

## Ritual Practices in Fishing

**Leandro C. Torreon (PhD), Allan S. Tiempo**  
Bohol Island State University- Candijay Campus, Cogtong,  
Candijay, Bohol, Philippines  
torreon\_leandro22@yahoo.com

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**Abstract** – *Fishing has been the primary livelihood of the people in Cogtong, Candijay, Bohol, Philippines. The place is known for rich in seafood products, as a matter of fact, the said place was named after its biggest fish captured. Since then, people fishing for livelihood make sure they do rituals to catch plenty of fish as it gives the fishermen hope to survive in the changing world. The objectives of the study are to ascertain the different fishing ritual practices and how these rituals affect their fish production. It anchored by Anxiety Ritual theory states that people behavior in adapting rituals is based on irreducible anxiety. The researcher used Narrative Inquiry to assist the participant's experience of the story through interviews. The data were collated, interpreted, and subjected to the framework analysis of Srivastava and Thomson (2009). It was found out that fishermen succeeded in this culture and tradition from ancestors. The richness in fishing will be mirrored how blessed this place in everything they have. It involves a better understanding to retain the rich history in terms of catch productivity. This would give the fishermen full responsibility in caring the old practices that would make them satisfied because of how the place being known. Transferring this to the new generation would be a great challenge even with the modern techniques in fishing and government support. Furthermore, commitment and support from the LGU, NGO and the university are highly needed for sustainable growth and technological advancement in their livelihood.*

**Keywords** – *Cogtong, Fishermen, Fishing, Practices, Ritual*

### INTRODUCTION

Traditions and beliefs were being practiced in this every other cultural places particularly in Cogtong, Candijay, Philippines. The myth about a big fish caught by their ancestors was named Cogtong in which they believed it is the folklore explanation of the origin of the place. Until now many people still believe in this myth. An origin of tongue handed from generation to generation.

The main source of income by most of the people living is fishing. They found fishing as their source of strength and have a belief that fishermen being a marginal community always play an important role to serve the society to save the aquatic life [1]. Traditional fishermen find pleasure and satisfaction in fishing [2] because they considered fishing as a treasure for it is their source of living and recognized as cultural heritage by communities, groups, and in some cases individual [3].

Ritual practices are part of the lives of many people. They believed that conducting ritual is a good luck in fishing. A belief handed from their forefathers. One way of preserving the intangible festive heritage in local culture is through their knowledge and

dissimilation by others in a way of general transmissions [4].

The ability of the fishermen in this locality is merely due to the knowledge they learned from information and experienced. The rituals they perform are being inherited mostly from their ancestors. They understood that it is part of their innate nature handed from their parents, relatives and friends what they follow. It brings them into awareness of its social function and the effect on their personal beliefs and the meaning behind all these practices will uncover their understanding that the knowledge of rituals usually being categorized into regulatory categories such as: (1) emotions, (2) performance goal sets, and (3) social connections to others [5].

Apparently, the intangible heritage that is characteristic of living cultural manifestations (such as festive rituals), or intangible culture functions as a depository of collective memory, implying a continuity, guaranteed by the various generations and local social groups [6]. Ritual has been studied from broad socio-cultural perspectives with little consideration of the psychological process at play [7]. Cogtong locals understand the importance of conducting fishing rituals in their fishing job. The

knowledge that they have earned through many channels enhances more their understanding on the importance of rituals before fishing. It is in their level of appreciation the significance of rituals to have good luck and have successful and abundance in fishing activities. For example, in Indonesia particularly the province of South Sulawesi, local fishermen conducted three cultural ceremonies in fishing namely: “Cera Turungang” (abundance catch of fish), “I caru-carui” (ship inauguration ceremony), and “Pasili” a blessing ceremony [8].

Every ritual corresponds to where the place located. People know that having a ritual brings goodness to the cultural heritage handed down from their ancestors. For the fishermen, it is a matter of how they will execute the said rituals. One of the example that can be is the use of “palina” (incense) in fishing in Tag-anongan Island in Cortes, Surigao Del Sur because they believed in mysticism. It was being used for it has a theme of spirituality, love for the environment, promotion of sustainable used of resources and strong family ties [9].

Therefore, conducting rituals is very important to have prosperity in fishing. Because of our belief that there are supernatural creatures living in nature particularly in the sea, fishermen conducted fishing rituals. It was understandable that the many places has history of ritual practices in fishing, the researchers are eager more to dig deeper the history of fishing rituals and how its importance on the lives of many fishermen residing in this area.

Folk traditions are visible in the Philippines in highland, farming or in the fishing communities. It is a form of oral lore that does have not change as it is part of social milieu in rural areas of the country. The folk tradition or folklore have several genres such as epics, wise sayings, indigenous knowledge system, child rearing practices, rituals, burial practices and the belief system in crop production and fishing which dominated in rural and urban areas, a kind of traditions which has been a part in the culture of Filipinos. These traditions have many perspectives from multiple dimensions such as culture, social and spiritual which is conducted by many coastal communities whereby the rituals has been inherited from generation to generation [10].

Fishing rituals is not only practiced in the Philippines. There are many countries have their own rituals in fishing. They perform these rituals because they believe that it brings good luck and also as a way of asking permission and thanking God for the safety and abundance in fishing. For them, rituals have a huge part in their country’s beliefs and practices.

As the largest and most famous festival offering sacrifice to the sea, it develops from the traditional ritual performed by the fishermen. This is the largest ceremony of offering sacrifices to the sea which has lasted for more than 500 years and has marine culture carnival with Chinese characteristic which has the purpose to get rid of the pressure because of hardwork and life dilemmas. It is conducted to have harvest and happiness in emotion.

In Bangladesh, majority of the fishermen (fisher folks) studied regularly information on weather, fish buying and selling prices, daily consumable products, entertainment and religion [11]. Fishermen mostly rely information from their friends, families, Media, and newspapers. Through these channels of information, they were able to calculate what the perfect timing in fishing.

Tianheng festival is a ritual offering sacrifice to the sea god was carried out around the sixth solar term Grain Rain, which means “goyu”(inherence) in Chinese calendar, in the middle of March every year because it is the time of fish harvest and influence by the time and weather for the safety harvest. This ritual originates from the fishermen’s fear and ignorance to the natural phenomenon with hopes to get blessing from Dragon King the Heavenly Master. The Matsu Sun Xiangyu a woman gives help to fishermen in legend and the fourth lord (he who evolve from a fox who can be in charge of the sea world to quell the shipwreck so that fishermen can return safety with rich harvest. On the day of fishermen are immersed in pious, mysterious and joyful atmosphere. The fishermen will share the sacrifice offerings to their relatives who don’t do fishing. For the fishermen the festival is the people’s expression of happy life and bright future especially in fishing [12].

A study conducted by [13] on “Ritual Process of Bajo People in Their Fishing Activities in Tiworo Island Muna of South Sulawesi, Indonesia”, found out that there were three stages of ritual ceremony : first “Nyalamak di lao”(fishing feast) to ask permission from the king of sea named, “Lolo Bajo” to have safety and good luck, “Nobire Palibu in Lau”(at sea) to ask guidance to the rulers of the fish the prophet khidir, to give instruction where the location of the fish, third “Mor Palibu de Lao”,(after fishing),the rituals is done when they with comeback with no fish caught.

The following rituals symbolize the richness of cultures and traditions of a country. It would entailed and mirrored a society in which ritual operates as social mechanisms with a pivotal role in sustaining vibrant

community interrelationship [14] and performing in one common goal, to have abundance in fishing. The fishermen understand that fishing has ceremony needs to offer to have good luck. They believed the meaning of rituals and beliefs in their fishing, the fishing communities should be based on the dialectical relationship between man and his social, cultural, political and economic environment [15]. Hence, that fishing is a part of life for the fishermen they valued having rituals in fishing. They understand that there were supernatural existences in this world. Every inhabitant has rituals practices which are a manifestation of an unseen element in nature. The performance of seasonal rites to call the "anitu" could bring good luck [16]. It is evident that rituals in fishing was performed to ask and offered sacrificed for the sea gods and it is being part of fishermen's life.

A study about "Religion and Culture Encounters in Misool Raja Ampat: Marine Ritual Practice of Susi Laut", found out that "susi laut" in Misool has existed long ago even before Islam [17]. During the time when Islam was not yet in the place, it was performed in order to honor and respect God and their leaders. As Islam came the designation and process were change. They address Allah instead of God. They used supplemental offerings for the God and sea, but nowadays they uses only wooden tree tied with betel nut and has colourful cloth together with a flag indicates that "susi laut" has been opened.

Rituals was been a part of life to many people across the globe. Even our ancestors already conducted this practice for their survival. Some of these were being performed until now. According to [18] essays on "Face to Face Behaviour", he pointed out that one of the major functions of rituals is to create and stabilize social relations. He believes that social rites serve the function of bonding and aggression blocking is centre in the interaction of human being. People do not necessary rely on nonverbal signals in developing rituals but could use verbal means in achieving their goals. Thus, people observed ritualized patterns, forms of nonverbal and verbal behavior that were used as signals of communication.

The researcher attempts to analyze the function of modern super collection through their social scholars. These collections are the list of beliefs in which the collectors and informant added some functions. Folklorist shows more interest on superstitions to further analyzed its superstitious behavior and lack of explanation in the content.

## **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

This study sought to answer the questions about the fishing rituals among the fishermen of Cogtong, Candijay, Bohol, Philippines. Specifically, on the common fishing ritual practices, how it was performed and the result of the said fishing rituals.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The researcher used qualitative method with an ethnographic approach. Qualitative research is a systematic scientific inquiry which seeks to build a holistic, largely narrative, description to inform the researchers understanding of a social or cultural phenomenon. It is primarily an inductive process of organizing data into categories and identifying research patterns (relationship among categories). This method of research is based on research context. It emerges from the observations and interviews. The definition of this implies from the data and meaning through gathered information [19].

Using qualitative form of research helps the researcher gather the specific result of the study on how the rituals of fishermen relate to the fishing practices of people. It would enhance the absolute result of the study so that researchers able to analyze the in-depth of this practiced. The accuracy and reliability focused on the questions used in the interview. Hence, this method will greatly challenge the researcher's ability to formulate a best outcome that emphasized the importance of study and its result.

The questionnaire about fishing rituals employed by the researchers was constructed based on the given problem. The researchers constructed their own questions to formulate answer of the problem being presented. These questions will gather answers which clarify the set of questions being asked to the fishermen to fully understand the study.

Close and open questions were being asked to the participants. Close questions are those which can be answered by a simple "yes" or "no," while open questions are those which require more thought and more than a simple one-word answer. These questions will gather relevancy of this study and its outcome to the community and how to make them understood the importance of fishing rituals in their field of work. The researchers imply questions that would formulate accurate result. This could be used for further understanding of the study to connect the importance of rituals for the fishermen.

Understanding every detail through interviews will solidify the result of the study. Knowing the answers is

very integral to come up a reliable research because it should be back up by concrete and accurate information. The results were proved the study's validity and how to produce broad explanations regarding the study. Every bits of information uttered by the fishermen solidifies result of the research.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

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This study aims to determine the common fishing ritual practices, how it was performed and the result of the said fishing rituals.

Rituals exist in the lives of fishermen. In Cogtong, they still practice fishing rituals for their livelihood to have good luck and abundance in fishing. These rituals were conducted to ask permission from the nature spirits allowing the fishermen do fishing at sea. It symbolizes human and nature relationship which showcases the richness of local traditions and cultures that are unique from others.

### **Pagpalina (Fumigation)**

It is a form of ritual where in the fishermen used the incense as the main ingredient in their ritual. The incense was placed in a coconut shell with "baga" to create smoke. They put thorny and sticky grasses on it which would make the "palina" produced more smoke. The grasses they used are amorseco, makahiya, bagaswa, lemon grass, buli and tagilyo. They also used kamanjan and tawas to enhance more the smell and smoke. After combining all the needed ingredients to be used in the rituals, the fishermen will place the "palina" near the new assembled fishing net as a way of blessing and good fortune in the fish harvest. The ritual conducted only if the fishermen's fishing net was new to remove bad luck because when they perform the ritual there is a huge effect. They believe that it is the best way in helping them to catch more fish. The ritual vanishes the nature spirits whom they believe is the reason why they don't have abundance catch in fishing. Because of the reason that, "if they don't ask permission from supernatural powers living at sea, they were not allowed to have good fishing result".

### **Paglubog /Lusbog sa Banka (Submerging the Boat)**

It is a form of ritual wherein the boat is sinking to release bad luck. Fishermen said that, "the sea has many

forms of nature spirits that they need to avoid and during fishing these spirits will suddenly appear that would cause the fishermen to be frightened". According to the stories by fishermen, "the nature spirits will form into different supernatural creatures like a giant person, sea animals and creatures, shadows and a ball of fire known as "santilmo" to distract the fishermen while fishing". To avoid this form of distraction, the fishermen sank their boats into the sea to remove bad luck cause by the spirits and evil. They put rocks and any heavy objects to make the boat sink. The bad luck will be washed out and the spirits and evil will disappear because on the effect of saltiness of the sea. Fishermen said that, "the evil and nature spirits will not like to be put any salt because it could cause on their death". Since the fishermen applied and conducted the form of fishing ritual, the sea spirits and evils are no longer distracting them while fishing and it helps to have abundance of fish caught. Because of the ritual of sinking the boat the owner of the sea allows the fishermen to catch plenty of fish which results to have bigger income compared of not doing any rituals. The rituals help the fishermen to stop the spirits and evil of delaying their fishing which results in small amount of fish being caught. Many fishermen believe this ritual because it is effective especially to those small-scale fishing.

### **Pagdiwa-diwata (Fairy Enchantment)**

A form of ritual done through "tamban" (faith healer). This ritual uses chicken blood and it will be conducted in the sea together with Latin prayer uttered by the faith healer. The faith healer helps the fishermen perform the ritual. They use white chicken together with wine and 1 piece of raw egg because it is more symbolic to be offered. According to the fishermen, "the sea nature spirits would love to have this form of chicken because chicken color will calm the spirits and make them attracted through their eyes". The used of chicken blood is conducted only when they have new fishing net. The fishermen together with the faith healer bring the new fishing net and the live chicken at sea. When they reached the sea, the chicken will be slaughtered. They put wine first on the chicken while the "tamban" was uttering prayer in Latin words. The fishermen will pray to St. Vincent Ferrer, San Roque and on Mother of Perpetual Help. This prayer is a form of conversation between faith healer and the spirits by allowing them to have access of the fishes at sea. The blood of the chicken will put directly on the sea. It will symbolize an offering for the supernatural forces at sea.

It is a form of gift in exchange for the abundance of fish caught. Many fishermen believe and practice this fishing ritual. They said that, "since they conducted the rituals, fishes will easily caught because it will went directly to the fishing net and the fishermen have an easy way of catching the fish". Fishermen notice that the one who conducted the ritual got plenty of fish while those who are not having any ritual are not successful in their fishing. The ritual helps also avoid any bad luck because there is faith healer that can communicate with the spirits.

### **Pagpahid sa Dugo (Smearing of Blood)**

It is a form of ritual which involves slaughtering either of pigs or cows. They slaughter the pig because it will contribute to have abundance in fishing. The pig was offered to the nature spirits. It symbolizes harmony in catching the fish. The nature spirits will allow the fishermen to access the sea. The blood of the pig is smeared in the boat and pig's body will be thrown to the sea. It means that the spirit is washed out any thrash cause by the humans. It opens the portal of the sea to where bountiful of fish located. Fishes will swim towards the net and it will easily be caught. It was said, "that those spirits residing the sea would love to have offered because it makes them help the fishermen for it believes that it softens their heart towards human for help in return on the effort of the fishermen to cleanse the sea from destructions". Some fishermen use this as a sign of peace offering towards the spirits. Other fishermen also performed this ritual by using the cow instead of the pig. They say that "the bigger animals being offered the bigger number of fish they caught". The sea spirits would love to have blood offered because it is a sign that fishermen value the sea and the spirit. It is believed that these supernatural powers are good to human if we are good to them in return.

### **Fishing Ritual Using a Rat**

It is a form of fishing ritual used by the fishermen to remove bad luck in fishing. The fishermen put the rat inside the plastic and then wrapped it with cellophane. After the rat was wrapped it will be put in the boat. When they are already at sea, they will sink the rat. The sinking of rat is way for the bad luck to be removed during the fishing activities. Because according to the fishermen, "the rat is a symbol of prosperity for the sea spirits". The rat body shows sign of respect for the fishermen towards supernatural forces residing at the sea. They observed that conducting ritual has an effect on their fishing harvest and the bad spirits did no longer

exist.

### **Fishing Ritual Using Rice and Viand**

It is a ritual in the form of food offering to the sea supernatural powers. This ritual is conducted by using cooked rice together with a viand. The fishermen bring the offering into the sea. They place the food on the top of their boat before they went on fishing. When they reached the fishing destination, they will throw and scattered the food to the sea for it symbolizes the desire of the fishermen to ask permission in exchange of the food they offered.

The ritual of food offering is a symbol of respect by the fishermen in acknowledging that there are supernatural forces at sea. Fishermen believe that, "if they offered food there was abundance in fishing because they share the blessing they have". This ritual was inherited from their ancestors and still existing nowadays. Many fishermen say that, "this ritual was more convenient compared to the others". They could perform it in anytime of the day even if their fishing net was old. The result of the rituals is good because they have abundance of fish harvest.

Ritual practices of Cogtong fishermen emphasize how they enhance their fishing production. The conducting of rituals symbolizes how they understood that importance of rituals in their fishing activities. It shows where the areas needs to focus in fishing as part of the livelihood program and it determined its impact on the movement of the fishermen's community and how it relates to the fishermen across the locality in Cogtong.

The rituals being performed shows how unique the living condition in the work of fishing community. It signifies the character of society in which fishing is the main source of survival. This characterizes the importance of rituals in a community that varies in certain aspects in terms of the fishing skills and capabilities of fishermen who rely mainly on the sea as their place of living. It is a determining factor in recognizing the reality that despite of modern practices, ancient rituals still exist, and it is more effective.

The modernization of society will not affect on how fishermen of Cogtong act. Many fishermen still believe that fishing rituals help their fishing. Upon conducting the rituals, they know that importance must be given to the old practices and the forces of nature. A characteristic which was unique for the fishermen is that what is observed is a realization that changes of the world would not affect the old beliefs and practices as a whole because fishing community still embraced early customs and traditions. Although younger

generation of fishermen is coming it would not change the narrative that it will be handed generation by generation. It would not change the reality that Cogtong fishing community is unique and it is why they are abundant of fish because the people value so much the sea which is a gift from God.

#### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Performing the rituals for fishermen in barangay Cogtong, Candijay, Bohol, Philippines was a way of showing respect by asking permission from the supernatural forces in the sea. The fishing rituals were conducted because of the belief of fishermen that it would help to have abundance fish caught at sea. It was an offering made in exchange for the goodness of sea spirits towards fishermen. It is a practice of friendly gesture through understanding the supernatural forces existing which need high respect for the owner of the sea. This is a form of enhancing fishing activities by applying ancient beliefs and practices.

The acknowledgment of fishermen on the importance of fishing ritual is a way of valuing relationship with nature. It gives a clear understanding in determining what ritual is most effective and has impact on the fish production of fishermen. A reflection on how ancient and modern fishing connected to each other. This would give an answer to the questions why rituals is needed by fishermen to be performed. It could carry perception to the public who are ignorant about fishing rituals.

Therefore, fishing rituals is a practice by many fishermen about their beliefs in connection to the fishing activities of fishermen in a local community. This is a symbolic approach of local fisher folk towards cultural beliefs of the early fishermen settlers in barangay Cogtong.

Furthermore, commitment and support from the LGU, NGO and the university are highly needed for sustainable growth and technological advancement in their livelihood. There should be a further study on the intervention and the adaptation to the new skills and technology.

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