

STAR GAZING IN THE TIME OF COVID-19: The Animated Giant Lantern as Expression of Hope, Unity, and Instruction

Dominique Angela M. JUNTADO

Far Eastern University Manila, Philippines

djuntado@feu.edu.ph / dmjuntado@gmail.com

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9261-4186>


ABSTRACT

San Fernando, Pampanga is recognized on both the national and international level for her Giant Lanterns and their respective festival. As time passed on, the creation of the giant lantern along with its tradition and its practice with its symbolism was no longer considered confined to the seasonal territory of 'the longest Christmas'. Among the latest instances of creative lantern design, COVID-19 is seen rendered. Circulated on the 29th of April 2020, Roland Quiambao and Joshua Lorenzo shared a COVID-19 themed animated lantern of their design, which was intended as an expression of hope and to help ease emotional stress.

The article is set on a Geertzian-flavored Symbolic & Interpretive Anthropological framework, which posits that understanding culture is a perennial act of interpretation, involving the positioning of a cultural act into the specific and local contexts, in which the act is meaningful. This piece is written from an emic perspective; the author is Kapampangan. It begins with a close reading of the online performance of the lantern using a step formula, which breaks down gimmicks (light pattern sequences and design which fit the songs) into subjects, structure, symbols on the iconographic level, and form-qualities, which are in turn organized via the visual-kinesthetic and thematic classification. The message of the imagery is reinforced through the playlist in which the lantern's lights dance to.

The discussion follows with critical ruminations on the online animated format of the lantern in terms of performance, accessibility, and its implications on the framings of lantern spectatorship and lantern creation in the time of COVID-19 and the 'New Normal'.

Keywords: *Giant-Lantern, San-Fernando, COVID-19, Animation, Heritage.*

n the 29th of April 2020, Roland Quiambao, a lantern artist of 33 years, working with his grandson Joshua Lorenzo, uploaded a two-dimensional, animated giant lantern onto his personal Facebook page. Quiambao posted that this was their 'little way of showing support for fighting Covid 19'.¹ It was a project in which the rendering of the lantern gimmicks and sequence into animation took four weeks.² The video earned about 16727 views, 1100+ shares, 966 reactions, and 72 Comments at the end of the first two months it was uploaded.

This article is about appreciating the varied imageries projected in the Covid-19 themed lantern, and how these express the encouragement of hope and ease of emotional stress. Its historical significance is how, in terms of image design, it is the first lantern (not to mention an animated variant) which combines the instructional and the inspirational in its plays. It also incorporates the predominant buzzwords which are used on both the local and international level, culturally describing the social mindset of the pandemic era. Its video format and online circulation also makes it accessible any time and easily addable to anyone's archive.

Foremost, in developing the reading advanced in this paper, the creators of the animated lantern have been interviewed to provide the story and motivations behind the design. Succeeding their responses, the researcher weighs in with her interpretations of the images and respective play. The succeeding portion of the discussion, which delves into the animated format of the lantern in terms of performance, accessibility, and implications on the framings of lantern spectatorship in the new normal, includes the subtopic of how a change of exhibition space from physical to the virtual --- in this instance being social media --- potentially influences the reception of the lantern. Furthermore, to afford a glimpse into the impressions of the viewers towards the animated lantern and its exhibition, the comment history of the original post, Facebook React types included, was interpreted for potential aspects of favorability and trends in remarks resulting from anchored thinking; this is usually present in the process of an appreciation of giant lanterns.

¹Quiambao, Roland. 2020. "Design & Concept by: Rolando S. Quiambao of RolRen's Lantern" Facebook, April

29, 2020. <https://www.facebook.com/rolandos.quiambao.quiambao/posts/657339365048754>

² This timeframe is exclusive to this particular design

THE GIANT LANTERN AS MEDIUM FOR EXPRESSION

The lantern stepping out of the territory of the ‘longest Christmas’ and into the more ecumenical has to do with changing design motifs to accommodate stylings, icons, and topics, which are outside the traditional essence and aesthetic of the holiday season. This does not necessarily strip the lantern of its original character, as it is still recognized for its humble religious beginnings and carries over the characteristics of the Lantern as evoking emotion, particularly joy and kindness. In previous lantern festivals, people have witnessed gimmicks (light pattern sequences and designs which fit selected songs^{3,4}) which have the intention of delivering messages to the people. Previous designs ranged from inspirational biblical passages to occasional expressions of patriotism and diplomacy. The positive reception to these vivid metaphors eventually encouraged the creation of more thoughtful designs, bearing thematic messages on the part of lantern artists, who knew how to frame them. The trend appeared to have caught on in the festival of 2017, as seen among most of the participating lanterns, their designs demonstrating the idea of politics as virtue⁵, mostly showing references to the events of the nation that year, expressing solidarity, and promoting environmental advocacy. All these considered, the public can be encouraged to receive the lantern as a symbol of hope, sympathy, resilience, and wishes of joy that linger year-round.

Doing ‘Star Gazing’: Notes on Doing a Close Reading of a Lantern⁶

As an art form, the giant lantern is designed to communicate with people.^{7,8} Similar with other visual arts in the general sense, attention is initially placed on how the form can convey through itself, context aside. This does not imply that there is lesser importance in context, as context is needed because of its function for full understanding and appreciation of a work. This emphasis on

³ Arvin Bondoc Quiwa. Interview by the author, Santa Lucia, San Fernando, Pampanga, Philippines. January 21, 2018.

⁴ See Dominique Angela M. Juntado, “Ligligan Parul: Pampanga’s Giant Lanterns as Political Cultural Thought,” TALA: An Online Journal of History. Vol. 2 No. 2 (2019): 182-184, http://talakasaysayan.org/Tala_Archives/Second_Volume/2/volume2-no.2-art6_juntado.pdf

⁵ Juntado, “Ligligan Parul”, 187

⁶ Juntado, “Ligligan Parul”, 182

⁷ Roland Quiambao. Interview by the author. Del Pilar, San Fernando, Pampanga, Philippines. May 2015.

⁸ Arvin Bondoc Quiwa, interview

form has to do with the mechanism as art ‘does not communicate unless the form of the work has some meaning by itself’.⁹

The process of deriving meaning begins with recognizing that there is a sign in the first place; the signs have ‘structure’.¹⁰ When it comes to the lantern gimmick, ‘signs’ (their function of being ‘the smallest unit of meaning’ that ‘can be used to communicate’)¹¹ could be applied to refer to the motif, which could either encompass the overarching theme uniting the gimmicks; or individually classifying each gimmick per turn of display for organizational purposes, granting that there is more than one message being expressed on the lantern. The symbols which are incorporated in the design, their meanings are ‘all established by social convention or through the channel of historical tradition’¹²

There are three elements to consider when it comes to reading and deciphering the meanings projected by the lantern --- subjects, symbols on the iconographic level, and form-qualities.¹³ Each element has the potential to express a message, but in order to obtain the messages rendered in each code in a particular event, the reader has to have some understanding of the ways each code operates, as in a system. Visual communication is like linguistic communication in the sense that artworks have parts which can resemble utterances, speech, and a cultural style found in a language.¹⁴ Applied to Gimmicks, these are formed through a consolidation of tiled imagery, to compose a unified display.

The visual-kinesthetic aspects of giant lanterns on the other hand, include synthesis and patterns; these are categorized to make them closer to relatable analysis. Sorting and classifying subject and or content can be in terms of what is ‘recognizable’ or in accordance with the primary subject matter.¹⁵ Subject or content can be representational in their forms.

Attempting to read into a work has its occasional difficulties in the sense that there is the possibility that the interpretation of the audience might differ from what the artist had in mind. The lantern artist is aware of this, and they lessen

9 Evelyn Payne Hatcher, *Art as Culture an Introduction to the Anthropology of Art* (USA: University Press of America, 1985), 135.

10 Marcel Danesi, *Messages, Signs, and Meanings: A Basic Textbook in Semiotics and Communication* (Toronto: Canadian Scholars Press, 2004), 14.

11 Danesi, *Messages, Signs, and Meanings*, 31.

12 Danesi, *Messages, Signs, and Meanings*, 31.

13 Hatcher, *Art as Culture an Introduction to the Anthropology of Art*, 138.

14 Hatcher, *Art as Culture an Introduction to the Anthropology of Art*, 138.

15 Hatcher, *Art as Culture an Introduction to the Anthropology of Art*, 140-141.

the potential instances of this occurring by using established symbols or icons with familiar references to reinforce the design. This is usually accomplished via the pairing of image(s) with an associated tune or sound byte as a measure for disambiguation.

However, working with icons can also be somewhat problematic. Being a category of meaning, icons are forms in which those sharing a culture understand, while those outside the culture have to be informed so as to relate.¹⁶

Like art appreciation in general, the giant lantern also has a set of aesthetic standards. Particularly, in the presentation of the lanterns, what are considered are the color combinations, song selections, and the interplay of lights with music to deliver the overall message.

The giant lantern as a performance combines color, form, design, sound, and taste. It is also defined by a sense of ‘order’ and ‘harmonization’¹⁷ illustrated in its diligence on patterns and imagery; and the same is required in its operation (regardless if manual or animated) where there must be synchronization with the beat and lyrics of the music. Music, which is a definitive half of the giant lantern performance, also evokes emotion and can be likewise evaluated in terms of audial aesthetic qualities and lyrics. The playlist for the lantern is entirely decided by each artist and is compatible with the visual character and message of the lantern.

Why the Lantern as a Device?

The lantern is used as a medium for expression because of its popularity with the people.¹⁸ Its versatility remains just as long as the design to be affixed isn’t for the purpose of bad, given the religious associations of the lantern.¹⁹ What makes it attractive is its existing framing --- in which given its associations with Christmas, things lively, and ageless adoration --- is conducive to open minds and hearts. If a lantern projects a message, this framing potentially suspends immediate judgment and instead, encourages discussion of the design, with anchored thinking.

¹⁶ Hatcher, *Art as Culture an Introduction to the Anthropology of Art*, 143.

¹⁷ Ellen Dissanayake, *What is Art For?* (USA: University of Washington Press, 2002), 36.

¹⁸ Juntado, “Ligligan Parul”, 185.

¹⁹ Dominique Angela M. Juntado, 2019 “Star Gazing: The Giant Lanterns of Pampanga as Political Culture”. PhD diss. University of the Philippines Diliman.

The Artists and the Significance of Their Story in Shaping the Lantern

At the foundation of this discussion of the lantern, is how it includes the insights of the lantern artist and the animation artist. This employs Clifford Geertz's symbolic and interpretive anthropology. It is in his 1973 collection of essays entitled *The Interpretation of Cultures* that one can find his definition of 'culture' ---

Believing with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning.²⁰

Geertz's approach to culture is based on the idea that understanding another culture is perennially an activity of interpretation, an act of inspection which involves taking a cultural act and --- be this a ritual, a game, a political campaign, and so on --- positioning it into the particular and local contexts in which the act is meaningful.²¹ The effort of interpretation begins with determining the explications behind the cultural act, through situating the event in a particular cultural actor's motives, values, and intentions; this will then be deciphered within a code of meanings.²²

A Geertzian brand of analysis also places focus on the point of view of the individual participant in society, dubbed as an 'actor-centered perspective'.²³ This time, lifted from his 1995 work named *After the Fact: Two Countries, Four Decades, One Anthropologist* in verbatim:

Human beings, gifted with language and living in history, are, for better or worse, possessed of intentions, visions, hopes, and moods, as well as of passions and judgments, and these have more than a little to do with what they do and why they do it. An attempt to understand their social and cultural life in terms of forces, mechanisms, and drives alone, objectivized variables set in systems of closed causality, seems unlikely of success.²⁴

²⁰ Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 05

²¹ Jerry D. Moore, *Visions of Culture: An Introduction to Anthropological Theories* 3e (UK: Altamira Press, 2009), 260.

²² Moore, *Visions of Culture: An Introduction to Anthropological Theories*, 229.

²³ Jon McGee, *Anthropological Theory an Introductory History* (USA: McGraw-Hill, 2008), 483.

²⁴ Clifford Geertz, *After the Fact: Two Countries, Four Decades, One Anthropologist* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 127.

The concept of ‘layers of meaning’ also applies in the development of the content of the lantern’s reading. The discussions involve a combination of detailed description of cultural activity with attention placed on context, this attributes significance to a certain item, behavior. To view culture as context, thick description would also become a means of taking account not only of an act but also of the culture that informs it.²⁵

In writing academically about the designs of a lantern, context provided by the artists prevents documentations (screenshots, copies of the video) from turning into what folklorists like Allan Dundes²⁶ call a collection of dead ‘butterflies’, where “items of folklore are treated as rare exotica, metaphorically speaking, to have a pin stuck through them and mounted in a display archival case, such that it is almost impossible to image that the folklore items were ever alive (that is, performed). Context is typically ignored, and it is the text only that is prized by the local collector.”²⁷ Roland Quiambao and Joshua Lorenzo provide perspectives on how they connect with their work; this is expressed in two moods—first is being artists of the lantern craft, and the second as Kapampangans who use their skills in contribution to the folklife that is lantern making. The interviews were a mix of Kapampangan and English and conducted over the phone. For this article, excerpts from the conversation are translated into English.

ROLAND QUIAMBAO: THE ARTIST’S COMMENTARY BEHIND THE COVID-THEMED LANTERN

For Lantern Artist Roland Quiambao, he believes in the importance of telling the story behind a creation. He reasons that if a product or creation that does not have a story behind it, then it has no value.²⁸

Quiambao begins by sharing details to how he came up with the idea of creating the design for the COVID-themed lantern:

²⁵ Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 14 & 20.

²⁶ See the book called *Meaning of Folklore: The Analytical Essays of Alan Dundes* by Simon J. Broner

²⁷ Dundes, Allan. *Folkloristics in the Twenty-First Century* (AFS Invited Presidential Plenary Address, 2004) *Journal of American Folklore* 118: 385-408.

²⁸ Roland Quiambao. Interview by the author via Telephone. San Fernando, Pampanga, Philippines. October 05, 2020. Precise words were: ‘Ing metung a bage, nung ala yang kuwentu, ala yang kuwenta!’

“Actually, there was a project I worked on before I came up with that lantern. I composed a jingle titled ‘Homeward Bound’. It went like this: *sings*²⁹

Home, magdatun ta pa king home (Home, let’s stay for now at home)

E ta pa lukwal keng home (Let’s not leave home)

Bang ing virus e makalub keng home (So the virus won’t be able to get in)

The Governor liked it. It was after this jingle that I was able to think of the lantern. *continues singing*

Disiplina ing kailangan, (What we need is discipline)

Mamintu ka kaluguran (Listen, my friend)

Home magdatun ka pa keng home... (Home, stay at home...)

‘There we have it — Tatang Roland has spoken. Let’s listen to what he says,’ said the Governor. Then I thought to myself it would probably be more effective to create a lantern. The lantern’s reach is larger, both international and national. People understand it compared to the jingle which can only be appreciated by Kapampangan listeners.”

He also talks about how environment and the times shape the creative condition and influences motivation:

You know, ideas come during trying times. The more difficult the spirit of the times are, all the more inspired you get. First off, you’re isolated. You want to help out somehow. Bring some happiness to people. One of the things that can cause illness is when a person is very tensed, when the person is stressed. When they see the lantern light up, it eases their stress and worries; it has healing properties. Yes, the lantern is an expression of Hope. That’s why we are taking the lantern projects very seriously.

He related that the Christmas motifs in Pampanga have an early start this year because of the COVID-19 pandemic. It was the lantern artists’ passion to lift spirits, and this prompted the advanced ordering, distribution, and setup of street lanterns along certain passes of towns and cities as early as the 3rd of October.

It helps somehow. A person could have nothing in his pockets, no money, but he can be satisfied, (even if it is just his eyes that were fed), he’d feel some sense of relief.³⁰

²⁹ The translations here basically provide the essence of the lines and are by no means lyrically complimenting.

³⁰ The original line in Kapampangan is: “Maka kayi mu rin e. Ala ne rugung laman ing bulsa ning tawu, adyang mabsi ya keng mata, mipasno ya.”

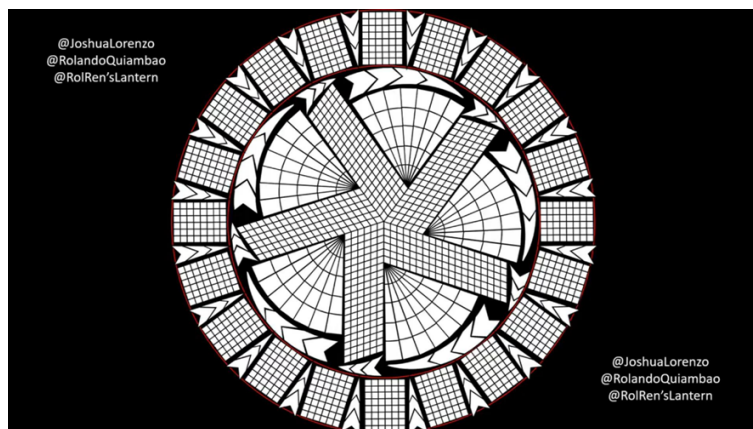
With all these considered, what about the reading of the lantern itself?

Quiambao explains that the design (the collective of tiled shapes composing the face of the lantern, seen when the lantern is off) is a carryover of his 2015 festival lantern, but repurposed via the altered gimmicks.

The COVID-themed lantern as a project, shows how there could be a bridging of people through and with passions. The product being an animation, reinforces further how the lantern is received as a symbol of resilience, because of how it is demonstrative of resourcefulness³¹. According to Roland Quiambao, the creation of the animated lantern is a contribution to the history of lantern types:

“It’s like going Old-School to New-School. Yeah, because the Old-School methods to crafting a lantern — we don’t want to do away with that. At the same time, you can’t not go with the New-School. My children all took IT courses. Joshua is good at computers, so I share my ideas with him, and we throw ideas around, like if we could make the designs happen. I’d draw and come up with the gimmicks and he uses his computer skills to animate them. It’s kind of more for fun than anything else.”

To be precise, Quiambao explains that Lorenzo uses his skills in IT, to emulate the effects and results seen in the manual approach of the lantern. He expresses his optimism in the hopes that seeing the different takes towards lantern creation would encourage others, that the next generation would be better than the previous.³²



[Image 01]

The Covid-19 Animated Lantern in it's 'Off' state. Displaying the design before the play of the lantern is partly in recognition of Quiambao's 2015 lantern.
Screenshot taken by the author.

³¹ Quiambao, Interview with author. May 2015

³² Quiambao, Interview with author. October 2020

The animation project was crafted by Joshua Lorenzo who is currently majoring in BS Information Technology. He re-purposed the slide show program to create the lantern video, banking on the software's inherent animation and transition features, to achieve the effect of dancing lights. It is a meticulous task. Lorenzo shares some details on how he eventually found himself in the lantern advocacy:

I got inspired from my grandfather. I see the lantern designs and gimmicks he works on and I decided to make it animated.

And when asked about how difficult the task is, and what parts can get challenging, he weighs in as follows:

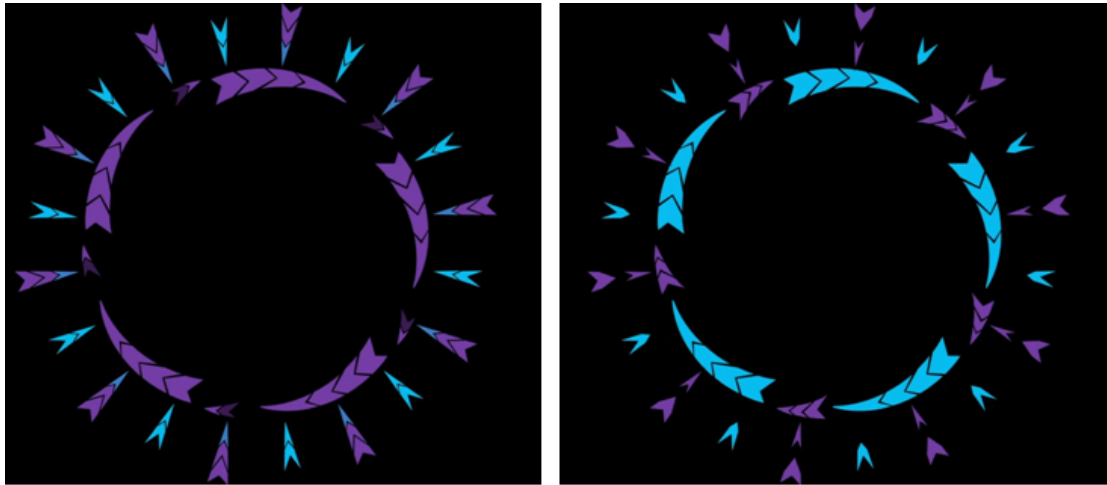
You can't really put a fixed timetable on creating an animated lantern because it depends on the design of the lantern if it's simple or more intricate. For the COVID lantern, it took four (4) weeks for that kind of design because it gets tedious. The difficulty is in the software. When a presentation has too many animations and too many slides, it struggles to load and play.

But much like the trailblazing lantern artist in the making, Lorenzo does not let the occasional technical troubles get in the way of pursuing his skills:

We can expect more animated lanterns in the future. What really drives me is that I want to continue the lantern tradition. Aside from the COVID lantern, I have another animation I finished.

APPRECIATING THE COVID-19 ANIMATED LANTERN

The COVID-themed animated lantern is a video that is four minutes and nine seconds (04:09) long. Quiambao confirms that the opening gimmick is a reference to the Coronavirus. This is evident in the varying spikes and sharp motifs shown in the first minute.



[Images 02-05]

Gimmicks referencing the coronavirus in aesthetic
Screenshot taken by the author.

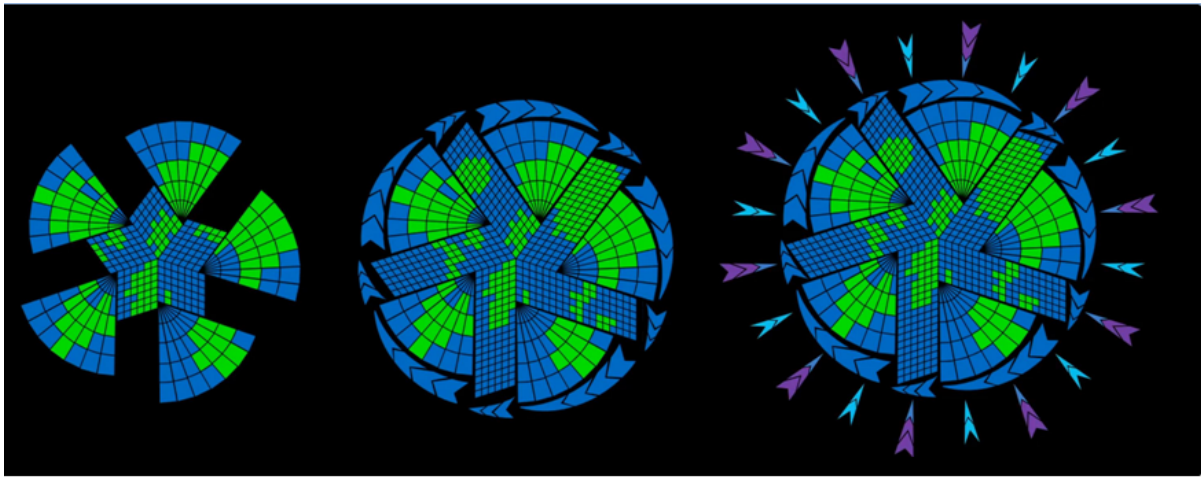


Comprising its playlist are excerpts from three songs in this precise order: *'We Are the World'* by Various Artists, *'Heal the World'* by Michael Jackson, and *'We Heal as One'* by Various Artists. The lantern's gimmicks can be sorted into two categories.

Metaphorical Renders of Lyrics + Melody

The mechanism of the animated lantern operates along a synesthetic formula. There are gimmicks in the lantern which can tell stories beginning with the song that is played. The visuals tend to be interpretations of lyrics to a particular song, rendered into moving components. Attention is placed on the

synchronization of lights with the music. It may, to an extent, be comparable to a Windows Media Player visualization.



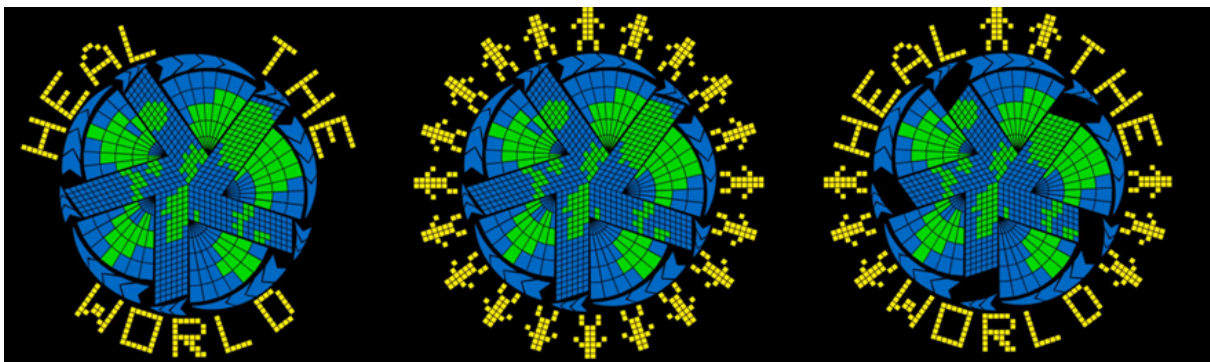
[Images 06-08]

Coronavirus as a global affair.

Gimmicks for the play for 'We Are the World' reflect a rendering of the lyrics into visual symbols.

Screenshot taken by the author.

The COVID-themed lantern relies mostly on this approach, being a uniform feature in all three songs, through the display of icons and display of words from the lyrics. The usage of the 'globe' (identified by the color scheme, paired with music), and aesthetic for 'people' (shape with head, torso, and limbs) is an example of established symbols that are universally recognized and used.



[Images 09-11]

Of Hope and Unity

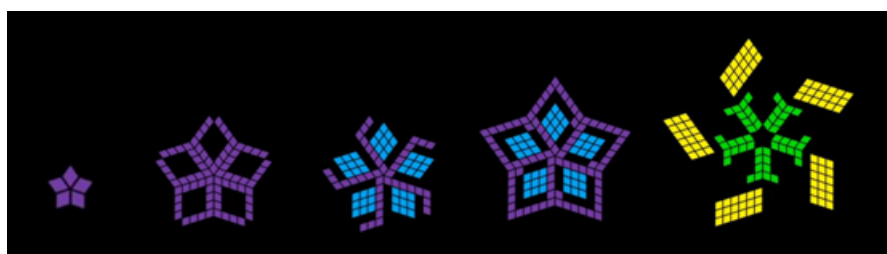
Gimmicks for the play for 'Heal the World' likewise reflect a rendering of the lyrics into visual symbols. The distinction of this one is the juxtaposition of text.

Screenshot taken by the author.

Of the Theme of 'Hope' as Embodied in the Two Renderings of the 'Star'

What consistently separates each song is a gimmick, which begins with a Star or star-type formation. The lantern being received as both a representation of the star and as canvas for projecting star imageries, is originally seen in the context of the biblical. Allowance for the interpretation of the star had eventually accommodated definitions inspired by spiritual ornamentation and decoration.³³ In the ecumenical, it proposes the twin ideas of 'light' and 'hope'.

Hope and optimism are at the foundation of each gimmick, given the positioning of the star at the Tambor (Center of the lantern). The distinction, however, lies in how the star or star-type formation is introduced in each song.

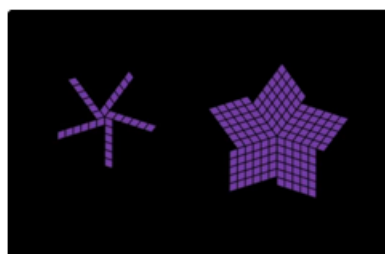


[Images 12-16]

Stars as Hope

These are from the play for the song 'Heal the World'

Screenshot taken by the author



[Images 17-18]

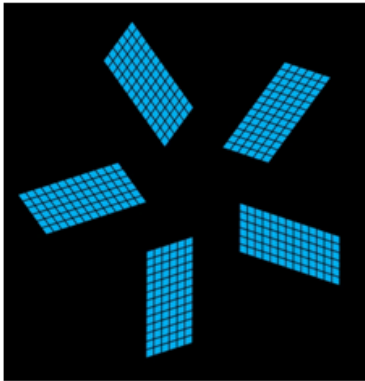
Stars as Hope

These are from the play for the song 'We Are the World'

Screenshot taken by the author

³³ Anne Therese Mabanta-Fabian, "Exhibiting the Giant Lanterns of Pampanga", 2007. (Conference Proceeding)

Of Framing and Featuring the 'Dark' Star.



[Image 19]

The Dark Star

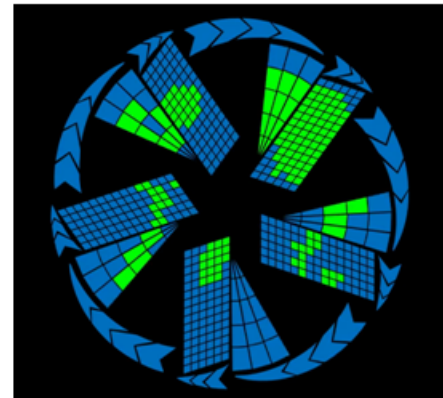
Gimmick for the play for
'We Are the World'

Screenshot taken by the author.

a rather pleasant and satisfying surprise.

In the case of the COVID lantern, this is exemplified in three instances of the star-based gimmicks. Along this context, it can significantly contribute to the 'hope' narrative by serving as a render of the metaphorical darkness and the optimistic potentiality for things good to rise from it.

For instance, in *We Are the World*, the dark star can be interpreted as hope radiating from the time of darkness as the rays of the star-type formation are spreading to the peripheries of the lantern originating from the center. It cannot be interpreted as the other way around, with the perception of the fleeting of light and growing darkness as a spread of gloom; this has to do with reasons going back to the lantern artist, their sense of purpose, and duties.



[Image 20]

The Dark Star

Gimmick for the play for
'Heal the World'

Screenshot taken by the author.

³⁴ See Dominique Angela M. Juntado, "Contemplating Instances of Kapampangan Heritage Projected in Two, 2019 San Fernando Lantern Displays," TALA: An Online Journal of History Vol. 3 No. 1 (June 2020): 19-46, http://talakasaysayan.org/Tala_Archives/Third_Volume/1/vol3-no1-art2_Contemplating-Instances-of-Kapampangan-Heritage.pdf

Lantern artists would never create a work which would cause offense. They are involved in an artistry in which the motivation is to bring light --- expression can include references and content as long as these are positive, peaceful, and diplomatically articulated.³⁵

In the play for *Heal the World*, there is an implied star in the middle, which is formed from the rays coming together—a dynamic take on unity, before this is further reinforced with a *puntetas* (outermost portion) consisting of repeated icons of people joining hands and the succeeding addition of the words ‘Heal the World’.

On the other hand, *We Heal as One* has gimmicks which resemble the play for Heal the World in the sense that there are ray-like elements from the periphery and closing into the center, which signify countries coming together in the war against COVID-19.



[Images 21-23]

The Dark Star

Gimmicks for the play for ‘We Heal As One’ reflect rays approaching the center, symbolizing collaboration, cooperation, and unity
Screenshot taken by the author.

It is however in the final seconds of the play where there is a remarkable feature, which leaves an idea to think about. It involves a transition from the reference to the Philippine flag, into the universal icon of the globe. A more profound meaning can be derived from the transition, which graces the last gimmick before the presentation goes to black. In a diplomatic tone, it bears the impression of multilateral relations being forged for friendship and solidarity.

³⁵ See Juntado, “Ligligan Parul”, 186.



[Image 24]

Multilateral Relations

Transition Gimmick for the play for
'We Heal As One'

Screenshot taken by the author.

Part of the inspiration for this reading comes from Roland Quiambao's slogan for the San Fernando lanterns, which he shared in his 2017 interview by Maureen Gepte Castro and Rey Yumang for the local Kapampangan talk show *Personalan*: "Parul Sampernandu, Aslag ning Mabilug a Yatu" ('The San Fernando Lanterns Bring the light of the Whole World'). He elucidates on the context:

"I made it into a slogan. Because we are doing something global."

His idea is that the slogan can serve as a foundation for a San Fernando branding. The San Fernando lanterns have served diplomatic functions, reaching other countries as gifts to embassies³⁶; the giant

variety are just as recognized in the international setting, in part due to events and festivals done abroad³⁷; the ASEAN lantern; and Catriona Gray's costume for the Miss Universe competition of 2018. The COVID-19 animated lantern is the latest in the sense that the video is shared by Filipinos around the globe, and their acquaintances on social media may also access the content and appreciate it, regardless of ethnicity. First, most of the lyrics are in English. The first two songs on the playlist are international pop cultural classics, and the matching gimmicks involve universal symbols. Meanwhile, the third play involves a more exclusive reference in terms of the song (the theme of the Philippines during these dark times) and the Philippine flag is a definitive aesthetic. This third play establishes a sense of identity, as it mentions the origin of the lantern.

Of the Motif of Verbal Messages on the Lantern

According to Roland Quiambao, he decided to use the lantern as a canvas for his art. He expressed that his wishes were to bring joy and hope to the lantern's audience, as well as to provide instructions on how to conduct one's self, staying safe, and being courteous to others in the time of COVID. This is accomplished via the form of reminders directly projected from the lantern. These gimmicks

³⁶ Ching Pangilinan. Interview by the author. City of San Fernando Tourism Office. Pampanga, Philippines. 2018.

³⁷ Giant Lantern Foundation. Giant Lantern Souvenir Coffee Table Book, 2015.

are exclusive to the third play of the lantern, *We Heal as One*, where unity is not just in spirit but in the simplest actions.



[Images 25-27]

Of Instructions

Gimmicks for the play for 'We Heal As One'

Screenshot taken by the author.

THOUGHTS ON THE ANIMATED FORMAT OF THE LANTERN AND MEMORABLE REMARKS ON ITS PERFORMANCE

In picturing the typical scene composing the 'Old Normal', aside from the presence of the massive giants, the composition of the giant lantern performance is defined by the large crowds and the reactions you can hear from them (praise of design, side-comments, interjections expressing elation). Part of the authentic spectator experience involved being practically elbow- to-elbow and breaking personal space with people one has never met before. This, all in the nostalgic sense of reviving some concept of communal spirit. The exhibitions are held in open spaces of malls and select squares and parks as they are big enough to accommodate the crowds. It must be clarified however that the festival has been adjusted in accommodation of the safety precautions of the 'New Normal', by admitting viewers through a drive-in setup—the people park and spectate from the safety of their vehicle.

The COVID-themed animated lantern performance, on the other hand, turns the concept of the giant lantern on its head, in several respects. The drawn lantern is only 'giant' in terms of its conceptual label, because of it being recognizable as a giant lantern (it looks the part), that people are familiar with

it; and in the essence of the play in which there is the synchronization of lights with music. Also, people can only ‘crowd’ via the Comments section of social media in the form of rave and humor. Skimming through the 72 comments, fellow lantern artists, Quiambao himself, and a relative of Quiambao made remarks in the style of lantern guild in-jokes ---

Rolando S. Quiambao: Bayu la reng rotor. (The rotors are all new)

Eretz Quiambao: Ala ya pang pundi (The lantern doesn’t have any busted bulbs yet)

Graceana Tomi Martin Quiambao: E tipid bumbilya? (It didn’t skimp on bulbs?)

Arvin Bondoc Quiwa: May nanalo na (Someone already won)

The humor here lies, to state the obvious, on how none of these aspects (physical materials and competition) are existing in an animated lantern and in this present performance.

Of the remaining remarks, the people commonly express compliments to the duo for having successfully created and delivered the project online. There was Kee Quiwa who marveled on the precision of the clips and the feasibility of the design; this comes across as an expression of hope in the continuation of lantern tradition even without the physical ones, in the worst-case scenario that the normal lantern exhibition is suspended. Then from Chit Alviz, he commented that the design was a demonstration of Filipino ingenuity but doesn’t expound on this thought further. In terms of attempts to hold conversation, it does not go beyond this. Quiambao does chime in now and then by commenting on the context of the design to inform online viewers on his page about the story behind the lantern; nothing different from what was already mentioned earlier on in this article.

THE COVID-19 LANTERN AS COMMUNICATION GONE VIRAL: SOME FINAL THOUGHTS

The COVID-themed lantern reflects the same spirit of the time that it was created, references to timely gimmicks aside. First, it was created in mind to make viewing in isolation possible. It is also asynchronous. Second is how it exemplifies the push for interdisciplinarity, a goal further enforced in the pandemic era, out of realizations of the importance of learning the significance of flexibility. The idea of interdisciplinarity is originally associated with academic research, in which the motivation is to encourage purpose-driven and mission-oriented thinking. It came about in recognition of the societal changes,

wherein problems or issues are better resolved when there are collaborations across the skills and specializations.

Perhaps in the world of the digital, the animated lantern can be perceived as a form of poetry rendered visual. Roland Quiambao designed the lantern with the intentions of giving messages to the people. He wished to help somehow using his humble knowledge. He wanted to inspire. He reminds that these dark times will be ‘overcome some day’.

Likewise, the activity of watching the San Fernando lantern can be likened to star gazing. The intention is not merely in entertaining its crowds, but as seen, has recently gone to encourage rumination. When the audience ruminates, part of the process is defined by how they relate, how their thoughts are anchored to what they see.

In addition, when the lantern plays, usually the artist fades into the background. Getting the chance to speak with them can be as simple as sending them a message to their social media. The important point is that connecting with the creators completes the cycle — of both the creation process and in rumination in the sense that there is a reaction triggered and the artists could reconnect with the people.

The previous pages told the story of a virus-themed lantern that has gone viral. It aims to infect every eye, ear, heart, and spirit that its visualizations and songs touch; that this lantern’s brightness and simulated twinkle would provide inner strength for people to face tomorrow.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author wishes to extend her gratitude to Mr. Roland Quiambao and Mr. Joshua Lorenzo for having taken the time out of their hectic schedules and sharing the sincerest insights in the name of the lantern advocacy.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Bronner, Simon J. *The Meaning of Folklore: The Analytical Essays of Alan Dundes*. Utah: Utah State University Press, 2007.
- Danesi, Marcel, *Messages, Signs, and Meanings: A Basic Textbook in Semiotics and Communication*. Canadian Scholars Press, 2004.
- Dissanayake, Ellen, *What Is Art For?* USA: University of Washington Press, 2002.
- Geertz, Clifford. *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books, 1973.
- _____. *After the Fact: Two Countries, Four Decades. One Anthropologist*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995.
- Giant Lantern Foundation. *Giant Lantern Festival 2015*. (Coffee table Book) Self-Published.
- Hatcher, Evelyn Payne. *Art as Culture an Introduction to the Anthropology of Art*. USA: University Press of America, 1985.
- Juntado, Dominique Angela M. "Ligligan Parul: Pampanga's Giant Lanterns as Political Cultural Thought," *TALA: An Online Journal of History* Vol. 2 No. 2 (2019): 182-184, http://talakasaysayan.org/Tala_Archives/Second_Volume/2/volume2-no.2-art6_juntado.pdf
- _____. "Contemplating Instances of Kapampangan Heritage Projected in Two, 2019 San Fernando Lantern Displays," *TALA: An Online Journal of History* Vol. 3 No. 1 (2020):19-46, http://talakasaysayan.org/Tala_Archives/Third_Volume/1/vol3-no1-art2_Contemplating-Instances-of-Kapampangan-Heritage.pdf.
- Mabanta-Fabian, Anne Therese. *Exhibiting the Giant Lanterns of Pampanga: Issues on the Universality of Display of a Regional Heritage* (Conference Proceeding) 2007.

Mcgee, Jon. Anthropological Theory An Introductory History. USA: McGraw-Hill, 2008.

Moore, Jerry D. Visions of Culture: An Introduction to Anthropological Theories 3e. UK: Altamira Press, 2009.