

Anthropology Museums and the Maritime and underwater cultural heritage of *Capiz* (*Placuna Placenta*) artisanal dive fishery in the Philippine Archipelago

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ABSTRACT

My paper examines the maritime and underwater cultural heritage of the *Capiz* (*Placuna placenta*) artisanal dive fishery. There are three types of collections of the material culture of the *Capiz* dive fishery. These include the *Capiz* artisanal diving fishery materials i.e., improvised diving gears and apparel; the *Capiz* shells and shell craft commodities classified according to use and function and other secondary data about the Philippine *Capiz* shell industry, and the map showing the distribution of *Placuna* beds around the Philippine archipelago. The *string of agents*, the socioecological practices and the social relations likewise encompass the material life of fishing households engaged in *Capiz* artisanal dive fishery. 'Follow the thing', a geographical approach allows me to conduct multi-sited ethnographies covering the source communities of Trapiche and Botong, Oton, Iloilo, the natural habitat of *Placuna placenta*. And Banica, Roxas City, *Capiz*'s shell craft manufacturer *Kapis* atbp. The museum visits and online *capiz* shell craft sellers encompass the diverse sites to further document and describe the uses and function of the *capiz*. The local ecological knowledge embodies the intangible maritime and underwater cultural heritage of *Capiz* artisanal dive fishery. Thus, integrating the narratives of the development of fishing households, their labour and livelihoods. To analyze the significance of anthropology museums in the preservation of the *Capiz* artisanal dive fishery maritime and underwater cultural heritage, I applied three theories, namely: materialism, the biographies and itineraries of things, and object-oriented ontology (OOO).

Keywords: artisanal dive fishery, *Capiz* (*Placuna placenta*), anthropology museums, maritime and underwater cultural heritage

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1. INTRODUCTION

The material life of *Capiz* artisanal dive fishery

'Museums are institutions devoted to the collecting, preservation, exhibition, study, and interpretation of tangible artefacts,' according to Stocking (1985 4; see Gathercole (1989), cited in Haas 1996, 11). My research focuses on the material culture of the *Capiz* (*Placuna placenta*) artisanal diving fishing as a subject of maritime and underwater cultural heritage. I propose collecting, preserving, exhibiting, studying, and interpreting material objects as well as the local ecological knowledge in the *Capiz* artisanal dive fishery. *Capiz* shell crafts, as well as the commodities and artefacts made from shells, are part of the material culture of the *Capiz* artisanal dive fishing. The evolution, transitions, and developments in modern diving methods, as well as the narratives of fishing households about their lives and livelihoods, compose the *Capiz* artisanal dive fishery's lifeworld.



Figure 1 The distribution of *Placuna* beds in the Philippine Archipelago author commissioned map (Talavera and Faustino 1931).

Placuna placenta (Linnaeus 1758) is a windowpane oyster, a bivalve marine mollusc with thin mica-like translucent shells. Capiz is a marine bivalve with high economic value for the Philippine shells and shell craft industry. (Talavera and Faustino, 1931; Magsuci, Conlu, and Aypa-Moyano, 1980; Sotto and von Cosel, 1982; Young and Serna, 1982; Rosell, 1984; Woods and Wells, 1995; Adan, 2000; Floren 2003; Miagao, 2007; Laureta, 2008; Bañez, 2019) The common names of *Placuna Placenta* include window shell, Chinese window shell, window oyster. The local names of *Placuna Placenta* vary across the Philippine archipelago: in Tagalog, it is called *Capiz* or *Kapis*; Bicol, *kalampinay* or *katipay*; and *lampirong* in Visayan. Talavera and Faustino. (1931, 339-344). Specifically, in Capiz province, Panay Island, it is called *pios*. (Bañez 2021)

A collection of artefacts and materials used in *Capiz* artisanal dive fishing contains maritime and underwater cultural heritage. The tangible objects of *Placuna Placenta*'s maritime submerged cultural heritage can be categorized into three interwoven collections. The first set consists of the *Capiz* artisanal diving fishery material collection. These include improvised diving clothing and equipment such as diving fins ('*panyapak*'), half-masks ('*tempered*'), gloves ('*gwantes*'), and diving belts ('*pamato*'). The recycled

materials used, the design, maintenance, and repair, as well as the predicted worth or cost, are extensive descriptions of the above. The first collection also includes the material things used to gather and harvest *Capiz*, such as the compressor and the makeshift breathing apparatus- hose tube pipe, the mesh net ('*sibut*') and the wicker basket ('*bala-bala*'), as well as the *motorized* boat used for the diving expedition. The compressor's thorough description, as well as the connected hose tube pipe's average length, the length and dimensions of the mesh net and the wicker basket. The three varieties of dredging rakes used to collect *Capiz* shells in the 1990s, causing damage to the *Placuna* beds, are also conserved.



Placuna placenta (Linnaeus, 1758) is the scientific name of the popularly known, window pane or pearl oyster shell. *Placuna placenta* is the scientific name of *capiz* or *kapis*. In Oton, it is locally known as *lampirong*. Windowpane oyster is a “bivalve marine mollusk, which is distributed across the Philippines archipelago and has been utilized in making the iconic *capiz* window since the 19th century. (Faustino and Talavera, 1931; Sotto and von Cosel, 1982 in Bañez (2022) forthcoming).

Figure 2 *Placuna placenta* (Linnaeus 1758) Photograph by Ma. Arve B. Bañez, March 28, 2019.

The *Capiz* shells and shell craft commodities are classified based on their use and function. The second set of collections includes information about international trade exports, various shells and shell craft manufacturers, and the distribution of *Placuna* beds around the Philippine archipelago. These data sets were gathered through archival research, the review of related literature, and online searches.

The material life of fishing households is entangled in their livelihoods at sea. The socio-ecological practices, the history, shifts and changes in the diving practices, the social relations of the *string of agents* or the key actors, and the narratives of fishing households about their lives and livelihoods embody the lifeworld of the *Capiz* artisanal dive fishery. The third set of the collection represents the people, the social practices and relations; their recorded voices and fishing labour portrayed in photographs and videos. Essentially, the narratives of fishing communities that depend on the sea as a source of food and a place of labour encompass their maritime and underwater cultural heritage.

According to Anita Herle (2016 6), the development of relational models within anthropology shifted the focus away from objectified and fixed entities exclusively owned by individuals and institutions to a more nuanced understanding of the dynamic links between people and things. **A central premise is that entities (both people and objects) are given substance, meaning, and value through their enmeshed relations.** [Emphasis mine] Rather than simply being seen as static items of material culture, objects can be understood and analyzed as materializations of social relations, a dynamic process involving interweaving human actions, beliefs, skills, and materials to create physical objects (Bell & Geismar 2009).

The museum comes from the Greek ‘museion’ and its original meaning derived from the Muses, the nine sister goddesses of Greek mythology to watch over music, the arts, poetry, and the sciences. The museum was a place dedicated to the Muses (Murray 1984; Wittlin 1970 cited in Haas 1996, 11), so it seems, etymologically speaking. To muse also denotes thinking or studying. The material objects reproduce the socioecological practices, and subsequently, engender the social relations in *Capiz* artisanal dive fishery and vice versa. Practically, the material culture and non-material culture perpetuate the lives and livelihoods – the lifeworld of artisanal fishing communities at present and in the future. I am musing about the *Capiz* artisanal dive fishery, for the maritime and underwater cultural heritage preservation in the Philippines and the Asia Pacific.

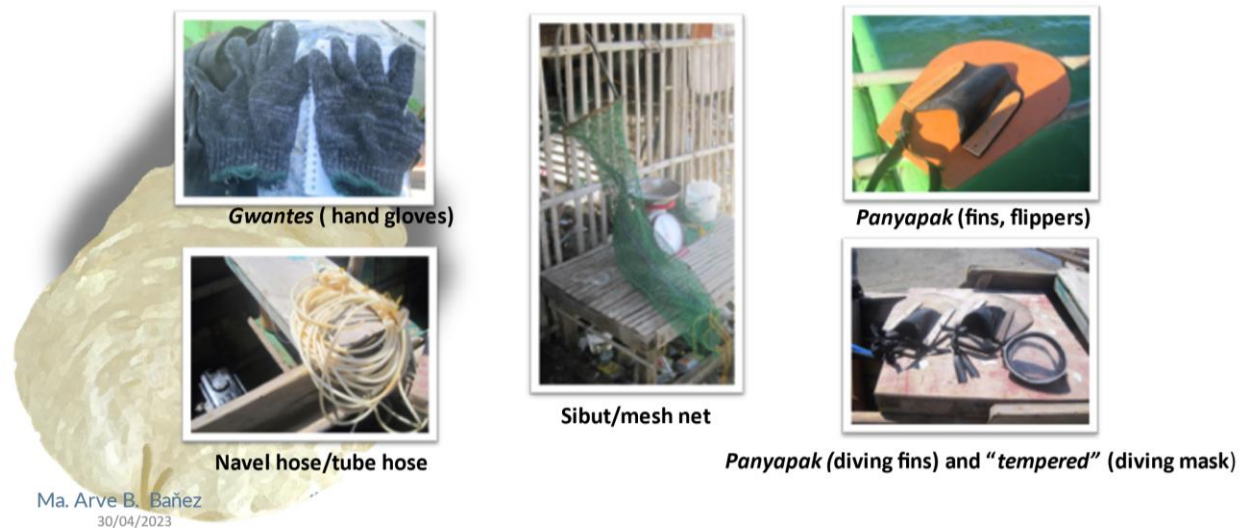


Figure 3 The material objects of *capiz* artisanal dive fishery

2. CASE STUDIES

The multi-sited ethnographic case studies for consideration focused on the coastal barangays of Trapiche and Botong, Oton, Iloilo, Panay, Philippines. Primarily, I obtained the first set of data from my dissertation *Unod kag Panit: The narratives of the development of the artisanal lampirong (Placuna placenta) fishery of Oton, Iloilo*. The second set of data was gathered from the two source communities, namely: Oton, Iloilo and Banica, Roxas City, Capiz. I documented the *benda- porma* process of *Capiz* shell craft making at *Kapis atbp.*, in the latter. From online research, I generated digital photographs of the *Capiz* shell craft items sold, recording their extensive uses, monetary price, and function. My online research resulted in a meet-up with the owner of *Capiz* Flowers and Antiques. They create a bouquet made of *Capiz* shells. The third set of data also were collected from Oton, Iloilo where I generated information about the lives and livelihoods of fishing households engaged in the *Capiz* artisanal dive fishery.

I visited two public museums at the National Museum of Philippine Maritime History and the National Museum of Western Visayas in Iloilo City. The third museum is privately owned, the Camiña Balay na Bato, which is open to tourists and showcases the famous bahay-na-bato built with the *Capiz* sliding panel windows, dividers, chandelier, and other home furniture made from *Capiz* shells.

A ‘polysemy of spaces’ of the source community Oton, Iloilo, the natural habitat of *Placuna placenta*; Banica, Roxas City’s *Kapis atbp.*, the *Capiz* shell craft manufacturer; the public and private Museums with *Placuna placenta* and *Capiz* shell craft curated items exhibited; and cyber communities selling online *Capiz* shell crafts. These offline and online sites are platforms of the enmeshed relations of people, places, and

the *capiz* (*Placuna placenta*). The marine bivalve metamorphoses into a maritime heritage cultural material object of the Philippine archipelago.

***La Ventana, Gabaldon School
Building, Farol/ Parol/Christmas
Lantern***



Figure 4 *Capiz* (*Placuna placenta*) commodities and museum material objects

3. RESOURCES

The resources available to conduct the research include secondary data sources, the data collected from my fieldwork in Oton, Iloilo and Banica, Roxas City, and online sources. The information on the distribution map of *Placuna* beds across the Philippine archipelago was based on the 1931 published journal article of Faustino and Talavera. The tables with information about the 1920s Philippine export of *Capiz* shells and shell craft also were based on Faustino and Talavera's research. The social media platform Facebook carried the online pages of sellers of the *Capiz* shells and shell crafts. International *Capiz* shell craft industries-maintained web pages that I accessed using the Google search engine.

4. FRAMEWORK

My study inquiries into the maritime and underwater cultural heritage of the *Capiz* artisanal dive fishery. In particular, the maritime submerged tangible and intangible heritage of *Placuna placenta* and the material culture of *Capiz* artisanal dive fishery as a subject of anthropology museums. What comprises the maritime and underwater cultural heritage of the *Capiz* artisanal dive fishery? Why are the narratives of the development of artisanal fishing households engaged in *Capiz* dive fishery included in the maritime and underwater cultural heritage of the Philippines? What is the significance of anthropology museums in the preservation of the *Capiz* artisanal dive fishery maritime and underwater cultural heritage?

To frame my analysis and interpretation, I am appropriating the materialism conceived by Marx and Engels (1845-6), stating, “practice, activity, production and the conditions of life are all characterized as material... real individuals, their activity and the material conditions of their life and state that by producing their means of subsistence men are indirectly producing their material life.” (31) The socioecological practices, the marine and coastal ecology, and the labour in *capiz* artisanal dive fishery reproduce not only the social

relations of production but the material life in a fishing community. This conception of materialism is integrated, and appropriate in describing and analyzing the labour and the material objects in *capiz* artisanal fishery including the commodities they produce.

Moreover, Marx and Engels (1845-6, 36) treat the ‘production of ideas, of conceptions, of consciousness’, too, as a form of societal practice. These activities are, as they put it, ‘directly interwoven with the material activity and the material intercourse of men’. Thus, the ingenious improvisation of the diving gears and apparel and the careful selection of recycled materials, the design, maintenance and repair of the compressor and hose tube pipe breathing apparatus, which are conceived from local ecological knowledge constitute the material life of *capiz* artisanal dive fishery.

The biographies and itineraries of objects and things frame my analysis of the *Placuna placenta* on display at the National Museum in Western Visayas and the *capiz* shell crafts exhibited in the National Museum of Maritime History. Essentially, to ‘follow the thing’ permits me to conduct a multi-sited ethnography. Thus, tracing the itinerary of the submerged *Placuna placenta* from the seafloor to divers collecting and putting them inside a mesh net. Then, unloading the sackful of *capiz* shells on the seashore, the post-diving activities of shucking shells (*panala*), steaming, fermenting, and selling the seafood in the roadside sheds, or the intricate and laborious process of *capiz* shell making, selling the shell craft commodities in retail shops and online sites, export the global *capiz* shell craft commodities comprise the itineraries of the *capiz* (*Placuna placenta*). The *capiz* sliding panel window is iconic and an architectural feature of Gabaldon school buildings and the *bahay-na-bato*. The *capiz* farol/parol or lantern is a sought-after commodity during the Christmas season. Using the object-oriented ontology (OOO) theory, these material objects made of *capiz* shells do not only have a biography and an itinerary but possess attributes agential in character. The *capiz* sliding panel window evokes nostalgia for the 19th-century Spanish colonial period in the Philippines. The Gabaldon school buildings with *capiz* panel windows remind us of the public school system established during the American colonial period in the Philippines. The *capiz* parol or lantern is symbolic of the festive Christmas season in the Philippines.

To summarize, three relevant frameworks apply in my analysis and interpretation of the material culture of *capiz* artisanal dive fishery, Marx and Engels’s conception of materialism, the biography and itinerary of things, and the object-oriented ontology theory. These theories meld a meshwork of analysis and interpretation of the maritime and underwater cultural heritage of the *capiz* in the Philippines.

5. RESULTS

The three types of collections of the material culture of *Capiz* artisanal dive fishery are:

- 1) the *Capiz* artisanal diving fishery materials i.e., improvised diving gears and apparel;
- 2) The *Capiz* shells and shell craft commodities classified according to use and function and other secondary data about the Philippine *Capiz* shell industry, and the map showing the distribution of *Placuna* beds around the Philippine archipelago; and,
- 3) The third set of the collection represents the people, the socioecological practices and social relations of fishing households engaged in *Capiz* artisanal dive fishery.

These material collections are shown below in photographs, tables, graphs and digital illustrations and are curated with captions and descriptions. Analysis and discussion of these material cultures seek to answer the following research questions:

1. What comprises the maritime and underwater cultural heritage of the *Capiz* artisanal dive fishery?
2. Why are the narratives of the development of artisanal fishing households engaged in *Capiz* dive fishery included in the maritime and underwater cultural heritage of the Philippines?
3. What is the significance of anthropology museums in the preservation of the *Capiz* artisanal dive fishery maritime and underwater cultural heritage?

The analysis and discussion are framed according to the three theories, namely: materialism, the biographies and itineraries of things, and object-oriented ontology (OOO).

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