

# "Tagay ta, Bai!": The Social Dynamics of Filipino Social Drinking



Jamaal S. Omamalin

Department of Anthropology, Sociology, and History  
University of San Carlos, Cebu City, Philippines

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## Corresponding Author:

Jamaal Santos Omamalin  
jmamalin@gmail.com

**ABSTRACT.** This study investigated the social dynamics of Filipino social drinking, or "*tagay*". It aimed to answer the following: (1) define *tagay* as a distinct drinking culture; (2) determine the technicalities and rules of *tagay*; and (3) assess the perceptions and interpretations of the participants on *tagay*. This study employed the qualitative research design through the ethnographic method as the primary research technique. *Tagay* is engaged by people for reasons usually celebratory and enjoyable in nature. It possesses social dynamics and elements which gear its conduct- rules, time and place, behaviors, gender and power relations, material components, roles, mechanisms, definitions, and functions. Differing through social considerations, the identity of *tagay* as a Filipino drinking culture remains distinct as embodied by a single drinking glass and continues to be dynamic and adaptive, relying on those who partake. *Tagay* becomes what it is depending on the perception of those who participate.

## 1.0. Introduction

Anchoring its origins from pre-colonial practices of social drinking, in the Philippines, Filipinos partake in a drinking practice known as *tagay*. This is a unique Filipino drinking culture wherein instead of having individual cups or glasses to drink from, all members of the drinking session partake from a single glass which is passed around. The process of this drinking practice is facilitated by the *tanggero* (Tagalog), *tig-tagay* (Bisaya), or *gunner* (a more contemporary term), the individual responsible for refilling the glass and passing it on to the next person in the sequence of the drinking session. Siarez (2019) discusses that pre-Spanish society manifests its culture by consuming local wines. As such, drinking is considered of great value and function in Filipino merry-making activities, further strengthened with the arrival of the Spanish missionaries and their introduction of Catholicism.

Other Asian cultures also have some version of a social drinking practice. In Asia and other parts of the world, drinking alcohol has been integral in seemingly mundane life, with each culture having its own way of social drinking. For example, the Japanese drinking culture is exercised through concern for others than for the self and is shown by having to make sure that the glass of another member in the drinking session does not fall empty- this is done by filling glasses by another person present in the circle, which is viewed as an expression of social bond and cohesion, as well as concern for other members of the session.

Social drinking or drinking, in general, serves various purposes throughout the course of traditions within a culture, such as a camaraderie, initiation, ritual, medicinal, and many others. Alcohol has become an important component of social relations with substantial global value and social significance and hence regarded as a multi-dimensional phenomenon (Wilson, 2004, Morris, 1998, Garine, 2001), a social act, and a symbol of mateship and social solidarity (Douglas, 1987, Savic et al., 2016) which is embedded into the life systems of cultures around the world (Baldwin et al., 2006). Heath (1995a) discusses that drinking alcohol, looked upon as an anthropological phenomenon, is defined as a social act embedded in a context of values, attitudes, and other norms. Further, not only do the contexts mentioned dictate the technical conduct of the social activities, but it also influences how one might be affected by drinking, regardless of chemical and physiological aspects associated with alcohol drinking.

Each culture possesses a different set of rules and expectations of alcohol (Heath, 1982; 1995b),



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and how members of a culture drink are determined substantially by the sort of drinking observed, attitudes toward drinking, and the people the drinking is done alongside with (Peele & Brodsky, 1996). With such definitions in mind, the exercise of drinking alcohol, along with its technicalities and social function, would vary across various cultures and would likewise deliver various cultural implications as to the dynamics each drinking culture would have. Wilson (2004) supports this in his paper in that alcohol consumption [or drinking] within cultures facilitates how the revelation of class, ethnicity, and nationalism is manifested through the [alcoholic] drink, implicated in the behaviors, ideologies, values, and history of varying cultures- drinking is a culture in itself.

Almost all occasions of significant levels of socialization and purpose call for a hearty drinking session. Further, as stated by McDonald (1994), although the interdependence of alcohol consumption and festivity is apparent in all societies where alcohol is used and consumed, the connection appears to be more evident in 'ambivalent' drinking cultures where one needs a reason for drinking than in 'integrated' drinking cultures where drinking is a morally neutral element of daily life and does not necessitate a justification. In the Philippines, owing to the significant feature of 'integrated' drinking cultures in Europe is likewise adopted in Philippine society. Alcohol is widely and abundantly consumed in simple get-togethers, celebrations, special occasions, at fiestas, rice-harvesting ceremonies, and healing rituals. In such cases, festivity is strongly associated with alcohol consumption in Filipino culture. However, it is not necessarily invoked as a justification for every drinking occasion- a celebration requires alcohol, but every drink does not require a celebration.

It is to my observation and interest that few studies look into the social intricacies of *tagay*- the Filipino variant of social drinking- and the underlying technicalities, elements, symbolisms, implications, and meanings which are often unobserved if not totally taken for granted. Through an ethnographic lens, in tandem with other anthropological research techniques, this study intended to describe the social dynamics of Filipino social drinking, otherwise known as *tagay*. Specifically, it aims to respond to the following objectives: (1) define *tagay* as a distinct drinking culture among Filipinos, looking into social considerations, gender-related interactions, power relations, and material components; (2) determine the technicalities of *tagay*; and (3) assess the perceptions, interpretations, and personal definitions of participants on *tagay*- its social and personal importance, social and personal functions, and challenges faced.

The significance of this study may provide Filipino sociologists and anthropologists with a detailed view of the social dynamics and interactions within *tagay* and its possible implications for Filipino values and larger communal functions and dynamics. For the Filipino drinker, this study may provide an understanding of this distinct component of Filipino cultural practices and traditions and its implied importance and symbolisms, possibly giving more value to their conduct of social drinking. For the Filipino people, this study may substantiate their understanding of the Filipino way of life and boost their pride and identity as Filipinos.

## **2.0. Methodology**

The research was conducted in various locations in the province of Cebu, Philippines wherever and whenever drinking sessions were accessible and available. The province of Cebu was chosen as the research locale based on convenience and accessibility to the social groups and drinking sessions conducted therein.

This study used the ethnographic research design. Fieldwork began in 2018; Field work was done frequently but arbitrarily, taking advantage of drinking sessions whenever and wherever available and accessible in various locations in the province of Cebu where drinking sessions were done. The key informants for this study were individuals who engage in social drinking or *tagay*. There were 11 informants who engaged in *tagay* comprised of 2 males, 7 females, and 2 self-identified non-binary individuals, all beyond the age of 20, and were selected through convenience sampling.

Participant observation was the primary data gathering technique employed. It was used to gather first-hand and personal information on the conduct of the drinking practice in its natural setting and analyzed via descriptive analysis based on unfolding scenarios during the sessions and my own experience as I engaged in *tagay*. In-depth interviews were also conducted to substantiate and validate observations from various drinking sessions. The interview responses were analyzed through narrative analysis based on previously identified aspects of focus, i.e., social definition, technical and behavioral rules, and perceptions and interpretations. Secondary source data were used to support and substantiate the narratives and observations and analyzed using content analysis. A

triangulated approach was used to collectively analyze the various data sources. The data obtained via participant observation were strengthened and validated through the narratives and responses obtained from the in-depth interviews and further given relevance and foundation through relevant literature supporting the data from both fieldwork and interview correspondence.

Unstructured questions as an interview guide in tandem with field notes were used as the research instruments. Interviews were done both personally and through a modern approach in the form of interview questionnaires through *Google Forms*, field observation and participation, and field notes were made discretely. The study did not include specific identities of research participants, and only occurrences and events were recorded during field and participant observations. Pseudonyms and codes were used in this study to protect the identity of research informants. No children or participants under the age of 18 were observed or included in and during the conduct of this research.

### 3.0. Results and Discussion

#### Rules, requirements, and implications of *tagay*

The act of social drinking is by no means arbitrary in nature. As a social act, drinking is governed by a set of prescriptions, rules, and norms. This section discusses the various elements which connote the reasons, initiation, spatial and temporal requirements, and age and gender implications of *tagay*.

*Reasons for engagement.* When asked about their reasons for their engagement in *tagay*, a significant majority of the informants remarked that their reason for engaging in social drinking was for leisure, relaxation, enjoyment, socialization, reunion, and celebration. Morris (1998) enjoins that drinking, across all cultures, may function as a festive ritual associated with celebration and is an essential element of festivity. One respondent revealed that one reason for engaging in social drinking was for the intention to escape reality often as an effort to unwind and relax after a busy engagement. As remarked,

"Most of the time, to escape reality. Often times, *para maglingaw*." [Most of the time, to escape reality. Oftentimes, for enjoyment]. (Participant 3, personal communication, 03 December 2019)

Heath (1976) discussed that drinking is assigned a positive image for most world's cultures. Drinking is perceived as an important companion to sociability and a considerably inexpensive and effective relaxant. In this regard, drinking [alcohol] plays a transitional function in that it facilitates the shift from work to leisure (Morris, 1998).

On the contrary, another reason revealed was to let loose unwanted and undesired emotional stress, such as, as remarked, *broken-heartedness*. Although it is observed that drinking does not necessarily augment the emotional stress felt and is often intensified as a result of the influence of intoxication- as Morris (1998) puts it, alcohol exaggerates the emotion felt in such a way that a happy drinker becomes happier, and a sad drinker becomes sadder. In this case, drinking plays a utilitarian function (Savic et al., 2016).

Most of these sessions were celebratory, such as a birthday. At the same time, some were done for unwinding and letting loose emotional tension from work and other heavy and stressful engagements, with alcohol functioning as a relaxant (Heath, 1995b). The rationale for engaging in *tagay* is diverse but emphasizes celebratory reasons and casual emotional de-stressing. Thus, it is further inferred that the purpose of *tagay* is as diverse as the reasons the participants might have a reason for social drinking- there is no definite reason for doing so.

*Invitation and participation.* Citing Morris (1998), alcohol drinking as a social act made alcohol at the most basic level a substance or commodity shared- as is manifested across various cultures. The invitation could range from personal invitations- such as being offered a shot, a wave, or being pulled in to join the circle- to virtual communication- such as through texts, calls, or chats by friends or associates. On the other hand, one informant stated that invitations are unnecessary for as long as friends are gathered, *tagay* is surely an activity to be done. Further, this is enjoined by another informant when it was remarked that a drinking session may occur without notice. They remark,

"Walay invite-invite, magka pundok lang ang barkada kahibaw nami mag tagay jud mi." [No invitation, for as long as the group is gathered together, we would already know that we will be having tagay]. (Participant 2, personal communication, 03 December 2019)

"Magsabot or kalit-kalit, it depends." [We plan or not, it depends]. (Participant 3, personal communication, 03 December 2019)

These scenarios are likewise observed wherein regardless of a planned intent to engage in *tagay* or otherwise, for as long as friends and family are gathered in one place for any event, a drinking session is sure to occur. Additionally, the invitation in this session was deliberate from the side of the host, which, prior to going to the venue, was done through friendly but persistent insistence by the host towards the invitees [FN-2].

In a setting where *tagay* is already ongoing, the majority of the informants are invited directly by the participants of the active session, usually through calling out or being offered a glass or shot. Sharing, in this case, is done in a friendly sense and goes with the cross-cultural governing stipulation of the socially contextualized consumption and sharing of alcohol which requires that sharing be done in a friendly way with expressions of goodwill (Mars & Altman, 2003; Heath, 1991; Thornton, 1987) towards the establishment of a *shared identity*, or the unification of *others* and the *self* (Labor & Gastardo-Conaco, 2021), among members of the social drinking act. Rejection to join or engage in the session is met with various treatments and responses. Most of the informants do not see many issues in the rejection to drink or join, considering various reasons for declining, such as not being in the proper condition or not having permission from other members of the family (wife or parents). As stated,

"Ok raman, basin sad dili sugtan sa asawa or wala sa kondisyon muinom. Musabot raman ka." [It is okay, maybe he is not permitted by the wife or maybe not in a condition to drink. I will understand.]. (Participant 2, personal communication, 03 December 2019)

Others felt slightly disappointed or disgusted towards those who rejected an invitation or offer, labeling these people as indifferent or "*others*" in colloquial terms. There were also cases when those who expressed their commitment to catch up did not fulfill their promise. The host met such cases with slight disgust but no lasting grudge [FN-2].

In terms of *self-invitation*, general approval of the gesture was expressed but with certain considerations such as if these people are close friends or associates, socially welcome to the group, contributions to the session, and for as long as the members of the group are not compelled to entertain the outsider. Marshall (1979) mentions that drinking alcoholic beverages occurs commonly with friends or relatives and rarely among strangers- in this case, there is some exemption to this consideration, albeit not without some reluctance. Others would consider it a friendly gesture owing to the possible intention of socializing with the group. In contrast, others would view self-invitation and the person committing the invitation as someone leeching on *freebies*, as remarked, at no expense.

*Time requirements.* *Tagay* sessions are done on diverse occasions. A significant number of informants remarked that *tagay* may be done any time for as long as permissions are acquired from family members and people of close relations (*i.e.*, spouse, girl/boyfriend, parents, etc.). It is remarked that unplanned drinking sessions are more likely to be realized than planned. Moreover, most informants usually engage in *tagay* after successful events as a celebration of success or during birthdays, *fiestas* (feasts), parties, and other occasions. As stated by one of the informants,

"Sa tanan higayon basta lang naay kwarta ug sugtan sa uyab." [Any time for as long as there is money and if there is permission from the girlfriend.]. (Participant 4, personal communication, 04 December 2019)

*Tagay* sessions usually happen in the late parts of the day, particularly in the late hours of the evening [FN-1 to FN-4]. It is also noted that these sessions happen during or after major events or occasions [FN-1 to FN-4]. The time requirement for a *tagay* session is indefinite but is usually more emphasized in cases during or after major events and typically late in the evening. Moreover, the information is diverse when asked about the duration of the session. A number of informants

remarked that a *tagay* session may typically last between 3 to 5 hours and may also depend on financial resources, reasons for the session, further commitments, and tolerance of the group. Such basis for the duration was likewise observed in the field, such as tolerance of the group [FN-1 and FN-3], further commitments [FN-2], and exhaustion of drinks [FN-4].

All of the sessions partaken in ended with not much ceremony but were decided through an informal and unstructured consensus, usually with a simple farewell. The commencement of a *tagay* session relies on establishing the social requirements of the session, usually when participants are gathered in one place. Drinking sessions were commenced when the first shot was offered to one of the group members, usually facilitated by the *gunner*, *tanggero*, or *tig-tagay*- the person responsible for passing out shots via single glass [FN-1 to FN-4].

The session's conclusion is decided based on the capacity of the group to carry on and the availability of time and pertinent financial and *alcoholic resources*. These being without much ceremony or structure, decided by a consensus with a simple farewell. As remarked by one of the informants,

*"Kasagaran mag sugod ang tagay if mag pundok uban sa barkada and mahuman kini if mahubog na or if wala na kwarta ika palit drinks." [Usually, the drinking session starts when friends are gathered, and ends when most are drunk or when drinks are no longer available.]. (Participant 5, personal communication, 04 December 2019)*

*Venue.* Although Morris (1998) mentioned in his discussion regarding the specificity of environments for communal drinking, the narrative indicates a lack of specific, designated mention of venues. However, in some cases, it is determined through certain criteria, albeit considering preference, i.e., accessibility and affordability. Venues for drinking sessions are diverse owing to the emphasis on comfort, safety, propriety, and access to alcoholic drinks. However, a majority of the informants prefer to have it at their homes due to the lesser expense incurred and access to resting amenities. Venues may differ from homes, grills, bars, and convenience stores to anywhere calm, comfortable, and accessible. This is enjoyed by one informant when they said,

*"Anywhere na makalingkod ug kalma na place. Mas prefer naku na walay daghang samok kay mas malingaw mos imung mga kauban." [Anywhere where we can settle, and preferably a calm place. I would prefer less distractions for more enjoyment with friends.]. (Participant 2, personal communication, 03 December 2019)*

*"We usually drink on drinking pubs or in the house or place of our friends. We drink in these places because we find it appropriate and safe." (Participant 6, personal communication, 05 December 2019)*

Yet, regardless of the venues, there is a general emphasis on the importance of the presence of drinking buddies. One of the participated drinking sessions was done in a bar [FN-1], while 3 (three) were done in the home [FN-2 to FN-4]. The time and place requirements of *tagay* depend on the participants' preference with considerations for consensus, necessity, propriety, comfort, access, and financial capacity. As for duration, there is no set duration requirement for a *tagay* session and is dependent on arbitrary factors governed by the group or factors outside the control of the participants. Moreover, Heath (2000) mentions in his analysis the correlation between drinking place and the temporal dimensions, i.e., drinking occasions, in that drinking influences the establishment of a temporal pattern manifested through the agreed assignment of what time of day drinking is appropriate- marking the transition from work to leisure (Gusfield, 1987; Wilson, 2004).

*Acceptable and unacceptable behavior.* The informants were not clear about what is acceptable behavior in a *tagay* session, but they were clear about what is unacceptable. A number of the informants express resentment towards extreme drunkenness, excessive emotional openness, and mismanagement, such as exaggerated crying, excessive sadness, and poor temperance. As remarked,

*"Kantang tao nga if mahubog unya mag maoy-maoy or mangitag gubot." [That person who, when drunk, would go on excessively emotional or look for trouble.]. (Participant 2, personal communication, 03 December 2019)*

"No to *bastos jud*. No to *way tampo*. Okay ra nang mag maoy ug mohilak basta discreet lang sad. Ayaw nang mag wild." [Definitely no to rudeness. No to no contributions. It is okay to feel sad or heartbroken and cry, as long as it is done discreetly. No to those who lose control of themselves and go wild.]. (Participant 7, personal communication, 07 December 2019)

Ngokwey (1987) enjoins the resentment or social disapproval towards drunkenness as it shows a lack of sharing- indicating excessive drinking without sharing, violating the governing consideration of alcohol drinking as a social act. It is also noted that other manifested behavioral excesses mentioned, i.e., excessive emotionality, are all results of drunkenness. Barnett (1955) also mentions that the individual who fails self-control while under the influence of liquor is reprimanded or ridiculed, and if the behavior persists, it is met with ostracization.

There is likewise disapproval towards the discrete disposal of a shot, a prolonged possession of the glass, rude and sexual advances, phone usage, and the lack of logistical or financial contributions to the session. This is substantiated by observations in the field [FN-4] wherein a member of the group had shown a lack of emotional management- this was met with general resentment by the group. Zinberg (1981) mentions that inappropriate behavior when drinking, i.e., aggression, overt sexuality, over-emotionality, is met with disapproval, and the responsibility of dealing with and quelling these behaviors falls on the sober or less intoxicated members of the session.

It was observed that terms and jargon, expressions, and cussing are done with relative freedom without prejudice. However, excessive use would be dealt with naturally and automatically through a friendly, but not necessarily subtle, reprimand which depends on the relationship shared by the members of the circle. Additionally, smoking during a drinking session is generally accepted, as this is done to combat alcoholic satiation, thus, increasing alcohol tolerance and delaying drunkenness [FN-1]. Even though *tagay* is an avenue for openness and vulnerability, the excessive involvement of emotions, excessive cursing and expressing, the deliberate wastage of alcohol, and prolonged holding of the glass, are grounds for disapproval of the group as these may cause inconvenience to the members of the group.

*Age considerations.* Age is likewise assigned certain rules and regulations in relation to intoxicating beverages. In the Philippines, the drinking age is set starting from 18 years old, with current legislative bills still on debate in the Houses of Congress and with existing executive mandates such as the *Presidential Decree 1619*, which penalizes the use or possession of unauthorized sale to minors of volatile substances. Apart from existing and proposed laws on the drinking age in the Philippines, informants were diverse in their feelings pertaining to age considerations when it comes to *tagay*. Most of the respondents were keen in stating that drinking alcoholic beverages must be exclusive to those at least 18 years old owing to the presumed better-established sense of self-control and tolerance to alcohol, as well as considering legalities. Participants remark,

"Yes, you should be in legal age and most importantly you can control and handle yourself." (Participant 8, personal communication, 07 December 2019)

"For me, they should be at least age 18- above because it's not good for kids." (Participant 10, personal communication, 07 December 2019)

As for the other informants, there is no prescribed minimum allowable age for drinking as long there is a considerable exercise of self-management and control. Additionally, the informants expressed the importance of early-age drinking towards the eventual mastery of *tagay*, along with the necessary capacities and tolerances essential to the conduct of the practice, with such practice being done first with close associations as that of family members then gradually expanding to other groups and associations. As stated by some of these informants,

"Teenage, start little by little *para inig dako kay master na*." [Teenage, start little by little so that as growing up, one could already master the necessary skills.]. (Participant 6, personal communication, 05 December 2019)

"There isn't actually but *dili lang jud dapat bata kaayo mag kat'on ug tagay*. Start tagay with your family first before *ka mo tagay sa lain*." [There isn't actually [an age requirement] but not too young. Start tagay with your family first before you tagay with others.]. (Participant 9, personal communication, 07 December 2019)

This attitude towards drinking among *children* is likewise observed in China and France, albeit the mid or late teens are preferred when speaking in matters of legality (Heath, 1995a). Small quantities of alcohol are given to children under the supervision of adults, and children drink. They also acquire a set of attitudes regarding the practice (Barnett, 1955).

*Tagay*, in terms of age, considerations are looked upon based on legal and cultural perspectives, though not necessarily in complete coherence with each of these aspects. Engaging in *tagay* requires certain considerations on age but may not necessarily be as rigid. Timely and early exposure to the practice, guided by elders and more experienced drinkers, allows for the acquisition and development of certain skills on tolerance and behavior and the understanding of the tacit aspects of the practice—such as meaning and value, relations building, etc.

*Gender engagement and gender and power relations.* It was observed that most of those who engage in *tagay* are men, with casual involvement of women. This is probably due to existing and prevalent patriarchal notions in Philippine society implying that alcohol is a man's drink [FN-1 to FN-4]. It is observed that drinks consumed differ between men and women. Men tend to partake in traditional alcoholic beverages such as beer, brandy, whisky, gin, rum, etc., in their original variant. On the other hand, women often consume mild versions of the drinks men consume, such as light or flavored beers, flavored gin, mules (cocktails made with ginger beer or ginger ale), citrus juice, and any kind of spirit), etc. Although there is no strict imposition of the kind of alcoholic drink assigned for either men or women, the choice is often dictated by the drinker's preference since men also partake of the drinks *assigned* to women, and vice versa.

Men are more noticeable and are more public in the conduct of the *tagay* session, usually in venues visible to the public, i.e., sidewalks, roadside convenience stores, and quiet neighborhood streets. Further, there is a general statement that despite the prevalence of male drinkers, it does not set aside the fact that women could also be heavy drinkers but are not as noticeable and public as men. As stated by some of the informants,

*"Sauna, lalaki gyud. Karun, naa nay instances na mas mutagay na ang babae kesa lalaki."*  
[Before, it was really men. Now, there are instances than women drink more than men].  
(Participant 3, personal communication, 03 December 2019)

*"Boy, nature nila ang tagay."* [Boy, it is their nature to drink.]. (Participant 6, personal communication, 05 December 2019)

In terms of power relations, the older members usually dominate the drinking session in settings where there is diversity in seniority. These are shown through the giving of commands and purchasing the drink for sharing [FN-3]. In settings wherein age is relatively uniform and profiles of the participants are the same, power relations are typically determined based on who is the host, who is more respected, or who is more prominent. It is also observed in sessions where males and females are present. Females, particularly those who share intimate and romantic relationships with a certain male in the circle, often function as a moderator to the amount of alcohol consumed by the associated male. However, such a scenario is not absolute across all sessions but is usually the case. In other cases, males and females consume the same amounts of alcohol. There is an unapparent manifestation of hierarchy, which may be interpreted as a manifestation and exercise of relative equality between males and females in the *tagay* session.

From these, gender still plays a significant role in *tagay*, with men regarded as dominant and more public, but not necessarily negating the fact that women could be as engaging in drinking but are less visible. Power relations are presently based on age, gender, personal values, and social perceptions shared by and present in the group.

### **Elements and mechanism of *tagay***

The effective conduct of *tagay* is not only governed by social norms and agreed-on rules but also relies on the presence of certain elements—material and social—which allows for the execution of the social act, guided through certain mechanisms. This section will discuss these.

*Material components (tools, drinks, food).* The material components utilized in the session are few and mundane: the glass, chairs, alcoholic drinks, and food. The glass or cup plays a vital role in

the *tagay* as this is what gives the drinking culture its identity. In any *tagay*, there can only be one glass (or 2 glasses when there is a chaser), and this is passed on to the members of the session, facilitated by the *gunner* (a more contemporary term), *tanggero* (Filipino), or *tig-tagay* (Bisaya).

The determination of the alcoholic drink is usually based on group consensus and budget, but within certain types of liquor depending on the nature of the occasion. Beer is usually drunk during informal or relaxed occasions [FN-1 and FN-2], while spirits, i.e., imported or premium brandy, whisky, or rum, are consumed in special celebration events [FN-3 and FN-4]. Beer and hard drinks may also be consumed in one sitting [FN-1 to FN-4]. This dynamic of drink choice is supported by Morris (1998) in the discussion that every drink carries a symbolic meaning and conveys a message and that drinks define the nature of the occasion. *Tagay* is accompanied by finger food known as *pulutan* (from the Tagalog term *pulot* meaning to 'pick up') or *sumsuman* (from the Bisaya term *sumsum* meaning to 'indulge'), which is usually an easily consumable food (Caballar, 2016). Commonly partaken are chips, and fried foods, usually with strong flavors to combat the bitterness of the alcohol, and are likewise subject to budget availability [FN-1 to FN-4]. *Tagay* comprises a triage of material components- the glass, the drinks, and the food- with the glass serving as the primary identity component of the drinking culture. Though in most settings, *karaoke* (similar to a jukebox) is also present and is generally looked for or requested.

*Topical considerations.* Topics for conversation in a *tagay* session are not confined to a limited and categorical set of choices. In other words, it is subject to the desire or uncontrolled flow of exchange in a group, which to a certain extent is dependent on the profile and shared experiences among members of the circle. As mentioned by the informants, topics shared for conversation in a drinking session may range from deep and personal matters to anything else. As shared by a couple of the informants,

"It depends. It can range from memories together to politics/social issues to life events and advices about it." (Participant 11, personal communication, 07 December 2019)

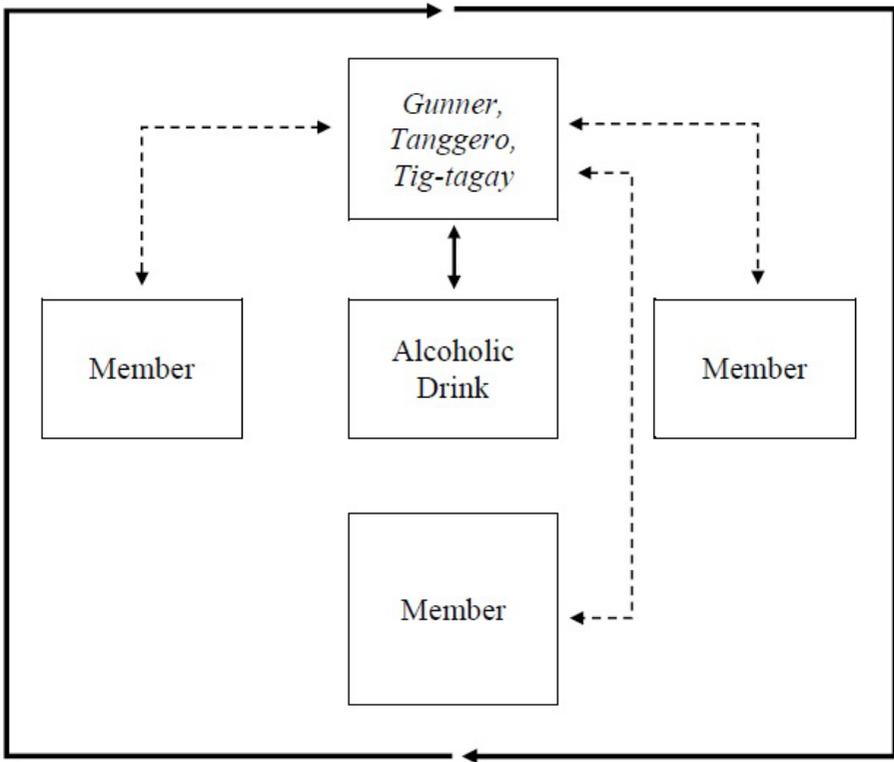
"*Libak*, updates in life, economy, *mag depende sa gilawmun sa among tagay. magkadugay magka*"anything under the sun" *ang among estorya.*" [Gossip, life updates, the economy, it depends on the depth and intensity of the drinking session, the longer [the drinking] our topics could go with anything under the sun.]. (Participant 1, personal communication, 15 November 2019)

It is also worthy of note that when choosing a topic for conversation in a *tagay* session, approval is often subtle and is often shown by an enthusiastic interest in the topic manifested through verbal engagement. On the other hand, disapproval of a topic is shown through indifference, gestures of disinterest, or a deliberate expression of disapproval. It is then with the inference that topical considerations in a *tagay* session are infinite and would be determined by the members of the circle themselves and whose acceptance and rejection are determined by the same members.

*Participants and their roles.* The drinking session is comprised of at least 2 participants with two primary profiles of participants- the *gunner*, *tanggero*, or *tig-tagay*, and the rest of the participants. The *gunner* plays a significant role in the session. He or she is responsible for facilitating the flow of the drinking session via a single glass. He or she controls the speed of the drinking session and determines the amount of alcohol for each shot for each person in the group [FN-1 to FN-4]. As shared by the informants, the *gunner* is responsible for determining the drunkenness of the different members of the group- he or she must not become drunk before everyone else and must sustain himself or herself throughout the session. This person is usually the host or could be the youngest in the group and drinks the first shot before everyone else- marking the start of the actual *tagay*. Further, the appointment of the *gunner* is openly determined either through volunteerism or appointment by the group.

All other members of the group also possess certain roles. Some may be the bringer of conversation, while the rests are listeners and commentators. Others may play as entertainers or comedians and serve as caretakers of those who have passed out. In general, the role of other members in the group, apart from the *gunner*, are diverse and openly defined. These are not determined beforehand and only spring up as the session progresses, and more shots are consumed.

**Mechanism.** As shown in Figure 1, the mechanism of *tagay* is simple and revolves around the glass through the *gunner*.



**Figure 1.** Tagay Session Flow Chart

This diagram is formulated in reference to the manifested flow of exchange observed during participant observation.

The *gunner*, *tanggero*, or *tig-tagay* facilitates the refilling of the glass, then passing it on to members of the session based on sequence and direction determined by the *gunner* or the group. The members, after each shot, return the glass to the *gunner*, and the *gunner* passes it on to the member next in the sequence.

**Interpretations and limitations of tagay**

Social drinking, in this case, *tagay*, possesses symbolic meaning, which may be interpreted in varying ways across various groups, and also functions in varied ways in the lives of those who participate in the social act of social drinking. This section expounds on this.

*Interpretations of tagay (importance and function).* To the informants, *tagay* is interpreted as a cultural exercise symbolic of celebration, enjoyment, socialization, and letting loose. It is a period of building connections and revitalizing others and the self. As remarked by some of the informants,

*“Tagay, higayon nga mahubog ug malipay samtang kauban ang mga higala.”* [Tagay, a time to be drunk and to be happy together with friends.]. (Participant 2, personal communication, 03 December 2019)

*“Tagay kay usa ka pamaagi na makig pundok sa imung mga higala gawas sa kaon.”* [Tagay is one way of bringing friends together apart from dining.]. (Participant 3, personal communication, 03 December 2019)

In African culture, this notion of the symbolism of social drinking is also observed. In African cultures, social drinking and social alcoholic drinks provide strength, happiness, and hospitality and reinforce social hospitality and communality (The Kins Foundation of Africa, 2020).

Informants view the social importance of *tagay* as a means of boosting friendships, strengthening bonds, and socialization. The personal importance of *tagay* is expressed in that it uplifts self-confidence, improves self-discipline, and helps in the deeper understanding and knowledge of friends and family. As stated,

*"The importance of tagay is it creates the stronger bond of friendships because we become vulnerable and honest when we are drunk, so we see and appreciate our friends on their most honest state."* (Participant 8, personal communication, 07 December 2019)

Morris (1998) supports this statement in his paper discussing that the choice of drink, hence drinking, implies a statement of affiliation or belongingness, membership in a particular group. It is a symbol of identity and camaraderie. This notion of social drinking is manifested across various cultures as Peele and Brodsky (1996) mentioned that alcohol is valued significantly due to its promotion of sociability- as observed in many populations.

Through the various celebratory and open interactions among the group members, *tagay* plays a socially important role in revitalizing and strengthening social bonds- a strong rekindling of relationships was achieved. A letting loose after heavy engagements were done, enjoyed together with friends and family through laughter, singing, and enjoyment symbolic of camaraderie, social cohesiveness, uplifting, and healing.

*Limitations.* When asked about the challenges faced in *tagay*, the responses were diverse. Some remarked that the drinking culture faces a social challenge pertaining to lack of commitment from members, emotional mismanagement, and the growing apprehension to the culture brought by accidents related to overconsumption of alcohol. Further, some view financial constraints as a challenge to *tagay*, as well as the health risks associated with the exercise- such as liver complications, hypertension, and tuberculosis (transmitted by the partaking from a single glass).

Due to the entrance of foreign, primarily western, drinking cultures in the Philippines, a certain diversion is observed, albeit not severely, of newer generations of drinkers from *tagay*. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the conduct of *tagay* has been affected. Although social drinking is still observed and exercised, the mechanism by which *tagay* is given identity (sharing a single glass) is not done. Participants of the drinking session, albeit no longer constituting as *tagay*, still engage in a shared drink but no longer with a shared glass. With vaccination aggressively underway and cases no longer as severe, the traditional conduct of *tagay* has slowly returned.

#### **4.0. Conclusion**

*Tagay* is engaged in by people for a multitude of reasons, usually celebratory and enjoyable in nature. Despite its mundane presence in Philippine society, it possesses myriad social dynamics and elements which govern and influence its conduct- process of initiation, time and place, behaviors, gender and power relations, material components, roles, and mechanisms, definitions, and functions. The permeation of globalization and foreign, primarily Western, drinking practices has challenged, albeit not intensely, the practice of *tagay*, while the presence of the COVID-19 pandemic has greatly altered the drinking practice among Filipinos, hence voiding the drinking act as *tagay*- this has slowly returned in recent months as a result of decreased cases, and better vaccination efforts. Even though the culture is controlled and determined by a collection of various social considerations and challenged by *force majeure* factors, the identity of *tagay* as a Filipino drinking culture remains unique and symbolic as embodied by the use of a single glass from which to drink and continues to be dynamic and adaptive, with heavy reliance on those which involve themselves in the tradition. The essence of the drinking practice is reliant on the values of friendship, community, and sharing. *Tagay* alters in form and meaning depending on how it is assigned, defined, and viewed by those who do it.

The study, however, has not considered the implications of the age of the participants in the manifestations and conduct of *tagay*. The phenomenon was merely observed based on the interactions and experiences of those involved in social drinking regardless of age. Further, this study has not looked into the differentiation of the practice among or between various social groups or entities, i.e., members of the upper class *versus* members of the middle class *versus* members of the

lower class of the social strata, and vice versa.

Other scholars may utilize the outcome of this study in the social sciences in the further inquiry on Filipino cultural practices with respect to our social values as a way to allow for a better and more rounded grasp on the sociocultural dynamics of Filipino society as a collective which may be integrated into the crafting of educational techniques (i.e., *tagay* as a knowledge sharing technique), approaches in community development (i.e., *tagay* as a method in mobilizing community members towards local development programs and initiatives), culture and heritage programs (i.e., *tagay* as part of national identity and tradition, and as non-tangible heritage), among others. This study may provide policymakers and health authorities an inside perspective into the socio-cultural dynamics, meanings, and values of *tagay*, or alcohol drinking in general, in crafting improved programs and policies in response to the issues in alcohol drinking in the country.

Although globalization, and Western drinking practices, have already permeated Filipino society, it may be suggested that a look into *tagay* in terms of its macro-social manifestation could be done- an inquiry on the communal reflection of the micro-social values and norms found within the social act to Filipino society. Further, it is observed that there is a lack of cross-cultural studies on the various social drinking practices in Asia, i.e., Southeast Asia. Hence, with this, a comparative study between such practices could be done to determine the intertwined relationship between Asian drinking acts, i.e., Southeast Asian drinking acts, and how these might have influenced the others in the region and contributed to the definition of *Asian identity*.

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The author has no potential conflicts of interest regarding the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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**Additional Author's Information:**

JAMAAL SANTOS OMAMALIN, LPT  
jmamalin@gmail.com  
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2271-359>