

# Teofilo Garcia (The Living Treasure of the Ilokanos): His Language as a Communal Artist

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This study, entitled Teofilo Garcia (The Living Treasure of the Ilokanos): His Language as a Communal Artist revolves around Teofilo Garcia, a resident of Sabulod, San Quintin, Abra. He is laden with human values that helped him become what he is now. Ilokanos are popularly known to be industrious, thrifty, generous, kind, patient and God-fearing. As an Ilokano, Teofilo possesses all these traits, which helped him achieve all his goals in life. Having maintained these traits from his childhood to his present age, he was able to come up with a product named “Kattukong a Tabungaw” (Gourd Hat). This is an Ilokano hat made out of the vegetable called “Tabungaw” (Gourd) now loved to be used as a hat or decoration in offices and homes by Filipinos and foreigners, not only in the Philippines but in other parts of the world. The “Kattukong, a Tabungaw” made by Teofilo, is made from the round-shaped gourd harvested in his vast plantation in the place he named as “Third Mountain”, situated at Sabulod, San Quintin, Abra. There are a lot of advantages of observations, imitations and applications on what a person sees around him. On the part of Teofilo, his presence during the time that his grandfather and his father were making a “Tabungaw Hat” gave him the chance to patiently observe, imitate and apply how to make one. Just like any beginner, his first products were not yet perfect, but due to his persistence to make the best “Tabungaw Hat”, he became a successful artist in this field. These great evidences, even if they remain unsaid, serve as a language to prove that he is a very precious gem of the Filipinos. He gave justice to his belief that being wealthy is not the only way to be considered as a “National Living Treasure” and be awarded the Gawad ng Manlilikha ng Bayan administered by the National Commission for Culture and the Arts, institutionalised through Republic Act 7355. This research hopes that the exquisite “Tabungaw hats of Garcia as stressed by Almosora (2012) will motivate the younger generation – those from the communities all over



the Philippines to appreciate the Gawad Manlilikha ng Bayan awardees like Garcia as a source of inspiration and pride for a deep national identity, the “language” used to define the real Filipinos.

**Keywords:** *Teofilo Garcia, Ilokanos, Communal artist, Bangued, Abra, Philippines.*

## **Introduction**

There are different opinions about how a person acquires the talent or wisdom he possesses. Some people say that these characteristics are inborn and are inherited from the parents. Others say that a person might not be born intelligent and talented but could turn out to be so through strong determination to learn and become knowledgeable or skilful in his line of interest in order to become successful. There are also others who believe that destiny plays its role. They believe that long before a person is born, God has already designed his life and has already set what he will become in the future.

There are multiple factors that serve as barriers to achieve the goals set for anything planned. These could be humiliations from people with negative intentions, poverty, risks, destructions from calamities both natural and man-made and many more. However, these aforementioned barriers could never affect the fervent desire of a person with positive outlooks in life to reach his goals. Instead, these will serve as challenges for him to overcome to the fullest in order to become a victor at the end.

These are only a few of the many opinions about how people got their talents. Whichever is true, it is only the person concerned who knows which one is contributory to his success story.

## **Methodology**

This study made use of a face-to-face interview. The interview was recorded for the accuracy of the information needed. Direct observation was carried out on how to make the “Kattukong a Tabungaw”. The Gourd Plantation was personally visited. The displayed product for sale in the artist’s home and in his booth during the Kawayan Festival (Abra Foundation Day) was actually viewed. In addition to the needed information, published articles, books and other related sources were used.

Attendance to the Commencement Exercises of the Fourth Year Students of San Quintin National High School also added to information needed.



## **Results and Discussion**

### ***Teofilo Garcia and His Family***

Teofilo Garcia is from Sabulod, San Quintin, Abra. He was born on March 27, 1941. His parents were Francisco Padapat Garcia and Concepcion Cabotaje Callos. He is the fifth of eight siblings. At an early age, he married Dolores Cabael from Cadacad, Narvacan, Ilocos Sur and they are blessed with three sons and two daughters.

Arranged in chronological order, Ferdinand, the eldest, graduated with a Bachelor of Science in Electrical Engineering but decided to join the Philippine National Police instead of exercising his profession as an engineer. The second is Redentor who graduated as a Marine Engineer at Northern Philippines College for Maritime, Science and Technology in San Fernando City, La Union and preferred to work as a dispatcher of the Partas Bus Company rather than as a seaman. His youngest son and the third child is George, who finished the same course as his brother Redentor and ended up working with his father on their farm and in their Kattukong-making business. His older daughter Jocelyn graduated with a Bachelor of Science in Chemical Engineering at St. Louis University in Baguio City, worked as an OFW but had decided to take care of her children. Carol, the youngest of his five children, finished a Bachelor of Science in Hotel and Restaurant Management at the University of Northern Philippines, Vigan City. She never applied for any work because she took care of her only child when her husband, who was formerly a seaman, died.

The main source of living for Teofilo Garcia is farming. He is a hard working person, an industrious farmer. He owns 60 hectares of land he inherited from his parents in a mountainous area situated at Sabulod, San Quintin. His agricultural lot is planted with different agricultural crops such as eggplants, string beans, tomatoes, peanuts, gourd, tobacco, and many more. There are also mango trees of different varieties and other trees that could be used as lumber planted in the said place. In short, Garcia's property exemplifies a very perfect example of a place with a panoramic view of God's beautiful and bountiful gifts of nature. Though against his will, according to him, he decided to sell some portions of his land because now that he is getting older, and is already hard up in maintaining his farm, even with his son George helping him. Going daily to and from the high mountain he named as the "Third Mountain" where his lot is situated is something to highly appreciate. The narrow road leading to his lot is very risky to navigate, and is very slippery during the rainy season and very dusty during the dry season. Walking up through the ravine to reach the place is risky for a person with health problems.

With regards to his life with his wife Dolores, he was so happy to share that they had had a smooth sailing relationship up to now, despite the trials and challenges that came their way, because they both believe that marriage is not always a bed of roses.



### ***The “Third Mountain of Sabulod” is the Secret of His Success***

Starting from their home situated near the highway of Pantoc, San Quintin, Abra, the road is still a plateau. It takes a few minutes to walk across the plateau before gradually climbing the three high mountains. For Garcia, it seemed that he was not affected by the difficulty of climbing up the mountains, because this was already part of his daily routine activity. Aside from being risky, a person going there for the first time might risk not only his/her health but might not have the intention to go there again.

The Gourd Plantation of Teofilo is found in the “Third Mountain”. It is a very high place overlooking some areas in the municipality of San Quintin. The land area of his plantation is very wide, proudly containing hundreds of nicely shaped gourds of different sizes, promising good harvests to be converted into elegant “Kattukong a Tabungaw” hats. Going to and from the high mountains is so easy for Garcia, his son George and some of his other farm workers, but the risk along the way always awaits. This situation did not serve as a barrier for a noble and Godly cause. Everybody who appreciates his passion to create a good product supported him all the way. They helped him in bringing up and down the mountains all the things he needed in farming up to the time the Gourds were ready to be harvested and brought down to his home to be dried up. Besides, upon reaching the top of the mountains, anybody going there feels relaxed and relieved because of the unexplainable beauty of nature, all from God’s creative and amazing hands.

However, there were also times when his plants, especially the fruits of his Gourd, were destroyed by stray animals, pests, thieves and natural calamities. Garcia is also a jolly fellow. He shared one unforgettable experience and technique he applied when people kept stealing the young fruits of his gourd for a viand during his first planting time. Thieves kept stealing the fruits of his plant and nothing was left for making a Kattukong. He thought of placing a piece of wood with an empty bottle of insecticide he filled with drinking water at the center of his gourd plantation. Right at that moment, he told people who saw him that they had to inform others that he bought the bottle from a province famous for witchcraft, so that whomever would steal the fruits of his gourd again would suffer from something unusual. Since then, because he was also clever and wise, he was able to gather more than enough of the Gourds he needed for his craft.

### ***Advantages of Observations, Imitations and Applications***

Teofilo was still a young boy when he saw his grandfather making Kattukong being helped by his father. He was always observing his grandfather and his father whenever they were working, with the desire that he would be able to learn what they were doing. He attentively observed the procedure they applied, from the start of the processes up to how the product

was completed. That became his routine activity until he decided to imitate what he had observed. How happy he was when he was able to make one.

He was able to prove that he could make a kattukong just like those made by his grandfather and his father, although the quality was not as good as theirs. He was only 15 years old then. That was the start of his passion for making Kattukong. He made some only to be worn by him when he went to other places, even outside the province, until many people wanted to buy his products. He made more kattukong and tried to bring them to nearby places for sale. People paid him money but others bartered their other products in exchange for his kattukong. Then the rest was history on the life of Teofilo Garcia and his elegant “Kattukong a Tabungaw”.

### ***The Gourd Plant***

One of the most delicious vegetables for a viand is the Gourd. The young leaves can be cooked in as many ways as the fruit itself. These can be cooked with meat or fish or be plainly cooked according to one’s taste or choice. The young fruit can also be broiled. The Gourd that will be used in making a Kattukong is planted in the month of October. When well-taken care of, one plant can bear abundant fruits. Gourds come in many shapes and forms. The so-called bottle gourd is elongated, while the gourd used in making a kattukong has a rounded shape.

One sign that the gourd is ready to be harvested is the sound it produces when knocked with the knuckles. If the fruit is extremely big in size, it will take 120-150 days before it can be harvested, if small in size, it only takes 90-105 days. Gourds that are already matured are light green and seem to have small stains that are white and grey. The knife used in harvesting the gourd should be sharp to preserve the handle necessary to make the kattukong elegant in style or design. Once the gourds are harvested, they should be placed in a shady space with open air until thoroughly dried up to serve the purpose.

Through these processes, it can be proven without question that the family of Teofilo Garcia is composed of patient, hard-working and creative people who are always ready to help one another and work cooperatively for their family’s plans to achieve success.

Recalling the history of the Philippines, the couple Diego and Gabriela Silang, well-known heroes of the Philippines, wore Kattukong during their time and this can be seen in their monuments, in books, magazines and other materials where information about them is published. Since they are Ilokanos who wore Kattukong in their prime days, the said head covering seems to have been a symbol for being an Ilokano.



The beauty, elegance and attraction of the “Kattukong a Tabungaw” is not only to be viewed among the Filipinos; foreigners staying in the Philippines or those who only come to the country as tourists are also very much attracted to them. Some Filipinos working abroad even consider it as a very precious gift to their employers, and are not bothered by the difficulty of transporting it. Orders for Garcia’s product overflow, so he often needs more workers to help him. Most of his workers are teenage relatives.

His intention in hiring his young relatives to work with him is very noble. This is not only to his own advantage, to cope up with the numerous orders, but to give the young people a source of living and train them in making a “Kattukong a Tabungaw”, not just for livelihood but for sincerity and concern in the preservation of the trade from generation to generation. According to him, this will be the legacy he intends to leave behind with a hope that somebody will continue making the product when he will no longer be in this world. In addition to this, he wants the young generation of today to feel the essence of being a lover of different arts, because it might serve as avenues to bring fame and glory not only for themselves and their families but for the community where they belong in particular, and for the country in general.

### ***Significance, Honour and Opportunities Given by Kattukong a Tabungaw (Gourd Hat)***

Kattukong a Tabungaw is one of the many crafts creatively produced to be worn on the head, either for protection from the sun and rain or to cover thinning hair or a bald head. This is made out of the upper portion of dried rounded gourd with the handle. At present, it is used as an expensive living room decoration of wealthy people, given as a gift to top leaders of other countries visiting the Philippines and worn as a substitute for a commencement cap. This has been the practice at San Quintin National High School, the school where Garcia is a part-time teacher. They use the Kattukong a Tabungaw as their commencement cap instead of the usual caps used by all other schools in the country.

Garcia’s outstanding achievements, include his awards of recognition in local, regional, national and international levels, cash incentives, medals, invitations as a speaker in the Philippines and in other countries, served as his inspirations in life. Some of the major awards he received were the “Gawad sa Manlilikha ng Bayan Award (The Living Treasure) through Republic Act 7355, strongly supported by the National Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCCA). Another award he received was the “Outstanding Abreno Award during the Abra Foundation Day. He received cash incentives for all of these achievements.

The vision, mission, goals and objectives of the NCCA and all other supporting agencies is one of its kind. Its task of appreciating and recognising the outstanding achievements of all artists is equally and highly appreciated, and it is hoped and expected that it will

continuously give recognition to all artists who will be carefully chosen among the nominees with their areas of expertise. The nominees, of which Garcia has always been lucky enough to be one, showcased their products in their own unique ways and strategies as they answered the questions of the judges. According to Garcia, all of the nominees were very deserving. They were all very eager to display their products in the Philippines and in other countries where they were invited to go. The winners were awarded at Malacanang during a very special ceremony, a rare opportunity afforded only to those who excel, selected from among the millions..

The awarding ceremony was attended by then Abra Governor Hon. Eustaquio “Takit” B. Bersamin, proof that he had given his all-out support to every endeavour the people from Abra wanted to undertake during his term as top executive of the province. The awardees were given cash incentives of Php100000.00 each. Garcia bought a hearing aid with money from his prize because he had difficulty in hearing.

All these wonderful accomplishments of Garcia and his co-Gawad sa Manlilikha ng Bayan Awardees serve as inspirations to the Filipinos especially the youth, whom our National Hero Dr. Jose Rizal considers as the “Hope of the Fatherland”. It is a dream for all Filipinos that this nation will become great again if everyone will do his part to help preserve the rich culture, traditions, beliefs and good Filipino values in the Philippines. It is for this reason that Garcia wants to continue helping the young Abrenos to love his craft through the years. Due to his noble purpose, he received another blessing from God, because not long after receiving his award from the NCCA, the Department of Education in the province of Abra included in their curriculum, particularly in TLE – the Making of a Kattukong a Tabungaw. This was specially implemented at San Quintin National High School in San Quintin, Abra where Garcia resides.

The TLE subject included making a Kattukong a Tabungaw in their list of learning priorities with the following objectives:

- a. To provide the necessary information in order for the students to learn the different procedure or processes in making a “Kattukong a Tabungaw”.
- b. To provide another type of training different from the usual lessons or projects they used to have.
- c. To transfer the skills possessed by Garcia.

The skills Garcia has acquired through observations and also believed to be inherited from his father and grandfather are enough to transfer the necessary learning to his students. Though he did not graduate from a Teacher Education Course, he was given a teaching load in

Technology and Home Economics for 30 minutes for two days through Peer Teaching with the teachers in San Quintin National High School. This is the so-called Techno Transfer Program. The NCCA paid the salary and allowance of Garcia for becoming a partner of the school in teaching the students his expertise. They also assisted him in everything he did for the preparation of the “Kattukong a Tabungaw” making Teaching Modules, Student’s Modules and Teaching Guides used by Garcia himself, the teachers and the students. This was made possible due to the efforts of the supportive principal of SQNHS, Dr. Herman M. Barcena who was also the coordinator of the said program.

### ***Preparation of Materials for the Kattukong***

Making the “Kattukong a Tabungaw” is not an easy task. It needs months of preparation from planting, harvesting and drying to the actual assembling processes. Going over the hardships of Garcia from his tedious tasks in the farm up to his expenditures until the finished product is sold is hard to explain. But this never served as a hindrance to Garcia in his passion. Instead, he worked harder, encouraging his workers to create the best products they could ever produce. These are the steps used by the “Living Treasure of the Ilokanos” in Abra in working on his Kattukong a Tabungaw:

- Dry the harvested gourd to make it hard in a shady place. Note: the gourd will have tiny scars or breaks once placed directly under the sun.
- Divide the gourd nicely (crosswise) using a sharp rip saw. Be careful in dividing in order to have a perfect shape.
- Remove the seeds of the gourd and let it dry under the sun. Keep it for future planting.
- Let it dry in a shady place for one month.
- Thoroughly clean the inner part of the gourd (half of the gourd with handle) with the use of a brittle brush or kitchen scrub pad.
- To remove stains (if any) in the outer part of the gourd, smooth it through the use of a kitchen scrub pad. Be careful in doing this so as not to break or destroy its appearance, especially the handle.
- Dry the thoroughly cleaned gourd in a shady place.
- Prepare it for assembling.

### ***Procedure in Making the Kattukong a Tabungaw***

Through the interview conducted, the researcher noted the following steps followed by Garcia in making the Kattukong a Tabungaw:

- Prepare the cushion made of woven bamboo or rattan. (Sometimes this was made by Garcia and his workers but due to numerous orders, he preferred to buy ready-made cushions from Lapaz, a place where the famous bamboo craft industry in Abra is found).
- Place the cushion at the inner part of the gourd, being sure that it should be perfectly placed and fitted, trimming down the cushion according to the shape of the gourd.
- Spray or paint the gourd evenly with a yellow varnish for the first coating. Let it dry completely for a few minutes.
- Apply a natural varnish evenly for a shinier effect giving the gourd a more elegant look.
- Finish the lower part of the kattukong a tabungaw by using “nito” to make it sturdy and more attractive.
- Inspect the finished product for quality assurance.

Garcia is strict as far as the quality of his products is concerned. This is one of his commitments to NCCA, to himself, to the Filipinos/Abrenos he represents and most of all to the art he had learned to love. Another important thing is, he wants to maintain his status as an Outstanding Tabungaw a Kattukong maker, the ultimate reason why he was awarded the famous Gawad sa Manlilikha sponsored by the National Commission for Culture and the Arts.

### ***The ARYA Abra Festival and the Prices of His Products***

Every year, Garcia used to bring his products for exhibit during the ARYA ABRA now the KAWAYAN FESTIVAL. This is in celebration with the Abra Foundation Day, where different products of the 27 municipalities in Abra are displayed for sale. Different activities to prove how beautiful and talented Abrenos are also take place. Agricultural products and animals are paraded around the town and booths for each municipality are prepared for exhibits. Programs are put on daily from morning to late evening, where both private and government sectors in the entire province of Abra are well represented. It is during this occasion that Abra is really a peaceful place to visit and to stay despite the negative impressions many people have of Abra.

It is also during this celebration that Garcia displays his products in a space he occupies. He also goes to other provinces upon invitation to advertise and sell his products. The following are the prices of his Kattukong a Tabungaw based on their quality, design, and sizes, but the prices are subject to increase:

1. **First Class** - Php2,000.00 with a diameter of 14 – 15 inches, no stains and perfectly painted and varnished, decorated with “nito” at the lower portion and with bamboo or rattan cushion.

2. **Second Class** –Php1,900.00 with a diameter of 12 – 13 inches, no stains and perfectly painted and varnished with “nito” at the lower portion and with bamboo or rattan cushion.
3. **Third Class** – Php1,700.00 with a diameter of 10 – 11 inches, no stains and nicely painted and varnished with “nito” and bamboo or rattan cushion.
4. **Fourth Class** – lower than P1,700.00 and with smaller diameter nicely painted and varnished, with small stains, with “nito” and bamboo or rattan cushion.
5. **Fifth Class** – Php500.00 – Php700.00 with a diameter of 6 – 7 inches, with stains, painted and varnished, with “nito” and bamboo or cushion.

### *The Words in the Language of Garcia as a Lover of Arts*

Garcia’s words in his language as an artist might have connections with his success. Some experts say that the quality of the language used by a person describes who he is and might serve as a guiding light to follow in his life’s journey. This might be the reason why Garcia, the artist that he is, uses these words in his language to use, understand and realise all his plans in order to achieve success.

The following words were used by Garcia in his daily undertakings as a famous “Kattukong a Tabungaw” maker, giving him prestigious awards:

1. Adipen –naayat wenno pasurot iti arte (lover of art).
2. Agkaraiwarais – agkaraiwara (scattered).
3. Anting-anting – karkarna a kabaelan wenno talibagok (amulet).
4. Apal – saan a nasayaat a kababalin iti maysa a tao iti tao a nagballigi (envy).
5. Apo Dios – Namarsua iti amin a tao ken mangmangted bendision iti amin a kanito (God).
6. Arte – kinalaing nga agpartuat babaen iti bukod nga estilo (art).
7. Bamban – nakayasan wenno napaingpis a nagisla a kawayan (bamboo strips).
8. Barnis – nasileng a likido a mabalin nga iyisprey wenno iwaras baben iti paint brush. tapno napintas ti efekto ti nalpas a produkto (varnish).
9. Bin-i – napili a bukel a maidulin a nasayaat para iti sumaruno a panagmumula (selected seeds/grains).
10. Kalamidad – saan a nasayaat a pasamak a mangted iti pakarigatan (calamity).
11. Kalidad – klase ti nalpas a gapuanan wenno produkto (quality).
12. Kaputotan – amin a kakabagian idi, ita ken ti dumteng pay a panawen (generation).
13. Kasimpungalan – asawa wenno kاپisi-ti-puso (husband/wife).
14. Kattukong – banag a maikabil iti ulo para iti proteksion , napintas a para regalo wenno pagdekorasion (hat used to cover the head made from any available material).
15. Dardarepdep – kasla tagtagainep a kayat a pumudno (dream).
16. Dayaw – imahe nga maited iti maysa a tao gapu iti naindaklan wenno nasayaat a pakalaglagipan nga ibatina iti agnanayon (honour).

17. Determinasion – napintas a kababalin a mangipakita iti pigsang ken tibker ti pakinakem a magaw-at ti tartarigagayan (determination).
18. Disenio – napintas a resulta ti arte nga itden ti nasariwawek a panagpampanunot ken pulido nga aramid (design).
19. Maipatawid – maibati kadagiti kayat a pangitedan kas koma iti material a sanikua, talento, wenno aniaman a pagsiriban (to be given as inheritance).
20. Malpay – madismaya wenno maawanan iti namnama (to be depressed or dismayed).
21. Manangngaasi- addaan iti managayat a puso a nakasagana a tumulong iti asino man nga agkasapulan iti amin a kanito (kind).
22. Mataragutog – matnag manipud iti nangato a disso (to fall down).
23. Naanus – addaan iti naandur a kinatao ket saanna a samiren ti amin a rigat a lasatenna (patient).
24. Namaris – napnuan kaipapanan, naragsak ken naballigian (colourful).
25. Naridam – nalaing nga agpuot wenno managsapsapa nga agriing kada aggunay (alert).
26. Narisgo – delikado wenno saan a natalinaay (risky).
27. Nalaga - napagpipinnarabaw a linabag agingga iti makaporma iti napintas a disenio (woven).
28. Panangbigbig – panangted ti importansiya iti napintas a naaramidan (appreciate).
29. Pammadayaw – maited nga motibasyon wenno gapu iti panangbigbig iti nasayaat a gapuanan (award).
30. Panagilako – panagipalias iti produkto kadagiti mayat a gumatang kasukat ti kaibatoganna a presio tapno maisubli ti nagasto nga addaan met iti maitutop a ganansia (to sell).
31. Tabungaw-a-nagtimbukel – maysa a kita ti nateng a tabungaw a mabalin nga aramiden a kattukong nga nagtimbukel ti sukogna (gourd).

These were some of the many words Garcia used to live by. Everything that he did was patterned from these words in his own language as an artist bringing him up to the high pedestal he now occupies.

## Conclusions

Based on the observations and interviews conducted, the following conclusions were drawn:

1. Poverty is not a hindrance to success.
2. Age is not a problem in attaining the goals set for the improvement of people's lives.
3. Cooperation within and among the human resources in the school, community and in a wider society leads to the development of the place.
4. Direct observations and hands-on activities lead to the development and perfection of skills.



5. Support of NCCA and other concerned agencies helps motivate artists to perform well in their crafts.
6. Support of school heads to all the programs of the school leads to good results.
7. Recognition and rewards contributes to one's effective performance.

### **Recommendations**

Based from the conclusions drawn, the following recommendations are forwarded:

1. A positive attitude should always be applied in the performance of planned work even with scarcity of resources.
2. Senior citizens should always be inspired to remain productive as long as they can.
3. Values of education should be continuously integrated in all subjects to instill within the students the importance of good behaviour in one's success.
4. The spirit of cooperation should always be observed in all programs, activities and tasks planned and implemented.
5. The NCCA and other agencies involved in the preservation of culture and the arts should continue supporting artists all the time.
6. Institutional plans should include activities and funding for the implementation of all school programs and activities for the progress and development of the school.
7. There should always be rewards to be given to those who perform well, especially the known artists to serve as motivations to other artists so they will do the same.



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