

International Partnership Programme for Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage
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Case Study Report: the Philippines

*Philippine Intangible Cultural Heritage Committee (PICH)
and Tao Foundation for Culture and Arts*

1. Project Area:

The geographical configuration of the Philippine islands was not always as we know it today. It is said that during the pre-historic ice ages, these islands were not only linked with each other through land bridges, these were further linked in the west to the Sunda shelf which encompassed the Malay Peninsula, Sumatra, Java, part of Celebes, Borneo, part of the Sulu archipelago, and Palawan; and to the east, Mindanao was connected with the Sahul shelf of Australia.¹ As such, the Philippine islands shared many environmental features with each other as well as with many parts of the region. Such patterns included the ways and means by which early humans adapted to their environments giving rise to their diverse but interrelated cultures.

Linguistically, William Henry, Scott² notes that “by the time of Spanish advent, Austronesian³ speakers occupied the whole archipelago, diversifying into three main branches: a northern branch included Luzon languages like Ilocano, Ibanag and those on the Cordillera. A southern branch included almost all languages spoken in Mindanao. A central branch had proliferated most widely; it included not only Visayan but all the languages between Pampanga and Butuan, as well as Taosog in Sulu. With few exceptions thus, the Filipinos that the Spaniards met in the sixteenth century were speaking languages produced within the archipelago, not introduced by separate migrations from abroad.”

On the matter of oral traditions, Hornedo⁴ observes that epics (sung and/or recited) abound all over the archipelago. These include the Lam-ang among the Ilocano, the Hudhud among the Ifugao, the Ulaging among the Manobo, the Darangen among the Maranao and Maguindanao, the Hinilawod among the Panay, the Ullalim among the Kalinga, among others. There are also folk narratives (myths, legends, folktales) such as

¹ Jocano, F. Landa, *Filipino Prehistory*, Manila, Punlad Research House, 1998

² Scott, William Henry, *Barangay*, Manila: Ateneo de Manila Press, 1994

³ The Austronesian language belongs or is related to a family of agglutinative languages spoken in the area extending from Madagascar in the west through the Malay Peninsula and archipelago to Hawaii and Easter Island in the east and including practically all the native languages of the Pacific islands with exception of the Australian, Papuan and Negrito languages.

⁴ Hornedo, “Philippine Literature: The Ethnic Tradition,” CCP Encyclopedia, Vol. IX, 1994

the Tagalog *alamat*, the Cebuano *kasugiran*, Ilocano *sarita*, Ilongo *gintunaan*, Tausug *kissa*, and others; folk songs and folk poetry in the form of riddles and proverbs such as the Tagalog *bugtong*, Cebuano *tigmo*, Ilocano *burburti*, Ilongo *tugma*, Ivatan *kabbuni*, Tausug *tukudtukud*, among others.

In the field of music, Maceda, Dioquino, Santos⁵ note patterns in “life-cycle songs in many groups. Most common are lullabies, courtship and marriage songs, death chants. Occupational songs also abound among the different groups. Special rituals with corresponding music are performed for various purposes such as curing the sick, for thanksgiving, for seeking special favours, etc.”

There are many other shared cultural patterns that can be found across the Philippine islands including pre-colonial religious practices akin to shamanism in central and other parts of Asia.

2. Project Rationale:

All this cultural interrelatedness outlined above however, eludes many Filipinos today. Not even nationalist rhetoric can galvanise a sense of ritual kinship, especially when pursued by privileging certain tribes and cultures, while side-stepping others.

There is also the matter of dividing Filipinos into “minorities” and “majorities” which wrongly implies that only the minorities are “indigenous” who have Asia-related cultural traditions, while the majorities are non-indigenous and only have Hispanised, Americanised or Arabicised cultural forms. Mercado⁶ reminds us that the “minoritisation of several ethno-linguistic groups in the Philippines began only upon the arrival of Spanish colonisers. The Spaniards called the local inhabitants *Indios*. Those who lived separately from them were the “*tribos independentes*” and those who refused baptism were the “*infieles*.” The Americans lumped together the IPs and the Muslims. Together, they are the “cultural communities” in the 1973 Marcos constitution. The 1987 constitution calls them indigenous cultural communities.”

The challenge today is for each and every Filipino to reclaim his or her indigeneity by rediscovering and re-rooting in their ancestral traditions (may be trans-tribal). One must be guided by an understanding of Indigenous Cultural Communities/Indigenous Peoples not only as referring to minority indigenous groups, but also to “peoples who are regarded as indigenous on account of their descent from the populations which inhabited the country, at the time of conquest or colonisation, or at the time of inroads of non-indigenous religions and cultures, or the establishment of present state boundaries, who retain some or all of their own social, economic, cultural or political institutions, but who

⁵ From Maceda, Dioquino, Santos, “Philippine Music: The Ethnic Tradition,” CCP Encyclopedia, Vol. VI, 1994

⁶ Mercado, Leonardo, *Working with Indigenous People*, Manila, Divine Word Publications, 1994

may have been displaced from their traditional domains or who may have resettled outside their ancestral domains.⁷

In the task of rediscovering ancestral traditions such as oral traditions, getting to know the expert practitioners who keep traditions alive in the dynamic context of history is the most crucial step. Recording, transcribing, translating and publishing the rich inventories of oral traditions of these expert practitioners are the second important steps, but must not stop there as had been the practice in many purely academic approaches to this task. By taking a more humanistic, person-oriented, and practical approach, expert practitioners are given a venue to also share their life stories which provide living contexts to these oral traditions which continue to be recreated each day in countless circumstances. Culture-based perspectives and pedagogic methods must also be treated with equal importance compared to matters of form and content. Finally, research and publications must not be ends unto themselves but serve as tools to encourage the new generations to take up the active practice of oral traditions as relevant means of expression, communication and transformation

3. Project Objectives:

A. To get to know expert practitioners of Philippine oral traditions from different islands and ethno linguistic groups, gender, faith affiliations and generations;

B. To record, transcribe, translate, publish not only inventories of oral traditions but also culture-based perspectives, pedagogic methods, and life contexts in which these oral traditions continue to be created and recreated throughout ever-changing history;

C. To use these publications not for posterity purposes alone but as tools for further interaction and engagement between expert practitioners and the new generations of Filipinos.

4. Methods of Project Implementation

For a number of decades now, there had been an urgent call to rethink pedagogic and research methods. Much of what had been generally deemed as “scientific” have proven to be not necessarily relevant to the research sites and participants at hand, precisely because such methodologies hail from other lands and cultures like the west.

Obusan writes that “there is today a steadily growing number of Filipino scholars who are deeply conscious of the richness of Philippine culture, yet feel a sense of frustration that much of what they see as distinctive knowledge, is not getting into mainstream

⁷ Republic Act 8371: Indigenous People Rights Act of 1997

research. There are of course many reasons why this has happened, but perhaps a major one is the dearth of research approaches responsive to the nuance of Philippine culture.⁸

Among others, this project on Philippine oral traditions makes use of the following more culturally-sensitive approaches:

- ① People to people, not top-down approach. While institutional approaches have their importance and place, these must never annul peoples' initiatives to regenerate their own traditions since time immemorial. Both approaches must in fact complement each other.
- ② Participatory. Informants are not relegated to footnotes but are credited as oralists, research participants, co-producers, who receive shares of the research outputs.
- ③ Inclusive. Participants are selected not solely on their virtuosity, because community values are such that shared practice is encouraged, thus allowing for varying levels of proficiency.

Participants are also not chosen by virtue of being “uncontaminated” by other cultures. It is acknowledged that no culture exists in a vacuum nor does any culture remain frozen in the past. The dynamism and variegatedness of cultural expressions are fully acknowledged.

- ④ Practical and theoretical. The project is not a mere academic exercise but a necessary step towards actual and dynamic practice.
- ⑤ Inter-disciplinary. The project does not deal with text and music alone but also permeates into other aspects of existence—history, communication, worship, healing, entertainment, among others.

5. Outcomes of the Project

Publication of:

- The Shared Voice: Chanted and Spoken Narratives from the Philippines, Anvil Publications, Fundacion Santiago, 2008 (book and CD)
- Kahimunan: Cultural Music of the Manobo, Higaonon, Banwaon of Agusan del Sur, Tao Foundation for Culture and Arts, 2002 (booklet and CD)
- Tudbulul Lunay Mogul: T'boli Hero in a Place of Gongs and Music, Tao Foundation for Culture and Art, 2002 (booklet and CD)

⁸ Obusan, Teresita, ed., Pamamaraan: Indigenous Knowledge and Evolving Research Paradigms. Quezon City, University of the Philippines Asian Center, 1994

Asia/Pacific Cultural Centre for UNESCO (ACCU)

- Marino: Hanunuo Mangyan Music and Chanted Poetry, Tao Foundation for Culture and Arts, 1998 (booklet and cassette)
- Pakaradia-an: Maranao Epic Chnats and Instrumental Music, Tao Foundation for Culture and Arts, 1997 (CD)
- Maguindanao Kulintang, Tao Foundation for Culture and Arts, 1995 (CD)

B. Workshops that have been attended by at least 20,000 students and teachers in Luzon and Mindanao in the past 15 years

6. Summary of Conclusion

Because of the challenge of sustainability, particularly with rising research, production and printing costs, we can only continue this important work with the welcome partnership of committed institutional partners.

We thus invite UNESCO to be a partner, not only in safeguarding but in regenerating the dynamic practice of intangible cultural heritage for generations to come.