

# A Close Encounter of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century ‘Rizal’ at the Bumpy Road of Buhisan

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Rainlee N. Bentazal<sup>1</sup>, John Eric B. Rubi<sup>2</sup>, Chenny Mendoza<sup>2</sup>,  
Reynaldo B. Inocian<sup>1</sup>, Romualdo B. Generalao<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1-2</sup>BEED State Scholars, Bachelor of Elementary Education Department,  
College of Teacher Education, <sup>1</sup>Director, Institute for Research in  
Innovative Instructional Delivery, <sup>3</sup>Professors, Social Science Department,  
College of Arts and Sciences, Cebu Normal University, Philippines  
<sup>1</sup>rainleebentazal@yahoo.com, <sup>1</sup>inocian03@yahoo.com,

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**Abstract:** *This study described the life of a 21<sup>st</sup> century ‘Rizal’ at the bumpy road of Buhisan. It answered these objectives to extrapolate common themes on the tricycle driver’s life in relation to Rizal, determine his strengths and weaknesses as a modern day hero, and ascertain his enduring legacies to his country. A qualitative method of narrative inquiry, interviews, and natural observation were used, with the primary informant who personified Jose Rizal’s heroic attributes. To observe ethics, the key informant’s name was held confidential, who is named fictitiously as ‘Dodong.’ A 27 year old ‘Dodong’ worked very hard daily, rain or shine, drove his tricycle to fulfill his family’s needs. As a key informant, he was selected based on the following criteria: a typical married family man, a religious individual, and driving more than ten years in the village. As a tricycle driver dubbed as ‘Dodong’ personified some attributes of a 21<sup>st</sup> century ‘Rizal’ at the bumpy road of Buhisan. The narratives of ‘Dodong’ embodied a modern heroic character of being loving to the family and the country, charming in a social environment, competing a challenging limited advantage, resisting a hostile weather condition, enduring the times of adversity, and taking advantage of one’s weaknesses illumined a trademark of a hero’s legacy. The 21<sup>st</sup> century Rizal encountered his ‘bumpy road’ symbolic to the challenges of his heroism.*

**Keywords:** 21<sup>st</sup> century hero, calesa, tricycle driver, bumpy road, kolorum

## INTRODUCTION

In order for an individual to be a 21st century hero, comparable to the eminent Philippine National Hero Dr. Jose P. Rizal, one should possess a heroic character. Having a strong feeling with pride to the country or the consciousness of being a nationalistic, then a spark of heroism radiates an act of goodness to someone. Being a hero does not need for one to be a ‘Batman’ or a ‘Superman,’ in order to succor someone who needs help, and gets the fame of being popular. A hero possesses the ability to exhibit good traits and protect the welfare of everyone. As mandated in the offering of the ‘Life and Works of Rizal’ in the new General Education Curriculum in the tertiary education in the Philippines, there is a need to capacitate the millennials’ civic-mindedness to provide certain forms of Rizal’s heroism in the 21st century [1, 2].

Viewing on Rizal in a more than a semester study, a transcended reflection on the embodiment of his heroism illuminates the personification of a tricycle driver in Barangay Buhisan, Cebu City, Philippines.

Commuting is very much part of the Filipino lifestyle, riding a motorized tricycle is a common means of transport among the lower and middle class members of Philippine society, more popular among students. This tricycle driver exhibits the 21st century ‘Rizal’ at the bumpy road of Buhisan (a hilly village of Cebu City). Though, he does not possess the intellectuality and acumen like Jose Rizal does; but he also has his own way of how he expresses his love and responsibility as a family man, a driver, and a good citizen of his own village. Contextualizing Jose Rizal’s idealism at the bumpy road of Buhisan is one way to localize heroism’s impact in the life of the common people. Supporting this, San Juan urges in finding out the source of the Rizal’s ideas and how he impacts his environment locally, as a main concern of true heroism [3].

A tricycle driver has his own duties and responsibilities. First, being a bread winner in the family with three kids: two boys and one girl. Second, being a driver, he is responsible to his passengers. And

lastly, being a good citizen who abides rules and regulation in the country, for having a safe driving in the community. Tricycle drivers carry passengers to their desired destination for a minimal fare. Rain or shine, he is waiting for the passengers who need transport services. His driver's life is not easy; but can be fulfilling, while easing out the dust and scorching heat of the sun, because of his dedication to serve the village community. A dedication to serve is one of the manifestations of heroism [4]. To be able to appreciate a hero, we must be able to learn more about him/her not merely his/her acts; but his/her thoughts behind these actions and situations that motivate his/her heroism [5].

This study is significant to all millennials who aspire to become future heroes that they may see a reflection of goodness and transparency of their actions to protect the common good in the community where they serve. This is also significant to all citizens of the country that they can be little heroes for the Filipinos and the rest of the citizens of the global community. Letting them see that their contributions through innovation, research, experiment, and advocacy matter in shaping up a resilient nation, and for building a strong world.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

### The 19th Century's Transportation Experiences of Jose Rizal

During the Spanish times in the Philippines, the use of tricycle is not a popular form of transportation, unlike the use of carriages, which are available in the *poblacion* or urban centers. Carriages, like the *calesa* or the *tartanilla* is a popular form of localized transport with the use of native ponies. In 1825, a Portuguese resident in the Philippines, Don Jose Huet, applies for a permission to establish a factory for making paper for its reeds, according to the Chinese ways. [6] He is granted the exclusive right to write this article for eight years for an exemption for a tribute to employ Chinese workers [6].

Strangely enough, it is in carriage-making that local enterprise is able to compete successfully with the imported products, which the Philippines, at that time badly needs. This enterprise begins with the establishment of plant using imported machinery and essential parts by a Frenchman, in order to make the needed carriages for use by the Filipino *illustrado* (the rich and famous) [6]. The manufacture of carriages is an important industry in Manila. Everyone who is

typically rich and influential in the society must have this vehicle. The vehicle is a prime necessity to be satisfied, before any business can be done [7]. Slowly, a number of local carriage works on limited production and low standards take care of the ordinary demand, for middle income earners. The wealthier classes, particularly foreigners, import their carriages from Batavia (modern Indonesia), and some faraway places like England and the United States of America [7].

One Sunday afternoon in June 1869, after kissing the hands of his parents and a tearful parting from his sisters, Jose Rizal has left Calamba for Biñan, Laguna. He is accompanied by Paciano, his brother, who acts as his second father [6]. The two brothers take a carromata (cart); reaching their destination after one and one-half hour drive is one of Rizal's reminiscing life experiences [6]. In Jose Rizal's letter with Family Trouble, it states one experience of Rizal, taking a couch (coupe), saying "I went to the Grand Hotel Noailles located on Rue Cannebiere." [8] The Rizal's family, who belongs to a *principalia*, a town's Hispanic aristocracy during the colonial times in the Philippines, is not exempted to own a farm carriage. As evidence of their influence, Rizal's parents build a large stone house which is situated near the town church and owns a hacienda. Their carriage ownership is a status symbol of an *illustrado's* lifestyle then in Calamba [9].

During Rizal's travel in Japan, he is favorably impressed with Japan's popular mode of transportation by means of a rickshaw drawn by men. However, a late realization is made that makes him sad because this means of transportation makes use of human labor. As time goes by, everything in transportation keeps evolving, the old horse-drawn *calesas* or couches, barouches, jitneys are gradually changing to a more enhanced and stylistic models [10]. It begins with the establishment of a French factory in San Miguel, which puts out a line of pretty carretelas sparkling with glass, wooden wheels, fitted with good lamps upholstered to taste. The revolution in it has been launched. It is completed by that great American named Don Hood, who initiates the first combined carriage factory and establishes carriages for hire on a scale never seen before in this country [7].

### The 21st Century's Means of Transportation among the Potential Filipino Heroes

Potential Filipino heroes are fortunate these days because they are exposed to different means of transportation; unlike those times of Rizal. In the

Philippines, one common means of transportation is motorized tricycles; it is a localized form of an auto-rickshaw. An "auto" in the sense that this is driven by one person that resembles like the traditional "rickshaw" in ancient and medieval China. As a form of public utility vehicle, a motorcycle is extended in its side a space good for 2 to 4 passengers with one or two seats at the back of the driver. This is economical compared than the use of a taxi. Most skimpy and interior villages use this means of transportation to bring passengers to the main road to take a jeep, a bus, a train, and other form of mass transport. This is also popularly used in rural towns in different parts of the country. But these tricycles cannot run without the drivers who manipulate and drive in order to earn income. Amidst the different design of tricycles in the Philippines, Codoy [11], in his study on the ergonomics of tricycles in Lipa, reveals that riding these tricycles can result to leg cramps and pain in the abdomen, upper and lower back pains, and neck pains because of its structural design.

Poor countries in the 3rd and developing world use tricycles as an essential means of transportation. In Philippine metropolis, these tricycles, the *habal-habal*, a motorcycle taxi for hire have played a role in the cultural aspect a Filipino life [12]. This is also locally known in Metro Manila areas as *angkas*, which is used as a common rescue of pedestrians who want to reach their destinations on time, despite its security risks, during heavy traffic congestion. This means of transportation has been also popular in the rural areas, when means of mass transport is limited. Motorcycle drivers are expected to safeguard the passengers' safety by driving safely; by checking the conditions of the vehicle before its use, in order to prevent road accident [11,13,14]. CNN Philippines in 2012 announces that, "There are over 658,675 for-hire tricycles and motorcycles operating in the Philippines, accounting for nearly 67.9% of the total for-hire vehicle population." [15] According to the National Statistical Board, tricycles outstrip the required number of vehicles for hire [16].

### **Motorcycle and Tricycle Drivers' Socio-economic Life**

In some Asian developing countries, public local transportation develops motorized vehicles from motorcycle and scooters exist to evolve the use of buses and trains for a large number of passengers in response to growing number of human population. This happens

similarly like the "tuktuks" in Thailand, "helicak" in Indonesia, and "moto-dub" in Cambodia. [17] In the case of the "habal-habal," in the Philippines, this has been dubbed as the motorized taxi. [18] When tricycles are replaced with Manila's "trisikads" (bicycle with a sidecar that accommodates two to three passengers) in 1950s, other cities subsequently followed including Cebu City use this for public transportation. In barangay Buhisan, Cebu City, (an elevated village of Cebu City's metropolis) a new variant motorized "habal-habal" emerges as one of the easiest way to commute against the heavy traffic congestions in the city.

Tricycles in the Philippines can service where no motorized Public Utility Vehicles (PUJs) are available. They traverse from one town to another based on the identified location of the passenger. The fare is largely dependent on what the passenger has contracted to pay the tricycle driver, which is based on the distance traveled and the road conditions. If the road is bumpy, then expect to pay a little more than the regulated fare. When the road is rough the speed has to be reduced. The slower the speed, the longer it takes to get to one's destination, safe from any untoward accident. Tricycles in the Philippines are favorable in many areas, where the roads are most jarring and muddy. Rain or shine, passengers can rely on the tricycle drivers' versatility. Tricycle drivers are after for everyone's safety. They take care of their passengers on the road. The life they save on the road is dependent on the obedience of the rules and regulations of the road safety.

In many places, these motorized bikes have been around for quite a time that stopping these to operate on the road is impossible. Their presence is deeply rooted in the cultural system of a Filipino. This means of transportation has become a large part of many people's lives, as means of earning a living. Tricycle drivers can earn a daily income of one to two hundred Philippine pesos (barely 3 to 5 US dollars); enough to meet both ends meet for the three meals of the members of the family, and an extra amount use for sending the children to school.

### **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The paper described the life experiences of a 21st century 'Rizal' at the bumpy road of Buhisan. Specifically, it aimed to extrapolate common themes on the tricycle driver's life in relation to Rizal, determine his strengths and weaknesses as a modern day hero, and ascertain his enduring legacies to his country.

## METHODS AND MATERIALS

### Research Design

This study used a qualitative method of narrative inquiry, interviews, and naturalistic observation, with the primary informant who was viewed to have personified Jose Rizal's heroic attributes. Bracketing was used in order to separate the subjectivity of the researchers and surfacing out the objectivity of the key informant's experiences and narratives. To observe ethics, the key informant's name was held confidential, who is named fictitiously as 'Dodong'. A 27 year old 'Dodong' worked very hard daily, rain or shine, drove his tricycle to fulfill his family's needs. As a key informant, 'Dodong' was selected based on the following criteria: a very responsible family-oriented husband, shrewdness to defend what is right from wrong, spiritually enlightened individual, sensitive to the needs of others, and resilient to challenges.

### Research Tool

The study made use of unstructured interviews of the informant, which was done with his consent according to his most preferred time. Responses of the interviews were recorded as field notes. More than three times the key informant was observed when the researchers used to take a ride of his tricycles from their residences to their work destinations. These data are conferred with the use of other secondary data from news clippings and other journal articles. These data were clustered and coded in order to generate the illuminating themes in the study.

### Research Environment

This study is conducted in Sitio X, Barangay Buhisan, where the key informant lived. Barangay B is a neighboring barangay to nearby villages of Punta Princesa and Tisa, Cebu City. The bumpy road of Buhisan is connected to the roads bound to barangays Punta Princesa and Tisa, where most of the commuters from the upland Buhisan descended to the lowlands to commute to the city and to other destinations in the province of Cebu.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### A Hero's Nurturing Love for His Family

Though Dr. Jose P. Rizal is not a married man, but his concern and love for his family, most especially his love for his mother, remains one of the most visible

topics of discussion in Philippine history classrooms. It is said that a simple individual can be a hero to someone's darkest life. Anyone of us can be a hero; we do not have to be superpowers like superman and wonder woman with strong abilities, in order to fight against our oppressors. Being someone with dignity, trusting ourselves, and making good things to others can make us a hero in our own right. In line with this, 'Dodong' performs his responsibilities not only to his passengers; but primarily to his own family.

He is three years committed to 'Maria' (not her true name), his wife. They bear three kids: the two boys named fictitiously as 'Andres and Peter' and one girl as 'Rose.' Driving a tricycle is his only source of income to meet his family's daily subsistence. Every day, 'Dodong' goes out with his tricycle to look for passengers, regardless of the weather condition, rain or shine, a complete meal is ensured after the day's toil. But before he does this regularly; he wants to be sure that before leaving his home everything should be prepared; he always expresses how he loves his wife and his children by kissing them. He bids sweet messages and promises to bring "pasalubong" or goodies when he comes home. That is how he shows his deep love for his family.

On the other hand, Jose Rizal also shows his love to his family in different ways. Like showing his love to his mother, he travels to different places to explore about medicine, in order to heal his mother's eye disease. Besides, he also shows deep concern and love to his family by writing letters to his mother (Teodora), father (Francisco), brother (Paciano) and sisters (Saturnina and Trinidad). The night before his execution, his last words to his parents as recorded by H. dela La Costa, SJ in 1961 documents the hero's love for his family. [7]

"My Most Loved Father,

Forgive me for the pain with which I pay you for struggles and toils to give me an education. I did not want this nor did I expect it. Farewell, Father, Farewell. 'To My Very Beloved Mother, Mrs. Teodora Alonzo, at 6:00 o'clock in the morning of the 30th of December, 1896.'

Jose Rizal"

At the last moments of Jose Rizal's life, he also shows a deep love to his family by recognizing his family's efforts to earn a degree both in the country and

abroad. How much love Rizal does he show for his countrymen? Well, it can never be measured. He even sacrifices his life for his countrymen. The death of Jose Rizal carries out a signal "Fuego" is heard, he bravely faces the bullet that marks the end of his life at 7:03 A.M. on the 30th day of December, 1896. [24] As the case of Dodong, his deepest love to his family is the reason why he continues finding a living, despite the challenges that he meets. He takes the risky situation during bad weather condition on the road, even he knows there are disadvantages on his life; but he is willing to gamble in order for his family to survive.

### **A Hero's Love for his Countrymen**

Jose Rizal's nationalism for the country is so deep. Nationalism is a concept that is still vague from its humble beginnings in 1872, particularly for the poor Filipinos. To Rizal, "reasons that originate in the lack of national sentiment are still more lamentable and more transcendental ... the lack of national sentiment brings another evil, which is the absence of all opposition to measures—prejudicial to the people and the absence of any initiative may redound to its good intention." [6, 19] During the colonial times in the Philippines, a man or woman is not treated as an individual of his or her nation. Outlawed or denied of his or her right of association, and therefore, he or she is regarded as weak and sluggish [6].

The concept of nationalism now is wider; unlike during Rizal's time. Its true essence, sacrificing for one's family while leaving home for so long in the case of overseas workers, is an act of heroism; winning for a coveted title for the Miss Universe is another; and Manny Pacquiao in boxing is also another act of heroism. Anyone can be a hero like a teacher to an ordinary citizen like a driver too. To Dave Barry, "One thing that unites all human beings, regardless of age, gender, religion, economic status, or ethnic background, is that, deep down inside, we all believe that we are above-average drivers." [20]

'Dodong' takes the passengers to their destination safely with an affordable fare. Even how bumpy the road is, he is cautious and slower to drive in order keep his passengers secure. Being approachable, neat, kind, and honest makes him catch the attention of his passengers to take a ride on his tricycle. He also loves his passengers as well as giving them a comfortable service. As a tricycle driver, Dodong is vigilant to identify the *kolorum* (unregistered) tricycles in the village. One is expected to follow the enforcement of the law to be observed among the government officials.

He sacrifices his life for the income he would receive, when he knows that a tricycle is *kolorum*. When his tricycle is *kolorum*, before the registration is secured, he takes his maximum responsibilities to give the best service to the passengers and avoids meeting an accident. Being stubborn is one thing in common to him with Rizal. Rizal's defiance with the Spanish government liberates the souls of his people.

### **A Hero's Charm in a Social Environment**

Stern and inflexible is Rizal in dealing with himself to pursue his dreams; but he is generous and kindly toward everybody else. The love that overflows from his heart is combined with pain, which he constantly feels for his tortured homeland, with an appealing magnetism. Without effort, he makes friends to all men who magnetize his charm. Sitting down in a steamer full of strangers, Rizal is once noted by every passenger. Before dinner, he is served with foods in good terms with most of everyone and the crew on board. His voice is low pitch, and so strangely vibrant that one hearing it at its best never forgets him [23].

Vis-à-vis, 'Dodong' is a driver that wears a brilliant smile, neat with clean attire every day. He wants to be clean all day long so that his passengers are comfortable and not to be conscious about his body odor. The smiles that he wears catch the mood of the passengers to be happy while traveling on the road. He gains a lot of friends too; he is a companion with his colleagues sharing their experiences in so many things.

### **A Hero's Competitive Challenge for a Limited Advantage**

Racing on the road with undisciplined drivers is not easy. Occasionally, 'Dodong' complains about how undisciplined the tricycle drivers are at the bumpy road of Buhisan. This happens when they stop; they block the way and stop in our track to call for passengers. Learning on how to deal with his passengers, 'Dodong' chants "*Punta, Punta, Punta*" (Punta Princesa, a place where the passengers are destined to disembark), before riding a jeep for city and other destinations. When passengers do not intend to take a ride, they ignore or simply shake their head. But, there are times that some passengers are getting annoyed by them, who are insistent to get their motor vehicle with full packed passengers.

To satisfy our curiosity on why there seems to have more tricycle units in Buhisan, going down to the tricycle terminal to take for a tricycle ride every morning is a chance to approach 'Dodong' and ask

some questions. 'Dodong' is a dignified and a principled man, which resembles that of Rizal's trait of looking forward for the ultimate goodness vis-à-vis for the safety of his passengers. This competition is further aggravated when more tricycles arrive in the area to pick up passengers. Some are even *kolorum* tricycles, when these have no body numbers, which most drivers rent because they cannot afford to buy their own tricycle units.

#### **A Hero's Resilience during Bad Weather Conditions**

Jose Rizal experiences hostile weather condition in Europe. When winter comes, he tries to work extra job in order to meet both ends meet for earning a penny for his means. A similar challenge that 'Dodong' also meets is the hot weather condition in Buhisan. When it is hot, he acquires *subaw* (colds), backaches, and headaches. During rainy seasons, there is lesser number of passengers on the road. The hot tricycle engine affects and causes pain on his legs and feet. Tricycle drivers entail long hours driving leading them experience lower back pains, which eventually impairs their economic productivity. Driving of tricycles shows a big risk to the health conditions of the driver, because of an open cabin, which drivers and passengers inhale the smoke from other smoke-belching vehicles on the road. 'Dodong' risks this for his family's sake. Part of the responsibility of 'Dodong,' as a driver, is to inspect a rented tricycle before leaving the place, whether it is in good condition. Once he leaves the rental facility with the vehicle, any damage found is the responsibility of the renting party. Drivers never operate a vehicle when it is suspected to be not in good condition. The driver parks the vehicle and makes appropriate arrangements so that the vehicle can be serviced for hire.

#### **A Hero's Patience in times of Adversity**

When asked on some questions, 'Dodong' is a bit skeptical; but later, he starts answering and gains his trust. He narrates that in a normal day, a total of 30 trips can be made. Considering the short driving distance, he has a maximum of 30 passengers for 12 hours of work. Like other tricycle drivers. 'Dodong' observes queueing while waiting for prospective passengers. In Europe, Rizal's patience is also tested when he has nothing left, not even a penny, to buy for his basic necessities, a time that he realizes the value of frugality and dependency with friends' support [4, 5].

#### **Taking Advantage on a Hero's Weakness**

In the case of 'Dodong,' his ways of living put his life in trouble, because of disobeying some franchising regulations for driving a *kolorum* tricycle. When the Cebu City Traffic Operator (CCTO) or Philippine National Police (PNP) has an operation for *kolorum* tricycles, 'Dodong' does not take a trip and he waits when they are no longer in the checkpoint. But some of the tricycle operators are bias. Some are being caught without the complete file or some have an expired file or not wearing the proper attire in driving, they just hand some money to the operators, in order not to be reprimanded and violation receipts are not to be issued on the erring drivers. This is what other tricycle drivers experience and notice in the society today. In the case of 'Dodong,' he would have wanted to put a stop on this and to consider him a good model, but he is thinking first his family, more than anything else. Like Rizal, he could have opted not to return the country and never face his untimely demise; but because of his love to his family and his country, he returns home and dies a hero.

#### **A Hero's Enduring Legacy**

The person with efforts, giving good services, and having followed rules and regulations in the government policy and being a good driver, despite his weaknesses, is what 'Dodong' achieves to be viewed as our modern hero. Showing love to his family and his job is how he faces his trials and takes new challenges in everyday life. Though, Rizal creates a big impact to our history. As the intellectual father of the Philippine Revolution and becomes a symbol of protest against Spanish rule, he is recognized as one of the country's pride. Austen Coates' biography of Rizal suggests awakening concept of Rizal as a hero. [24] "Rizal's poems and many articles show his love of the country, his patriotism, and his love of parents, his happiness, and his sorrows." [20] He expresses his feelings on what he witnesses as unjust during the time of Spanish occupation in the Philippines. [25] Though, Rizal is incomparable to 'Dodong' in terms of his intellectual prowess, but Rizal's attributes of being resilient and family-oriented radiates in 'Dodong's' embodiment.

#### **CONCLUSION**

As a tricycle driver dubbed as 'Dodong' personified some attributes of a 21st century 'Rizal' at the bumpy road of Buhisan. The narratives of 'Dodong' embodied a modern heroic character of being loving to the family and the country, charming in a social environment,

competing a challenging limited advantage of the use of resources, resisting a hostile weather condition, enduring the times of adversity, and taking advantage of one's weaknesses illuminated a trademark of a modern hero's legacy. The 21st century Rizal encountered his 'bumpy road' symbolic to the challenges of his heroism.

#### RECOMMENDATION

Based on the findings and conclusion, it will be recommended that Local Government Units (LGUs) will have to sanction *kolorum* tricycle operators. A re-orientation of the operators and drivers will be conducted in order to re-examine the drivers values system and heroism to promote honesty and national integrity.

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