

**Unveiling the Baybayanon psyche: Collecting and characterizing
Cebuano nursery rhymes**

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ABSTRACT

One untapped fragment of the Philippine folklore is the nursery rhyme. In fact, there is no fixed category where nursery rhymes can be classified, resulting in scarcity of comprehensive studies in this genre and its exclusion in academic discourse. Specifically, in the Visayas region, there is dearth of research on Cebuano folk literature that focuses on collection and analysis of Cebuano nursery rhymes. This study addressed the gap by characterizing Cebuano nursery rhymes based on the features or traditional literature and by unveiling the collective psyche of the people of Baybay City through the rhymes they sing and recite. The entholiteracy method was employed to justify the analyses and interpretations of the data gathered. Results revealed that the nursery rhymes of the Baybayanons come in various types and forms that often overlapped. Structurally, majority exhibited the different literary elements and styles found in traditional literature, thereby qualifying them as legitimate forms of Philippine folklore. Moreover, the rhymes depicted the diverse and evolving collective psyche of the Baybayanons. The study underscored the need for more comprehensive studies on nursery rhymes and the inclusion of these folklore forms in academic discourse and instruction.

Keywords: Cebuano nursery rhymes, collective psyche, folk literature

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INTRODUCTION

Folklore is considered as a field of study that needs clarification of its basic terms (Bascom, 1965). According to Ben-Amos (1971), definitions and descriptions of folklore are as many and varied as the versions of a well-known story. The difficulties in defining folklore result from the nature of folklore itself and of its historical development. While anthropologists regard folklore as literature, scholars of literature describe it as culture. However, it is logical to say that the

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indigenous environment, the cultural context, and background information of folklore forms are essential for their permanent existence (Ben-Amos, 1971).

In essence folklore comes to us from the ordinary person or an anonymous storyteller and exists orally rather than in writing until some collector finds, records and publishes it (Lukens, 1990). Hence, for a number of years folklore forms have survived only in the oral tradition of the people (Russell, 2001).

In the Philippines, Lopez (2006) expressed that for a long time there had been overemphasis on gathering folklore, which inevitably postponed classification and analysis. Some of these pieces found their way to printed page while others remained as unclassified raw materials devoid of contextual meaning. One untapped fragment of the Philippine folklore is the nursery rhyme. According to Cuezon (2004), there has been a minimal interest in collecting, preserving, and analyzing these first songs and singing games by scholars in folk literature. In fact, there is no fixed category under which to place nursery rhymes. Eugenio (1981) as cited in Lopez (2006) primarily classified riddles and proverbs under folk speech. Later, jokes, chants, charms, curses were added, and other forms of “colorful speech” (Lopez, 2006).

Folk speech is considered the simplest form of verbal folklore, but there is almost no Filipino term for this folklore form; on the other hand, folklorists Manuel and Francisco categorized nursery rhymes as oral or verbal folklore (Lopez, 2006). This conundrum may have been the reason for not having many comprehensive studies on this genre. This neglect has resulted in the exclusion of nursery rhymes in academic discourse (Cuezon, 2004).

Basically, rhymes are brief stories which have been passed on orally from generation to generation, and if children are fortunate, they encounter them in infancy (Lukens, 1990). Universally, these nursery rhymes are recited or sung. The Oxford Dictionary of Nursery Rhymes or ODNR (Opie and Iona, 1952 in Cuezon, 2004) has categorized folk nursery rhymes to include the nonsense rhymes, humorous songs, character rhymes, rhyming alphabets, tongue twisters, nursery prayers, and singing games. Cuezon (2004) has added the lullabies, counting rhymes, taunting songs, and magic spells. The categories sometimes overlap, and some nonsense rhymes are singing games (i.e., clapping rhymes, finger rhymes) or humorous songs. Lukens (1990) also noted that the characteristics of nursery rhymes are based on their literary elements, style, rhythm and sound, and compactness and surprise as present in traditional literature and in the most famous Mother Goose rhymes. Figurative language is also another stylistic trait of nursery rhymes.

In the Visayas region, while scholars of literature have been trying to revive and preserve the oral narratives and lore that contribute immensely to the culture of their immediate communities, there is almost none in the body of research on Cebuano folk literature that focuses on collecting and analyzing Cebuano nursery rhymes (Cuezon, 2004). One probable reason is that the origin of these rhymes is usually unknown, other than being part of one’s memories as a child. Cebuanos (also called Sugbuanons) occupy the provinces of Cebu, Negros Occidental, Bohol, Leyte, and Southern Leyte. The Sugbuanons have many nursery rhymes that they sing or recite for amusement. Yet, most of these have not been recorded in print, especially those that originate from areas away from the metro. The Cebuano Studies Center (CSC) houses materials pertaining to Cebuano-speaking areas in the country, particularly Cebu City. However, as far as its records of acquisitions show, there is only one material specifically on Cebuano children’s rhymes at CSC: Cebuano children’s rhymes in cartoons by Juliet V. Basa. Although there is an anthology of

Cebuano poetry until 1940 by Resil B. Mojares, Cuezon (2004) purported that the singing games and/or poetic lines that are probably still current among Cebuano children are not included.

According to Cuezon (2004), both scholars and the man on the street have to be educated on the need to gather these rhymes before they are gone forever. They have to be published and taught again in our schools and in our homes.

Statement of the problem

This study generally responded to the call to preserve and revive Filipino nursery rhymes, in this case the Cebuano nursery rhymes of the people of Baybay (the Baybayanons), one of the municipalities in Leyte. Particularly, the study addressed the need to characterize the Cebuano nursery rhymes of the Baybayanons based on the characteristics of traditional literature. By doing so, nursery rhymes may find their proper place in this traditional genre.

Moreover, the study recognized the point of Ben-Amos (1971) that although folklore forms have shifted media, crossed language boundaries, and passed from one culture to another, there still retain sufficient traces of similarity that enable people to recognize a core of sameness in all their versions. Generally, traditional literature reflects the common experiences of a group of people (Ogdoc-Gascon, 2015b) and expresses the universality of these human experiences and needs (Lukens, 1990). This study also looked into these significant universal truths and the underlying patterns of sameness innate in traditional forms of literature by utilizing the nursery rhymes of the Baybayanons.

The final aim of this study was to unveil the Baybayanon collective psyche through the nursery rhymes they sing and/or recite. On the whole, the researcher intended that this study serve as a benchmark for future research on Philippine nursery rhymes, particularly Cebuano nursery rhymes. Specifically, this study answered the following questions:

1. What are the qualifications/characteristics of and types of the nursery rhymes of the Baybayanons as folklore forms?
2. What themes and corresponding archetypes are dominant in these rhymes?
3. What do these themes and archetypes signify and/or suggest of the collective psyche of the Baybayanons?

METHODOLOGY

This research is descriptive in nature and utilized the ethnoliteracy method. As noted by Ogdoc-Gascon (2015a), ethnoliteracy research is the study of literatures of the ethno—folk or people. This study also employed interviews and personal observations to provide further justifications to the results and analyses of the data gathered.

The key contributors of nursery rhymes were the parents, elders, and teachers of a group of pre-elementary pupils from a particular learning institution in Baybay City, Leyte.

Letters explaining the purpose of the study and survey forms for the collection of nursery rhymes were distributed to the children to show to their parents and elderly. The survey forms were collected back two days after they were sent.

The data analysis for this study was conducted in four phases, beginning with the English translation of the collected Cebuano nursery rhymes. The translations were carried out either through online resources or the researcher's own initiative and were subsequently verified and

refined by a language and literature expert to ensure accuracy. Following the translation, the nursery rhymes were categorized and characterized based on their intended purposes as reported by respondents, as well as according to the classifications provided by The Oxford Dictionary of Nursery Rhymes (ODNR). Each rhyme was further analyzed to identify its literary elements and stylistic devices, allowing for a thorough characterization and assessment of its qualifications as a form of folklore.

Once the literary elements and themes were identified, the rhymes were grouped into major thematic categories according to thematic similarity or relatedness. These themes then served as the basis for an archetypal analysis, wherein common and universal patterns, objects, and images within the rhymes were recognized and interpreted. Finally, the study examined the collective psyche of the Baybayanons through the lens of the identified themes and archetypes. Guided by Ogdock-Gascon's (2015a) simplified definition, the collective psyche was understood as the set of behavior patterns and attitudes revealed through the dominant themes and archetypal structures present in the nursery rhymes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study involved seventeen Cebuano nursery rhymes collected from parents, elders, and teachers of pre-elementary pupils in Baybay City, Leyte. These rhymes were gathered using survey forms distributed to children, who then shared them with their parents and elders, ensuring that both traditional knowledge and oral practices were captured. Following collection, the rhymes were translated into English, verified by language and literature experts, and analyzed using literary criticism approaches, namely New Criticism and the Archetypal Approach. Each nursery rhyme was categorized according to type, and its literary elements, style, and tone were examined to determine its completeness and folkloric qualities. The data revealed a rich diversity of nursery rhymes, which were further analyzed for thematic content and underlying archetypes, reflecting the collective psyche of the Baybayanons.

Among the collected rhymes, lullabies formed the majority. These were typically fragments of folk songs or complete songs taught to children to soothe them to sleep. The Baybayanons also used lullabies during moments of rest while planting, harvesting rice, or fishing, reflecting their rural lifestyle. Notably, most lullabies were complete with literary elements such as character, setting, plot, and theme, except for *Lub-Lubi* and *Ang Batang Buotan* (A Well-Behaved Child). *Lub-Lubi* exists as a fragment of a larger folksong, serving as a mnemonic device for agricultural cycles, consistent with Cuezon's (2004) observation that nursery rhymes can be remnants of older customs or songs. *Ang Batang Buotan*, on the other hand, is a character rhyme lacking plot and setting, primarily describing character traits. Common stylistic devices among lullabies included rhyme, repetition, and assonance, contributing to their predominantly sad, somber, or serious tones.

Four nursery rhymes were classified as humorous songs, featuring playful characters and comical plots that delighted both children and adults. These rhymes, including *May Unggoy Kong Gamay og Dako* (I Have a Small and Big Pet Monkeys), *Pearly Shell*, *Pakitong-kitong*, and *Kung Ikaw Kalibangon* (If You Want to Poop), often incorporated actions such as swaying, clapping, or finger movements, enhancing their interactive nature. They contained complete literary elements, with stylistic devices like rhyme, repetition, and parallelism prevalent across the texts. While

humorous in tone, some rhymes, like Pakitong-kitong, also conveyed moral lessons, exemplifying the capacity of nursery rhymes to blend entertainment with ethical instruction. Local variations in rhymes were noted, reflecting regional adaptations while maintaining overarching themes common to Baybayanon and broader Filipino cultural contexts.

Character rhymes, such as Ang Batang Buotan and Ako si Angi (My Name is Angi), were similarly employed to occupy children during work or leisure, often emphasizing melody over message. While Ako si Angi possessed complete literary elements, Ang Batang Buotan lacked plot and setting, demonstrating the varying structural complexity of character-focused rhymes. These rhymes commonly employed rhyme, alliteration, and parallelism, and their tones ranged from pride to frustration or boredom.

Clapping rhymes, singing games, and nonsense rhymes, such as Mangga-kos, Apol-kis (Mango-hug, Apple-kiss) and Ania na Kami (We Are Already Here), encouraged physical engagement and social interaction among children during play. Despite lacking certain literary elements like character or setting, these rhymes maintained clear plots or implied messages, with playful tones enhanced by stylistic devices like repetition, consonance, and assonance. Similarly, tongue twisters such as Ako Kalo Lingin (My Cap is Round) and Lalum Lapad (Deep and Wide) engaged participants in verbal challenges, emphasizing repetition and assonance while providing playful enjoyment.

The collection also included a finger song, Ang gagmay nga lawa (The Small Spiders), which employed hand and finger movements to accompany the rhyme, drawing from local variations of the Mother Goose rhyme Itsy-Bitsy Spider. The rhyme contained complete literary elements and a dominant use of assonance, with a happy and eager tone. A single nursery prayer, Balay Ko sa Langit (My House in Heaven), reflected the community's spiritual values, teaching children awareness of a divine presence. This rhyme also contained complete literary elements and utilized consonance, repetition, and assonance, contributing to a hopeful tone.

Overall, the nursery rhymes of the Baybayanons varied widely in form and content but consistently employed literary elements and stylistic devices that qualified them as legitimate expressions of early literature for children. Many rhymes were fragments of larger folk songs or adult expressions of playfulness, yet they retained pedagogical and cultural significance, allowing older generations to transmit knowledge and values to younger ones. These rhymes form an integral part of the rich tapestry of Philippine folklore, preserving both cultural memory and communal identity.

Thematic analysis revealed eight major categories among the seventeen nursery rhymes, illustrating recurring ideas and archetypes embedded in Baybayanon literature. The first theme, Feeling Sorry for Oneself, conveyed frustration and anxiety through archetypes like pobrang alindahaw (poor dragonfly) and paghilak sa kamaguwangan (crying of the eldest). The second theme, Aggressiveness of the Young, highlighted childish assertiveness and playful mischief, represented through archetypes like gamayng unggoy (small monkey) and pagpahawa (evicting someone). Hope and Faith in the Passing of Time formed the third category, emphasizing resilience and anticipation through archetypes such as pagsidlak sa adlaw (sunrise), langit (heaven), and lubi-lubi (palm tree). The fourth, Perseverance and Patience, portrayed endurance in daily life, with archetypes including pagkuha sa alimango (catching a crab) and paghuwat (waiting).

The fifth thematic category, Paying Attention to Details, underscored the Baybayanons' attentiveness to objects and surroundings, exemplified by archetypes like pagdeskribir sa hugis o

porma sa kalo (describing the shape of the cap). Resourcefulness, the sixth theme, reflected adaptive strategies for survival, represented by archetypes such as pagdagan sa baybayon (running to the shore) and pagpili og dakong bato (choosing a big rock). The seventh category, Longing for Significant Other's Presence, captured the bittersweet emotions of separation, with archetypes like pagbiya (leaving) and pag-apas (following). Finally, the eighth theme, Standards of Goodness, emphasized moral development and filial pride, exemplified by the archetype batang buotan (well-behaved child). These themes and archetypes collectively highlighted the significant truths and moral lessons embedded within seemingly simple rhymes, revealing the profound cultural wisdom present in Baybayanon literature.

The identified themes and archetypes provided a lens through which the collective psyche of the Baybayanons could be understood. The nursery rhymes reflected a diverse range of emotions, instincts, and experiences that align with Jung's concept of the collective unconscious, encompassing inherited archetypes and shared human experiences. Patterns of behavior, attitudes, and values derived from these rhymes demonstrated the community's accumulated knowledge and lived experiences, portraying a society that balances playfulness, moral guidance, perseverance, and spirituality. In this way, the Cebuano nursery rhymes of Baybay City serve not only as educational and recreational tools for children but also as cultural artifacts that preserve and communicate the collective identity, wisdom, and values of the Baybayanon people.

CONCLUSION

This study has contributed significantly to the preservation and revival of Philippine nursery rhymes, particularly focusing on the Cebuano nursery rhymes of Baybay City, a Cebuano-speaking community in Leyte. The data collected revealed that these rhymes exist in a variety of forms and types, including lullabies, humorous songs, character rhymes, clapping rhymes, singing games, nonsense rhymes, tongue twisters, finger songs, and nursery prayers. Among these, lullabies were the most prevalent, often serving both as soothing songs for children and as melodic interludes during daily activities such as farming and fishing, illustrating their integration into the everyday life of the Baybayanons. Structurally, most of the nursery rhymes contained essential literary elements, such as character, plot, setting, and theme, as well as stylistic devices like rhyme, repetition, assonance, alliteration, and parallelism. These elements not only qualified the rhymes as legitimate forms of Philippine folklore but also provided them with compactness, rhythm, and aesthetic appeal, enabling them to engage both children and adults alike.

The thematic and archetypal analyses further demonstrated the depth and cultural significance of these nursery rhymes. Eight major thematic categories emerged, encompassing emotions, behaviors, and values shared among the Baybayanons. These themes ranged from expressions of self-pity and frustration, exemplified through rhymes like Pobreng Alindahaw (Poor Dragonfly), to portrayals of the aggressiveness of youth, as seen in May Unggoy Kong Gamay og Dako (I Have a Small and Big Pet Monkeys), as well as hope and faith in the passage of time, perseverance and patience, attention to detail, resourcefulness, longing for the presence of loved ones, and standards of goodness, as reflected in Ang Batang Buotan (A Well-Behaved Child). The archetypes embedded in these rhymes—ranging from animals, natural phenomena, and everyday objects to character traits—revealed recurring patterns of human experience and instinctive behaviors, aligning with Jung's concept of the collective unconscious. Collectively, the

nursery rhymes reflected the cultural knowledge, experiences, and values of the Baybayanons, capturing both the joys and struggles inherent in their social and physical environment.

In light of these findings, the study underscores the importance of ongoing scholarship in Philippine folk literature. Scholars and folklorists are encouraged to continue exploring and classifying nursery rhymes to preserve fragments of the past and situate them formally within the domain of traditional literature. Efforts should also extend to other language groups in the Philippines to provide a broader representation of communal thought, emotional expression, and cultural identity. By collecting, analyzing, and publishing these rhymes, researchers can illuminate historical, cultural, and spiritual practices, enhancing Filipino awareness of their heritage. Educational institutions are likewise urged to integrate Philippine nursery rhymes into instructional materials, textbooks, and teaching modules, thereby fostering cultural literacy and heritage appreciation among children. Overall, this study calls for a more comprehensive and sustained engagement with nursery rhymes, recognizing them not only as early literature for the young but also as vital cultural artifacts that continue to shape and reflect the collective identity and psyche of Filipino communities.

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