

# **THE ROLE OF SCHOOLS FOR LIVING TRADITIONS (SLT) IN SAFEGUARDING THE INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE IN THE PHILIPPINES: THE CASE OF *HUDHUD* CHANTS OF THE IFUGAO**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

At present, there are several national laws/ acts in existence that pertain to the safeguarding of Philippine intangible cultural heritage (ICH). As a guide in determining what is intangible cultural heritage, the Philippines has adopted the UNESCO definition of ICH which refers to the practices, representation, expressions, knowledge, skills as well as instruments, objects, and artifacts associated therewith, that communities, groups and individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage, such as (1) oral traditions, languages, and expressions; (2) performing arts; (3) social practices, rituals, and festive events; (4) knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe, (5) traditional craftsmanship.

Concrete steps have been taken by the Philippine government with support from international cultural agencies, local governments and communities to address the need to safeguard the intangible cultural heritage of the country.

Peralta has identified key strategies towards the reinvigoration and propagation of ethnic memory: 1) identification of the item of intangible cultural heritage; 2) recognition of the ICH as a cultural treasure; 3) and intensification of ethnic pride regarding this treasure 4) Increase and propagate the depth of knowledge among the incoming generations; 5) Institutionalize safeguarding efforts from the national to the local levels (include inventory-making); 6) Provision of socially relevant context for the practice of the intangible heritage; 7) A continuing program of incentives for practitioners and teachers (both cash prize and trophies).

The National Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCCA) for its part, instituted the establishment of the Schools of Living Traditions (SLT) as one of the strategies to safeguard intangible cultural heritage. Over the last fifteen years, there has been a number of SLTs among different ethno-linguistic groups in the country. NCCA developed the concept of SLT defined as one where a living master/cultural bearer or culture specialist teaches skills and techniques of doing a traditional art or craft. The mode of teaching is usually non-formal, oral and with practical demonstrations. The site may be the house of the living master, a community social hall, or a center constructed for the purpose.

My report will focus mainly on the case of the *Hudhud* Schools for Living Traditions set up in

the province of Ifugao in the northern part of the Philippines that specifically address the need not only to safeguard the continued practice of the *Hudhud* Chants of the Ifugao but also to encourage its transmission to young Ifugao. As described by Lambrecht, *hudhud* (story) is “a non-ritual oral narrative” and also “a manner of chanting an epical romance” (Peralta) of the Ifugao ethno-linguistic group in Ifugao province in the northern Philippines. Peralta further elucidates *hudhud* chanting as a tradition practiced mainly by women during four occasions only: in the rice field during cleaning/ weeding time and harvest season, and in the village during funeral wakes and bone-washing rituals for the deceased. The *hudhud* epics are sung alternately by the lead chanter who tells the story and the chorus whose part consists of commentaries on the story, repetitions of names or persons, places or duplication of certain terms. The language is archaic, and cannot be directly translated due to pleonastic nuances. Primarily, *hudhud* chanting is for entertainment, and to ease the tedious work in the field and the monotony of wakes. (Peralta, 2007)

In 2001, the *hudhud* chants of the Ifugao has gained international and national recognitions: “A Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity” by UNESCO; “The International Arirang Prize” by the Republic of Korea, and as “A National Cultural Treasure” by the National Museum of the Philippines.

These recognitions of the *hudhud* chants have further strengthened the commitment from national and international organizations to sustain the safeguarding of *hudhud* as a remarkable symbol of human creativity. It provided the impetus for the NCCA to create the Intangible Heritage Committee (IHC) to develop and implement programs and projects to safeguard this vital intangible heritage centered on the seven strategies identified by Peralta.

Several activities that have been developed consist of formal education in elementary schools through the ***Hudhud* Schools of Living Traditions (HSLTs)**, as well as research, documentation, publications, training, competitions and festivals.

Strategically, the program developed for the safeguarding and transmission of the *hudhud* chants of the Ifugao which commenced in 2003 saw the need to urge close coordination with the Department of Education (DepEd) - Ifugao Division. Management of the program was directly undertaken by the Ifugao Intangible Heritage Executive Committee consisting of local officials from DepEd and Ifugao provincial bureaus, local specialists, and NCCA and the National Museum representatives.

UNESCO/ Japan Funds-In-Trust (FIT) for the Preservation and Promotion of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) extended financial assistance for the program. With the completion of the project in 2008, the Provincial Government created a Provincial Council on Cultural Heritage to sustain the HSLTs and other related activities by providing funds after the UNESCO-Japan FIT grant had ended.

## **METHOD OF PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION**

Aimed at encouraging the transfer of the *hudhud* practice to the youth, each strategy identified above, involves specific activities focused on the HSLTs such as documentation, cultural

awareness and promotion in the community and on a national level, development of teaching guides, and performances in proper cultural context.

In 2004, an Executive Order was issued by the Ifugao provincial government for a collaboration of efforts of the local government units in the province such as the Department of Education (DepEd), the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples Provincial Office, Ifugao State College of Agriculture and Forestry, private and public schools concerned, national government organizations and other organizations in the province to assist in the creation and management of HSLTs.

To promote and perpetuate knowledge of the *hudhud* as an important tradition among the youth, five school-based **Hudhud Schools of Living Traditions (HSLTs)** supervised by the DepEd were established in key areas in the seven out of the eleven Ifugao municipalities in 2004 to 2005 and 14 were added in 2006 to 2008. To date, there are 20 existing HSLTs with 20 to 30 elementary students per school from grades three to six except in one school which has first and second year students. Notably, at the end of the training, students in each class learn the *hudhud* based on the traditional manner of chanting unique to each village.

Aside from the HSLTs, chanting competitions started in 2002 and are held every year for adults and youth. Cash and trophies were given as incentives to the practitioners and teachers during community festivals in the municipality. All municipal winners on these two categories (adult and youth) join in the grand annual competition held at the provincial level. Annual recognition awards are given to select set of lead precentors to entice others to become precentors; and, to HSLT volunteer DepEd teachers. In addition, a special award is given to the *hudhud* precentor who leads in the most number of chants in a year.

In 2006, to encourage more serious and deeper involvement in the *hudhud* practice, a “Perpetual Trophy” revolving around annual winners, based on a competition among municipalities where the *hudhud* are chanted in the proper context.

## **OUTCOMES OF THE PROJECT**

Based on the 2008 UNESCO Japan-FIT terminal report on the safeguarding and transmission of the *hudhud* chants of the Ifugao, the project has achieved more than its targeted objectives, as summarized:

### **Research/Documentation:**

- Documentation and transcription of 17 narrated and chanted *hudhud*, one narrated *hudhud* and one chanted *hudhud*; and translation into English of one complete *hudhud*;
- A registry of culture bearers includes 200 culture bearers (hudhud chanters, high priests, ritual practitioners, etc.);

### **Publication:**

- Two children’s books were published: *Pumbakhayon: An Origin Myth of the Ifugao Hudhud*

and *Halikpon: A Retelling of an Ancient Ifugao Chant*. Four hundred sets of books were distributed in public schools libraries in Ifugao through the DepEd-Division of Ifugao. Other recipients were the National Library and other institutional libraries in Manila, cultural agencies, 100 Philippine embassies and consulates abroad, etc.

**Training:**

• More than 1,000 elementary students in Ifugao were trained in *hudhud* chanting;

**Promotion/ Institutionalization:**

- 29 HSLTs were established in the seven municipalities 20-30 students; combination of grades three to six students per school except in one school composed of first and second year students;
- Annual *hudhud* competitions were organized in Ifugao and *Hudhud Perpetual Award* established as an annual recognition of performances in cultural context;
- *Hudhud* multimedia packets have been distributed in the 29 HSLTs, 80 local government units and barangays in Ifugao, 94 public and private school libraries in Ifugao, 532 municipal libraries nationwide, 100 Philippine embassies and consulates abroad, cultural organizations, media, select participants in national and international conferences (intangible heritage, indigenous peoples, and traditional arts), universities and research centers nationwide, etc.

**Integration in the school curriculum:**

• *Hudhud* has been fully integrated into the language arts curriculum in Ifugao Province;

**Community involvement/ participation:**

• Tremendous support was mobilized among Ifugao communities and *hudhud* singers, both old and young to encourage culture bearers and practitioners to propagate and preserve the *hudhud*;

**Sustainability**

• The Province has now assumed financial responsibility for sustaining the HSLTs and related safeguarding activities;

Moreover, in her country paper, Picache (2009) reported that the DepEd- Division of Ifugao continues to gather at least 300 students of HSLT for a exhibition performance in the *Hudhud* festival held every year.

**SUMMARY/ CONCLUSION**

In this report, I have highlighted the significant role played by the HSLTs as a strategy in safeguarding intangible heritage with the case of the *Hudhud* SLTs as an illustration. The sustainability of the SLTs as the case of the *Hudhud* SLT demonstrates, rest on the mobilization of not only political and financial resources coming from local, national and international institutions but more importantly also by the human resources available on the ground. I am referring specifically to the Ifugao themselves who have demonstrated the resolve to engage actively in the safeguarding of their own cultural heritage of which *hudhud* chants is a part.

Albeit, with the mobilization of local actors including practitioners of *hudhud*: young and old, men and women, etc. one can suggest that indeed, the *hudhud* chants will stand the challenges posed by outside influences. Hence, the successes of the *hudhud* SLTs, would serve as inspiration for other initiatives to safeguard intangible heritage in the country and elsewhere.

#### **Data Sources:**

Lambrecht, Francis. *Hudhud*. 2005. NCCA-IHC.

Peralta, Jesus T., 2007. *The Philippines: on Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage*. Terminal Report on the Safeguarding and Transmission of the Hudhud Chants of the Ifugao. 2008.

Picache, Cecilia V., 2009. *Country Report on the Intangible Cultural Heritage Safeguarding Activities in Asia and the Pacific 2009*.

*Status Report on the Intangible Cultural Heritage Safeguarding in the Philippines*. 2011.

## **Attachment:**

### **CRITERIA AND ISSUES ON INVENTORY-MAKING IN THE PHILIPPINES:**

There are six independent cultural organizations involved in different degrees in the field of ICH, each with different charters, and therefore specific objectives. This is compounded by the fact that initial data will emanate from local government units from 80 provinces. There are thus four levels of concern: a) municipal, b) provincial, c) national and finally, d) at the level of the NCCA where coordination takes place. At each of these level coordinating structures will have to be organized. Each of the cultural agencies maintains inventories of their own cultural focus. The inventories of the different national cultural agencies in accordance with their charters are maintaining their respective inventories as required by law. With respect to the Philippine Registry of Cultural Property (PRECUP), however, the inventory of items of intangible cultural heritage is done in several steps at the NCCA with respect to the five domains of ICH defined by UNESCO, in a format patterned after UNESCO ICH formats:

Ethnographic literature is scanned for inventory items and

These are entered into a preliminary inventory in narrative text format;

The individual intangible items are later transferred to a database format;

The database is then uploaded and integrated with the Cultural Databank (CDB) of the NCCA Portal.

The central inventory at the NCCA is contained in the Cultural Data Bank (CDB) in the NCCA Portal. This particular inventory contains both tangible and intangible collection items. This inventory will be continually augmented by three persons who undertake both the research and inputting of data into the inventories.

#### **Issues on Inventory Making:**

- ÿ The NCCA/ICH cannot possibly accomplish the inventory-making task unassisted because the expertise needed are varied and inventories are very broad. There are other institutions that specialize in certain of the domains needed in the task.
- ÿ There are efforts by the government and private institutions apart from the NCCA that work in different aspects of intangible cultural heritage safeguarding and practice. The work is largely uncoordinated.
- ÿ A network of some kind of integral organization is necessary to accomplish a substantial ICH inventory and other attendant ICH functions.
- ÿ None of the institutions have units dedicated specifically to ICH inventory-making. The function needs to be defined in each of the institutions/agencies with the corresponding operational structure, facilities, and personnel funding.
- ÿ The last three of the domains (Knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe; performing arts and traditional crafts) are less in the competence of the NCCA; hence efforts in these directions are limited. The course of action was to wait until a permanent office is legislated and additional expertise is obtained.
- ÿ At present, the task of making the preliminary enumeration and the finalization into a Summary Inventory Form is being undertaken by only one person. The work is being done intermittently when the opportunity allows since this one person has other functions.