabag*

After the “Daygon” the carolers will choose a song that will fit the occasion. The carolers will also choose the right tune for chosen song. They will start by humming to be able to know the tune of each of the voice group tuning it with the guitar and the instruments begin the opening stance and the mystery will begin.

The lyrics are a clear narration of the before, during and after the birth of Christ which is done in a poetic way. Each “PI” has 4 lines with 8 syllables in a line and it has a perfect

rhyme. This way of creating the poem-like lyrics create an easy assignment to the tune of the song which is the same in all of the mystery verses.

There are 2 ways of singing the songs. It can be done in major or in minor keys. The major arrangement is done when the carols is done in the day time because it is more high and loud. While the minor is done in the evening because it is lower and softer since some households are asleep in the evening when the caroling is done. Below are the two keys to follow in all the verses either major or minor keys which was done by a music expert Professor Darlane Yap of Cebu Normal University. The two songs are just representations as these songs were chosen by the carolers when the interview was done.

### Balatian sa Tawo

Transcribed by: Darlane A. Yap

Musical score for 'Balatian sa Tawo' in 4/4 time, key of B-flat major. The score consists of three staves of music with lyrics underneath. The first staff starts with an 'Intro' and includes chords Eb, F, Bb, F7, and Bb. The lyrics are 'Ang ta - wo ngamay ba la'. The second staff starts at measure 8 and includes chords F, Bb, G, and Cm. The lyrics are 'ti hi - an may - to - to - lo ca ga - lam - han Hu -'. The third staff starts at measure 19 and includes chords F, Cm, F, and Bb. The lyrics are 'na - hu - na - a pag - a - yo pa - sang - pu - ta sa - bu - ot - mo.'

### O, Halandun nga Maria

Transcribed by: Darlane A. Yap

Musical score for 'O, Halandun nga Maria' in 3/4 time, key of B-flat major. The tempo is marked as quarter note = 105. The score consists of three staves of music. The first staff includes chords Fm, C7, and C7. The second staff includes chords Bbm, C, Fm, C7, and Fm. The third staff is a blank staff. Below the blank staff is the section 'With Harmony', which includes two staves of music. The first staff of 'With Harmony' includes chords Fm and C7. The second staff includes chords C7, Bbm, C, Fm, C7, and Fm.

It does not mean that these songs will be in the minor or major but you can use either in any songs depending on the time and the request of the household.

The fifteen songs titles are *Balatiansa Tao* (People's Emotions), *CaanindotNiadtongGabii* (That Was a Beautiful Night), *Candelaria* (Candlemas), *GabiingaBulahan* (O Holy Night), *Halangdon* (Honorable), *HustongalCawalo* ( Exactly Eight), *MaoyOrasngaEmabot Na* ( The Time has Come), *Oh GabiiDacungBulahan* ( Oh, the Greatest of all Nights), *OrassaPaglacat* (Time to Go), *Otromoda*, *Pagcataoni Jesus* (*The Birth of Jesus*), *Pagpanamcon* ( The Conception), *Pangamuyoni San Jose* (The Prayer of Saint Joseph), *TotoloCaHari* (The Three Kings), and *Vergengga Ualay Sanglitan* (The Virgin who is Conceived without Sin).

*BalatiansaTawo* traces back the original sin that Adam and Eve committed followed by the birth of Mary who will bear the son that will save the world from the original sin. And the prophecy that Joseph will stand as Jesus' father on earth.

*CaanindotNiadtongGabii* talks about the journey of Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem. It narrates that the animals and birds bowed down when the couple passed by. It also tells the birth of Jesus and the soon crucifixion of Him.

*Candelaria* is all about the presentation of Jesus in the temple where Simon held a candle to represent Jesus as the light of the world.

*GabiingaBulahan* starts the narration with the journey of Mary and Joseph and ended with the birth of Jesus and the gifts given by the three kings that has the meaning for the future of the King.

*Halangdon* is the search of Mary and Joseph for the place of Mary to give birth to Jesus. It was illustrated that nobody accepted them because the inns were all full.

*HustongalCawalo* begins with the mentioning of the age of Jesus when he was circumcised. This is also the verse that gives details to the story of the three kings.

*MaoyOrasngaEmabot Na* is a simple narration of the time that Jesus was born.

*Oh GabiiDacungBulahanre* counts the greatest night of all when Jesus was born as the prophets had prophesied to take away the sins of the world. It also tells the hardship that Mary and Joseph had to go through for the birth of Jesus but in the end I was victorious.

*Orassa Paglacat* relates to the finding of Jesus in the temple. Here the verse narrates the false beliefs of the Pharisees that the messiah is not yet born. In the midst of all these arguments Jesus as a twelve years old was listening to them.

*Otromoda* talks about Jesus' being a mediator in the temple among the priests and the disbeliefs that the priests had when they heard about his wisdom as a child.

*Pagcataoni Jesus* highlights the Three Kings who saw the star and followed it. Before proceeding to the Child Jesus,

they passed by Herod to pay respect. This Herod instructed them to go back after the visit but they went in the other way as the angel instructed them.

*Pagpanamcon* recalls the miracle that happens when Joseph refused to accept of Mary's conception of Jesus. As he was dealing with God, he right away received the answer with his staff bears flowers even if it is not anymore part of a tree. There he believed and returned to stand as the father of Jesus.

*Pangamuyoni San Jose* is a verse of exchanges. Here Joseph was asking for favor for Mary and him to have a small place for Mary is on labor already but everyone has no room or a small place. Here Joseph is seen as a very responsible father for Jesus as he even said that he can stay outside just for Mary to have a safe place for the birth of Jesus.

*TotolocaHariis* the story of Three Kings. In this version the names of the wise men are mentioned unlike the other verse. The name of the angel is also mentioned. In this version the wrath of Herod is discussed where he asked the soldiers to kill the children 2 years old and below. The verse ended with the praise for Joseph and Mary as great protector of the Messiah.

*VergenggaUalaySanglitanis* a verse that proved the immaculate conception of Mary. Still Joseph's reaction and the angel's reminder for him are still mentioned. This is a shortened version of the other verse.

The complete lyrics of the misteryo are preserved in a booklet which is an output of this endeavor.

## 5. Experiences and Reflections

In order to gather sentiments from the place where the misteryo of Tudela, Camotes, Cebu originated which is Barangay General, interviews were conducted to some elders and younger generations of the place. These include the carolers or the mananaygon, some locals who experienced misteryo in their childhood and those younger generations who are children of the carolers. Some insights were taken from the people who are from the town.

As observed, it is now an obvious fact that the misteryo is not any more popular during Christmas time. It being replaced with the usual carolers like the children who carols residences every night or the organized caroling for the benefit of a church or chapel projects but not the misteryo anymore. The people from the town noticed this downhill of the misteryo since they can just be heard if there are requests from the wealthy family in town if they celebrate their birthdays during the season.

Recalling their experiences, they can only sigh and be sad. They recalled that they were a sight of joy when they start coming from the mountain when Christmas season come. People will be anticipating that they will be caroled and start preparing for the amount they will give. They educed also that they have to make a lot of torches made out of dried coconut leaves for them to use in the evening when they will go back to the mountain for the night. Usually, the caroling

will last until evening and when night falls they will use “petromax” as their light so that the reader can read the lyrics well. Times that they were chased by dogs of households that do not want to be caroled and other ridiculous and memorable experiences.

These made them sad as the carolers narrated all these. Sad because they did not expect that the very rich culture of mysteryo is almost coming to an end. This legacy is from their great ancestors who also had a dream of having mysteryo continued as Barangay General’s unique feature. They were hoping that the younger generation will learn and continue the legacy but they did not see any interest with mysteryo.

When asked why, an old woman said that the new generation are not anymore interested in mysteryo especially that the lyrics and the tune that are not anymore of the new generation taste. Children or the youth are more into the songs heard from radio for the carols that are easily sung. This kind of caroling can be heard if there is a special request for “*pa mysteryo*” which usually are from the affluent families in the town. This seldom happen because only affluent families whose grandparents or great grandparents were mysteryo fanatics are the only ones who invite the mysteryocarolers for the “*pa mysteryo*”. So, if the people left in the family are younger, there is a great possibility that these families are forgetting the culture of mysteryo.

Most of the respondents air out sentiments that it is a sad note that the mysteryo will be gone to the memories and will not be revived again. One said that it is what makes the barangay known for and if it will be gone the barangay will have nothing special to offer. The original reader of the mysteryo recalled that it was a joy for the household when the carolers sing. In doing so, the carolers became more inspired to sing their hearts out. She made sure that she read all the lyrics well so that the household give more since there are no mistakes in the delivery. She added that it is always a good thing that mysteryo will continue even if the original carolers be gone as others had gone before them already. She said there only four carolers left and one reader.

There was a time when the mysteryo was handed down to four children who started to go house to house. These children are the daughters and the son of the original mysteryocarolers. The older carolers were hopeful that the mysteryo will not stop but it was short lived because the people ridiculed the children mysteryocarolers. People were very judgmental and righteous that the children were just making fun of the mysteryo. With this, the children stopped because of the experience. Ever since, only the adult carolers did the caroling until it started to lose its popularity.

An interview with two of the children of the instrumentalists of mysteryo revealed that there was no nurturing and handing-down of the practice to them. What they do is to go around with their parents as they carol. One said that they will be the one to eat the snack that will be given to the carolers. Aside from that they were mere spectators and was not encouraged to follow them. So, they were not able to learn the exact way how to do it and just did care about

matters as children until they did not learn to love the mysteryo.

Asked if they would like to learn now that it is fading, they responded that it was too late to learn because people are not into this kind of caroling. Besides there still 5 members who are left to do it on request. The sad truth is these carolers who are left are on the average of 70 years old. Two males with the other one as the sole guitarist and the other is the leader of the carolers and three females with one as the reader and two for soprano and alto voices. Compared to the old times when “*comparsa*” was used, a sole guitar cannot be compared to it.

When asked the importance of mysteryo in their community and to their family, they had the same answers. They aired out that with mysteryo they were able to build the chapel in the barangay. It was the one that unified the community and brought out the best of everyone just to help raise the amount needed for the project. It was the thing that made everyone realize that being a community is to help without anything asked in return. It was the moment when everyone realized that they had a part in spreading the true essence of Christmas through the story telling in a song in a form of mysteryo and it was the time that gathered all the talents in music to put it in good use for the community.

For the households who still do request for “*pa mysteryo*”, they too were apprehensive of the deterioration of the popularity of mysteryo since they have a “*pana-ad*” every year to have “*pa mysteryo*”. Asked why they have to do it every year, they uttered that more blessings will come to them if they can here the mysteries of Christmas. They narrated a lot of success stories because of the “*pa mysteryo*” like children graduated and landed in good jobs, working abroad and made a luxurious houses, buying cars and others.

They even added that everytime the mysteryo is sang, they will be in tears remembering the experiences that Mary and Joseph went through for the birth of Jesus and the sacrifices they made to prepare him for the coming of his future death and crucifixion. They even added that it will make think of the sins they had done and how God saved them. For them it is a very important practice that should be saved and they are saddened that the number of carollers for mysteryo are getting few and old. They hoped that the new generation will continue this legacy for the future to come.

## 6. Conclusion

To preserve the cultural heritage of Tudela, It is just right that a notation of the both the minor and the major keys are made and a copy of the 15 lyrics of the songs are also put into writing. This is because of the apprehension that the “*mysteryo*” will soon fade away. With this, when the time that the young generation will become interested in continuing the carolling in Tudela, a copy of each song with a note in a form of a booklet can always be retrieved in Barangay General.

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