

## CHANTS, GONGS AND ANCESTRAL MEMORIES OF THE PANAY BUKIDNON, PHILIPPINE ISLANDS\*

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### Abstract

#### *Introduction*

Sugidanon (Epic Chanting) has been a long time favorite way of spending leisure time among the innermost villages of rugged Central Panay. Its listeners gradually waned with the arrival of transistor radios in the late 1960's – 70's and their exposure to modern sound technology, thereafter, in the lowland. The introduction of Christianity and public education also contributed largely to its decline because chanters, *babaylan* who were mostly ex-*binukot* (kept maiden), were discouraged to continue as a result of proselytization.

#### *Gongs in Epic Culture*

In 1980's – 90's, only few *binukot* survive. In the year 2000, you could count on your five fingers the remaining good *binukot* chanters because they passed away due to old age, sickness, malnutrition and starvation. Gone are the bearers of chants and ancestral memories! Gone are the histories and “her stories.”

Epic culture shows the importance of gongs in the life of the people. This material culture can be traced to pre-Christian times as coming from non-Visayan neighboring islands or places outside the Philippines. Its

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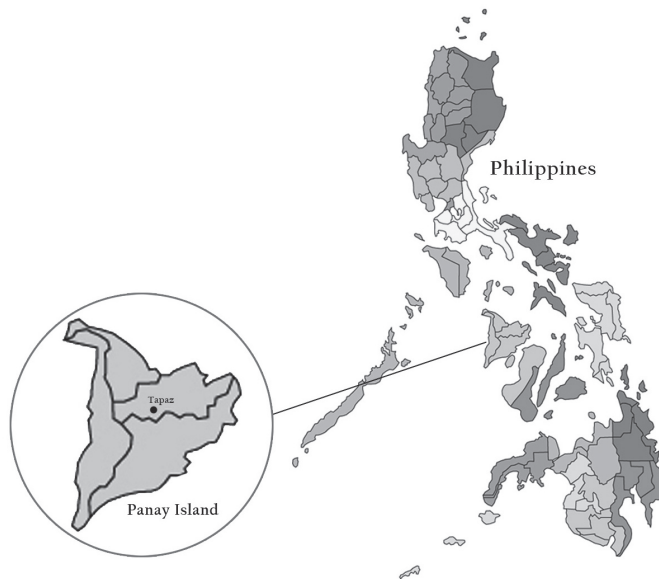
importance as a *paranublion* (heirloom) is shown in the value and care that the mountain people give it. It is a priced ancestral heritage bearing the name of a deceased ancestor – owner several generations back or of its peculiar sound when heard at a distance. It is used to announce important events like *hungaw* or *itib*, a traditional wedding officiated by elders before big *pangasi* or rice wine jar; also to announce rituals (e.g. *buruhisan* or ritual of transition or death). It summons people to assemble at the house of the owner who is a village leader and a respected man, a *buyong* (master); for only people with high status can own a gong. The use gongs in the epic days are similar today, and families with leaders have it. For truly the content of epics mirror the culture of yesterday and its surviving remnants today.

*Provenance.*

In all likelihood, the origin of gongs in Panay could be traced to Borneo Island or its adjacent places, if not, the nearby islands. These were carried to Panay by traders who travelled by boats – the *biday* or *balangay*. It could also be that the ancient Chinese merchants, the *sanglay* or *sangle*, traded with Panay coastal people, who, by historical circumstances were forced to move to the interior. The epic episodes mostly show a coastal setting and dexterity with sea travel using *bidays* or *balangays*. Scions of old chanters like National Living Treasure for Epic Literature, Federico “Tuohan” Caballero, mentions a *sanglay* as gong bearer. As such, a gong must have gotten to the interior through trade or leisure sea travel. The nearness of Panay to Borneo, and the contacts of people, as mentioned in Humadapnon and Balanakon epics, could be a good connection for gongs to reach Panay since smelting is not known in pre-colonial Philippines.

## Introduction

The presence of gongs as musical and ritual instruments in Luzon, Mindanao, Mindoro and Palawan is known to many music and dance researchers and enthusiasts. However, it was not reported as present in Panay, till the last decade.<sup>1</sup> Dr. Jose Maceda, however, cited that in 1521, Pigafetta, Magellan's scribe, made mention of the gong in a ritual in Cebu Island when they set foot in the Philippines in 1521.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps the rich presence of gongs in the other bigger islands stated above gave more attention to those places. It is also likely that intensive proselitization of the Agustinians in Cebu and Panay discouraged other natives from using them. In 1999, the use of gongs in Tapaz, Capiz, was mentioned in the author's article (Danyag, 1999); it was previously noted by the author in the texts of translated works (1994-2001) of the Panay epics and during her fieldwork in Tapaz when she would be welcomed by a *binanog* dance to the pealing of the gong. It is an important ritual and musical instrument of the epic people in the same manner that it is considered important by the Tapaz people (Panay Bukidnon) of Capiz. In the early 2000's, ethnomusicologist Christine Muyco cited it as a musical instrument in her dissertation. Past researchers who had visited Tapaz (e.g. Jocano, 1968) would not fail to notice it but it takes the eye of an ethnomusicologist to give it focus and prominence.



**Figure 1.** Map of Panay showing Tapaz, Panay Bukidnon territory, in relation to the Philippines.

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The author's anthropological interest is in the text of the *sugidanon*, the epics, which she had recorded and translated for over two decades. For many generations, *sugidanon* (epic chanting) used to be a favorite way of relating to children and to young men and women in the mountains of Tapaz, Capiz and also most likely in some other interior mountains of Iloilo, Antique and Aklan Panay. In the late 1960's, the introduction of Tapaz non-mountain people to modern sound technology (e.g. transistor radio and karaoke in the early 70's) gradually exposed the mountain people in Tapaz, Capiz to modern music. Sadly, the introduction of Christianity and formal education in the 70's also introduced other forms of music which gradually lessened listeners to epic chanting that by then was viewed by lowlanders as an inferior form of singing and/or storytelling. Good epic chanters were formerly *binukot* (kept- maidens), maidens jealously hidden from the eyes of men and commands a high bride gift. At an early age, they were exposed to epic chanting through storytelling, thus, they easily became good chanters. The excellent male chanters are also sons, grandsons or close blood relatives of kept maidens. Thus, in their later years, like the *binukot* chanters, they have also become good chanters because of constant and early exposure to epic chanting.

The epics of Panay are always mentioned as an important form of entertainment during traditional weddings and as night stories for children. This question therefore is posed: Why are gongs important to the life of the epic people? In this paper, the author is going to use textual analysis of selected epics of Panay. These epics, as previously mentioned have been recorded for more than 20 years. The recordings were done initially in its archaic language and translated through the years, first into contemporary Kinaray-a, then Hiligaynon, Filipino and last, into English. For purposes of this paper, the relevant portions related to the topic at hand will be shown in its archaic form and English translation only. Textual analysis is important in studying gong music tradition in the Philippines to show that gongs as musical instruments have several other important uses aside from forming parts of an ensemble. The textual analysis could lead other researchers to interesting ethnographic description which could be relevant for further study. Since the presence and the use of the gong in the Visayas has not been mentioned in the panoramic work of Dr. Jose Maceda, works thereafter serves as important contribution to the augmentation of previous studies in gong music tradition in the Philippines and Southeast Asia.

### The Epic Bearers and the *Sinuratan* (heirloom)

In the 1980s – 1990s, very few *binukot* chanters in Panay Island survived due to old age, sickness, malnutrition, starvation or a combination of these factors. Gone are the bearers of chants – bearers of ancestral memories. Fortunately, three sons of epic chanter Anggoran, a *binukot* (baptized as Preciousa Caballero) who died in 1994, are also good epic chanters. One became a GAMABA (Gawad Manlilikha ng Bayan) Awardee in 2000 in Epic Literature and another a recipient of the Indigenous Leadership Award in 2004.<sup>3</sup>

Gongs are *sinuratan* (heirlooms) often mentioned in the epic lines of the Panay epics. When there is a gathering or expected gathering of people, among Panay Bukidnon, the gong is pealed. As a very precious *sinuratan*, it is a much valued article of material culture, handed down from one *linukdo* (generation). Even if it is in the possession of one family, the gong is considered as belonging to several families or clans. It has a name which bears its characteristic sound. Tuohan identifies ten gongs in Tapaz, Capiz, each gong bearing a name to characterize it. To cite, the gong *Makahuraw-huraw* is compared to a strong, loud rain, which slowly softens down, hence “*nagahuraw-huraw*” (literally, “softening gradually”). The gong *Lamba*, reverberates, and is likened to the sound of a *lamba*, (a male deer) and, Danao was at one time used to contain scarce water. Other gongs are likewise named from their attributes: *Sungayan* (horned), *Aningalan* (echoing) and *Lumalakbay* (travelling). *Sungayan* was used during a festive *hungaw* (wedding celebration) in Barangay Garangan, in the borders of Calinog, Iloilo and Tapaz, Capiz last December 27, 2013

Gongs are also closely associated with the names of particular ancestors 5, 6 or even 7 generations back. When pealed, mountain people would know where the sound came from and the most probable reason why. The gong is also a status symbol, a mark of leadership, for one cannot call people to an assembly without credibility. It is also an invaluable percussion instrument used along with the *kadol* (drum) for *binanog* dancing when a *hungaw* is held. Today, however, most *hungaw* are no longer as festive as before and have been much simplified in food preparation and attire used. This is due to economic difficulties, especially the scarcity food. The need to produce marriage documents when looking for a job in the city has encouraged couples to have civil weddings instead. Nonetheless, along

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with the civil wedding, the *hungaw* is still performed in their houses and remains to be an important marriage institution.

### Gongs to Announce an Important Event

In the epic titled *Amburukay* (enchanted hermit woman), the beautiful Matan-ayon and her sister Suranggaon were sadly given away by Buyong/Datu Paiburong, their father, to Amburukay in return for his life for cutting down the sacred *buriraw nga kawayan* (yellow tube bamboo tree variety) where the *burugsak*, a priced bell-like gold object was tied. The *burugsak* was owned by the man-eating giant, Datu Makabagting who lives with Amburukay. The two children were adopted as daughters by Amburukay, made into *binukot* (kept maidens) and placed in a towerette of the cave where the two live. A *tuos* (a much valued object) however was pledged by the parents of Amburukay to her that, whoever gets the golden pubic hair of Amburukay, will marry her.

Meanwhile, Buyong Labaw Donggon (Abaw) lost the string of his *bidya* (a string instrument, similar to a *kudyapi*), and was informed that only the golden pubic hair of Amburukay would be a good replacement. Labaw Donggon ventures to look for Amburukay's house. With his *gahum* (power) he puts Amburukay to sleep and cuts her golden pubic hair. But Labaw Donggon could not escape from the *tuos* though. He is powerful and handsome but he is forced to marry the old, ugly Amburukay. "Malakingkahihya-an," a big shame, for on the day of the wedding all the beautiful *binukot* from other villages were there and were talking about the sad fate of Abaw. In the epic lines below, Amburukay invites Abaw's mother to peal the gong to the excitement of the old ugly Amburukay, the *muwa* (a monster woman) who had a handsome young man for a husband. She tells the mother of the young man:

...Hadikuno Anggoy  
Hindun ta dang bitayon  
Agong si Tawag Linaw  
Si Makaribong Banwa  
Si Makalyong Hanusan  
Si Makahunod-hunod  
Gahig balota't libanwa

...Come now Anggoy  
Let us hang  
The gong Tawag Linaw  
Makaribong Banwa  
Makalyong Hanusan  
Makahunod-hunod  
Let us announce to the village

<i>Himkaw it madinun-an</i>	Inform the whole world
<i>Pagkahangulang tawo</i>	The many people
<i>Pagkaraku nga alawon</i>	The multitude of men
<i>Hindun ta dang patingka</i>	There is a wedding rite
<i>Ada patalighuman</i>	There is a celebration
<i>Ibuyong Labaw Donggon</i>	For Buyong Labaw Donggon
<i>Kuontana dang Muwa</i>	Says the Muwa

The *karatong* (gong) serves as a news breaker. When it is pealed, the message is sent and is received right away by the whole village. It is received by the concerned people faster than today's cellphone. Whether one is at the *kaingin* (swidden farm) or at the *suba* (river) for fishing, the pealing is heard and the news/message is received immediately. This is described in the epic, *Amburukay*:

Kinaray-a (Archaic)	English
<i>...Danukdanukoy agong</i>	...The gong is struck
<i>Dupilalay karatong</i>	The <i>karatong</i> emits a sound
<i>Wara gani madugay</i>	Not a moment passed
<i>Wara himiripidki</i>	Not a minute delay
<i>Naka-ali-ali dun sa banwa</i>	The news reaches the land
<i>Kalibut sa dinun-an</i>	It is all over the world
<i>Kunina pa dang limog</i>	The forceful sound
<i>Ada pa dang sibagon</i>	The loud sound
<i>Isibagon ka agong</i>	The sound of the gong
<i>Limog ka karatong</i>	The voice of the powerful <i>karatong</i>
<i>Manganduhoy libanwa</i>	The villagers wondered
<i>Manganduhoy madinun-an</i>	The people were surprised
<i>Inmanu mang kabtanga?</i>	What is happening?
<i>Anong kahistoraha?</i>	What's the matter?
<i>Naghibalo la't libanwa</i>	Why is the village called?
<i>Himkaw it madinun-an</i>	The people of the land informed
<i>Anggoy si Daranu-on</i>	By Anggoy Daranu-on

On the day of the wedding, when all the gongs of the *dinun-an* (land or world; also groups of villages) were pealed to announce the wedding of Abaw to *Amburukay*, magically, the house of *Amburukay* and Abaw

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were brought together. But what a relief, because, when Abaw got inside Amburukay's house, two beautiful kept- maidens were seated near the huge *pangasi* (rice wine jars) to be wedded to him in a *hungaw*. In another epic, *Derikaryong Pada* (Gold Pendant), the same thing happened. Abaw, pledged in child marriage to Matan-ayon, was not yet ready for marriage as he still wants to enjoy bachelorhood. So Matang-ayon was wedded to another handsome man. All the gongs of the land were pealed to announce the event. On the actual day of the wedding, the gongs became musical instruments for *binanog* dancing along with other bamboo instruments.

### Gongs to Announce an Impending Dangerous Situation

In the epic *Derikaryong Pada* Matang-ayon, the woman wedded to Sinagnayan, was compelled to live with the latter against her wishes. But she and her would-have-been brother-in-law, the arbiter Humadapon, made a secret arrangement that he will get her from the house of Sinagnayan on an arranged day. Due to an impending danger anticipated by Sinagnayan's relatives, the house of Sinagnayan was doubly fenced with *talogtog* (log fence) and during the actual day of Humadapon's rescue of Matan-ayon, the gong *Makaribong Banwa* was pealed by Sinagnayan's relatives to announce an impending dangerous event needing help. But those who came to help Sinagnayan failed because Matan-ayon used her prowess to make Sinagnayan drowsy. Matang-ayon stealthily left for the seashore to join Humadapon who was waiting there. The big conflict ensued which was peacefully settled when Sinagnayan was married off instead to another beautiful sister of Matanayon.

Consider the previous wedding scene, when men from the family of Sinagnayan who came for the *hungaw*, were all armed and ready with their *kalasag* (shield) and *linaywan* (spears), just in case Humadapon makes trouble to stop the wedding. Meanwhile, the lovely *binukot* (kept maiden) trembles. Bulawanon, the mother of Matan-ayon, appeals to Humadapon not to make trouble. Bulawanon herself was in favor of the wedding of Sinagnayan to her *binukot* daughter; Humadapon, an arbiter, keeps a resentment for not being informed. Abaw still wants, to roam around, enjoy bachelorhood and would not consider marriage to Matan-ayon:



...Nahadlok may buntog  
 Nahadlok pay binukot  
 Hindun huring-huringon  
 I Uwang Bulawanon  
 Uyamu-an sa sigbong  
 Uyamu-an sa abaga  
 Buyong ako kaluy-i  
 Ako kalungayo  
 Idinmata kay lawas  
 Idinmata ko lay tubu-an  
 Bisan inmanu du lang pa-agan  
 Ano'y nasapgiranan  
 Hulog akong kapirdihan  
 Wara gid it katarungan  
 Kuon ni Bulawanon  
 Anggoy isuli ko ninyo hawa-i  
 Kuon ni Humadapnon

...The kept maiden is frightened  
 The beautiful maiden is afraid  
 There are whispers  
 Mother Bulawanon  
 Grasps her by the arms  
 Holds back her shoulder  
 Buyong, pity me  
 Have mercy on me  
 I will give my life  
 I will lay down my life  
 Whatever I'll go through  
 Whatever will happen  
 I am the loser  
 I have no right  
 Says Bulawanon  
 Anggoy stay away from me  
 Says Humadapnon

The wedding went on, but a few months later, when the agreed date to rescue Matan-ayon came, the gong was pealed by Sinagnayan's relatives to announce that an incident needing help is taking place. All the relatives of Sinagnayan rushed to the house of Sinagnayan fully-armed. Read a portion of the epic lines:

...Danuk danukay agong  
 Dupilay karatong  
 Wara mahimiripidki  
 Wara gani madugayi  
 Pagkahangulang tawo  
 Pagkarakong tawo  
 Panarunggan kano sa agong  
 Pamati sa karatong  
 Hindun dun da gamo libanwa  
 Maribok sa dinun-an  
 Iwanon taron lamang  
 Inuganos ka nino  
 Iningos ka bulalo

...The gong was struck  
 The karatong was pealed  
 It didn't take long  
 It didn't take a while  
 A multitude of men came  
 A throng of people came  
 Listen to the gong  
 Harken the sound of the karatong  
 A trouble is being announced  
 There's a big riot going on  
 What shall we do?  
 The noise of a throng of people  
 They are shouting

*Apaw kuno ay Buyong  
Hugiwan karu pagbugtaw  
Adak aw pagmukayaw  
Hugiwan ko rat bugtawan  
Halayan mo sa banwa  
Habtayan mo sa dinun-an  
Hadi parayong panaw  
Nalibut pa ragto  
Nahamulagpulangan  
Si Buyong Sinagnayan*

Oh Buyong  
Why don't you get up?  
Why don't you rise?  
You won't wake to see her  
Your wife in the village  
Your beloved in the land  
She has gone away  
He was startled  
He was astonished  
Buyong Sinagnayan

### Gongs as Important Ritual Instruments

In the last epic *Nagbuhis* (ritual of transfer), *Matan-ayon*, who is now an old woman, became very seriously ill and the reason was her failure to perform the *Nagbuhis*, a ritual/ceremony to hand over her *dalagangan* prowess to her beautiful daughter, *Nagmalitong Yawa*. In the said rite, the ritualist (*Matan-ayon*) will have to face and talk to her spirit guide/sponsor. This is shown in the following epic lines:

*...Duktat kabubunawon  
Anggoy mong Matan-ayon  
Si inmano may lingdon*

...She was struck with illness  
Your Anggoy Matan-ayon  
From whom shall we seek help?

*Sino malay balikdon  
Galimbangon ta't binuno  
Gapamahog ka tun-og  
Gatumbo gabusali  
Sa buhawi ka lawdon  
Sa bonbon ka layagon  
Hay dugay duraging tiempo  
Sa ka buhay-buhayan  
Hugiwan ka pangasandang  
Wara ka pangatubang  
Anggoy mong Matan-ayon  
Padagison sa lawdon  
Padulhog sa layagon  
Si Buyong Ginduluman*

From whom shall we get assistance?  
We will be soaked with mist  
We will be exposed to fog  
As we dance  
At the sealane  
At the sandy shoreline  
It's been a while  
A long length of time  
She has not faced them  
She has not talk to them  
Your Anggoy Matan-ayon  
He goes to the shore line  
He walks to the sealane  
Buyong Ginduluman

On the day of the *Buruhisan* rite, the whole village was getting ready for the ceremony. The gong, Tawag Linaw, was brought to the shoreline by the *iwhay* (slaves) together with the ritual food and paraphernalia. The *palaypay*, ritual structure made of bamboo and as tall as the beam of the bamboo house, which shows a *Buruhisan* rite is going on was constructed along the shore. Below are selected lines from the epic *Buruhisan*:

<i>...Hindin datu hakuton</i>	... There they carried
<i>Sa buhawi ka lawdon</i>	To the shoreline
<i>Sa bonbon ka layagon</i>	To the sea lane
<i>Kuon dun kuno ragto</i>	As it was said long ago
<i>Agong si Tawag Linaw</i>	Agong Tawag Linaw
<i>Si Makaribong Banwa</i>	Makaribong Banwa
<i>Si Makalyong Hanusan</i>	Makalyoy Hanusan
<i>Si Makahunod-hunod</i>	Makahunod-hunod
<i>Danuk-danukoy agong</i>	Strike the agong
<i>Dupikaloy karatong</i>	Peal the karatong
<i>Gatambala agongan</i>	They were beating the gong
<i>Duto gakarattungon</i>	They were peeling the karatong
<i>Wara bayawing sulaw</i>	It didn't take long
<i>Wara himiripidki</i>	It didn't take a long while
<i>Nagli-ali sa banwa</i>	It reverberated in the land
<i>Naglibot sa dinu-an</i>	It was heard around the world
<i>Isibagon ka agong</i>	The forceful sound of the gong

We can imagine Matan-ayon seated on the beach the whole evening drenched by the dew waiting for her *haraywon* or *saragadon* (spirit guide) to come and get inside her. A tall *palaypay*, a bamboo pole stood nearby as a banner to show that a big ritual is going on. Nearby is a tall open structure arranged with food offerings laid on it for the ancestral spirit beings. The ritualist goes up and down the stairs of the structure to offer food to the sky deities. Each time food was offered to the deities of the sky, *Laonsina* and *Sindang Muro*, the gongs were pealed for the deities to hear and receive their prayers. Only a gong could call the deities in the heaven, who in turn will bring the supplication down to the head deity of the lower world, *Luyong Kabig*.

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## Conclusion

The sound of gongs is of crucial importance in passing on non-verbal communication among epic people and their descendants, the Panay Bukidnon. Though the gong cannot give detailed information, unlike modern sound technology now, the kind of sound it produces and its social context supplies the needed details of information. An alarming situation needing help is played fast as though panicking and becomes intense; but a happy event such as a *hungaw* (traditional wedding) is melodious. Announcement of death or the ebbing of life has a quite a dull and long interval sound. Since there is a close kin relationship in the community, blood relatives and even those quite distantly related are aware of what is going on in the community: who are getting married, who are seriously ill and who are preparing for an important ceremony or big ritual. Also, a serious conflict which might blow up into an open clash and needs to be averted is known by every villager. The sounds of the gong, therefore, are read and interpreted in the context of village daily life.

Also, the role of the gong as a ritual instrument will lead serious scholars and researchers to a rich harvest of ethnographic data on pre-Hispanic Visayan worldview, their cosmogony or structure of the universe (e.g. layered or spiral universe), the spirit beings found in them, their nature, attributes and their relation to the earthly beings, or *lupan-on*, whose daily lives in search for subsistence goes beyond territorial boundaries and encroaches to the world of the unknown – the world of the spirits. Ritual communication therefore has to be performed for them by human beings, the *lupan-on*; and gongs are perceived by the Panay Bukidnon as the only instruments recognizable to the spirit beings living in the upper world. When important rituals, like *buruhisan*, are officiated, the goddess of the upper world (Laon Sina) receives the *lupan-on*'s message and sends it back down to the undersea world deity, Luyong Kabig. Since the epic people's lives revolve around the sea,<sup>4</sup> the use of the gong as a ritual device means balance and survival of the community life.

But where could be the origin of these gongs from Tapaz, Capiz? Since smelting is not known in pre-Hispanic Philippines, I venture to say that it could have come from Burnay or any place in Borneo or anywhere in Southeast Asia for it closely resembles their gongs. The elders or gong

owners in Tapaz could not say where their gongs came from. But a gong, in a museum in Malaysia I visited in 1996, came from Borneo and they closely resemble the embossed Tapaz gongs. Those in Jeradong Park in Burnay were also closely similar to those in Tapaz except that the former were large, purposely done for display, and made with finesse. Tuohan (Federico Caballero), Philippine GAMABA Awardee 2000 in Epic Literature, states their gongs were brought to their place by the *Sanglay* or *Sangley* (Chinese traders) and acquired by elders of the Panay Bukidnon most likely in a coastal trade. The nearness of Panay Island in Central Philippines to Borneo and Burnay makes sea travel faster and easier and it is reasonable to say, the ancient coastal trade between the Chinese traders and the central part of the Philippines (Visayas) and with other Southeast Asian countries must have made movements of these gongs between these places easy.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Ethnomusicologist, Christine MUYCO of the UP Diliman College of Music has written several articles about the presence of gongs in Tapaz and Calinog where binanog dance is often performed during *hungaw* (a wedding rituals) and in welcoming guests from the lowland. Refer to the articles and writings of Christine MUYCO.

<sup>2</sup> (cited by Maceda in Blair and Robertson, 1909; 33, pp. 149-151).

<sup>3</sup> They were the chanters shown in the CD which accompanied this presentation. The woman in the film is Lucing, the wife of a GAMABA Awardee (Tuohan); she is a gong pealer and also a maker of bamboo instruments (e.g. *tulali*, *tikumbu* and *subing*).

<sup>4</sup> I had theorized in my paper "Sea Episodes in the Sugidanon and the Boat Building Tradition in Central Panay, Philippines" (1999: 25-26)

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## Epic Chanters

- Federico Caballero (Tuohan), 79, resident of Garangan, Calinog, Iloilo
- Leopoldo Caballero (Paino), 68, resident of Garangan, Calinog, Iloilo
- Romulo Caballero (Amang Baoy), 67, resident of Garangan, Calinog, Iloilo
- Tarsila Caballero (Tarsing), 65, resident of Garangan, Calinog, Iloilo

*\*Delivered with filmed video footage at a Conference during the 1st International Gong and Bamboo Festival held at Dipolog City, Zamboanga, Philippines.*