

Spring 5-2-2019

Kumain Na Tayo! Exploring the Role of Food in Communicating Tradition and Instilling Familial Values

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Recommended Citation

Negrillo, Aaron, "Kumain Na Tayo! Exploring the Role of Food in Communicating Tradition and Instilling Familial Values" (2019). *Student Research*. 1.
https://knowledge.e.southern.edu/jour_studentresearch/1

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Kumain na tayo!

The role of food in communicating tradition and instilling familial values.

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Author Note

This research was supervised by Professor Natalia López-Thismón from the School of Journalism and Communication and was supported in part by a grant from the Southern Scholars Honors Program.

Abstract

As a core part of Asian values, family plays a huge role in developing the individual's identity. Family strongly contributes to the passing down of traditions and values. The expression of cultural values can be observed through many surface-level interactions such as food and meal rituals. This auto-ethnography explores the link between food and culture, specifically how it serves as a vehicle of communication that passes down traditions and values. The underlying core values of hospitality, respect, and sacrifice stand emerged from the thematic analysis conducted. Overall, food can be understood as a tangible expression of love: creating something for someone else and giving the energy they need to survive. Not only that, the preparation of food and meals facilitates bonding, the sharing of ideas, creating unity, and the passing of values from generation to generation.

Introduction

Mom had plans to take us to where she grew up, through the town of Sison to a small *barangay* (village) hidden away in the countryside: Amagbagan. It didn't seem like a big deal at first until we turned down a hill. The green trees that hid the setting sun began to thin out as the growth became sparse and was replaced with rocks littered about. A single lane stretched through the dry valley, the newly paved road beginning to reveal gravel and cracks. This is where the Bued river flowed, the same river that would overflow when my mom was a kid and prevent her family from reaching the larger towns in times of need. Then the metal sign appeared: "*Amagbagan. Welcome.*"

We continued straight through the barangay, moving on to the next one called *Tara Tara*. The farmlands stretched far to our right as tobacco and corn rolled over the horizon. After passing a small basketball hoop, we parked the car and walked down a short rocky slope. My mother announced her presence and was greeted by her Uncle Cipriano, also known as Cipring, cousin Elaine and her family.

Tears began to roll down Lolo Cipring's face. This wasn't the last time tears would be shed. Mom said Lolo Cipring was the type to cry whenever he saw his nieces or other family from far away visiting his humble home. Auntie Elaine stood at the metal pump, gathering water to wash her clothes while mom sat and talked to Lolo. I could see his face light up as he recognized my mom and recalled his sister, my grandmother Lola Taliang. These were tears of love and joy, tears that conjured moments and people that could be recalled perfectly only through *Ilocano*, his native tongue.

Auntie Elaine and her husband showed us the land behind the house. There was no crop here, just chickens and stray pups darting around the empty lot. I turned to take in the

land in its entirety. The fields were showered in golden rays of sunset. The land in the valley seemed to go on forever, the hands still tending the cattle. First crop was over and there was no second planting of rice. Instead, the carabao and cows grazed the dry, leftover stocks scattered on the ground along with loose grass and seeds. This was her homeland. This was where my mom was from.

My mother is the youngest in a family of seven children. Every day while I was growing up, she would work tirelessly to make sure her sons had food to eat. Even if the dishes she prepared were mostly American, there was always rice available at each meal. This was the same crop that she had spent so much time around in her youth.

Lolo Carding, my grandfather, would call all of his children to the paddies to help farm the rice. Understanding the work that went into taking care of the crops during that time period established an appreciation of rice by the Tejada siblings. To the young Joyce Tejada, rice was something that she associated with family: it was something the family raised together through hard work, something that was present at every meal, and something that helped the family survive the rural life in the Philippines.

Literature Review

The Philippines and its culture is an amalgamation of the numerous people groups that migrated to and populate the archipelago. Influencing the developing country in a prominent way were the countries who sought to colonize the island chain including Spain and the United States (The World Factbook: Philippines, 2018). The island country's proximity to mainland Asia has also resulted in similarities across cultural value systems. However, the Philippines remains unique in its values and traditions.

Traditional Asian Values

Confucianism acts as a strong influence in most Asian cultures and traditions, including Filipino culture, resulting in notable dimensions: familism, communalism, high power distance, and work/education ethic (Kim, 2010; Toyokawa, Toyokawa, & Leong, 2013). These values are similar to and even shared among other ethnic groups, such as Hispanics, Caribbeans, and African-Americans. Many researchers have sought to understand Asian cultures through the lens of these other ethnic groups, but recognize that these similarities are expressed in differing degrees and ways in each culture (Schwartz et al, 2010; Toyokawa, Toyokawa & Leong).

Understanding the importance family. Just as in most Asian cultures influenced by Confucianism, family has become a core part of Filipino culture and identity. Traditionally, the Filipino understanding of family is not simply limited to the immediate family. Research has identified a core value of Filipino identity to be *kapwa*. *Kapwa* is understood as “fellow being” and refers to connection or unity with other people, regardless of factors typically used to distinguish people (David, Sharma, & Petalio, 2017). *Kapwa* takes the idea of family and extends it. Family goes beyond the immediate family into the community — a collective.

As a key indicator of Filipino culture, family and familism have become, “embedded in [Filipinos’] social sphere, translating its relational quality outside the family,” (Morillo, Capuno, & Mendoza Jr., 2013). David, Sharma, and Petalio (2017) explain that family is a strong component of personal identity and a shared value among Filipinos. The emphasis placed on family and the strength of its dynamic serves as a method for passing on important family values such as filial piety.

Expressions of familism. Familism, placing the needs of the family before oneself, can be exhibited by Filipinos through filial piety. Filial piety refers to the unconditional respect for parents fulfilled through bestowing honor on the family, caring for parents as they age, and even respecting the parents' wishes after death (Kim 2010; Schwartz et al, 2010). One way this is expressed is children finding work abroad — e.g. Saudi Arabia, USA, etc. — and sending funds back home, resulting in transnational families.

Transnational families are families whose members migrate from their country of origin either due to work or even as refugees (Seyfried, 2009). As a common quality of Filipino families, being transnational comes with both positives and negatives. Being far away from relatives weakens the influence of the family in passing on traditions and values (Morillo, Capuno, & Mendoza Jr., 2013). However, this transnational quality allows the family in the Philippines to receive funds as well as other goods. The traditional use of *balikbayan* boxes is to send home items such as food and clothes because it is much easier to obtain with the outside member's income and location. These boxes may act as a way to control what food is consumed at home by providing a specific type of food, such as canned corned beef or Vienna sausages, thereby resulting in a cross between culture and culinary practices (Patzner 2018).

The food that is sent home is usually canned or prepackaged and has a long shelf life. This preserves the food for emergency purposes in case the family lacks access to resources during times of trouble such as lack of income or even natural disasters. The *balikbayan* boxes reinforce how families take care of one another even from miles apart, but also the role food plays in the transnational Filipino family (Patzner 2018).

While the food in *balikbayan* boxes demonstrates the purpose of food for survival,

food also serves different roles in society. “Studies show that food reflects the character of a culture, its values, religion, social history, and way of understanding existence.” (Vidal Claramonte & Faber, 2017). Many Asian cultures are steeped in tradition with meal practices and rituals having different social functions. (Ma, 2015). The food itself may act as a symbol because of its association with specific rituals in a culture (Nevana Stajcic, 2013). These meanings associated with food rituals and food as symbolic help to distinguish a culture. This is especially true when the main ingredients are demonstrative of what resources are available to that culture (Nevana Stajcic, 2013).

Research Question

I chose to research the intersection between Filipino food and culture, specifically familism because I saw a lack of research in those subject areas. This research will aid to bridge the subject silos and add to the overall body of knowledge of Filipino culture and food. After seeing the importance of food with respect to my cultural heritage, I arrived at my final research question and the purpose of this paper: In what ways does food serve as a vehicle for communicating tradition and expressing values in Filipino culture?

Methods

In order to better understand Filipino culture and its traditions with respect to food, I utilized an auto-ethnographic approach. This included four (4) semi-structured interviews, six (6) days of field observation, and one (1) survey. Key participants were Filipino citizens were my parents, Ulysses and Jocelyn Negrillo. While most participants share some direct relation to me, I interviewed other participants were included to establish a more general idea of how Filipinos view their culture.

Data Collection

My field observations were facilitated by my father, Ulysses Negrillo, and mother, Jocelyn Negrillo. The observation period lasted six days, approximately 100 hours of observation. I worked with my father to establish an itinerary, visiting locations that were important for establishing context for my research and observation:

1. Metro Manila – an urban area with the majority of the Filipino population
2. Putting Kahoy, Silang, Cavite – the current town of my paternal grandfather
3. Santa Ignacia Proper, Tarlac – the town where my father was raised
4. Amagbagan, Pangasinan – the barangay where my mother was raised, ancestral home
5. Vigan City, Ilocos Sur – the capital province of Ilocos Sur, UNESCO World Heritage City
6. Baguio, Benguet – the city where my parents, and now nieces and nephews, attended university
7. Hundred Islands National Park, Alaminos, Pangasinan – a national park and tourist attraction

While not every site included an interviewee, the individuals selected for the semi-structured interviews included:

1. Jeruel Ibanez – a professor of History and Social Sciences at the Adventist University of the Philippines (AUP)
2. Alma Adap – a real estate and travel agent and cousin of Ulysses Negrillo
3. Cipriano Calub and Elaine Calub – the uncle and cousin of Jocelyn Negrillo
4. Elvie Smith Padua – a science teacher at Northern Luzon Adventist College (NLAC) and close friend of Ulysses Negrillo

Each participant answered a similar set of questions in order to better understand general (1) Filipino culture and traditions, (2) Filipino family dynamic, and (3) the Filipino's relationship to food. Each interview lasted between 20 and 30 minutes. The nature of each participant's relationship to the key actors aided in obtaining verbal consent as participants were willing to help with the collection of required ethnographic data.

The initial sample size of four was augmented with two additional methods. There was an informal interview with my mother, Jocelyn Negrillo, to provide more situational context. The second method was a Google form survey sent out to other relatives and friends, either not interviewed or directly located in the Philippines due to time constraints. The survey garnered seven (7) responses from cousins, nieces, and other Filipino citizens — included in the appendix. Two mentioned in the findings are:

1. Rowena Orpilla, also known as Ate Weng, my cousin, niece of Jocelyn Negrillo
2. Sherrie May Palabay, grand-niece of Jocelyn Negrillo, daughter of my first cousin Ate Rachelle

Findings and Discussion

After reviewing the qualitative data, the responses presented two general categories: (1) traditions and (2) values. As the findings are introduced, discussion will be included to provide further insight and context.

Traditions

As a country that has been subject to many cultural influences, the Philippines has done an incredible job in adopting practices as their own. Catholicism is the dominant religion of the Philippines, due to Spanish rule; as such its religious holidays are important to Filipinos. All kinds holidays are celebrated, more than are recognized in the United

States such as Ati-Atihan that honors the “Santo Niño” and the Feast of the Immaculate Conception.

Along with Catholic holidays, Filipinos search for any reason to celebrate: whether it is a birthday, a graduation, or a general get together. When important events arise, the next instinctive action is to start a party – i.e. the *fiesta*, a word taken from the Spanish. Filipinos have adopted foods and adapted them to utilize ingredients native to the archipelago, never missing the opportunity to share them with friends and family who pass by.

The fiesta. Before arriving at one of my mom’s friend’s house, we stopped at a mall to pick up a mango cake from Red Ribbon. Red Ribbon is one of the signature bakeries in the Philippines whose goods one would often find at birthday celebrations. That’s exactly what this cake was for. It was a reunion for my mom and Auntie Ofel, her friend from college, as well as an early birthday celebration for Auntie Ofel’s daughter, Joan.

The food for the party was already being set out when we arrived at Auntie Ofel’s house. Ate Violet, the home helper, was working away in the kitchen preparing all kinds of dishes. The final dish she was preparing was *fresh lumpia*: a pancake-like wrapper filled with fresh vegetables and some chicken to be garnished with a sweet garlic soy sauce and peanuts. It was incredible watching her work. There were no visible recipes, only the quick movements of separating egg yolks and adjusting of the flour and water ratio as needed. Each lumpia was made with great care; she let no wrapper rip open to spill its contents.

The food was all laid out and it was plentiful. There was *pancit bihon*, *caldereta*, *adobo manok*, *fresh lumpia*, and of course the rice — foods typically found at any Filipino party. When Joan arrived with her father and sister, we sang happy birthday before Joan ran back to shower and change. Once she was done, everyone gathered around the table to

bless the food. My mother prayed before Auntie Ofel blessed the food again and everyone signed the cross. Then the celebration began.

The fiesta is a key tradition of Filipino culture. It is a reason to gather any and all family and friends together. No Filipino party would be complete, however, without the presence of food. Professor Jeruel Ibanez, a professor of History and Social Science at AUP, explains:

Usually, because Filipino families have is a big family, so it's a social gathering. This is time when we share our experience for the whole day. It's a fun activity. When there is a celebration, food is always a part of the celebration. And we Filipinos usually spend for food because we want to celebrate including birthdays, anniversaries, death anniversaries, graduations... Any special day is always accompanied with food. Sometimes Filipinos would borrow money just to spend for the celebration. Even if we don't have much we still manage to prepare for a special occasion.

Eating habits. In general, the Filipino family will look for any reason to eat. If there are guests, the host will typically offer a *merienda*, meaning snack — another artifact of Spanish colonial rule. The offering of food may escalate to hosting a full meal at home or in a restaurant. This is especially true when family comes to visit. Filipina aunties are known to ask any child or any guest whether they have eaten enough.

A celebration that calls for eating out may be something as simple as having family come to visit. It is a way to provide a gift for having taken the time to see someone. One example of this is the dinners after travelling from Vigan to Baguio.

It had been a long day in the car. Darkness surrounded us, save for passing

headlights, as the car weaved through the hills. The passengers lay asleep while the radio hummed faint tunes from decades past. We were on our way to Baguio, the same city where my parents went to university and now nieces and nephews attend. They wanted us to see a little bit of the city as well as meet my family who was there.

When we finally arrived, the landscape had changed drastically. The forest had given way to a city on hill. The roads filled with cars as people wandered through the streets. It was like Manila, but there was still room to breathe.

The car turned right onto a steep slope that led into the underground parking garage. At the entrance, the host instructed us to take the elevator to the sixth floor. Our dining party consisted of 11 people. I was concerned about seating time, but as soon as we entered, we were ushered to a long table. Apparently, the restaurant was designed for this capacity: to hold multiple large group parties. It was a restaurant made especially for celebrations and gatherings: to spend time together.

The rows of tables seated university student groups, other family reunions and more. It was a large seating area with windows that showed off the city at night. The lights blinked here and there as the outlines of other buildings and hills could be made out in the distance.

While we were seated and deciding what food to order, the family members began to enter. First, my cousin Ate Rachele's daughters, then Kuya Gideon's son, and then finally Ate Dhang's son. All of them came to eat dinner with us, and what better way than a place made to serve large plates of food in a family-style.

The food came out and was shared in a family-style. Plates of chicken, chop suey, rice and even fried fish crowded the table. The food was borderline too much as Ate Dhang

encouraged us to finish the last piece of chicken or whatever food was left. All the while, our nieces and nephews worked on getting to know their American family even better. It was funny, though; even though they were older by one or two years, they still had to call us “uncle.”

We spent almost two hours passing around food and sharing conversation. Our parents were interviewing our nieces and nephews, getting an idea of how they were doing. At the same time, my brother and I were interviewed by them. This was a time to get to know their family from America — people they had only seen through pictures on Facebook.

As the meal came to a close, my dad handled the bill as he usually did, by taking care of the whole thing. ‘*Salamat, uncle and auntie*’ rang around the table as my mom and dad were thanked for the food. This wasn’t an unusual action from my parents. To them, the cost of sharing food and feeding family was nothing compared to being able to spend quality time with them. Even outside the context of the fiesta, families use meals to check in with each other. Experiences are shared and emotional bonds are more deeply developed.

Types of food. It is not enough to discuss food celebrations with mentioning the kinds of food that are typical of these events. Drawing their inspiration from what the land provides as well as the neighboring countries, Filipino cuisine consists of food that was made to last. According to survey respondent Rowena Orpilla, my cousin also known as Ate Weng, food such as *adobo*, *paksiw*, and *sinigang* are important because, “[they] will last longer without refrigerating,” (A. Negrillo, Family and Food Questionnaire, March 11, 2019). This is important, especially in rural homes where refrigerators and even electricity may be lacking. The data reveals these key foods important to the traditional Filipino diet

and make an appearance at almost any gathering. These foods include rice, chicken, and *pancit*.

Rice is the staple of Filipino, and most other Asian, diets. It is consumed alongside another *viand* (an item of food, especially a choice or tasty dish). Many consider a meal incomplete should there be an absence of rice. Professor Ibanez stated that a family can survive on rice alone, embellishing it with salt or soy sauce. Its importance is further observed by the fields of rice paddies that extend beyond the horizon, visible as one drives along the expressways.

Rice is also a highly valued commodity to the Tejada lineage, my mother's family. The small barangay of Amagbagan is home to many farmers who raise this crop. This was the livelihood of my mother's family, including her uncle's family in the neighboring barangay. Oftentimes, Lolo Carding, my maternal grandfather, would take time off during the planting season to ensure his crops were well. This would entail the Tejada children being called to the fields and help out. After having to go the entire process of planting, harvesting, and even milling, the children have learned to value the hard work that goes into a food that plays deeply into their identity. Even today, Lolo Carding's daughters will not let a single grain end up in the waste bin.

Another key food to the Filipino diet is chicken. There are many chains that advertise chicken alongside unlimited servings of rice, or "unli-rice". Chains such as *Jollibee* and *Mang Inasal* advertise heavily the image of chicken alongside happy people, causing families to be inclined to eating there.

Chicken is also a very popular protein utilized in a variety of Filipino dishes. One popular dish is *adobo manok*, or chicken adobo. The adobo style of cooking is a variant of

that from the Spanish which utilizes olive oil, vinegar, garlic, and other spices. It has been adapted to include, “a mixture of vinegar, garlic, bay leaf, peppercorns, and soy sauce,” or much more local ingredients (Goody & Drago, 2010, p.134).

The most common food found at Filipino parties, besides the rice, is *pancit*. *Pancit* originated as a Chinese noodle dish, but has also been adopted by Filipino culture (Goody & Drago, 2010, p.133). There are many ways to cook *pancit*, the most popular being *pancit bihon*. *Pancit* is a favorite of Filipinos and is always present at special occasions. *Pancit* brings with it the superstition that the long noodles give long life.

Pancit is a dish that is special in the Tejada family. Lola Taliang taught her daughters and the recipe has been passed down to even her great grandchildren. Sherry Mae, one of my nieces, says that a meal would not be considered complete without the presence of *pancit*. *Pancit* is also a favorite of the Misa families, the other half of my dad’s family. Lola Herma, or my grandmother we call Nanay, would always ask her sister and even Auntie Alma, my father’s cousin, to cook *pancit*. Even Uncle Alex, my dad’s brother who was visiting the week before we arrived in the Philippines, asked Auntie Alma to prepare *pancit palabok*.

Each of these foods are a notable part of Filipino cuisine and demonstrate identity being developed through tradition. These are foods that have been passed down from elder to young by spending time together in the kitchen. These and other dishes such as *releyong bangus* take so much time to prepare. Making these foods highlights the care and dedication Filipinos display when providing food to their guests and especially loved ones. They are recipes that are cherished beyond generations.

Meal rituals. The ritual of eating is of great importance to the Filipino. Beyond

replenishing energy, meals have social implications as well. Two practices that stand out are the act of eating together and the act of saving food.

The meal is a time when the family can gather together to socialize. Throughout the day they are separated by work or chores, but the time to eat together is sacred. A family will wait till everyone is gathered before blessing the food and beginning the meal, whether a large party or even the routine dinner with immediate family.

In the event that schedules do not work synchronously, the conflict does not lead to outright animosity. Rather, food is set aside for the individual so that when they are available, they will still have something to eat. It was difficult to adjust to the time change and, oftentimes, I would wake up late for breakfast or fall asleep before dinner was even served. Yet each time I walked to the table, there was always food set aside to eat. Whether it was something as simple as rice and fried eggs or a more coveted viand like corned beef.

Offering food. The day began early as it did many days during my visit. A course was set for Vigan, as we left the house with the sun still reaching over the horizon. A thin curtain of fog parted as Ate Dhang drove north to Ilocos Sur, the province of Lolo Carding. The roads began to ever so slightly incline upward as the rice plains transformed into mountainous surroundings. Bouncing around the car in and out of sleep, the sun began to make its appearance, alerting me that there was a long day ahead.

The first goal was to make lunch with Uncle Vincent, a family friend. He was actually a former co-worker of my Ate Weng from Kuwait. He had moved back to the Philippines and offered to host us for lunch as we made our way to Vigan.

The sun was right overhead, signaling that it was the proper time for lunch. We made a sharp left into a tight side street, leading us to a bridge and the entrance of a

barangay. The first house on the left was our stop. We exited the car as Ate Dhang greeted our hosts. After *mano po* — asking a blessing from the elder by taking the elder's extended hand and bringing it to the receiver's forehead — they led us inside to rest and talk while they finished preparing food.

The house was quite spacious with the same concrete inside reminiscent of other homes in the Philippines. When it was time to eat, we were taken outside to the backyard. The yard overlooked a large field while a group of young goats remained near the fence to graze. Hens roamed free as their little chicks trailed along.

The table was set and food was brought out in large bowls and plates. On the menu was seaweed salad, eggplant, *papaitan*, *caldereta*, *pinakbet*, mussels, and of course rice. I'm not sure whether most people would feel badly seeing the source of their meal, the goats, standing a few feet away, but I didn't think much about it. I was hungry. We sat around, conversing and washing down the food with the bottles of water and Pepsi. Despite being in the shade, the heat was still prevalent.

When it was time to leave, Uncle Vincent took the food back inside. The plates still had plenty of food on them, so I assumed the food would go straight into the refrigerator. However, when I walked through the kitchen and back into the living room, I saw the silhouettes of Uncle's family members gathered around the plates. I felt a wave of shame come over me. I understood that guests would be offered food and then the family would come join, but I didn't expect them to wait until we were completely done eating before they could take from what was left.

Uncle Vincent was still respectful of our time, encouraging us to go since we still had a way to go before reaching Vigan. Instead, I was left feeling more uncomfortable than

when I had arrived with my hunger. I felt like we had imposed, but that was not the case. Uncle Vincent was only following what he felt was right: sharing his best with his visitors.

The tradition of offering food is not uncommon in the Philippines. In fact, it is common practice to offer whatever one has to guests. Auntie Elaine, my mother's cousin, affirmed this practice when sharing about her own experience: "Even if we only have a little food on the table and we have visitors, we try our best to offer it to the visitors before we even eat."

This practice of sharing food has long been performed in my family, my mom shared, even since the time of Lola Taliang.

When my parents died, so many people community came to their funeral. I was surprised. These were the same people that would walk by our house and have conversations with mom. Some of these people wanted to work for my mom and ask for rice rather than money. We lived on a rice farm, so to them she would give them one *ganta* (three liters) of rice and add more on top of that. There were others she would talk to and they would tell her how they didn't have any food left. My mom would tell them to come to the house and she would prepare them some food. I have something that I can share. Her belief was that if I can give you something so that you will be able to eat, I will give it to you.

Values

After looking at food traditions of the *fiesta*, typical foods, and other rituals, such as offering food, it is important to consider the underlying values that drive these actions. These same traditions work to instill the values through observation and practice. Key themes that arose throughout the analysis include (1) hospitality, (2) respect, and (3)

sacrifice.

Hospitality. Hospitality is a key value in Filipino culture. In speaking with Professor Ibanez, “[We] set aside very good materials... they are only taken out for the visitors. The special blankets, special spoons, special plates, everything... The visitor takes the best seat, the best food, and is really treated with special attention.” Considering especially the case of the fiesta, we see that the Filipino will go to great lengths in food preparation, going so far as to contract a fast food chain (Goody & Drago, 2010, p.138).

While hospitality is associated with care for external guests, it is also important to consider how this hospitality is displayed towards the family and its members. Care for family, no matter how distant they may be by space or family tree, is of utmost importance. Such is the case for Auntie Alma.

Your nanay said before that her children were sickly. And my mom is a doctor. And I think the property where they stayed, I think a family or relative took it from them. So that's why I think they are forced to live with my mom. And my mom helped them to find a place.

When Auntie Alma was young, she remembered how her cousin, Kuya Uly or my dad, came to live close to them. They spent all their time together playing games. One fond memory she had was when their Auntie Lori taught them all to balance by walking along a high fence that surrounded their yard. They felt like siblings more than cousins.

When Auntie Alma was starting university, her parents went to work in the United States. Instead of leaving the children, some of whom were still in elementary school, Nanay Herma, “adopted them” to provide more of a moral support. While they had caretakers, Nanay fostered an environment of moral support should they need it.

Auntie Alma channeled this same character as she grew older. She developed a sense of responsibility having to watch over her younger siblings. Now as most of them live in the United States, she acts as a counsel for her younger siblings seeking advice. She even chose to reciprocate this care to Nanay. When Nanay was choosing a where to live when she moved back to the Philippines, Alma told her, “[Auntie] if you buy a house far from me no one will look after you.’ She's a second mom to me. Because when my parents went to the United States, she's like a mother to us.” Despite not being her actual child, she felt an obligation to pay her back.

Throughout my time in the Philippines, I never once had to think about where my next meal would come from. It was either bought or cooked for me by my cousins who hosted us. Even the act of hosting us was something I was used to, but never really thought about. I was provided towels, a bed, clean sheets, and even an electric fan while my nieces had to sleep in other rooms, sometimes even on a floor mattress. Hospitality is a value expressed readily to visitors, but even greater towards one’s own family.

Respect. Hospitality is something that can be easily discerned. Digging deeper and determining the reason why hospitality is expressed at an even greater level when the guest is related, I think, is tied to respect. One of Hofstede’s cultural dimensions, power distance, is indicative by the respect for elders (2019). This tied with its low score in the dimension of long-term orientation, respect is learned and passed down through gestures and words.

Respect, especially for elders, is exhibited by almost all Filipinos. They are greeted with the *mano po*; responses are followed by the word *po* (sir or ma’am), to show respect; and any requests are fulfilled immediately. Growing up, children are taught this respect by

being assigned roles. Unmet expectations of respect can result in corporeal punishment.

Respect for other family members is something else that is taught. In the case of Lolo Cipring Tejada, he was charged with taking care of the animals used for farming. This task, as Lolo Cipring commented, was to teach them to be responsible and work hard. He would also go with great-grandma to help sell vegetables and salted fish to supplement their income. His work ethic continued as he worked to support sending 12 children through school, or at least to a point where they could be self-sufficient and give back to the family. He learned to respect what his parents asked of him and that same respect was passed down to his children, nieces, and nephews. Auntie Elaine shared that a value she gained from her parents was, “[To] love each other and help each other [because life was hard].”

My mother exhibited a large amount of respect while we were visiting Tatay, my paternal grandfather. As we pulled up to the gate, Tatay was standing outside, surprised to see a car driving up to his house. When we got out, we were greeted with strong hugs. Tatay was not expecting to see his American grandchildren greeting him outside of his home across the ocean. We walked inside his house and got settled down.

It was around lunch time when we arrived. My mother wanted to take Tatay out to eat at one of the Filipino fast food chains, but he had no interest. Tatay was in the kitchen preparing eggplant and moringa quite slowly. His right hand was crippled from a work accident long ago, so he was doing the best he could cleaning the vegetables. My mother, noticing this, approached Tatay and took the knife from him. She instructed me and Ate Florence to go pick up some fried chicken and soda; she would stay to cook and clean his vegetables. She was more concerned about his food being cleaned properly, especially

avoiding any unwanted pests inside the vegetables.

Finally, being able to sit down and relax, Tatay remarked, "*Buti pa itong manugang ko. Hindi maselan! Marunong mag luto! Ganyan ang gusto kong asawa. Hindi amo magugutom!*" Translated: Would you look at my daughter-in-law. She is not picky! She knows how to cook! This is what I like in a wife. I will not be hungry!

I didn't think much of his words until later on as we sat around his modest table, sharing rice and viands. While our Nanay was no longer with us, my mother took it upon herself to prepare her father-in-law's lunch. She didn't have to take the knife from him, much less told to cook and clean the food, yet she did. She even went so far as to cut up the rest of his produce and place them in Ziploc bags for deep freezing so that he wouldn't have to worry about preparation for the next few meals.

As I pressed her for an answer about why she decided to clean Tatay's food, she couldn't provide a clear one.

This is the natural way. I know he's old and having a hard time and can't really see. I just want to do it. The least I can do is help him. I know he wants to be independent, but for me being there and not doing anything I just want to do it.

This innate desire to help out Tatay was so strange to reflect on. Families are dynamic and their values are not always the same. The same act of helping a father-in-law isn't expected in all families, so my parents and Tatay say. To my family, respect is something important that children must learn.

Respect that is taught at home is exhibited outside the home as well. When asked about what values Auntie Elvie wanted to pass on to her children, she replied:

They have to be respectful to people, regardless of status in life. They have to learn

to adjust to situations... [Being] one who grew up in the barrios, those secluded places that there are no currents no, we only have water – just that. We learned to make fire, cook by wood, and it's totally different because they have not been exposed to that. I ask them that if you go to a place where you [are uncomfortable], adjust to the situation. You will not die anyway.

Sacrifice. As we mature, learning how to adapt and accommodate opens the way for empathy. We are better suited to process the world around us and work to understand the motivations for peoples' actions. All this to say, Filipinos develop empathy as a byproduct of respect. In the case of Filipinos, they become more aware of what their parents have done in order to help them succeed in life. Like most parents, they work hard to ensure their children to not have a life as hard as their own.

The car returned us to Amagbagan, making a few turns before stopping in front of the elementary school. This was the school my mom went to until Lola Taliang made her walk the road to Sison and attend there. It stood right next to a small corner property. As we made our way towards the house, my mother stopped at the fence. She pointed out two sets of letters welded into the rusting blue metal: RVT and AQC. These were the initials of Ricardo Veloria Tejada and Anatalia Qunit Calub, my maternal grandparents.

Pwede po bang pumasok? (May we enter?). When we heard the yes given by the renting tenants, my mom led us around the property and even into the house. She showed us where the stairs to the second floor would have been if tropical storms hadn't ravaged the home. She pointed out the trees that her brother, my Uncle Bert, planted for the family which were currently bearing fruit.

It was a modest home, with small signs of care. The sheet metal displayed orange

accents, scars from weathering the elements. I can only imagine what the house used to look like. It was a shadow of what it used to be. Even then, it was still humbling to see what little my mother grew up with. This combined with seven other siblings makes my life look so easy.

Growing up as the child of immigrant parents, I heard no end to how hard life used to be in the Philippines. They would talk about walking miles, uphill, both ways, and in the rain. I would say this was an exaggeration, but I saw their homes with my own eyes. Walking around the huge plots of land sent a wave of exhaustion through me; my mother's family would have to plant rice, gather it, and even mill it. They worked hard to get by and it was by no means an easy life.

One phrase that really encapsulates this is *magtiis ka*. Auntie Alma describes it as, "You have to stick with it. Committed. Whatever happens, should be." With my parents' generation usually having more than two siblings, the attitude of *magtiis ka* is exemplified by having to work together in order to make ends meet. Not only would parents sacrifice for their children, but siblings would sacrifice for each other. In their minds, your family was the only thing you had that would stay with you and help you.

A common way that Filipinos sacrifice for each other is through working abroad. The nursing career is one of many that Filipinos pursue in order to get sponsored in other countries. Careers take Filipinos to places such as Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Australia, and especially America. The Filipinos leave their homes and their family, in order to earn an increased income that can be sent back to supplement their family. Members of my family like my Auntie Peng, Auntie Cora, and Ate Weng are great examples of leaving everything behind to build a better future for their family. Auntie Cora especially worked hard when

she was naturalized to petition the rest of her siblings to come to America.

This mobility is all thanks to their parents', my grandparents', sacrifice. When my mother spoke about her parents' limited educations, it explained why she valued it herself and communicated that to her children.

[Lola Taliang] always told us, 'We never had a good education. We don't want you to be like us.' It's a mindset held by a lot of elders in the provinces... They sent us to school by sacrificing their wants and living frugally for us to have a good education.

We didn't have money. The only inheritance we can give you is this education.

This attitude my mother's parents had and her reflection on it embodied the concept of bestowing honor to the family by trying to control the future, giving the kids the ability to escape the provincial lifestyle through school.

Instead of keeping track of expenses or other debts, Filipinos describe reciprocity as *utang nag loob* – a sense of indebtedness to the family for everything that they have done for the individual (David, Sharma, & Petalio, 2017). Rather than expecting financial compensation outright, taking care of your parents and their needs is seen not as a responsibility, but out of a sense of gratitude (J. Negrillo, personal conversation, February 3, 2019). *Utang nag loob* is another example of an underlying cultural value that persists intergenerationally and reinforces the importance of family. The members recognize the sacrifices that others have made – sacrifices that helped them achieve their success. Success is not an individual effort, rather a collective one.

Conclusion

Defining Family

To Filipinos, family is of the utmost importance. Lolo Cipring defined family by

saying, “*Saan mo naga baybay-an isuda.*” This means that when you say family, you will not leave them. You have to take care of each other. Each participant made reference to family being there to support you. Not only is it important for the members to be there for you, it is equally important for individual to be there for the members i.e. reciprocity. In the words of my mother’s sister, Auntie Peng: “It is about unconditional love and respect and to be there when needed.” Family is there no matter the time or distance apart.

Tying it Together

Food is a defining characteristic of culture. It is shaped by the resources produced by the land. It is influenced by the natives as well as the global population. In Filipino culture, food is a tangible expression of love and care. It is offered to visitors in an act of hospitality and respect. In some cases, it may even be sacrificed to feed others, whether the elders or the young children. The preparation of food and meals facilitates bonding, the sharing of ideas, creating unity, and the passing of values from generation to generation.

Limitations and Future Research

This auto-ethnographical paper does present limitations. It is mostly a study of my family and the expressions of values may not necessarily be generalized to the Filipino population. Traditions and celebrations may vary from family to family. There is also the constraint of time and observation hours. Much more time should be spent observing and interviewing individuals in the Filipino culture at large, using other methods. Further research can be done to identify other common Filipino values and establish connections between those values and food. It would also be interesting to spend time understanding and more clearly defining the ex/intrinsic motivators for expressing certain actions, as well as analyzing the correlation between said actions and values.

Personal Reflection

As the sun set in the valley beyond the farmland and Bued river, I thought about how thankful I was to be there in that moment. The land had been a strong producer of rice and other sustaining crops. But the land had also produced a strong-willed woman. This is a woman whose heart continues to love as radiantly as the setting sun and as unending as the fertile, golden fields that lay before me. This is a woman who maintains the bonds shared with her family and especially the value that she places in family. This is my mother.

This study has allowed me appreciate not only my cultural heritage, but also my family. It has connected me with relatives I had never personally met. By going to my parents' homeland with intentionality, I have gained a deeper understanding of the sacrifices they have made to me to be where I am today. I understand what it means to be Tejada-Negrillo.

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