

# Cebu Lechon: Cultural Knowledge of “Manglitsonay”

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**Abstract**— *Lechon is one of the favorite dishes in Cebu, Philippines. Some of the Cebuano “manglitsonay” has enough knowledge in making lechon and this knowledge was used by them to produce a tasty and crispy lechon. In connection to this, the researchers conducted a study that aims to answer the following queries: (1) What are the processes in making lechon? (2) What makes the Cebu lechon unique from other lechon? (3) What is the cultural knowledge of the “manglitsonay”? The descriptive analysis was used by the researcher to analyse the data. Based on the data gathered, the cultural knowledge of the “manglitsonay” is one of the big factors for the favourable taste of Cebu lechon. There cultural knowledge includes the features, type, and physical appearance of the pig. The local herbs and spices used by the “manglitsonay” likewise contribute to the unique taste of the Cebu lechon.*

**Keywords**— *Lechon, Cebu, cultural knowledge, culture, manglitsonay.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

The lechon is one of the dishes that completes the Filipino table, especially during special occasions. Most Filipinos are very eager to eat Cebu lechon. According to Claire (2023), Cebu lechon is distinctive due to the mixture of herbs and spices used to marinate the meat, unlike lechon from other parts of the Philippines, which is not known for its crisp crust. This means that Cebu lechon is exceptional and incomparable to the roasted pig from other regions. Cebu lechon is not only sought after, but people also travel to the city specifically to taste its hot and flavorful roasted pig.

The tradition of roasting (paglilitson) is also part of the culture of the people of Cebu. Many people from Cebu and nearby provinces have unique processes and methods in selecting and cooking it, which results in a distinct and exceptional taste of lechon. While the Manila Lechon, for example, depends on sauce for taste, the Cebu Lechon, on the other hand, is tasty by itself. The abundant spices that Cebuanos put in the lechon during the cooking give the resulting dish a unique flavor (Peña, 2018). Because Cebu is abundant in spices and herbs found in various provinces, these provide opportunities for many roasters to enhance the flavor of their lechon. Having sufficient knowledge of the entire roasting process is crucial for roasters to cook a unique and delectable litson.

The entire process is not just a simple cooking and preparation of a basic dish because lechon is one of the sought-after dishes, especially during celebrations or special occasions. The words "magpalitson" or "maglitson" are statements that immediately come to mind for many, especially during significant or grand occasions. It can be

observed that litson is closely associated with Filipino celebrations or occasions.

In relation to these observations, the researchers conducted a study that aims to gather and analyse the cultural knowledge of the roasters in Cebu, which results in a savory and distinct taste of the lechon.

### Statement of the Problem

The objective of this study is to gather and analyze the cultural knowledge of roasting pig (paglilitson) in Cebu.

Specifically, answers to the following queries will be sought:

- 1) What are the processes in making lechon?
- 2) What makes the Cebu lechon unique from other lechon?
- 3) What is the cultural knowledge of the “manglitsonay”?

## II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this study, the descriptive analysis was used. The researcher first visited the selected “manglitsonay” residing in Cebu from Cebu City, Lapu- Lapu City, Danao City, Mandaue City, Bogu City, Talisay City, Minglanilla, Medellin, Pinamungajan, Carmen, Dalaguete, Moalboal, Carcar, Bantayan Island and Argao covering the northern, central, western, southern, and eastern parts of Cebu, to seek permission for the ongoing research. Secondly, interviews were conducted and questionnaires were administered. Thirdly, after conducting interviews and answering questionnaires, interpretation was carried out with the aid of tables.

## III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Based on the gathered data, there are ways and conditions in selecting a pig for fattening. The ways for selecting a pig suitable for lechon are presented in Table 1 below.

It is noticeable that each place and province in Cebu has different ways. Based on the data, one of the considerations of the "manglitsonay" is the physical appearance of the pig.

In Danao City, Dalaguete, Moalboal and Carcar City, one of their considerations is a lean pig. It means that the “manglitsonay” would prefer a pig with less fat content and more muscle mass. It implies that the pig has a relatively higher proportion of meat compared to fat.

According to Van Ba et al., (2019), producing pork with higher QGs should be taken into consideration in order to meet consumer expectations because the pork with higher QGs had higher fat content, total unsaturated fatty acids, and better eating quality. Based on this statement, the physical appearance of the pig serves as a good basis and can result in a delicious and flavorful lechon.

TABLE 1. Methods of Selecting a Pig Suitable for Lechon

| Places                 | Methods in Selecting  |
|------------------------|---|
| <b>Cebu City</b>       | Choose a native pig, check its tongue, and taste it to determine if it is bitter.   |
| <b>Lapu-Lapu City</b>  | It is necessary for the pig's skin to be in good condition or quality.  |
| <b>Danao City</b>      | The pig should be large and well-built.   |
| <b>Mandaue City</b>    | The pig should be young and of dark or black color.   |
| <b>Bogo City</b>       | Choose a pig with a large and well-developed body.  |
| <b>Talisay City</b>    | Examine the pig's mouth to see if its tongue has any ulcers or lesions, as this indicates that the pig is sick. A clean tongue signifies a healthy pig. The "native" or black pig is preferred because it has thicker skin or hide compared to the white pig, which has thinner skin. The female pig is better because it has more tender meat, while the male pig has tougher meat.. |
| <b>Minglanilla</b>     | Choose a young pig to ensure that the skin is not tough when cooked. Remove the tail or ear of the pig and taste it to check if it is not bitter. If it tastes bitter, the pig should not be roasted.   |
| <b>Medellin</b>        | Prefer a pig with thick skin, especially those of a black or dark-colored pig, should be large, well-developed, and in good condition.  |
| <b>Pinamungajan</b>    | The pig's skin should be in excellent condition or quality.   |
| <b>Carmen</b>          | The age of the pig should be appropriate in terms of years and months.  |
| <b>Dalaguete</b>       | The pig should be well-built  |
| <b>Moalboal</b>        | The pig should be well-built and have a good-quality skin.  |
| <b>Carcar</b>          | A well-built pig is preferable. The "native" or black pig is better for cooking because it has thicker skin or hide compared to the white pig, which has thinner skin. The female pig is more desirable as it has more tender meat, while the male pig has tougher meat.  |
| <b>Bantayan island</b> | The black pig with a well-developed body is preferred.  |
| <b>Argao</b>           | That depends on the weight and size. A native black pig is preferred.   |

In places like Mandaue City, Carmen, and Minglanilla, the age of the pig is considered. They take into account whether the pig is at the right number of months or still relatively young. Meanwhile, in Argao, the weight of the pig is considered. A pig's age and weight are related factors that can affect a variety of aspects, such as its growth, physical characteristics, and suitability for particular uses. In Cebu City, Talisay City, Bantayan Island, Medellin, Carcar City, and Argao, they specifically choose and prefer native pigs because of their thick skin compared to white pigs. In Lapu-Lapu City and Moalboal, the "manglitsonay" look at the quality of the pig's skin. In Talisay City and Carcar City, the gender of the pig is also considered. "Manglitsonay" prefer female pigs because they have thicker skin compare to male pigs.

In Cebu City, they have a unique method of selecting pigs. According to the "manglitsonay," they examine the pig's

tongue to determine if it is clean. They also taste the pig's tongue to check if it has a bitter taste. In Minglanilla, they cut off the tail or ears of the pig to determine if it does not have a bitter taste. In Talisay, they check if the pig's tongue is not swollen or swollen and as an indicator of the pig's health condition.

Based on the mentioned methods of selecting pigs, it is evident that the "manglitsonay" share a common goal. That goal is to choose a pig that is suitable for lechon, resulting in a delicious and mouth-watering lechon.

On the second table, the process of roasting is presented. In the process of roasting, the steps before, during, and after roasting are almost the same. The differences lie in the ingredients used and the methods or styles employed to achieve the desired result.

TABLE 2. Process of Roasting

| Places                | Before  | During  | After  |
|-----------------------|---|---|--|
| <b>Cebu City</b>      | Choosing a good pig   | Grilling, Roasting  | Cooling, Packaging   |
| <b>Lapu-Lapu City</b> | There are scarecrows and angry people   | Stir the pork so that the whole pork is cooked  | And when it's cooked, coat the pork with oil so that it's still crispy   |
| <b>Danao City</b>     | After cleaning the pork, put all the meat in the stomach  | Stir the bamboo in the pork until cooked.   | Then wrap it in manila paper to prevent it from getting too hot  |
| <b>Mandaue City</b>   | More recently than maghaling. Place the pork on top of your lungs.  | Look at the roast if it is almost cooked, then let the smoke go.<br>Once cooked, put it on a lechon tray and wrap it in manila paper.   | Once cooked, put it on a lechon tray and wrap it in manila paper.  |
| <b>Bogo City</b>      | Wash the pig, scrape the skin with a blade, chop and separate the insides from the pig and put the scarecrows in the stomach.   | While the charcoal is bubbling, roast the pork.   | After that put it in the roasting container and deliver it.  |
| <b>Talisay City</b>   | Roasting pork involves heating water in a large pot. While waiting for the water to heat up, prepare a knife to plunge into the pig's neck. Pour the pig's blood into the basin. After washing the pork well. Then put the pork in a bowl with hot water, then grind it. Clean the pig's ears, feet, and nails. After getting to the bottom. Clean the inside of the stomach until there is no blood left inside. Stick the pork in a bamboo or cane. Then poke the pig to straighten it. Hit the back of | The garlic paste, onion leaves, salt, betsin, sangke, panakot, Mallorca, 7-up, vinegar, and fish sauce (soy sauce) are ready. Put all the meat on the stomach. Straighten the stomach well and tie it with hemp thread so that the stomach comes out. Place the side on the chin so that it does not slide when cooked, then place the pork side on the back side. Expose the pork and marinate then add fish sauce to the pork. Leave for 30 minutes for it to penetrate. Have a good time. Charcoal can use | Stir in the pork roast and expose it so that the skin does not burn. Coat the body with inasal and oil using a cloth to make it shine.<br>If the broth runs out, remove the rice. Remove the nail and the bamboo or tube then place it on the banana leaf.<br>As long as there is no dog coming out of the house, it means it is no longer hot.<br>Wrap the pig's body in "manila paper" |

|                        |  |   |  |
|------------------------|--|---|--|
|                        | the pig to straighten its position. Scrape the fur back with the blade, and use a blue torch to burn the fur on the pig so that no fur remains | wood. The longer you get stronger, the more the skin will stick to it, but if you use it less, you won't stick to it. If wood is used, it will take 2 to 3 hours to cook, if charcoal is used 3 to 4. Manually spin the gray pork, use electric. While the meat is cooked, occasionally coat it with oil to mask the smell from the dog. If the vault is cracked, pierce the lock so it doesn't expand. | and then tie it with a string. When it reaches the table or orders the roast pork, give instructions to the owner to open the package so that the skin is not still crispy |
| <b>Minglanilla</b>     | Clean the belly of the pig after slaughtering and put the charcoal   | Coat the whole body of the pork with oil and then start roasting  | After 2-4 hours, poke the pork skin with the ice pick to make sure it's cooked   |
| <b>Medellin</b>        | Heat water while washing the pork  | Season the meat inside the stomach and start roasting   | When the roast is cooked, it is ready to be filled with ninini and immediately wrapped in manila paper   |
| <b>Pinamungajan</b>    | Wash the pork, scrape off the skin with a blade, pat and set aside the pork stuffing. Place the scarecrows and skewer them on the bamboo       | Put the pork on the coals. if the pork is almost cooked, leave the lungs  | When the roast is cooked, put it aside so that it doesn't burn   |
| <b>Carmen</b>          | Grate and bathe the pork, pat and set aside the pork stuffing  | Put all the ingredients in and start roasting   | Make the roast that is stuck in the bamboo stick stand up and put it aside on the manila paper   |
| <b>Dalaguete</b>       | Cut open the stomach and remove all the stuffing from the pork   | After everything is done, start roasting the pork and it is important not to leave it while it is cooking in the roasting so as not to overcook   | After cooking in the roast, wrap the pork in manila paper to keep it warm yesterday  |
| <b>Moalboal</b>        | Bathe the pig, then scrape the skin with a blade, cut open the stomach and chop all the contents   | Place the skewered pork on the burning coals and start roasting   | When the roast is cooked, immediately wrap it in manila paper  |
| <b>Carcar City</b>     | First wash the pig after roasting and then start cleaning the stomach  | Put all the meat, season and start roasting the pork  | After it's cooked in the grill, take it out and wrap it in manila paper so that it doesn't lose its heat   |
| <b>Bantayan island</b> | Grill, clean and mayo, put all the mixture in the stomach and sew  | Coat the whole body with fish sauce and marinate for 2-3 hours. Then put it on top of the burning charcoal  | If it's cooked, put it in the oven and wrap it to keep it warm   |
| <b>Argao</b>           | Clean the body including the stomach where the contents are and put the waste  | Pierce the roast and place it on top of the coals. Stir-fry until cooked  | When cooked, put it on a tray and wrap it  |

TABLE 3. Ingredients Used by Manglitsanay

| Lugar                  | Rekados  |
|------------------------|--|
| <b>Cebu City</b>       | vinegar, salt, 7-up, onion, pandan leaves, evaporated milk, oil, MSG, seasonings                           |
| <b>Lapu-Lapu City</b>  | garlic, onion, lemongrass, salt, MSG, vinegar, soy sauce   |
| <b>Danao City</b>      | vinegar, soy sauce, salt, MSG, lemongrass, oil, garlic, onion  |
| <b>Mandaue City</b>    | 1 ka takos sa salt, 1 ka onion leaves, ½ kilo pandan leaves ug 3 can of evaporated milk                    |
| <b>Bogo City</b>       | sili- espada, onion leaves, lemongrass, onion, garlic, ginger  |
| <b>Talisay City</b>    | onion leaves, garlic, ginger, onion, soy sauce, panakot, Mallorca, 7- Up, vinegar, MSG, sangke, fish sauce |
| <b>Minglanilla</b>     | Lemon grass, onion leaves, soy sauce, vinegar, oil ug salt   |
| <b>Medellin</b>        | lemongrass, onion leaves, soy sauce, vinegar, oil ug salt, water   |
| <b>Pinamungajan</b>    | oil, vinegar, soy sauce, salt, MSG, lemongrass, onion leaves, evaporated milk                              |
| <b>Carmen</b>          | garlic, lemongrass, salt, MSG, vinegar, soy sauce  |
| <b>Dalaguete</b>       | lemongrass, vinegar, soysauce, MSGn, salt ug garlic  |
| <b>Moalboal</b>        | vinegar, soy sauce, MSG, salt ug onion   |
| <b>Carcar</b>          | salt, garlic, onion, lemongrass, vinegar, soysauce, water, atsuet  |
| <b>Bantayan island</b> | lemongrass, dahon sa tambis ug tubig sa lubi para pampapuwa sa panit sa baboy                              |
| <b>Argao</b>           | Onion leaves, onion, garlic, sangki, pineapple, chili, Sprite, soysauce, MSG ug salt                       |

The third table presents the ingredients used by the lechon makers. It is noticeable that each place uses different ingredients. The lechon makers also have various reasons for using them.

In Carcar City, atsuet is one of the ingredients used, which contributes to a delicious and unique flavour. This atsuet is abundant in Carcar City. This place also uses lemongrass (tanglad) as an ingredient. In Cebu, Carcar City is known for its lechon. Tourist visit and drop by in the city to taste and buy the famous lechon and other pasalubong such as chicharon, bukarilyo, banana chips and many more.

Furthermore, Carcar City's lechon tradition has been passed down through generations, preserving the authentic techniques and flavors that have made it famous. The meticulous attention to detail, from the selection of the pig to the roasting process, ensures that each bite of Carcar City's lechon is a burst of savory goodness.

The places like Bogo City, Minglanilla, Medellin, Carmen, Dalaguete, and Bantayan Island use lemongrass as an ingredient in their lechon. The lemongrass adds a tangy citrus taste to the lechon. Because of this, the lechon becomes even more delicious. In places like Cebu City and Talisay City, the "manglitsanay" uses panakot. They use star anise and pepper.

Same as the Cebu City and Talisay City, Argao also uses star anise which adds flavor to the lechon. In Cebu City and Mandaue City, they use pandan leaves, which further enhance the aroma of the lechon. In Argao, they add pineapple juice, which provides a sweet and delicious taste to the lechon while in Bogo City; they add ginger as an ingredient.

Talisay City, known for its delicious lechon, also uses Mallorca and 7-up soda, as an ingredient. This serves as a sweetener. Same in Cebu City, they use 7-up soda as sweetener while Argao uses Sprite soda. There are also places like Cebu City and Pinamungahan that use evaporated milk as an additional ingredient. In Bantayan Island, they use coconut water as a basting liquid for the lechon to give it a reddish color.

The ingredients used by the lechon makers and even the process of selection and cooking make the lechon of Cebu distinct. The skill and knowledge in lechon making are already part of the culture of each place. It is also noticeable that the mentioned ingredients are often abundant in those areas and some are known already.

In the fourth table, the cultural knowledge of the lechon makers is presented. It can be observed that from the selection of the pig to the cooking process, each lechon maker in every place possesses cultural knowledge. According to Butt (2021), cultural knowledge is what you know just by living. It is the information knows by an individual not because of formal education, but as a result of living everyday life, talking to relatives, observing surroundings, or practicing family traditions.

TABLE 4. Cultural Knowledge

| Process of Lechon Making     | Cultural Knowledge   |
|------------------------------|--|
| Selection of the Pig         | *Appropriate age & weight<br>*Black pig (native)<br>*Female pig (think skin)<br>*Pig's tongue (not swollen)  |
| Ingredients                  | *Using of right amount of herbs and spices (atsuete, star anisis, pepper, lemon grass,ginger,pandan leaves)<br>*Using sweeteners ( evaporated milk, pineapply juice, soda, coconut water)  |
| Seasoning and Marinating     | *Using the right amount of herbs and spices and marinating in longer time. The longer marinating time, the more the flavors of each ingredient are absorbed.   |
| Materials Used               | *Using of woods and charcoal to achieve crispyness<br>*Nail the pig's mouth to prevent it from sliding.<br>*Tie the pig's feet at the back to prevent them from falling.<br>*Sewing the belly using abaca to keep the ingredients inside the belly intact. |
| Fire and Temperature Control | *High to medium heat to achieve crispyness and low fire if almost done   |
| Roasting                     | *Apply oil to the pig to make it shiny and crispy and to prevent the smoke smell from lingering.<br>*Applying coconut water or water for juiciness.  |
| Presentation and Packing     | *Wrap in manila paper to keep it hot and crispy.<br>*The lechon is no longer hot when there is no more smoke coming out of its rear end.<br>*Open the packaging to prevent the lechon's skin from becoming soft. (for lechon orders)                       |

In the context of lechon, cultural knowledge includes the specific techniques, recipes, seasonings, rituals, and regional variations that are inherent to the process of preparing and cooking lechon in different cultures or localities. This knowledge is often passed down through generations and plays a significant role in preserving cultural heritage and identity.

Based on the cultural knowledge presented, the lechon makers possess remarkable expertise. The lechon makers possess exceptional expertise in their craft. It is not surprising that lechon in Cebu has a unique taste. The extensive understanding of selecting the right ingredients, employing traditional techniques, and following specific processes showcases their deep-rooted knowledge and skill.

Each locality has its own approach, incorporating local ingredients, flavors, and techniques that have become an integral part of their culinary heritage, which has been shaped by the cultural knowledge passed down through generations. With their knowledge of the importance of proper seasoning, marinating, and basting, which guarantees that the meat is tender, juicy, and infused with delicious flavors, and their artistry in achieving the desired crispiness of the skin, they are able to enhance the flavors and textures of the lechon, creating a mouthwatering and appetizing final product. They have a deep cultural understanding, respecting and uphold traditional methods, and honor the significance of lechon in their local celebrations and gatherings. The cultural knowledge they possess is not only about the techniques but also about the values, traditions, and pride associated with the art of lechon-making. Their expertise goes beyond the technical aspects of preparing lechon.

Overall, the cultural knowledge possessed by the lechon makers highlights their remarkable expertise, showcasing their dedication to their craft and their role as custodians of their culinary heritage.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

The cultural knowledge of the manglitsonay in Cebu plays a significant role in the distinct flavor of lechon. Their knowledge of choosing the ingredients, using traditional methods, and skills in roasting is evidence of the cultural knowledge and skills that have been learned.

Recommendations

Based on the conducted study, the following are the recommended study:

1. Lechon: Culinary Techniques and Innovations
2. Regional Variations of Lechon in the Philippines
3. Lechon and Tourism in Cebu

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Conflict of Interest

The researchers affirm that there is no conflict of interest in conducting this study. The primary objective of this research is to disseminate and share valuable knowledge that can be beneficial to the general public. The study aims to contribute to the existing body of knowledge, provide insights, and potentially address relevant issues or challenges in the field. The researchers are committed to maintaining objectivity, rigor, and integrity throughout the study process, ensuring that the findings are presented transparently and accurately. The ultimate goal is to contribute to the advancement of knowledge and promote the betterment of society as a whole.

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