

Editorial: Families and heritage

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BRIDGES. May, declared as National Heritage Month, challenges Filipino families and communities to keep alive the valuable legacy of our ancestors, which shape our sense of who we are. **(File Foto)**

WHAT does it take to keep tradition from dying?

This year's celebration of National Heritage Month (NHM) carries the theme of "Pamilya para sa pamana (Families for heritage)."

On Aug. 11, 2003, when Presidential Proclamation 439 was issued, declaring May as the NHM, the government recognized the importance of fostering in citizens an awareness of and respect for the country's history and legacy.

Since many parts of the country celebrate fiesta and homecomings in May, the NHM theme resonates because families singlehandedly transmit and sustain indigenous practices, as well as foster the values of pride, respect, and stakeholderhood that generations accord to notions of identity rooted in cultural and religious traditions.

Endangered past

However, social changes make families vulnerable as the sole guardians and carriers of heritage. Pressured by daily survival, trends of mass consumption, and more competitive industrial rivals, these artisans, whose skill, industry and craftsmanship may have once been a source of local pride, have been reduced to being exotic remnants of the past.

Danao's Karansa Festival features the traditional craft of clay pottery in its annual festivities. In reality, the daily output of the "mamikpikay (clay potter)" in Suba, Danao has dwindled from 100 clay pots in the 1960s-70s, when the demand peaked, to 20 pots currently.

According to a May 19 Sun.Star Cebu article, exhaustion of clay sources in Guinsay; Suba potters' preference for the traditional process, evaluated as "crude" by trade officials; and the market preference for plastic products have thinned Danao's community of potters.

Written by University of Philippines Cebu Mass Communication students Lorraine Ecarma, Kris Andujar, Patricia Ranili and Meg Lim, the article also reported that most of the potters encourage their children to pursue "more practical and sustainable means of livelihood."

Communal stake

Perhaps facing better prospects of survival than Danao's "mamikpikay," the "hablon" weavers of Argao receive an infusion of government support in the form of training, technical assistance, and a Shared Service Facility (SSF).

Complementing this is private support fueling production and consumption.

Sun.Star Cebu's Jeandie O. Galolo reported last May 19 that handloom weaving is also a "dying industry" in Argao, where the traditional weavers are dwindling and the current generation is ignorant of a meticulous process that once produced the sought-after "kinarnero" and "benorilao" houseware products.

Better income opportunities drew away the generations that could have learned the craft and continued the tradition of handloom-weaving among the families in Cancainap, Tulic, Lamacan, and Canbanua.

The future of "hablon" now rests on 20 handloom machines, 20 weavers, and 20 assistant weavers. The SSF was recently set up by the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) in the Argao campus of the Cebu Technological University (CTU). Challenging the campaign to sustain hablon is the disparity of the values of past and present generations. According to the same Sun.Star Cebu article, Laicah Villamonte and Florencia Amaca were among the youngest trainees who produced swathes of the "hablon" using the SSF.

Eighteen of their schoolmates found the process too meticulous and preferred to stick to cleaning the CTU buildings for their summer job.

Bridging present and future

The goal to keep “hablon” alive finds stakeholders in local artists, entrepreneurs, and civic organizations. According to Sun.Star Cebu, the Junior Chamber International (JCI) volunteered to assist the Argao weavers through research and development, as well as marketing.

The JCI partners with fashion designer Dexter Alazas to make a suit for JCI members that will use “hablon” designed by Alazas. The CTU Argao and the JCI target a monthly sales of P350,000 for the next five years.

Making heritage financially viable may persuade families that their children can expect a more secure future if they learn the craft, aided by technology, and produce the same or better quality of craftwork.

Beyond survival needs, at the heart of the heritage movement must be a Filipino’s pride in the legacy of the past and appreciation of one’s contribution in sustaining heritage.

“We need to create our own Cebu textile,” declared Alazas, who noted that this year’s Miss Cebu candidates wore “hablon”.

Beyond NHM, families and communities must pass the torch of sustaining heritage.

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