

Cultural Heritage in Philippine Society

by

Aurora Roxas-Lim

University of the Philippines

➤ Working Definitions -

Culture is viewed as the system of beliefs (philosophy, religion), values (morals, ethics, concepts of right and wrong), practices, behavioral patterns and survival strategies shared by a collective, or society (country, nation) over time and transmitted by various means through generations. Ethnicity or race, religion as well as language are vital elements of culture, although some bearers of the culture may be racially mixed and may speak a dialect, or even a different language from the majority population belonging to the culture system. All the elements of the system are in constant dynamic interaction. We separate the elements of the system mainly for analytical and heuristic purposes only.

Culture usually evolves as a continuous human interaction with environment and is inextricable to specific geographical location. For example the small and dwindling Mamanuwa population of northern Surigao and Agusan provinces in Mindanao were mainly hunting gathering tribe well adjusted to the densely forested area before 1930's. Similarly the Ilongot of Quirino, Aurora and Nueva Vizcaya provinces were hunters and gathers until loggers and land grabbers ate up the forests in the early 20th C. The Mamanuwa were displaced by the massive influx of Christianized Bisayan immigrants who were settled agriculturists in their former homeland. Their migration to Mindanao was encouraged by the central government to ease peasant unrest in Luzon and the Visayas. This phenomenon illustrates that as the culture system matures (in this case the Christianized Bisaya) and bearers of the culture increase, and are better organized, the culture need not be confined to the original territory where it originated. For the culture system can transcend geography. The Bisaya immigrants decimated the dense forests and undertook intensive cultivation of rice and other cereals as well as commercial aquatic culture. Unlike the hunting gathering Mamanuwa and the Ilongot who subsisted more or less in harmony within the forested

environment, the Bisayan type of intensive agriculture while more profitable in the short run, had dire ecological consequences in the long run. It caused periodic flooding, soil erosion, and intrusion of sea water on the land.

Survival strategies refer not only to the methods and technology utilized to obtain and satisfy physical necessities but involves at the same time moral, psychological, emotional motivations that make people strive.

Culture is transmitted to the majority of the population over time through social, political, educational, and economic institutions and their activities. Institutions organize social relations for survival and protection of its members and constituents thereby transmitting culture. Institutions are supposed to embody and implement beliefs and values of its members. The family is the primordial social institution being the reproductive and productive social unit. It expands its affiliation to kinship groups, clans, tribe, villages, communities, associations, schools, government, and productive forces (agriculture, craft, industry, trade, business, services, etc.). Affiliations may even go beyond original territory or country. For example Ilokano communities in Hawaii, USA retain memories of Ilokano culture after one hundred years.

Culture developments are part and parcel of how people make a living, how they think and feel, and seek and define their sense of self and wellbeing.

The way people define the self and well being is contingent on historical time, environmental, and social – economic circumstances. Thus in the Philippine archipelago different cultural communities may be categorized according to their “ecological niche.” These different cultural communities have their own distinctive ways of expressing their sense of self and wellbeing.

However, we must keep in mind that this are loose categories for people shift from place to place and practice various survival strategies.

We have small and diminishing bands of semi – nomadic hunting – gathering tribes such as the Aetas and Baluga of Zambales, Pampanga and Bataan provinces.

The Igorot and Ifugao of the central Cordillera of Luzon have carved out astonishing irrigated rice terraces on the steep slopes of the mountainous terrain the oldest dateable (by C14 dating) to the 10th C AD.

The Mangyan of Mindoro, the Tagbanwa and Batak of Palawan were shifting agriculturists up till the 1960's. They practice kaingin – upland agriculture cultivating rice, corn and varieties of root crops.

Maritime and sea-oriented people are represented by the Tausug and to some extent the Magindanao who combine fishing and trading and oversee political and economic activities of people and areas where they dominate such as the Bajau-Sama people of Tawi-tawi. These semi-nomadic “sea gypsies” pursue their prey within the inland seas of Mindanao, Borneo and Sulawesi. Up till World War II they lived mainly on their lepa-lepa (houseboats) and fishing boats.

Settled irrigated rice agriculturists comprise the majority population of our country who raise coconuts, sugar cane, bananas, pineapple and other food stuffs for commerce. The Rizal family represents the wealthier commercial agriculturists in the mid-19th C. who were able to lease large areas of land from the friar order, mobilize peasant labor to produce surpluses for commerce.

■ Cultural Heritage

What is the “Filipino Culture Heritage ? From the foregoing discussion it is evident that “Filipino” refers not only to those who are officially documented as citizens possessing birth certificates, passports, voter's and other identity cards. “Filipino” encompasses all inhabitants of the archipelago – Malay, Chinese, Spanish, American mestizos, etc. including the Indigenous Cultural Communities – IP's or *Lumad*. Formerly ignored and discriminated against, the IP's are acknowledge as citizens by the 1987 Constitution. They also belong to

the 84 plus million Filipino citizens with all the rights, privileges and responsibilities of citizenship.

“Cultural Heritage” refers to our most vital patrimony – the entire Philippine archipelago without which lift is impossible. Comprising 7,100 islands most of them mountainous and volcanic, and numbers vary depending on whether the tide is high or low. The inland seas of our archipelago including the 300 nautical miles from the base line comprise Philippine exclusive economic zone (EEZ) under the UNCLOS. This would enlarge Philippine territory enormously. However, Taiwan, Vietnam and China also claim their own EEZ causing overlap of territorial claims. Every year the archipelago is subject to violent typhoons, periodic earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, alternating flooding and drought, soil erosion and all the accompanying dangers and discomforts of a humid, tropical environment. In effect our heritage includes the good and the bad, the beautiful and the ugly. Apolinario Mabini realized that the archipelago is no paradise on earth. In exhorting his countrymen and women to fight the revolution against Spain and the USA, Mabini wrote:

“Ang kapuluang ito ay ipinagkaloob sa atin ng Maykapal. Ano mang hirap ang ating daranasin, ipakita natin sa Kanya an tayo ay karapatdapat na magmana ng bayang ito. Ang himagsikan at pagtatatag n gating sariling bansa ay pagsubok sa ating kakayahan, katapatan, kadakilaan at sa ganap nating pagklatao.”

(These islands were given to us by God. Whatever suffering we endure we must demonstrate that we deserve this land. Our revolution is our struggle to establish our own nation. It is a test of our capabilities, our resolute loyalty, our greatness that makes us truly part of humanity.)

“Cultural Heritage” includes tangible inheritance, the land, seas, fauna and flora and other natural resources, including the hazards, dangers and pitfalls in these islands. We inherit monumental edifices, ruins, three trillion foreign debt (as of 2005), slums and garbage, pollution, and prevailing social and economic disparities between social – economic classes,

between dominant Christians and Muslims, between urban cosmopolitan centers and remote barrios.

More importantly, cultural heritage encompasses intangible inheritances – language, literature, religion, beliefs, values, heroes, villains, psychological and emotional disposition, colonial mentality resulting from three successive imperialist domination.

The complexity of the culture system is such that very few individuals can absorb much less master all of its elements, gain control of how it operates in society, change and contribute to its development. Therefore every society, especially the nation-state establishes special institutions precisely tasked to undertake the collection, study, conversation, promotion, preservation and transmission of its culture.

State sponsored socio-cultural institutions are important transmitters of culture for they also serve to identify what of the nation culture are “significant,” what and how culture is to be preserved and propagated and to whom and why.

National Museum – repository and custodian of the nation’s natural and cultural heritage; in-charge of collection, research, conversation, education of the public through exhibits, publications and public forums, and branches in the provinces.

National Library – repository of all publications in the country and from abroad; disseminates knowledge by serving the reading public.

National Archive – repository and custodian of all documents and other archival materials, and undertakes their conversation and restoration.

National Historical Commission – repository and custodian of historical documents, publications, and historical artifacts; identifies significant historical figures, events, places; in-charge of setting up and conversation of historical makers, monuments, heraldry and other historical artifacts.

National Commission for Culture and the Arts – oversees and funds research, publications, cultural performances, puts up exhibits, organizes workshops, symposiums, conferences, etc. to promote and propagate Philippine culture and host cultural activities of other countries.

Cultural Center of the Philippines – repository and custodian of works of art; sponsors cultural performances, exhibits, organizes workshops, conferences on Philippine culture and of other countries.

Department of Education – teaching of Philippine culture in the elementary and high school; training of teachers

Commission on Higher Education – oversees the teaching of Philippine culture in the colleges and universities, training of teachers.

Department of Tourism – encourages and facilitates travel throughout the country, identifies tourist destinations, helps put up and conserve tourist attractions together with the local government units. In-charge of Intramuros Administration.

Department of Environment and Natural Resource – identifies, conserves, Philippine natural environment and natural resources.

University of the Philippine – undertakes teaching, research, publication, public forums, workshops, conferences on Philippine culture, also serves as repository of Philippine cultural artifacts in its museums and collections.

Muesong Pambata – promotes art and culture among young people through exhibits, lectures, workshops, conferences on Philippine culture and other countries.

Legal instruments on the preservation, conservation and promotion of Philippine culture heritage

UNESCO conventions on cultural, economic and social rights

UNESCO Culture Heritage sites

UNESCO conventions that prohibit illicit trade and transport of cultural and art objects

Other cultural institutions are the schools, colleges, universities, private museums and libraries (Ayala, Lopez, Yulo-Locsin, Villanueva), theaters, radio and television stations, churches, mosques, professional art, cultural, historical, educational and other civic organizations, such as the National Philippine Historical Society, Historical Conversation Society, Knights of Rizal, the Philippine Masons, etc. Some exemplary local cultural centers are the Bulacan Cultural Center, Kapangpangan Cultural Center, Cavite Historical Society and the Angelo King Heritage Center in Intramuros.

Awards to outstanding writers, artists, journalists, and other civic leaders and private citizens like the Magsaysay Awards, TOYM, TOWNS, Manlilikha ng Bayan (living national treasure), National Artist, etc. help to inspire creativity and public service among the people. Literary and art contests among the youth and upcoming artists and writers also help channel creative energy of our people.

The arts of literature, music, dance, visual arts, theater, crafts (textiles, pottery, basketry, carpentry, etc.) contribute to the molding and shaping of the sense of the self and of well being by intensifying experiences in visible, palpable, memorable and recoverable from and thereby help articulate meaning and significance of life.

There are a wide range and variety of the arts and forms of symbolic expressions in a given society. We will focus on Philippine society and will take as a starting point the late 19th C. when Filipino nationhood developed at a higher stage setting the groundwork for the Philippine Revolution of 1896-1900 and the establishment of the Republic. It will bring the discussion to contemporary times.

Our discussion will attempt to provide an understanding and appreciation of the diversity of peoples and cultures of the Philippine archipelago and their relations with other countries of Southeast Asia. We will try to relate the forms of art to their levels of social and economic development.

We will discuss representative examples of the arts of the cultural indigenous communities (sometimes called “tribal arts” in the literature) who have more or less retained their indigenous cultures compared to the lowland, Christianized or westernized Filipinos. It will consider the arts as they illustrate social, political and technological developments of the different cultural communities. It will discuss how the arts reflect traditional values and belief system of these communities and how the arts serve to sustain a sense of community and self-identity. We will also discuss the significance of the arts of cultural indigenous communities to the larger Philippine population who have been Christianized and, or subjected to intensive western or other external influences. We will consider how the various arts of the indigenous cultural communities form an essential part of the country’s cultural tradition and heritage.

We will also consider how the arts reflect and contribute to change, as well as those art forms that break away from certain traditions, and those that introduce new or contrary views and insights. (such as cartoons, political satire, comic books, protest rallies, etc.) Hence, works of art will be studied within the processes of continuity and change. One of the fascinating features of art is that while it helps define, sustain, and strengthen community values and beliefs especially and indigenous cultural communities, the arts can at the same time lead to change.

Periodization involves how we conceive of time, how and what social, political and economic processes are at work, which social forces are important and why? Are we going to focus on the ruling elites? Or follow the Marxist model of analysis by focusing on class struggle and on the working classes? Which among these historical processes shall we utilize and why? We must bear in mind that these historical periods and processes are not mutually exclusive. They do not operate in neat linear progression. They operate together in various degrees of

intensity depending on time, place, people, sector of society and analytical assumptions and methods.

Sinicization – since the expansion of the Chinese people in the Han dynasty, Chinese people have filtered down into Southeast Asia and contributed to the remarkable changes of native Southeast Asian cultures and the Philippine archipelago from the last hundred years BC to the present.

Hindu-Buddhist influences from India have left a profound imprint and impinged on the direction of cultural developments in Southeast Asia since the early AD era.

Islamization – in the late 14th C Islam came to Southeast Asia and the Philippine archipelago that led to the formation of Muslim kingdoms in Mindanao and Sulu that fought Spain and the USA from the 16th – 21st C.

Christianization – Spanish conquistadors and missionaries undertook conversion of the inhabitants of the archipelago to Christianity and their influences are still dominant in Philippine society.

Westernization – complex social, economic, political process that brought western ideas and practices to Asia and the rest of the world from the late 15th to the present centuries.

Americanization – influence of the USA remains paramount today since it is the sole hegemon in the world.

Ethnic and localized cultural norms – Indigenous People have gained increased social and political awareness and assert their rights as equal citizens of the Philippine Republic.

Multi-culturalism and Pluralism - this is a concept that evolved through decades of debate and struggle around the world. The rise of separatist movements in the newly-created states after World War II remain one of the most difficult issues facing the world. The aspirations of ethnic, religious and racial minorities have been articulated in the various UN agencies on culture and education particularly UNESCO.

Filipinization – the notion that the Philippine Republic needs to formulate a distinct, unique and rich culture drawing from the various socio-cultural communities that can symbolize and serve as a motive force for strengthening the sense of nationhood.

Globalization – the notion that cultures around the world are becoming more and more integrated and share many commonalities irrespective of localized expressions and manifestations.

I choose to deal with technological changes since it is more or less “neutral” and could also serve as a jumping board to examine the impact of technology on the various sectors of society at different periods of time.

Technical innovations in combination with each other and alongside with changes in social attitudes and behavior induce long-term social transformation. The introduction of bronze and iron (1st C. to 500 AD), led to improved and intensive agriculture, shipbuilding and navigation. These in turn intensified overseas long distance trade, the introduction of and widespread use of porcelains (by the 9th C. AD) that improve food production, preparation and preservation. This chain of events provided for craft and occupational specializations so that Sultans and rajahs could build forts, fortifications, lantaka (cannon) tools and weapons (in the 14th – 15th C AD) that allowed the establishment of a centralizing government. Spread of literacy and printing help advance intellectual life, hastened spread of new ideas, and enabled long-distance communication in space and time.

In modern times printing in mass scale allowed revolutionary ideas from Europe and from Manila to spread to the wider society. Today, movies and computers provide novel forms

of expression, faster and easier travel and communication. New philosophies, religious movements, together with technology bring sweeping changes in people's attitudes and the arts. The coming of Hindu-Buddhism in the first centuries of the AD era, the coming of Islam (14th C.), Christianity (16th C.) and western Spanish and American imperialism, and revolutionary ideas all induce change albeit in varying degrees and intensity of impact and duration. The high point of intellectual development is the Philippine Revolution of 1896 and the establishment of a democratic form of government.

There will be a discussion in the analysis of works of art based on the aesthetic standards of the artist and the viewer or user of the arts. Various approaches and methods of analyzing works of art will be discussed, and propose those approaches most appropriate to the Philippine and to specific works of art under study. There will be a study of how the two processes of continuity and change operate in society, and in the arts; how to undertake systematic gathering of social, cultural and historical information in order to understand the social context in the production of the arts and interpret their significance.

It is important that viewers of art are able to evaluate their own reactions to works of art, in order to deepen their understanding of their own feelings and develop their own ideas. They will be encouraged to express themselves clearly and persuasively through discussions, and by writing their own reactions.

Finally, viewers of art should be encouraged to undertake critical analysis of the various art forms and how their knowledge of the arts can contribute to the better understanding of Philippine society. We will discuss the implications of their knowledge and understanding of the arts with contemporary Philippine life, the various institutions in charge of production, preservation, dissemination and development of culture and the arts; and how individuals can contribute to the further development of national cultural traditions.

➤ Approaches and working definitions to the study of art are enumerated one by one but not according to priorities. These approaches are not mutually exclusive but are inter-related. Since not one single approach can provide fully satisfactory and complete explanation

of the meaning and significance of works of art, we need to consider all of these approaches together and find out if these are applicable to specific works of art under consideration. We should also bear in mind that art forms need not be man-made. Natural phenomena like sunrise, sunset, landscapes, flowers, rocks may be viewed as art.

- A. Art as *artifex*, man's handiwork conveying mastery, skill, technical proficiency, control of materials, techniques and processes of fabrication and manufacture.
- B. Art as part of material culture, of technological developments, and methods of production, part of socialization process in organizing and producing skilled labor.
- C. Art as representation, theory of imitation, verisimilitude or Mimesis. The artist imitates life in order to give satisfaction to likeness, to re-create life, and thereby provoke sympathy, empathy, arouse delight, and entertain.
- D. Art as the expansion of human experience and imagination, enables humans to transcend common sense "reality" to direct and divert perceptions, emotions beyond ordinary physical and emotional states in order to expand human capabilities and open up new possibilities; bring up new options with greatest degree of detachment and enjoy freedom from their possible consequences, in this sense, art serves as "play", make believe, fantasy.
- E. Art as symbol, as a means of cognition, of categorizing thought, as an aspect of epistemology, knowledge.
- F. Art as self expression, as essential human need to give meaning and a permanent form to his or her own personal, individual experience, and to communicate this experience to others.
- G. Art as the expression of community or social values, beliefs and practices, as means of reinforcing a sense of community such as monuments, shrines, rituals and ceremonies.
- H. Art as a means to gain control of overwhelming experiences such as fear, frustration, defeat and rejection, etc. Art serves as therapy and catharsis.

➤ Art and Culture as we know them today are centered on our physical make-up, or our physiognomy. They are also inextricably bound to our planet earth. As part of the creative

impulse, we can ask – what kind of art and culture would emerge in other planets or galaxies?

- Physical Conditions in the Perception of Art – the faculties of seeing, listening, and feeling depend on our physiognomy. Hence, we must always strive to be healthy even though extraordinary disabled people like Helen Keller and Stephen Hawking were able to achieve wonderful feats. How to develop and sharpen perceptions, audio-visual memory and sensitivity should be part of everyone's education. Building up a wealth of systematic information, vocabulary and means of expressing one's perception, reaction and evaluation of works of art are essential if we are to instill humane and profound sensibility as human beings and as Filipinos.

- Discussion of the elements of form in the visual arts: line, color, textures, space, lights and darks (chiaroscuro), shape or forms, volumes, how these inter-act together to produce sensations and meanings. The way these elements are organized in a work of art is called composition and design and the effect could vary depending on subject and peculiar style of distinctive technique used by the artist. LIGHT – is the most crucial element in our ability to see and feel works of art especially visual arts of painting, sculpture, and architecture. Light travels at the speed of 186,000 miles per second and it is the means whereby we can see colors, perceive space, volumes and depths. An understanding and appreciation of natural light is important since it provides the reference point in the analysis and appreciation of almost all of the arts.

- LIGHT – is that what makes things visible, or affords illumination, all colors depend on light. Without light it is difficult to perceive the visual arts. In physics, light is electro-magnetic vibration to which the organs of sight react, ranging in wave length from about 4,000 to 7700 angstrom units and propagated at the speed of about 186,300 miles per second. It is considered variously as a wave, corpuscular or quantum phenomena; also as luminous or radiant energy.

- MUSIC – In music the elements of form are: tones, rhythm (is the effect of the combined inter-action of tones, their beat, duration, accent or stress) timbre, texture (amplitude), and dynamics (loud, soft, medium). When tones are strung together into a rhythmical sequence – that is the tones are assigned duration, dynamics and texture we have a melody or a musical idea like a sentence.

- SOUND – is the sensation produced in the organs of hearing when certain vibrations (sound waves) are caused in the surrounding air or other elastic medium, as by a vibrating body such as the human voice and a musical instrument. Sound is also the vibrations in the air, or vibrational energy, producing this sensation; longitudinal vibrations propagated at about 1088 feet per second at sea level at 32 degrees Fahrenheit. It is the particular auditory effect or vibrational disturbance such as to be heard by the human ear. The hearing range of humans hovers between 20 to 20,000 Herz. Sound is different from noise in that it has a distinct and steady vibration while noise does not. Sound is any vocal utterance, musical tone, or the like. In phonics, sound is a segment of a speech corresponding to a single articulation or to a combination of articulation constantly associated in the language; called a phone. Sound anything within earshot. Sound contrasts or is the opposite of noise. Noise is irregular vibration that is loud, discordant, or unpleasant to the human ear. Tone is applied to a musical sound, one conceived of as possessing a certain quality, resonance, pitch and can be related by any type of sounding instrument.

Sound Barrier - the phenomena observed when an object approaches and surpasses the speed of sound in air. Such phenomena, vibration, resonance, pitch, are actually the result of certain parts of the object moving at subsonic velocity, others at sonic and still others at supersonic velocities.

- DANCE – Movement of the feet, arms and the whole body rhythmically especially to music. Some dances and songs are performed without musical accompaniment or a capella. Besides those mentioned earlier in the visual arts, the elements of form unique to dance are: body movements, gesture, and facial expressions, including costume, stage

setting, the kind of accompaniment and social context or situation or occasions for performances.

➤ LITERATURE – Writings that recount events, ideas and feeling using special expressive means in a specific form and has permanent and wider interest and value to others such as poetry, stories, novels, essays, biography, chronicles, letters, inscriptions, etc. Language is the medium of expression using various literary techniques that develop within its literary, cultural and historical tradition. Literature can also be oral like epics, myths, riddles, proverbs, chants, invocations, incantations, magic spells, etc.

➤ SUGGESTED READINGS:

Agoncillo, Teodoro, *History of the Filipino People*, U.P. Press, 1972.

Bonifacio, Andres, "Pagibig sa Tinubuang Lupa".

Bonifacio, Andres and Emilio Jacinto, "Ang Kartilya ng Katipunan."

Bresnahan, Roger J. editor, *Literature and Society, Cross-Cultural Perspectives*, U.P. Los Banos, 1976.

Balthazar, Francisco (Balagtas), *Florante at Laura*.

Corpuz, Onofre D. *Roots of the Filipino Nation*, Aklahi Foundation, Inc. Q.C. 1989.

Cultural Center of the Philippines, *Encyclopedia of Philippine Art*, Manila, 1994.

Datuin, Flaudette May V., Patrick Flores, Brenda Fajardo, Elena R. Mirano, et al, *Art and Society*, U.P. Press, 1977. Textbook for Humanities II

Rizal Jose P., *Noli me Tangere*

Rizal Jose P. *El Filibusterismo*

Roxas-Lim, Aurora, "Art in Ifugao Society," *Asian Studies*, 1973.