SA PAGPAKAON, PAGBISA, PAGHATAG LIMOS SA ILA JESUS, MARIA, KAG SAN JOSE: THE SOCIO-RELIGIOUS TRADITION OF *DECINUEVE* AND THE LOCAL POLITICS OF RELIGIOUS SYNCRETISM

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ABSTRACT

When the Spaniards arrived in the Philippine archipelago, they encountered the indigenous people who already had established religious systems and traditions. These systems, however, possessed a similar framework with Catholicism's idea of saints, such that it permitted the Spanish friars an easy conversion of the indigenous people and their adoption of Catholicism. This is the crucial thread that led to the development of Miagao, Iloilo's Decinueve tradition—a practice that resulted from the fusion of two different cultural products. At the heart of this celebration are the rituals that center on the Holy Family, represented by three people who were chosen by the San Jose devotee family. They are dressed for the "little theater" and are fed several dishes as the ritual necessitates, effectively becoming a vessel in which the host family's promise of celebrating the Sagrada Familia annually is fulfilled. While the whole affair looks like a totally Roman Catholic practice, a closer examination reveals precolonial religious elements. Taking from Astrid-Sala Boza's concept of Folk Catholicism and Neils Mulder's concept of Localization, and by categorizing individual features of the Decinueve tradition into indigenous, foreign, or syncretic, this thesis argues that the practice is ultimately Folk Catholic. This thesis further investigates the socio-historical and cultural context of and within Miagao that permitted the syncretic tradition to be rationalized and internalized within Miagao's Catholic social reality. The findings suggest that elements within the practice are recognizable, and the politics of its syncretism is four-fold. Thus, syncretic traditions are formed and take new meanings because of the politics surrounding them.