

Banquets and Festivals: Revisiting the Filipino Culture

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ABSTRACT: The study primarily aimed to explore and understand the banquets' social and psychological functions during the Tig-Aw festival in Tigaon Camarines Sur as part of Partido culture. Specifically, it aimed to describe the Social Structure and Hierarchy, Economic and Subsistence Patterns, Religion and Ritual, and Cultural Identity and Nationalism. A qualitative study, it employed an ethnographic research method which yielded insightful responses from the 10 participants of the study. The study found out that festivals and banquets serve as multifaceted cultural expressions that transcend mere celebration. They embody social order, tradition, and power through symbolic rituals such as seating arrangements and food presentation, while also offering spaces for unity and cultural exchange. For communities like the Tigaoños, these gatherings reflect economic resilience and resourcefulness, revealing how local subsistence practices shape communal identity. Rooted in sacred traditions, religious festivals foster spiritual reflection and reinforce social bonds, becoming enduring legacies of belief and connection. Simultaneously, these events act as vessels of cultural identity and nationalism, preserving heritage through commemorations, cuisine, and performance. Together, festivals and banquets illuminate the evolving dynamics of society, economy, faith, and nationhood.

KEYWORDS: Banquets and Feasts, Filipino tradition, Cultural identity

I. INTRODUCTION

Fiesta is a deeply rooted Filipino tradition—an annual celebration that embodies religiosity, vibrancy, merrymaking, and even tourism. At the heart of every fiesta lies a profound appreciation for sumptuous banquets, which serve not merely as feasts but as sacred spaces where Filipinos gather to express joy, gratitude, and a strong sense of community. Typically held on the Feast Day of a town or barangay's patron saint, fiestas are joyful occasions steeped in history and culture. During the Spanish time, it was a way of spreading Catholicism. Moreover, it is celebrated as a form of thanksgiving for the many blessings received throughout the year.

Fiesta celebrations in the Philippines date back to the 15th century, when farmers offered their harvests at the foot of Mount Banahaw. Over time, these offerings were brought to churches in honor of St. Isidore the Laborer, the patron saint of farmers. Today, the annual observance of fiestas continues to yield meaningful benefits: strengthening religious devotion, preserving customs and traditions, enhancing community pride, fostering familial and communal harmony, transmitting cultural values across generations, and contributing to regional economic development (Nunez, 2019; Jauhari & Munjal, 2015; Getz, 1993; Gursoy et al., 2004).

This study examines festivals and banquets through an anthropological lens, focusing on the municipality of Tigaon in Camarines Sur, Philippines. Tigaon's annual Tig-Aw Festival features banquets that reflect the social and psychological dimensions of Partido culture. By exploring these gatherings, the study offers a glimpse into the country's rich heritage and enduring values. Whether in bustling cities or quiet rural communities, fiestas and banquets remain inseparable—binding Filipinos together through shared celebration. This paper seeks to uncover the anthropological perspectives and inner sentiments of the people of Tigaon regarding the role of banquets in their fiesta traditions.

Objectives

The study primarily aimed to explore and understand the banquets' social and psychological functions during Tig-Aw festival in Tigaon Camarines Sur, Philippines, as part of Partido culture.

Specifically, it aimed to describe the

- 1.) Social Structure and Hierarchy
- 2.) Economic and Subsistence Patterns
- 3.) Religion and Ritual

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4.) Cultural Identity and Nationalism

II. METHODOLOGY

The research employed the qualitative research design. Data were derived from the insightful responses of the participants through the key informant interview. As an ethnographic study, the researcher did a systematic recording of human or individual cultures. The use of this method yields better insights without necessarily influencing the participants. Singh (2023) defines ethnographic research as a “systematic and immersive approach for the study of individual cultures. Ethnographic research methods involve the examination of cultural phenomena from the perspective of the subjects under investigation.”

The research was conducted in the municipality of Tigaon in Partido in Camarines Sur, where fiestas and banquets are very much a part of their tradition. The Tigaonons annually celebrate the Tig-Aw Festival every August 5-12. This is a celebration of thanksgiving in honor of the town's Patroness, St. Clare of Assisi.

Purposive sampling technique was used to get the thoughts and sentiments of participants composed of the clergy, resort owner and caterer, Tourism Officer, Barangay Captain, teacher, dressmaker, vegetable sellers, and fruit vendor. Primary data were gathered from the participants through an in-depth interview and participant observation. Primary data collection was through Key Informant Interview where a set of semi-structured interview questions was used.

Other ethnographic method of data collection used was participant observation where the researcher engaged in the individuals being studied, documented patterns of their social interaction and analyzed the participants' own interpretations of their behavior within their local contexts during banquets.

The data were analyzed comprised of description or recounting of data, and interpretation. It included thematic analysis and documentary/textual analysis. Responses of the participants were clustered by themes and analyzed to come up with a comprehensive and holistic perspectives from the participants.

III. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

The study primarily aimed to explore and understand the banquets' social and psychological functions during Tig-Aw festival in Tigaon Camarines Sur as part of Partido culture. Specifically, it aimed to describe the 1.) Social Structure and Hierarchy, 2.) Economic and Subsistence Patterns, 3.) Religion and Ritual, and 4.) Cultural Identity and Nationalism.

This study centered on Tig-aw Festival, the official festival of Municipality of Tigaon. It is a rallying event that showcases Tigaoños culture and tradition expressed through dances, music, culinary arts, poetry and many other forms. According to the Tourism Officer, Mr. Gerry Musa, the festival was institutionalized on April 10, 2017 by the Municipal Ordinance No. 17-007. It officially commences every August 1 and ends every August 13 of every year.

Social Structure and Hierarchy

Festivals and banquets have been the mirrors reflecting the intricate social structures and hierarchies in the Philippines. Gatherings like political and religious celebrations foster a sense of unity and tradition and at the same time reinforce societal roles, privilege, and power dynamics while simultaneously fostering a sense of unity and tradition.

This study focused on two indicators of social structure and hierarchy which are 1.) symbolism of power and 2.) magnificence of historical context. The symbolism of power can be observed in the arrangement and presentation of food (Salvado, 2022), seating arrangement in banquets reflecting age and gender, and quantity of food served (Geissler, 2012). On the other hand, the magnificence of historical contexts can be observed in holding sweet banquets as a symbol of high status (Stewart, 2018), and wedding banquets reflecting an evolving gender roles and shift in women's status. (Enrique and Vicente, 2013)

The Role of Social Structure in Festive Gatherings

Social structure plays a crucial role in determining participation, seating arrangements, and responsibilities during festivals and banquets. In many cultures, hierarchical order dictates who leads the festivities, who presides over the banquet, and who serves as honored guests. These distinctions reinforce established societal divisions, whether based on lineage, occupation, or economic standing. In the early times in royal or aristocratic feasts, seating arrangements and dining etiquette strictly follow hierarchical lines. The leaders are made to occupy the best and prominent seats. In traditional community banquets, elders often hold esteemed roles like presiding or leading the occasion and imparting wisdom to the people.

In the interviews conducted in this study, the social structure and hierarchy are evident among the politicians, and among principal sponsors in weddings. In gatherings, they are seated at Presidential table and they are served first than the other guests. While it is already a practice in most gatherings that all guests are served the same food, still they are attended first and usually there are 2-3 special additional dishes that are only served to them unlike the others. From the interview with Ms. Jinky Paladan, a Farm Resort Owner and Caterer,

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“ Mas tinatawan man nin maray na pagkakan an mga ninong/ninang sa kasal ta gulpi man an gastos ninda sa okasyon like igwa sindang “pagugom” sa kinasal”. The principal sponsors in weddings have additional special food because they spend more in the wedding like they give wedding money to the couple”.

This exemplar shows that indeed there are important people in an occasion such as the Principal Sponsors in weddings who are treated in a special manner. Similarly, in formal occasions where the priests and politicians are invited, they are always considered special guests. During occasions, they are given this special treatment because they are respected. They are looked up to by the people and are considered their leaders. Geissler in 2012 stressed that the conduct of eating and drinking during occasions generally reflects patterns of social behavior, governed by local traditions, rules, ritual, beliefs and ideology embedded in society. In addition, banqueting may be closely interwoven with other social events, while rules of inclusion or exclusion may well come into play, thereby helping to reinforce or create social hierarchies. In the like manner, in every occasion, the leaders are given the special treatment and those guests who are not considered leaders are also served food but not in big quantity as the leaders.

Maintaining and Challenging Social Order

While festivals and banquets often reinforce existing hierarchies, they also provide opportunities for social mobility and interaction across different classes. Some celebrations blur social distinctions by allowing all individuals to partake in community banquets, fostering a sense of equality.

A common response expressed by the participants is that in most of less formal festivals and banquets, most of the leaders now are treated the same as all others. They can sit anywhere they like and they eat the same food with others. Leadership connotes being in touch with the ordinary people and not establishing the social distinctions. The leaders are one with the people during the vibrant and festive occasion. It becomes the opportunity to mingle with people in the community. It appears that in this modern times, festivals and banquets continue to reflect hierarchies, but they also serve as spaces for inclusion and diversity. Religious and political events often strive for greater equality, ensuring broader participation regardless of social rank or economic status. This evolving change reflects the social mobility of the distinguished guests and their desire to blur distinctions and be treated equally like the other guests rather than putting them in honored seats during festivals and banquets. Semper in 1997 cited that in the early modern Spain, banquet is a sign of feast par excellence. It shows abundance, refinement, pleasure and tradition. It also reflects the established social order. Consequently, the rich eat more and better food and the poor enjoy only less due to shortage of food and other priorities. Banquets likewise reflect social positions, from the upper class to the lowest ones. Big occasions like Christmas and fiestas showcase food not only nourishment to the body but a performance as well. Eating is no longer done to survive but people live to enjoy eating. From the anthropological perspectives on festivals and banquets, banquets highlight their role as symbols of social order, abundance, and refinement, showcasing societal distinctions through banquets. Furthermore, Hayden and Villeneuve (2011) explained the logic and reasons behind the unique human behavior of lavish displays of banquets. The study claimed that ethnographers consider it as acquiring prestige while archaeologists consider it is a form of coping with social conflicts. On a wider perspective, banquets play significant roles in establishing social identities and memories, creating political power and inequalities, gender identities, accomplishing work, and developing technological advancements.

A common observation expressed by the participants of the study show that banquets also serve as platforms where power is seen. The rich demonstrate their wealth and influence through lavish banquets, offering an abundance of food on the table and served to guests. A family of politicians and a well off family in Tigaon serve food lavishly to guests during Fiestas. This can be understood because apart from relatives and friends, their important guests include the political party they are affiliated with.

Festivals and banquets serve important integrative functions in society. (Benz, 2006) It shapes the social dynamics without necessarily altering existing hierarchies. While social structures remain intact, such gatherings create spaces where members of different groups—like politicians or clergy—come together to plan, strategize, and coordinate communal efforts. For instance, politicians use banquets to discuss political agendas, while religious leaders collaborate on parish activities with their committees. These events foster unity and shared purpose within established roles.

Beyond their social utility, festivals also carry deep educational and anthropological value. As highlighted by Holliseutig-yunghabgyo (2022), festivals embody aspects of human nature and allow individuals to temporarily step away from daily life. They provide opportunities for rest, emotional expression, shared values, and reflection on existence. Festivals are not simply recreational or consumptive—they are essential experiences that nurture freedom, connection, and learning. Through religious, playful, rebellious, and integrative dimensions, they serve as meaningful rituals that mirror and enrich the human experience. The study of Lincoln in 2014 showed that formal banquets can yield negative result when seating patterns and distributions of valued foods are imposed. This study shows that rituals and etiquettes shape society's borders and hierarchies. In reality when banquets

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impose seating arrangements, there is a feeling of superiority among the guests seated on the best seats while those in the ordinary seats feel inferior.

Magnificence of Festivals and Banquets

The court of Henry VIII of England in 1520, started the new meal type called the 'banquet'. This is served after the main meal, and it consists of sweet foods, spiced wine, and sculptural sugarwork. The study of Stewart in 2018 showed that a high-status person would have expected to be entertained with a sweet banquet at any important social occasion. The visual and material cultures associated with the banquet implies these are highly effective means to express class status at a time of anxiety regarding social mobility.

Sweet banquets are practiced by Filipinos, too. The occasion may or may not be formal but an array of sweets treats are prepared on a separate table now called Grazing Table. The Grazing Table includes cold cuts, cakes, pastries, cookies, chocolates, and fresh fruits. In Bicol, the Grazing table can include the well loved "kakanin" like pichi pichi, sapin sapin, kalamay, glutinous rice rolls (ibos), and cochinta. In Partido, binamban and binut-ong which are popular delicacies from Lagonoy and Tigaon, respectively, are oftentimes served.

Other than the sweet banquets which show the magnificence of festivals and banquets, wedding banquets is another occasion which reflects an evolving gender roles and shift in women's status. (Enrique and Vicente, 2013)

Traditionally, weddings are deeply rooted in patriarchal customs. The wedding ceremonies emphasize the bride's transition from her father's household to her husband's. Banquets often reinforced these ideas, with seating arrangements, speeches, and rituals highlighting male authority. Today however, modern weddings are increasingly breaking away from these traditions. We observe that many couples choose gender-inclusive wedding roles, moving away from traditional customs and expectations. For example, instead of the bride being "given away" by the father, the parents of the bride walk down the aisle together, symbolizing equality. Wedding banquets now feature shared speeches, where both partners express their thoughts, rather than just the groom or the bride's father. Additionally, women are taking more active roles in planning and financing weddings, reflecting their growing independence and financial power.

A thematic analysis of the Social Structure and Hierarchy shows that the function of festivals and banquets are reflected in dual mirrors. Both reinforce and redefine social hierarchies. Specifically, the social structure and hierarchy is expressly shown in the

1. Symbolism of power through ritual and display. Banquets are not just feasts, they are staged performances of status. From the exclusive "Presidential tables" to the quantity and quality of food served, rituals around eating become quiet expressions of who holds the highest position in the community. This reinforces the traditional power structures. The politicians, elders, and religious leaders command reverence symbolized through their placement and treatment at the table.

2. Magnificence as a Marker of Social Identity

Sweet banquets, like the Grazing Tables, shows prestige. These practices root back to traditions seen in royal courts and colonial practices, emphasizing how food becomes not just nourishment but a social currency—specially in events like weddings or political gatherings.

3. Festive gatherings are venues of social stratification and resistance

There's a fascinating contrast between reinforcement and disruption. While festivals clearly showcase hierarchy, they also blur lines—leaders sometimes choose to dine with the common folk, and communal sharing replacing exclusivity. This points to evolving norms and perhaps even humility, driven by modern ideals of inclusion.

4. Gender Roles and Changing Traditions

Weddings serve as a lens for viewing gender dynamics. Traditional patriarchal structures are giving way to more equitable roles, symbolized in the act of both parents walking the bride, and in shared speeches and planning. This signals a broader societal shift in how roles and power are defined across gender.

5. Food as a Cultural Text

Ultimately, food becomes a medium for storytelling. The regional kakanin varieties speaks about the economic generosity, and cultural heritage. The banquet becomes a living example of power, generosity, and transformation.

In summary, these celebrations are more than merrymaking. They serve as cultural patch where you can read the past, present, and future of social order.

Economic and Subsistence Patterns

Festivals and banquets reflect economic and subsistence patterns that shape how communities sustain themselves. These celebrations highlight resource distribution, trade, and the economic impact of large gatherings, demonstrating how societies balance tradition and economic demands.

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Economic and subsistence patterns were observed in : 1.) Food resource management in banquets such as refinement or moderation (Semper, 1997), abundance (Semper, 1997), slaughter of too many cows or pigs showing social status and competition (Jeunesse and Denaire, 2017); 2.) Food distribution like sharing of meat among households showing decentralized consumption pattern highlighting community interdependence. (Jeunesse and Denaire, 2017), showing economic disparities, social status, inclusion/exclusion dynamics (Howard, 2022); and 3.) Subsistence pattern such as the wealthy indulge more in banquets while the less fortunate experience temporary relief from scarcity (Semper, 1997)

Food resource management and food distribution in banquets primarily depends on the capacity of the host to spend. Well off Tigaoños slaughter pigs and they even serve lechon or roasted pig. Some middle level families would slaughter pig and distribute it to married family members for the food of their guests. Festivals and banquets often showcase the subsistence patterns of a society, revealing how food is sourced and shared. The traditional subsistence method used by the participants is through agriculture. Agriculture Festivals also influence the types of food prepared for the occasions. Tinagba which is practiced in Tigaon is a harvest festival that highlights the importance of farming. The abundance of agricultural produce are offered to God as an expression of thanking Him for the bountiful harvest. These produce are also the same ingredients which they cook and serve during the town and barangay fiesta.

Beyond subsistence, festivals attract visitors, leading to increased commerce, hospitality industry, and cultural exchange. The participants observe that during Tig-Aw there are local guests. Primarily, they join the religious activities, the Cultural Night and Tigaoños Night. Some simply stay in the house of the host and simply watch the various activities. The presence of guests during Tig-Aw Festival somehow contribute to trade because they explore the unique food and they buy goods in Tigaon. This is supported by literatures that Filipinos find some positive benefits in celebrating annual fiesta. This includes drawing them closer to religion, preserving tradition and customs, improving local community pride, promoting harmony in the family and the community, carrying the message of the past generations to the present and future, and preserving our culture and heritage. Most importantly, fiestas contribute to regional economic development. (Nunez, 2019, Jauhari & Munjal, 2015, Getz, 1993; Gursoy et al., 2004).

In summary the outstanding theme here is that festivals and banquets reflect economic trends and subsistence. This is shown in how these gatherings are deeply connected with how the Tigaoños sustain themselves, manage their resources, express abundance, and confront economic inequalities. The interview also showed that

1. Festivals are expressions of economic life and shared sustenance. It emphasizes agriculture and communal sharing.
2. Banquets are mirrors of class, consumption, and survival. It shows inequality and excess.
3. The changing economic landscape during cultural gatherings highlights the interlink between livelihood and tradition.
4. On the business side of every celebration bring in trade and economic ripple effects.

Religion and Ritual

Festivals and banquets have long been intertwined with religious practices and rituals. They serve as expressions of faith, devotion, and communal unity. These gatherings offer spaces for worship, spiritual reflection, and the reinforcement of cultural traditions, while also highlighting the relationship between sacred rites and social cohesion. Religious festivals frequently feature priests performing sacred rites that symbolizing their elevated status in the community.

Religion and ritual were observed in 1.) Ritual context and sacrifices in banquets like social cohesion and ideological transformation formed (Berrocal-Rangel, 2004), and Familial bonds and cultural identity created (Maués, 2016); and 2.) Social dynamics and invitations such as Social stratification and community identity among the elites established (Raja, 2020), and God invited in the banquets. (Veyne, 2000)

The Role of Religion in Festivals

Many festivals are rooted in religious beliefs and commemorate significant events, such as divine interventions (like miracles and answered prayers), or rites of passage (baptism, marriage, death). Whether through prayer, sacrifice, or pilgrimage, these celebrations connect individuals to the spiritual realm and reinforce shared religious identities.

The participants in this study celebrate festivals specifically pilgrimages and ritual gatherings. They engage in prayer, and join processions. Barangay Captain German Melgarejo, dressmaker Carmen Peley, and teacher Maria Ailyn Colina expressed that they celebrate their barangay fiesta instead of the town fiesta called Tig-Aw Festival. Their celebration is deeply rooted in their religious belief. All of them expressed that the most important ritual for them during fiesta is to offer and attend mass in honor of their Patron Saint. It is their way of thanking the Patron Saint for all the blessings bestowed to them the whole year. These blessings include good health, sustained jobs, and the times they overcome various trials that are experienced by the family.

Fiesta is started with a procession the night before the Feast Day where the young and old alike join. Then on the day, a Thanksgiving Mass is celebrated. A nine-day novena in honor of the Patron Saint is held. According to Maria Ailyn Colina,

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“Specifically in barangay Huyon Huyon, there is no procession on the eve of barangay fiesta but a Diana early in the morning is held. Diana is a Filipino tradition. It is a procession at around 4:00 in the morning with an early wake up tune played by a band that marches down the street. It signals the eventful festival in the barangay.”

Rituals and Symbolism in Banquets

The banquet is secondary for the participants. Banquets, however has religious significance, it symbolizes divine generosity. The participants however do not practice some symbolisms like sacrificial offerings and ceremonial feasting. They prepare communal meals and eating together for them is an act of oneness and solidarity, reinforcing connections between family members, relatives, classmates, and friends. According to Carmen Peley, a dressmaker,

“An fiesta sarong pasasalamat mi kaya minatiripon kami bilang sarong familia. Ini man ginigromdom mi dahil may tugang kaming magagadan na kuta dahil sa helang kan sya apat na taon pa sana. Pigsalbar sya kan Mahal na Diyos.

Kaya an fiesta sarong tradisyon sa familia mi na taon taon ming pigseselebrar”. Fiesta is a time for thanksgiving and a celebration to eat together as a family. It is also a reminder for us to thank God for giving my younger sibling his second life who survived a grave disease when he was four years old. This became a tradition in our family”.

Maria Ailyn Colina, a Faculty Member in a State University, likewise stated that,

“An fiesta para sako sarong pasasalamat sa gabos na grasya sa bilog na taon. Ini man sarong tradition nin pagtitiripon kan samong familia. An Segunda Dia kaini nagkakaigwa kami nin family reunion”. Fiesta for me is a thanksgiving for all the graces we received the whole year. It is a tradition of gathering our family members. The day after the fiesta we hold a family reunion and we go out swimming”.

Among these rituals and symbolism, there is no specific symbolic food prepared by the locals to purify, renew, or establish sacred bonds. The observed symbolism in banquets are the sacrificial offerings. The most observed sacrificial offerings are done during death anniversaries or birthdays celebrated for departed family members. The foods on the plate are offered in front of the altar where the family members pray. The family believes that on the death anniversaries or birthdays, the spirit comes and celebrates with them.

Another ritual and symbolism is on communion and fellowship. Community banquets means solidarity, reinforcing connections among believers. In St. Catherine Parish for instance, Rev. Fr. Angel Corre explains that,

“Banquets reflect the family orientedness of the people and as a Family of God. Nagiging paagi ang handaan para magkasararo an mga tao. Sa sarong Familia ini nagpapakusog kan connection asin marhay na iribahan. Pag pirming sarabay magkarakan, nagkaka istoryahan asin nagiging open sa kada saro”. It reflects

the family orientedness of the people and as Family of God. Banquets are a way to unite people. For the family, this is a way to strengthen their bond and establish good relationships. If they eat together, they have the chance to tell stories and open up their emotions.

Rituals That Reinforce Social and Spiritual Order

Religious festivals and banquets follow structured rituals that highlight divine hierarchies, leadership roles, and spiritual discipline. The parish priest and elders in the parish often lead these gatherings, guiding prayers, and blessings. Their act of adhering to specific customs reflects the respect for tradition and this ensures continuity of faith in the community. Fr. Angel even mentioned that he basically leads the rituals in the church. He said,

“We have assigned committees, one of them is the Pastoral Council and their members. Worship committee is in-charge of liturgy and we have Temporalities Committee, assigned in services. But overall, I am the one who handles everything”.

Recent years however, show that Religious festivals and banquets have evolved in the modern time. It blends tradition with contemporary practices. It appears that while sacred elements remain central, societies have incorporated new cultural influences, making these events more inclusive and accessible. Interfaith dialogues and secular adaptations have also broadened participation, emphasizing shared values of gratitude, generosity, and community-building. In Tigaon, the other significant events that shape the cultural influences are gift-giving, medical mission, blood letting, concert, mass wedding for common law couples, mass baptism, and mass confirmation.

The parish also celebrates Tinagba Festival during the Feast of Sto Nino. The fruits and other farm produce that are offered are donated to their beneficiaries like the BJMP and seminary. These events were not practiced before but became part of the tradition because of religiosity, gratitude, and common needs of the people.

A thematic analysis shows that religious festivals and banquets is an interplay an interplay of Faith, Family, and Social Order The rituals rooted in faith create space not only for spiritual devotion, but also for family unity, cultural continuity, and the

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reinforcement or shifting of social hierarchies.

The respondents specifically identified the following.

1. Faith and fellowship are shown in the banquet of traditions focusing on gratitude and religious unity.
2. Banquets are expressions of Divine Devotion and Social Harmony. They highlight symbolic and spiritual dimensions.
3. They recognize the presence of God during rituals, social roles, and sacred gatherings.
4. Food served on the altar for the dearly departed shows communal identity.

Cultural Identity and Nationalism

Festivals and banquets serve as powerful expressions of cultural identity and nationalism, reinforcing collective heritage and fostering unity among communities. These celebrations provide opportunities to showcase traditions, values, and national pride, strengthening a shared sense of belonging.

Festivals as Expressions of Cultural Identity

Every country has unique festivals that reflect its history, beliefs, and customs. These events serve as living archives of a nation's cultural identity, preserving traditional music, dance, attire, and cuisine. Through these celebrations, individuals connect with their heritage, reinforcing connections among community members and the next generations.

During the Tig-Aw Festival in Tigaon, an interesting religion and folk celebration is the faith-based dance of women who wish to have children. They gather at the grounds of the St. Clare Parish on the eve of Torn Fiesta and perform the Fertility Dance. This local custom is believed to make women bear children.

Celebrating the Town Fiesta is one of the traditional festivals. This reflects nationalism and collective identity in Tigaon. This is deeply connected to nationalist sentiments, reinforcing Tigaon's historical milestones. The Tourism Officer, Mr. Jerry Musa, explains that,

"... the two activities that really show cultural identity in Tigaon are the Cultural Night and Tigaoños Night. Among other things, these include the search for Miss Tigaon Competition, cultural show, and the band concert that showcase the talents in Tigaon. The civic parade during the Fiesta celebration also shows the vibrancy in Tigaon. This is participated by the different sectors of the local government unit and even contingents from neighboring municipalities. "

Moreover, cultural identity and nationalism is observed in Food as a symbol of the identity of the locals. These are in terms of traditional foods served that symbolize heritage and history (Tyrrell et al., 2007). Food is then a cultural representation. The traditional dishes and preparation methods symbolize the agricultural resources, history, and influences.

Bicolano cuisine is known for its bold flavors, particularly its love for spicy dishes and coconut milk. Among the traditional culinary Bicolano dishes prepared in Tigaon during fiesta are: Bicol Express which is a fiery pork dish cooked in coconut milk and chili peppers, a true Bicolano icon. Gulay na Laing is made of taro leaves simmered in coconut milk and chili peppers, offering a rich and creamy texture. Kinunot is a unique and exotic dish from stingray or shark meat cooked in coconut milk with malunggay leaves. Sinanglay is a dish made from fish wrapped in leafy vegetables and cooked in coconut milk with tomatoes, ginger, garlic, and onions. These are also served in banquets specially when the guests come from abroad or other parts of the country.

Other than these, the culinary heritage is shown in the food that most households prepare during Fiesta. In the interview with Maria Ailyn Colina, Fiona May Pejo and Joan de los Santos, they all identified food like higado, caldereta, menudo, adobo, embutido, and pancit. Some well off families prepare lechon or roasted pig which is the main attraction among the foods on the table. Kakanin like binut-ong, glutinous rice rolls (ibos) and arroyo are also prepared for snacks. To signal the start of the fiesta, the night before the fiesta or "Bisperas", the traditional dinuguan and paksiw are already served. The culinary practice when cooking Bicolano food often involves slow simmering to fully infuse the flavors, and the use of local ingredients like coconut, chili, and seafood. The region's cuisine reflects its rich cultural heritage and love for bold, and hearty meals.

In Tigaon, one of the distinct culinary heritage is binut-ong. It is a local native food that is popular and special. This is served during special occasions and at ordinary times, it is a breakfast or merienda/snacks in households best paired with hot choco or coffee. Binut-ong is prepared from glutinous rice and coconut cream. When cooked, it is sprinkled a little sugar on top to blend a delightful taste. Informant Josefina Padua learned this unique kakanin from her Tigaoños ancestors which she also passed on to her daughter, Jenny Apudaka. Both of them sell their kakanin in Tigaon market as early as 5:00 am till 11:00 am.

Timothy and Ron (2013) show that regional cuisines enhance a destination's image abroad, and promote the culinary heritage affirming their own cultural identities. It also preserves gastronomic tradition. Clearly, this study shows that food is a symbol of national identity. The traditional food prepared in Tigaon during fiesta symbolize the rich heritage and history. Every food tells a story.

The thematic analysis can be summarized that Festivals and Banquets are catalysts for cultural identity and national unity. This

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encapsulates how these community practices go beyond festivity—they serve as a medium for building history, pride, and tradition, while also evolving to reflect a more inclusive, connected society. Specifically, it is shown that:

1. Culinary heritage reflects cultural identity. The food prepared in banquets are the food prepared not only in Tigaon but in the entire Partido area. The food preferences are reflective of the identity as Tigaoños.
2. Festivals have a big role in shaping Filipino nationalism. The Cultural Night and Tigaon Night emphasize a collective sense of belonging and pride.
3. Some activities such as Search for Miss Tigaon, holding of concerts and Bloodletting to assist patients in need of blood supply are modern expressions of national culture. A further analysis shows that these highlight the crossover between existing tradition and evolving identities.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

From the findings of the study, it can be concluded that

1. Festivals and banquets are more than mere gatherings; they are expressions of social order, tradition, and power. Through the symbolism of power shown in the seating arrangements, food presentation, and quantity of food served, and the magnificence of sweet banquets and wedding banquets, these events reinforce societal hierarchies, yet they also provide moments for cultural exchange and unity. Reshaping traditional roles, these celebrations remain powerful reflections of the ever-evolving dynamics within communities.
2. Festivals and banquets are not merely merrymaking. They are windows of economy of a community. For the Tigaoños, these events reveal how people cultivate resources, celebrate abundance, and navigate economic challenges. Rooted in local subsistence methods and economic realities, the gatherings reflect patterns of resilience, resource management, and community identity that are essential to understanding how societies endure and evolve.
3. Religious festivals and banquets serve as expressions of human belief, identity, and connection. Rooted in sacred traditions, they not only foster spiritual reflection but also strengthen ties and reshape social structures. These gatherings transcend mere ritual, becoming living legacies that bind communities together and pass on enduring values from one generation to the next.
4. Festivals and banquets are essential expressions of cultural identity and nationalism, preserving traditions, fostering unity, and celebrating national pride. Through historical commemorations, culinary showcases, and artistic performances, these gatherings continue to play a vital role in shaping and strengthening collective identity.

In conclusion, banquets serve as powerful social and psychological spaces where tradition, identity, and community converge. They reinforce social hierarchies through symbolic gestures like seating and food distribution, while also nurturing unity and collective pride by celebrating cultural heritage, religious beliefs, and national values. Economically, they reflect a community's relationship with abundance and resilience, showing how people adapt and live together. More than festive gatherings, banquets embody deeply rooted practices that shape identity, affirm belonging, and pass on shared values across generations.

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