

## **A Structural Analysis of Religious Legends about an Iconic Image in the Philippines**

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### Abstract

The study aimed to conduct a structural analysis of seven legends surrounding an iconic image in the Philippines, the *Sto. Niño de Cebu*. The corpora used for the study were limited to the legends on healing people's illnesses through the *Sto. Niño*'s miraculous interventions. Specifically, this study identified the binary oppositions found in the legends, derived syntagmatic sequences or mythemes and their variations from the legends, determined the central message of each legend based on the mythemes, and related each legend to one another. This qualitative study adopted the procedures used by Gray (1978) in "Structural Analysis of Folktales: Techniques and Methodology." The study found that each legend has its binary opposition/s and central message textually, and the mythemes were expressed in different details and bundles. Intertextually, such binary opposition sickness vs. healing, may be linked with the mythemes and central messages. The researcher recommends that future researchers study the other legends about the *Sto. Niño* focused on other themes to validate if the mythemes found in this study may apply or if a new set of mythemes may surface. It is also highly recommended that the *Sto. Niño* legends are included in the reading list or required readings in English and Philippine Literature classes. For the study's academic implications, the study of religious legends, particularly the *Sto. Niño* legends as texts for critical analysis to apply Literary Criticism theories may be integrated into the basic and higher education curricula.

*Keywords:* binary oppositions, Catholicism, mythemes, *Sto. Niño*, structural analysis

At the height of the pandemic in April 2021, the Catholic Church started the year-long celebration of the 500 years of Christianity in the Philippines. With the theme, “Gifted to Give” the celebration of the different events was spearheaded by the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines (CBCP). Part of remembering Filipino Christianity is the arrival of the Spaniards in Cebu with their leader, Ferdinand Magellan offering the Holy Image of the Child Jesus Christ or the Sto. Niño as a token of friendship to Raha Amihan (Queen Juana), wife of Rajah Humabon Based on a survey on the most revered figures of the Filipino Catholics among the suffering Christ, the Sto. Niño, and the Sacred Heart, the Sto. Niño is the unique image that links the nation’s birth with Christianity’s establishment, as Bautista (2021) articulated in his paper. Indeed, the Sto. Niño has been part of the local church for almost 500 years of Christianity, with the devotion to the image as a symbolism of the foundation of Christianity in the Philippines.

The devotion to the Sto. Niño can be considered part of every Filipino’s everyday Catholicism. According to Cornelio (2014), everyday Catholicism “covers a wide range of religious experiences that include folk beliefs in local spirits and healing practices, crucifixion rituals, feasts dedicated to saints, Marian piety, and even charismatic Christianity.” As a matter of fact, almost every local church in the Philippines has the image of the Sto. Niño either as the patron saint or as one of the saints venerated by people. In some households, the Sto. Niño or Holy Child is usually dressed according to the profession of one of the dwellers of the house. Likewise, in private cars or public utility jeepneys, there is a small altar where the image of the Sto. Niño is displayed.

Guerrero (2016) quoted National Artist for Literature, Nick Joaquin, who stated that the Santo Niño of Cebu “is believed to have been carved in Flanders in the 15th century and was presented the Queen of Cebu when she turned Christian.” The TriValley Sto. Niño Prayer Group website also quotes Nick Joaquin “during that strange interlude, the wondrous miracle happened: we accepted the Santo Niño as part of our land, part of our culture, part of our history. During those 44 years when the Cross had vanished from our land, the Santo Niño kept us faithful to him.”

The Sto. Niño is known for being miraculous. One pious legend of the Sto. Niño was recently narrated by Modequillo, (2017) who recalled that many men were imprisoned in Atocha in Madrid because of their faith. Further, to make the lives of the prisoners miserable, the prison steward ordered to have only children 12 years old and below to bring food to their male family members. The families with no children of the prescribed age suffered from hunger. The town’s women invoked the help of the Virgin of Atocha for their male family members to be fed. The children who fed their families said they saw an unfamiliar young boy who visited the hapless prisoners without children who could bring them food. The children recounted that the gourd the little young boy carried never ran empty, and there was always plenty of bread in his basket. The strange young boy who brought food to the prisoners came at night while the guards were sleeping, and he smiled at those who were awake. The townspeople believed that the young boy was the Sto. Niño.

In another anecdote, Lachica (2021) narrated an account about the daughter of the Lim family, who had a heart problem and was scheduled for operation. They went to the Basilica Minore del Santo Niño two days before the operation as part of their devotion and to ask for the Holy Child's intervention. They were surprised that after the pre-operation tests, the doctor told the family that the hole in the heart of their youngest daughter was closed.

Sala-Boza (2008) classified the numerous accounts of Sto. Niño miracles as medical, non-medical, and other manifestations of the image in the legends. Medical miracles included medical cures and granting of children. Non-medical miracles were granting rain, special protection, domestic peace, economic assistance, finding lost people or objects, caution, conversion, and retribution. Other manifestations of the image included voyages and miraculous returns to Cebu, the wandering Sto. Niño, the black Sto. Niño and its supernatural manifestations.

As folk narratives, myths and legends are losing popularity among educators and students; thus, they are considered the most understudied component or area of literature. There is a course on Greek Mythology in the curriculum of students who want to become teachers of English in the Philippines. However, there is no course provided on Filipino or Philippine Mythology in the curriculum.

Damiana Eugenio (1992), the mother of Philippine Folklore, classified legends as etiological and non-etiological. Etiological or the explanatory type of legends refers to the origin of things and places and how they got their names. Non-etiological or non-explanatory legends are heroic/historical, religious, supernatural beings, and miscellaneous. Likewise, in her handbook on Philippine folklore, Lopez (2006) outlined the classification of Philippine folklore. Folk narratives include legends, myths, folk epics, genealogical tales, and folktales. Legends are classified as religious and secular. Religious legends are Christian legends about the miracles of God and the saints, miraculous images, revelations as blessings, and biblical sources.

Few studies were conducted on religious legends. Guzman (2013) did a textual analysis of Kalinga legends and myths and clustered them according to thought, emotion, behavior, and folkways. The analysis made by Guzman (2013), revealed that faith belonged to one of the dominant thoughts of the Kalingas as revealed from their myths and legends. In addition, Austria (2005) claimed that oral traditions such as religious legends incorporate details of the environment where they originated. The legends, which served as "photographs" of the everyday life of people in Santa Cruz de Malabon, reflected the social conditions of the 19th century Tagalog province. The author found four salient features of early 19th century Sta. Cruz de Malabon: (1). Santa Cruz de Malabon had a wide-geo economic disparity (2). The 19th-century upheld a rigid-patron client relationship as a value (3). The search for water was an integral part of the life of people, and (4). The devotion of people is attuned to their mentality.

### **Aim of the Study**

Generally, this research undertaking is a literary analysis that aims to apply the literary theory of Structuralism in the select Sto. Niño de Cebu religious legends. The seven Sto. Niño de Cebu legends were analyzed based on the two layers of content analysis: the textual and the intertextual levels. Specifically, the study identifies the binary oppositions found in the legends about Santo Nino de Cebu, breaks down each legend into syntagmatic sequences or mythemes, finds each legend's message based on the mythemes and relates each legend to one another.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study has significant implications in the fields of narratology, research, and school curriculum and in the development of students' critical thinking skills and literary appreciation. The study contributes to Philippine narratology since the structural analysis may help the practitioners of the discipline to see how the binary oppositions found in the legends of Sto. Niño de Cebu, one of the favorite miraculous icons in the Philippines, maybe linked with the mythemes and the individual message.

Conducting a structural analysis allows researchers to apply a literary theory using a critical approach in local literary texts. Future researchers may replicate the study by using other texts about the Sto. Niño or other religious legends but still applying the principles of Structuralism.

As folk narratives, myths and legends are losing popularity among educators and students; thus, they are considered the most understudied component or area of literature. This study may serve as additional readings and its results may serve as lessons for inclusion in the English curriculum to enhance understanding of the Filipino local culture. Likewise, this study may offer an enhancement in the curriculum by including Philippine Mythology in the course Mythology and Folklore.

Reading and understanding literary texts based on a particular lens is a way of developing students' critical thinking skills and, at the same, enhancing their appreciation of the local culture that is in line with the foundation of Christianity in the Philippines. By recognizing the structures of Sto. Niño legends of Cebu and understanding the universal truths behind these structures, students may appreciate the beauty of language engraved in local literature and inspire them to be proud of their local traditions expressed in literary texts.

### **Literature and Sources Review**

The Sto. Niño has inspired social and political movements. For instance, Bautista (2006) studied the politics of "use" and "misuse" of religious iconography during popular uprisings in the Philippines and discussed how "religious icons, specifically, the Santo Niño and Our Lady of Epifanio de los Santos Avenue (EDSA), were co-opted for specific political and social agendas." He mentioned the Tres de Abril revolution in Cebu as a "religiously inspired uprising" with divine backing from the Sto. Niño. The revolution was considered a successful

political upheaval and a victory of folk Catholicism with the belief of the Sto. Niño's intercession in the success of the revolution.

Ati-Atihan, a festival in honor of the Sto. Niño was studied by a few researchers. Coldero, N. et al. (2020) analyzed and interpreted the Ati-Atihan Festival of Kalibo, Aklan as a literary event applying semiotics and narratology. The authors concluded that the various signs in the Ati-Atihan Festival were classified as iconic, indexical, and symbolic. Iconic signs included the Sto. Nino, the devotees, aetas, dancers, and spectators. Indexical signs were the street dancing known as "sadsad," paepak, where the body of a sick person is rubbed with the image of the Sto. Nino and the procession. Moreover, among the symbolic signs were the costume, painting, devotion, or vow known as panada, sound of the drums, time of the day, and mass among others. Each sign has denotative and connotative meanings and a sub-theme. The feast of the Sto. Niño, which transformed the previous Ati-Atihan Festival, has shown the merging of the past and the present. The completion of the celebration is the celebrants entering the church to kiss the wooden image of the Sto. Niño. They will have the "peapak," defined as having their back be massaged with the Sto. Niño. Their willingness to engage with this gesture shows their belief that the "peapak" heals their body and spirit.

In his study, Mujal R. (2020) elaborated on the relationship between the believers' faith to the Sto. Niño and the healing for their health condition through the practice of the "pahilot" or "peapak." The ritual is done by rubbing the image of the Sto. Niño in the body and pressing the small hand statues. The faithful believe that the Holy Child Jesus will continue to bless them, and they will be relieved of their fatigue during their participation in the festival. Data were gathered through oral history and validated by library research. The study revealed that the Pahilot or Peapak, a healing ritual observed during the Ati-atihan in Aklan, "is an essential notion" that will remain as the traditional practice of the Aklanon people because of its deep religious significance.

In the study of religious legends surrounding the Sto. Niño de Cebu, faith remains an overarching theme. For instance, Brion, M. et al. (2018) studied the testimonies of the devotees of the Sto. Niño de Cebu through interviews and thematic analysis. From the narratives of the devotees, the researchers extrapolated the following themes on faith: (1) answered prayer, (2) miracles, (3) sacrifices, (4) intimate personal obligation, (5) adversaries, and (6) tradition. Based on the multiple perspectives of faith deduced from the study, the authors concluded that the faith of the Cebuanos, though criticized by other religious nominations, would remain strong and undying.

Another study about the faith of the Cebuanos to the Sto. Niño is through the Fluvial Parade, which is a part of the Sinulog Festival, was conducted by Ibones, N. et al. (2016). Through a phenomenological type of qualitative research, the study delved into the lived experiences of the devotees. Using field notes, journal records, interview transcripts, observations, and storytelling, the researchers gathered data from the five elderly respondents aged 60 and above who have witnessed the parade for at least two years. One important finding of the study was when the participants emphasized the significance of the Fluvial Parade as being a part of their

faith and tradition. They witnessed and participated in the event to express their gratitude to the Holy Child Jesus Christ for the abundant blessings such as good health and many opportunities that come into their lives. The Fluvial parade will remain a significant celebration to the devotees of the Senor Sto, Niño. The celebration manifests the devotion to the Child Jesus Christ, which shows the Cebuano's unconditional faith.

The aforementioned studies showed that faith in answered prayers and faith in miracles were the overarching themes in the religious legends about the Sto. Niño de Cebu. The difference between this study and the reviewed studies is that the former is a literary criticism employing the theory of Structuralism. The latter is more participatory and ethnographic research involving human participants who were devotees narrating their discourses on the miracles of the Sto. Niño de Cebu. This study will fill a research gap because much has been studied about the miracles of the Sto. Niño de Cebu from the perspectives of participatory research, but very little was done on the textual analysis applying a literary theory on religious legends about the Sto. Niño de Cebu.

## **Materials and Methods**

### **Structuralism as Literary Theory**

This study applies Structuralism, which is one of the literary theories employed when doing literary criticism. As a theory of literature, Structuralism has been viewed from different perspectives. Some viewed that, in structuralist reading, the author is dead, and the reader is insignificant, while for other followers of the theory, a literary text can be analyzed and interpreted as an autonomous structure, that is, the text is not married to its context. However, for Saussure and his followers as cited by Sanusi (2012), “the text shall be analyzed and interpreted as part of a larger structure.” The larger structure, which determines the worth of a literary text, maybe a particular genre, a range of intertextual connections, a model of a universal narrative structure, or recurrent patterns.

Structuralism implies that elements of human culture must be understood in their relationship to a broader system. It means that the text is more of a product of culture; and in turn, it creates the culture. Since myths and legends mirror the culture of people, they are potential materials to apply Structuralism.

According to Mambrol (2016), Claude Levi-Strauss applied the structuralist outlook to mythology through a binary as a useful approach in the analysis of myths. Since myths are part of a country's culture, the binary oppositions like high/low, inside/outside, and life/death may exist in mythology as a literary form.

As contextualized in this literary study, which systematically applies the Theory of Structuralism, how the binary oppositions operated in the texts, which are the religious legends, and how the mythemes revealed patterns in the legends when related to other legends of the same theme were done. Thus, the study adheres to the principle of Structuralism that a text is

not an autonomous structure because it belongs to a larger structure. In this study, the larger structure are the intertextual connections expressed through the binaries, mythemes, and messages of the legends.

## **Research Methods**

This study used the qualitative type of literary analysis, which is the process of analyzing a literary piece or several literary pieces textually, intertextually, and even contextually. Specifically, to show textual unity and coherence of the seven legends of Sto. Niño of Cebu, a textual analysis was done to identify the binary oppositions present in them, break down each legend into syntagmatic sequences or mythemes, and find the individual message of each legend based on the mytheme. To relate the structure of each legend to one another, an intertextual analysis was done wherein recurrent patterns are deciphered.

According to Lopez (2006), structural analysis applies to all folklore genres. As a research method, Structuralism is a type of textual research used by literary critics to interpret and analyze literature, which focuses on contrasting ideas or elements of structure and attempts to show how they relate to the whole or larger structure in the forms of a particular genre, a range of intertextual connections, a method of universal narrative structure, or recurrent patterns. This study adopted the following four procedures advanced by Gray (1978), “Structural Analysis of Folktales: Techniques and Methodology”: (1) A systematic reading of the selected legends to list all the binary oppositions. Binary oppositions may occur when two poles for example, night/day and dry/wet, are presented in the same subject. However, in some cases, the opposites do not have to be completely opposed in all traits, but only in one or two important attributes like rich/poor or kindness/greediness. Binary operations are the universal binding factors related to each myth; (2). Find mythemes by breaking down each legend into the shortest possible sentences. (3). Analyze each legend by finding the individual message based on the mythemes, and (4). Link or relate each of the legends intertextually based on the binary oppositions, mythemes, and messages.

## **Sources of Data**

In this study, the sources of data came from the book “The Legends of Sto. Niño de Cebu,” written by Enrique de la Calzada. The book is a historical anthology of folk stories translated into English by Martin Abellana in 1965. It covers the origin and legends about the small wooden image of the Child Jesus that was given as a gift by Ferdinand Magellan to the King and Queen of Banawa in the Central Philippines in 1521 when he landed with the Spanish expedition. The English translation of the anthology contains two parts: the historical background and the legends. There are about 37 stories collected as legends of the Sto. Niño. The 37 legends are narratives of local accounts dealing with the miraculous interventions of the Sto. Niño.

To gather relevant data for the study, the researcher scrutinized the 37 Sto. Niño legends about the Sto. Niño of Cebu from the source. After scrutinizing the Sto. Niño de Cebu religious



legends, the corpora, or the texts were focused only on the theme of the legends related to how people were cured and saved from sicknesses and plagues through the Sto Nino de Cebu interventions. By focusing on the specific theme based on the representative texts, the textual and intertextual analysis became more systematic since the identification of binary oppositions, mythemes and messages was centered only on an overarching theme.

### Scope and Limitations of the Study

The inclusion criterion used for the textual analysis in this study was on the theme of the legends of the Sto. Niño de Cebu that revolved on the miraculous interventions that saved people from plagues and cured their sicknesses; thus, from the 37 legends, the landmark texts were reduced to seven (7) religious legends of the Sto. Nino de Cebu. The study did not intend to reveal a distortion of historical facts in the published religious legends. Likewise, the researcher recognized the miracles of the Sto. Niño de Cebu published in the book were purely for literary analysis, and the veracity of the miracles is already beyond the purview of this study. The inadequacy of the study was in the absence of sociological analysis since no fieldwork was applied or employed in conducting the study. As for the limitation of the literary theory used in this study, Structuralism is confined only to the recurrence of patterns within the same genre of legends that occurs in the same source.

Table 1 outlines the Sto. Niño legends used for the study and indicated the pages where the texts are found in the book “The Legends of Sto. Niño de Cebu.” (de la Calzada, 1965)

**Table 1**

*The Legends Analyzed*

<b><i>Sto. Niño Legend</i></b>	<b>Pages</b>
1. The Case of the Poisoned Family	18-19
2. How the Epidemic of Children’s Disease was Stopped	20-21
3. The First Procession of the Image of the Holy Child	25-26
4. When the Mad Dogs Ruled the Kingdom	32-33
5. The Mysterious Boy	41-42
6. The Cholera Epidemic of 1883	59-61
7. The Baybay, Leyte Mystery	79-81

### Results and Discussion

This section of the study presents tables 2, 3, and 4 that depict binary oppositions, mythemes and their variations in the legends, and the message deduced from each legend.

**Table 2***The Binary Oppositions*

<b><i>Sto. Niño Legend</i></b>	<b>Binary Oppositions</b>
1. The Case of the Poisoned Family	Sickness vs. healing Prayer vs. ritual Superiority vs inferiority
2. How the Epidemic of Children’s Disease was Stopped	Sickness vs. healing Simplicity vs complexity
3. The First Procession of the Image of the Holy Child	Sickness vs. healing Tradition vs nature
4. When the Mad Dogs Ruled the Kingdom	Sickness vs. healing Good vs evil
5. The Mysterious Boy	Sickness vs. healing Superiority vs inferiority
6. The Cholera Epidemic of 1883	Sickness vs. healing Prayer vs ritual
7. The Baybay, Leyte Mystery	Sickness vs. healing Negligence vs fulfillment Truth vs falsity

The binary opposition sickness versus healing operates in all the seven legends. Sickness includes poisoning of family members, epidemic of children’s disease, people bitten by mad dogs, cholera that caused the death of people everywhere, strange sickness that led to simultaneous death, sickness because of the inclement weather, and peculiar sickness of a person (Otik). The *Sto. Niño* performed miracles as a child dealing with people, and a ritual dedicated to Him healed the different kinds of sickness and epidemics.

Prayer versus ritual, superiority vs. inferiority, and simplicity/grand vs. complexity/complex are the next dominant binary oppositions in all the seven legends about the *Sto. Niño de Cebu*. In the legend, “*The Case of the Poisoned Family*,” the opposing binary, prayer versus ritual, is evident in the instances when King Humabon told the Amoy “to say a prayer for the dead.” Simultaneously, Queen Juana approached “each member of the poisoned family, letting the feet of the image touch the forehead of each.” Likewise, the binary opposition, prayer vs. ritual, is manifested in the legend “*The Cholera Epidemic of 1883*,” when “auroras” were held in places where many people were dying. During the procession, the women who sang the gozos of Santo Nino Jesus alternately recited the Litania Mayor.

King Humabon ruled the kingdom, and he was the one who directed and led the actions of people; thus, the existence of the binary opposition superiority vs. inferiority in the legends “*The Case of the Poisoned Family*” and “*The Mysterious Boy*.” When King Humabon learned about the case of the poisoned family, “he ordered that all members of the poisoned family be brought to the square.” The King’s intention for such command was for the people to see the consequence of eating poisonous fish and teach them a lesson. The people willingly obeyed

the King: “A great crowd gathered around the family who was lying flat on three lantay (bamboo beds).” In the legend “*The Mysterious Boy*,” the wise men decided to sacrifice the innocent boy to cure the strange sickness that broke out in the kingdom. The boy’s playmates were against the King’s order: “But it was the command of the King. The King’s command should be followed and obeyed.” In another instance, while the decision was not yet made about the fate of the mysterious boy, “the King commanded that the boy should meanwhile be put in prison. It took a long time to make a final decision.” The different scenarios showed the power of King Humabon, thus satisfying the binary, superiority vs. inferiority.

The life of the Cebuanos during the nineteenth century could either be simple or grand. However, when the epidemic struck the land, the simplicity of life turned into complexity. Two legends on the epidemic, “*How the Epidemic of Children’s Disease was Stopped*” and “*The Cholera Epidemic of 1883*,” exhibited the simplicity-complexity and grand-complex binary oppositions. In the legend “*How the Epidemic of Children’s Disease was Stopped*”; it was stated that “the people who lead a simple life in the Kingdom of King Humabon were happy, but a time came when there was a foreboding gloom over the whole kingdom.” The happiness turned into sadness when an epidemic on children happened, and the remedy seemed out of hand because the quack doctors could not control the disease.

In another legend on the epidemic, “*The Cholera Epidemic of 1883*,” the luxurious life of people is demonstrated in the following words and phrases: “singing, laughter, afternoon promenade of the rich and the high government officials; they road in their *caruaje*.” A gloom fell over the whole city and the outlying barrios: “No longer could the people be heard singing. Laughter became as rare as the proverbial dodo. The tolling of the church bells added to the dreariness and the gloom of the city and the barrios. The afternoon promenade of the rich and the high government officials wherein they road in their *caruaje* stops. The markets, the stores, were closed. The schools were closed. Desolation crept over the land.”

The legend “*The Baybay, Leyte Mystery*” offers two related binary oppositions: negligence-fulfillment and truth-falsity. Amazed by the merrymaking they experienced when they went to Cebu, the young couple, Pitong and Bini, forgot to get a cutting of Magellan’s cross, which would cure the sickness of Otik. To fulfill the promise, even if it is not true, they resorted to the sailor’s advice to cut from any piece of wood and give it to Otik. When the couple reached Baybay, they went to the house of Otik to give him the fake cutting from a piece of wood. Otik greeted them and told them that a “chubby boy with curly hair who wore a red suit” gave him the cutting from Magellan’s cross. Pitong admitted that he did not send a boy and what they brought was not from Magellan’s cross. Otik was perplexed about who sent the boy and who the boy was. Nobody could answer the question, but the parish priest told Otik that the boy who gave him the cutting from Magellan’s cross was the Holy Child. Otik was cured of his strange sickness, and Pitong and Bini were gifted with a healthy baby boy.

A mytheme is a generic unit of narrative structure from which myths and legends are constructed. This study banks on Levi-Strauss’s notions of mytheme to reduce each legend into its smallest component parts. Table 3 presents the mythemes derived from the seven legends

about the Sto. Niño de Cebu. Also found in the table are the details in the legend based on the mytheme or the mytheme variations.

**Table 3**

*Mythemes and their Variations in the Legends*

Legend	Mytheme	Mytheme Variations
1. The Case of the Poisoned Family	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Tragedy/sickness disrupts the life of people or certain individuals.</li> <li>2. Solutions are offered to end/mitigate the tragedy/sickness.</li> <li>3. The <i>Sto. Niño</i> appears/intervenes in the form or image of a child.</li> <li>4. The tragedy is solved/The sickness disappears.</li> <li>5. The people attribute the miracles to the <i>Sto. Niño</i>.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. A family in Pansil ate a poisonous fish.</li> <li>2. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. The Amoy mumbled the prayer.</li> <li>b. Queen Juana let the feet of the image of the Holy Child touch the forehead of each poisoned family member.</li> </ol> </li> <li>3.</li> <li>4. The poisoned family members opened their eyes and stood up as if nothing had happened to them.</li> <li>5. The onlookers were surprised to witness a miracle.</li> </ol>
2. How the Epidemic of Children's Disease was Stopped	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Tragedy/sickness disrupts the life of people or certain individuals.</li> <li>2. Solutions are offered to end/mitigate the tragedy/sickness.</li> <li>3. The <i>Sto. Niño</i> appears in the form or mage of a child.</li> <li>4. The tragedy is solved/The sickness disappears.</li> <li>5. The people attribute the miracles to the <i>Sto. Niño</i>.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. An epidemic of children's disease broke out that made everybody sad. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. The quack doctors cannot control the epidemic.</li> <li>b. Queen Juana brought the sick children to the room where the image of the Holy Child was there.</li> </ol> </li> <li>3.</li> <li>4. The children slept soundly and asked for food when they woke up.</li> <li>5. The grateful parents who witnessed the miracle shouted with joy.</li> </ol>
4. When the Mad Dogs Ruled the Kingdom	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Tragedy/sickness disrupts the life of</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The dogs in Banawa, the Kingdom of Humabon, suddenly</li> </ol>

- |                                 |  |   |
|---------------------------------|--|---|
|                                 | <p>people or certain individuals.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2. Solutions are provided to end/mitigate the tragedy/sickness.</li> <li>3. The <i>Sto. Niño</i> appears in the form/image of a child.</li> <li>4. The tragedy is solved. /The sickness disappears.</li> <li>5. The people attribute the miracles to the <i>Sto. Niño</i></li> </ol>                                      | <p>became fierce that they attacked everyone, even those in their houses.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2. King Humabon organized brigades fully equipped with weapons.</li> <li>3. A small boy who seemed unafraid of mad dogs appeared during the desperate situation.</li> <li>4. The small boy disappeared, and a giant white dog appeared, then proceeded to the palace and lapped with its tongue the wound of everyone. Everyone was healed.</li> <li>5. The people believed that the little boy who appeared at the palace's doorway was the <i>Sto. Niño</i>. They were free from fear and terror.</li> </ol> |
| 5. The Cholera Epidemic of 1883 | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Tragedy disrupts the life of people or certain individuals.</li> <li>2. Solutions are provided to end/mitigate the tragedy.</li> <li>3. The <i>Sto. Niño</i> appears/intervenes in the form/image of a child.</li> <li>4. The tragedy is solved. /The sickness disappears.</li> <li>5. The people attribute the miracles to the <i>Sto. Niño</i>.</li> </ol> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. In September-November 1883, the worst cholera epidemic hit Cebu.</li> <li>2. The government with its soldiers and employees, the church with its priests, and a handful of doctors united to curb the pandemic.</li> <li>3.</li> <li>4. The dreaded disease disappeared after the typhoon.</li> <li>5. The grateful Cebuanos who attended the mass of Accion de Gracia attributed their</li> </ol>  |

		deliverance to the Holy Child.
6. The Mysterious Boy	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Tragedy disrupts the life of people or certain individuals.</li> <li>2. Solutions are provided to end/mitigate the tragedy.</li> <li>3. The <i>Sto. Niño</i> appears/intervenies in the form or mage of a child.</li> <li>4. The tragedy is solved. /The sickness disappears.</li> <li>5. The people attribute the miracles to the <i>Sto. Niño</i>.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. A strange sickness believed to be caused by people's sins broke out in the kingdom.</li> <li>2. With the king's consent, the wise men decided that a child should be sacrificed.</li> <li>3. They decided to sacrifice a boy with an unknown residence.</li> <li>4. When the king decided to set the boy free, the sick people became healthy again.</li> <li>5. The crowd, knowing who the boy was, went in a group to the altar of the palace, knelt and gave thanks.</li> </ol>
7. The First Procession of the Image of the Holy Child	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Tragedy/sickness disrupts the life of people or certain individuals.</li> <li>2. Solutions are provided to end/mitigate the tragedy.</li> <li>3. The <i>Sto. Niño</i> appears/intervenies in the form or image of a child.</li> <li>4. The tragedy is solved.</li> <li>5. The people attribute the miracles to the <i>Sto. Niño</i>.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The inclement weather made the people sick.</li> <li>2. Queen Juana took the Image of the Holy Child from the altar. She went around the palace to touch the heads of the sick with the feet of the Image.</li> <li>3.</li> <li>4. The sick people were cured.</li> <li>5. Thanksgiving happened on schedule.</li> </ol>
7. The Baybay, Leyte Mystery	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Tragedy/sickness disrupts the life of people or certain individuals.</li> <li>2. Solutions are provided to end/mitigate the tragedy.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Otik, the husband of Ilang (the old couple), got a peculiar sickness where his joints were weak so that</li> </ol>

3. The *Sto. Niño* appears/intervenes in the form/image of a child.
  4. The tragedy/sickness is solved.
  5. The people attribute the miracles to the *Sto. Niño*.
2. Pitong, the husband of Bini (the young couple), thought of going to Cebu to dance in the Sinulog and cut a piece of wood from Magellan's cross to be given to Otik.
  3. Otik greeted them and thanked a "chubby boy with curly hair who wore a red suit" to give him the cutting from Magellan's cross.
  4. Otik was cured of his strange sickness, and Pitong and Bini were gifted with a healthy baby boy.
  5. Nobody could answer the question, but the parish priest told Otik that the boy who gave him the cutting from Magellan's cross was the Holy Child.

For the first mytheme, "A tragedy/sickness disrupts the life of people or certain individuals," the seven legends yielded tragedies such as epidemics and different kinds of sickness experienced by a group of people, families, and individuals.

The second mytheme, "Solutions are provided to end/mitigate the tragedy," the solutions are in the forms of prayers, rituals, sacrifices, traditional practices, and brigades. The government, the church, and a handful of doctors worked together to curb the problems.

The third mytheme, "The *Sto. Niño* appears/intervenes in the form/image of a child," is explicit in the three legends: "*When the Mad Dogs Ruled the Kingdom*," "*The Mysterious Boy*," and

the “*Baybay Leyte Mystery*.” The boy who appeared unafraid of the mad dogs, the mysterious boy who was imprisoned, and the chubby boy with curly hair who wore a red suit” were all representations of the Holy Child who performed miracles to cure the sickness of people.

For the other legends, there was no appearance of the *Sto. Niño*. However, his intervention was mostly in rituals performed by Queen Juana. She put the feet of the image of the Holy Child on the forehead of the sick or brought the sick children and left them lying to the room where the image of the Holy Child was there.

The fourth mytheme, “The tragedy/sickness is solved/cured,” is bundled in different details: recovery of the sick people as if no serious illness happened to them, a couple gifted with a child, and disappearance of the dreaded disease after a destructive typhoon.

The final mytheme found after analyzing the legends is “The people attribute the miracles to the *Sto. Niño*.” The attributions were through shouting with joy, attending mass, kneeling in front of the altar, and giving thanks.

Table 4 exhibits the central message of the seven legends about the *Sto. Niño*. The message shows the *Sto. Niño*’s miraculous interventions in sicknesses and epidemics experienced by a group of people, family members, and individuals. Three of the legends, “*The Case of the Poisoned Family*,” “*How the Epidemic of Children’s Disease was Stopped*,” *The “First Procession of the Image of the Holy Child”* featured the presence of Queen Juana rendering the ritual of putting the image on the forehead of the sick people. In the legends “*When the Mad Dogs Ruled the Kingdom*,” “*The Mysterious Boy*,” “*The Baybay, Leyte Mystery*,” the *Sto. Niño* appeared as a little boy dealing with people yet performing extraordinary things.

**Table 4**

*The Legends and their Messages*

<b>Legend</b>	<b>Message</b>
1. The Case of the Poisoned Family	The <i>Sto. Niño</i> cured the poisoned family when Queen Juana let the feet of the image touch each one of them.
2. How the Epidemic of Children’s Disease was Stopped	The sick children were healed when Queen Juana left them in the room where the image of the Holy Child was.
3. The First Procession of the Image of the Holy Child	The sick people could join the thanksgiving procession after Queen Juana went around the palace touching the heads of the sick with the feet of the image of the Holy Child.
4. When the Mad Dogs Ruled the Kingdom	From being a child unafraid of the mad dogs, he turned into a giant white dog that every person bitten by mad dogs was cured after licking everyone’s wound.



- |                                 |   |
|---------------------------------|---|
| 5. The Mysterious Boy           | He transformed into a mysterious boy that the sick people were cured after following him.   |
| 6. The Cholera Epidemic of 1883 | The cholera epidemic disappeared after the Aurora was held in places where many people died.  |
| 7. The Baybay, Leyte Mystery    | Otik was cured of his strange sickness when a “chubby boy with curly hair who wore red suit” brought him the cutting from Magellan’s cross that was promised to him by Pitong and Bini. |
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The overarching message of the legends is “Miracles happen to those who believe in them.” The Sto. Niño de Cebu cures people of their sicknesses. Sala-Boza (2008) stated that the beliefs in miracles “can only be understood through the eyes of faith, which Cebuanos have in abundance. Sala-Boza (2008) related the miracle principle in the miracle discourse of the *Sto. Niño* devotees through a paradigmatic cycle. The paradigm shows the relationship between the devotee and the *Sto. Niño*: such a relationship may be seen as a “cycle of love.” The devotees who received or experienced the miracles “gratefully acknowledged them in thanksgiving. The beliefs in miracles, according to Sala-Boza (2008), “can only be understood through the eyes of faith, which Cebuanos have in abundance.”

### **Conclusion and Recommendation**

Based on the Structuralist criticism applied in the seven legends of the Sto Nino de Cebu, the researcher found that textually, each legend has self-contained binary opposition/s, mythemes, and central message, which belong to the intertextual connections as a larger structure. Intertextually, the binary opposition sickness vs. healing may be linked with the mythemes and central message.

Sickness versus healing, prayer versus ritual, superiority versus inferiority, and simplicity/grand versus complexity/complex are the binary oppositions found in the seven legends about the Sto. Niño. The binary opposition sickness vs. healing prevails in all the seven legends analyzed for the study.

The mythemes deduced from each legend were: (1). A tragedy disrupts the life of people or certain individuals; (2). Solutions are offered to end the tragedy, (3). The Sto. Niño appears/intervenes in the form/image of a child (4). The tragedy is solved/The sickness disappears, and (5). The people attribute the miracles to the Sto. Niño.

The message drawn from the seven legends that faith in God brings to the cure of sicknesses brought by the epidemic, bad weather, or those sickness of unknown origin is derived from the central message that miracles happen to those who believe in them.

The researcher recommends that future researchers study the other legends about the Sto. Niño de Cebu that focused on other themes to validate if the mythemes found in the study may apply or if a new set of mythemes may surface. For the study's academic implications, it is highly recommended that the Sto. Niño legends are included in the reading list or required readings in English and Philippine Literature classes. Likewise, the study of religious legends, particularly the Sto. Niño legends as texts for critical analysis to apply Literary Criticism theories may be integrated into the basic and higher education curricula.

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