

# **Recording Oral Literature In A Literate Society: A Case Study From The Northern Philippines**

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Oral literature is the product of a world where there was no possibility of recording with any accuracy long or significant texts in any way other than through memory and interpersonal transmission. However, literacy and recording technology have penetrated even the remotest parts of the world, so that even where a guardian of oral tradition cannot read or operate a video camera, they are influenced by their knowledge of these technologies. Moreover, penetration of rural areas by technology has moved ahead so rapidly since the Second World War that a mode of oral transmission which has persisted for millennia is suddenly confronted with an urban culture for which memory has almost no role at all. Elders who do not read and write are suddenly challenged by the demands of their grandchildren to operate a mobile phone, a skill that they may subsequently acquire.

At the same time, the impact of globalisation is threatening the characteristic boundary maintenance strategies of ethnolinguistic groups. Children who go to school, move to the cities, and return home for weekends, inevitably develop a highly ambiguous relationship with their rural roots. Their command of the language is increasingly shaky and they have no strong motivation to improve it. Responses to this have been varied around the world, but movements to encourage 'cultural revival' and 'heritage' are not uncommon. These are often driven not by the rural populations whose heritage is threatened but by educated urban elites who promote these movements for a complex of reasons that may include ethnic politics, identity loss and by the possibility of accessing external funds. As a consequence, these elites will have highly selective views about the type of culture that needs to be revived or repackaged for the modern public.

Studies of oral literature are often remarkably short on this type of context; the text itself is the most significant goal. Exactly how it was recorded and transcribed, and what it might mean to the performers in a new, noisier world is less discussed. In this regard, the development of complex networks of rules concerning community consent<sup>1</sup> is an aspect that is probably ambiguous if not an almost impossible demand in the fragmented situation of much current fieldwork. Thus it may be worth setting down a rather more realistic account of the alarms and diversions attendant upon a documentation exercise in recent times.

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<sup>1</sup> There have been initial attempts from a number of funding bodies such as ELDP to create ethical frameworks developed for Australia and North America which may not be wholly appropriate elsewhere in the world.

This paper<sup>2</sup> concerns the oral literature of the Ifugao people in the Cordillera of Northern Luzon, in the Republic of the Philippines. The authors' project, which commenced in May 2010, was to document representative examples of genres of oral literature. Ifugao oral literature has been the focus of considerable previous attention, but for a variety of reasons much of the documentation is either barely accessible or of doubtful value. This paper provides an overview of the current situation of the various vocal genres preparatory to the task of transcribing the body of field materials. However, we also describe as realistically as possible the contradictions of recording oral literature where its performers are now embedded in contexts very different from those in which this repertoire evolved.

## 2. BACKGROUND TO IFUGAO

The Ifugao of Northern Luzon represent one of the better-known peoples of the Southeast Asian region. Their architectonic rice terraces are striking (Keesing 1962) and have been inscribed by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site in 1995 (UNESCO World Heritage Centre 2009). The Ifugao have been the subject of several anthropological monographs (*e.g.*, Barton 1919, 1946; Conklin 1980; Dulawan 1985; Dumia 1979) and the widespread practice of headhunting in the Cordillera has excited much prurient comment. The Ifugao language has had a written form since the 1920s (Billiet & Lambrecht 1970).

Ifugao is divided into an uncertain number of dialects (Table 1) many of which are not mutually intelligible, although similar to one another at about 80% level or above.

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<sup>2</sup> This paper is a preliminary output from a project to document Ifugao oral literature, funded by the World Oral Literature Project, to whom we are grateful for support. We would particularly like to thank Mr. Manuel Dulawan, whose own publications on this topic have been an important starting point and who pointed us to many other contacts we were able to follow up. Lily Beyer-Luglug, Councillor Tony Bangachon and Gabriel Maddawat were also extremely helpful both in providing historical background and giving us contacts in Banaue, Mayoyao and Asipulo, respectively. A DVD with video recordings of the major outputs will be made available for local and international circulation in due course.

**Table 1**  
**Ifugao dialects**

<b>Dialect</b>	<b>Location</b>
Tuwali	Kiangan
Lagawe Tuwali	Lagawe
Amganad	south of Banaue
Batad	Batad
Mayoyao	Mayoyao
Hapao	
Hungduan Tuwali	Hungduan
Kalanguya	Asipulo/Tinoc
Keley-i	Asipulo
Yattuca	Asipulo

Tuwali, or central Ifugao, covers the largest area, but it also appears to be internally diverse, and so may not be a useful term linguistically.

Three major ethnolinguistic groups are recognized by the National Statistical Office (Table 2) and these are subdivided into ‘tribes’ which probably correspond to major lineages.

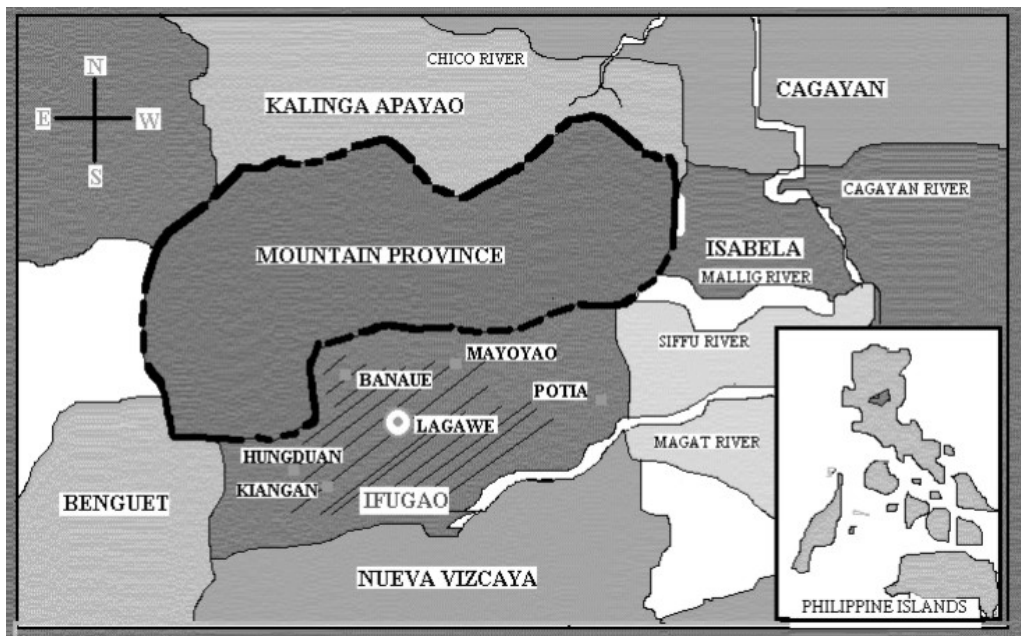
**Table 2**  
**Ifugao Ethnolinguistic Groups**  
**(Ifugao Provincial Government 2007)**

<b>Ethno Group</b>	<b>‘Tribes’</b>
1. Ayangan Group	a. Iolilicon b. Ialimit c. Ihananga d. Iguinohon
2. Tuwali Group	a. Ilag-aw b. Ibunne c. Munkigoj-a d. Mun-alyon e. Munganu/ Munkalyoj f. Kala g. Yattuka h. Ipakawol i. Imuntabiong j. Ihaliap k. Iboliwong l. Iambabag m. Dikkalay n. Ikamandag o. Ibannawol p. Icambulo q. Igohang r. Ihapo
3. Kalanguya Group	a. Iddaya b. Itenec c. Itabuy

At a broader level, Ifugao is part of the branch of Austronesian known as Nuclear Cordilleran, and its closest relatives are Bontoc and Kankaney (Lewis 2009). Each dialect has between 25,000 and 40,000 speakers, although competence is in decline among the younger generation due to labour migration and urbanization. Competing languages in the Cordillera are English, Ilocano and Tagalog. Although Tagalog has been reported as a major threat to other Austronesian languages of the Philippines, Ilocano is a much more common second language in this area and fluency in English is also surprisingly widespread.

Two features of the Ifugao region that are closely linked to the decline of oral performance, as well as many other aspects of pre-colonial society, are migration and religious conversion. The Ifugao region was opened up following the American period in the Philippines (from 1902 onwards) and this has gradually accelerated the flow of traders and officials into the area, especially from Ilocano and the Manila region. At the same time, young men and women have moved out to find work, either seasonally or permanently. Figures concerning the scale of migration between 1985 and 1990 are given in the provincial profile (Ifugao Provincial Government 2007) indicating that over 4,000 Ifugao were living outside the region. Figure 1 shows the Ifugao province and its relation to the greater Cordillera region.

**Figure 1**  
**The Ifugao and the Cordillera Administrative Region**



Christianity, in the form of Spanish-style Catholicism, has been enthusiastically propagated in most areas, and most Ifugao would define themselves as Christian. Various types of evangelical Protestantism also have a considerable following in the Cordillera, as well as more peripheral sects such as

Jehovah's Witnesses. Broadly speaking, conversion is by household, and whenever a household converts to Christianity, the rituals concerned with the agricultural year, death and curing are dropped and the oral performance that goes with them ceases. Traditional religion has a very negative stereotype among many Christians who refer to it as 'demonic'.

The Ifugao have a very rich oral literature, including epic poetry, which has been documented only in a sporadic fashion (Lambrecht 1960, 1967; Saguing 1971; Perez et al. 1989; Dulawan 2005a and 2005b; Ayalde-Jimenez 2008). The famous Philippines ethnomusicologist, Jose Maceda, made a series of field recordings beginning in the 1960s that have never been published. One particular epic genre, the *hudhud*, was included by UNESCO in 2001 in its list of 'Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity' (UNESCO 2001a, 2001b and 2009). The Philippines is rich in comparable epic traditions and among the Ifugao there are narrative genres worthy of attention. Members of the UNESCO nominating committee included *alim*, another Ifugao chant that some scholars believe to be older than *hudhud*, but the endorsement ultimately went to the latter.

### 3. CONTESTED GUARDIANS

The Philippines has a number of bodies concerned with the culture of its indigenous peoples.<sup>3</sup> The most venerable of these is the National Council for Indigenous Peoples (NCIP). The declared function of the NCIP is to mediate between government and minorities over issues such as human rights and also to authorise research. The impact of the NCIP on issues which concern minorities, such as migration, land rights and environmental destruction is unclear, and its procedures for authorising research appear to be vague, to say the least. However, the intersection of world bodies such as UNESCO with the remit of the NCIP have caused it to consider that it must 'protect' minorities from exploitative research. Very different is the National Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCCA) which was created in 1992 and was mandated to oversee five vital cultural agencies, namely, the National Historical Institute, the National Museum, the Cultural Center of the Philippines, the National Library and the National Archives. The NCCA covers all types of artistic endeavour from modern classical composition to village arts and crafts, as well as the funding of museums. The NCCA has funded a rather tardy publication on Ifugao oral tradition (Dulawan 2005a), but its main focus has been the 'Support to Living Tradition' (SLT) scheme. This scheme, which covers all of the Philippines and is concerned with material culture such as weaving, as well as music and oral literature, licenses groups to be considered for SLT

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<sup>3</sup> This seems to be a confused term for the Philippines, where all the populations are indigenous, or at least arrived in a determined historical sequence. But 'indigenous peoples' is typically used, for example by the Minority Rights Group, to describe highland populations, who are seemingly more 'ethnic' than lowlanders.

funding. This then supports individuals considered to embody a tradition to teach it to a licensed group through the school system, so that it can be transmitted to students. The SLT for Kiangan was granted for traditional music and dance in 2004. The current situation is described in §7.

The consequences of the SLT for performance have been ambivalent, to say the least. The process of ‘taking notice’ of these traditions has accelerated their monetisation. Performers, even from remote areas, are now convinced that they need ‘incentives’ to perform and somehow a standard rate has evolved (currently PhP250 or US\$5.50). At the same time, they have become convinced that they should wear ‘traditional’ costume. Modernised traditional costumes, with plastic accoutrements and acrylic-dyed threads, as well as the clear unease with which performers wear them, add to an air of unreality and nervousness. Festivals celebrating Ifugao ‘tradition’ are now a regular occurrence, featuring *hudhud* competitions, gong performances backed by snare drums and other hybrid events.

At the same time, even performers genuinely brought up in the tradition have come to think that tourists and researchers want severely abbreviated pieces. Officials and the schoolteachers tasked with ‘transmitting’ these traditions to schoolchildren are largely oblivious to these contradictions, as the performances conform to their modernising agenda. The similarities to the process whereby ‘English Folk Dancing’ was transmuted in the early twentieth century from chaotic village entertainment to genteel amusement for the middle classes can hardly be missed.

#### **4. THE ELUSIVE RECORD**

One of the more mysterious aspects of documenting Ifugao oral genres is the elusive nature of previous documentation. Community members with some concern for these issues are likely to mention the failure of researchers to return their results to the community. But it would be hard to know where to lodge such materials. None of the three museums in Ifugao territory, at Banaue, Kiangan and the nearby museum in Bontoc, have facilities to store audio-visual materials and two are anyway private foundations. Similarly, the function of NCIP does not include archiving schemes of these traditions. The collection of Jose Maceda, probably the largest archive of pre-digital ethnomusicology recordings from the Philippines, is now at the University of the Philippines. Until recently, it lay uncatalogued and effectively unusable.

Equally worrying is the disappearance or deterioration of the recordings associated with Manuel Dulawan’s (2005a) synthesis of oral genres. These were made with analogue tapes in the 1980s and they have now either been lost or the tapes have degraded badly. The book associated with the recordings was finally published in 2005, a decade after its submission to the NCCA. By this time, more than two decades after the original fieldwork, one might guess that much has changed in both performance and context. This book is the most recent publication by NCCA on Ifugao music and so far nothing more up-to-date is

projected. Despite a general impression that Ifugao oral genres (for which one may read *hudhud*) have been copiously documented, attempts to lay hands on this material are often as fruitless as the quest for Prester John.

## 5. IFUGAO ORAL GENRES IN 2010

Ifugao oral genres can be categorised by their manner of delivery (sung, spoken and chanted) and by their context of use (ritual and non-ritual). Almost all these genres are purely vocal; instrumental accompaniment is only used for punctuation especially in ritual contexts. The exceptions to this is the gong ensemble, *gangha*, which punctuate the vocal sections of genres such as *palat*. The typical format of sung and chanted genres is of a lead singer or cantor plus chorus; the chorus either has a stereotyped couplet or else picks up the words of the lead singer in some form. More recent performances have lead singers and chorus of the same sex. In formats where there is a responsorial relationship between the two sexes, the two groups will face one another. Many genres are characterised by archaic speech forms; the *hudhud* in particular is virtually incomprehensible without a specialised knowledge of its idiom. Extemporised forms such as *palat* and *liwliwa* now seem to have developed a split between modernised forms which use contemporary vernacular and 'old' texts which are difficult to interpret.

Musically speaking, these oral genres are relatively simple; the underlying scale is pentatonic but the ambit rarely reaches an octave. Choruses are always in unison and the lead singer often uses a type of *sprechstimme* rather than a clearly defined melody. Genres sung with male and female groups are always antiphonal, and there is no overlapping polyphony. In marked contrast to many other parts of the Philippines, musical instruments do not accompany song. The drum, *libit*, is beaten when the priests, *mumbaki*, perform the harvest ritual. The idiochord bamboo zither, *ayyudin* or *tadcen*, is beaten without words for amusement and the nose-flute, *təŋ'ali*, is played solo for entertainment.

However, in a development that is as yet not well understood, the Ifugao have developed 'talking' instruments. The use of musical instruments to imitate speech is fairly common in areas of the world where languages are tonal and the instrument can follow the pitch contours of a speech utterance. Sebeok & Sebeok (1976) is a useful compilation of articles describing the distribution and mechanisms of this type of speech surrogate. However, it is much rarer to find speech imitation in non-tonal languages such as Ifugao and there is no clear description of how this might work. We do know that speech imitation using the Jews' harp is common in Taiwan and Yunnan. The Formosan peoples developed some unusual types with multiple tongues, which made possible various types of speech-imitation (Lenherr 1967; Hsu 2002). In particular, it is also widespread in South China, where these same multi-tongue Jews' harps are found (Yuan Bingchang & Mao Jizeng 1986: illustration following p. 240). The capacity of the Jews' harp to produce the harmonic series suggests that the player may follow the F<sub>2</sub> formants inherent in speech, as in European whistle-speeches such as the

Canarian *silbo*. Ifugao men formerly used the Jews' harp, *bikkun*, as a courting instrument to utter stereotyped praises of the girl they were wooing. If the girl also knew how to understand this language and replay, the courting couple could perform clandestine duets. Figure 3 shows Martin Abbugao demonstrating surrogate speech with the *pi'oj* jews' harp in Mayoyao. He is the last performer on this instrument and is no longer able to play duets with his wife, who died a few years ago.

More surprising, however, is the use of the three-hole idioglot clarinet,<sup>4</sup> *ip-iip* (Figure 2), in duets between courting couples. Both a man and woman would have an instrument and they would exchange phrases interpreted on the clarinet. In Amganad, a three-hole duct flute is substituted for the clarinet. Regrettably, no players could be found to demonstrate this practice. Again, there are similar practices in Yunnan, although using various types of flute (Vorreiter 2009).



**Figure 2**  
**Paired idioglot clarinets from Ifugao (photo taken with the kind permission of Kiangan Museum)**



**Figure 3**  
**Martin Abbugao demonstrating surrogate speech with the *pi'oj* jews' harp (photo taken by the authors during fieldwork in May, 2010 at Mayoyao)**

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<sup>4</sup> Referred to as a 'flute' in most of the literature.



Non-ritual genres with fixed texts are typically episodic narratives. The *hudhud* can be chanted at any instance, particularly while working in the field or during funeral wakes. A soloist narrates while a choir comments on the narrative (Stanyukovich 2000, 2003). The *hudhud* relates the romantic adventures of Aliguyon led by the heroine Bugan (Dulawan 2005a). Although these epics have an overall narrative arc, episodes have their own coherence and can be performed separately.

Genres with improvised texts are usually those in contest form and involve a competition between men and women. The lead singers are required to choose a theme, and the opposing singer must respond, preferably with an abusive or witty reply. The *liwliwa* is similar to the Tagalog *Balagtasan*, which is a debate in verse form while the *ap apna* or *bonwe* is more humorous in nature that also tackles love, marriage and the economic situation in the community. The non-responsorial *palat* has merged with the function of master of ceremonies at weddings; the lead singer now makes jokes and comments on the situation as well as perfuming the improvised verses typical of the genre.

Ifugao spoken oral genres also include riddles, proverbs, myth recitations and magical tales (*apo*). Myths are recited in barked-out, terse phrases, followed by a *tulud* ('pushing') section, which underlines the magical elements behind the myth. Magical stories, *abuwab* in Mayoyao, are said to possess mystical powers analogous to requests granted through prayers. Among the Mayoyao Ifugao, the *poho-phod* and *chiloh* stories are usually recited during death and sickness rituals. Table 3 summarizes current information about the status of Ifugao oral genres covered in this study.

**Table 2**  
**Oral literature genres of the Ifugao**

Style	Ritual	Genre	Status	Performers	Context	Comment
Sung	+	<i>alim</i>	No longer performed	Male lead singer plus chorus	Performed for death and cleansing rites of the <i>kadangyan</i>	<i>Alim</i> seems to have only taken on epic proportions among the Tawali. Shorter chants known as <i>alim</i> are found in Hingyon and Hungduan
Sung	—	<i>liwliwa</i>	Current	Male and female lead singers plus choruses	Performed at secular occasions such as marriages where both sexes meet	
Sung	—	<i>ap apña</i>	Current	Male and female lead singers plus choruses	Performed at secular occasions such as marriages where both sexes meet	In some areas, this appears to be the concluding phase of <i>liwliwa</i>
Sung	—	<i>hanhanged</i>	Current	Male and female choruses	Performed at secular occasions such as marriages where both sexes meet	The chorus lines dance towards one another singing antiphonal strophes
Sung	—	<i>huai</i>	Current	Solo or unison chorus	Any secular occasion	
Sung	—	<i>uyaya</i>	Current	Solo or unison chorus	Performed at the wakes of rich people	
Sung	—	<i>palat</i>	Current	Single-sex leader and chorus and male and female lead singers plus choruses	Any secular occasion	Two types of <i>palat</i> exist, an older type with a fixed text and archaic language and a more modern type with a complex texture of loanwords and

Style	Ritual	Genre	Status	Performers	Context	Comment
Sung		<i>ergwad</i>	Current	4-5 male performers	Funerals and marriages	references to current events The lead is usually passed from one performer to another in a circle. Only known in the Mayoyao area
Chant	+	<i>baltung</i>	Current	Male lead singer plus chorus	Performed for death and cleansing rites of the <i>kadangyan</i> and for the <i>kulpi</i> rice ceremony	The name <i>baltung</i> means ‘stamp’ and the lead singer stamps on the ground during performance. Narrative text, rather like <i>hudhud</i>
Chant	+	<i>partung</i>	Current	Male lead singer plus chorus	Performed for death and cleansing rites	Mayoyao version of <i>baltung</i>
Chant	—	<i>hudhud</i>	Current	Female lead singer plus chorus	Performed during agricultural work and at funerals	ICH status and adoption by SLT has created shortened ‘performance’ versions quite dissimilar to the original
Recited	—	rhyme	Current	Individual, especially children	Personal amusement	In Kiangán these are very short (3-4 lines) and often nearly meaningless, in Ayangan they are more developed and encompass short narratives
Spoken	—	<i>apo</i>	Current	Individual	Any secular occasion	Stories, locally referred to as ‘fairy-tales’
Spoken	—	<i>abuwab</i>	Current	Individual healer	Narrated as part of a ceremony to divine healing strategies	The Mayoyao have <i>poho-phod</i> and <i>chiloh</i> sub-genres
Spoken	—	riddles	Current	Individual	Any secular occasion	
Spoken	—	proverbs	Current	Individual	Any secular occasion	

## 6. AMBIENT NOISE AND THE MANUFACTURE OF CONTEXT

The peoples of the Northern Philippines have rapidly travelled from a world where the loudest sounds were probably rain falling and the beating of gongs to one where ambient noise is constant, oppressive and unpredictable. Mains electricity has reached almost all major settlements, even in remote areas. Poorly adjusted motor-tricycles and motor-bikes move along remote country roads at any time of day or night, videoke bars and extremely loud sound systems burst into life unexpectedly. An additional factor during the fieldwork described in this paper was the pre-election campaigning, which involves jeepneys and pickups careering along the roads, blaring out sentimental sub-John Denver songs commending individual candidates. These musical choices have the additional impact of underlining the marginal nature of traditional music and lyrics in contrast to the globalised dross favoured by the dominant urban culture.

It is practically impossible to record performers in any sort of natural context if the recording is to be subsequently analysable. Marriages, wakes and other ceremonies held in villages are constantly interrupted by external noise and may well have the additional disadvantage of low-quality microphones and poorly adjusted amplification. Obviously it is useful to have a record of 'real' events to understand how they are conducted in a changing social context. But for an analytic recording, the performers have to be gathered and then transported to a (relatively) quiet place such as church grounds or a remote unoccupied space. Even so, unexpected noise can be a hazard, and half the work of making a recording is policing interruptions; the recordist becomes so tense that even a burst of birdsong causes a moment of irrational annoyance. The transport to a quiet place in turn creates its own tensions: logistics can be more problematic, performers are out of context and not as relaxed as they would be in a village situation. As a consequence, they become more enthusiastic for regular supplies of rice-wine and, increasingly, gin to try and mediate what must seem an unnatural experience.

## 7. MANUFACTURING TRADITION: THE SLT

The 'School of Living Traditions' (SLT) was instituted by NCCA to preserve cultural heritage in the country. It was initiated in Ifugao in 2004 as a direct response to the declaration of the *hudhud* as a '*Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity*' by UNESCO. This is locally called the 'Hudhud School of Living Traditions' (de Leon, 2008; NCCA-Intangible Heritage Committee, 2009). The municipality of Kiangan was among the successful grantees of the SLT programme and now has a performance group rehearsed by school teachers and dedicated private individuals. This group presents snapshots of Ifugao music and chant traditions performed by children and young people, with a group of older women performing *hudhud*. The snippets are often very

short, perhaps only a few minutes. The performers don 'traditional' clothes as part of the performance, although children would never wear the shells and knives that are part of adult costume. As, inconveniently, musical instruments were traditionally played separately, especially the clappers and buzzers, these have been integrated into a performance called *insambel*, i.e., 'ensemble'. One aspect of the performance seems almost designed to present a calculated insult to Ifugao tradition, the use of sacred instruments by children. For example, the *bangibang* percussion bar was only traditionally beaten by priests in healing and death ceremonies. The bamboo clapper was used by priests as part of a ceremony to cleanse the house of vermin. The stamping tube is apparently not Ifugao at all but has been adopted from the neighbouring Kalinga people. The *insambel* performances are largely by rote, with the chanters having almost no idea as to the meaning of the texts; these would be difficult even for older, more competent, Ifugao speakers. When we suggested that four minutes of *hudhud* was somewhat abbreviated for a narrative that can last more than twenty-four hours, they offered to sing for longer, provided the women could read out their lines from a printed sheet.

The coordinators told us it was much more difficult to recruit male students as compared to female students. This is a bit problematic for the performance as the more spectacular sessions of gong-beating and dancing are by males. However, it is clear to outsiders why this should be so; this type of performance must seem irrelevant to young men. Indeed there is no reason to believe that SLT performance groups will do anything to help Ifugao oral traditions to survive; they merely support the urban agenda of taming and packaging an otherwise dismayingly chaotic tradition.

It could, and probably would, be argued by the urban elites, that this type of re-invention is how tradition evolves and that to privilege past performance styles is a variant of the antiquarianism beloved of the external research community. It is certainly the case that within a generation, younger individuals will only ever have experienced this type of modernised performance. If it *is* reproduced and is not just an ephemeral enthusiasm (which is presently impossible to know) it will indeed become a new urban tradition. But this is largely irrelevant to the imperative to make a record of older, richer performance styles grounded in the community. These traditions can disappear almost without trace very rapidly and to yield to the tendentious arguments of the modernisers is to betray the generations of performers who evolved the diverse styles that have survived up to the present.

**Figure 4: SLT Performance group in Kiangan.**



## 8. COPYING, REPRODUCTION AND ETHICAL CONCERNS

The Philippines, like much of the developing world, is a region where pirated digital media are freely available. CDs, DVDs and software discs are copied and sold with little concern for ethics. Facebook and similar social networking sites are extremely popular and recordings, both audio and video, are freely exchanged. At a local level, tapes and digital versions of popular events are distributed without concern for the rights of those who appear in them. In an age of perfect digital reproduction, the ethical concerns of developed world institutions are increasingly irrelevant. Once recordings are made and copied they are likely to spread and be used and misused, and copied further without permission. Ironically, this can be no more controlled than the original process of oral transmission. The pieces of paper with which researchers surround themselves and which are increasingly required by both funding bodies and local cultural guardians have become largely irrelevant in the face of the reproduction revolution. As performers come to be more concerned about the transmission of tradition to the next generation, they may well appreciate this *laissez-faire* attitude to the diffusion of their performances. Indeed there is no doubt that a scholarly sub-industry will develop to study the uncontrolled spread of the products of researchers. There is every reason to reconsider field approaches in the light of these changes.

## 9. CONCLUSIONS

Oral literature genres evolved in a relatively silent world where memory was the only means of transmission of knowledge and tradition, and ethnicity was relatively homogeneous. They are now being recorded in another, where memory has been outsourced to technology and social fragmentation is the norm. Oral genres can become a type of currency to be manipulated, both to promote a modernisation agenda and the presentation of an anodyne version of a particular culture to an external audience. Researchers who engage to document these genres need to be aware both of the changed context and the impossibility of recreating any natural performance situation. Even performers who may have learnt their narratives within a tradition are changed irreversibly by contact with an external world for which that tradition is essentially meaningless. Experience suggests that while language endangerment is sometimes reversible, the conservation of cultural practice carried by language is less likely. Built from belief systems and social structures that cannot be glued together again once fractured, oral literatures are destined for the archive. This should not be an argument for assuming either that they must be re-invented for a modern audience or that consignment to the archive is a signal of their irrelevance. There is every reason to think societies will continue to value markers of identity, regardless of ephemeral rhetoric.

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