Contemporary *camareros*: *santos* sponsorship in the Philippines today

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Jose Antonio Lorenzo L. Tamayo
Department of English and Applied Linguistics, Br. Andrew Gonzalez FSC College of Education, De La Salle University, Manila, the Philippines

ABSTRACT

The use of religious images was already present in Filipino culture before the arrival of the Spaniards. With the coming of Christianity and the establishment of the Philippines as a Spanish colony, indigenous statues were replaced with Catholic images and icons, the *santo*. Records from the 17th to the 19th century show that missionaries relied on secular help in establishing a system of sponsorship for religious images. Those who sponsored *santos* were called *camareros*. This study aims to expand the work of Venida [1996, pp.500-513] and Galang [2012, pp.45-60], which focused on rural aristocracy and the traditional system of sponsorship for religious images established during the Spanish colonial period. Using anecdotes, personal interviews and a survey of *camareros*, the present study explores new systems of sponsorship for religious images in the twenty-first century, and describes the demographics, motivations, interactions, finances and *santo* collections of contemporary *camareros*.

Keywords

santo, *camarero*, religious images, *anitos* or *likha*, *santo* or *poon*, system of sponsorship, colonisation, ecclesiastical arts, Christianity, the Philippines, Spanish colonialism, social practices, rituals and festive events (ICH domain), traditional craftsmanship (ICH domain), social media, Facebook.

Introduction

The art of carving is indigenous to the culture of ancient Filipinos as part of the Malay tradition in Southeast Asia. As an island-nation that is fond of rituals and religious practices, the most popular carvings are images representing gods, deities and ancestors. In the pre-Hispanic Philippines, the natives were both monotheistic and polytheistic [Macdonald: 2004, p.52]. They believed in a supreme being who was called different names by different ethnic groups.[1] Alongside the supreme being, the natives also worshipped their

ancestors through idols called *anitos* [Barrows: 2016] or *likha* [Del Castillo: 2015, p.42]. These *anitos* or *likha* were made from a variety of materials: stone, wood, bone, the tooth of an animal or even gold[2] [Barrows: 2016]. Among these, wood was the most common material as it is readily available in the immediate environment.

One typical idol is the *bulul*[3], who may represent a granary god, an ancestor or a nature deity. In many ethnic groups in the Cordilleras, the *bulul* usually appear in pairs as representations of fertility, but in Kiangan, Ifugao they are used individually. For the Tagbanuas of Palawan, anthropological excavations found the use of ritual animals made of softwood. There is a smorgasbord of terms for native carving traditions. Ancient Filipinos definitely used statuary in rituals and other religious practices even before the arrival of the Spaniards. Blair and Robertson [1903, p.164] noted this at a ritual feast, a *manganito*, honouring *Bathala* (a god) and *diwata* (a deity). In the ritual, the natives offered food and wine to the *anitos* after a communal meal, while a *babaylan* (priestess) recited prayers.

At the conquest by the Portuguese explorer, Ferdinand Magellan, under the Spanish crown, his fleet reached the Philippines in 1521 instead of the Spice Islands.[4] Chronicler Antonio Pigafetta[5] recorded a vivid account of what happened in the expedition. In Cebu, Magellan was able to convince and convert its king, Rajah Humabon, his wife and 800 natives to Christianity, giving them the sacrament of baptism. In one of the masses conducted prior to the day of baptism, Magellan gave Queen Juana, wife of Rajah Humabon, an image of the *Sto. Nino* (Holy Child). It was then that the early Filipinos had a first glimpse of a statue bearing Catholic iconography. Juana also begged the Spaniards to give her an image of the Virgin Mary carrying the Holy Child that she saw on the day of her baptism; the Spaniards obliged. Forty-four years after the untimely death of Magellan in the Battle of Mactan, the expedition to the Philippines under the command of Miguel Lopez de Legazpi accidentally recovered the *Sto. Niño* Magellan had given to Queen Juana.

While Magellan's landing in Cebu was welcomed, Legazpi's arrival was met with hostility when he strongly opposed paying *dinuggoan* (wharfage dues) to Rajah Tupas. This particularly enraged Legazpi and led to a bloody episode in Banawa where the houses - which were made of flimsy materials - were gutted and destroyed by Spanish cannons and artillery[6] [Oaminal: 2018]. On 28 April 1565, one of Legazpi's soldiers, identified as Juan Camus, inspected the settlement where he found the image of the *Sto. Niño* safely tucked away in a box made of pinewood [Bautista: 2010, p.195]. In Legazpi's report, he wrote that the image was found in *a large and well-built house of an Indian woman where it was well-kept and surrounded by many flowers* [Del Castillo: 2015, p.44].

From these two accounts, it can be posited that between the pre-Hispanic period and before the colonisation of the islands, religious images played a significant role in the daily life of ancient Filipinos. The practice of putting these religious images on altars, using them in rituals and maintaining them over time was not introduced by the coming of Catholicism in the Philippines through the Spanish colonisation. It was, in fact, inherent in the culture of Filipinos way before the arrival of the colonisers. Pigafetta and Chirino observed these religious practices among the natives.[7] The Spaniards also used these indigenous traditions to their advantage by inculcating the doctrines of the Catholic faith and merging it with native customs. Neither Queen Juana's gesture when she received the image of *Sto. Niño*[8] (which reduced Queen Juana to tears), nor Legazpi's memory of the finding of the said image in good condition, are at all surprising. When the Spaniards successfully colonised the country and the missions were in full swing, images bearing Christian iconography superseded the use of *anitos* or *likha*; instead, Filipinos embraced Catholic religious images, e.g. *Sto. Niño*, Jesus Christ, the Virgin Mary, saints, martyrs and archangels. The missionaries from different religious orders maximised the use of these images to teach the doctrines of the Church to the unschooled. In the vernacular, these images came to be known as *santo* or *poon*. For the sake of clarity and consistency, the terms *religious images* and *santos* are used in this study.

This paper explores and describes the old and new systems of sponsorship for religious images in the Philippines. While there is a prolific literature on Philippine colonial religious images, it concentrates on the artistic merits, provenance, forms and values of the images. Gatbonton [1979] and Jose [1990], in

particular, discussed religious images in ivory, while Zobel [1958, pp.249-294] and Hernandez [2015] focused on the styles of these images based on the era when they were commissioned and on colonial religious images in both wood and ivory. However, literature about those who own the images, the *camareros* who sponsor or commission them, is limited or nonexistent. The closest discussions on the matter were the studies of Venida [1996, pp.500-513] and Galang [2012, pp.45-60], which explored the power of the rural aristocracy in the Philippines during the Spanish colonial period, and showed how these local feudal elites were able to impose a system of sponsorship for processional religious images, particularly in Camarines Sur and Cabiao, Nueva Ecija. They also concentrated solely on those religious images used in Holy Week.

The intention of this current study is to bridge the gap found in the works of Venida [1996, pp.500-513] and Galang [2012, pp.45-60]. Their discussions help both in understanding and conceptualising how the system of sponsorship for religious images worked during the Spanish colonial period and during the first half of the twentieth century. This study, meanwhile, describes the state and system of sponsorship for religious images today. From the old system of sponsorship, a new system has gradually developed because of the changing economic landscape of the country, where individuals or families, the new *camareros* who do not trace their roots to the economic elite of the old system, are now creating and influencing a new type of sponsorship. This was also acknowledged by Venida [1996, p.505] when he emphasised that the rise of *nouveau riche* families gave an impetus to the commissioning of more religious images in other provinces, particularly in Tagalog and Pampanga towns. Aside from describing the present system of sponsorship, this study also aims to identify the current *camareros*. It is therefore imperative that this study describes their demographics, motivations, interactions, finances and collections of religious images. The study discusses and explores three domains: (1) Philippine colonial religious images, (2) the old system of sponsorship for religious images and (3) the new system of sponsorship based on contemporary *camareros*.

Given that the author is a *camarero* himself, this study uses personal anecdotes and interviews from 15 *camareros* whom he knows personally. They hail from different provinces including Bulacan, Laguna, Pampanga, Tuguegarao and Zamboanga. Seven of these *camareros* and their families trace their lineage to the old system of sponsorship; their ancestors were part of the local elite composed of the *principalia* and the *ilustrado* class during the nineteenth century. The rest come from the new system of sponsorship. In addition, a survey was conducted of 54 *camareros* coming from various regions in the Philippines. These *camareros* were selected by a simple random sampling. Through Google Forms, the author was able to share the survey questionnaire with prospective respondents on his Facebook Page, *Arte Sacra Ph*[9], a page dedicated to Philippine ecclesiastical arts, which currently has 1,918 followers. The link to Google Forms was also shared through the author's personal Facebook account since it was easier for some of his friends, who are also *camareros*, to access and answer the survey that way. The survey questionnaire was comprised of both open-ended and closed questions, which targeted the demographics, influences, interactions, expenses and personal collections of *camareros*. Data from both the interviews and the online survey are maximised in discussing the finer points of this study.

Religious images in the Spanish colonial period

When the Spaniards colonised the Philippines, their mission concentrated on three things: God, Gold and Glory. Of the three, the first one was the most evident, and, through the religious orders, the Dominicans, Franciscans, Augustinians, Recollects and the Jesuits, this was to become the most successful mission, even after they left the colony. An important element in spreading the Word of God to the natives was the use of religious images, the *santos*, as pedagogical instruments for the new religion. In the first phase of colonisation, religious images were imported from abroad. Zobel [1958, p.250] notes that Spanish missionaries, soldiers and sailors brought these statues with them, together with picture books and prints. These would later on become models for local artisans to either replicate or from which to draw inspiration.

For the first two centuries of colonisation, religious images were commissioned for the exclusive use of churches and convents, and creating these religious images was under the strict supervision of the friars.

Between 1600 and 1800, the church was considered as the patron of the arts given the astounding number of their commissions, which, of course, helped the artisans and the craft itself to thrive [Hernandez: 2015]. Zobel [1958, pp.251-252] categorises these church-commissioned images as 'official' works. Religious images in this category are large in proportion, made by skillful artisans using sturdy materials, and they often do not conform to European models. While the friars were strict when it came to iconography, they honoured the artistic sensibilities of the makers. Religious images in the 'official' category are still present today in the *retablos*[10] (Plate 1) of colonial churches. Exceptional examples of these colonial *retablos* are still found at the Immaculate Conception Parish in Guiuan, Eastern Samar, Palo Cathedral in Leyte, Baclayon Church in Bohol and the San Agustin Church in Manila.

Another category, Zobel [1958, p.252] identifies, is that of 'informal' works (Plate 2). Religious images in this category are usually small and meant for private devotion at home. 'Informal' works include those statues that were made by individuals for their home altars or commissioned individually from artisans for secular use. Such images are often seen as 'folksy' or crudely made; they followed a distinct iconography but differ in style from 'official' works. Many of these folk images came from Bohol, the Panay islands, the Bicol region and Pangasinan. Meanwhile, those images that were personally commissioned from skilled artisans were of higher quality, and some were highly sophisticated.

Records of artisans who created religious images between the 1600s and 1700s are scarce. There is no denying, however, that during the first phase of colonisation the friars relied heavily on Chinese artisans, the *Sangleys*, to create images for church altars, as they were prodigious carvers, especially in ivory. The *Sangleys*' work was cheap and they were highly skilled [Chu: 2012, p.56]. Domingo de Salazar, a Dominican friar and the first bishop of Manila, comments on the ability of Chinese artisans to reproduce religious images, and



Plate 1
An exquisite *retablo* (retable) at Molo Church in Iloilo containing antique images.
Photo: Jose Antonio Lorenzo L. Tamayo, 2019



Plate 2
Unidentified male saint, probably a *San Ramon Nonato* (St. Raymond Nonnatus), from Panay.
Photo: Jose Antonio Lorenzo L. Tamayo, 2020

notes that *soon we shall not even miss those made in Flanders* [Galang: 2013, p.127]. The earliest recorded image made by a *Sangley* between 1593 and 1594 is the *Nuestra Señora del Santisimo Rosario de La Naval* of the Dominicans, which still survives today. This image, and others made by the *Sangleys*, reflected Buddhist artistic traditions where the hands were long and delicate, the legs were cylindrical and the faces were doll-like, with fleshy and heavy-lidded eyes [Galang: 2013, pp.125-126].

As for Filipino artisans, the first recorded one was Juan de los Santos (1590-1660) of San Pablo, Laguna, who was noted for being a sculptor and silversmith. Some of his works fortunately found their way into the collection of San Agustin Museum in Manila [Hernandez: 2015]. Aside from de los Santos, the many artists who worked on projects between the 1660s and 1700s remain unknown, and the reason behind this is still a lingering question to be answered. However, Hernandez points out that the economic developments of the nineteenth century, coupled with improvements in transportation, created a great demand for religious images.[11] Those commissioning religious images at that time were expecting high standards from the sculptors they employed. In 1879, instruction in sculpture was formalised and included in the curriculum of the Academia de Pintura, Escultura y Grabado de Manila.[12] The era also welcomed the first known woman sculptor, Pelagia Mendoza y Gotianquin,[13] who studied at the Academia de Dibujo y Pintura and won the 1892 Columbus Quadricentennial Art Contest. In the town of Paete, Laguna, Mariano Madriñan was one of the finest and most sought-after artisans, who also won a gold medal in the 1883 Amsterdam Exhibition.[14]

Regardless of whether the *santos* were meant for 'official' or 'informal' purposes, Spanish colonial religious images were further classified by Zobel [1958, pp.258-262] into three categories: 'popular', 'classical' and 'ornate'. The more primitive images fall into the 'popular' category, and they were made by untrained woodcarvers who simply copied existing models. While 'popular' images are faithful copies and iconographically correct, there is a sense of technical awkwardness about them, the anatomy of the figures is often faulty and they are garishly coloured. Normally, these images are in *de tallado* (fully-carved) style, small in size and used for private worship at home. 'Popular' images are usually 'informal works', created using softwoods like *batikuling (Litsea Perottetii), dap-dap* (Indian coral tree), *lanete (Wrightia pubescens)* and white *lawaan (Meranti).*

Religious images in the 'classical' category show a fusion of different influences. They combine elements of Spanish, Mexican, Chinese and Filipino artistry, and encompass models from the renaissance to the rococo, but with an emphasis on the baroque [Zobel: 1958, p.259]. One way to distinguish a 'classical' santo is to check if the design has strong academic influence. The details, especially the drapery, will be regular, with formal, symmetrical folds and it will have a sense of balance and restraint. However, Zobel [1958, p.259] admits that the 'classical' style in Philippine colonial religious imagery is a broad category that includes all types and sizes of santos made from different materials. Therefore he notes that a sub-classification system based on stylistic influences will help in understanding the 'classical' style.



Plate 3
An image of *Nuestra Señora del Carmen* (Our Lady of Mount Carmel) with heads and hands in ivory.
Photo: Jose Antonio Lorenzo L. Tamayo, 2019



Plate 4
A solitary image of *Kristong Gapos* (Scourging at the Pillar) made of wood from a chapel in Hagonoy, Bulacan.
Photo: Jose Antonio Lorenzo L. Tamayo, 2019

The 'ornate' style is highly influenced by the 'classical' style, but the richness of detail comes from the Spanish baroque and from the introduction of 'romantic realism' (Plate 3). The focus is on the elaborate detailing of the *santo* rather than its iconography. There are two types of 'ornate' religious images: ornate ivory and ornate wooden sculptures. The ornate ivory *santos* were most common between the middle of the eighteenth century and the middle of the nineteenth century, when they found their way into the grand oratories of the *principalia* and *ilustrado* families. While the bodies of the figures are made of a wooden framework either in *de tallado* (fully carved) or *de bastidor* (conical framing made of sticks) style, it is common for these *santos* to be fitted with ivory heads, hands and, occasionally, feet. They are also embellished with paint, wigs, glass eyes and tears, and eyelashes, among other things. To be even more realistic, they are dressed in elaborate vestments with rich embroidery made of gold threads, cords and metal sequins, and are given miniature attributes like crowns, halos, orbs, sceptres, batons and rosaries. These are normally made of silver or gold depending on the whims and budget of the person or family commissioning the image [Zobel: 1958, pp.260-261]. The base of ivory *santos*, called a *peaña*,[15] is an additional requirement. Since ivory images are more delicate than their wooden counterparts, smaller examples are housed in *virinas* (glass domes) for safekeeping.

Meanwhile, the 'ornate' wooden sculptures (Plate 4) try to replicate imported images from Spain and Mexico, or the ones brought by early missionaries. In this type of religious image, hard, medium and soft woods are used, although there is a definite preference for softwood since it is easy to carve and quite sturdy. The use of gesso and paint can also hide the imperfections made by the chisel. In addition, realism is achieved by the intricacies of the carving, the *encarna* (painting process) and the addition of wigs and glass, fluorescent or painted eyes [Zobel: 1958, p.261]. Many of these images are also fitted with attributes in repoussé work like crowns, halos and other iconographic details.

The old system of sponsorship for religious images

The word *camarero* literally means 'waiter' in Spanish, but during the Spanish colonial period, and even today, the term had religious connotations. In the Philippine context, it refers primarily to individuals who are considered caretakers of religious images. Further studies need to be done in order to understand how the word evolved over time and how it became associated with the stewardship of *santos*. On the one hand, one could simply postulate that its usage in a religious context might have started in Intramuros, Manila, which was the centre of both commercial and spiritual life during the colonial rule, given the number of churches and religious orders in the area. Documents in the Dominican archives explicitly mention the roles and names of *camareros*, beginning in the 1600s. Beata Jesus de Maria was said to be the earliest documented *camarera*; as a Second Order Dominican nun she was considered to be the caretaker of the jewels and vestments of the *Santo Rosario* (Our Lady of the Rosary). Similarly, Doña Ana de Vera, a society lady and a major benefactor of the Dominicans, was also a *camarera* and initiated efforts to restore the image. Doña Josefa Ursula Memije, on the other hand, was the *camarera* of both the *Vicaria* (replica) and image of the *Santo Rosario*

in 1821 [Galang: 2013, pp.135-137]. These snippets of information describe the specific roles of *camareros*: they prepared the image for use in rituals, they acted as custodians of the properties owned by the image, they managed the overall upkeep of the images and they spent a fortune out of their own pockets to keep certain religious traditions alive. Gender is not an issue for being a *camarero* as the documents in the Dominican archives suggest that both men and women have become *camareros* over the years [Galang: 2013, p.137]. However, it is unclear whether the early *camareros* were selected by the religious, referred by an influential personality, or assumed the role voluntarily.

While the old system of sponsorship may have been different in urban Manila during the Spanish colonial period, the system of sponsorship in the rural Philippines at the time followed a distinct path. The old system of sponsorship for religious images in the provinces is best analysed on the basis of Filipino medievalism. Venida [1996, p.509] claims that the class structure and the economic basis of the Philippines, particularly in rural areas during colonisation, had medieval features similar to Italy and England. In those countries, the nobles who owned vast tracts of land exercised political authority and power. Under them were the peasants who tilled their lands and managed their estates. In return, the peasants were given protection by their lords. The role of nobles also extended to the religious life of their subjects. In the case of saints or the patron of a city, the nobles were expected to fund the upkeep and ritual practices associated with religious images in their respective churches or shrines. The medieval mindset believed that devotion, obedience and the maintenance of a shrine meant that the saint would grant special favours. In this context, nobles are seen as the intermediary between the common people and a local patron saint.

In the Philippines, the same applied to the owners of *santos* in rural areas during the colonial period. The local elites were largely *hacienderos* (landowners), and held key positions of power.[16] Like their counterparts in medieval Europe, these local elites had a pool of servants[17] who were expected to serve their masters either by farming, servitude in the big house or tending to their personal needs. These roles lasted for generations, and even today they still exist in some rural areas. In the psyche of rural Filipinos, landowners and servants alike, *santos* were believed to possess supernatural powers like the *engkantu* (nature spirits). Such a world view resulted in the proliferation of elaborate festivities and long novenas in honour of the *santo*. Moreover, all rituals connected with the *santo* needed to be lavish, because prayers, whether for a good harvest, good health or curing an illness, were thought to be answered in proportion to the ornateness of the ritual [Jocano: 1967, p.48].

Aside from this rural mindset, the rise of an educated class - the *ilustrado*s - triggered by the agricultural export economy and the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, made these people the new patrons of the arts. Children of these families were able to secure an education in Europe and developed a taste for fine things, including *santos* [Hernandez: 2015]. Processional images in the provinces were originally commissioned by families from the elite class. The reason behind this was purely economic. First, commissioning a *santo* was expensive since many *talleres* (workshops) of famous *santeros* (sculptors of saints) were located in Manila, so the process of ordering and shipping alone cost a fortune. Second, maintaining the images and making sure that they participated in annual rituals was also expensive. These were valid reasons why the local parish priest would normally give such responsibility to those with considerable wealth. The case of San Isidro, Nueva Ecija explains this situation; an old document indicates the commitment of the local elites to commissioning religious images and *andas* (shoulder-borne floats) for an upcoming Holy Week procession to be celebrated *with modesty* [Galang: 2012, p.49]. In the rural Philippines, it was the members of the *principalia* and the *ilustrado* who became the *camareros* of religious images.

Land was also an integral part of the old system of sponsorship, since maintenance and practices associated with the *santo* were financed by profits from farmlands and fishponds. In the nineteenth century it was customary for the local elites to designate the *santo* as one of their heirs. A portion of the entire landholding would be 'given' to the *santo*, so the next generation inheriting it would have the means to maintain and continue the family tradition. In Guagua, Pampanga, for example, the current *camarera* of the ivory image of the *Mater Dolorosa* (Plate 5), Mrs Romana Limson-Reyes, told the author that their image still has a five-hectare property which used to produce at least 2,500 kilograms of rice that funded the rituals associated with



Plate 5
The centuries old image of the *Mater Dolorosa* (Sorrowful Virgin) of the Limson family of Guagua, Pampanga, with ivory head and hands.
Photo: Jose Antonio Lorenzo L. Tamayo, 2019

the family image. However, after the Mount Pinatubo eruption in 1991, the farmlands became useless as they were totally covered in lava. Similarly, the image of the *Mater Dolorosa* of the Laderas family, and the image of *San Juan* of the Saguinsin family of Hagonoy, Bulacan, had fishponds that maintained them through the years. Unfortunately, land reforms by the national government prompted these families to abdicate the properties.

Aside from the usual processions which these images normally joined, there were related rituals that *camareros* were expected to conduct, and these practices also consumed money. For Holy Week religious images, a related practice was the chanting of the *Pasyong Mahal*, known by locals as *Pabasa*. The *Pasyong Mahal*[18] is an epic narrative unique in the Philippines, describing the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. By tradition, the chanting should end before noon on Good Friday to make way for church services. In the conduct of *Pabasa*, everyone was welcome to participate, so an assortment of food and refreshments were prepared by the *camareros* in return for the participation of the community. The Limson family of Guagua, Pampanga, who own the image of the *Mater Dolorosa*, is one of the many old families that holds a *Pabasa* annually, which they conduct every *Viernes de Dolores* (Friday before Palm Sunday). The present *camarera* does not remember when the tradition actually started, but said that they inherited it from her father, Don Guillermo Limson. *Camareros* of the *paso* (tableau) of *La Muerte de San Jose* (Death of Saint Joseph) also conduct a *Pabasa* on or before March 19, the memorial of St Joseph. The Hans family of Las Piñas City and the Trillana family of Hagonoy, Bulacan are two families that have also inherited this *paso*. These families are still able to carry on the tradition of their ancestors, and continue to make lengthy preparations for the annual *Pabasa*.

Another important element in the old form of sponsorship was the *andas* of the *santo*. The *andas* had a wooden frame which was completely covered in repoussé silver work. Some families preferred to keep the bare wooden framing and attach repoussé designs to the *andas* as decorative installations. During processions, the *santo* was illuminated by flickering candles which were placed on *pescantes*



Plate 6
Lavishly decorated *carrozas* (processional floats) bearing images of the *Santo Niño* (Holy Child) during the feast of the *Sto. Niño de Malolos* at the Malolos Cathedral in Bulacan.
Photo: Jose Antonio Lorenzo L. Tamayo, 2019

(candle holders) in *virinas* (glass flutes). The beginning of the twentieth century saw the introduction of the *carroza* (Plate 6), a chariot-style float, where the *andas* incorporates a chassis with four wooden wheels. Unlike the *andas* which was carried on men's shoulders, the *carroza* could be drawn. They were first illuminated using *calburo* (zinc oxide) safely placed either in *pescantes* or *albortantes* (candelabras). For added drama, both were fitted with *virinas* in flower or *kalabasa* (squash) style. The use of electricity during the American period, which was deemed cleaner and safer, halted the use of *calburo* which emitted too much smoke. The *carroza*s were normally prepared a week before the actual procession, as those made of silver or bare wood with repoussé fittings needed to be polished, mechanisms had to be checked, electrical wiring and light fixtures be installed and the illumination tested. In the old days, the *carroza* was decorated with paper or natural flowers or, in some cases, *lagang* (nautilus shells).

Preparing a *santo* or *paso* for a *salida* (procession) and maintaining it throughout the year may involve family rituals as well. The Montojo family of Zamboanga recall their tradition when preparing and dressing their ivory image of the Immaculate Conception. Dr Aireen Arnuco, a descendant of the Montojos, recounts that children were not allowed inside the room where the actual image was dressed. Only the elders of the family could be inside the room before the image was completely dressed in order to preserve the solemnity of the occasion. She added that the entire clan would pray the rosary before the image was brought to church for the procession. Some families also consider an auspicious day for dressing the image. For instance, the Fule family of Alaminos, Laguna opted to dress their image of the *Mater Dolorosa* every Maundy Thursday, as family members would only arrive that day and the image was only processed on Good Friday and at the *Salubong* (dawn procession) on Easter Sunday.

The upkeep of these images was fairly simple, but at times shrouded in superstition or practicality. It was quite common to strip the *santo* or *paso* of its processional garments and replace them with ordinary garments, called *pambahay*, for everyday use. The Fule family would dress their *Mater Dolorosa* in plain clothing, normally of satin, and house the image in a wooden *urna* (cabinet for *santos*) inside the family oratory until its *salida* the following year. It was also usual for landed families who owned crying *santos* to remove the head and hands of the images and store them separately, out of public view, because many believed, especially in the provinces, that displaying images in tears throughout the year would invite *malas* (bad luck) to the family. The Laderas clan of Hagonoy, Bulacan has practised this tradition since time immemorial. Separate *urna*s house the head and hands of the *Mater Dolorosa* when not in use, and these are stored in a separate room set aside for the family's *santos*. Other families, especially those owning processional images with heads and hands in ivory, prefer to detach the ivory pieces from the wooden body and store them in a *caja de hierro* (safe) or send them to another household for security purposes.

Camareros today and the new system of sponsorship

Contemporary Filipino *camareros* are best explained by classifying them into four distinct categories. First, there are those individuals who have inherited *santos* from their ancestors under the old system of sponsorship. They are descendants of the *principalia* and *ilustrado* families that originally commissioned processional images for their respective localities between the 1700s and 1945. At present, these *camareros* abide by family traditions and continue to sponsor their heirloom *santos* during major festivities or processions, despite the changing socio-economic, cultural and religious landscape of the Philippines. Secondly, the rising number of successful professionals in different industries, and the proliferation of businesses in various sectors of the economy from the 1950s until the present time, has prompted an increasing number of the middle class and *nouveau riche* to become *camareros*. Individuals from this sector of society who are able to commission *santos* out of their personal means and can sponsor their *salida*s (processions), are contemporary *camareros*. Thirdly, there are those individuals or families who are financially able and were chosen by parish priests to assume the role of *camareros* at some point between the 1950s and the present. Lastly, there are individuals who have become *camareros* by accident. The present-day heirs of *santos* from the old system of sponsorship may transfer the stewardship of these religious images to someone else if they are no longer interested in the family tradition. They may simply pass or sell the *santos* to an interested party. Individuals who acquire these *santos*, and proceed to keep the rituals associated

with them intact, rather than simply seeing them as collectible items to be displayed in their homes, are also part of the contemporary system of sponsorship.

Another way of explaining the new system of sponsorship for religious images is by understanding the impact of the Internet on this small community. Between 2005 and 2007, a quick search on Google using the word *santo* would instantly lead to hits on Flickr, which is a microblogging website where members can upload pictures and comment on each other's posts. Unknown to many, this particular website was the first online platform for *santo* owners in the Philippines as it enabled *camareros* to interact with each other which had never been possible before. Longtime *camareros* and aspiring ones engaged in specific discussions on group threads tackling a variety of topics ranging from ivory and wooden *santos*, exhibition and procession updates, and information about old and newly-discovered sculptors, *burdaderas* (embroiderers) and *lateros* (metalsmiths). There were times that the discussions would become so heated that some members would resort to attacking or hurling insults at each other! Others would retaliate by creating fake accounts known in the *camarero* community as 'the secret accounts' that tried to poison the reputations of certain *camareros*. Despite these issues, Flickr afforded *camareros* the opportunity to expand their knowledge as information on anything *santo*-related was shared endlessly by reputable members. Important religious images and religious traditions were fully documented and made available for public and scholarly use. Lasting friendships were forged with fellow *camareros* as some groups were able to arrange annual assemblies, complete with seminars and immersion sessions (introducing different religious traditions and special collections) as well as pilgrimages. When Facebook arrived, the *camareros* shifted their platform and left Flickr for good. Since then, the *camarero* community has become even tighter, more vibrant and definitely relevant as it continues to influence the younger generation to be proud of this unique cultural tradition in the Philippines. In a way, the Internet has become a magnet for people interested in ecclesiastical arts, and it has greatly helped in reviving the interest of the younger generation in *santo* art.

Since 2005 the number of new *camareros* has risen. Facebook groups that cater to *santo* art have been established, like the *Esculturas Religiosas en las Filipinas*, which started as a small group on Flickr. At present, it has 8,800 members all over the Philippines, including *camareros* who are either working or residing abroad. The group also garners an average of five posts per day. Another Facebook group is *Anyare?!* which features *santos* that do not adhere to the traditional conventions of *santo* art. The aim of the group is to correct the mistakes of some *camareros* who go overboard as to the manner of dressing and presenting their *santo*. So far, the group has 6,400 members with an average of two posts per day. Photographers who specialise in capturing and documenting *santo*-related activities, and events like exhibitions and processions, also thrive on Facebook. These photographers have their own Facebook pages that people can like and follow. An example is *Egeria: the Philippine Pilgrimage*, which has 2,100 followers to date, and features *santo* art in the province of Laguna. These social media platforms influence prospective *camareros* and are quite significant in exploring how the new system of sponsorship for religious images works.

In order to understand the existing community of contemporary *camareros*, 54 *camareros* were surveyed and this has garnered some interesting results. Out of all the respondents surveyed,16 *camareros* have inherited *santos* from their ancestors (category one), 36 are new *camareros* (category two), 1 was selected by a parish priest (category three) and 1 has become a *camarero* by accident (category four). The *camarero* community today is dominated by men in all four categories, with only two female *camarera*s who said that they have personally decided to commission a *santo* of their own. The majority of *camareros* in all categories reside in the province of Bulacan, while others are dispersed in Metro Manila, Pampanga, Cavite, Tarlac, Cagayan Valley, Laguna, Rizal, Negros Occidental, Iloilo and Cebu. The majority of the *camarero* community in categories one, two and three are aged between 21 and 30, followed by men aged 31 to 40 years old in categories one and two. Only six *camareros* are over 60 years old and they are dispersed unevenly throughout categories one, two and three. Moreover, five *camareros* come from the 15-20 years old age bracket - three of them from category one and two from category two.

Looking at the *santos* that *camareros* presently own, *camareros* from all four categories have a definite

preference for the image of the *Sto. Niño*. This is not surprising as the first Christian image that arrived in the Philippines was the *Sto. Niño de Cebu*. Images of the Virgin Mary come second, and there is a high regard for canonically crowned Marian images like the *Santo Rosario (La Naval or Manaoag), Nuestra Señora de la Paz y Buen Viaje* (Our Lady of Peace and Good Voyage), *Niña Maria* (Young Mary), the Immaculate Conception, Our Lady of Lourdes and Our Lady of Fatima. Another significant Marian image for many *camareros*, especially in categories one and two, is the image of the *Mater Dolorosa*. Six *camareros* in category one and another six in category two have this image. There is also a liking for images of Jesus Christ, especially those related to his passion and death, in the first and second category. They include images of the *Señor Cautivo* (Christ Arrested), *Cristo Resucitado* (Risen Christ), Christ the King and the Sacred Heart of Jesus. A respondent in category one has even inherited an image of the *Sto. Entierro* (Dead Christ) from his ancestors. Lastly, *camareros* in all categories usually like images of the apostles and women followers of Jesus who were present during his passion and death, like Mary Magdalene, Mary of Bethany and St John. At least two *camareros* from both categories one and two have an image of *San Pedro*. However, many of these *santos* in category two are probably images commissioned for the use of newly-established parishes.

Materials for religious images matter in *santo* art. As for the *camareros* in the Philippines, the majority of *camareros* in both categories one and two prefer to have images made of wood. On the other hand, eight out of 16 respondents in category one admitted to having images in both wood and ivory. An emphasis on category two is needed to build a holistic view of the new *camareros*. As expected, the majority of them are self-financed, with only three respondents saying they source their finances directly from their families. Their primary motivation in commissioning a specific *santo* is their faith and devotion. They are also inspired by fellow *camareros*, their families and stories of other people who have religious images. One unexpected result was that three respondents admitted that it was their personal decision to commission a *santo* and that they were never influenced by external forces.

Another important element in the old system of sponsorship is the *andas* or *carroza* of the *santo*. This rings true even for *camareros* under the new system of sponsorship. In fact, the majority of *camareros* in all four groups have a *carroza*. Surprisingly, one respondent in category one still uses an *andas* for his *santo* in Cagayan Valley. Most *carroza*s are made of wood; however, six *camareros* in category one and four *camareros* in category two said that their *carroza*s are made of a wooden framework fitted with repoussé cutouts. Two *camareros* in category two have *carroza*s made of *pukpok kalesa* (hammered work). Meanwhile, one respondent each from categories one and two has a *carroza* made of pure silver.

The survey also asked the number of *salida*s that *carroza* owners join per year, as well as their expenses each time their *santo* participates in a procession. The response to the number of *salida*s participated in every year was quite diverse, but the majority of respondents in category one said that they participate in at least three processions per year, while the majority in categories two, three and four join more than three *salida*s per year. As for their overall expenses for each *salida* that they participate in, the *camareros* gave varying responses. A majority of those in category one spend an average of PHP14,800 (US$290), while those in category two spend an average of PHP12,500 (US$245) per *salida*. Those in categories three and four spend a combined average of roughly PHP7,500 (US$147) for each of their *salida*s. A majority of *camareros* in all four categories said that they use their personal funds to finance their *salida*s. In categories one, two and four, a small number of respondents admitted that their immediate family shoulders the expenses. A *camarero* in category one explained that each of his family members contributes every time their *santo* is brought out for procession.

One unique feature of the present system of sponsorship is the ability of *camareros* to interact with each other using social media, messaging applications or face-to-face conversations. Part of the survey inquired whether they interact with fellow *camareros* and if they have joined organisations dealing with *santo* art. Almost all the respondents communicated with other *camareros* with the exception of two respondents in category one and three respondents in category two. Similarly, almost everyone was part of an existing organisation in the *camarero* community. At least three respondents mentioned that they are part of the *cofradia* (co-fraternity) in their respective parishes.

As for their motivations in joining such organisations, many respondents in all categories stated that they liked to learn new things about the art of the *santo*, discover other *camareros*, and expected to deepen their devotion through knowing people who have the same interest as them. These *camareros* were also asked about the topics they usually discussed with fellow *camareros*. The three most common answers were: dressing a *santo*, maintaining it, and learning the tricks of the trade, especially in finding possible suppliers. Overall, almost all the respondents were satisfied by their current interactions with fellow *camareros*. Those who say otherwise have very personal reasons. One respondent in category two commented that interacting with fellow *camareros* has been an 'eye opener' for him, but whether this was a positive remark or not is open to discussion. Meanwhile, another respondent in category one believed that joining organisations related to the *camarero* community was a form of distraction. In the same vein, another respondent lamented the fact that the present form of sponsorship has become a sort of *pabonggahan* (competition).

Conclusion

The system of sponsorship for religious images in the Philippines has a rich history and is too significant not to be studied thoroughly. This present study proves that sponsorship for religious images already existed before the arrival of the Spaniards. Ancient Filipinos worshipped a supreme being, their ancestors, and a number of deities. When the Spaniards arrived and conquered the Philippines, the primitive religious statues were replaced with Christian models which they totally embraced. This veneration for *santos*, sponsored and maintained by *camereros*, is still an important aspect of religious life in the Philippines.

Analysing the results of this study and correlating them with extant literature on *santo* art, we see that Philippine religious statues became more refined over the years. While *santo* art was dependant on foreign models during the earlier phases of colonisation, it later took two forms: those statues produced by the religious for the use of parishes often followed European models, but those created for private individuals by craftsmen who lacked technical abilities were more crude and similar to the *anitos* or *likha*. However, developments in transportation and the economy from the middle of 18th century and for much of the 19th century prompted a renaissance in *santo* art. *Camareros* in the old system of sponsorship expected artists to create fine works following the prevailing academic style. Today, the same principle applies to contemporary *camareros*. They expect the artists to produce works that are technically precise. In fact, there is a movement now where a number of *camareros* request artists to make faithful copies of statues from Seville, Spain. Many artists are also guided by what they learned from their *maestro* (teachers), like Alberto Panganiban of Navotas who trained under the late Alfredo Contreras, or they are apprenticed abroad, like Wilfredo Layug of Betis, Pampanga who trained in Seville, Spain.

A question also arises about *camereros*' exclusivity. In the writer's opinion, there is nothing exclusive about *camareroship* today. Any Catholic believer could become a *camarero*. However, wealth is an important factor because there is only one practical reality when it comes to *santo* stewardship: it consumes money. For an affluent *camarero*, there are no problems, whereas the poorer *camarero* may have to rely on his creativity to fill the void. Two socio-cultural functions are manifested in *camareroship*. Firstly, the *santo* becomes a commodity and cultural capital for many *camareros*. Even in the old system of sponsorship, owning a *santo* showed one was well-off. The fact that many *camareros* today come from the second category seems to be about the need for social acceptance or prestige in the community. In the same way, the *santo* is an art form, and its market value depends on the popularity of the sculptor who made it, the era to which it belongs and the cost of its overall upkeep. This is also the reason why *santos*, especially the ones in ivory, are favourite pieces to be sold in local auction houses. Secondly, the *camareros* form a distinct community. The survey results highlight the fact that that majority of *camareros* actively interact with each other, whether in person or through their online presence. Regardless of one's social class, both affluent and disadvantaged *camareros* share the same thing, a passion for the sacred arts.

In the past, ordinary folks would either carve their own images, which were normally crude and small, or commission *santos* from skilled local artisans. In the 1600s, when the political and social climate was relatively stable, the missionaries gradually introduced

a secular approach to the sponsorship of religious images. In the more urban Manila, particularly in Intramuros, the Dominicans selected particular individuals, normally members of high society, to be a *camarera* of the image of the *Santo Rosario*, and they were responsible for the image's preparation, upkeep and the preservation of its precious jewels. In the rural Philippines, the missionaries took a different approach. Processional images were needed to complement the rituals associated with various fiestas or liturgical seasons. In the 18th and 19th centuries, this prompted the missionaries to seek the help of wealthy individuals from the local elite.

The end of World War II, the socio-economic developments of the twenty-first century and the introduction of mass media ushered in a new era and a new system of sponsorship for religious images. The presence of mass communication through the Internet is also important in understanding the renewed interest in *santo* art. Microblogging and social media platforms such as Flickr and Facebook have been utilised by longtime and prospective *camareros* to share information and interact with each other, and most of them see this in a positive light.

This study bridges the gaps in the studies of Venida [1996, pp.500-509] and Galang [2012, pp.46-58], which only covered the old system of sponsorship with emphasis on the *santo* and the rural aristocracy in Camarines Sur and Cabiao, Nueva Ecija. This current work has been a pilot study which describes how the new system of sponsorship for religious images manifests in the twenty-first century. While this study is not without its limitations, it nonetheless opens an opportunity for scholars to explore and expand on the topic of *camareroship*. Possible topics include the exploration and documentation of the *santo* collections of various *camareros*, and a different form of quantitative analysis to the one used in this study – perhaps covering equal numbers of respondents per region in the Philippines.

ENDNOTES

1 Ethnic groups in Luzon used different terms for a supreme being such as *Bathala* (Tagalogs), *Laon* (Bisayas) and *Kabunian* (Ilokanos).
2 For further information, read the chronicles of Pedro Chirino and Antonio Pigafetta.
3 The *bulul* is always depicted either standing or in a sitting position, with a simplified and geometric facial structure. It has short limbs and a big head with stalks of rice for the hair.
4 It is also known as the Moluccas, or present day Indonesia.
5 Antonio Pigafetta travelled with Ferdinand Magellan and vividly recorded the lifestyle of the natives, particularly in Cebu.
6 Oaminal [2018] based his explanation on the article by Dela Calzada written in 1965.
7 Chroniclers Antonio Pigafetta and Pedro Chirino observed how natives used 'idols' in rituals.
8 In Pigafetta's account, he explicitly describes how Queen Juana wept upon receiving the image of the *Sto. Niño*.
9 See *Arte Sacra Ph's* Facebook page: https://www.facebook.com/artesacraph/
10 A *retablo* is an elaborate wooden altar, also known as a cabinet of saints, where small niches house images of popular saints of the religious orders, including the tabernacle.
11 Crispulo Hocson, Romualdo de Jesus, Leoncio Asuncion and Isabelo Tampinco were celebrated sculptors of the 19th century. They became household names for connoisseurs.
12 Some popular sculptors produced by the Academia de Pintura, Escultura y Grabado de Manila were Bonifacio Arevalo, Graciano Nepomuceno, Marcelo Nepomuceno and Anselmo Espiritu.
13 Lorenzo Rocha, director of the Academia de Dibujo y Pintura, accepted Pelagia Mendoza y Gotianquin in 1889.
14 Madriñan's *Mater Dolorosa* won a prize at the Amsterdam Exhibition of 1883.
15 It is made of wood and extremely elaborate with *lusutan* (perforated) style as a common design.
16 The local elites during the Spanish colonial period normally held positions of power such as *cabezas de barangay* (today's barangay captain) and *gobernadorcillos* (municipal judges).
17 Those serving under local elites were called *mag-uusong* (Bicol - see Venida [1996]) or *kasama* (Tagalog).
18 The *Pasyong Mahal* is composed of stanzas of five lines with eight syllables each; it is chanted in dramatic fashion for an entire day, or divided into parts that could last for many days.

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