



## Ways of Weaving: Integrating Philippine Indigenous Philosophy and Art

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**Abstract:** This paper details ways of weaving Filipino indigenous cultures into the Philippine higher education curriculum. It particularly emphasizes the integration of philosophy and the arts. Ideas are proposed through a discussion of critical indigenous philosophy, Filipino philosophy and worldviews and indigenous arts. Although there are many challenges and limitations faced by educators in attempting to integrate indigenous knowledge, this paper comes up with certain classroom tools and activities that may be of help in teaching and learning. Furthermore, the role of education in the promotion of structural and social justice is also situated in the suggested paths of integration.

**Key Words:** philosophy; arts and *sining*; Philippine indigenous peoples; curriculum; HEI

### 1. INTRODUCTION

#### *1.1 Weaving Into the Curriculum*

One of the matters raised by the UNESCO Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues is that indigenous knowledge and culture is not integrated into the curricula at all. There is a gradual disappearance of indigenous cultures, thus, a call to set up programs that will recover such cultures. Since the Philippines is at the crossroad of transitioning to a K to 12 educational system, higher education institutions are now redeveloping and redefining their courses and curriculums. Given these impending changes, this paper proposes ways to integrate Philippine indigenous philosophy and art in the curriculum of Philippine higher education institutions.

#### *1.2 Significance of Weaving*

To weave is to “form fabric by interlacing long threads passing in one direction with others at a right angle to them” according to Google’s dictionary.. Traditional weaving in the Philippines can be traced in history as one of the oldest local industries. Unfortunately, the practice of weaving is declining. Older generations fail to pass on the learning of the craft to the younger generations. (“Preserving the Culture,” 2014) Figuratively, weaving means infusion, convergence, intertwining or integration. Like the practice of weaving itself, indigenous philosophy and art is rarely discussed, passed on or appreciated in the urban classroom setting. According to a research report on the relevance of IP culture, some teachers believe that indigenous culture is



too distant from the center (in this case the National Capital Region of the Philippines). As the saying goes, “out of sight, out of mind”; given that indigenous culture and communities are not readily available or accessible to the people in the cities, educators tend to neglect what they may contribute to learning. There is a failure to recognize the significance of possible integration. Thus, a need to assimilate the margins to the center. (Biana, et. al. 2015)

To intertwine indigenous philosophy and art into “mainstream” philosophy and art is to expose students to the richness of Philippine indigenous culture. Students may also be cured of possible social and historical biases. Such integration may also promote a deeper understanding and respect for indigenous philosophy and art and eventually, its preservation. (Manitoba Education and Youth, 2003)

## 2. WEAVING ART AND *SINING*

Indigenous communities can be found in various regions in the Philippines. These communities have their own unique arts and crafts. Whether it be visual arts, song and dance, handicrafts, tapestries and clothing or pottery, each region boasts of exceptional talent, skill and creativity. Unfortunately, these masterpieces have been “downgraded” by outsiders to merely crafts or handicrafts that are only worthy of being sold in tourist shops (This is also known as the art vs. crafts controversy) (Racette and Robertson, 2009). Indigenous artists are not recognized or appreciated. The question then is how does one integrate indigenous art into the curriculum so that it is given proper recognition and appreciation?

The earliest art forms in the Philippines that have not yet been somewhat penetrated by Western influences are music and dance. The war dance interwoven in Igorot rituals, the Ifugao funeral dance, and the Benguet victory dance are examples of the dances in pure indigenous form. Other dances represent the daily affairs of the community such as planting, fishing, pounding rice, etc. (Panizo and Rustia, 2003). An example of a song that represents the daily affair of planting rice is the traditional folksong *Magtanim ay di biro*.

Similar to performance art, sculpture and visual arts are practical in nature in indigenous communities. Everyday implements and accessories are adorned and decorated with such handiwork. In the Mountain Province, “shields, spoons, ladles, bowls” and figurines are infused with art through woodcarving. In Mindanao, on the other hand, original Muslim art can be recognized through certain motifs, colors and patterns. These stylized elements are evident through brasswork, tools, weaponry and musical instruments. (Ortiz et. al., 1976)

A Filipino person’s characteristic of being relational or communal is evident in his or her art. Traditional indigenous art reflects this orientation as well. In essence, Philippine indigenous art is not separated from its other values and functions such as “religious, moral, spiritual, social and ecological concerns”: art is assimilated into life, the community is involved in the work of art; thus, one artist is rarely, recognized and remains anonymous most of the time, there is no dichotomy of the artist and society, no rigid standards dictate materials, forms or techniques, the process of creation is valued over the work of art, and conceptualization and realization is simultaneous. (De Leon, 2011) Considering the aforementioned characteristics of traditional indigenous art, the struggle then is to diversify one’s understanding of art. The preference for “mainstream” art or the Western conception of art as “art for art’s sake” must be critically examined. By integrating indigenous art in the curriculum (i.e. in courses such as Art Appreciation, the Philosophy of Art and/or Aesthetics), students will revalue *sining and* realize that there is no one way and standard of creating and appreciating art.



### 3. WEAVING PHILIPPINE INDIGENOUS PHILOSOPHY

#### 3.1 *Filipino Philosophy*

Filipino Philosophy can be divided into three approaches with 16 different definitions. According to Gripaldo (2014), the following approaches can be observed: the traditional/ philosophical approach, the cultural approach and the nationality/constitutional approach. The traditional approach is based on the Greek model, wherein individual Filipino philosophers' ideas are discussed. The nationality/constitutional approach deals with writings of Filipinos in general, whether it be on a Western or Eastern topic. Whatever is written by a Filipino citizen, as defined by the constitution, is considered as Filipino philosophy under the nationality/constitutional approach. The cultural approach, on the other hand, addresses the people's philosophical perspectives and views on socio-linguistic, cultural and folk concepts. Philippine indigenous philosophy and worldviews are classified under the cultural approach of Filipino philosophy and they can be divided into the following categories: Filipino grassroots or folk philosophies, folk philosophy appropriation, interpretation of Filipino identity and worldview, local cultural values and ethics research and implications and presuppositions of Filipino worldviews. (Gripaldo, 2014)

Timbreza (2014), in his book *Pilosopiyang Filipino*, discusses the issue of whether Filipino philosophy exists or not. Since philosophy starts and ends with people's experiences, it follows that there is Filipino philosophy, considering that the Filipino experience exists. Timbreza uses the cultural approach as classified by Gripaldo, as he analyzes unique life experiences to harness these worldviews. Furthermore, if these worldviews are based on literature, art, ethics, practices and attitudes, Filipinos can be said to have their own *Weltanschauung*. Consequently, Timbreza uses indigenous and native legends, poems, epics, songs, riddles (*bugtong*), proverbs (*salawikain*), rituals and dances as basis for the collective Filipino philosophy of life. (He attributes the general Filipino worldview to the experiences of these respective groups –Ivatan, Ilokano, Tagalog, Pampango, Pangasinensi, Ibanag, Igorot, Bicolano, Cebuano, Boholano, Bisaya, Tiruray, Tausug, Maranao, Maguindanao, Aklano, Bukidnon, Sugnuanon, Zambaleno, Romblomanon, Kiniray-anom, Kalinga-Banao, Waray, and Ilonggo.)

Worldviews are “mental lenses that are entrenched ways of perceiving the world” (Hart, 2010). Significantly, all over the world, indigenous worldviews have a commonality, which is the relationship with nature or surroundings. Hart (2010) identifies seven principles of these worldviews: 1. Knowledge is holistic, cyclic, and dependent upon relationships and connections to living and nonliving beings and entities; 2. There are many truths, and these truths are dependent upon individual experiences; 3. Everything is alive; 4. All things are equal; 5. The land is sacred; 6. The relationship between people and the spiritual world is important; and 7. Human beings are least important in the world. For Timbreza, the Filipino philosophy of life can be divided into five fragments: “the law of reversion, balance of nature, cyclic concept of nature, centripetal morality, value of non-violence, and concept of life and death” (Garcia, 2013). Considering these ideas, Filipino thought is not a philosophy of being (as the Greek thinkers espoused) but rather the intellectualization of “indigenous perceptions of reality” (Garcia, 2013)

#### 3.2 *Critical Indigenous Philosophy*

Philippine indigenous philosophy and worldviews are based on the Filipino experience. Unique life experiences pave the way for these worldviews, and are most often than not based on literature, art, ethics, practices and attitudes towards life. These worldviews may be integrated in higher education through the tracing of its roots and identification of characteristics. One of the problems raised when it comes to indigenous



philosophy however, is that colonialism apparently, created it. Significantly, indigenous philosophy is seen as “an attempt to articulate the meaning and content of indigenous spirituality using Western European philosophical categories”. (Yancy, 2007) There is a divide between how indigenous peoples themselves classify explanations of indigenous thought. Thus, a critical indigenous philosophy is proposed. A critical indigenous philosophy is aware of the impositions of Western ideals and does not force its categories on indigenous ways of thought and understanding the world. At the same time,. A critical indigenous philosophy defends the “integrity of indigenous ways of understanding who they are as indigenous peoples”. (Yancy, 2007) It is imperative to make sure that what is integrated in the curriculum is a “critical indigenous philosophy”.

## 4. WAYS OF WEAVING

### 4.1 *Education towards Social and Structural Justice*

In the workshop entitled Curriculum Development for the Integration of Filipino Indigenous Cultures (Biana, et.al., 2015), teacher participants from all over the Philippines claimed that education must not simply end at the integration of IP cultures in the curriculum. The integration must promote an appreciation of these cultures and advance social and structural justices. Eisenberg discusses how education should address structural injustices. According to Mazo (2016), subjects such as history, art, music or literature must have a curriculum that “reflects the perspectives and values of the various social groups . . . procedures should be designed in such a way that voices of the disadvantaged social groups are expressed and heard”. Each group and individual must be rightfully recognized as a member of society -in this case, it is the role of education to recognize indigenous communities and individuals as members of society.

The role of education is holistic: spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. To have a social justice framework for education is to include the following, “analysis of domination and subordination at different societal, institutional, and interpersonal levels”, how such structures are “reproduced in the classroom, following patterns of social and cultural difference in the larger society”. (Skubikowski, et. al., 2009) It is the role of the educator to “recognize, interrupt, and transform” unequal social relationships”. (Skubikowski, et. al., 2009) Consequently, “a social justice perspective on course content enables us to scrutinize a curriculum in order to see the implicit judgements about social relationships embodied by what is included or excluded from the curriculum”. (Skubikowski, et. al., 2009)

### 4.2 *Weaving Philippine Indigenous Art and Philosophy*

The question being addressed by this paper is what are the ways to integrate Philippine indigenous philosophy and art in the curriculum of Philippine higher education institutions? Weaving Philippine indigenous art and culture into the curriculum requires four steps: proper knowledge-building, curriculum integration, cultural appreciation and promotion of social and structural justice. (Biana, et. al., 2015) Knowledge-building involves research work with and exposure to different IP communities. It is important to note that this is a group effort between IP and non-IP communities and individuals, how can indigenous art and philosophy contribute to learning? Integration, on the other hand, is the “mainstreaming” of IP knowledge, its incorporation which is also a nationwide effort. Cultural appreciation means understanding the historical significance of the IPs, coming up with fresh perspectives, hearing the IPs through their own voices and respecting their values. The final step is, of course, the attempt at promotion of social and structural justice in society. (Biana, et. al, 2015).



When it comes to Philippine indigenous philosophy, it has been said that it is evident through folk narratives, poems, etc. Since these are passed on through oral tradition, culling and documenting these modes of expression will embody the community's philosophy of life. Students may be encouraged to reflect through field exposures to communities and interviews of indigenous elders on their belief systems. Careful to make sure that they are following research ethics guidelines, intellectual property rules, and the activity of critical indigenous philosophy, researching, crafting papers and articles will also encourage the intellectualization and/or preservation of Filipino indigenous thought. (Biana, et. al, 2016)

Philippine indigenous art has distinct characteristics. Students may learn to appreciate such works of art through an understanding of the differences between artworks of different regions. Of course, art is not limited to only the visual arts but also the performance arts that are passed on from generation to generation (i.e. songs and dances). Students must first be exposed to indigenous art either through visiting museums, attending artwork demonstrations of weavers or performances (as long as the performance is not taken out of context, for example a ritual dance that should not be performed in public or outside a sacred space), film viewing, and/or research work for new perspectives on indigenous arts. Having students develop actual works of art inspired by their exposure can help them comprehend the process of creation. Helping indigenous communities "preserve" their works can also be done through a local event that can showcase performances and artworks (i.e. an indigenous art fair or exhibit). (Biana, et. al, 2016).

#### 4.2 *Independent Films in Sarmiento's Classroom*

During the *First Forum on Teaching Philippine Indigenous Cultures 2016*, Ramon Sarmiento of Catanduanes State University shared how he brings to life the indigenous peoples in his classroom through showcasing indie or independent films. He enumerates the challenges of discussing indigenous cultures in a non-indigenous classroom: 1) the supposed "othering" that happens with the students' awareness of different groups, 2) exotization, 3) romanticization and 4) hegemonization. According to Sarmiento, using good independent films as tools in the classroom can help avoid these pitfalls as they facilitate "a suspension of disbelief where audience is sucked up and gets fully engaged in the world created by the film". They also "promote a deeper understanding about the dynamics of culture. . . appreciation for specific social issues. . . and IP values". Furthermore, they also foster a realization of the humanity of IPs and "produces critical and responsive othering". (Sarmiento, 2016)

## 5. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Philippine indigenous art is different from the western understanding and standard of art. Art is not separated from its other values and functions such as "religious, moral, spiritual, social and ecological concerns". Sensory modes are cultivated holistically and have to be developed together. Basically, for indigenous communities, art is assimilated into life. There is no dichotomy of the artist and society nor rigid standards that dictate materials, forms or techniques. The process of creation is valued over the work of art and conceptualization and realization is simultaneous (De Leon, 2011)

The difference of art and *sining* explains the divide between the the western and Philippine indigenous conception of art. Only through its recognition can Philippine indigenous arts and crafts from the specific regions be appreciated. Furthermore, it is necessary to create venues in which these works can be showcased, reclaimed or preserved. Proposed classroom activities for integration of indigenous art include actual, hands-on

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creation of arts pieces, film viewings, visits to museums, and the coordination of a local event to showcase indigenous arts, crafts and performances that can be promoted through social media.

Florentino Timbreza, the father of Filipino philosophy, claims that there are five fragments that divide Filipino philosophy: “the law of reversion, balance of nature, cyclic concept of nature, centripetal morality, value of non-violence, and concept of life and death”. (Garcia, 2013) It is the intellectualization of indigenous perceptions of reality. (Garcia, 2013) Considering this, the everyday lives of IP communities already integrate their worldviews which may be obvious through their existing legends, poems, epics, songs, riddles (bugtong), proverbs (salawikain), rituals and dances. One must approach indigenous philosophy with the proper awareness as one problem that may arise, is the usage of Western philosophical categories in studying indigenous philosophy. Critical indigenous philosophy as a philosophical activity must be utilized in this sense.

In order to integrate Philippine indigenous philosophy and art in college and university education, the appreciation of these unique worldviews must be instilled in students. Independent films about the lives and beliefs of the indigenous peoples can also be helpful tools inside the classroom. Eventually, appreciation may lead toward the intellectualization/ preservation of Filipino indigenous thought. Philippine indigenous arts and crafts, on the other hand, can be weaved into the curriculum through recognition and regard of distinct works from respective regions all over the country. Showcasing, reclaiming and preserving these artworks will also enrich students’ learning.

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