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Research Article

## Music and Culture: Appreciating Agutaynen's Composo as a Reflection of Socio-Cultural Identity

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### Abstract

The relationship between music and culture has long been a subject of research, yet scholarly efforts on this topic remain limited in Palawan, Philippines. The province is home to various ethno-linguistic groups, including the Agutaynen of Agutaya, whose traditional song, Composo, holds significant cultural meaning. While some lyrics have been documented online, academic studies examining their socio-cultural messages are notably absent. This paper examines how cultural values and beliefs are safeguarded and preserved through music, specifically analyzing the lyrics of Agutaynen's Composo using a qualitative-descriptive approach. The analysis draws from existing documents provided by Composo performers in Agutaya, online sources, and insights from community elders. Findings reveal that Composo songs reflect key values and beliefs, including *maginalangen ung mga mepet ig ginikanan* (respect for elders and parents), *indi lipatan tang kulturang Agutaynen* (cultural preservation), *pagmal ung pamilya* (family-oriented values), *pag-intrisan tang lali may ang babay* (courtship traditions), *kaambengan tang tanan ig tarabangan* (communal happiness and cooperation), and gendered family roles. This study contributes to cultural preservation efforts by providing an academic foundation for understanding and valuing Agutaynen traditions.

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Music is a fundamental aspect of human culture, serving various purposes across events such as religious ceremonies, social gatherings, and livelihood activities. As a reflection of a community's cultural values and beliefs, music—particularly song lyrics—often conveys messages about traditions, worldviews, and cultural practices (McKinnon, 2010). Thus, music plays a vital role in transmitting stories from one generation to the next, helping to preserve cultural heritage (Petrušić, 2021). Documenting these indigenous songs through research contributes to sustainable development while safeguarding cultural heritage. It ensures the intergenerational transfer of knowledge, thereby strengthening a community's cultural identity, fostering social cohesion, and promoting environmental stewardship—especially when lyrics embody ecological knowledge and sustainable practices.

Furthermore, the documentation of traditional music provides a basis for acknowledging and supporting indigenous cultural rights, reinforcing communities' claims to ancestral lands and resources. Music has long served as a powerful medium for resistance, enabling marginalized groups to voice their struggles, assert their identity, and preserve their heritage. According to McKinnon (2010), music can serve as a vehicle of resistance, providing communities with an avenue to express their grievances, hopes, and resilience in the face of oppression. This aligns with Hallam's (2019) argument that music is deeply intertwined with social conditions, reflecting both the forces that facilitate social change and those that hinder it. Through music, people document their lived experiences, challenge dominant narratives, inspire collective action, and strengthen solidarity.

A concrete example of this is the music of the Tausug people, particularly their folk narrative song, *parang sabil*, which is known as *kissa* in Bahasa Sug. As Ingilan (2018) highlights, *parang sabil* serves as a form of resistance, narrating the struggles of the Tausug against historical injustices, including colonial oppression and military incursions. These songs recount the bravery of Tausug warriors and their unwavering commitment to defending their land and way of life. Through *parang sabil*, the Tausug not only preserved their history but also reinforced their collective identity and resistance against external forces. This exemplifies how music is not merely a form of artistic expression but also a political and cultural tool that shapes and reflects social realities.

However, indigenous music faces significant challenges due to technological advancements and modernization. Globalization, while facilitating cultural exchange, has exposed the lack of established spaces for many communities to protect, preserve, and sustain their cultural identities. Without formal documentation or repositories for their music, literary works, and performances, these traditions risk being lost or appropriated. Yu (2017), as cited by Yu, Manidoc, and Tsuji (2022), highlighted that indigenous cultural communities struggle to preserve their cultures due to the effects of acculturation and modernization. This emphasized the urgency of collecting, interpreting, and analyzing oral traditions before they vanish. Globalization often brings commercialization and unequal cultural exchange, in which mainstream media and Western musical forms gain disproportionate visibility, sometimes marginalizing indigenous traditions.

The issue, however, is not influence itself, but rather the conditions under which such influence occurs. Indigenous music has long evolved through contact and syncretism. When indigenous music is commodified without recognition, consent, or compensation, communities experience cultural degeneration rather than creative exchange. In the absence of institutional support and community-led preservation efforts, these dynamics can weaken intergenerational transmission and threaten indigenous peoples' connections to history, identity, and environment. This aligns with Harrison's (2020) argument that the sustainability of Indigenous music is challenged not only by historical forces such as colonialism but also by contemporary conditions, including neocolonialism and climate change. Addressing these challenges requires forms of sustainable development that prioritize cultural continuity by establishing inclusive, community-centered spaces, both physical and digital, where indigenous music can be recorded, taught, and performed. Such efforts affirm that authenticity lies

not in stylistic purity but in indigenous ownership, meaning, and agency, ensuring that communities retain control over their cultural identities while fostering responsible and ethical cultural exchange.

Additionally, despite the influence of modern technology and materialism, Philippine musical traditions continue to emphasize spirituality and ancient knowledge about life and nature (Santos, 1998). They also reflect the struggles, aspirations, and values of Filipinos, expressing their pursuit of freedom, identity, and dignity (Calleja, 2020; De Leon, 2022). For instance, according to McKinnon (2010), in Christian population centers, musical resources introduced by Spain were integrated into indigenous practices such as epics and rituals. This was highly evident, for example, in a long romance narrative later known as *awit* and *kurido*. Other cultural prints of the Spaniards in the Philippines are found in early Christian Filipinos' musical and theatrical experiences, such as the *komedya* and its subgenre, *moromoro*, centered around the enduring theme of Christian-Moro conflict, as well as the *sarswela*, romantic comedies featuring members of the Filipino elite at the turn of the 20th century. Moreover, traditional instruments like gongs and bamboo welcomed the guitar, the *rondalla* (a plucked string ensemble evolved from the Spanish *estudiantina*), the *comparza* brass band, and local adaptations like the *musikong bumbong* and *banda boca*. Essentially, the influence of Christianity is evident in the blending of religious customs in rural areas, as most musical engagements focus on the liturgical seasons of Christmas, Lent, Easter, and the *Santacruzán*—a May celebration commemorating Constantine and Helena's discovery of the Holy Cross. By documenting these traditions, alternative perspectives on Philippine life, history, and culture are learned or acquired, revealing distinctive regional and social variations. Moreover, they illustrate how Filipino communities interact with and adapt cultural influences beyond the Philippines, highlighting both the diversity within the nation and its engagement with the wider world.

Rafael (2005) also argues that the Spanish colonization of the Philippines was shaped through the politics of language and translation, showing how the mediation of communication and Christian conversion between Spaniards and the Tagalogs helped to create both colonial domination and native responses to it.

In Palawan, community songs are often embedded in festivals. In rural and far-flung municipalities, such as the Municipality of Agutaya, community members have developed songs through oral transmission. These songs provide them with utilities or satisfaction beyond mere relaxation or entertainment as they reflect their rich culture and traditions. Various works (e.g., Hallam, 2019; McKinnon, 2010; Petrusic, 2021) indicate that music profoundly shapes surroundings and exerts a significant influence on society. It serves as a means through which individuals express values, attitudes, and self-perceptions, influenced by psychological factors such as emotional expression, aesthetic enjoyment, entertainment, communication, physiological responses, and symbolic representation (Hargreaves & North, 1997, in Petrušić, 2021). Globally and nationally, the relationship between music and cultural identity has always been of special interest in the social sciences, wherein the argument centers on how music reflects cultural values and beliefs; however, scholarly efforts on this subject remain lacking in Palawan.

The said province is home to several ethno-linguistic groups, including the Agutaynen, who reside in the municipality of Agutaya, one of the province's geographically isolated and disadvantaged areas. The municipality is widely recognized for its rich cultural heritage, yet this heritage is gradually eroding amid cross-cultural migration, as many residents of the island barangays are no longer Agutaynen, and some community members exhibit declining engagement with local traditions. These shifts are further shaped by the circulation of imported musical genres and media, not as inherently corrosive forces, but as influences that, in the absence of community-centered support, can displace locally rooted practices. Geographical barriers, coupled with the lack of formal, sustained documentation and preservation efforts, compound these challenges, placing Agutaynen cultural

expressions at risk—not because they are incapable of change, but because the conditions necessary for their meaningful transmission and local ownership remain fragile.

Particularly, the municipality is still facing challenges in systematically compiling and documenting the community's cultural accounts due to several factors, including but not limited to: (a) legal and cultural restrictions on researching indigenous cultural communities; (b) limited interest, and consequently, few initiatives in researching the community; (c) insufficient resources to support a comprehensive documentation of Agutaynen's rich cultural heritage; and (d) the impact of cross-cultural migration.

The author is an Agutaynen with two initial publications, neither of which focuses on the Agutaynen community. Currently, being based in Puerto Princesa City, Palawan, and having limited opportunities to visit the island municipality has resulted in a loss of regular physical contact and interaction with fellow Agutaynen. In 2024, a visit to the municipality became possible through an extension project initiated by the Political Science Extension Unit of Palawan State University, Puerto Princesa City. During this visit, a teacher from Concepcion National High School (CNHS) offered a humbling wake-up call by drawing attention to a troubling disjunction between educational aspirations and cultural continuity—an informal community request. The teacher noted that while students were being oriented toward globally competitive and technically specialized fields, many could no longer recognize, perform, or even name the songs of their own, like the *Composo*. Also, she mentioned that even the history of the municipality is not yet formally and substantially documented.

This observation foregrounded the paradox of progress without rootedness. It highlighted the urgency of documenting Agutaynen culture before everyday practices fade into absence. Observations made during the extension project further revealed that many island barangays are now home to residents from various parts of the country. Consequently, most young people no longer identify themselves as Agutaynen and cannot speak the Agutaynen language. This reality accentuated the need for immediate action, prompting an initial step toward documenting and preserving one of the community's remaining cultural legacies, Agutaynen music, while strictly adhering to research guidelines that safeguard Indigenous cultural communities.

In this regard, this paper examines how a community's cultural values and beliefs can be safeguarded and preserved through music. Specifically, the researcher analyzes the lyrics of Agutaynen's *Composo* and maps their socio-cultural messages through a qualitative-descriptive method. The study primarily draws on existing documents provided by *Composo* performers in Agutaya, which serve as the main corpus for analysis. Supplementary insights from selected community performers and elders were used to guide and contextualize the scrutiny of the lyrics, ensuring culturally grounded interpretation without positioning interviews as the principal method of data collection. It is hoped that this analysis will highlight another means of preserving cultural identity and will serve as a preliminary contribution by the author to keeping Agutaynen culture thriving.

The specific objectives of this paper are: (a) to map how the cultural values and beliefs of the Agutaynen are reflected and preserved through music, and (b) to analyze the lyrics of Agutaynen's *Composo* and identify their socio-cultural messages using a qualitative-descriptive approach and inductive-content analysis.

## **Methodology**

This is qualitative-descriptive research that documents and analyzes the lyrics of the Agutaynen's *Composo* as well as maps their socio-cultural messages. It is also archival in nature, encompassing

research, collection, and analysis of documents that contribute to the understanding and preservation of Agutaynen's selected Composo. According to Lambert and Lambert (2012), the qualitative descriptive approach aims to provide a clear and comprehensive account of specific events as experienced by individuals or groups, using everyday language and emphasizing an understanding of the nature of the phenomena being examined; consequently, data are gathered through minimal to moderately structured methods such as open-ended individual or focus group interviews, observations, and the review of records, reports, photographs, and other documents.

Specifically, this research uses an inductive content analysis of Agutaynen's selected songs. Songs were chosen based on the availability of sources, as well as the most commonly used in social gatherings or festivals. The lyrics of these chosen songs were derived from different online platforms (e.g., YouTube, Facebook), local government units of Agutaya, Palawan, and Composo performers. Some of the performers were looking forward to the publication of this work as they also wished for scholarly documentation of the Agutaynen songs. Inductive content analysis was used in this study, following an open, data-driven process. Song lyrics were first transcribed and treated as meaning units. These were read repeatedly to gain immersion in the data. Words, phrases, and verses that conveyed culturally significant ideas were highlighted and assigned open codes (e.g., respect, longing, kinship, courtship). Through constant comparison, similar codes were grouped into subcategories, which were then abstracted into broader value and social message categories. This abstraction process allowed cultural values to emerge from the data rather than from pre-established frameworks.

To enhance analytic rigor, interpretations were subjected to informal member checking with community elders and members, who confirmed whether the identified values resonated with Agutaynen meanings. This was done by forwarding the full paper to the municipality through the Sangguniang Bayan member who heads the committee on culture and tourism for their review and verification. This process helped refine categories and minimize purely idiosyncratic interpretations.

Song selection was primarily guided by availability, as Composo pieces are largely transmitted orally and only a limited number are archived or recorded. This introduces a potential selection bias toward pieces that are more frequently performed or remembered. To mitigate this limitation, songs were sourced from multiple performers, elders, and community events rather than from a single repository or individual. The analysis also focused on recurring themes across pieces rather than on isolated lyrics, allowing patterns to emerge beyond any single song. This approach aimed to capture shared cultural meanings rather than idiosyncratic content.

As an Agutaynen, the author occupies an insider position that affords cultural fluency, linguistic competence, and relational access to performers and elders. This positionality enabled a nuanced interpretation of metaphors and practices that may be novel or unknown to outsiders. However, it also carries the risk of naturalizing meanings or privileging familiar narratives. To address this, the author engaged in reflexive memoing throughout the analysis, deliberately questioning taken-for-granted assumptions and seeking alternative readings. Interpretations were further grounded through an informal consultation with elders, allowing community-based meanings to temper individual perspectives. Additionally, as an Agutaynen and a college instructor in Social Sciences, the author translated the Agutaynen song lyrics into English.

This study was initiated in response to an informal community request to document the cultural heritage of the Agutaynen, with a focus on Composo. The study adhered to ethical guidelines in securing a copy of the Composo lyrics by obtaining permission and consent from both the composer and community members. This process was reinforced by a municipal resolution endorsing the study's conduct and publication, as well as a community resolution. Additionally, the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP) was duly notified and consulted, and all requirements were fully met.

Further, participation by Agutaynen composers was entirely voluntary, allowing them to withdraw or decline inclusion of their work in the publication. The composers consented to the disclosure of their identities to acknowledge their ownership of the song compositions. The community requires that songs only be shared within their proper cultural and historical context thus, the paper was forwarded to the community for review and approval, respect for collective ownership over their cultural expressions, collaboration, fair representation, and ensuring that the research benefits the community rather than exploiting it, and even after granting permission, and the community may later revoke it if they feel their cultural heritage is being misused or misrepresented. Throughout the research process, transparency, voluntary consent, and data confidentiality were prioritized to uphold ethical integrity.

## Results and Discussion

Agutaya is a fifth-class municipality in Palawan, home to the Agutaynen people. According to the 2024 census of the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA), it has a population of 13,351. It is particularly composed of ten (10) barangays: Barangay Abagat (441), Barangay Algeciras (4,760), Barangay Bangcal (250), Barangay Cambian (456), Barangay Concepcion (3,933), Barangay Diit (1,298), Barangay Maracanao (305), Barangay Matarawis (382), Barangay Villa Fria (591), and Barangay Villa Sol (935). Among these barangays, Algeciras, Concepcion, Diit, Maracanao, and Matarawis are island barangays.

**Figure 1**

*Location Map of Agutaya, Palawan (Source: Gonzalez, 2005)*



The municipality is located in the eastern part of the Cuyo Islands Group. It was formerly a part of Cuyo and was made into a separate district during the later part of Spanish colonization. The municipality's name, Agutaya, according to some locals' narratives, is derived from the words "Agunan," a root crop in the town, and "Yan," which means "fish," since the municipality's main source of livelihood is fishing due to its geographical location. The word "ta" was added between Agu[nan]

and Yan, thus Agutayan, which eventually became Agutaya. The same narrative was highlighted in one of the Composo songs in this study.

Despite its natural beauty, Agutaya is relatively isolated, with limited infrastructure and services. It is located approximately 200 kilometers northeast of Puerto Princesa City, the capital of Palawan, and reaching the municipality typically involves a combination of boat and ferry travel, making it one of the province's remote locations (usually 15-20 hours of maritime travel from Puerto Princesa City). The municipality's remoteness poses significant challenges for its residents, particularly in accessing essential social services, training programs, and the resources needed for cultural preservation and dissemination. Its geographical isolation, characterized by numerous small islands and limited transportation options, makes it difficult for Agutaynen to access established health facilities and other government services. The lack of reliable, daily transportation further exacerbates these challenges, often requiring long boat or other travel times to access even necessities.

Fishing and farming are integral to the local economy, and the archipelagic setting shapes the area's unique challenges and opportunities in infrastructure, connectivity, and resource management. In terms of culture, the municipality has a vibrant tradition. However, it struggles to scholarly document and preserve these cultural realities due to various factors, which include but are not limited to cross-cultural community migration, some of the residents in the island barangays are no longer Agutaynen, the declining interest of some Agutaynen in their culture, the inevitable challenges imposed by imported musical genres, geographical barriers, and very limited resources and machineries. Despite these challenges, the local government unit of Agutaya, Palawan, began its cultural mapping in 2016 to formally document the culture and traditions of Agutaynen. Locals anticipate that the final output will be presented in 2024; however, it is not yet completed. Hence, while initial efforts have been made, the community continues to call for ongoing and expanded scholarly documentation, underscoring the need for this research.

### Selected Agutaynen's Composo Songs

Agutaynen have different kinds of songs, usually performed during fiestas and other festive social gatherings. One of the known songs in this community is Composo, a narrative (or sometimes a ballad) song that was historically used by the community for mass communication during the Spanish period. This tradition has been passed down through generations through the art of singing. However, due to the absence of a printing press in the municipality during its early years and limited research efforts, no definitive tool exists to preserve this oral tradition. This situation is similarly shared by the Kagan culture, as seen in their folk epic Dawot, which Yu (2017) highlighted in his study. This Dawot, a long narrative poem, has been passed down through generations through singing and chanting, specifically in ancient times, because the community lacked a printing press. A *balyan* (priestess) served as the designated chanter, performing the epic for the younger members of the Kagan community. The Dawot explores themes of life, love, death, journey, and sacrifice. Because the Agutaynen have no *balyan* (priestess), the community members are expected to preserve their culture and traditions.

This paper is limited only to documenting and analyzing selected seven (7) Composo songs in Agutaya, Palawan, as detailed in Table 1, and the selection is affected and restricted by the availability of sources: (a) *Da Nanay ni Tatay*; (b) *Yawa lamang Aing*; (c) *Ang Istorya ni Nilda*; (d) *Mga Ita ay Pamagirimbeng*; (e) *Ong Baybay*; (f) *Manang*; and (g) *Yaming mga Agutaynen*.

Table 1

*Agutaynen's Selected Composo Songs*

Title	Description	Source & Date Accessed
<i>Da Nanay ni Tatay</i>	Family Song	Online & October 2, 2024
<i>Yawa lamang Aing</i>	Courtship Song	Online & October 2, 2024
<i>Ang Istorya ni Nilda</i>	Courtship Song	Local Government Unit of Villa Fria Agutaya, Palawan/ August 6, 2024
<i>Mga Ita ay Pamagirimbang</i>	Song of Unity and Friendship	Online & October 2, 2024
<i>Ong Baybay</i>	Happy Song	Online & October 2, 2024
<i>Manang</i>	Family Song	Online & October 2, 2024
<i>Yaming mga Agutaynen</i>	Community Song	Online & October 2, 2024
[Script was provided by the Composer, Mrs. Concepcion O. Adier]		

For Agutaynen, the Composo stands out as a vibrant testament to their rich sociocultural values and stories. Composo, a form of traditional song poetry, reflects narratives that echo through generations, transmitting wisdom, collective memories, and the essence of Agutaynen identity. An oral tradition, these compositions not only entertain but also educate Agutaynen and other communities about the community's culture and preserve the community's ethos. It typically explores themes such as life, love, career, journey, and sacrifice. The *solteras*, or the *kababaihan* traditionally perform it, wearing their *patadyong* and *kimona*, through a singing-dance presentation accompanied by the *tipano* (flute) and the *gitara* of the *solteros*, the *kalalakihan*. Messages are often focused on courtship, cultural preservation, *kaambengan* (festive mood), *tarabidan* (social gathering), and storytelling. Over the years, the presentation has evolved and is now delivered through various activities within the municipality.

Further, the elders of the community shared that it is the most-sought part of a festival as people are looking forward for the actual performance that reflects the following values and beliefs: (a) *maginalangen ung mga mepet ig ginikanan* (respect for elders and parents); (b) *indi lipatan tang kulturang Agutaynen* (culture valuing and preservation); (c) *pagmal ung pamilya* (family-oriented); (d) *pag-intrisan tang lali may ang babay* (courtship); (e) *Kaambengan tang tanan ig tarabangan* (communal happiness and *bayanihan*); and (f) gendered family roles.

### Socio-Cultural Messages from the Selected Agutaynen's Composo Songs

The Composo of the Agutaynen serves as a mirror of the community's identity and values. It is not merely an entertainment but a repository of traditions, norms, values, and stories. Through its rhythmic melodies and poetic lyrics, it fosters a sense of belonging and continuity, connecting present generations with their ancestors and guiding future ones. With this, the analyses of these chosen Composo works are guided by structural functionalism—a sociological perspective.

Specifically, the Agutaynen regard music as a vital social institution, deeply intertwined with the reinforcement of societal norms, cultural identity, and values. For them, Composo songs are more than just artistic expressions; they are essential cultural artifacts that embody the community's collective identity and way of life, which fuels their strong desire to preserve and document these songs, ensuring that future generations have access to these invaluable pieces of their heritage. These musical traditions serve as an intergenerational bridge, allowing the stories, wisdom, and practices of their ancestors to be passed down and integrated into the lives of the younger generation.

Furthermore, Composo's performance during festivals and communal gatherings strengthens group solidarity. It creates a shared space where individuals come together to express their common experiences, struggles, and aspirations. Through these musical performances, the Agutaynen people reaffirm their collective identity and communal responsibilities. This practice of engaging in music as a collective tradition ensures that the community remains united, connected not only by geographical proximity but also by the cultural values and bonds that these musical expressions nurture.

The next section specifies the sociocultural messages and values highlighted by the selected Composo songs.

*Maginalangen ung mga mepet ig ginikanan* (respect for elders and parents)/*Pagmal ung pamilya* (love for the family/family-oriented). *Da Nanay ni Tatay* and *Manang* reflect how Agutaynen love and value their parents and siblings. They are family-oriented people who give the utmost respect to elders, parents, family members, and relatives. The community demonstrates strong family ties.

*Da Nanay ni Tatay*

*Da Nanay ni Tatay indi mabayano  
Yaray nagpabaked tang mga duli o  
Maski anday manggad nirang matubliyo  
Sirbiano ka enged, Sirbiano ka enged  
ay Ginikanano.*

[TRANSLATION]

*My Mother and Father*

*I could never leave my mother and father behind.  
They sheltered and nurtured me.  
Even if I receive no inheritance,  
I will still serve them because they are my parents.*

The song *Da Nanay ni Tatay* (My Mother & Father) underscores a child's unconditional love for his/her parents that despite having no material inheritance, he/she will always prefer serving them because he/she owes them everything (*Da Nanay ni Tatay, indi mabayano. Yaray nagpabaked tang mga duli o, maski anday manggad nirang matubliyo, sirbiano ka enged, Sirbiano ka enged ay Ginikanano*). It highlights that the lessons learned, the moral values instilled, and the emotional support received from parents are the true inheritance of life, shaping the child's identity and purpose.

Moreover, the lyrics also convey a broader cultural sentiment that prioritizes familial duty and respect, suggesting that serving one's parents is a way to honor their sacrifices and express appreciation for the nurturing they have provided. It denotes strong family ties among Agutaynen, and it is deeply rooted in their cultural practices and societal structure. Respect and love for family members are often manifested and expected through "giving back" to the parents. A good child is someone who respects and loves their family members regardless of circumstances. The common line a young Agutaynen will often hear is *Indi mo mapilik kung sino pay maging ginikanan mo animan kung may pagkukurang man tanira, anday duma, pagsirbian mo ka enged tenged ginikanan mo* (you cannot choose who will be your parents, hence, despite their shortcomings, you need to serve them because they are your parents). While this cultural value has good intentions, it imposes an inevitable pressure on young ones to meet the criteria for being a good child, because if they do not, the entire community will reprimand them for not doing well.

These findings reveal that *Da Nanay ni Tatay* functions not merely as a sentimental Composo but as a cultural text that preserves and transmits Agutaynen, and more broadly Filipino, moral philosophy regarding family, identity, and duty. Specifically, the song's lyrics also reframe the concept of inheritance, from the usual material-based to ethical and emotional capital. This suggests that a child's purpose and sense of self are shaped less by what they receive materially and more by what they owe relationally. In this context, the parent-child relationship is situated as a moral economy grounded in reciprocity. Parents provide life, care, and moral formation; children repay through lifelong respect, obedience, and service. Love, therefore, is not only an emotion but a duty enacted through concrete

practices of “giving back”. Hence, to serve one’s parents affirms one’s identity as a “good child” and, eventually, as a morally upright member of the community. This Comoso song serves as a normative guide because it teaches what is admirable, expected, and socially accepted.

Moreover, the result highlights that filial duty is non-negotiable. Parents are beyond choice and evaluation; even though they have shortcomings, their children are still expected to perform their duties to them. This produces a powerful moral absolutism—service is owed because parents are parents—and, within this framework, moral worth is measured by compliance. While this cultural value promotes cohesion, gratitude, and interdependence, it has ambivalent consequences. The ideal of the “good child” becomes a social standard enforced not only within families but also by the wider community; thus, failure to conform invites reprimand and moral judgment. As a result, what begins as an ethic of love can evolve into a mechanism of social pressure. The community now acts as a surveillance system that polices behavior, turning filial piety into a public performance of virtue. The mentioned tension emphasizes a critical dimension of Filipino family ideology—its dual capacity to nurture and constrain. Children grow up with a clear sense of purpose; however, the moral weight of obligation can limit personal agency.

According to Fuligni et al. (1999), as cited by Alampay (2024), family obligations indicate parental beliefs regarding the duties expected and considered important for children to fulfill, which include respecting older family members, assisting the family by completing chores and caring for grandparents, and doing well and making sacrifices for the welfare of the family. Fulfilling these obligations is a significant indicator in Filipino children’s upbringing, exemplifying the Filipino cultural value of *utang na loob* (immeasurable debt of gratitude) towards one’s parents and the centrality of family interdependence and cohesion. Alampay and Garcia (2019) emphasize that educational and career achievements are common ways for children to contribute to their families’ welfare. This dynamic reinforces the Filipino ideal of interdependence. Individual aspirations are viewed as morally legitimate insofar as they serve familial ends. The self is therefore relationally constituted; identity is anchored in being a son or daughter who gives back. This sociocultural value reflects the general identity of Filipinos, as Filipino families value close family ties, respect and affection for the aged, solidarity, and religiosity (Gozum, 2020).

However, the results invite a critical reading of how these values operate in practice. It must be noted that the moral ideal of gratitude may inadvertently silence legitimate struggles, such as emotional neglect, parental failure, or structural poverty that constrains both parents and children. By arguing that parents are beyond critique, the culture may discourage young people from articulating pain or setting boundaries. The ethic of *pagsirbi* (an Agutaynen term for service) can thus become burdensome, especially in contexts where children are expected to shoulder adult responsibilities prematurely.

In this light, *Da Nanay ni Tatay* encapsulates both the beauty and the burden of Filipino, specifically Agutaynen familial culture. Agutaynen and Filipino notions of being a “good child” are deeply moral, communal, and relational, and affirm that identity is forged through service and gratitude. At the same time, they call attention to the need for a more nuanced understanding of filial duty—one that preserves the strengths of family solidarity while recognizing the emotional and psychological pressures it can impose on the young ones.

Likewise, the song *Manang* (Sister), a composition by Glenda Abus Adion, features the love of a sibling for her sister [*Abaw ang kasinlo, abaw ang kaambeng. Mga may Manang ang kaparyo tang yamen*]. It aims to honor the sacrifices of the eldest daughter for the family (*Ong mandiyang ang tiempo yara’y pagpaadal, Ong mga lugod pang ba’long pansilansar, Tenged napatapos da dadaton ung nandiya, Narin ang kakanta, narin ang kakanta. Pagpasalamat ung nandiya*).

Additionally, the song reflects the usual story of the eldest daughter who is often expected to assume the role of parents when circumstances hinder or limit the parents from performing their role. The eldest daughter, known as the “Inaasahang Anak” (IA), as coined by Riñoza (2017), is expected to improve the economic condition of the family and take them out of poverty. They are often pressured to succeed, prioritize family over personal interests, and suffer from feelings of inadequacy (the struggle of “not being enough”). In exchange for these sacrifices, they are often tagged as the most responsible child or the source of pride.

<i>Manang</i>	[TRANSLATION] <i>Sister</i>
<i>Abaw ang kasinlo, abaw ang kaabeng Mga may Manang ang kaparyo tang yamen Agboaten tang tanan, yamen ang agmalen Anday kaparyo na, anday kaparyo na Yay ang Manang amen.</i>	<i>So beautiful, so joyful To have a sister like ours She does everything, we love her, One of a kind, one-of-a-kind That's our sister.</i>
<i>Ang tokaw ang tiempo ay aglipilipien Ang aning ong nandiya tang domang taw ung yamen Indi unu matapos tang paragadalen Ay malised ami, ay malised ami Yay ang goy ung yamen.</i>	<i>In the past, we were judged Other people told us That she wouldn't be able to finish her studies We are poor, we are poor That is what they said to us.</i>
<i>Pinama'yan nalang tang bitalang narin Bindoat ang inspirasyon ong paragadalen Nagprosigir enged ig nagsirbi ung doma Matustusan lamang, matustusan lamang Paragadalen na.</i>	<i>She just listened to these words And used them as inspiration for her studies She worked hard – a working student To support herself Especially her education.</i>
<i>Asing natapos da ig nakadiploma Ginikanan amen naginiyak ong nandiya Ang masking maliwag tang kabetangan pa Da Nanay ni Tatay, Da Nanay ni Tatay Mandiyan may maestra ra.</i>	<i>Now that she has completed her degree and earned a diploma Our parents cried for her Even though our family struggles My Mother and Father, Now, have a teacher.</i>
<i>Ong mandiyang ang tiempo yara'y pagpaadal Ong mga lugod pang ba'long pansilansar Tenged napatapos da dadaton ung nandiya Narin ang kakanta, narin ang kakanta Pagpasalamat ung nandiya.</i>	<i>Now, she is the one supporting Her siblings, who are just starting their education And because she has helped the next one to complete her degree Now she is singing this song To express gratitude to her.</i>

The sociocultural message of these two songs resonates with the broader collectivist culture of Filipinos, which highlights interdependence and meeting mutual expectations and obligations (Oyserman et al. 2002 & Tamis-LeMonda et al. 2007, as cited in Alampay 2024) within the family. Medina (2001) added that Filipino children are expected to prioritize familial obligations over personal desires because, if they do not fulfill these responsibilities, they will surely be regarded as a child without honor or gratitude, otherwise known as “utang na loob” or “hiya”.

Family is at the heart of the Agutaynen community, which supports the arguments of Bang, Nolan, and McDaid-Morgan (2018) that families are the core of Indigenous nations and communities. Thus, the strength and well-being of Indigenous families are fundamental to the strength and well-being of Indigenous nations.

The song also cited the economic limitations imposed by the geographical location of the

municipality. Some Agutaynen families are struggling financially to support their children's education, despite farming and fishing being the town's primary sources of livelihood. These livelihood opportunities only help them survive the day but are insufficient to meet other needs. Also, Agutaynen believes that education is the only way out of poverty, and strong family ties are highlighted once again.

Further, since Agutaya is a small municipality, the residents know everyone. It is like a big family in a municipality, which culturally explains why almost everyone shares inputs or opinions about one's life. Hallam (2019) asserted that Indigenous music narrates or reflects social conditions, including factors that either facilitate or hinder social change in a community.

Essentially, these two songs highlight the crucial role of music in narrating the community's collective identity, way of life, common experiences, struggles, and aspirations. It is indeed an institution that accounts for Agutaynen's collective identity, communal responsibilities, and practices.

*Indi lipatan tang kulturang Agutaynen* (culture valuing and preservation). The song *Yaming mga Agutaynen* (We, the Agutaynen) by Mrs. Concepcion O. Adier manifests an ongoing call for the valuing and preservation of culture among Agutaynen. It specifies the unique characteristics, culture, language, and values of the Agutaynen so that the rest of the nation understands that this culturally rich community thrives in Palawan.

*Yaming mga Agutaynen*

*Ang banwang Agutayan, yamen ang pinagalinan  
Ang poro lamang ang gue'ley, ong norte tang  
Palawan  
Manggaden ong Agunan ig mababael ang mga yan  
Atan nagalin tang bitala, ang aran tang Agutayan.*

*Yaming mga Agutaynen, may kulturang  
agta'lingan  
May tradisyon ang ipatubli ong tanan ang  
kamamolan  
Agud indi malipatan, agud perming mademdeman  
Tang kustombring pinanublian ong yamen ang  
kamepetan.*

*Yaming mga Agutaynen ong pangabwi tabid  
tabidan  
Mga mola ig mamepet tanan magbereket-beketan  
Agud indi maliwagan agud indi malisedan  
Ong yamen pagpangabwe tanan ami ay tabang  
tabang.*

[Chorus]

*Ang respeto agtutuldok Da Nanay ni Tatay  
Galangen tang tata may tata labi pa tang ginikanan  
Mga ana pamagtuman ong ordin ta ginikanan  
Magprosigir ang magadal agud dangaten tang  
kinao'yan.*

[TRANSLATION]

*We, the Agutaynen*

*Agutaya is our home origin,  
A small town in northern Palawan  
Rich in a root crop known as Agunan as well as  
fish or yan  
Both were used to create the name of the town.*

*We, Agutaynen, have a culture to protect  
Traditions to pass or transfer to the next generation  
So it will remain, be remembered, and thrive  
The customs we have learned from our elders or  
ancestors.*

*We, Agutaynen, work together in life  
Young ones and the elderly are closely related  
So that no one struggles and no one suffers  
In life, we work together.*

[Chorus]

*Respect is being instilled by our mother and father  
We respect each other, especially our parents  
Children obey their parents  
Strive hard in education to attain success.*

Kamamolan ang Agutaynen, ong timpo tang milinyo  
Magandam ta mu'ya ong yaten ang pagparanawen  
Ang dalan ang matu'lid tang yaten ang bagtasen  
Agud ong oring mga timpo dangaten ta tang kinao'yan.

Itang mga Agutaynen indi dapat ikaeyak ta  
Ang yaten ang lengwahe kaministiran padengegan ta  
Ang bitalang Agutaynen pagpaylala ong rasa ta  
Ay malen ta ig gamiten mintras itay gabwi pa.

Ang bitalang Agutaynen pagpaylala ong rasa ta  
Ay malen ta ig gamirten mintras itay gabwi pa.

Young Agutaynen, of your era or generation  
Be careful in following your path  
Only the right path must be traversed  
To achieve a peaceful or better life.

We, Agutaynen, must not be ashamed of our language  
We should value, promote, and love it  
The Agutaynen language must be known in other places  
We should use it, and value it, as long as we live.

The Agutaynen language must be known in other places  
We should use it, and value it, as long as we live.

The song provides a brief explanation of the municipality's name, "Agutaya" (Ang banwang Agutayan, yamen ang pinagalinan, Ang poro lamang ang gue'ley, ong norte tang Palawan, Manggaden ong Agunan ig mababel ang mga yan, Atan nagalin tang bitala, ang aran tang Agutayan), the important values taught by the parents to their children (respect, obedience, prioritizing education, following the right path, communal/common welfare), and the essence of culture-valuing and preservation. In this context, the song positions culture as both memory and guide. It highlights a worldview where identity is inseparable from collective value.

Further, the song highlights that the Agutaynen language must be preserved and used actively for preservation and dissemination (Itang mga Agutaynen indi dapat ikaeyak ta, Ang yaten ang linguahi kaministiran padengegan ta, Ang bitalang Agutaynen pagpaylala ong rasa ta, Ay malen ta ig gamiten mintras itay gabwi pa). It denotes that cultural continuity depends on intergenerational transmission. Thus, the song works as a cultural archive in sound, embedding social norms and historical consciousness in a form that is accessible, emotive, and communal.

Additionally, the result demonstrates that the song functions not merely as a cultural artifact but as a living pedagogical tool that encapsulates the historical identity, moral framework, and linguistic heritage of the Agutaynen. Language is also viewed not simply as a medium of communication but as a conduit of meaning, worldview, and belonging. The insistence on its use implies an understanding that cultural survival is deeply tied to linguistic vitality; hence, when a language recedes, the cultural frames embedded within it are likewise negatively affected.

This mirrors the argument of de la Cruz's (2018) study, which underscores the importance of cultural preservation and protection, particularly in the context of Ilokano folk songs, as they reflect the way of life, beliefs, ideals, and aspirations of the Cagayanos. Also, it aligns with Tejero's (2009) assertion that traditional music is a vital component of cultural heritage but faces the threat of extinction, necessitating the production of various music materials for its preservation.

Similarly, Techie and Tetteh (2016) identify the shifting musical preferences of the younger generation as a key factor contributing to this decline. Yu et al. (2022) noted that community elders in Mindanao remain deeply committed to preserving their folktales. However, these traditional narratives are at risk of disappearing as younger Lumad, an Indigenous group in Mindanao, increasingly experience acculturation. Thus, in response, Legall (2008) advocates preserving traditional music through documentation and promotion, including the creation of registers, inventories, and databases, as well as educational initiatives to sustain traditional knowledge.

The municipality of Agutaya has changed over the years, with both positive and negative impacts.

While there has been a gradual improvement in the standard of living, there has also been a noticeable decline in the community's interest in preserving and continuing the traditions and cultural heritage passed down by their ancestors.

An Agutaynen, in an informal interview, said:

*Mapongaw ang andang pisan ay dokumentong pwedeng e-dul ung mga kabatan mandiyang agod matawanan pa ka nged nera tang yaten ang kultura. Kayadian ay indira bibitala ta Agutaynen, ang duma gangaeyak, tapos anday pagcompile munupa tang yaten ang kaugalian (It is unfortunate that we do not have documents to provide to young Agutaynen so they can continue to learn and practice our culture. Most Agutaynen are no longer using the language—some are even ashamed of it—and there is no compilation of indigenous knowledge and practices.*

Also, another Agutaynen shared:

*Pageley ita rang pisan ung banwa. Kung may dudulang man belag da ta mga Agutaynen tang dun ung kapoporaoan. Pamagalin da ung domang lugar. Siyempre indi mo ka tanera mataligan na tumanen tang yaten ang kaugalian. Ang doma munupang Agutaynen indi ka ra ka pamagbalik tenged ang obra nira ung dumang lugar, ang duma may pamilya ra nira ung dumang munisipyo. Mapongaw kaso anda kay mabwat ta tenged kaministiran nira. Ang yen lang balampang indi ka nira lipatan tang nirang pinagalinan may ang kulturang kinabalwan nira para indi pa ka malipat tang kulturang Agutaynen (Our population is getting smaller. Even if it increases, those new members are usually not Agutaynen, especially in the island barangays. They come from other places, so we cannot expect them to practice and preserve our culture. Some Agutaynen choose not to return to Agutaya for work or because they have families in other municipalities. It saddens me, but it is their choice. I only hope they do not forget their roots and culture, so we can keep it thriving.*

These statements reflect the current weakening commitment to cultural continuity amidst improvements in economic conditions. This implies that modernization and material progress have not translated into cultural sustainability. The mentioned reality aligns with the arguments of Botangen, Vodanovich, and Yu (2017), who assert that preserving indigenous knowledge is a crucial prerequisite for ensuring the sustainability of indigenous cultural communities in the era of globalization. Indigenous groups are increasingly exposed to challenges brought about by migration and the pervasive influence of modernization, which often result in cultural assimilation or the gradual erosion of their traditional identity. In particular, a growing number of indigenous peoples have inevitably begun exploring and integrating into global society through migration. For example, many Agutaynen have left their hometown in search of economic opportunities in urban areas, viewing migration as a means to improve their livelihoods. Conversely, Agutaya has also attracted settlers from various parts of the Philippines who see the island as an ideal place to live and establish businesses. Consequently, the once relatively insular Agutaynen community has become increasingly exposed to diverse cultural influences, leading to shifts in cultural dynamics. These external influences contribute to the continuous evolution of Agutaynen culture as manifested by cultural hybridization. Blended practices (e.g., mixed languages) now exist along with the transformation of values and lifestyles (e.g., some Agutaynen now adopt more individualistic or career-oriented lifestyles and a different view about family, gender roles, work, and success) and changing community structures (e.g., some Agutaynen are drawn to cities, altering kinship ties and community life). In essence, migration and economic progress drive Agutaynen culture to become more dynamic, plural, and adaptive—reshaping how people speak, live, relate to one another, and express who they are. However, over time, such cultural transformations may result in the gradual loss of significant traditional practices, beliefs, and ways of life. Without conscious efforts to preserve culture, Indigenous knowledge and heritage may fade, threatening the unique identity of the Agutaynen.

Generally, the findings reveal a paradox of development. Economic progress offers improved

living standards, yet it simultaneously accelerates cultural vulnerability. The song's emphasis on values and language becomes a counter-narrative to this trajectory. It reasserts that development without cultural continuity is incomplete. In this light, this song can be viewed as political and strategic. It challenges the community to recognize culture as a form of symbolic, moral, and historical capital that must be safeguarded alongside material advancement. The song emerges as both a mirror and an intervention. The mentioned insights affirm that cultural preservation is a prerequisite for the sustainability of indigenous communities.

*Pag-intrisan tang lali may ang babay* (courtship)/Gendered family roles. Aside from the family-and-community-centered messages, Composo songs like *Yawa lamang Aing* (If It is Only You, My Lady) offer a glimpse of courtship practices in Agutaya through a playful, humorous conversation between two individuals. The usual Agutaynen terms in courtship are *mangentres* (*manligaw*), *mamasyar* (*mamasyal/pumasyal*), and *magpresentar* (*mamanhikan*).

*Yawa Lamang Aing*

*Yawa lamang Aing tang makatawa ta  
Indiya engued Aing papag obraen [t]a  
Pakarungon na yen bulawan ang silya  
Papagbasaena yen, Papagbasaena yen  
Tang libro tang baka.*

*Ong niyo lamang Aoy indiyong pag-imurat  
Ang sinangoni mo ang punok ta kangat  
Ang indiyong pandigo ang tiemping abagat  
Ang makatutuka, ang makalilimat.*

[TRANSLATION]

*If it is Only You, My Lady*

*If you were the one I could marry, my lady  
I will never let you do any job  
You may sit on a golden chair  
And will read the book of the cow.*

*If you were the one I would end up marrying, then  
forget it  
Your entire body is covered in grime  
You do not bathe during the Habagat season  
It is disgusting, it is revolting.*

In this song, the lyric “*Yawa lamang Aing tang makatawa ta, Indiyong engued Aing papag obraen [t]a, pakarungon na yen bulawan ang silya, Papagbasaena yen, Papagbasaena yen, tang libro tang baka*” is symbolic rather than literal. The golden chair represents honor, comfort, or elevated status, suggesting that the person being addressed (often the beloved) will be treated with respect and placed in a position of value. In courtship poetry and folk verse, this imagery implies that the speaker promises dignity and security to the one they are wooing. Additionally, reading the book of the cow can be understood as learning or entering into the rhythms of rural or family life, knowing how to manage a household, tend resources, and live within a shared world of work and care. In essence, these lines suggest a promise in courtship.

When examining using the lens of gender roles, the lyrics imply how courtship encodes expectations about women, men, and married life in agrarian or traditional societies. For example, the woman is not described as building the chair; rather, she is invited to sit. This reflects a gendered ideal in which the man proves his worth by promising status, protection, and material security, while the woman's role is to be elevated, cherished, and displayed. Her value in courtship lies in being worthy of honor. Meanwhile, the man's role is being the provider and benefactor. He offers the golden chair—status, stability, and material security. Grounded in these observations, these lines reflect how traditional courtship often balances praise with prescription: it flatters the beloved with images of gold and honor, while gently initiating her into a gendered future in which her worth is realized through care, nurture, and the management of life-sustaining resources. The romance lies not in escape from roles, but in consenting to them under the promise of dignity and security.

However, the following lyrics: *ong niyo lamang Aoy indiyong pag-imurat, ang sinangoni mo ang punok ta kangat, ang indiyong pandigo ang tiemping abagat, Ang makatutuka, ang makalilimat*

highlight the refusal to fantasy. Courtship is pulled down from metaphor to material reality. It is a structural assertion wherein, in agrarian or impoverished contexts, “grime” is often inseparable from labor, climate, and class. The Habagat (monsoon) evokes mud, rain, and hardship. Implicitly, the response denotes that the man should not wear or dress in hardship as romance. In this context, the woman (or the addressed beloved) is no longer the passive recipient of a man’s promise; she becomes the evaluator. The man is placed under scrutiny rather than idealized as a provider.

From this lyrical analysis, it is worth noting also that the Agutaynen practice the traditional ‘*pamamanhikan*’ of the Filipinos. Family members, particularly parents, play an important role in the entire courtship process leading to marriage. The first stage is *pangentres* [*panliligaw*]. It is traditionally expected of the male members of the community. *Pangentres* denotes respect, sincerity, and patience in a relationship. It is expected to happen in the presence of the family, emphasizing that love and marriage are family matters.

But today, due to social media platforms and external influences, the courtship process has also changed. There was a gradual shift in practices from family-centered and communal to more individualized and mediated by technology. With modernization, however, new forces, especially social media, mobile communication, and exposure to outside cultures, change how relationships begin and develop. Courtship now often begins in private online spaces rather than at home. Individuals increasingly make decisions that once required family participation. This does not mean tradition disappears entirely, but its authority weakens as young people gain more autonomy. Thus, modernization produces change by introducing new tools (phones, social media) that bypass traditional settings, promoting values of personal choice and privacy over communal decision-making, and exposing individuals to alternative models of romance and marriage. Thus, there is a hybrid system wherein traditional practices like *pamamanhikan* may still exist. However, they are often delayed, simplified, or treated as symbolic. At the same time, the real beginnings of relationships occur in modern, digitally mediated ways.

*Ang Istorya ni Nilda*

[An Excerpt Only]

[Nilda – 4th verse]

Aroy, Ate Erlyn onopay masinlo  
Pagelat si Edward ong maging sabato  
Kaso lamang baya, ni Tatay na gaeyako  
Permeng enteremes mga gabagato.  
Oman ang tata pa baya si Nanay na  
Ong panaydo lamang indiyo maliagan na  
Mga gabagato kokomod ta sobra  
Labi pa mga ong balay si Edward, agkusilen na.

[Nilda – 5th verse]

Maliwag pa ka nged mga isipin no  
Medio makaeled pa ang yo ay magignobyong  
Kense anyos palang mandiyang tang edad o  
Doro pag kamola ang yo magignobyong.

[Aling Maring – 2nd verse]

Oh siya kaman Aing, tama tang desisyon mo  
Magpasol a ung Cuyo para may kwarta mo  
Ang mapasulan mo emes emesen mo  
Para ung adalan ay may gastuson mo.  
Pasensya ra Aing malised ita lamang

[TRANSLATION]

*The Story of Nilda*

[Nilda – 4th verse]

Oh dear, Ate Erlyn, what should I do?  
Edward is waiting for my answer.  
But I am embarrassed around his father  
As he always makes fun of it [courting] whenever  
we meet.  
Then there is his mother;  
I think she does not like me  
Whenever I see her, she has a frown.  
And whenever Edward visits us, she always picks  
him up.

Having a [romantic] relationship is still difficult to  
think about

It is still scary to be in a relationship  
I am only 15 years old right now  
I am too young to have a boyfriend.

Oh, that is right, young Lady, your decision.

You may work in Cuyo, so you can have some  
money  
Save what you earn, so you will have [something]  
to use for school  
I am sorry, we are poor.

[Nilda – last verse] *Aroy, ang kadali anda pay obra ta*  
*Mga pwede lamang magela elat ta*  
*Uldan ta ka ta kambengan mga ginikanan ta*  
*Na malbet ita ung mga sakripisyo nera.*

*Oh dear, it is too soon; we do not have jobs yet*  
*Maybe you could wait.*  
*Let us first serve our parents*  
*To repay their sacrifices.*

[Edward – last verse] *Sabagay kakaman tama tang*  
*inaneng mo*  
*Galiyago lamang na manigurado*  
*Ong tata ang bulan ay magpresentar ro*  
*Para matawanan da baya da nanay mo.*

*Well, you are right about what you said*  
*But I want an assurance*  
*Next month, we will do pamamanhikan*  
*So your parents will know.*

The Story of Nilda song is a true-to-life story of an Agutaynen. It is a very lengthy Composo song that also highlights the courtship process, the influence and role of the parents, and factors affecting the [romantic] relationship. Some of the realities highlighted are (a) the economic situation of the family determines the priorities of an Agutaynen in life; (b) family comes first for every Agutaynen; and (c) *pagpresentar* (*pamamanhikan*).

*Pagpresentar* o *pamamanhikan*, done through a formal visit to a female's family, embodies respect, mutual consent, and family unity. It demonstrates the suitor's commitment and dedication to pursuing the relationship. This can be derived from the following lines: "*sabagay kakaman tama tang inaneng mo, galiyago lamang na manigurado, Ong tata ang bulan ay magpresentar, para matawanan da baya da nanay mo.*" For Agutaynen, *pagpresentar* is more than a proposal. It is a gesture of respect toward the female's family, indicating that the relationship and marriage are not only about the two individuals but also between families. It also shows the capacity of the involved persons to start a family together. This practice reinforces the importance of familial approval and community involvement by allowing families to discuss wedding details, expectations, and how the couple's lives will intertwine. This reflects the traditional Tagalog wedding process, which begins with *pamamanhikan*—a formal introduction and negotiation between families (Jun, Adelaar, & Himmelmann, 2005). In this sense, it operates as a cultural mechanism that safeguards social order by ensuring that relationships are anchored in accountability and transparency.

Furthermore, the lyrics, "*Aroy, ang kadali anda pay obra ta, mga pwede lamang magela elat ta, uldan ta ka ta kambengan mga ginikanan ta, na malbet ita ung mga sakripisyo nera,*" show that family comes first. It reinforces the collectivist orientation of the Agutaynen community. The song reflects a cultural logic where individual happiness is meaningful only insofar as it aligns with family welfare. This echoes broader Filipino values identified by Retuya et al. (2017), as cited in Guzman (2020), that Filipinos are highly family-oriented and tend to involve their families in crucial decision-making processes, such as marriage and courtship. Among the Agutaynen, family relationships are deeply significant, often extending to maintaining an extended family structure. In Agutaynen culture, marriage is not merely a union between two individuals but a bond between two families. A daughter holds a position of high regard within the family, not just as a sibling but as someone whose future must be carefully considered. In this light, parents take great care in ensuring that the man who wishes to marry their daughter is of good character and capable of leading a family.

Also, the song highlights that the family's economic situation determines the priorities of an Agutaynen in life. The lines, "*Oh siya kaman Aing, tama tang desisyon mo, magpasol a ung Cuyo para may kwarta mo. Ang mapasulan mo emes emesen mo para ung adalan ay may gastuson mo. Pasensya ra Aing malised ita lamang,*" illustrate a worldview in which personal aspirations are inseparable from cultural survival. For many Agutaynen, love goes with responsibility: the need to support one's family, to contribute to household stability, and to delay personal fulfillment, especially if the family is economically or financially struggling. This aspect humanizes courtship by grounding it in everyday struggles.

*Kaambengan tang tanan ig tarabangan* (communal happiness and *bayanihan*). This song is an Agutaynen translation of “Kung Tayo ay Magkakasama.” This sends a message of *bayanihan* (community spirit) and communal happiness among Agutaynen.

<i>Mga Ita ay Pamagirembeng</i>	[TRANSLATION] <i>When We are Together</i>
<i>Mga Ita'y pamagirimbeng</i>	<i>If we are together,</i>
<i>Pamagirembeng, pamagirimbeng</i>	<i>Together, together</i>
<i>Mga Ita'y pamagirimbeng dorog kaabeng</i>	<i>If we are together, we are always happy.</i>
<i>Tangay mo, tangay o</i>	<i>Your friend, my friend,</i>
<i>Tangay mo, tangay o.</i>	<i>Your friend, my friend</i>
<i>Mga Itay Pamagirimbeng, dorog kaabeng</i>	<i>If we are together, we are always happy.</i>

The message of this song powerfully resonates with the concept of shared identity, known as *Kahampatan* among the *Ambala Ayta* in *Sitio Alibang*, *Barangay Naugsol*, *Subic*, *Zambales*, *Philippines*. According to *Meneses (2019)*, *Kahampatan* embodies a deep sense of care and responsibility for the well-being of fellow community members, reflecting a collective consciousness that prioritizes harmony, mutual help, and solidarity.

This sense of communal interconnectedness aligns with the *Filipino Psychology* concept of *kagandahang loob*, which refers to an innate inner nobility characterized by kindness, selflessness, and reciprocity. Beyond mere obligation, *kagandahang loob* highlights a profound commitment to the well-being of others, driven by genuine compassion and shared humanity. Similarly, the *Agutaynen* people possess a deeply ingrained communal culture that exemplifies *kagandahang loob*. Their way of life is anchored in a strong sense of collective responsibility, where acts of generosity and empathy are not only expected but also celebrated as vital expressions of their shared identity. In times of crisis—whether it be the loss of a loved one, financial struggles, family conflicts, illness, or natural calamities—the *Agutaynen* community comes together in unwavering support, ensuring that no one faces hardship alone.

Central to this shared identity is the *Filipino* value of *Kapwa*, which transcends individualism and reinforces the idea that every person is intrinsically connected to others. *Kapwa* fosters genuine empathy, respect, and generosity, serving as the foundation of social harmony and communal unity. Within such a framework, the community is not just a group of individuals but an extended family, bound by an unspoken yet deeply felt commitment to uplift one another. Thus, as featured in this *Composo* song, *Agutaynen* echoes the enduring values of *Kahampatan*, *kagandahang loob*, and *Kapwa*, all of which highlight the beauty of a culture that places human connection, compassion, and shared responsibility at its very core.

*Entertainment/Storytelling (Magistorya)*. *Composo* songs like *Ong Baybay (By the Seashore)* denote pure entertainment or happy storytelling of one's experience. ‘*Dublan*’ refers to the *Java plum* tree leaves used for tobacco cigarettes by the elders in the community.

<i>Ong Baybay</i>	[TRANSLATION] <i>By the Seashore</i>
<i>Nungaynang damal damal</i>	<i>I went to the seashore,</i>
<i>Napaningo ong Baybay</i>	<i>Under the Java plum tree, something was moving.</i>
<i>Ung sirong tang lomboy kumalap kalapan</i>	<i>I wondered what it could be—</i>
<i>Ang yen ang kaesep kung unu pa lamang</i>	<i>Turns out, it was a man picking up leaves.</i>
<i>Na pala si Aoy pamisik ta dublan.</i>	

This composition emphasizes how music serves as a powerful artistic expression of an individual's daily encounters and personal experiences. Music, in this context, caters to the need for aesthetic enjoyment and entertainment, offering both a sense of pleasure and a means of relaxation. Beyond personal enjoyment, music functions as a form of communication, enabling individuals to connect with others and convey messages. According to Hargreaves and North (1997), as cited in Petrušić (2021), music encompasses all of these dimensions, making it a multifaceted form of human expression and interaction. Through music, people narrate their stories, express their emotions, and connect with the broader cultural and social landscape.

To summarize the analyses of the selected Composo songs, a tabular presentation (Table 2) is provided that maps the key messages and values emphasized in each Agutaynen Composo song.

**Table 2**

*Key Messages and Values in Each Agutaynen Composo Songs*

Composo Song	Socio-cultural Messages	Socio-cultural Values
	(Respect for elders and parents)/ <i>Pagmal ung pamilya</i> (love for the family/family-oriented)	Thriftiness, Diligence, Patience, Generosity, Responsibility, Respect for Parents, Love for the Family, <i>Bayanihan</i> , <i>Utang na Loob</i> (Debt of Gratitude)
<i>Da Nanay ni Tatay</i> (My Mother & Father)	These songs reflect how Agutaynen love and value their parents and siblings. They are family-oriented people who give the utmost respect to elders, parents, family members, and relatives.  Specifically, <i>Da Nanay ni Tatay</i> reflects the broader cultural sentiment that prioritizes familial duty and respect, suggesting that the act of serving one's parents is a way to honor their sacrifices and express appreciation for the nurturing they have received. It denotes strong family ties among Agutaynen, and it is deeply rooted in their cultural practices and societal structure.	
<i>Manang</i> (My Sister) composed by Glenda Abus Adion	The <i>Manang</i> song features the love of a sibling for her sister. It aims to honor the sacrifices of the eldest daughter for the family, known as the "Inaasahang Anak" (IA) as coined by Riñoza (2017). She is expected to improve the economic condition of the family and take them out of poverty	
<i>Yaming mga Agutaynen</i> (We, the Agutaynen) by Mrs. Concepcion O. Adier	<i>Indi lipatan tang kulturang Agutaynen</i> (culture valuing and preservation).  This manifests an ongoing call for cultural valuing and preservation among Agutaynen. It specifies the unique characteristics, culture, language, and values of the Agutaynen so that the rest of the nation has an idea that this culturally rich community thrives in Palawan.	Love for hometown, cultural and language valuing and preservation, family-centeredness, <i>bayanihan</i> (community spirit), respect for elders and parents

Composo Song	Socio-cultural Messages	Socio-cultural Values
<i>Yawa lamang Aing</i> (If it is Only You, My Lady)	<i>Pag-intrisan tang lali may ang babay</i> (courtship)/ Gendered family roles  This song provides a glimpse of the courtship practice in Agutaya. The usual Agutaynen terms in courtship are <i>mangentres</i> ( <i>manligaw</i> ), <i>mamasyar</i> ( <i>mamasyal/pumasyal</i> ), and <i>magpresentar</i> ( <i>mamanhikan</i> ).  The family members, particularly the parents, have an important influence and role in the entire process of courtship until marriage. The first stage is <i>pangentres</i> [ <i>panliligaw</i> ]. It is traditionally expected of the male members of the community. <i>Pangentres</i> denotes respect, sincerity, and patience in a relationship. It is expected to happen in the presence of the family, emphasizing that love and marriage are family matters.	Love and respect for family/parents and women, and sincerity and patience in a relationship
<i>Ang Istorya ni Nilda</i> (The Story of Nilda)	<i>Pag-intrisan tang lali may ang babay</i> (courtship)/ Gendered family roles  Similar to <i>Yawa Lamang Aing</i> , this composo song highlights the courtship process, the influence and role of the parents, and factors affecting the [romantic] relationship. Some of the realities highlighted are (a) the economic situation of the family determines the priorities of an Agutaynen in life; (b) family comes first for every Agutaynen; and (c) <i>pagpresentar</i> ( <i>pamamanhikan</i> ).	Thriftiness, Diligence, Patience, Generosity, Responsibility, Respect for Parents, Love for the Family, <i>Bayanihan</i> , and <i>Utang na loob</i> (Debt of Gratitude)
<i>Mga Ita ay Pamagirembeng</i> (When We are Together)	<i>Kaambengan tang tanan ig tarabangan</i> (communal happiness and <i>bayanihan</i> ).  This sends a message of <i>bayanihan</i> and communal happiness among Agutaynen. The Agutaynen people possess a deeply ingrained communal culture that exemplifies <i>kagandahang loob</i> . Their way of life is anchored in a strong sense of collective responsibility, where acts of generosity and empathy are not only expected but also celebrated as vital expressions of their shared identity. In times of crisis—whether it be the loss of a loved one, financial struggles, family conflicts, illness, or natural calamities—the Agutaynen community comes together in unwavering support, ensuring that no one is left to face hardship alone.	<i>Bayanihan</i> , <i>Kagandahang loob</i> , concept of Kapwa
<i>Ong Baybay</i> (By the Seashore)	Entertainment/Story-telling ( <i>Magistorya</i> )  Composo songs like <i>Ong Baybay</i> (By the Seashore) denote pure entertainment or happy storytelling of one's experience. 'Dublan' refers to the Java plum tree leaves used for tobacco cigarettes by the elders in the community.	Valuing storytelling and creative expression to communicate personal experiences

Generally, Composo songs have an evident cultural significance. It reflects the diverse sociocultural values and experiences of the Agutaynen. It embodies a heritage that evolves with the community it serves. However, while it adapts to current realities, it still confronts the fear of disappearing or being

lost. There is a need to preserve this ancestral knowledge and values, ensuring cultural continuity amid modern challenges. As the municipality of Agutaya navigates the complexities of the modern era, Composo should remain a resilient expression of cultural resilience, presenting insights about the past, present, and aspirations for the future. Aside from its cultural significance, Agutaynen Composo also plays a crucial role in social cohesion. It serves as a communal activity where individuals gather to celebrate or commemorate important events. The act of composing and performing these songs strengthens social bonds, reinforces collective identity, and affirms shared experiences.

In this way, music becomes a catalyst for unity, fostering solidarity among Agutaynen and reinforcing their collective resilience in the face of change.

## Conclusion

In a small island municipality like Agutaya in Palawan, Philippines, the Composo is brought to life through a singing-dance performance by the *solteras* (young women) clad in their *patadyong* and *kimona*, accompanied by the *solteros* (young men) who play the *tipano* (flute) and guitar. The presentation weaves together music, movement, and verse, with messages that often revolve around courtship, cultural preservation, *kaambengan* (a festive, joyful spirit), *tarabidan* (social gatherings), and storytelling. More than mere entertainment, the Composo serves as a living narrative of everyday life, emotions, and relationships within the Agutaynen community.

Elders in the community shared that the Composo is the most anticipated highlight of any festival, as people eagerly await a performance that embodies deeply held values and beliefs. These include: (a) *maginalangen ung mga mepet ig ginikanan*—respect for elders and parents; (b) *indi lipatan tang kulturang Agutaynen*—the valuing and preservation of Agutaynen culture; (c) *pagmal ung pamilya*—a strong sense of family orientation; (d) *pag-intrisan tang lali may ang babay*—courtship and romantic expression; (e) *kaambengan tang tanan ig tarabangan*—communal joy and the spirit of *bayanihan*; and (f) the affirmation of gendered roles within the family and community.

For the Agutaynen, therefore, the Composo functions as a powerful cultural platform, one that not only reflects their collective identity but also actively transmits their values across generations. In a time when youth are increasingly exposed to foreign cultures and global influences, the Composo remains a vital medium for grounding the younger generation in their heritage, reinforcing a sense of belonging, and sustaining the cultural memory of the community.

This research is a preliminary step toward contributing to Indigenous music sustainability from the perspective of ‘within’ the community, rather than non-Indigenous perspectives. Basically, the preparation of this work is with, by, and for the Agutaynen – not just simply about Agutaynen. The findings of this project contribute to the development of a repertoire of strategies in indigenous language and culture activism amidst modernity. It is a good, preliminary reference material that can be used in history and Palawan Studies courses (Palawan Studies is an institutional elective course at Palawan State University) to promote cultural awareness and sensitivity. This is an initial attempt to create a more respectful, relevant, reciprocal, and responsible space for Indigenous people in research. Thus, the call remains—there is an ongoing quest to document, protect, sustain, develop, and preserve the dying culture and traditions of the Agutaynen; hence, it is recommended that (1) the local government of Agutaya should consistently further its efforts to revive and/or preserve the municipality’s culture and traditions by providing support and resources for documentation and by facilitating events to showcase these cultural practices; (2) the educational institutions in Agutaya should collaborate with the municipal government in teaching and instilling cultural awareness and the importance of practicing and valuing the culture and traditions of the community; (3) Agutaynen should continuously work together in preserving the culture and traditions of the community through

performing them or documenting them; and (4) for future researchers, there is a need to conduct a comprehensive cultural documentation of the Agutaynen as an ethno-linguistic group in Palawan.

**Conflict of Interest Statement**

We have no conflict of interest to disclose.

**AI Disclosure**

We declare that this manuscript was written without the use of artificial intelligence. Hence, the content of this paper is original.

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