

# FROM HIGHWAYS TO ALLEYS: TRACING CEBU CITY GOVERNMENT RESTRICTIONS OF THE TARTANILLA, 1945-1990

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## ABSTRACT

More than half a century ago, the *tartanilla* (Cebu City, Philippines's local version of the horse-drawn carriage) was the king of the road. It was the main form of transportation around the downtown and in neighboring suburbs. Almost 2,500 rigs crisscrossed the city in 1960. But suddenly the trend of growth stopped, and in the following decades, the number of rigs dropped: 1,192 in 1966, 530 in 1973, 437 in 1992. Today, less than two hundred rigs remain, ferrying passengers and cargoes in the sidestreets of Cebu. Was the downfall of the *tartanilla* the inevitable consequence of advances in transportation technology? This paper argues that the city government's increased restrictions of the *tartanilla* operations significantly contributed to its slide from its primary position in Cebu City's transportation system. It shows that with each restrictive city ordinance, policy or decree imposed on the rig industry, the number of *tartanilla* units had decreased and the number of routes had reduced. Surveying the city council's records on ordinances and minutes, the study traces the Cebu City government's regulation of these horse-drawn carriages beginning after the Second World War up to the 1990s. The fate suffered by the *tartanilla* was mainly due to technological developments. Market forces sided with the more efficient mode of transport: the faster tricycles, and later, the bigger taxis and jeepneys. The rigs became just another casualty of progress. However, the Cebu City government had hastened their decline as a form transport. Instead of waiting for market forces to decide what will happen to the *tartanilla*, the city council passed successive ordinances that quickened the transition from horse-drawn carriages into motorized transport. In its quest to find solutions to traffic problems, it jumped to the conclusion that the rigs were the culprit, and eliminating them would solve traffic congestion (which it did not). Thus it marginalized the *tartanilla* service. The late king of the road was killed by progress... but city hall conspired.

Keywords : government regulation of transportation, history of horse-drawn carriages, transportation development, transportation history

## INTRODUCTION

The *tartanilla*, Cebu City, Philippines's version of the horse-drawn carriage or rig, is past its heydays. *Jeepneys* (a small, covered truck used as a sort of bus) and taxis are the preferred mode of transport in the city today. Add to that the tricycles (motorized), *pedicabs* (non-motorized tricycle) and motorcycles-for-hire also competing to share in the commuter traffic in Cebu's streets.<sup>1</sup> More than half a century ago, when taxis were absent and *jeepneys* were few, the *tartanilla* was king of the road. It was the main form of transportation around downtown Cebu City and in the neighboring suburbs.

Slowly modernization crawled in. Motorized transport which is more efficient than horsepower became a growing business enterprise. Commuter preference for speed and convenience also followed: the passengers began vacating the familiar seats of the *tartanilla*

after the Second World War when Cebu's streets were slowly invaded by motorized transport.<sup>2</sup> Competition came from downtown *jeeps*, taxis and tricycles for commuter service. "Downtown *jeeps*, like Daitson, Daitso, etc. could enter smaller and narrower roads like rigs." And their fares were only slightly higher than rig fare. Taxis were also preferable because these can travel faster and can bring passengers to their doorstep; a former advantage offered only by the *tartanilla*. Some families even bought mini-cars and motorcycles by installments for private use.<sup>3</sup>

Without patrons, earnings dwindled. A significant number of rig drivers or *cocheros* gave up their means of living. Without renters, rig owners let their carriages deteriorate; old rigs were left in disrepair and only a few new ones were constructed. The *tartanilla* business was on a downturn. The rig numbers dwindled as did the routes they ply. Slowly they were squeezed into a few streets in the downtown. Many a stubborn *cochero* and rig owner finally gave up, but others still stuck their necks out; either they were the most determined or the most in need. Their horses kept on clip-clopping in the few remaining *tartanilla* bailiwicks: the streets from Carbon and Taboan leading to districts of Duljo, Mambaling and A. Lopez.

Percy Ruita Jamin in its study of the *tartanilla* industry of Cebu City in 1974 cited additional reasons, besides the increase of motorized vehicles, for the decline of the *tartanilla*<sup>4</sup>:

- "[1.] Ordinance prohibiting the entrance of the *tartanilla* in some streets of the city
- [2.] Upliftment of the educational standards of the children (of *cocheros*)
- [3.] Centennial celebration (of Cebu City) in 1965
- [4.] High cost of feeds
- [5.] Establishment of Big Firms"

Besides the competition offered by taxis and jeeps, she also listed the following as problems faced by the rig industry at that time:

- "[1.] High cost of horse feeds
- [2.] Lack of government incentive
- [3.] Fare remains steady
- [4.] Bad Weather"

Two of the reasons for the decline of the *tartanilla* industry were government imposed: the ban on some streets and the centennial celebration for the Christianization of the Philippines. Also, two of the problems faced by the diminished *tartanilla* in 1974 were government inflicted: absence of government support and no fare increase. These government-imposed and inflicted factors, continued in the succeeding years, caused the further decline of this service. The government did have a hand in the decline of this transport industry.

## PROBLEM AND METHOD

This paper argues that the city government's increasing restrictions of the *tartanilla* operations contributed to its slide from its primary position in Cebu City's transportation system. It shows that with each restrictive city ordinance, policy or decree imposed on the rig industry, the number of *tartanilla* units had decreased and the number of routes had reduced. The paper traces the Cebu City government's regulation of the *tartanilla* beginning after the Second World War up to the 1990s. After the 1990s, the council no longer enacted additional restrictive measures because the *tartanillas* were already too few for them to bother with.

The study uses the historical method. It traces the development of government regulation on the *tartanilla* industry: what ordinances, decrees and resolution were passed that affected the rigs? It also assesses the impact of these regulations on the *tartanilla* business. The regulations were gathered from the records of ordinances kept by the city council.

### When the Tartanilla was King

However, in the 1940s and 50s, the *tartanilla* was still king of the road; it was the primary form of transport within Cebu City. The number of units were growing from around 1500 in the 50's to almost 2500 in the 60's.<sup>5</sup> In 1960, there were 2425 rigs plying the city.<sup>6</sup>

The *tartanilla* would take you anywhere in the city and its suburbs.<sup>7</sup> Similar to the taxi, it did not follow a line or route but may take its passenger to any destination in the city based on these rates in 1945<sup>8</sup>:

I – WITHIN CITY LIMITS – P0.10 per capita

II – BEYOND CITY LIMITS – P0.10 per capita plus P0.05 for every additional kilometer

III – BY THE HOUR – P0.60 for the first 30 minutes or less. Over 30 minutes but not over one (1) hour, P1.00 and for every additional hour or fraction thereof, P0.75

IV – By City Limits is meant that area of Cebu City comprised within and bounded by Carlock, Tres de Abril, Mango Avenue and Martires streets and the sea. Passengers using rigs beyond these limits shall be subject to Tariff No. II.”

Three years later, changes were made on the fare schedule. Fare for additional kilometers was increased from P0.05 to P0.10 beyond city limits; and city limits was redefined as “within Tuti - Calamba Streets, P del Rosario - Imus Streets, Martires - T. Padilla Streets and the sea or water front.”<sup>9</sup>

### City Council Conspires Against the Tartanilla

While the rig transport was on an upswing in the 1950s, the city council suddenly applied the brakes to the momentum of growth. Beginning at the closing years of the decade and pursuing it in the decades thereafter, the council successively imposed restrictive ordinances on the transport; it was overtly campaigning against the *tartanilla*. “This is a kind of industry which the government endeavors to eliminate and they are doing this by installments. City planners are planning to ease out this industry. According to them, this industry does not give a good image to the city,” says Jamin.<sup>10</sup> The reasons cited by the city officials for their desire to limit, if not abolish, the rigs were<sup>11</sup>:

- “1. hazard to traffic;
2. horses sometimes are hard to control, when restless become uncontrollable;
3. source of waste matters, a hazard to health; and
4. bad image to visitors of the city.”

They then enacted corresponding ordinances to respond to these problems; ordinances which led to the decline of the *tartanilla* as transport.

### **Anti-Horse Manure Ordinance**

In 1958, civic organizations lead by the Board of Directors of Zapatera Elementary School Parents Teachers Association petitioned the city council to act on a unique Cebuano problem—horse manure. It was a grave garbage and pollution problem at that time. The council estimated five thousand kilos of manure being scattered around the city daily (a kilo per horse for the 5000 horses in the city). When dried and pulverized, the horse manure was blown about and mixed with the air they breathe.<sup>12</sup>

The council responded with an anti-horse manure ordinance. All rigs must carry a receptacle for the manure and the driver must stop the rig and pick-up the manure as discharged by the horse.<sup>13</sup> That ingenious contraption attached behind the butt of the horse today which captures the waste as it is released by the animal was not yet used at that time by the Cebuanos.

So far, no restriction which limited *tartanilla* operations due to the health risks posed by horse manure was enacted. But later on, the health risks would be cited by the government in passing another law that further restricted *tartanilla* service.

### **Limitation of the Number of Rigs**

The more immediate and direct problem faced by the rig owners and drivers was the view held by the city council that the *tartanilla* was the main cause of the worsening traffic congestion. The only way to go, most councilors believed, was to limit the rig operations or ultimately abolished it. In 1961 the city council delivered a big blow to *tartanilla* operation—Ordinance no. 328. The ordinance barred further growth of the number of *tartanillas* by limiting the number of rigs allowed to operate in the city at 2500. The 2425 rigs which were registered in the previous year would be the ones renewed their registration, while the first to apply for licenses in 1961 would be given the remaining 75 slots.<sup>14</sup> No more licenses will be issued over 2500.

Why this drastic measure? At this time the rigs were still the dominant form of transport in Cebu; tricycles and *pedicabs* were few. A well-traveled Bureau of Lands employee observed that Cebu has the most number of *tartanillas* in the Philippines. The city council, searching for a solution to traffic problems, saw the numerous *tartanillas* as the cause of the problem. They believed that these century-old carriages should be replaced by a more efficient form of transportation. They were thinking of scooters as replacement.<sup>15</sup> Scooters, or motorcycles, must have been attached to side cars and transformed into the tricycles.

For the council, the scooter was the solution to traffic congestion: 2500 rigs could be replaced by only 700 scooters, thus decongesting the streets. The proponents of the ordinance, Councilors Eulogio Borres and Raymundo Crystal, even claimed that the rig owners and drivers were willing to be converted into scooter operators and drivers. And this conversion was within their means—the cost of a brand new *tartanilla* (P500.00) was enough downpayment for a scooter.<sup>16</sup>

But the council plan was not without opposition. In the city's search for a more efficient transport, there was no need to harass one of the competitors. Councilor Nazario Pacquiao pointed out that the provision on no substitution placed the rigs at a great disadvantage. This provision banned replacement of delinquent rigs and voluntary surrendered licenses. There slot will not be given to new applicants but will remain vacant. According to Pacquiao, the 2500 rigs allowed to operate will slowly reduce in number even if there are only five delinquent operators

every year: from 2500 in 1961 to only 2495 in '62, 2490 in '63 and so on.<sup>17</sup> And five delinquent operators a year is the best case scenario; varied reasons prevent a rig operator to settle his taxes on time.

The councilor suggested that they allow free competition to take its course instead of giving unfair advantage to the scooters by limiting the number of rigs. If the scooters are really more efficient, they would eventually push aside the rigs from the streets.<sup>18</sup> The suggestion was unheeded, the ordinance was passed by a majority decision with one oppose and one abstention.

### **Limitation of their Routes**

The city council did not stop with controlling the maximum number of *tartanillas*; they also prohibited the rigs from entering selected districts of the city. If in the 1940s and 1950s, the *tartanilla* operated like a taxi: it could convey its passenger to any point in the city, in the 1960s it was already banned in several streets.

In 1965, during the celebration of the 400<sup>th</sup> year anniversary of the Christianization of the Philippines which was held in Cebu City, rigs were banned from entering some streets like Sanciangko, T. Padilla, Imus-Sikatuna, Bonifacio and various smaller streets near the centennial area. The celebration lasted for a month but the prohibition continued after, forcing many *cocheros* to quit. The lay-off from *tartanilla* service during the centennial also resulted to the deterioration of rigs; the units fell into disrepair and decay rendering them unusable. From 2430 rigs registered in 1964 prior to the centennial celebration the number dropped to only 1192 rigs in 1966.<sup>19</sup>

Seven years later another restriction was imposed: Ordinance 801 series of 1972 of Cebu City Traffic Code. "According to Lt. Alfonso S. Perales, Education Officer of the CPD [Cebu Police Department], *tartanillas* are banned from entering the national highways of the city. The previous ordinances (No. 65) were repealed and the prevailing ordinance is Ordinance No. 801 series of 1972 of Cebu City Traffic Code...."<sup>20</sup>

The ban from the national highways prevented them not only from entering but also from crossing the highways; making other streets inaccessible. Formerly restricted only in mainstreets like Colon, Magallanes, M.J. Cuenco and Leon Kilat; with the new ordinance, rigs are now allowed only in Sanciangko, Borromeo, Tres de Abril, Garfield, a certain portion of Junquera, Imus, Sikatuna, T. Padilla, C. Padilla, Aranas, Spoliarium, Carlock, a certain portion of M. J. Cuenco, Tupas, and other small streets. These resulted to more rig owners and *cocheros* quitting; only 530 rigs were registered in 1973.<sup>21</sup>

Plague by the oil crisis in the 1970s, we assume that the government will reverse its attitude towards the rigs because it is an alternative to motorized transport. However, "Patrolman [A.D.] Sayson [of CPD Traffic Division] says that the stringent measures and restrictions are imposed strictly now as before even with the oil crisis because of [the city officials] aim to eradicate this road nuisance."<sup>22</sup>

The restrictions continued with another ordinance in 1990. Ordinance 1381 set the remaining streets allowed for passage of the *tartanilla*.<sup>23</sup> It states:

"Section 7.- The rigs drivers are authorized and may pass only through the following streets any time of the day or night:

- a. From the junction of D. Jakosalem Street following Sanciangko Street, Juan Climaco Street up to Forbes Bridge, back and forth;
- b. From Taboan Market (Tres de Abril Street) through Sanciangko Street up to the junction of D. Jakosalem St., back and forth; from Taboan Market (B. Aranas Street) through Lakandula Street, then C. Padilla Street to Duljo, back and forth; From Pasil Fish Market through Tupas Street up to the corner of Magallanes and El Filibusterismo Street, back and forth; from Taboan Market (Tres de Abril Street) through Katipunan or V. Rama Street or A. Lopez Street, back and forth; from Taboan Market through Tres de Abril Street, then Carlock Street and B. Aranas Ext., back and forth.”

The city council passed this ordinance in a unanimous resolution. Citing health risks due to manure, and traffic congestion worsened by the slow moving rigs as reasons, they sent the staggering rig industry to its knees. This time the rig people cared less, or were powerless, to defend. Unlike the prolonged debates in the council session when they set the maximum number of *tartanillas* at 2500, no objection was raised. Unlike the vehement opposition of operators and drivers when the council planned to prohibit rigs from entering some streets, they assented to be allowed only in a few. Two years later there were only 437 registered *tartanillas* in the city.<sup>24</sup>

## CONCLUSION: A KING NO MORE

The downfall of the *tartanilla* is mainly due to the advance of technology. Motor-powered vehicles are superior to the horse-powered rigs; market forces sides with the more efficient mode of transport, the faster scooters (converted into tricycles), and later, the bigger taxis and *jeepneys*. The *tartanilla* is just another casualty of progress.

However, the Cebu City government may have hastened the decline of the *tartanilla* as a form transport. Instead of waiting for market forces to determine the fate of the *tartanilla*, the city council passed successive ordinances that quickened the transition from rigs into motorized transport. In its quest to find solutions to traffic problems, it jumped to the conclusion that the rigs were the culprit, and eliminating them would solve traffic congestion (which it did not). Thus it marginalized the rig service through its increasing restrictive ordinances.

## The Tartanilla Today

The *tartanilla* may be king no more, but it continues to ferry passengers and cargoes along the sidestreets of Cebu. It is a preferred transportation of shoppers returning to nearby suburbs from shopping in the city's three largest public markets (Carbon, Taboan, and Pasil) for a fare below the regular transportation (five pesos only while *jeepneys* collects eight). Today, from one to two hundred rigs remain.

While the city is bidding out its plans for a modern mass transit system (either by Light Rail Transit or Bus Rapid Transit); while other Philippine cities have retired their horse-drawn carriages into tourist rides, Cebu's *tartanillas* continue to serve commuter needs unsatisfied by regular transportation; it is still a limited means of transport to some inner parts of the city. Our generation will never witness a *tartanilla* traffic jam again but once in a while you will notice from your *jeepney* seat a *cochero* announcing the passage of the one time Cebuano king of the road.

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