

HUDHUD: A LIVING ORAL TRADITION OF THE IFUGAO

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ABSTRACT

This study focuses mainly on the oral tradition of Ifugao called Hudhud, its performances, cultural values, and means of pedagogical transmission. It is important to note that this oral tradition is sustaining through the school of living tradition in the place of its origin. Through this study, people will be aware of this unique oral tradition of Ifugao, which is situated in the northern Philippine highlands. This ethnographic study captures the holistic purpose of the study of Hudhud; and thus, immersion, interview, archiving, and observation of the subject were made. Performances of the Hudhud are still popular during the community gathering called *Gotad ad Ifugao*, death rituals, weddings, and other important gatherings—big or small—in the entire province of Ifugao.

KEYWORDS

Hudhud, Munhaw-e, Oral traditions, Munhudhud, Ifugao

INTRODUCTION

The reflection of people can be seen in their culture and arts. Their stories can be seen and heard through visual arts and music—some of them are in oral traditions. In the different parts of the Philippines, the singing and chanting of various oral traditions can still be heard, and actually thriving despite its riddance during the Spanish occupation. To give way to Catholicism, the church eradicates the sounds and sights of gongs and traditional oral traditions practiced by the indigenous people throughout the country. Navarro (2007) has immensely discussed how the Spaniards changed the religious belief of the Filipinos at expense of the face of the Philippine music in his book *Kolonyal na Patakaran at ang Nagbabagong Kamalayang Filipino*. He asserted:

“Bilang pormal na pagsasanay sa pag-awit, binuksan ang isang paaralang ng musika para sa mga batang lalaki. Ito ang Colegio de Niños Tiples. Itinayo ito noong 1742 sa Manila Cathedral sa pangunguna ni Reverendo (14) Rodriguez, and arsobispo ng Kapuluan ng panahong iyon. Nakatuon ang kurikulum ng paaralang ito sa pagsasanay sa boses (bokalisasyon), solfeggio, piano, organ, chanting, paglikha ng musika, at pagtugtog ng instrumentong may kwerdas. Kasama rin dito ang akademikong pag-aaral sa ilalim ng isang guro” (Navarro, 2007: 17). [As a formal singing practice, a music school was opened for young boys. It is called Colegio de Niños Tiples. It was built in 1742 in Manila Cathedral under the leadership of Reverend Rodriguez, the archbishop of the archipelago at that time. The curriculum of this school focuses on vocal training

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(vocalization), solfeggio, piano, organ, chanting, music creation, and playing string instruments. It also includes academic study under a teacher.]

...“pagdating ng Kastila ay pilit na pinalitan ito (daloy at praktika ng musikang katutubo) at nagpakilala ng bago ayon sa praktika at kamalayang kanluranin” (Navarro, 2007: 22). [arrival of the Spaniards forced to replace it (the flow and practice of indigenous music) and introduced something new according to Western practice and consciousness.]

This proof was also agreed by Arwin Tan (2019) in his article ‘Patronage and Capitalism in the Musical Associations of Late Nineteenth-Century Colonial Manila’. Tan mentioned that the Spanish friars opened an informal school that offers thorough studies in music. He mentioned that:

“The only formal institution whose sole focus was music was the Colegio de Niños Tiples de la Santa Iglesia Catedral which centred its training on the musical needs of the church. In the absence of a formal institution, these associations catered informally to the demand for musical learning through the orchestras and bands they maintained” (Arwin Tan, 2019: 123).

These statements are the proofs of the musical suppression of the colonizers to assert their authority among the Filipinos. But as mentioned earlier, many of the oral traditions in the country, including music, have thrived due to the resilience of the people and the love for their own identity. Despite the Western music taught in both private and public schools, authentic Philippine music has remained progressive and has started to emerge among many studies and researches both by the locals and foreigners resulting in the support of the government (though is obviously not enough) for the preservation of this cultural diversity and wealth. Many of these were mentioned in the study by Ramon Santos, a national artist who championed research on decolonized approach in transmitting authentic Philippine traditions. He mentioned in his study entitled ‘Mga Katinigan sa mga Epiko sa Filipinas’ some of the oral traditions in the form of epics (both sung or cited as a poem):

“Ang Ullalim, halimbawa, ay isang uri ng himig na ginagamit ng mga makatà sa pagkanta ng mga berso at mga mahalagang panayam sa mga malalaking okasyon at mga pagpupulong ng mga nakatatandâ sa mga kasunduang pangkapayapaan at mga pagdiriwang” [The Ullalim, for example, is a kind of melody used by poets in singing the verses and important dialogues in large occasions and gatherings of elders at peace treaties and celebrations.]

... “Gayundin ang Ulahingan ng mga Manobo, na ang salitang **ulahing** ay isang uri ng estilo ng wika at musika. Ang unang ulahing ay tinatayang inawit ni Bayabayan, ang anak ng bayaning si Agyu. Ang ulahing ay ang tawag sa pagsalaysay sa prosa o tuluyan ng **kepuunpuun** o ang sinaunang pagsibol ng tao sa mundo”. [... and also, the ‘ulahingan’ of the Manobo, the word ‘ulahing’ is a kind of language and music style. The first ‘ulahing’ was said to be sang by Bayabayan, the son of the hero named Agyu. Ulahing is a term used in narrating prose of Kepuunpuun or the ancient human emergence in the world. Emphasis by the author.]

...“Ang Darangën ay epiko ng mga Mëranaw na higit na malawak ang gamit sa larangan ng tunog, gampanin, at likhaan. Unang-una, ito ay inaawit sa ibá’t ibáng okasyon, labás sa pagganap dito bilang pangunahing epiko ng bayan” (Santos, no date, unpublished manuscript.) [The Darangën is a Mëranaw epic that is widely used in the field of sound, performance, and creation. First of all, it is sung on different occasions, other than being the town’s main epic in the oral tradition.]

... “Ang Sugidanon naman ay ang tradisyong epiko ng Panay na nagmulâ sa katagang **sugid** na ang ibig sabihin ay magsiwalat o magsalaysay o narrate. Ang tawag sa mga kumakanta

ng epiko sa isla ng Panay ay **manugsugidanon**". (Santos, no date, unpublished manuscript.) [The Sugidanon, on the other hand, is a traditional epic of Panay that comes from the word 'sugid' which means to reveal or narrate. The epic singers on the island of Panay are called 'manugsugidanon'.]

"Sa mga Sama, ang epiko ay tinatawag na Kata-kata, mga mahabang kuwento tungkol sa moralidad na malimit isinasagawa sa mga lamay sa sementeryo o sa mga pagpapagaling ng maysakit (Santos, no date, unpublished manuscript)." [Among the Sama, the epic is called Kata-kata, long stories about morality that are often performed in wakes at cemeteries or at the healings of the sick.]

These studies prove the existence and continued preservation of the above-mentioned oral traditions, whether sung or cited as a poem. In this study, I particularly focus on the oral tradition of Ifugao called Hudhud, originally from the province of Ifugao in the Cordillera highlands.

Ifugao province is composed of 11 municipalities: Banaue, Hingyon, Hungduan, Kiangan, Tinoc, Asipulo, Lamut, Mayoyao, Aguinardo, Alfonso Lista, and Lagawe, which is also the capital of the province. Ifugao is derived from the word 'Ipugo', literally means 'from the mountain', or 'mountain people', i.e., people dwelling in the highland of the Cordillera region, where in the past—even to this day—the main source of living is farming, similar to other indigenous people in the neighboring provinces. One of the most important oral traditions practiced to this date in this province and among its people is the singing (chanting) of Hudhud, which is also one of the oldest in the Philippines. Although there have been many studies about this, my experience and understanding in witnessing a Hudhud performance and being a resident of the Cordillera region are not the same from reading it in books.

It took me half a day to travel to the province of Ifugao and at certain times to schedule interviews with locals and key informants, one of them being the late Manuel Dulawan. I was also able to discuss matters with the Hudhud master in Lagawe Central School, teaching and preparing students for the performance of this popular chant. A handful of researchers have explored the province of Ifugao and its oral tradition and written many researches about it. I wish to contribute a unique paper through my own observations about Hudhud.

HUDHUD PERFORMANCES AND CULTURAL VALUES

Hudhud is the longest existing oral tradition of Ifugao. Hudhud, indeed, is one of the best reflections of Ifugao culture. The oldest Hudhud pieces were said to be traced in Kiangan and, therefore, presumed to have originated in Kiangan, Ifugao (Lambrecht, 1967). Hudhud is a long composition performed either for entertainment or for wakes and vigils, weeding, and during good harvest. Hudhud are tales produced centuries ago, when Ifugaos established themselves in their present habitat. There was also a myth mentioned in the article of Dulawan (2000) regarding how exactly Hudhud started and a proof of its inception.

The UNESCO proclaimed Hudhud as an Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2001. It was confirmed that Hudhud consists of narrative chants traditionally performed by the Ifugao community, which is well-known for its rice terraces extending over the highlands of the northern island of the Philippine archipelago. It is practised during the rice sowing season, at harvest time, and at funeral wakes and rituals. Thought to have originated before the seventh century, the Hudhud comprises more than 200 chants, each divided into 40 episodes. A complete recitation may last several days (Verora, 2001).

The number of stanzas differs in the composition. Some would have more than 400 stanzas, whereas others more than 300. In fact, Ifugaos trace them back to a long, long line of mothers, grandmothers, and great-grandmothers (Lambrecht, 1957). A single Hudhud can contain different values that a child can learn. Young people grow in appreciation of values through music (Siruno, 1980). The Hudhud is said to be a nonritual chant and is also sung for entertainment. *Hudhud* is a kind of entertainment because when there is an occasion or gathering of people especially during wakes, people listen to the chanting to keep them awake and to stimulate them to reflect on Ifugao culture and history. The dominant theme of the Hudhud is about Ifugao epic heroes, love, marriage, and wealth of the *Kadangyans* (wealthy families).

According to Lambrecht (1957), these (Hudhud) tales, treasures of significant linguistic peculiarities, are outstanding pieces of primitive literature, memorials of an ancient culture that has maintained itself for ages. *Hudhud* contains different values but the best value that the child can learn from it is the love of his own culture and pride of his own race.

Dulawan (2000) in her article entitled ‘Singing Hudhud in Ifugao’ mentioned that several cultural values reflected in Hudhud pieces are such as wealth and beauty, family solidarity, respect for parents and elders, the prominence given to women, bravery, and social prestige. Dulawan attested in her writings about family solidarity that social organization is built on kinship. The ancestors’ norms of conduct became also the norms of the people’s conduct ... betrothal, marriage, prestige feasts, and many rituals linked to the ancient Ifugao cosmogony and religion. It is the knowledge of the ancestors of the Ifugao and what they did, which are the fundamentals of the custom laws—the unwritten laws of the Ifugao. Her observations are listed as follows: **People married into their own class**; monogamy is strictly observed. Kinsmen gathered together during tribal wars. Children are lovingly cared for. The children’s duty is to avenge any offense made against the family by an outsider. **Respect for parents and elders.** Parents were always addressed properly—*Amanhi Iken an hi* [My father, old man]; *Inan hi* [My mother]; *Aammod an bulalakki* [our elders, the handsome and braves elders of]. **Prominence given to women.** The hero’s mother, although a secondary character in the story, is always given prominence as she is the first to be consulted for all the prestigious feasts, especially in the arrangement of the marriage feast for her children. Hence, her home is the starting and ending place of all the stories. **Bravery.** The hero is praised for his skill as a warrior. He has to lead his people in tribal war and headhunting expeditions. Spear battles are intense moments that show his skill in handling the deadly spear. **Social prestige.** As one can observe, all the above values emphasize social prestige which is the ultimate cultural value.

The textual content has different meanings that indirectly describe their love of culture. Hudhud as an Ifugao oral folk literature defines clearly the authenticity of Ifugaos. It portrays the life of the early Ifugaos and their cultural values. Hudhud is a nonritual chant because it is not performed as a part of a specific ritual...of course, they can chant it during certain occasions, but they are not necessarily a must (Dulawan, 2000).

This is also attested by one of the officers of the Ifugao Cultural Heritage who said during an interview that Hudhud is an Ifugao epic. We have promoted Hudhud through the children of Ifugao in a form of competition especially during ‘Gotad’ [Gotad Ad Ifugao.]. Hudhud is sung under three circumstances: in the village house yard of a deceased person of honor and wealth, during funeral wakes; in the rice fields when a group of women clean the fields, during weeding time; and during the harvest season (Lambrecht, 1957).

Alliguyun and *Bugan* are the main characters in this song. The Hudhud is performed by women, but in some localities, men may occasionally join in the chant; according to Lambrecht (1957), men cannot sing Hudhud and most of them do not understand them well. Nevertheless, men have been mentioned to participate in this tradition.

Hudhud is used in certain important occasions. According to Dulawan (2000), the Ifugao epics, or Hudhud, are long sung narratives of the lives, exploits, and adventures of heroes who could defy

time and space. These narratives are performed in the fields during harvest time (*Hudhud di ani*) and at home during the wake for an elderly person's funeral (*Hudhud di nate*).

The many events narrated by their soloists and commented on by the whole group of choristers really happened in the distant past. None among them admits that because they cannot understand how their forbearers could ever have invented them. In the performance of Hudhud, the *munhaw-e* (lead singers) memorized the texts but it does not seem necessary for the choristers. The members of the group need not memorize them. They can reply in the form of singing, but it is important for them to know the theme and the cues so they would know what to sing. During the author's observation of the rehearsals, the children sat on a small stool and recited the lines of Hudhud in a very relaxed manner. The lead chanter is a girl and as she chanted the verses, other members would reply. In an interview, the master said that the Hudhud is composed of the soloist called *munhaw-e* and the choristers made of 10–12 people called *munhudhud*. For every other verse that the soloist would recite, the choristers would respond.

The *munhaw-e* tells them the title, and it is understood that the choristers knew exactly what to reply during the singing. When asked whether they need to memorize the entire Hudhud episode, the master answered that this is not necessary. Whatever you can memorize throughout your life, that's what we sang. There were also many other Hudhud singers in different parts of Ifugao who also recite different episodes from us and that make us a whole. We only do parts of the huge whole of Hudhud. We chose the right one for the occasion. Most are informal gatherings or events and usually are not written in the program. The people watch us and I think they are proud and entertained because it is part of our tradition. Now I teach this to our children because I believed it is time for them to take over. *Habang bata pa sila, alam na nila*. [While they were young, they already knew.] Dulawan (2000) also attested to the master when she stated that singers are ordinarily female, although some male singers are known. There is a leading soloist, *munhaw'e*, and a chorus of 10–12 women, *munhudhud*. An expert singer of tales usually volunteers to be the soloist. The choristers need not know the text of the Hudhud. The leading singer simply announces the title, and the choristers would know the cue word when they all join in the chanting until the end of the sentences, as these are all stereotyped phrases of the names of characters, names of villages, topography, and kinship relationships. Improvisations can also happen in the actual and informal singing of the Hudhud. According to Dulawan, the choristers, in fact, add many reduplications and alliterations at their pleasure, according to their wit and aptitude to improvise. These can be considered ornamentations, mere embellishments to amplify the unfolding of the story, and enhance its beauty in sound.

However, improvisation in singing Hudhud is not as broad or detailed as that of the secular Arab music and the Gamelan and Kreasi Belaganjur (Racy 1998 & Bakan 1998) where the beauty of the music relies on improvisations. Hudhud is somehow improvised through the use of grace notes but still observes the rhythmic pattern; otherwise, if too much improvisation will be done, the rest of the group will become offbeat. In some performances, it happens. Perhaps, this is the reason why Hudhud competitions are held in the province. Improvisation is even rehearsed and, therefore, is no longer considered as improvisation. There is also a common melody for all Hudhud—if not the same—all over the place. Subsequently, the singers are usually not pitch-perfect, the range therefore might differ, though most are moderately high and fits in the range of the singers.

It is, but amazing, to ponder how these chanters have memorized the long lines through time and coordinated with the choristers. To this day, however, many of the pieces have been rehearsed and have minimized improvisations during competitions.

It is very significant to note that those original pieces are all from the sharp memory of the lead singer as well as the choristers. It is also very important to consider that it takes to be an Ifugao to recite the Hudhud.

MEANS OF TRANSMISSION OF HUDHUD

Transmission is one way of conserving and promoting the oral traditions of the Philippines. One cannot rely on the support of the government alone but on the action taken by the community, particularly those that are practicing it. Through the collaborative effort of the government and the community, actions were taken to particularly transmit this unique oral tradition of the Ifugaos. NCCA (NCCA, no date) is one government agency that helps preserve traditional practices all over the country by establishing informal schools called the school of living traditions (SLT). The schools are set up in remote areas where traditional practices are still being observed. Grants are being given to sustain the traditional practices of the specific place. They tap the help of the elderly or master of the traditional practice to lead and teach. According to the agency (NCCA), a school of living traditions (SLT) is the one where a living master/culture bearer or culture specialist teaches skills and techniques of doing a traditional art or craft. The mode of teaching is usually nonformal, oral, and with practical demonstrations. The site may be the house of the living master, a community social hall, or a center constructed for this purpose.

The one who teaches are those considered masters or elderlies who carry with them the virtues of the culture. During this study, I conducted the interview in an SLT located in Kiangan, which is led by its master of Ifugao culture, Manuel Dulawan. They offered to teach many of the Ifugao traditional practices such as weaving, making traditional musical instruments, dancing, cooking traditional foods, and the chanting of Hudhud and Alim². According to NCCA (NCCA, no date), it is the **culturebearer** or **master** or **specialist**. This term refers to an individual who is recognized to possess the skills and techniques in doing a particular traditional art or craft. He shall be responsible for teaching his craft to a group of learners and shall ensure that his/her students learn the craft.

This is true to what M. Dulawan said during the interview in the SLT, Kiangan:

“I taught the children (Ifugao) what I think is necessary for them to learn as part of their identity as Ifugao, regardless of what particular Ifugao tribe they belong (to). We have the same practices anyway. We have here, cooking of traditional food, making of our musical instruments, chanting of Hudhud, and sometimes I invite some teacher also to teach young girls and women how to weave” (Dulawan, 2019).

The students or clients of the school are usually the same children or adults belonging to the ethnolinguistic community. Thanks to the UNESCO’s call on the preservation of the intangible cultural heritage that pushed the NCCA (NCCA, no date) to fund and support the advocacy to sustain the living traditions of the indigenous people of the Philippines which includes the listing of Hudhud as one of the intangible heritage. There it is written that it (SLT) is limited to the young people from the same ethnolinguistic community. The establishment of SLTs is in response to UNESCO’s call for the preservation of cultural heritage by preserving it in a living form, ensuring its transmission to the next generations (the other approach is the recording in a tangible format and conserving it in archives). While there are various facets of cultural heritage that can be transmitted to the next generations, this program would like to specifically focus on the transmission of indigenous skills and techniques to the young. It aims to encourage culture specialists/masters to continue with their own work, develop and expand the frontiers of that work, and train younger people to take their place in the future.

² Alim = Aleem. One of the names of God in Islam which means the ‘All-knowing one’.

The master's informal teaching of Hudhud also includes teaching the children to attend Ifugao. I personally observe and interviewed one in Lagawe Central School where the teacher is considered a master chanter of Hudhud. It took her years to become one. During the interview, she narrates with me her own story and how she embraced the culture of chanting Hudhud. Starting as a young girl and being part of the choristers in a group, she took time to memorize some of the Hudhud episodes until she became the leading chanter. She began leading when she was around 40. From simply socialization or wedding, she leads her usual group of friends, relatives, and some members of the community to perform.

At this time of the interview, she teaches children to recite Hudhud after their class in the afternoon in preparation for the fast-approaching competition in 'Gotad ad Ifugao' an annual festival of the gathering of all municipalities in the province, showcasing unity through the display of products, talent, concerts, and competition in Hudhud.

The Blackfoot of Montana (Bruno Nettl, 1984) has no class of professional musicians, no formalized music, and no written or otherwise articulated music theory. The Ifugao has the same experience on how to acquire the skill of singing the Hudhud. One of the important things to understand about the Blackfoot and Hudhud musical culture is the conception of creating music as closely akin to learning. A Hudhud master will take years and maturity to be selected by the community to become a leader or master of a certain traditional cultural practice (otherwise, she volunteers to be a leader—nevertheless societal respect, as to how I observe the instance, is necessary).

From the time Hudhud was written by Francis Lambrecht to this day, this ageless Ifugao epic continues to amaze me and the spectators all over the world, particularly the researchers and writers. In many ways, NCCA, UNESCO, and the Ifugao—both municipal and provincial governments have—hand-in-hand—worked together to preserve, promote, and continue the practice alive among the Ifugaos in the form of performances during important occasions and events in the province and the putting up of SLT where the community (Ifugao) has the chance to decide to continue this intangible heritage of the province and the country. It is important to participate in the preservation of this epic and among other Philippine intangible oral traditions that have been considered treasures that define the identity of every Filipino Indigenous group and the vast culture of the Philippines through research, observations, and presentation of studies in conferences.

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