

Cultural and Historical Analysis of Traditional Games in Mt. Isarog, Bicol Region, Philippines

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ABSTRACT

Traditional games help the young generation engage in social interaction and develop teamwork. Games also impart aspects of community history, traditions and social values, thus deepening one's sense of rootedness and sense of pride. By playing traditional games, children can engage with and actively co-create their heritage, which has a deep and lifelong positive impact (Pukhtoonkhwa & Fata, 2013). This study gathered and analyzed traditional games in barangays of Goa, Camarines Sur adjacent to the foot of Mt. Isarog. Specifically, it aimed to identify traditional games commonly played by the inhabitants of the locality, describe their purpose and mechanics, and analyze the traditions embedded in them through a historico-cultural lens. These games were documented in selected peripheral barangays near Mt. Isarog, namely Abucayan, Pinaglabanan, Hiwacloy and Digdigon through a mini-ethnographic survey design; this allows the researchers to conduct fieldwork within a shorter time span and with intervals. In particular, the communities were visited at least once a week for the conduct of data collection. There were 20 informants who were selected through snowball sampling. Data were collected through interview, kwentuhan (informal conversations) and focus group discussions (FGD), and transcripts were subjected to thematic analysis. It was revealed that the participants were engaged in four traditional games that reflect the joyful disposition of Bikolanos. These are patintero or tubigan, tumbang preso, waralatan panyo, and sungka. All these traditional games are played by a minimum of two players, which reflect the communal orientation of the games. Further, these can be played not only by younger age groups but also by adolescents, which highlight social skills and values like physical fitness, community bonding, cooperation and care for the environment. These documented games embody collective identity and local heritage, and through their performance they are preserved for posterity.

Keywords: Filipino traditional games, cultural performance, local heritage, Bikolano identity, Mt. Isarog

INTRODUCTION

Traditional or indigenous games in the Philippines are played across multiple generations, usually using native materials or instruments. These traditional games are simple games with noble values passed down from ancestors emphasizing physical skills and community solidarity. Due to limited resources for toys, children usually invent games that require only players. The various skills used in these games develop the physical, mental and social development of the players.

Traditional games serve many purposes. In teaching traditional games, students understand important major social science concepts and generalizations (Edwards, 2017). This is also a way of helping children and even the youth develop teamwork and social interaction. It also teaches children the importance of folk traditions, social values and norms, thereby deepening their rootedness to the community and developing sense of pride. Pukhtoonkhwa and Fata (2013) stressed that playing these traditional games can make children actively engage with and co-create their heritage through sports, which eventually develops a deep and lifelong positive impact on them. Children learn the nation's cultural heritage while they play traditional games (Lestaringrum, 2017).

Lestaringrum (2017) also posits that early childhood education is fundamental and cannot be separated from the playing world as a part of children's developmental stage that must be met (Lestaringrum, 2017). Developmental stages of children that involve the acquisition of literacy and numeracy concepts and skills can

be implemented utilizing games. Interestingly, a study in Bicol conducted by Abay and Parola (2024) analyzed mathematical concepts including numbers and number sense, geometry, patterns, and probability in the folk games. They found out that teaching mathematical concepts using the folk games is engaging and culturally relevant in Bicol Partido. Trajkovik, et al. (2018) similarly found a novel teaching approach for integration of children's traditional games in elementary school program. Findings show that the students' achievements were directly influenced by students' intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors, as well as perceived experience. Moreover, students accept the integration of traditional games in teaching. These literatures highlight that playing traditional games is useful in teaching concepts and at the same time crucial for preserving culture and promoting social interaction among the younger generation.

While dynamism characterizes culture, the rapid changes brought about by social conflicts, technological innovations, natural and anthropogenic disasters and cultural adaptation always carry the threat of cultural loss which itself is an inevitable trend. This documentation and analysis of traditional games in communities surrounding Mt. Isarog in Bicol, Philippines is an attempt to preserve the rich heritage of the Filipinos particularly in the peripheral communities.

Figure 1. Location map of Mt. Isarog Natural Park in the Philippines.



Source: https://www.oocities.org/my_isarog/location.html

Objectives

General Objectives

This study aimed to gather and analyze traditional games in selected barangays of Goa, Camarines Sur that are adjacent to Mt. Isarog.

Specific Objectives

Specifically, this study aimed to:

1. Identify traditional games commonly played by the participants.
2. Describe the purposes and mechanics of the games.
3. Analyze the traditions embedded in and reflected by the traditional games.

METHODOLOGY

This study focused on documenting traditional games in selected barangays of Goa, Camarines Sur surrounding Mt. Isarog. Utilizing mini-ethnographic design, the study recruited 20 key informants through snowball

sampling. They were 20 residents from the identified barangays who were still able to recall and describe traditional games during their younger days. Permission from the barangay captains concerned and the participants were secured, and data were collected through interviews, kwentuhan (informal conversations) and focus group discussions. Field notes were manually recorded and with the help of an audio-recorder and cellphone camera. Among the 20 participants, 12 participated in the FGD during the validation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Traditional games played by the participants and their mechanics

This study aimed to gather and analyze traditional games commonly played by the inhabitants of Goa, Camarines Sur specifically from Barangays Abucayan, Pinaglabanan, Hiwacloy and Digdigon, all situated near Mt. Isarog. Among the many traditional games, the informants identified four that were commonly played by them. These are (1) *patintero* or *tubigan*, (2) *tumbang preso*, (3) *waralatan panyo*, and (4) *sungka*.

The informants say that these games hold a historical origin deeply rooted not only specifically in Bikolano culture but encompassing Filipino culture. The games are not only reflective of their lifestyles but also serve as significant national heritage, embodying values and skills passed down through generations. This makes the traditional games crucial in passing down cultural knowledge by serving as interactive tools for teaching academic concepts, social skills, and cultural values.

A ground with plain and solid surface or a cemented area is chosen for the performance. As for ground preparation, a rectangular box of about five by six meters is drawn on the ground. Parallel lines are drawn inside the rectangle, the number of lines depending on the number of players.

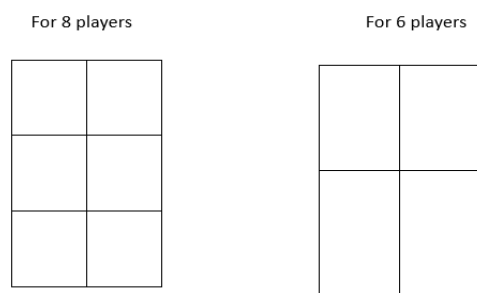


Figure 2. Parallel lines drawn on the ground for patintero.

Patintero or tubigan is a popular outdoor game where players try to cross lines drawn on the ground without being tagged by the opposing team members who guard the lines. This game is played by our ancestors in Partido, as previously documented in the Historical Data Papers of the towns of Partido Area. Both boys and girls can take part in this game, and tends to be popularly played when there is moonlight. The game starts with the tossing of a coin to determine which team assumes the offensive role and which will take the defensive roles. The defensive team is called the “line guards” or “taggers” while the offensive team is called the “passers” or “runners.” The line guards enter the field and assume their designated positions. The team captain can move vertically to tag any opponent attempting to breach the defense. The object of the passers is to get through all the lines and then return without being tagged. The taggers try to block and tag the runners as they get near them or as they cross their lines.

This game is also played during town fiestas; during such events, the best team players of a town play against an out-of-town group. Felicidad Bermejo, 81 years old from Barangay Pinaglabanan, said that after the game, the losers receive their consequence. The usual penalty for losing the game is to require the team to enter the mouse hole: the members of the winning team form a line with their legs wide apart, and the members of the losing team are one by one made to crawl under the spread legs of the winners in line, then crawl again back in the other direction. Another usual penalty is piggyback-ride. The winners are given a ride on the backs of the losers usually for a few minutes.

Tumbang preso is another traditional game where players throw slippers to the “taya” (guard) or “It” who protects the can and tags the others whose slippers enter the circle. This is played by many players.

For ground preparation, a toe line is drawn on the ground. A circle, one foot in diameter, is drawn 6 to 8 meters from the toe line, and the can is placed standing in the middle of the circle. In playing this game, the first player throws his slipper at the can as he stands behind the toe line. The aim is to hit and knock down the can outside the circle. The “guard” stands ready to retrieve the can. The player must recover the slipper and then run back to the throwing line without being tagged. If he fails to run back to the toe line with his slipper, player no.1 stands on the spot where the slipper landed and waits for the second player to play. Two important points must be considered here: (1) The “It” cannot chase and tag the player who knocked down the can unless he first returns the can to its original place inside the circle and (2) the player who knocked down the can cannot return to the toe line unless he retrieves his slipper from where it landed.

The unsuccessful player who stands frustrated must pick up his stone and run the moment the second player knocks the can down. Should the player be tagged by the “It” before he reaches the toe line, that player becomes the “It” of the next game. If the player reaches the toe line without being tagged, the second player has his turn.

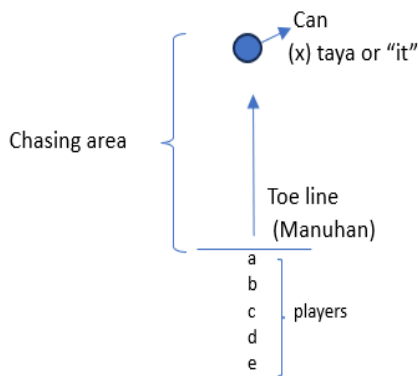


Figure 3. An illustration of the Tumbang Preso game.

Waralatan Panyo is another traditional game played by the key informants and their predecessors particularly during the night. It is played by children of all ages. There is no exact number of players but the more players involved, the more fun it is. The players form a circle and the IT or guard will stay at the center. At the signal, the IT will run outside and run at the back of the players’ original place inside the circle.

The players are not allowed to look back once the IT runs. Once the panyo is dropped to one player, the player automatically gets the panyo and run. If he is not able to run, the IT will tap the player and he will be the next IT.

Waralatan Panyo, according to Gloria Asilo, 84 years old, is “*sarong suanoy na kawat na pirmeng pigkakawat dati kang mga kaakian pag bulanon, o maliwanag ang bulan. Ini pigkakawat ninda pag madiklom na o pag banggi.*” (This is an old game which is always played by children under the moonlight. They play this at night time.)

Its importance is shared by two participants. According to Kenneth and Edwin, both 35 years old,

“*Saro sa mga importansya kan kawat na ini iyo na nagiging paagi ini para mahasa ang talento kan aki sa pagkanta, siring man na apwera kan nalilibang ang aki nagkakaigwa pa sindang maray na pagiriba-iba asin relasyon, na nakakahaman nin sarong maray asin maogmang memorya asin eksperyensa.*”

(One of the importance of this game is that it develops their talent in singing. Moreover, they deepen their friendship and they create good memories and experiences together.)

Waralatan panyo also requires sharpening one’s tactile perception, hence it is a game that develops vigilance and keen observation among players. It can be played by young ones and adults alike.

Sungka is a traditional Filipino board game played on a wooden board. In this game, players move shells or stones around the “houses,” aiming to capture the most pieces on one’s mother house. This is an ancient board game that our ancestors used to play, enjoy, and have fun with children and adults; children and adults alike can play with each other—no age limit is imposed on the players. It is a two-player game that gained popularity in Bicol Partido and is widely cherished across the entire country. The materials needed include a wooden board with holes, as shown in Figure 4, and small items like small rocks, marbles, or shells.



Figure 4. The sungka board.

According to Elizabeth Felias 74 years old from Hiwakloy during their younger days sungka is played in the ground, they make holes like the wooden board and used small rocks since there is no available wooden board during their time.

Material culture of some traditional games like sungka become treasured artifacts that are handed down from generation to generation. It connects the past to present, and although there are modifications at times, they form part of the intangible and tangible heritage of the locality.

Embedded traditions and social values

The informants in the FGD mentioned that the traditional games played by the inhabitants around Mount Isarog are deeply rooted in the traditions and social fabric of the region. These games are more than just past times. They are a reflection of their values, history, and communal bonds with the local people. While only four traditional games are discussed in the preceding pages, they equally share the traditions and social values embedded and reflected in the games mentioned in the following paragraphs.

Many traditional games like *patintero*, *luksong tinik*, and *agawan base* are team-based, fostering a sense of cooperation, teamwork, and community bonding. These games require players to work together and strategize, promoting social interaction and unity among participants.

Games such as *sipa* and *kadang-kadang* emphasize physical fitness, agility, and coordination. These games encourage children and adults to stay active, develop motor skills, and maintain physical health, which are important aspects of traditional rural life.

Traditional games like *sungka* and *piko* help preserve and pass down cultural heritage and identity. These games have been played for generations, and their continued practice helps keep the local customs and traditions alive. They serve as a connection to the past and a way to honor and remember the ancestors.

Also, some traditional games are often played during community celebrations, and festivals. These events bring the community together, fostering a sense of joy and collective celebration. During such gatherings, games like *tumbang preso* and *langit-lupa* are popular among children, adding more fun to the events.

Serving as activities beyond merriment, traditional games also often carry moral lessons and values. For example, *patintero* teaches the importance of teamwork, while *luksong tinik* emphasizes precision and timing. These games are a way for elders to impart important life skills and values to younger generations. Likewise,

they promote social harmony and ensure that everyone, regardless of their status, can participate and enjoy the games

Lastly, many traditional games are played outdoors, which connect the players with nature and their environment. Games like *piko* and *kadang-kadang* are typically played in open spaces such as fields and schoolyards, fostering an appreciation for the natural surroundings. Simple objects like stones, cans, and bamboos are also often part of the material culture of traditional games, demonstrating the creativity and resourcefulness of the local people. This reflects a cultural tradition of making the most out of available resources and finding joy in simplicity.

Therefore, the traditional games played by the inhabitants around Mount Isarog are not just forms of entertainment but are integral to the cultural traditions, values, and social life of the community.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Games are part of the lives of the people in a community. The study identified and described the four traditional games commonly played by the informants of the study area, which are patintero or tubigan, tumbang preso, waralatan panyo, and sungka. Most of these games were developed to be played in open spaces such as front yards and back yards, or where community members frequently gather around to relax; often, these are spaces close to nature, which reflect the people's preferences for natural settings where everyone can witness or participate. This shared sense of belongingness is enforced by the frequency of playing traditional games—which are often played anytime and anywhere, with lesser temporal and spatial restrictions than sports tournaments.

Going past merriment and physical development, traditional games develop social skills and values necessary for becoming active members of the society. These include the development of keen observation, vigilance, companionship and concern for others, shared responsibility and accountability, simplicity and joy. The simple rules of games also reinforce to children the concept of law, order and justice. Games, therefore, strengthen our threads of pakikipagkapwa (shared identity and oneness).

As they are collectively played and transmitted to the younger generations, traditional games become—by themselves—part of the shared identity and traditions of closely-linked communities and at the same time a vehicle through which traditions, norms and values are passed on to posterity. The materials linked to these games become important part of the natural and cultural heritage of communities, at times celebrated through symbolic rituals and festivals, emphasizing their deep historical and social relevance.

The following recommendations are proposed by the researcher:

1. A documentation of the games in the locality or the province should be conducted and a book be published for future use.
2. A similar study be conducted by future researchers since there are still many games that are not documented in this study.
3. The traditional games in this study be adopted in schools for instruction purposes or part of institutionalized activities during intramurals and district meets. Local communities may also incorporate traditional games for promoting mental health and inclusion of persons at odds with the law.

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