

THE 'MUTYA' FIGURE IN THE KUNDIMAN

Grace Odal-Devora, Ph.D.

College of Arts and Sciences, UP MANILA

Abstract

This paper presents the word and image of "mutya" in Tagalog arts and culture, particularly, in the kundiman, depicting it as a "diwa", a core concept and a cultural metaphor.

From its earliest historical reference, through its uses in Spanish times, and as central image in kundimans and songs, the paper traces the various meanings and significance of "mutya." It ends with the view that "mutya" may be a potential of the spark of divinity within us, waiting to be awakened.

Introduction

Literally, the word "mutya" signifies a "pearl" or a "magical stone." Its earliest historical reference can be found in Pigafetta's account in 1521, referring to his compilation of Bisayan words gathered during his stay in Cebu with Ferdinand Magellan and his crew.¹⁵ In this account, the word "mutia" comes in its long version term as "mutiara," which he classifies as Old Cebuano, referring to "pearl".

However, the term also appears in Bahasa Indonesia, Bahasa Malaysia, Javanese, and Sundanese with the same reference to "pearl." Its short term "mutia" was included as an entry in Padre Pedro San Buenaventura's *Vocabulario de la Lengua Tagala* published in Pila, Laguna in 1606 and 1613. In this entry the word "mutia" signifies "piedra preciosa" or "precious stone."

In the 1624 *Vocabulario Tagalo* of Padre Francisco de San Antonio, and in the next dictionary, the *Vocabulario de la Lengua Bikol* by Padre Marcos de Lisboa, which was re-published in 1865, "mutia" also signifies "piedra preciosa." In 1668, however, Padre Ignacio Alcina, SJ, writes that it is a "piedra preciosa...atribuyen a esta piedra varias virtudes..."

¹⁵ Rodrigue Levesque, translator, (1980). *The Philippines : Pigafetta's Story of their Discovery by Magellan* (Quebec, Canada : Les Editions Levesque Publications, 1980), 124.