



HIGAONON CULTURAL PRESERVATION: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL LIVED EXPERIENCED

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Abstract

The preservation of culture through the traditional products of the Higaonon tribe in Hagpa, Impasug-ong, Bukidnon, Mindanao Philippines. It highlights how traditional products play a crucial role in preserving cultural heritage. The challenges encountered in preserving the cultural legacy of the Higaonon tribe qualitatively studied through the ten (10) participants from the Kalandang weavers in Mintapod and Hagpa. The traditional products as tangible expressions of culture, showcasing the enduring value of indigenous knowledge and practices that future generations be proud. Eighteen months (18) ended of fiscal year of May 2024 in Hagpa, Impasug-ong, Bukidnon ethnographically and anecdotally recorded the observation, interviews, conversation, dialogue and Focus Group Discussion (FGD) thematically and carefully handled the Higaonon Tribe, elders. The research instrument prioritized validity and reliability, supported by inter-rater reliability measures, while ethical considerations centered on informed consent and cultural sensitivity throughout the research process. The results and discussions uncover the role of traditional products, such as locally woven textiles, in preserving the Higaonon tribe's cultural heritage. Challenges and financial limitations and inadequate promotion, came out that support system is highly needed in bolstering weaving practices, promoting cultural products, and conserving environmental cultural heritage.

Key Words: *Culture Preservation_ Traditional Product*

Introduction

Cultural preservation is not an outside event. It is a natural God-given richness. It is a gift by nature. It is what it is. It is there before us. It's the inhabitant or the settler's events on their action, reaction and interaction on the given environment. It is their own pride. They became the Higaonon Tribe of Hagpa, Impasug-ong, Bukidnon Mindanao Philippines because of their geographic peculiarity. They became the indigenous minority. Their distinctive way of life and rich cultural legacy is made of their environment. Their traditional practices and land stewardship play a central role in their cultural preservation efforts, tied-up closely to their production and promotion of their traditional products. Indigenous and local knowledge systems (ILK) and

knowledge holders are often marginalized and excluded in various research policy which is why this study was born.

The preservation of cultural heritage is a pivotal aspect of maintaining the identity and diversity of indigenous communities worldwide. The Higaonon tribe is a local indigenous group in Hagpa Impasug-ong, Bukidnon, Mindanao Philippines that has its own pride and identity (Gomez, 2023). It is an example of a community that has successfully preserved their traditional practices and products (Balilla et al., 2020). Examining their cultural significance and production processes of these traditional products, we can gain valuable insights into how indigenous communities sustainably maintain their peculiar cultural legacies (Conservation Is at the Heart of Traditional Knowledge in Fiji, 2023). As they live within the Steepy and sloppy area of this geographic regions they slowly merged with the Talaandig tribe at the nearby forestall regions at the forest. While others are also merging to the Manobo tribe at the nearby river banks and swampy regions but they sustained and developed their own pride and identity.

The Higaonon tribe is known for their intricate and vibrant traditional textiles, which hold deep symbolic meaning within their community (Jiang, 2021; Gomez, 2023). These textiles, woven using locally sourced materials such as abaca fibers, selected fibers from the selected bark of the tree, buri, romlon and pineapple leaves serving as functional garments but also carry cultural narratives and spiritual motifs. The production of these textiles is an integral part of the Higaonon way of life, with weaving techniques and designs passed down through generations to generations (Naro et al, 2022). It became the pride of their children to their children.

The Higaonon Tribe has traditionally relied on their natural resources and indigenous methods to support their way of life as guardians of ancestral lands and traditional knowledge. However, contemporary challenges and shifting socioeconomic realities have placed a greater emphasis on safeguarding their economic sustainability. A number of indigenous items, including agricultural products, handicrafts, and traditional medicines, hold cultural value and economic potential for the Higaonon Tribe (Hoque et al., 2020). And, this can be a source of local entrepreneurialship.

The preservation of these traditional textile practices is not without its challenges (Cincik, 2022). As the Higaonon community has faced external pressures that threaten to disrupt their cultural continuity, such as the introduction of mass-produced textiles and the encroachment of modernization, the delicate balance between tradition and external influences emerges as a central concern. At the interjection of tradition and innovation, the traditional products meticulously crafted and cherished by the Higaonon Tribe (Artifacts: Archeology, 2022). These cultural fossils and artifacts are not merely an objects but vessels of cultural significance, embodying the tribe's values, stories, and connections to their ancestral roots. Each product holds a story waiting to be told, a tradition waiting to be shared, and a legacy waiting to be preserved for future generations. And, this can be handed from generation to generation to tell the world.

The Higaonon tribe is an indigenous group in the Philippines, specifically found in the northern and central regions of Mindanao (Moya, 2021). The culture of the Higaonon people is deeply rooted in their traditions, beliefs, and way of life, reflecting a strong connection to their ancestral heritage and the natural environment (Gomez, 2023).

The Higaonon tribe is known for its rich oral traditions, including myths, legends, and epic narratives that are passed down through generations (Chad Valdez, 2024). These stories often revolve around nature, spirits, and the origins of the Higaonon people, serving as a means of preserving history and cultural knowledge with their ancestors (Gomez, 2023). Ceremonies and rituals are essential aspects of Higaonon culture, marking important life events such as births, weddings, and harvests (Lynna Mohamad, 2022). These ceremonies often involve offerings to ancestral spirits, prayers for guidance and protection, and the participation of the entire community, reinforcing a sense of unity and shared identity in their life journey.

Indigenous communities, including the Higaonon Tribe, encounter various challenges that threaten their languages, identity, and self-determination, including cultural hegemony, degradation of ancestral domains, health issues, financial constraints, diaspora, technological advancements, globalization, miscegenation, political factors, and racism (Bonifacio et al., 2020). Through an exploration of the cultural preservation efforts of the Higaonon Tribe, particularly through their traditional products, this research aims to contribute to the understanding of indigenous cultural sustainability. Recognizing the significance of traditional products in preserving cultural heritage and promoting economic sustainability (Law-Ay et al. 2020).

The production and sale of these traditional products not only contribute to the economic sustainability of the Higaonon Tribe but also play a crucial role in preserving their culture. Engaging the creation and trade of these products, the tribe ensures the continuity of their traditional knowledge and practices, passing down cultural traditions from elders to younger members of the tribe (Patel, 2023; Gomez, 2023). Furthermore, the marketing and promotion of these traditional products provide opportunities for the Higaonon Tribe to share their cultural heritage with the wider community. Showcasing their products at local markets, festivals, and cultural events raises awareness about their traditions, fosters intercultural understanding, and promotes appreciation for indigenous cultures (Law-Ay et al. 2020). And, in fact these also became the superhighway on the interfaith initiatives.

As this study aims to explore the cultural preservation efforts of the Higaonon Tribe through their traditional products. The qualitative research methods through the ethnographic and anecdotal recording during interviews, observations, and analysis of cultural artifacts, the meanings, symbolism, production techniques, and marketing strategies associated with these products. Gaining insights into the role of traditional products in cultural preservation, it is with the earnest desire to seeks contribute to the understanding of indigenous cultural sustainability and provide commendations for supporting the Higaonon Tribe in their efforts to preserve their cultural heritage.

Methods

The ethnographic and anecdotal recording were design during the interview, conversation, observation, analysis of cultural artifacts, the meanings, symbolism, production techniques, and marketing strategies associated with these products were done focusing on in-depth FGD (Focus-Group-Discussions) during the eighteen (18) months of living with Higaonon Tribe and residents of Hagpa, Impasug-ong, Bukidnon, Mindanao Philippines.

The geographic locale was in Hagpa, Impasug-ong, Bukidnon, Mindanao Philippines as known for its rich cultural heritage and peaceful traditions, particularly in handwoven abaca, romlon, buri and pineapple leaves products. The Kalandang (place at Hagpa) weavers, including

participants from Mintapod (place at Hagpa), played a significant role in preserving their weaving tradition and cultural heritage. Due to their geographic location, distance and the interaction to the lowland settlers they are still in their own peculiar tradition, customs and beliefs that are reflected in their own woven materials as fossils and artifacts of cultural heritage.

The ten (10) participants from the Kalandang and Mintapod weavers were selected purposively based on their phenomenological experienced in weaving and understanding of traditional products. Steps were taken carefully to ensure the validity and reliability of the research instrument by aligning the objectives of the study through the standardized procedures. The research team visited Hagpa, Impasug-ong, Bukidnon, Mindanao Philippines and seek permission and performed the traditional ritual called "Singampo" (communication to the spirit) as a welcoming ceremony. The ritual involved specific items and practices essential for engaging with spirits to the Higaonon Tribe. Ethical considerations were always upheld as the toughest action, informed consent, ensuring cultural sensitivity, and respecting the customs and values of the Higaonon Tribe throughout the whole process of the study were observed.

Results and Discussions

Culture are classified into material and immaterial. And, these are seen to the culture of the Higaonon tribe. The materials like beads, abaca fiber products, accessories, and bags play a vital role in preserving the cultural heritage of the Higaonon Tribe in Hagpa, Impasug-ong, Bukidnon. These traditional items, crafted with unique craftsmanship and passed down through generations, symbolize the tribe's cultural values and beliefs. And, the following phenomenological experiences were thematically arranged according to the dominant themes founds in the craftsmanship in their handicraft.

Intricate designs. The meticulously and intricate designs of jewelry, beadwork, clothes and garments and traditional bags showcasing the tribe's exceptional skills reflect their core beliefs and ancestral knowledge. These products serve as tangible connections to ancestral traditions and storytelling, highlighting the participants' crucial role as custodians of the tribe's customs. Through sustainable production methods using local materials and techniques, the tribe maintains a harmonious bond with their natural environment, reflecting a deep connection to their cultural roots and heritage within the locale. The intricate designs of the product from their own hands is the reflection of their own soul through the designs interwoven in the piece of materials. And, they told the researcher to wit:

Sa amon pag himo sa panapton amon guid na sunud sa amon nga mga katigulangan. Amon gid gui ubay-ubay lang sa kanilang gui mugna. Ug hatud sa amon nga mga kamugnaan ma dalig kami sa sakat. Ang kamugnaan sa obra nga na suway piit gyud sa subhang nga paaginud. Ug kini di way ambawon ang itsura kay tagbis, kugkug o banug o sura and maaninaw.

[in our design in the woven cloth, we are only following to our great-great grandparent. We are doing and following the concreteness and the intricacies to the handmade that will fit the occasion. And, the concreteness on the art work will fit to the celebrated occasion. In order that this will not be eaten by the rat the woven intricacies must have the face of the bird or fish as you've seen]

As mentioned above by Datu Mantangkilan Cumatang, a revered leader among the Higaonon people in Northern Mindanao Island, when asked about the preservation of Higaonon products, Datu Mantangkilan Cumatang highlighted the ongoing commitment to preserving these

products as a reflection of care for the environment and support for their cultural heritage. The rats, birds and fish are symbol for the ecological balance for the tribal customs. In reaffirming the importance of cultural preservation on the healthful ecological balance (Gomez, 2023), Datu Mantangkilan Cumatang acknowledged the instrumental role of individuals like Father Vincent Cullen, SJ in the successful continuation of weaving practices within the community. He funded for the promotion using the elements of the environment in their craftsmanship.

The “kugkug” (owl); “Banug” (eagle); “Tagbis” (generic name of bird); “tukmo” (pigeon); “putyukan” o “tambubuan” (bees) “sura” (fish) and the “ambaw” (rat) are symbol of abundance. In fact, during the phenomenological observation researchers found-out that animals found in their ancestral land or in their protectorate are reflected in their handicraft. This would mean that their connection to nature still very high. And, the researcher further observed that they are using the ancestral land as living ground to be their laboratory of life.

Meaning and Implications. Datu Magsasangyaw (Jimmy Cumatang), a re-elected Barangay Kagawad in Hagpa, a former Sitio leader in Mintapod for 19 years, and a 2nd generation member of the tribe, a key insight was shared to the researcher regarding the preservation of the Higaonon culture through traditional products. Datu Magsasangyaw highlighted the importance of weaving industry in maintaining cultural traditions. He emphasized that the use of natural materials like abaca, rattan, wood, buri, romlon, tigbaw and pineapple leaves, has been pivotal in preserving their cultural heritage. The evolution of production from personal use to a commercial enterprise has not only sustained traditions but also allowed for the products to be marketed as souvenirs for special occasions and visitors (WASET, 2023). Thus, Datu Magsasangyaw added to say and to wit:

Sabuwa hayon tagbis, o banug, o tukmo, o kugkug, o buyog o putyukan o tambubuan, o sura o balaw na otaw o itsura hai badi o bebyagin o tabla o kayu. Hai unsa lamang gid ma bisto tahai ma lantaw ag Higaonon, amon gid hakupon tahai mag muso ag maka sapi para hai di mamatay sa amon bungkalon dahai pinudpud ta Migbabaya.

[One is that bird, bees, fish or a brave person or the image of the bolo or animals or wood or tree. And anything within the surrounding of the Higaonon, we will utilize for the livelihood and main source of income for the survival and the utilization of the things around the environment as gift from God]

The ethnology of the Higaonon dialect are always seen in the action, reaction and interaction of the individual Higaonon in their own environment. It is said by Datu Magsasangyaw that since the environment are God-given richness we will use them for the glory of God (Megbibaya). That is one of the reason that the Higaonon are always depicting nature and its creations in the woven handicrafts of his people in Mintapod, Hagpa and Kalindang. No doubts that products made by the Higaonon brethren is always an expression of their cultural pride.

Therefore, understanding the Higaonon culture is understanding their material and immaterial way of living. Ethnographic notes revealed that the socioeconomic status of the Higaonon is very much depended on the richness of the environment. Material is low and spirituality is high. No wants and only needs in a living are with the Higaonon. They lived for the day and “Megbibaya” (God) will provide for tomorrow. And such time when alive, look for the blessing (bulid) of the “Megbibaya.” That is the reason that there is a need to preserved the ancestral land (as home) and preserving the cultural pride to have a continuity to the connection of the “Megbibaya”.

Identity and pride. Mark Arthur Altohan a seventy-two (72) years old key informant in the preservation of culture within the Kinaiyahan community, several noteworthy points emerge regarding the efforts to safeguard cultural practices and products passed down from their ancestors, specifically the IPs (Indigenous Peoples) and their community. While it is true that there are internal and external forces that the community offers in this modern world but all of the Higaonon action done is always in dedication to the preservation of the Higaonon culture despite of the challenges. Listening to his discourses during the FGD, the Higaonon practices align their traditions and customs without contradiction instead adapting and accepting the changes of the modern world, potentially hindering the preservation of this cultural identity (Caprar et al., 2022). And, therefore allowing to push one step higher on the understanding, developing, promoting and protecting the Higaonon cultural identity is promoting the cultural products on the IPs (Gomez, 2023). IPs cannot prevent the flattening globalization to the geographic regions of their people, places and events however, using these flatteners to be the portal or trunk-line in herding the Higaonon culture using the principle of accommodation without assimilation nor acculturation.

This would mean further that “identity and pride” of an IPs must be innovative and reinventive. Although in the spirit of globalization and modernization they are at far. And the only way that the IPs will be part of this changing world they must open-up and allow their cultural practices, traditions and beliefs must be known to the universe of humanity. To this end, they Higaonon must tell the world that they exist and their cultural product must be competitive in the market of culture.

Designs and weaving technique. Norma Lipanta, a 59 years old (Member) and Lita Naabot (President) of Kalindang weavers' group, shared their insights regarding the challenges faced in preserving their culture and the improvements needed to enhance their weaving practices. The discussion highlighted the status of their weavers' group and the areas needing improvement to preserve their culture. Identified issues such as lack of promotion and competency were recognized as areas requiring enhancement (Borres, 2020; Kadir, et al., 2021).

Despite these challenges, the preservation of the traditional designs and weaving techniques remains essential in promoting and preservation of the Higaonon cultural heritage however, the investors who invested their capital is dominant to introduce their cultural biases. The designs and weaving technique are there but allowing these to come—out from the crafts will be always an issue. That is one of the reason that the IPs traditional crafts are corrupted or prostituted even altered to other culture being embedded for reason and circumstances.

However, during the designing and weaving technique on the handicraft being crafted it cannot deny that the Higaonon culture prevail because during the weaving, the ritual song, rhythm, melody and the body movement are gracefully communicating to their god and goddesses.

Symbol and Symbolism. Myla Carcasuna, a 49 years old dedicated weaver within the community, shared a valuable insight regarding the weaving process, product promotion, and the cultural significance of their traditional products (Klinsing & Usop, 2020). Bai Myla began weaving in 2005, creating a diverse range of products over the years, including earrings, bags, wallets, mats, book covers, and more. And this technique was known to her from her great - great grandparents. Each member of the community has specific tasks that determine the products and the craft. It's not on the concept of promoting their culture and the products it's by way of doing the craft according to the available raw materials for weaving and others.

Myla explained their participation in international exhibits to showcase their abaca products and weaving skills. This exposure has allowed them to introduce their group to a global audience, emphasizing the craftsmanship of their handmade products. Their success in these exhibits has earned appreciation for their artisanal items, symbolizing care for the environment and their culture. Bringing their product one step forward from their own backyard and sharing the knowledge, identity and pride through the traded culture.

Purchasing their crafts and woven goods signifies support for environmental preservation and cultural heritage. And, it's Higaonon way of doing. Additionally, Myla discussed the training she received in many occasions through weaving skills through generations, acknowledging the initial challenges she faced due to the intricate nature of the work, the values and the global forces in the remaking of the new culture but she remains steadfast and standby as where she is in her culture. Despite the initial difficulties, she recognized the cultural significance of preserving weaving traditions beyond mere business transactions, reflecting the community's traditional barter systems and values (Putri & Kusumastuti, 2020). And, let the team to quote her and said:

Hai daw buntos gid na takna sa pagligwat sa bag-ong kalibutan sa kaliwatan. Hai daw katumbas sa kulig-lig nga natibuok ang pag mugna sa tiunay nga sable ug mapusga nga maka nunu sa bag-ong layang tibuok nga aragi. Ta hai nan limbasug ako sa pag barog kinaraang ikagi. O hai daw na lisang di ma kupkup o maaghat dini katuung tiruga aha namugna nga di kasarangan. Aha dai kamugnaan nga di kasarangan sa luyong sa punoan alima, gatuk, buol, gatuk kagpa sa kahiusang tibuok sa maayad sa among gid nga katiguwangan nga kaliwat nga nasubli.

[I have the hard time to navigate myself in the new world of culture. They have the machine that are already assembled pattern for weaving purposes of their own culture and ready for the remaking of a new one. But, I remain to be on my own using the traditional tool that I have. I am afraid that they will not appreciate my presence and my doing but I fell they don't sleep and seen my craft that something special for them. They saw me on how I have done my craft, the gracefulness of my body, hands, head and my feet working together in harmony as if they have seen the gods of my community, my grandparents and my culture]

The testimony of Myla Carcasuna showing wisdom of her ancestors and allowing the world to see that no one can substituted the craftsmanship of man although this can have replicated by machine in coping up the phase value of "time and space" in the macro reproduction of the items needed for the purpose.

Cultural Identity. In the context of this study, Mary Jane Sabanto, a 79 years old weaver reveled in her insightful experience that said, "in weaving one will have a peaceful mind. Peace and serenity will be the highlight of weaving. One cannot perfect the sequential mating and treading the line-grade, noting and sewing during the weaving. And, it embodies the ancestral knowledge and service to gods as vital to the culture of the Higaonon (Susanti et al., 2020). Additionally, Mary Jane's shared further that the selling of the products reflects a deeper understanding on how traditional products contribute to cultural preservation upon adapting to modern business practices while staying true to their cultural roots. And she said:

Dai ag ka gayha kay ta mag anhi sa sagayad dai masupok ag ka subo hai wa kay na ilhi daw sa pagtinag ko na iling sila ta may mga bug-at nga gui bitbit nga gui samukan guid hai. Sa pagtinag ko wa ko na ilhi bisan ug nasanguyan na hai nasil-ad ang utaw di lang nahinoung. Dai ad kupya ta saruk di naka tinag.

[I feel ashamed when I go to the lowland and feel heart pain and sad because nobody knows me and I see that they are bothered because of me as I come they are in

trouble. The way I see it, I did not exist even I have touched and bumped them and this are people didn't mind me. They are wearing the sun hat and seeing nothing]

The statements above summatively emphasized that all works and deed shown by the member of the Higaonon are expression of their day to day daily life. Nay Mayhunan Cumatang, the esteemed wife of Datu Mantangkilang Cumatang and the First Generation of Weaver and Teacher of Weaving, shared a profound insight into the intricate transformation of the raw materials into special textile. Recounting the deep-rooted customs and traditions of the Higaonon tribe in Mintapod, Nay Mayhunan described the sacred process through which the Hinabol is created, embodying a loving tribute to the youth of the tribe and serving as a cultural legacy passed down through generations. The Hinabol stands as a testament to the tribe's heritage and a symbol of reverence to their ancestors and future cultural bearers (Byram, 2021; Gomez, 2023).

And, during her stay in the crowded city she found out that the goods and product that she is trying to promote during the festival is not the issue but the “walks of life,” “upbringing,” “camaraderie,” and the way others see you in the common place and time of stay. For her this a “big-bang” or “culture shock” to her culture because she is still in her own “Higaonon attire” and “Higaonon folkways.” This is a good reflection that cultural identity may thrive if we’ve the same people [person]like the Higaonon participants on the study that will stand by their own culture and never mind what the society or community can say about them but they will standby it.

Thus, traditional products have a significant impact on cultural heritage preservation by maintaining cultural identity, supporting economic sustainability, promoting cultural heritage, and preserving traditional knowledge. These products are crafted using time-honored methods and materials, passed down through generations within specific cultures or communities. They serve as tangible links to cultural roots, provide economic opportunities, educate about heritage, and safeguard traditional craftsmanship and expertise for the future.

EXHAUSTIVE DISCUSSIONS

The preservation of culture is a challenge in the Beta generation. Globalization is a fast growing mode in the life of mankind. People are becoming the citizens of the world. The herding of the multimedia infrastructure everybody becomes a Netizens. Wherein the future generation are no longer called as a Wifi generation but a Psyfi generation. At this juncture, we’ve seen already the decay of time and space where culture slowly becoming extinct. It’s a good moved for the Higaonon in Hagpa, Mintapod and Kalandang, Impasug-ong, Bukidnon, Mindanao Philippines packages their cultural heritages showcasing their cultural product to be an expression of their peoples, places, events and interaction through symbolism and implication in their cultural product mainstreaming in the midst of glocalization (Global and Local) in the time and space of multimedia herding.

Conclusions

Higaonon culture has a vital importance of Higaonon traditional products in preserving both culture and economic sustainability and development in Hagpa, Impasug-ong, Bukidnon Mindanao Philippines their intricately woven textiles and beadwork, serve as tangible embodiments of the tribe's rich history, values, and beliefs. They are not merely crafts but living testaments to a legacy passed down through generations to generations, from children of their children and children to

their children that has sense of cultural identity and pride are expressed in their day to day undertakings as “bulid” (blessings).

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