

Pusô: A Labor of Love and Culture

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Abstract

Foods have always been a part of Filipinos' traditional arts and crafts. Food and culture are inseparable identities for one mirrors the other. Adopting the descriptive-qualitative research design employing grounded theory approach, this research project aimed at documenting as a means of preservation and conservation of the rice based traditional cuisines found in Capiz. The investigation resulted that Capiz, with its precolonial Filipino traditions mixed with Hispanic influenced, is rich with rice-based delicacies spread all over the municipalities in the province. Among these rice-based delicacies are ibos, inday-inday, bayi-bayi, biko, bibingka, padusdos, and pusô. However, pusô stands out among these delicacies because it originated mainly in Barangay Libon, Panay, Capiz with the Benliro family as the producers. This delicacy is made from glutinous rice (pilit) wrapped in a crafted heart-shaped nipa palm leaves and boiled in nipa palm wine (tubod) as sweetener (tam-is). Gender equality is observed in the preparation of pusô where the man prepares the nipa leaves for the packets (balayan) and he harvests and cooks the nipa wine. The woman makes the balayan, washes and dries the glutinous rice and puts them in the packet. Moreover, both of them help each other in the cooking process. Pusô became popular through the word of mouth, marketing in nearby municipalities, ordering for occasions, multimedia advertisements, and featuring in a television program. Hence, it augmented the family's economic sustainability. Pusô as Capizeños' pride must patronize this delicacy for it reflects their unique identity, cultures, and literatures.

Keywords: Capiz Cuisine, Delicacies, Cultural Studies, Traditional Arts and Crafts

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Introduction

The problem of waning interest in the study of traditional arts and crafts in looking back to Filipino origins in understanding why they are and what they are today, has become a great challenge in the present Philippine society. The lack of interest in traditional arts and crafts among the new generations and the flourishing of western culture have caused this problematic situation. This has brought acculturation despite the efforts of parents, old folks, teachers and other carriers of the country's cultural heritage to make the people appreciate and value their own culture.

Foods have always been a part of Filipinos' traditional arts and crafts. Food and culture are inseparable identities for one mirrors the other. Filipino foods reflect their distinct identity, traditions and culture, historicity and literatures. Being cut off from the unique Filipino traditional cuisine means being constrained to steal from other cultures' buds, or to create their own cultural myths so as to contrive the illusion of being rooted in something, or being a part of the whole.

Capiz is known as the seafood capital of the Philippines because of the abundance of its shore in producing aquamarine products. However, these aquamarine creatures do not only define the image of every Capizeño; the food that rooted from the agricultural lands widely speaks the rich and valuable cultural traditions of the people.

Agriculture, specifically rice production as one of the major natural resources of the Capiznon is much diverse in all over the province – having the diverse varieties of rice which are used as the main part in preparing traditional cuisines and dishes. Rice based traditional foods in Capiz are just one of the many testaments of the natural resources available in the province as well as the ingenuity of the people to develop products that are environment-friendly and economically sustainable in the fulfillment of the basic human needs of food, socialization, self-esteem and identity.

Materials and Method

Research Design

The study is descriptive research in nature aiming to identify, document, and interpret the historicity and folkloricity that embody the rice and seafood based traditional cuisines in Capiz. It adopted the qualitative research employing grounded theory approach. Data were gathered through informal fieldworks where observation, interview, demonstration and interaction, photography and videography with the informants of the study were evident in real-life scenario. The researchers utilized the triangulation method in determining the informants from the different municipalities of Capiz and the traditional transmission of the orality. To check the consistency and veracity of the findings Selection of informants was done through referral adopting the inclusion and exclusion criteria set by the researchers.

Results and Discussion

Mapping of the Rice-based Traditional Cuisines

Capiz, with its mixed Hispanic of influenced precolonial Filipino traditions is rich with rice-based delicacies or kakanin spread all over the municipalities in the province.

The name kakanin is derived from two Tagalog words: “kain” (to eat) and “kanin” (rice). It’s an umbrella term for sweets made of glutinous rice and coconut milk, two ingredients that tropical countries like ours have in abundance. These ingredients are usually employed in one of two forms. Some recipes use galapong, made by soaking rice flour overnight, then grinding and straining it using a cheesecloth. Other types of kakanin use simple malagkit or sticky rice grains that are either ground up or left whole. Kakanin of sticky cakes were initially created to serve as offerings to pre-colonial gods and/or as gifts to honored guests and visitors. While the aforementioned clay stove is now a rare sight, many of the old recipes and cooking methods for making kakanin are still actively used in modern times (pepper.ph, 2019).

Among these rice-based delicacies are:

Ibus. Ibus is the Hiligaynon version of of suman in Tagalog region. Suman is allegedly rooted in an old Spanish phrase for “rice cakes wrapped in leaves, with somewhat longish pieces,” as described by Antonio Pigafetta, the chronicler for the first Spanish expedition to arrive on Philippine shores. Suman’s regional variants, meanwhile, derive their names from the material or method used to wrap them. Suman sa ibus are rice cakes poured into coil-shaped receptacles made out of young palm leaves, which are called “ibus” in Tagalog resulting to a nod geometric shape that resembles its namesake.

For the Capiison, ibus is a kakanin (goodies) made from pilit (glutinous rice) wrapped in a coconut leaf which is artistically tied in a nod shape. In some parts of the province, a banana leaf is used as the wrapping material resulting to a geometrical shape of ibus. Once wrapped, the ibus is steamed along with the coconut milk or gata in an hour. It is served in pair with a kalamay or brown sugar or sweet mango while some pair it lasaw or sweetened coconut milk.



Plate 1. Ibus

Inday-inday. Inday in Hiligaynon means a young lady. They are usually task to prepare the kakanin such as inday-inday. This Capisnon kakanin is similar to what the Tagalog called palitaw, derived from the word litaw, which means “to rise”. Inday-inday is kind of goodies made from powdered glutinous rice added with a certain amount of water to make it sticky. It is formed into a thumb-size ball-shape and pressed to flatten. The flattened ball-shaped pressed form is then put into a piece of banana leaf until it reaches a desired number of balls. These are then soaked into boiling water for several minutes and removed from the water once it rises. It is best served paired with a bukayo or sweetened strips of coconut milk. Others paired the inday-inday with purely brown sugar and sesame seeds. The syllables in inday-inday are just repeated because this supposedly increases the prosperity it will bring.

Our Chinese forebears were the ones who introduced the idea that round, starchy desserts symbolize wealth sticking to anyone who consumes them. In addition, the tradition of doubling up the syllables in the dish’s name is said to strengthen its power.



Plate 2. Inday-inday

Baye-baye. Bayi in Hiligaynon means a woman. Like the “Inday” or young lady, they are also task to prepare some goodies for the visitors or in any special occasion. Baye-baye is also made from powdered glutinous rice. The rice is fried until it becomes golden brown and then being powdered. It is added with freshly scraped young coconut meat and brown sugar pounded in a hal-o and lusong (mortar and pestle). There is a shared responsibility in the preparation for baye-baye since it is the man who pound and the woman protects the food from scattering from the pestle. It is served in a circular form. Bayi-bayi is part of the colonial delicacy being offers to the gods for the abundance of harvests and wealth.



Plate 3. Baye-baye

Biko. Biko has no inclination in Hiligaynon language, unlike with bayi-bayi and inday-inday. However, E. Arsenio Manuel, stipulated that “bi” essentially means rice in Chinese. Hence, we have bibingka, bihon (rice noodles), bilo-bilo (glutinous balls for Tagalog region) or the inday-inday in Visayas. One of these kakanin is biko, literally means sticky rice. Biko is also made from steamed glutinous rice soaked and mixed into starched-like coconut milk (gata) and brown sugar (kalamay). Some added the biko with minced ginger to enhance taste and aroma. Gooey, sticky, and with distinct, nutty sweetness, biko is one delicacy that’s difficult to put down after you have had a bite.



Plate 4. Biko

However, one that stands out as unique among these rice-based goodies or cuisines is the pusô. Pusô is a Filipino term for the “heart”, an internal organ that pumps blood all throughout our body parts. It is the organ that is also responsible in dictating or determining human emotions, especially on love. Pusô, pronounced as pusô, is rice enclosed in a woven pouch made of young coconut fronds, locally known as “lukay”.

Some say that the pusô was food for the gods. It was offered to the deities of our ancestors along with the sacrificial pig, dog, chicken, or cow. Though deities have become stories of the past in our modern times, pusô to most natives of the Visayan region say that it is home, rather put it as, it is a piece of home, a reminder of what they had while growing up in their locality and thus, it lingers in the hearts of every true native of the Visayan region, especially for those who have gone abroad (Hinahabi Ang Kanin, nd).

For Capizeño, pusñ is not just an organ. The accent changes its meaning. Pusñ, or pinusñ, means bundles or groups. So the production or making of pusñ as a form of traditional food from Capiz is a collaboration of two persons or more from their labour of love and culture that embody this kind of delicacy.



Plate 5. Pusô

Historical Background of Pusô

Rice-based delicacies (kakanin) were the favorite cuisines served by the Filipino people, particularly the Capizeños whenever they are having a special celebration. One of these pleasing delicacies found in Capiz is Pusñ in municipality of Panay. Pusô is considered as one of a kind not just because of its luscious appearance, but also because of the sweet romance embodied to this. In addition, it is different from the pusô of other places because of its unique ingredients and procedures in making this.

Pusô is made from a glutinous rice (pilit) woven in a heart-shaped young nipa palm leaves (local term) which then soaked into nipa palm wine (tuba) for 8 – 10 hours long until it became sweet and sticky.

Prior to this, it has been practiced by the current business owner of this delicacy to make rice-based products or kakanin when they have family gatherings like birthdays, holy week, and other occasions.

The late father of Manong Boy, the current business owner of this delicacy, was the only member in their family who makes pusô. He makes pusô as their gift to their visitor(s) when they have special gathering and sometimes they just give it to their loved ones.

The family of Manong Boy was known for selling rice-based products like ibos, inday-inday, puto, biko, etc. Meanwhile, the family background of his lovely wife, Manang Ging, was also known for selling nipa goods. Manang Ging was too young when her father started selling Nipa goods for making pawod and later her late father found out that they could sell its wine too.

Along the years, their father taught them how to do the proper way of getting the wine from nipa tree and how to preserve it. After so many years of selling nipa wine, they realized that they could use it in making delicacies.

Manang Ging followed her father's procedure in getting all the best in nipa tree. She even adopted all the skills and all these skills she had developed when she met Manong Boy as her companion or lover and even partner in making sweet delicacies. Manong Boy courted manang Ging for three (3) years, they became lovers for two (2) years and 7 months, and now married for 32 years.

The union of these two lovely couple was also an immersion of each culture, tradition and legacy. Due to the love and affection of Manong Boy to her lovely wife, he tried his best to learn his wife's family procedure of getting a nipa wine. At the same time, Manang Ging adopted all the skills of Manong Boy's family in making a various kind of rice-based delicacies.

As day goes by, the couple came up with this idea, why not use the Nipa wine in making pusô instead of using ordinary water in soaking this particular delicacy. With the combined efforts of Manong Boy and Manang Ging, they brought out the best in

the famous delicacy called pusô.

Now, the journey of romance in this pusô delicacy had started when this “Nipa Girl and “Kakanin Boy” met. The inherited skills and potential of these two people bind together and develop their own style of making pusô.

Pusô can be classified in two forms. First, the making of single and the other one is in-paired. The father of Manong Boy usually does single pusô, and they even used to make single pusô if only for them and not for selling. The paired pusô is commonly known as babayi and lalaki. Manong Boy and Manang Ging used to make in-paired pusô for several years since they started this delicacy as their small business. They love to make in-paired pusô as it is the symbol of their love, unity, and passion. In-paired pusô was considered luck for the couple, and in-paired pusô symbolizes the couple, as Lalaki symbolizes Manong Boy and Babayi symbolizes Manang Ging. It was already pinned in the minds of people whenever they see in-paired pusô, it's the product of Manong Boy and Manang Ging.

Manong Boy together with his family, they're all happily in love in making pusô as the product of skills, love, and memories from their ancestors.

Process of Making the Pusô

Pusô really pleases our plate. However, the preparation of pusô is not an easy labor. It is really a product of labor and true love for the foods coupled with the practice of the traditions. There are four major processes in the preparation of pusô. These are rituals from the harvesting of tuba or nipa wine, boiling of the tam-is, crafting the balayan or the packet, and rituals on the preparation of the pilit or glutinous rice.

Harvesting of the tuba. Tuba in Hiligaynon means “wine” made from nipa. Among the municipalities, only Panay has the large plantation of nipa usually located in the coastal areas or barangays. The matured nipa leaves are made as pawod or roofing materials, pugad or nest of either ducks or chickens; while the young leaves are used for the arts and crafts including the balayan of pusô. The tuba on the other hand is usually preserved for vinegar. Sometimes, the freshly harvested tuba is drunk serving as native wine among men and other locals. Below is the traditional way of harvesting the tuba to be used as tam-is in pusô:

1. Identification of a good nipa tree.
2. Determining if the flower stalk of the nipa tree is either good or ready to cut off for the sap by touching or kicking its seed.
3. Cutting off the young flower stalk of young nipa tree. After which, the sap/ juice (tuba) is placed in a bamboo container. The harvested sap/juice is being put in the gallon or container for preservation.

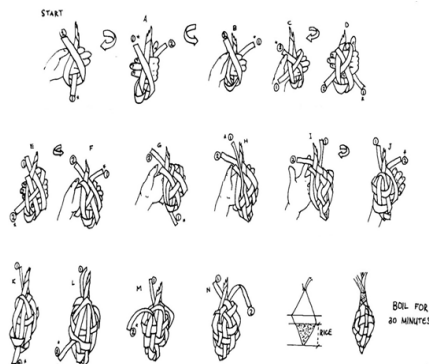
Preparation of the Tam-is. Tam-is in Hiligaynon literally means “sweet”. Tam-is as

part of the ingredients in pusñ is taken from the tuba (wine) or juice from the nipa. Below are the processes of preparing the tam-is.

1. A liter (or depending on the desired number of pusñ to be cooked) of harvested tuba is placed in a clean container.
2. Boiling of the tuba into a prepared firewood.
3. While boiling, the bubbles are removed.
4. Waiting for the tuba to reach in a desired stickiness.

Steps in making the Balayan of Pusô. The making of balayan is the hardest yet, fulfilling part among the rituals in the whole processes of making the pusñ. It requires skills and interest to learn the craft. It started by splitting the nipa leaves into strips and cut off the ends. Then, weaving the four strips closely together is done in order to come up with the balayan. The informant uses two traditional styles of packets, one is having the pointed base (lalaki) and the other is flattened (babayi). The secret of the balayan to maintain its craft is to weave it tightly, enough to hold the pilit that it cannot come out.

A significant difference was found in the attitude of the students towards waste segregation according to discipline ($pval=.017$) and to identify where the significant difference lies among the disciplines, post hoc analysis was considered. The College of Education (CoEd) differed significantly when compared to the College of Management (CM) in favor with the College of Education (CoEd). However, when College of Education (CoEd) is compared with College of Engineering, Architecture and Technology (CEAT) and Bachelor of Industrial Technology (BIT), it does not differ significantly. The aforementioned result implies that each discipline possess diverse attitude towards waste segregation and this can be attributed to the exposure of the students in waste segregation practices at home and also this may be due to the integration of environmental education issues in their respective curricula in terms of specialization and trainings.



Source: <http://lutongpinoy.info/puso-hanging-rice>



Plate 6. The informant demonstrates making of balayan

Steps in Cooking Pusñ. According to the informant, the cooking process is as easy as long all the needed materials such as tam-is and balayan are ready. Hence, she discloses the following procedures in the preparation or cooking the pusô

1. Put a kilo of glutinous rice or “pilit” into a bowl.
2. Wash the rice for three (3) to five (5) times.
3. Drain and dry up the rice for fifteen (15) minutes long before putting inside the packets of pusô.
4. Split the palm leaves and insert a handful of uncooked rice and weave the palm leaves tightly to close.
5. Classify all the pusô according to their packets (babayi or lalaki).
6. Tie them up together as couple (babayi and lalaki).
7. Put them all together in a large pot containing a one and a half (½) – tam-is or tinam-is from a nipa tree (to be done by a man) and boil for 8-10 hours long. Usually, they do the cooking overnight outdoors using the firewood.
8. Hang and dry it out a little. Capiznon people prefer to eat them a couple of hours old, when they are quite compact and a little dry.
9. Cut the pusô open with a knife, or peel it open by unraveling the fronds.



Plate 7. The Informant showing one of the processes in making the pusô

Impact of Pusô in the lives of the Informants

Pusô has become not only a part of family's inheritance and traditions from their forbearers, but it is also a means of living for the family of the informants. From a small production serve for the visitors, the appetizing taste of pusô spread all over the town of Pan-ay through a word of mouth. Neighboring towns knew this delicacy and had to order it from Manang Ging and Manong Boy during special occasions.

The Provincial Tourism Office of Capiz, through Mr. Alphonsus Tesoro, discovered the popularity of pusô has gained. The office gave several platforms to Manang Ging wherein she demonstrated to the students the arts of crafting the balayan, and the cooking of pusô but she was careful of unveiling the ingredients to her audience. Moreover, Manang Ging had been featured to Rated K, a magazine television program hosted by Korina Sanchez-Roxas. Since then, pusô and the family became famous not only among Capizeños but also in the global. The balikbayan made order of pusô and brought it as pasalubong among their relatives or neighbors or even keep some of it for home consumption. Since, Manang Ging and Manong Boy received a lot of calls for the orders of pusô and became their source of living.

Both the husband and the wife prepare the pusô, however, it is Manong Boy who delivers the product into the market. Their children help them both in preparation, marketing and delivering of pusô.

Through their income from pusô-making, they have sent their children to school. The eldest had graduated his Marine Engineering. The second is already working in fast-food chain. The youngest, inspired by their business in pusô, took BS Food Technology in CAPSU. She is dreaming of expanding their business in the future. Meanwhile, she helps her family in making the pusô whenever she is free from school, especially when there are high demands or order from their suki or in the market.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Capiz, aside from tagging as the seafood capital of the Philippines, is rich with rice-based traditional cuisines or term it as kakanin. The preparation of the kakanin is coupled with the precolonial and Spanish influences on traditions. However, pusô, a mouth-watering rice-based kakanin stands out as originally originated in Capiz, from a family in the town of Pan-ay, which had sustained not only the culture and history, but more so on economic needs of the family.

With globalization and the evolving local market driving a lot of international establishments to open establishments here, Filipino diners are increasingly being exposed to and developing a taste for foreign cuisines. But although we continue to cultivate a universal palate, the taste of kakanin (the taste of home, really) remains something we can never do without.

Pusô foresees its future, not only in local but also in the global food industry. Pusô as Capizeños' pride must be patronized for it reflects their unique identity, cultures, and literatures.

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