



## The Ethnical Significance of the Tao-Tao Indigenous Sculpture of the Pala'wan Tribe in Sitio Soked, Sofronio Española, Palawan

Felix A. Madriñan  
*Palawan State University  
Quezon Campus, Palawan  
felix.madrinan@yahoo.com.ph*

**Abstract:** This research traced, described and explained in detail the ethnical significance of the Tao-Tao woodcrafts, an indigenous sculpture of the Pala'wan Tribe in Sitio Soked, Municipality of Sofronio Española, Province of Palawan. Tao-Tao or locally made wood figures has become a popular indigenous product in souvenir stalls, native restaurants and tourist destination areas throughout the Province. The commercialization of Tao-Tao as an indigenous product depicting the culture of the Pala'wan Tribe is a threat to its ethnical significance like any other culture in history that was altered or defaced by modernization and commercialization. This expository research will dig deeper on Pala'wan Tribe's history, its culture, beliefs and traditions to provide the reading public the ethnical significance of Tao-Tao. Using data from related literatures, documentaries and in-depth interviews, the researcher would like to present conclusive evidence that the indigenous Tao-Tao art has a meaningful connections with the way of life of the Pala'wan tribes of Sitio Soked, Sofronio, Española, Palawan. Its origin has been traced to fulfill a functions of healing. But due to the progressive transition from traditional to modern society, this long traditions of healing ritual is now going to be a flickering culture that need constant quenching of the flame. The commercialization of Tao-Tao had devalue its ethnical importance for the Pala'wan Tribe and the preservation of this unique art as an intrinsic part of their beliefs and traditions that is continually fading will be given a saving hand.

**Key Words:** Si'let Healing Ritual; Pala'wan art & crafts; Healing Deities; Palawan Culture & Arts; Indigenous Wood Carvings

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Any work of art, any piece of culture becomes all the more beautiful when it is meaningful and the deeper meanings of these works are bound intrinsically to the cultures that

brought these to life. Meaningful connections can only come when we listen to the stories of these works, when we understand the circumstances of their creations, the mindsets of craftsmen who created them, the motifs and the symbols, the experiences and memories, the processes and only

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then will we understand these are more than just beautiful, they are significant and important sources of our knowledge and pride. (Legarda 2015)

Indigenous sculpture or carving is an important element of a particular culture. Sculptures are made and used for different purposes like to tell traditional history, to celebrate events in life like birth and death, to initiate rituals and celebrations, to invoke good spirits and cast away the bad.

Like any other ethnic groups in the Philippines, the Pala'wan is rich in tradition and ritual life. A handful of indigenous dances accompanied by the sound of the gongs, chants and songs reflect the unique culture of these people. Carving is also a long tradition handed from generations to generations. Carved wooden figures in human form can be seen in villages where they lived, such object ascribed with a ritual function. I was captivated tracing its ethnical significance of these human form indigenous sculpture which is common among souvenir shops, houses and art enthusiasts being unaware of its origin and cultural value. Among the many rituals of the Pala'wan using carved wooden idols had not specifically known from the outside people that the dawning of Tao-Tao has a specific purpose for healing. I found no book mentioning the specific name and type, of this healing ritual before maybe because of some cultural reasons.

The Pala'wan Tribe in Sitio Soked, Sofronio Española, Province of Palawan has become a major supplier of wood sculptures widely known as Tao-Tao. Back in time when tourism industry in Palawan was quite adamant, wooden figures are being offered for sale by tribal members, house to house until the tourism industry in Palawan got the chance to escalate because of persistent campaign in the promotion of top tourist destination areas. This development demands for local business product which is part of the local tourism promotion. Since then, the demand for Tao-Tao increased as it became a favourite souvenir item by local and foreign tourists because of its unique native feature. With the increased demand

for Tao-Tao, the Pala'wan Tribe in Sitio Soked focused in increasing its production. The former hunters and farmers altered their livelihood to woodcarving, involving most of its tribal members in the production of Tao-Tao.

The commercialization of Tao-Tao for economic gain of the Pala'wan Tribe in Sitio Soked, Sofronio Española poses challenges to its cultural significance. Its contribution in tourism promotion can cause depreciation of its cultural substance. Aside from its economic value and demand as a native art form depicting Pala'wan culture, the origin of Tao-Tao, and its ethnical significance to the Pala'wan Tribe should be recognized.

## 2. MAIN CLAIM/S

“We will preserved more and recognized the cultural worth attributed to the “Tao-Tao” art as a healing ritual object which are being devalued instead of focusing only on commercialization.”

People views the Tao-Tao as a mere piece of a wood craft, interested only with its aesthetic characteristics, that is most probably one of the reasons why individuals forget to appraise the worth of this indigenous art. Looking at the different stance in the creation of the Tao-Tao indigenous sculpture, there is more to unveil in this piece of art, not just a trivial work of art, rather it has an element and substance that is more valuable than just what you see as an object in itself. It has a cultural value that denotes the degree of importance, there is practicality of its functions and origin. Most certainly, a cultural worth that many humans lamentably fail to acknowledge. Our awareness about the cultural significance of the practices will offer a wider perspective and understanding about our ancestral



heritage. This perspective leads to appreciation and respect for our very identity that matters in tracking the very direction of our purpose.

### “Commercialization Trivializes the Ethnical Value of the Tao-Tao Art, In Sad Contrast, Raises Environmental Issues.”

According to informants, the early sign of commercialization of Tao-Tao started during American occupations period. Foreigners came to the houses of their ancestors and asked for the wooden carvings tied in their houses in exchange of goods. Until a time came when local tourists and art collectors came to them and offered money for replicating the carved wooden figure in various forms and sizes, using popular hardwoods like Ipil (Family: Leguminosae, Scientific name: *Intsia bijuga*) (Colebr.) O. Kuntze and Kamagong (Scientific name: *Diospyros blancoi*). This rapidly popularizes the Tao-Tao to art collectors and used the indigenous sculpture of Pala'wan Tribe as a local business product for the growing number of tourists in the Province who are most likely to buy Palawan souvenir items.

Ritual is still practiced by the Tribe and they admitted that its cultural significance is noticeably depreciating because of its commercialization. The increase in demand for Tao-Tao in the market also demands indulgence of more tribal members in wood carving. At early age, children were taught of making Tao-Tao to meet the demand and to also increase the income. The conditions had given the idea of the tribe members to divert their attention into focusing more on the value of economic gain from wood carvings with ready tangible cash for the economic good or service to fill-in their stomach and provide their needs rather than entrenched with their slash-and-burn farming activity and hunting for them to survive. The repercussions lead to a partially lost of memory of the cultural worth of the wood crafts caused by commercialization and modernization.

The demand for Tao-Tao and other crafts made from Ipil or Kamagong and other hardwood species by locals and foreign buyers is on the rise. Craft production is an economically and socially important industry for many indigenous groups throughout the world (FAQ 1995). Furthermore, indigenous crafts production is credited for promoting social and cultural values by providing a source of rural community development that incorporates traditional values and practices (Kerr 1990, from Kerr no publication date; Siwok 2004). However, we should also be concerned the value of our forest as to the effect of commercialization that raises some important issues taking into considerations that the production is directly dependent on raw materials derived locally and where our indigenous people are dependent with and has survived. A matter in question like, sustainability of tree species, density of exploited species, ecosystem, conservation initiatives shall also be given of great importance in order that the crafts and livelihood of these indigenous peoples will not be in danger.

### “Authenticity Adds Value and Story of the Object as an Art Despite the Integration and Influences of the Outside Tribe Carvers and The Mass Production Challenge of the Indigenous Human form Sculpture.”

Integration caused by migration of other local carvers from other places in the Philippines coupled with the rising demand of indigenous crafts particularly the Tao-Tao art had brought the decreasing value not only to its ethnical importance but also to its form as a carved human figure that is purely Pala'wan made. Other carvers from the outside of the indigenous Pala'wan have replicated the indigenous art. Other than imitation, modification has been observed that do not match with the local indigenous artistry of the craft originated from Sitio Soked. Traces of differences

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as to the indigenous facial feature varies from the authentic one. Moreover, the craftsmanship of the outside carvers are more refined and polished compared to the works of the Pala'wan tribes which is more uneven or irregular surface and quite jaggy. Authentic one has a primitive appeal. The contrasting feature manifests the type of a carving tools used. Carvers' tools from the outside tribes have complete superior advantage for ease and comfortability in doing the craft while the indigenous Pala'wan are using only the very primitive type called kempusan (bolo) and pais (small sharp knife) which is more difficult to produce primitive craft. Outside carvers have the probability of making inaccurate features and descriptions of what the Tao-Tao is like. The integration and mass production somehow give a misleading representation thereby bending the truth of the culture of the Pala'wan tribe of Sitio Soked based on their crafts. According to Richards (1994:2), representation is made in the form of objects and images. Richards further argues that it is through such objects, images and performances that people's lives are represented as those of the other. This view is well supported by Richards' (1994:289) assertion that there can be cultural misrepresentation when such lives are portrayed contrary to how people live. Cultural representations are a source of entertainment for tourists. That can be in the form of traditional dance performances and the sale of traditional crafts, as I have indicated earlier. In view of Walle (1998:181) the colourful and exotic lifestyles of the host culture play a big role in attracting tourists. It is also essential to represent what tourists can regard as culture in order to satisfy their expectations. Ryan (2002:953) has argued that if cultures are authentically represented, tourists can learn more about lifestyles, heritage and arts in an informed way. However, other authors such as Echtner and Prasad, (2003:669) rejected the possibility of authentic representations in the sense that past "no longer existing" culture is represented rather the modern lived culture. Even though the past lifestyles no longer exist, tourists perceptions

about the lives and customs of ordinary people remain unchanged, and people in turn represent their lives as static. As a matter of fact, tourists still perceived old represented ways of living as beautiful culture. People, though, are cautious not to be tempted to represent their contemporary lives since tourists might not be impressed in that regard. Despite the inauthentic representation that tourists observe, they still continue to spend lots of money in search of culture. Furthermore, following Lewis (1990:30), arts and culture are important tools for tourism development, and tourists will spend lots of money on cultured based entertainment, including the purchase of crafts and the attendance of dance performances. The carved wooden figure of the Pala'wan tribes of Sitio Soked is a unique manifestation of their identity and a representation of a long-honored way of life.

The existence of the modern technology is a threatening concern, expected mass production can be produced by a lone machine that can reproduced the same features that leads to an alarming occurrence to the significance of Tao-Tao and other crafts as well as their alternative means of carving livelihood of the Pala'wan tribes of Sitio Soked. The product are being commoditized and the traditional handicrafts are replaced by machine made products and as a result of increased competition at global level the handicrafts are competing with other similar substitute products. Handicrafts are replaced by mass-produced items. Consequently, the handmade products are diminishing very fast and the traditional crafts face stiff competition in the market, as mass-produced items are cheaper and the sellers have higher production capacity with strong logistical support.

"We see the people creating an art that is not entirely theirs because content no longer comes from within but is made to order from without, to meet economic demands. The original function and motivation for creation is lost in meeting the demands for products which have taken on a commercial nature so that motifs and images may not even significant to the person creating the piece". (Brenda V. Fajardo 1992)



### 3. PRESENTATION OF THE ARGUMENT/S

The Pala'wan tribe form an ethnolinguistic entity, an autochthonous population that has diversified over the course of centuries and whose communities, adapting to various ecological niches from coastal to mountainous have become to a certain extent culturally and linguistically differentiated. Their social ties are based on cognatic kinship, with a predominance of the monogamous family as the core social and economic unit. All Pala'wan were, up to recent times, shifting agriculturist, while also relying on marine, riverine and forest products for subsistence and housing, some relying on hunting and others more on fishing depending on their location on the sea-mountain gradient. (Charles J-H Macdonald 2007) They all chanted epics and told myths or legends sharing similar traits in form and content (Macdonald 1988a), they all played more or less the same musical instruments, built the same houses, lived in small settlements or hamlets, were all peaceful and nonviolent, entertained polytheistic beliefs and made basketry, blowguns and other artifacts, with some minor variations in style.

Tribe's culture is rich in ceremonies, prayers, chanting and healing rituals. The intrusion of newcomers pushed the Pala'wans to the surrounding areas and was divided into groups. They were introduced to the outside world and they were forced to move places to dwell which eventually caused alteration of livelihood and also their traditions.

Sitio Soked is located between borders of Barangay Abo-abo, Sofronio Española and Barangay Pinaglabanan, Quezon, Palawan. The area can only be reached by means of walking along trailway and passed by a streams and river for about 1 and a half hour to 2 hours from the accessible main national highway of Quezon, Palawan to the village. The Pala'wan Tribe in Sitio Soked, Sofronio Española, Province of Palawan, the

subject group of this study, is a small tribal community with a total population of One Hundred Thirty Three (133) including male and female, comprising only Thirty Three (33) households. This minority group had survived in the Domadoway Valley by means of hunting and farming known as Kaingin. Later, they shifted into wood carvings popularly known as Tao-Tao that became their major source of livelihood. The Pala'wan Tribe of Sitio Soked is a major contributor of Tao-Tao to souvenir shops of Palawan particularly in the City of Puerto Princesa. None other group or tribe could supply voluminous woodcrafts in Palawan but only the Pala'wan tribe of Sitio Soked who has been gifted with this unique carving ability which is being passed through generations.

The indigenous Tao-Tao made by Pala'wan Tribe of Sitio Soked is the center of this study. Before the age of modernization, crafts use to spring out of the heart and hands of man because he needed them. These products were made for use without any thought of creating works of art. People's art is created for its function and the maker is usually not conscious of producing art. (Brenda V. Fajardo 1992). The locally made wood figures become a popular indigenous product in souvenir stalls, native houses and restaurants and tourist destination areas throughout the Province. The increase on influx of local and foreign tourists noticeably increase the demand for Tao-Tao which is sold for price ranging Php 150-1,000 or more depending on size and wood species being used.

The Pala'wan Tribe, for this study inhabitants of Sitio Soked naturally known to be animists (original meaning referred to a religious belief, said to be held by indigenous peoples of the world, that natural objects and beings, both animate and inanimate, possess mental and spiritual faculties and powers, Graham Harvey 2015) and whose culture known to have existed more than 50,000 years, should have its traditional community governed by traditional beliefs, preserved this knowledge of Tao-Tao wood carving as an intrinsic feature of their customs and traditions amid introduction of new religions,





modernization, migration and shift in source of livelihood. The Tao-Tao should be recognized as an important component of the culture of Pala'wan Tribe in Sitio Soked, Sofronio Española whose artistry in woodcarving is greatly inspired by traditional beliefs passed on and preserved through generations, not as a local piece of art for display or decoration. With the booming tourism industry in Palawan which sees the opportunity for Tao-Tao to be commercialized, the ethnical significance of Tao-Tao to Pala'wan Tribe has to be examined.

Hence, the proponent desired to obtain first hand information in the origin of Tao-Tao wood carvings using qualitative research methods and obtained data through participant observation, in depth interviews focus groups and utilizing verbal reports narrated from the key informant interviews and documentary analysis to generate materials such as notes, audio/video records and transcripts. Data from the archives, newspapers and published reports shall also be collected and presented for sufficient discussion of research issues using organized, detailed and reliable information to be able to come up with a substantial, reliable and conclusive result that Tao-Tao wood carving is an important element in Pala'wan Tribe culture.

## Tao-Tao is Derived from a Healing Ritual Known as Si'let

Based on interviews with informants and examination of gathered information, the Tao-Tao of the Pala'wan Tribe of Sitio Soked, Municipality of Sofronio Española, Palawan is an innate part of tribe's culture that was existed prior to foreign occupations in Palawan Island.

The "Tao-Tao" was derived from Si'let read as Si'lot, a distinctive type of healing ritual using a carved wooden figure exclusively carved from a tree known as Girangan (Tagb.) *Melanolepis Moluccanos* (Pax & Hoffm.) or widely known for its common name *Alim Melanolepis Multi Glandulosa* (Reinw. Ex Blume) . Reichb. & Zoll. It has an anti-viral and other medicinal properties. Its bark

leaves, flowers, fresh or slightly heated applied to the skin as sudorific for chest pains and fever. In some other asian countries, decoction of leaves used as vermifuge and used for cough, constipation, treat centipede and snake bites and used as anti-infection (Godofredo Stuart Jr. 2018).

The ritual is performed by a Babaylan, a Si'let specialist, to heal severe dry cough that cannot be medicated with the modern medicine. The Girangan as an exclusive wood species that has been used for Silet implies edibility aside from its medicinal properties. The leaves is used to wrap minelmel, a kind of indigenous rice delicacy mixed with porad and wrapped it with the Girangan leaves to sweetened the food. It is also used to cover the lid of the Tabad Jar filled with rice wine during Pagdiwata ritual.

According to a Babaylan interviewed by the researcher, traditionally, the Si'let wooden figure (used in Si'let Ritual) is carved only at the time the patient came at the house of the Si'let specialist to ask for medication. It shall not be made without a patient. A Si'let usually measures 6 cm to 1 foot in height. The half portion of Si'let's body is wrapped with colored cloth (represents a malong), its head is also wrapped with colored cloth (represents head turban if it's a male form) and a carved wooden bolo figure tied-up in both the belly portion.

The Si'let Specialist goes to the area where the Girangan tree located and then mumbled asking permission to what they believe as spirits of their ancestors before cutting the tree. Having done, he goes back to the house where Si'let has to be performed and started carving the human form figure. Having carved the Si'let, he has to fix the wood scrap and put in an area where it cannot be set down by foot.

The Si'let Specialist will then cook rice using firewood. The cooked rice is scooped and placed in a banana leaf.

The Si'let Specialist sit near the fire to signal the initiation with chants:

"Tomarek Alipotong, Libo-Libo Dapogan (Chanted five times) " and moves his hands with the Si'let

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around over the lighted firewood and manipulate the carved wooden figures in a dancing moves while chanting repeatedly five times.

The Si'let's head will then place in the cooked rice laid in the banana leaf, poked it with ladle while chanting :

“Kaan Ne Ilet, Kaan Ne, Pegpekolen Megdekla, Pegpekanen Megdisek” and then put the Si'let in the neck of the patient for a while. This process is usually repeated for 7 to 8 times.

Having done the chanting, The Si'let practitioner will have his final words saying:

“Ebeta Ne, Indak Sombiling, Indak Bolo-Bolo  
Ne I Peng Amori, Neng Seketin Itoe, Ikew  
Megsesanged, Kaas Ne Peksangda.”

After the ritual has done, the carved wooden figure is tied up to undisturbed areas of the house for a time being.

Israel Dupla Inalao, said that “The idea of the Tao-Tao which they are carving for sale is originated from Si'let. However, at present, it is done in an improved manner. Previously, as far as I can remember, a white man approached me to make Si'let in exchange for goods and a few pesos which I thought he will use it for healing”.

To validate the information obtained from Israel Dupla Inalao, First Babaylan , the researcher interviewed second Si'let Specialist named Hansang Digal who is residing approximately five (5) kilometers away from the First Babaylan. He confirmed that the features of indigenous Tao-Tao sculpture are being copied from Si'let (carved wooden figure use for Si'let ritual). The information obtained from the Second Si'let Specialist and his demonstration of Si'let Ritual matches with the First Babaylan. Another Si'let Specialist, a woman name Minan Daniya Bokak Damlino who is living from a nearby Sitio of the area has been demonstrated the same processes and using the same features of the carved wooden figure. Another Si'let Specialist named Vicente Patinti, a Gorar of the village performing the same procedures employed in doing Si'let rituals. He then emphasized the cultural value of the carved human figure that has been commercialized in

different modified forms. According to him, “Buyers of the items are pushing us to innovate the crafts in accordance with their request because they don't buy the product if it is against what they like”.

The researcher also conducted interviews from tribal members and leaders in the tribal community as well as some wood carvers who gave consistent information about the Si'let Ritual where the local wood carving Tao-Tao was derived.

## The Sacrality of Si'let

Oftentimes, I find hard to convince my respondents to witness and do the actual demonstrations of the Si'let ritual just because they are interdicted by their traditions not to perform unless there is the presence of the patient. Even by uttering the name Si'let is prohibited. Upon my observation during my stay with the tribes, children will stay away when they see their elders carving the Si'let. For them it is something that is divine and to be treated with great respect. Minan Dayna told me that “there was a couple who make fun of the carved human figure that has been used in her ritual, after a week they encountered great misfortune and all of them got sick”. This is maybe the reason that the Si'let ritual is little-known to the outside people due to cultural beliefs that Si'let is a kind of ritual that needs not to be talked about, for it is “culturally sensitive”. Miriam Clavir and John Moses assert that the term “culturally sensitive” broadens concepts embodied in sacred and holy to include any objects demanding special respect because of their significance within their cultural context. The object's associations with a particular individual or group invoke protocols recognized by the whole community, which is again a demonstration of respect. “Traditionally (western plains) bundles are not the only objects which can be imbued with medicine or power. Certain types of shields and shield covers, head-dresses, pipes, drums, and various articles of clothing and personal adornment, can also function as physical manifestations of this concept of medicine” (Moses 1998). Respecting cultural protocols, though, is not



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asking people to believe, but asking them to respect those who do.

## Making of the Tao-Tao

Unlike with the creation of Si'let, it requires sensitivity. It does not need the engraving nor the blackening process and even the species of a tree to be carved is entailed to be exclusive. It is imperative to be pure.

In a more modified form, making the Tao-Tao is just quite as the organic way as finding a piece of wood that suits what they want to carve is the first thing they do. Cutting and chopping according to the desired sizes. Rough out, modelling and detailing using a bolo (kempusan) and a small sharp knife (pais) to carve the craft. Having done and formed, it will go through a primitive and organic process of blackening using the leaves of a vine called kolegbew by way of rubbing to the carved human figure and heated by fire. After blackening, they started etching and engraving geometric lines and designs and ornamental pattern in accordance to what they see in their environment and surroundings.

At present, to keep the supply going and meet the demand of the buyers, techniques and processes of making the Tao-Tao has been sacrificed. The indigenous and organic way of blackening the wooden carved figure by means of rubbing the kolegbew leaf to the craft heated by fire has been replaced by the modern-day blackening solution "black coal tar" introduced by buyers to hasten the process in order to meet urgent orders from consumers.

## 4. REPORT OF OPPOSING OR DIFFERING VIEWS

It has been noted that the Pala'wan tribes are living and thriving mostly in the southern part of Palawan island. In the book of Macdonald (1972, 1973, 1974a-c, 1977a-b, 1988a-b, 1996, 2002)

asserts some event where he visited in subsequent years several other areas in Southern Palawan and observed a number of Pala'wan sub-groups. One section of the Pala'wan people he visited was located in the Southwestern corner of the Southernmost portion of the island. It consisted of two adjacent lowland areas located in the Kulbi-Kenipaqaq river basin. Although this is a lowland or hill area from an environmental and ecological point of view, it is and was for centuries inhabited by tribal people practicing shifting agriculture and collecting variety of products from the forest, rivers, mangroves and reefs.

Sitio Soked, Sofronio, Española was formerly a part of Brookes Point. It was made into a separate municipality by virtue of RA No. 7679 and ratified by a plebiscite on June 11, 1995. This Municipality shares the border of Quezon, Palawan. It is apparent that living in one area, the Pala'wan tribes shares common rituals and practices.

Macdonald (2007) state the fact that wood carving is another craft at which some are more adept than others. Old Pitu from Megkelip, for instance, is still the official carver of the little human figure (Taw Taw) for the Panggaris Ceremony (meaning "cutting" or "slicing"). Once a year, it brings together people from all corners of the territory and its general aim is to "cleanse the earth" and bring a general state of welfare for the entire area and its inhabitants. This ceremony is held after harvesting and before clearing the new fields, during the months of October-November. It should coincide with the flowering of the tawljaj tree (Ulmaceae), and with the season when certain other trees, like the durian tree, or the Malaga tree (*Wendlandia densiflora*) [BI.] DC., Revel 1990, 343), or the bunsikag tree bear fruit, no later and no sooner. He, like many others, produces carved handles for the quiver (Kereban), nicely shaped ladles (luluwag), the mortar and pestle (lesung & lagyu) for pounding rice, handles (pulug) for the bush knife and the decorated wooden propeller found in many houses.





The fact stated by Macdonald re: Little Human Figure (Taw Taw) or (Tao-Tao) emphasizes: For the Panggaris Ceremony which differs to my study and claim that the Tao-Tao carved human figure is for the Si'let healing ritual.

He further highlight The (Taw Taw) (Macdonald 2007) wooden carvings of human figures (Taw Taw) a man bearing a fighting knife and a woman are placed on the platform and attached to the crossbeam. Such human representation is unique in that I have never seen in the whole of Palawan. Another carving is in the form of a human being- this is meant to protect the world and to attract the attention of the deities (diwata) who will lower their gazes and look down on the earth.

The carved human figures (Taw Taw) a man bearing a fighting knife and a woman as argued by Macdonald, is a closer resemblance to the features of the Si'let, a carved human figures used for healing in my claim.

However, (Macdonald) In the course of his studies, he lived and stayed for extended periods of time with five communities in different locations. He came to the conclusion that apart from linguistic differences, local variations were most significant in two areas: 1.) Ecological and economic orientation along a gradient from the seashore to the middle slopes of the central mountainous system, and 2.) beliefs and representations, as well as practices, relating to the supernatural, or what is commonly referred to as "religion".

In all other aspects pertaining to social organization, kinship, residence rules, and customary law, all sections of this ethnic group are remarkably similar.

Consequently, based on the certainty, the Pala'wan Tribes living in Sitio Soked, Sofronio, Española, Palawan vary from the Pala'wan Tribes living somewhere in the area of Brookes Point, Palawan, as to beliefs and representations, as well as practices, relating to the supernatural, or what is commonly referred to as "religion". Hence, their belief and practices of the indigenous carved human figure is dissimilar from one another. In

Sitio Soked, it is intended for healing while in Brookes Point, Palawan, it is intended to attract deities (Diwata). Both are the same indigenous carved human figure from wood but of different animistic functions.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis of the gathered information, it is hereby concluded that the origin and significance of the indigenous Tao-Tao art sculpture has an ethnical and meaningful connections with the way of life of the Pala'wan Tribes of Sitio Soked, Espanola, Palawan. It is not demanded to be experienced aesthetically, but rather, the indigenous Tao-Tao art sculpture before its commercialization as conceived from Si'let fulfills a functions of healing, according to the beliefs and traditions of the tribe.

The Pala'wan carving creativity being the only one of its kind must be represented in real sense by their idiosyncratic works of authentic art which retains their identities. Though commercialization and tourism conveyed positive impact to the lives of these people economically, we must also find a proactive means in identifying and preventing potential problems to the devastating effects carried by commercialization and tourism. Outside people are encouraged not to take advantage of the tribe's innocence and the tempting profit brought by commoditization. Faking the authenticity downgraded the cultural worth of the indigenous wooden sculpture and put the traditional craft at risk.

The Tao-Tao commercialization which was originally of Pala'wan Tribe's custom and tradition can still be preserved by the help of the tourism sector by promoting public knowledge of the originality of the product and its cultural importance not as a form of art or deco. The tourism industry should recognize the importance of indigenous product and at the same time be an instrument of preserving the local cultures for sustainability of the industry and preservation of



the authenticity of the indigenous product or culture.

By looking into the deeper meaning of the Tao-Tao art and the people behind its existence, we can rediscover therefore the ethnical value which is imperative and urgent for cultural preservation.

## 6. KEY INFORMANTS

1. Apiong Sapit, A resident of Sitio Suked and currently a barangay Kagawad of Barangay Abo-Abo.
2. Daniya Bokak Damlino, 89 years old, A Si'let specialist of Sitio Tabon
3. Danny Canto, A resident of Sitio Suked, Sofronio Espanola, Palawan. Dealer and Carver of woodcrafts.
4. Gerry Inalao, Resident of the area.
5. Gonzales Libanan, A resident of the area. Carver and woodcrafts dealer.
6. Hansang Digal, 86 years old, a resident of Sitio Suked. Also practicing traditional and customary healing by the use of Si'let
7. Israel Dupla Inalao, 75 years old, a resident of Sitio Suked, Sofronio Espanola, Palawan. He has been practicing the healing ritual by means of a Si'let since he was 15 years old to present.
8. Ptr. Claudio Batifora Jr., 56 years old, security guard at PSU-Quezon Campus.
9. Vicente Patinti, 55 years old, A Gandilan (Gorar) also a Si'let specialist of Sitio Suked whose responsibility is equivalent to a tribal police of the area.

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