Crissot and his 'Alang Dios': A Metacritical Study

Mildred M. Crisostomo

Abstract - Informed by John Guillory's theory on canonformation, and Michel Foucault's author-function, this present work critically analyzes the criticisms about Juan Crisostomo Soto and his masterpiece Alang Dios! It intends to disclose and interrogate the power relations/struggle at work in the creation of a "Crissot" that was over and beyond the historical man that he was—a construct, a revered author, a literary icon, a "myth" of Kapampangan Literature. Significantly, it offers critical foundation and framework in the study of regional literature which is the pressing need at the moment to help characterize national literary sensibility. Using close reading and metacriticism to unveil the assumptions, norms, and contexts that necessitated the criticisms, findings show that the critics were moved by the needs of their own time and space. This means that their criticisms were meant to satisfy the demands of time that led to the use of similar means of propagating such demands through the use of press, newspapers, agencies, relevant situations, and celebrations that led to the sense of identity and valor for every Kapampangan and Kapampangan literature as a whole amidst colonial influences, subjugations, and promising literature across regions.

Keywords - Metacriticisms, construct, myth, literary icon

I. INTRODUCTION

Myth is defined as a widely held but false belief or idea. It can also be a traditional or legendary story, usually concerning some being or hero or event, with or without a determinable basis of fact or a natural explanation.

Myth making is a universal activity. Regardless of reasons, many are lured by the idea of creating or producing "something" especially creating or producing "someone". This habit is foremost culture-oriented. Our culture presupposes us to love our own, to patronize our own, to show concern for our own, and to fight for our own.

In literature, myth making functions in its real and literary meaning. In fact, the way we know a lot of writers is a product of blatant myth making that needs to be either confirmed or denied so that such writers would be given the stature or honor that they deserve.

It is said that in the field of Kapampangan literature and Philippine literature as a whole, one poet could have singlehandedly put Bacolor on the map. The name Juan Crisostomo Soto y Caballa (1867-1918), popularly known as

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Crissot, shines the brightest among the galaxy of Kapampangan writers. He wrote a mind-boggling 50 plays (including 3 tragedies, 8 comedies, 20 zarzuelas), more than 100 poems, as well as essays, novels, and short stories. "This is an output", wrote Icban-Castro (1981) one expects from a major writer in order if not of Shakespeare at least the minor Elizabethans". His best known works are the zarzuela Alang Dios!; the novel Lidia; the play Delia; the short story Y' Miss Phathupats; and the poem Malaya. Soto edited three newspapers, El Pueblo, El Imparcial, and Ing Alipatpat. Literary jousts in Kapampangan, rhymed and improvised on the spot, have been called crissotan, the Kapampangan counterpart of the Tagalog balagtasan. Soto was a major practitioner of belles letters comparable to Balagtas. Many of his works mirrored his intense revolutionary fervor; Soto wrote for La Independencia and served with Gen. Tomas Mascardo as major of infantry.

Soto went on to write about fifty plays, steadily acquiring his reputation as Pampanga's greatest dramatist. The real break from metrical romances was made earlier by 'Crissot' whose work 'Lidia' was the first prose narrative of its kind in Pampangan literature. By using contemporary material for his plot and prose as his medium, 'Crissot' gave his work the features of contemporaneity and realism that were to ultimately distinguish the new prose narratives from the metrical romances (Manlapaz 1976).

Likewise, Lacson (1984) expressed that Juan Crisostomo Soto will endure as a luminary in the whole of Kapampangan literature with his zarzuela *Alang Dios*!. Although Crissot wrote prodigiously, his fame would have been assured with just this single work of his.

In parallel sense, Mallari (2011) said that Juan Crisostomo Soto is a Kapampangan literary giant, most versatile and prolific writer. His literary craftsmanship achieves hybridity that allows his people to relish their "otherness" and "difference" and be glad for having such an identity. Soto's prosody reverberates, drawing attention to itself thus decentering the language of the colonizers.

Juan Crisostomo Soto made his way too, in poetry. In fact, his contribution as a poet was deemed of highest significance.

As published in the magazine The Torch (1965), 'No Kapampangan ever equaled nor surpassed Juan Crisostomo Soto on his use of rhythm and beauty in his poetry. This was seconded by Perez (1965) saying, 'Juan Crisostomo Soto is one of the heirs of Kapampangan poetry. His style in his poems is

clear, sweet, and orderly when compared with other Kapampangan poets.

All these and more attested one thing, that Juan Crisostomo Soto popularly known as Crissot was a cultural icon, an initiator of great things, a literary god adored by critics, a great Kapampangan author and poet worthy of emulation.

However, if he really was a cultural icon and a great author and poet, how come Kapampangan younger generations especially Bacolorenos do not have an idea of who he is? Worst, Kapampangan subject is not even offered as a general subject in the very hometown of Crissot which is Bacolor. How can you emulate someone you do not know? Would it be then justifiable to right away ride on the ship that his creators (critics) built on his behalf? Can we easily equate number of works produced to exceptionality? Is quantity equivalent to More than eight decades of extant reviews, critical essays, theses, and dissertations about Juan Crisostomo Soto and his Alang Dios! made Crissot a blatant product of a myth where he remains either as a beneficiary or a victim. The former is equivalent to the honor and prestige showered upon him while the latter makes Crissot a malleable construct or a myth whose destiny is relative, uncertain.

Therefore, a critical analysis of the way his greatness was assessed is in order.

A. Statement of the Problem

This study aims to identify, categorize, and analyze the criticisms about Juan Crisostomo Soto and his *Alang Dios*! from 1932 to 2013 which may ultimately lead to his rightful place and his masterpiece in Kapampangan literature.

Specifically, this study intends to answer the following questions:

- 1. What are the sociological, economic, and cultural events that paved the way for the critics in question to read and value Crissot and his *Alang Dios* in terms of both national and regional issues or events, sensibilities, and temperaments?
- 2. How did institutions like the government, schools, and other agencies participate in the propagation of the myth created of Crissot?
- 3. What were the theoretical underpinnings that influenced the critics' adulation for Crissot and his *Alang Dios*?
- 4. What are the implications of the findings of this study to Kapampangan critical tradition and literature?

B. Theoretical Framework

This study is based on John Guillory's canon-formation who said that literary critics have long known that the reputations of many writers have risen or fallen through the ages, and for many complex reasons; on Michel Foucault's author-function which states that the name of an author does not simply refer to a particular individual; it signifies a role that

is created by the ways discourse is treated in the culture, and it serves a particular function in the circulation of texts where it characterizes a particular manner of existence of discourse (cited by Hendricks 2002:153).

Along with history, the context, the demands of the critics' time and space were tackled in this study.

C. Significance of the Study

This study is an answer to the observation of Tinio (1973) that it is difficult to characterize the national literary sensibility because the great of bulk of vernacular literature has remained uncollected. Hence, it seems imperative that massive basic research in vernacular literature be undertaken.

Such observation was seconded by de Ungria (2009) when he said that lack of critical consciousness in regional literature is an indication of the lack of passion for truth.

Furthermore, the result of this study provides means on how a particular regional writer and a particular regional literary text is valued and preserved through canon-formation.

II. METHOD AND MATERIALS

This study made use of close reading and metacriticism so that assumptions and norms involved in the criticisms will be surfaced including the context, the said, the unsaid, and the history that necessitated and supported such.

The study focused on the criticisms in the forms of reviews, critical essays, theses, and dissertations about Juan Crisostomo Soto and his masterpiece *Alang Dios* (1932-2013). Noteworthy to emphasize is the fact that the study is not about Juan Crisostomo Soto but the criticisms about him and his *Alang Dios*! as a script or a text.

This is limited only to the identification, categorization, and analysis of the said criticisms in a span of eight decades (1932-2013) which ultimately lead to the rightful place of Juan Crisostomo Soto and his masterpiece *Alang Dios* in Kapampangan literature.

III. RESULTS

The table below shows the summary of findings and results of the study.

Identification and Categorization of criticisms	Means of Propagating the myth	Theoretical underpinnings	National, regional, cultural issues and sensibilities
THESES AND DISSERTATIONS			
Juan Crissotomo Soto and Pampangan Drama by Aguas (1963)	Various activities in Kapampangan like staging of zarzuelas continues until mid 70's.	Aguas was somehow aware of how a prominent literay god or icon like Crissot could help maintain if not improve the popularity of Kapampangan language and literature.	It was written when Kapampangan newspapers, magazines, and dailies were still in active circulation because of active patronage of many writers and readers in Kapampangan.
A Deconstruction of the Social and Cultural Discourses in Juan Crisostomo Soto's Alang Dios by Delos Reyes (2013)	Different Agumans and Kapampangan organizations were formed which primarily sponsor and host seminars, workshops, and various activities in Kapampangan.	De los Reyes believed that there is a need to facilitate the crossing or transporting of Crissot and his famous 'Alang Dios' from the traditional to contemporary to help preserve the value of such author and work.	It was written when few Kapampangans started to re-introduce, revive, and remind fellow Kapampangans especially the young ones about their own literature highlighting Juan Crisostomo Soto and his <i>Alang Dios</i> .
Isang Pag-aaral sa mga Tula ni Juan Crisostomo Soto:Ang Ama ng Panitikang Kapampangan ni Sunga (1973)	Various activities in Kapampangan like staging of zarzuelas and continues until mid 70's.	For an author to transcend his own time and space is to explore his ingenuity in other fields. Sunga did a novel work by introducing Crissot as a poet and an initiator of great things in Kapampangan poetry.	It was written a year after the declaration of the Martial Law by President Ferdinand Marcos. In the same year Kapampangan newspapers and dailies started to have gradual publication decline.
Saling Akda sa Filipino ng Sarswelang Kapampangan "Alang Dios" ni Juan Crisostomo Soto ni Tagala (2006)	Different Agumans and Kapampangan organizations like Dinsulan and Katatagan were formed which primarily sponsor and host seminars, workshops, and various activities in Kapampangan	Tagala made 'Alang Dios'and Crissot accessible to non Kapampangan speakers as a means of promoting Kapampangan literature in general.	It was written when few Kapampangans started to re-introduce, revive, and remind fellow Kapampangans especially the young ones about their own literature highlighting Juan Crisostomo Soto and his <i>Alang Dios</i> .
REVIEWS AND CRITICAL ESSAYS			
"Crissot Acknowledged Best Poet Ever Produced in Pampanga Province by Capitulo (1933)	Organizations like Parnasung Kapampangan and Aguman Crissot (Crissot Society) hold occasional activities on Crissot's behalf. Many Kapampangan artists, writers, and poets made regular gathering, shows, and plays which were open to the public like bulaklakan and crissotan. Crissot's 'Alang Dios' was staged many times since it was first presented on November 16, 1902. Many Kapampangan	Capitulo highlighted the achievement of Crissot as a poet to help strengthen Kapampangan language and poetry. The critical essay was primarily	Onset of the Commonwealth Period when Komisyon ng Wikang Filipino was established, Kapampangan Language was second to the least spoken languages in the country, and Pilipino was chosen as the National Language due to its vast and extensive achievement in literature Onset of the Commonwealth Period when
"Crissot: Pasuglap Qng Bie Na," by Baluyot (1935)	Many Kapampangan artists, writers, and poets made regular gathering, shows, and plays which were open to the public like bulaklakan and crissotan. Crissot's 'Alang Dios' was staged many times since it was first presented on November 16, 1902.	The critical essay was primarily meant to celebrate Crissot's accomplishments as a means of celebrating Kapampangan literature as a whole. It was written to make Kapampangan language more popular.	Onset of the Commonwealth Period when Komisyon ng Wikang Filipino was established, Kapampangan Language was second to the least spoken languages in the country, and Pilipino was chosen as the National Language due to its vast and extensive achievement in literature
"Crissot" by Galang R.(1938)	Many Kapampangan artists, writers, and poets made regular gathering, shows, and plays which	Just like that of Baluyot, this criticism was written to make Kapampangan language more popular.	Onset of the Commonwealth Period when Komisyon ng Wikang Filipino was established, Kapampangan Language was second to the least spoken languages in the

	were open to the public like bulaklakan and crissotan. Crissot's 'Alang Dios' was staged many times since it was first presented on November 16, 1902.		country, and Pilipino was chosen as the National Language due to its vast and extensive achievement in literature
Encyclopedia of the Philippines by Galang Z. (1935)	Many Kapampangan artists, writers, and poets made regular gathering, shows, and plays which were open to the public like bulaklakan and crissotan. Crissot's 'Alang Dios' was staged many times since it was first presented on November 16, 1902.	Galang implied that being part of the encyclopedia of the Philippines is equal to fame.	Onset of the Commonwealth Period when Komisyon ng Wikang Filipino was established, Kapampangan Language was second to the least spoken languages in the country, and Pilipino was chosen as the National Language due to its vast and extensive achievement in literature
A Brief History of Philippine Literature by Del Castillo (1937)	Many Kapampangan artists, writers, and poets made regular gathering, shows, and plays which were open to the public like bulaklakan. Crissot's 'Alang Dios' was staged many times since it was first presented on November 16, 1902.	Crissot and his Alang Dios were presented as outstanding in Kapampangan literature. Most likely, Del Castillo thought of showcasing Kapampangan literature and language as on a par with that of Tagalog.	Onset of the Commonwealth Period when Komisyon ng Wikang Filipino was established, Kapampangan Language was second to the least spoken languages in the country, and Pilipino was chosen as the National Language due to its vast and extensive achievement in literature
Parnasong Capampangan ding Ibpa ning Amanung Sisuan ni Gutierrez (1932)	Many Kapampangan artists, writers, and poets made regular gathering, shows, and plays which were open to the public like bulaklakan and crissotan. Crissot's 'Alang Dios' was staged many times since it was first presented on November 16, 1902.	The criticism is a counter-act to the plight of Kapampangan language during the specified period.	Onset of the Commonwealth Period when Komisyon ng Wikang Filipino was established, Kapampangan Language was second to the least spoken languages in the country, and Pilipino was chosen as the National Language due to its vast and extensive achievement in literature
Literature of the Pampangos by Icban-Castro (1981)	Various Kapampangan contests and shows were held to showcase unique Kapampangan talents like crissotan (a literary joust named after Juan Crisostomo Soto which is the Tagalog counterpart of balagtasan), and poetry writing and reading.	This criticism could also be a counter-act to the lack of patronage, and interested writers and readers in Kapampangan.	It was written when newspapers and dailies in Kapampangan ceased to publish due to lack of patronage, interested writers, and readers in Kapampangan, and the spiraling cost of publication.
Kapampangan Writing: A Selected Compendium and Critique by Lacson (1984)	Various Kapampangan contests and shows were held to showcase unique Kapampangan talents like crissotan (a literary joust named after Juan Crisostomo Soto which is the Tagalog counterpart of balagtasan), and poetry writing and reading.	Lacson's criticism celebrates the what the writers and their writings achieved in the field of literature to help propagate the popularity of Kapampangan literature and language.	It was written when newspapers and dailies in Kapampangan ceased to publish due to lack of patronage, interested writers, and readers in Kapampangan, and the spiraling cost of publication.
Indigenizing the Zarzuela: Kapampangan Ethnocentric Adoption of the Foreign Genre by Mallari (2011)	Different Agumans and Kapampangan organizations were formed which primarily sponsor and host seminars, workshops, and various activities in Kapampangan like Aguman Talaturung Kapampangan. This organization holds	Mallari is very exact in writing this criticism. She specifically focused on the ingenuity of Crissot and his 'Alang Dios' in fulfilling the role that Kapampangan culture imposed upon Crissot.	It was written when few Kapampangans started to re-introduce, revive, and remind fellow Kapampangans especially the young ones about their own literature highlighting Juan Crisostomo Soto and his <i>Alang Dios</i> .

Notes Towards A History of Pampangan Literature by Manlapaz (1976)	seminars in academic institutions having both teachers and students as audience. Various activities in Kapampangan like staging of zarzuelas continues until mid 70's.	Manlapaz considered that this criticism could somehow help the gradual yet steady decline of publication of Kapampangan materials like newspapers.	It was written during the Martial Law Period when Kapampangan newspapers and dailies started to have a gradual publication decline; a year after the packed house play of 'Alang Dios' at the Cultural Center in 1975.
Kapampangan Literature: A Historical Survey and Anthology by Manlapaz (1981)	Various Kapampangan contests and shows were held to showcase unique Kapampangan talents like crissotan (a literary joust named after Juan Crisostomo Soto which is the Tagalog counterpart of balagtasan), and poetry writing and reading.	This anthology of Kapampangan literature strengthened the claims of every Kapampangan with regard to their rich literature. It was written to increase the number of interested writers and readers in Kapampangan.	It was written when newspapers and dailies in Kapampangan ceased to publish due to lack of patronage, interested writers, and readers in Kapampangan, and the spiraling cost of publication.
Revisiting the Historical Data Papers on Microfilm as Source of Kapampangan History by Mendoza (2003)	Different Agumans and Kapampangan organizations were formed which primarily sponsor and host seminars, workshops, and various activities in Kapampangan	Mendoza stressed that history can help validate claims and ssumptions. She validated the stature of Crissot and his 'Alang Dios.'	It was written when few Kapampangans started to re-introduce, revive, and remind fellow Kapampangans especially the young ones about their own literature highlighting Juan Crisostomo Soto and his <i>Alang Dios</i> .
A Survey of Pampango Literature by Perez (1969)	Various activities in Kapampangan like staging of zarzuelas continues until mid 70's.	The criticism aided in the propagation of Kapampangan literature which is culture-oriented.	It was written when Kapampangan newspapers, magazines, and dailies were still in active circulation because of active patronage of many writers and readers in Kapampangan.

Gutierrez (1932), Capitulo (1933), Galang (1935), Baluyot (1935), and Del Castillo (1937), Galang (1938) wrote their criticisms during the onset of the commonwealth period from 1935-1945 when Kapampangan was the second to the least spoken dominant languages in the country. It was on the same period when the Komisyon sa Wikang Filipino was established and Pilipino (Filipino) was chosen as the National Language due to its extensive literary achievements. The context was therefore out of the critics desire to make the Kapampangan language known and be on a par with the other dominant languages in terms of number of people speaking the language in the country through re-introducing Juan Crisostomo Soto highlighting his masterpiece 'Alang Dios'. During this period, a number of Kapampangan newspapers and dailies were also written and published. Along with it, was the mass production of zarzuelas including Alang Dios into theater and stage plays. The critics specifically focused on the works of Juan Crisostomo Soto like Ing Cavitena, Lidia, and especially Alang Dios which reflected unique Kapampangan sensibilities, temperaments, and passion for truth.

The criticisms of Aguas (1963), Perez (1969) were written when Kapampangan newspapers, dailies, and magazines were still in active circulation due to strong patronage, interested writers, and readers in Kapampangan.

Staging of zarzuelas especially 'Alang Dios' also continued up to mid 70's.

Sunga (1973) and Manlapaz (1976) produced their writings during the Martial Law period when anything that was revolutionary in nature was stopped for production. Various literary activities in Kapampangan were held like crissotan, poetry writing and reading contest, and even the staging of the zarzuela 'Alang Dios'. While, Castro (1981), Manlapaz (1981), and Lacson's (1984) reviews and critical essyas were written when Kapampangan newspapers and publications discontinued its circulations due to lack of patronage, interested writers and readers in Kapampangan and spiraling publication cost. Thus, the best way to remind people specifically the Kapampangans about their own literature and language was through talking and writing about Juan Crisostomo Soto and his 'Alang Dios' and Kapampangan literature as a whole. This group of critics also talked about Soto's poetry and short stories which portrayed the poet's themes which were drawn from socio-political happenings around him like Malaya and Ing Anac Ning Katipunan. The functional sense of the aforesaid works which aimed at transforming the society into a more receptive yet indomitable and humane one was clearly expressed.

On the other hand, Mendoza (2003), Tagala (2006), Mallari (2011), and de los Reyes (2013) reviews and

manuscripts were produced to re-introduce, revive, and celebrate the accomplishments of Kapampangan writers and their works specifically Juan Crisostomo Soto and his *Alang Dios* and the Kapampangan literature as a whole so that younger Kapampangans would become aware and be proud of their own literature. They also cited some of the works of Soto which fall under satiric corpus of laughing at follies and foibles of individuals and society to change them for the better like *Y Miss Phatuphats* where Soto ridiculed those who tend to consciously forget their native tongue after a short encounter with foreigners.

As a whole, the criticisms had the purpose of making Crissot, his 'Alang Dios' amd Kapampangan literature accessible to both Kapampangan and non Kapampangan, speakers, writers, readers, and researchers through translation (Filipino and English), transporting of the material and the author from traditional to the present by means of contemporary reading, highlighting the exceptional qualities of both the author and the works.

Specifically, on Mallari's Indigenizing the Zarzuela...

Mallari emphasized that culture undoubtedly played a very important role in the emergence of an indomitable spirit among Kapampangans. Instead of being subjugated, the Kapampangans experienced a profound sense of fulfillment, be it personal or tribal because of zarzuelas.

Soto, the best known Kapampangan dramatist, together with his contemporary writers responded enthusiastically to the spirit of the times by being productive. These writers produced works which remain unsurpassed—perhaps primarily because of their synchronicity with local culture and their relevance to the life of the consumers at that time. Given their artistic achievements, therefore, the zarzuela writers largely determined the course of the province's literary development.

- Mallari, 2011:165

From the aforementioned statements by Mallari, it is clear that 'Crissot' played the role that his culture dictated. Considered as the Kapampangan literature's most prolific dramatist and writer who produced across genres, 'Crissot' led the writing Kapampangans to a peaceful revolution that caused the literary development of the province. He, along with other zarzuelistas was extremely supported by the literary culture which includes the community of readers, writers, history, and agencies.

Similarly, Galang (1938) speaking about the exceptional qualities of Crissot when it comes to presenting a unique Kapampangan cultural identity, sensibility, and temperament, expressed:

Crissot was highly temperamental in nature and his attitude of mind was romantic. Mountains, moonlight, music, and flowers appealed to his sensitive nature. He went through period of barrenness, but thoughts of the beautiful engrossed

his mind and the writing urge came upon him, he did write. He wrote lines of the most delicate lyrical quality, and of the most exaggerated burlesque, descriptions of the most peaceful country life and of the bloodiest battle scenes, passages of the deepest profundity on the death of Christ...

- Galang, 1938:382-383

Indeed, many critics and writers have single, unified impression on Crissot. Cayco (1932) said that "Crissot is the man who, more than anybody else, depicted faithfully the life and feelings of his generation. Undoubtedly, he may be singled out as the true representative of the Pampango drama and Pampango poetry. He was head and shoulder above the rest in the poetry, dramas, zarzuelas, etc., that he wrote." Amado Yuzon, Pampango poet, shares the same view, saying that as a dramatist and lyrist, Soto was without peer in Pampango literature; and Galang considers him "as having laid the foundation for the present interest in the literary development of Pampangan...

IV. CONCLUSION

The findings of this study led into the reality of how the critics were one in terms of motivation, context, and method creating the myth of 'Crissot' or Juan Crisostomo Soto and his masterpiece Alang Dios to achieve a sense of identity and valor for every Kapampangan and Kapampangan literature for survival amidst colonial influences, subjugations, and promising literature across regions. Despite varied and changing needs of time, space, and culture along with serious problems on Kapampangan orthography that caused faction among Kapampangan writers, old and young, the critics created no conflict in making use of press, papers, and even agencies like the academe and other relevant situations and celebrations in the propagation of Juan Crisostomo Soto and his Alang Dios' myth making. Translation, contemporary reading, and highlighting the exceptional qualities of Crissot and his 'Alang Dios' were done by the critics to somehow make them accessible to both Kapampangan and non Kapampangan speakers, writers, readers, and researchers for appreciation and preservation.

Different Kapampangan organizations both institutional and local based were formed. Various activities were and still are regularly held to celebrate unique Kapampangan talents through literary contests like *crissotan*, poetry writing, and reading contest, stage plays and presentations.

Regular seminars and workshops are also held in different schools, universities and local offices where teachers, students, writers, and culture enthusiasts are invited. At present, launching of Kapampangan books and giving of recognition to outstanding Kapampangans are given importance so that younger Kapampangans would be encouraged and inspired to love their own and write in their own language and literature.

Juan Crisostomo Soto's stature and position in Kapampangan literature including his masterpiece *Alang Dios* is but right and well deserved. He is obviously a literary god, a cultural icon, and an initiator of great things in Kapampangan literature.

Meanwhile, the need to continue works on critical studies in Kapampangan literature and on other Kapampangan writers and their works aside from Juan Crisostomo Soto is recommended.

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AUTHOR'S PROFILE

Mildred M. Crisostomo, Ph D, The Graduate School, University of Santo Tomas, Espana, Manila, Philippines/ Don honorio Ventura Technological State University, Bacolor, Pampanga, Philippines, Ph D, The Graduate School, University of Santo Tomas, Espana, Manila, Philippines/ Don honorio Ventura Technological State University, Bacolor, Pampanga, Philippines