

## A study on shark totems among ethnic groups in the southern Palawan Island of the Philippines

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### 〈Abstract〉

In the Indo-Pacific region, there is a common myth about an ancestor drowning in the sea and being rescued by a shark. This paper mainly reports the totemistic beliefs about sharks in the myths that prevail even today among both the indigenous and Muslim people in the southern region of Palawan Island in the Philippines. In other words, this paper investigates the details of these totemistic beliefs on the Island. The main fieldwork for this research was conducted in 2010 through interviewing local people and conducting a questionnaire survey by visiting their households. The fieldwork revealed that five ethnic groups among the locals recognize four shark totems and do not hunt or eat these sharks. The Molbog from Balabac Island of Palawan Province said that the scalloped hammerhead is their totem. The Molbog from the Municipality of Bataraza recognize the giant guitarfish as their totem. The Pala'wan and the Panimusan recognize the zebra shark as their totem. Jama Mapun and Taosug also recognize the brown guitarfish or the great barracuda as their totem and consider it a taboo to eat them. Although drastic socio-ecological changes have transformed the ethnicity and religion of the people in Palawan Island, their beliefs regarding shark totems have persisted, and shark totems are considered a cultural norm. The paper concludes that shark totems remain meaningful even today as a source of identification among people in the acculturated social environment. In addition, they serve as reminders of the primary Filipino values before the introduction of monotheism to the nation. This study clarifies how shark totems can be key to a reconsideration of the social and cultural histories among the ethnic groups in southern Palawan Island and contribute to understanding their thinking and living. However, a limitation of the study is that it could not clarify why shark totems differed by hierarchy of ethnic groups in the local history of the area and the socio-cultural meaning underlying this.

Keywords: sharks, totemism, ethnic groups, southern Palawan Island, the Philippines

### 〈要旨〉

インド太平洋地域では、祖先が海で溺れ、サメに助けられたという同様の伝承が存在する。本論文は、フィリピン・パラワン島南部地域の先住民とイスラーム双方の間で今日でも認められる伝承の中でも、サメに関するトーテム信仰について主に報告する。つまり、本論文は、パラワン

島におけるこれらのトーテム信仰の詳細を検討する。本研究に関する主なフィールドワークは、2010年に現地の人々へのインタビューと、世帯訪問による質問票調査を行った。フィールドワークの結果、地域における5つの民族集団が4種のサメのトーテムを認識しており、これらのサメを捕ったり食べたりしてはいけないことが明らかとなった。パラワン州バラバック島のモルボッグは、アカシュモクザメが彼らのトーテムであると回答した。バタラサ郡のモルボッグは、トンガリサカタザメをトーテムとして認識している。パラワンとパニムサンは、トラフザメをトーテムとして認識している。ジャマ・マプンとタオスグも、サカタザメやオニカマスをトーテムとして認識しており、それらを食べることを禁忌と考えている。パラワン島では、急激な社会生態変化により島の人々のエスニシティーと宗教が変容してきたが、サメのトーテムに関する人々の心意は存続し、サメのトーテムは文化的規範と捉えられる。本論文は、サメのトーテムが、文化変容した社会環境における人々の間においてアイデンティティの源泉として、今日でも意味を持っていると結論づける。さらに、それらは、一神教が国家に導入される以前の、主要なフィリピン人の価値観を想起させるものである。本研究は、サメのトーテムが、どのようにパラワン島南部の民族集団の社会文化史を再考する鍵となりうるか、そして人々の思考と生活の理解に貢献できるか解明するものである。しかし、本研究の限界は、サメのトーテムがローカルヒストリーにおける民族集団間の階層の異なりの理由と、この根底にある社会文化的意味を明らかにできていない点にある。

キーワード：サメ、トーテミズム、民族集団、パラワン島南部、フィリピン

## Introduction

This paper investigates shark totems among the major ethnic groups in the southern region of Palawan Island in the Philippines and the lessening totemism in their daily life and beliefs owing to the rapid socio-environmental changes. Each ethnic group has its own shark totems, although some of these “sharks” are in fact species of stingray.

The Indo-Pacific region, including the Philippines, is famed for many oral traditions; for instance, there is a myth about a fish totem helping a founding ancestor to return home safely when the ancestor was in danger of drowning (Goto, 1999, p. 154; Ivanoff, 2001, p. 286; Karimata et al., 2003, pp. 146–148; Yano 1979, p. 49). Such fish are mostly sharks and stingrays, although turtles too appear, depending on the area (Ker, 1980, p. 231). For example, Micronesians categorize sharks and stingrays as humans (Akimichi, 1984, pp. 20–21), similar to the practice of natives in Palawan Island considering crocodiles as humans (Tsuji, 2021). In Melanesia or Polynesia, many animals — including moray eels, snakes, sharks, turtles, and octopuses — are not eaten because they are totems and hence it is considered taboo to eat them (Goto, 1997, p. 62, 2002, p. 31; Takayama, 2009, p. 12); further, people believe that if they eat these animals, they risk becoming sick or transforming

into animals themselves. In Ryukyu, Japan, several groups refrain from consuming shark meat owing to a belief that sharks once rescued their ancestors. Thus, eating shark meat is believed to result in *volvulus*, a condition where a loop of the intestine twists around itself and the mesentery that supplies it, leading to bowel obstruction (Yano, 1979, pp. 49–51).

Indonesia and the Philippines abound in tales about monkeys who cheated megafaunas, such as crocodiles and sharks, to cross the waters, riding on the backs of such animals, and then being bitten by the marine megafaunas when their falsehood is detected by the latter (Goto, 2002, p. 151; Tsuji, 2021, p. 22, in press). Crocodiles and sharks are believed to be sacred vehicles of God or mediators that connect the physical world and the spiritual realm. However, these animals are not always holy; there are tales of people seeking revenge on man-eating sharks as well (Roberts, 1980, pp. 1–8).

Sharks generally induce fear, but many peoples in the Indo-Pacific region revere the shark as their totem (Gerhardt, 2018, p. 1; McDavitt, 2005, p. 2). This belief is cross-cultural and universal throughout the region. To understand this belief is to trace human evolution and adaptation in the maritime world and clarify the equivocal relationship between people and sharks. There have been studies on the cultural holiness and biological fierceness of sharks and crocodiles in the southern region of Palawan Island (Tsuji 2012, 2021, in press), but ethnographic studies on sharks are not available.

Sharks and rays are classified into different categories in modern taxonomy. However, they fall under the same category in folk taxonomy among the ethnic groups. Shark totems are found among the indigenous people and the Muslim people in Palawan Island but not among the Christians in the region. These shark totems are deeply rooted in the cultural elements in the southern Philippines. Nevertheless, totemism is not connected to faith in a supreme God. It is a myth rooted in nature and embedded in the minds of the people. Its value cannot be completely ignored. In the study region, people worship at least two types of shark: the scalloped hammerhead (*Sphyrna lewini* Griffith & Smith)<sup>1)</sup> and the zebra shark (*Stegostoma fasciatum* Hermann), and two types of ray: the brown guitarfish (*Rhinobatos schlegelii* Müller & Henle) and the giant guitarfish (*Rhynchobatus djiddensis* Forsskål). These sharks are not fierce by nature (Ferrari & Ferrari, 2001, p. 121, 189); hence, people find it comparatively easy to recognize the shark totems, although most Filipino people consider sharks as fierce and greedy (Eugenio, 1996, pp. 370–371).

In general, sharks are considered the strongest predatory megafauna of maritime ecology. Quite a few reports exist on sharks attacking people and even killing them (Ferrari & Ferrari, 2001, pp. 12–13). Although most sharks are timid around people, some dangerous sharks, such as the great white shark (*Carcharodon carcharias* Linnaeus), bull sharks (*Carcharbinus leucas* Valenciennes), oceanic whitetip sharks (*Carcharhinus longimanus* Poey), and tiger sharks

(*Galeocerdo cuvier* Peron & Le Sueur), are known to attack people fiercely (Ferrari & Ferrari, 2001, pp. 140–142, 168, 172–173, 178–179). Such sharks are not afraid of people.

Thus, people remain fearful of sharks and associate them with ferocity. However, not all shark species are ferocious; in fact, most of them pose relatively little danger to people. More than 360 species of shark are identified worldwide (Ferrari & Ferrari, 2001, p. 14). Furthermore, several groups in Ryukyu, Southeast Asia and Oceania consider sharks to possess supernatural powers beyond human understanding, and they are even worshipped as deities (Tsuji, 2012, p. 113, in press). This notion relates to totemism and the associated food taboo.

## Theoretical Framework

Totemism is defined in various ways. For instance, members of a clan do not eat a particular animal because they believe that they belong to the lineage of that animal's genus and that their soul regenerates as such an animal after their death. Others consider that they, or their ancestors, have some obligation to such creatures (Frazer, 1996, p. 100).

Considering their sacred characteristics, eating totem animals or plants is prohibited (Durkheim, 1941, p. 228) in some cultures. Such totems distinguish social groups (Lévi-Strauss, 1970, p. 7), and worshipping these special living creatures that are said to possess supernatural power or fierceness is considered to protect a social group such as a clan or lineage from falling into disorder. People also regulate the killing or eating of specific living creatures to avoid misfortune befalling them.

Totems can be found in almost every society in different forms. In Australia, members of kangaroo clan called themselves kangaroo and they identify themselves with the animal (Durkheim, 1991, pp. 239–240). In the southern part of Canada, the Ojibwa preserve their reindeer totem even after reindeer became extinct (Lévi-Strauss, 1970, p. 37). In America, the Pueblo catch and breed eagles but do not kill them, and some groups forbid even catching and breeding of eagles because they are afraid the eagles would starve to death (Lévi-Strauss, 1976, p. 63). In Papua New Guinea, the Gidra project the cassowary as their totem, recognizing it for being a clever and intelligent bird (Otsuka, 1996, p. 51). In Siberia, one clan expressly forbids the killing of the bird of their clan — the eagle; further the eagle and the spotted nutcracker are considered to be siblings, and hence, the eagle is requested not to kill the spotted nutcracker (Lot-Falk, 1980, p. 27).

Totemism is also said to a part of the human understanding of the intellectual order (Lévi-Strauss, 1970, p. 170). Humans tend to live by classifying themselves based on age, gender, social status, and ethnicity, etc. Totemism must be one such form of categorization.

Above all, totemism is an important cultural factor for people living in a natural society to

maintain the identity of their clans and to modify their relationship with other clans. Differentiation and classification are based on a given human nature.

However, totemism was considered vulgar and primitive by Europeans in the eighteenth to nineteenth centuries because humans and animals are considered to share a harmonious common origin as per totemistic beliefs (Leach, 1991, pp. 118–119).

Although human and animals are closely linked within totemism, Christianization in the Philippines — triggered by Spanish colonialism since the sixteenth century — led to such notions being considered heresy or a form of primitive thinking. Islamization, prior to Christianization, probably did likewise. As a result, totemistic beliefs were mostly abolished although they remain alive as a background cultural element in the mind-set of the people in the Philippines.

On Palawan Island, there are no reports of totemism; further, it is important to mention that so far there have been no studies on the recognition of sharks as totems by ethnic groups. Systematic studies on totemism in the Philippines are rare, almost non-existent, although religion studies are plenty, especially about *anitos* — the soul of ancestors invoked and worshipped on all occasions (Blumentritt, 2021, p. 45). In pre-colonial Philippines, totem and taboo gave psychoanalytic pertinence to the practice of animism (Mahinay & Latras, 2019, p. 23). Thus, totemism in the Philippines has been connected to ancestor spirits and animism, which are considered a form of savagery (Tylor, 2019, p. 561).

As mentioned earlier, since studies on totemism in the Philippines are scarce, it would be meaningful to add the datum on the existing notions. This paper explores the totemistic notions prevailing in the southern area of Palawan Island among indigenous and Muslim people, who recognize sharks as their ancestors and refuse to eat shark meat.

However, this is not strictly observed, and the kinds of sharks worshipped vary according to the ethnic group.

This paper reports details of these notions on the Island. Other related shark narratives are also considered to provide more detailed information on the cultural beliefs and behaviors related to sharks among people living in the southern area of Palawan Island. Overall, this paper investigates totemism of the ethnic groups by examining the shark folklore uniquely found in the area.

## Materials and methods

The author has been researching in Palawan Island from 1999 to 2019. The main fieldwork for this research was conducted from September 6 to 11, 2010, in the municipality of Bataraza in the southern part of Palawan Island, which is in the southwestern part of the Philippines (Figure 1).

The ethnic groups in the research site consist of the Pala'wan, who are indigenous animist; the

Molbog and Panimusan, who are indigenous Muslims; the Jama Mapun and Taosug, who are Muslim; the Ilongo of Panay Island of the Visayan Islands in the center of the Philippines and Bicolano of the southern part of Luzon Island, who are Christians; and the Cuyonon, who are indigenous Christians of Cuyo Island of Palawan province. The main groups in the site are the Pala'wan and Molbog. Historically and linguistically, these groups are closely linked (Revel-Macdonald, 1972, p. 22); they are considered to have originally been one group. It should be noted that intermarriages under a bilateral social structure are often practiced among the ethnic groups.

The main subsistence activities in the site are shifting cultivation, fishing, shellfish gathering, copra collection in coconut plantations, oil palm plantation, paddy field cultivation, livestock husbandry, and trade of marine products at periodic markets. In recent times, an increasing number of young people who have graduated from university have started working for a nickel mining company and a banana plantation in Bataraza.

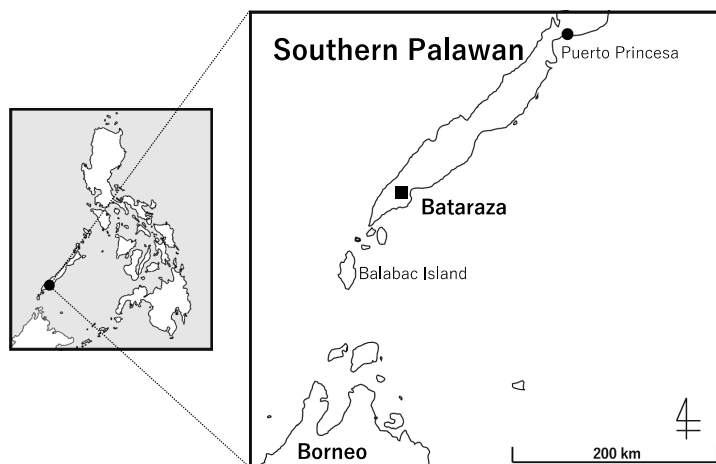


Figure 1. Location of the research site.

Source: Author.

The fieldwork involved conducting interviews and a questionnaire survey by visiting households of local people who are Molbog, Pala'wan, Panimusan, Jama Mapun and Taosug randomly to have informal group discussions or informal interviews using a questionnaire. Informants were basically chosen from among farmers who also engage in fishing as a secondary activity and have considerable knowledge about fish.

The main interview questions and questionnaire items concerned (i) myths, (ii) food taboos, (iii) food culture, (iv) images, and (v) other information (e.g., damage caused by sharks, fishing, and the distribution of shark fins) about sharks, including stingrays. Taxonomically, sharks and stingrays belong to the same sub-class, elasmobranchii. However, as per folk taxonomy, some rays

are identified as *käritang*, which means sharks, and ray-like sharks are likewise known as *pägi/päri*, which means rays. For example, Brown guitarfish is biologically a ray but recognized as a shark *käritang pindung* in folk taxonomy. Thus, it should be noted that mention of shark totems in this paper includes rays as well.

I conducted manual research also to collect folklores on sharks in Japan, the Philippines, and Vanuatu. Encyclopedias (Allen, 2000; Ferrari & Ferrari, 2001; Masuda & Allen, 1987) were used to identify sharks and stingrays.

The research language used on the study site was Tagalog, a common dialect in Palawan Island, although Pala'wan, Molbog, and Jama Mapun dialects were also frequently spoken on the site. The names of sharks or stingrays in the dialect are included (Appendix). The cases analyzed from the survey data in this paper were narrated by the local people. The survey was conducted under the supervision of the local leader, who is the "tribal chieftain."

## Results and discussion

### Shark totems

Five ethnic groups consider the shark as their totem (Table 1) because a shark had saved their ancestor from drowning in the sea. Among these five groups, it is taboo to eat sharks.

Among the ethnic groups in Palawan Island, sharks and stingrays are essentially and locally categorized as *käritang* and *pägi/päri*, respectively, although they are generally called *pating* and *pägi*, respectively, in the Philippines.

Interestingly, the Molbog have two types of life-saving sharks as their totem. Molbog from Balabac Island, which is in the southern part of Palawan Province, say that the scalloped hammerhead, locally called *käritang bingkung*, is their totem. Molbog from Bataraza recognize the giant guitarfish, locally called *sudsod*, as their totem. Strictly speaking, the giant guitarfish is a kind of stingray, not a shark, but it is categorized as a shark. According to the Molbog informants, if people eat this shark, they develop a painful disease called dermatitis (*galis-galis*). It is also taboo for rheumatic people. According to some of the Molbog, the zebra shark or giant guitarfish is taboo. It thus appears that the recognition of a certain type of shark or ray as taboo can waver within an ethnic group, and this may be due to intermarriage or acculturation on the research site.

Table 1. Shark totems recognized by the indigenous and Muslim people in southern Palawan Island

	<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Common name (Scientific name)</b>	<b>Local name</b>	<b>Note</b>
1	Molbog (Balabac)	Scalloped hammerhead ( <i>Sphyrna lewini</i> Griffith & Smith)	<i>käritang bingkung</i>	–
2	Molbog (Bataraza)	Giant guitarfish ( <i>Rhynchobatus djiddensis</i> Forsskål)	<i>sudsod</i>	Some people consider it a smalltooth sawfish ( <i>Pristis pectinate</i> Latham) called <i>käritang parangang</i> .
3	Pala'wan	Zebra shark ( <i>Stegostoma fasciatum</i> Hermann)	<i>käritang ämbilidan</i>	–
4	Panimusan	Zebra shark ( <i>Stegostoma fasciatum</i> Hermann)	<i>käritang ämbilidan</i>	–
5	Jama Mapun	Brown guitarfish ( <i>Rhinobatos schlegelii</i> Müller & Henle)	<i>käritang pindung</i>	They also recognize the great barracuda ( <i>Sphyaena barracuda</i> Edwards) as their fish totem.
6	Taosug	Brown guitarfish ( <i>Rhinobatos schlegelii</i> Müller & Henle)	<i>käritang pindung</i>	They also recognize the great barracuda ( <i>Sphyaena barracuda</i> Edwards) as their fish totem.

Source: Author.

Case 1: Why do the Molbog consider it taboo to eat the scalloped hammerhead? It is because they believed that a shark had helped their ancestor who was drowning in the sea to safely reach the land. The Molbog thus swore not to eat the shark in return. If anyone eats a shark, their body starts itching all over.

The Pala'wan, one of major ethnic groups in Palawan Island, recognize the zebra shark locally called *käritang ämbilidan* as their totem and consider it taboo to eat these sharks. People said that the shark is like their sibling. It is said that if people eat the shark, they will die. Some people said it is taboo to eat a brown guitarfish or giant guitarfish. The guitarfish swims as if it were rolling through water; hence, people associate it with feeling dizzy and becoming insane. Related to the guitarfish, some people do not eat the spotted eagle ray (*Aetobatus narinari* Euphrasen), locally called *pagi/pari manuk*, because the ray swims as though it were flying, which is associated with old people passing away.

The Panimusan — often called Pala'wan Muslim or Karawa, who originate from the municipality of Brooke's Point, which is adjacent to Bataraza — recognize the zebra shark as their totem and



consider it a taboo to eat them. People say that this shark is fierce. Some people consider the brown guitarfish their totem, and if people eat it, they believe their body will start itching. The Jama Mapun and Taosug, originally from the islands of Cagayan de Tawi-Tawi and Jolo, also recognize the brown guitarfish or giant guitarfish as their totem and consider it a taboo to eat them. Both the Jama Mapun and the Taosug believe the shark is like their sibling. Some Jama Mapun also recognize the great barracuda (*Sphyraena barracuda* Edwards), locally called *rumpi?*, which has sharp teeth like a shark, as their totem because this fish is considered to have rescued an ancestor drowning in the sea. People tend to choose bigger and predatory fish as their totems. If these fish are caught while fishing, people say that they are released back into the waters.

Case 2: The reason the Jama Mapun consider it taboo to eat the shark is because an ancestor drowning in the sea was rescued by a shark. The shark carried the ancestor to the land in safety.

Thus, ethnic groups in southern Palawan Island can be identified through their shark totems, although such totems are obscure in certain cases.

#### Other shark-related legends

This paper also introduces some legends about sharks narrated by various people as mentioned below.

Case 3: According to the Molbog and Pala'wan, the blacktip reef shark (*Carcharbinus melanopterus* Quoy & Gaimard) — called locally *käritang tutungan* — was grilled in the kitchen and the tip of its dorsal fin became black. According to local people, this shark is close existence to humans, but it has its home in the sea.

People essentially personify sharks to explain their characteristics.

Case 4: According to the Jama Mapun, their ancestor was swallowed by a shark or a big fish while fishing in the sea. The ancestor cut open the stomach and reached the safety of land.

This legend is reminiscent of the story of Jonah from the Old Testament.

Case 5: According to the Jama Mapun, two brothers were fishing in the sea. The younger brother dove into the sea because the hook was caught on a rock in the water. The older

brother was eaten by a shark when he tried to rescue his younger brother; the latter found the place where the shark lives in the water. The older brother who was eaten lost his life because he talked about the shark, but the younger brother did not die.

The older brother being eaten by a shark was a true story, according to the people. Among the Molbog and Pala'wan, this legend is thought to relate to the belief that one must avoid whistling or mentioning the big fish to prevent sea accidents caused by a mermaid-like bad spirit, called the *galap* (Revel, 1990, p. 330; Tsuji, 2005, p. 76, in press). One should also avoid mentioning sharks and crocodiles while fishing because these creatures or a strong wind could overturn the boat (Tsuji, 2005, p. 76, in press).

Case 6: According to the Pangotaran, they mostly do not eat the coral catshark (*Atelomycterus marmoratus* Bennett) — locally called *käritang täki?-täki?*. *Täki?* means tokay gecko (*Gekko gecko* Linnaeus) because the shark looks like a gecko. People believe that this shark lives in the feces of another shark in the water, and hence, it exudes a strong smell.

The Pangotaran are Muslims from Pangotaran Island in the Sulu zone of the southern Philippines. They also consider it a taboo to eat the great barracuda, because it rescued their ancestor, just like the ancestor of the Jama Mapun and the Taosug. It is possible that the Muslim people from southern Philippines commonly recognize the great barracuda as their totem.

## Summary and conclusion

This paper investigated the shark totems among ethnic groups in southern Palawan Island through folkloristic research by interpreting people's discourse. Consequently, it was found that the Molbog of Balabac Island have the scalloped hammerhead for a totem, while the Molbog from Bataraza in Palawan Island have the giant guitarfish as a totem. Although of the same ethnic group, their totems are different, which is perhaps the result of local variation or social history. The totem of the Pala'wan and Panimusan is the zebra shark. These two groups were originally one group before the introduction of Islam to Palawan Island, when the Panimusan converted to Islam. Totem here is considered a part of pre-Islamic culture. The Taosug and Jama Mapun were rulers of the Molbog, Pala'wan, and Panimusan when Palawan Island was under the control of the Sultan from Jolo Island at the beginning of the nineteenth century (Warren, 1999, p. 3).

Islamization and the Sultanate affected the religions and society of the indigenous people but did not extend to their rooted belief system owing to the development of folk Islam — the synthe-

sis of native and Islamic beliefs and practices (Casiño, 1974, p. 174). Rather, people connect with each other based on the belief system about shark totems, using this to bond with each other beyond the relationships imposed by the local hierarchy. Totems equalized people in their human nature. In the context of the Philippines, totem is partially a primary form of resistance or defense within an intermingled society to solidify totem consciousness among ethnic groups.

To distinguish a totem is considered a societal or ethnic projection (Goto, 2002, p. 31). In the social environment of Palawan Island, several ethnic groups intermingle with distrust. Eight vernacular languages groups — the Pala'wan, the Tagbanwa, the Molbog, the Batak, the Cuyonon, the Agutaynen, the Jama Mapun, and the Cagayanen — are listed in Palawan province (Macdonald, 2014, p. 70). The wave of Islamization and Christianization affected these societies, and indigenous peoples and Philippine Muslims had to be brought under the fold of the dominant culture, which is the culture of lowland Christian Philippine society (Eder & McKenna, 2004, p. 63). In the process of societal transformation, ethnic boundaries are vague, as are those of religion and language. Although totems are also prone to vacillate under certain circumstances, they are a proto-cultural indicator to understand the origin of groups.

Totems have lost their significance owing to socio-cultural changes in Palawan Island, as the indigenous people and Muslims became marginalized by the majority Christian population since around 1949, when an immigration rush from the islands accelerated to seek land for settlement under the government policy (National Resettlement Rehabilitation Administration: NARRA), but this paper clarifies that the totems themselves have been preserved. Although people do not have any profound knowledge about the shark totems, they are willing to share what little they know.

This paper concludes that each indigenous group and the Muslim people have their own shark totems in southern Palawan Island and that the belief in shark totems reveals the origins of these groups in the multi-ethnic environment of the acculturated society of the present day. Associating themselves with shark totems could have led to the establishment of common beliefs within the groups and served as a beneficial system. Additionally, this belief must have had an Islamic element because it is not found among the Christian population and must have been formed as part of the local history of the southern Palawan Island.

Focusing on shark totems in terms of equivocal existence in the southern area of Palawan Island, this paper also considers the possibility that people in different areas have similar notions about sharks or other animals. On the basis of this study, further investigations should be made into pre-Islamic society in the Philippines. Totems are engraved deeply in the history of the local people. The study contributes to the literature by elucidating the cultural influences of different ethnic groups based on their totemistic notions. Understanding shark totems is equivalent to understanding the ethnic groups and the history of their relationships with other groups in their society

although circumstances have been acculturated drastically to hunt sharks for commercial purposes. Thus, the study suggests that shark totems are key to a reconsideration of the social and cultural histories among the ethnic groups in Palawan Island. Simultaneously, the study also investigates the reasons underlying people's folk belief that shark totems contribute to their approaches toward thinking and living. Shark totems may serve as reminders of the primary Filipino values before the Islamization of the nation. The study can be used as reference for future research on pre-Islamic notions and natural society.

However, a limitation of this paper is that it did not clarify the socio-cultural meaning of shark totems differing by hierarchy of ethnic groups in the local history of southern Palawan Island. Future research needs to investigate whether shark totems encourage bonding between communities and strengthen fellow feelings with other communities to ease conflict. At the same time, since belief in shark totems indicate a common origin of these groups, identification with shark totems can support multi-ethnic relationships for peaceful co-existence and strengthen inter-community ties in the present-day acculturated society.

## Footnote

- 1) The names added next to the scientific name of the various sharks mentioned in this study are those of the people who named these sharks based on the genus and family to which the sharks belong.

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Appendix: Sharks and sting rays recognized by the ethnic groups in southern part of Palawan Island  
(Prepared by author based on interviews, fieldwork, and encyclopedias)

	English Name (Scientific Name)	Local Name
	<b>Selachimorpha</b>	
	<b>Scyliorhinidae</b>	
1	Coral catshark ( <i>Atelomycterus marmoratus</i> Bennett)	<i>käritang täki?täki?</i>
2	Cloudy catshark ( <i>Scyliorhinus torazame</i> Tanaka)	<i>käritang säsäp</i>
	<b>Carcharhinidae</b>	
3	Blacktip reef shark ( <i>Carcharhinus melanopterus</i> Quoy & Gaimard)	<i>käritang tutungan</i>
	<b>Sphyrnidae</b>	
4	Scalloped hammerhead shark ( <i>Sphyrna lewini</i> Griffith & Smith)	<i>käritang bingkung</i>
	<b>Stegostomatidae</b>	
5	Zebra shark ( <i>Stegostoma fasciatum</i> Hermann)	<i>käritang ämbilidan</i>
	<b>Other Sharks</b>	
6	A kind of sharks (unidentified)	<i>käritang kämänsjan</i>
7	A kind of sharks (unidentified)	<i>käritang babangan</i>
8	A kind of sharks (unidentified)	<i>käritang mangali</i>
9	A kind of sharks (unidentified)	<i>käritang ?ägis</i>
	<b>Batoidea</b>	
	<b>Pristidae</b>	
10	Smalltooth sawfish ( <i>Pristis pectinata</i> Latham)	<i>käritang parangang</i>
	<b>Rhinidae</b>	
11	Giant guitarfish ( <i>Rhynchobatus djiddensis</i> Forsskål)	<i>sudsod</i>
	<b>Rhinobatidae</b>	
12	Brown guitarfish ( <i>Rhinobatos schlegelii</i> Müller & Henle)	<i>käritang pindung</i>
	<b>Platyrrhinidae</b>	
13	Yellow-spotted fanray ( <i>Platyrrhina tangi</i> Iwatsuki, Zhang & Nakaya)	<i>pägi bärangkas</i>
	<b>Dasyatidae</b>	
14	Common stingray ( <i>Dasyatis kuhlii</i> Müller & Henle)	<i>pägi baras</i>

15	Bluespotted ribbontail Ray ( <i>Taeniura lymma</i> Forsskål )	<i>käjampäw</i>
16	Honeycomb stingray ( <i>Himantura uarnak</i> Gmelin)	<i>pagi rarang</i>
	<b>Myliobatidae</b>	
17	Spotted eagle ray ( <i>Aetobatus narinari</i> Euphrasen)	<i>pagi manuk</i>
	<b>Mobulidae</b>	
18	Manta ray ( <i>Manta birostris</i> Dondorff)	<i>pagi säälängä</i>
	<b>Other Sting Rays</b>	
19	A kind of sting rays (unidentified)	<i>pagi basi?</i> , <i>kulutup batu</i>
20	A kind of sting rays (unidentified)	<i>pagi däʔunan</i>
21	A kind of sting rays (unidentified)	<i>pagi saʔul</i>

