

## **A Living Shamanistic Oral Tradition: Ifugao *hudhud*, the Philippines**

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The most ancient genres of oral literature date back to the time when one ritual specialist performed the functions of epic singer, shaman, and priest. Once studied in Siberia and Central Asia, these ancient forms are better preserved nowadays in insular Southeast Asia (Stanyukovich forthcoming).

The Ifugao *hudhud* oral tradition, which I have been studying for the last two decades, is the core of ritual and ideology among highlanders of Northern Luzon, Philippines. The Ifugao are wet-rice cultivators who until the early twentieth century practiced headhunting, preserving their traditional society with no political and very loose territorial organization.

The *hudhud* meets all the standards typical of heroic epic patterns, including plot structure and formulaic style (Stanyukovich 1983). At the same time it is a highly archaic combination of heroic epics and shamanistic narratives. The *hudhud* characters are regarded as ancestors and incorporated into the male pantheon as part of the Hulupe class of benevolent deities.

The female ideology that looks so much out-of-place in the genre of the heroic epic is another striking characteristic of the *hudhud*. It emerges that while male epic concentrates on violence, expressed through a system of headhunting based on rage, enmity, and vengeance, female epic concentrates on the problem of peacemaking and represents a tradition of heroic exploits in which no blood whatsoever is spilled. After a series of battles during which no one is either killed or wounded, the principal *hudhud* characters exchange sisters and celebrate a double marriage. That means a total elimination of enmity: the next generation will have no enemies (Stanyukovich 2000).

The most urgent study in regard to *hudhud* is the comparison of three genres of Ifugao folklore. The first is “pure” heroic epic. The second is *hudhud di nate* (“funeral song / song of the dead”), which I was lucky to find

and record in the areas south of Kiangan. It is a shamanistic song performed in the same manner as epic, “pushing” the soul toward the abode of the dead. Before it reaches the underworld, the souls of one or two relatives who participate in the chant are sent to catch up with it. They are endowed with *qawil*—gifts of the souls of rice, pigs, and chickens (the underworld being the source of fertility)—by the deceased. The moment when they meet is marked by the possession. The chant uses the epic melody and formulaic language, the deceased being named by the appropriate epic hero’s name (Stanyukovich 1998). The third genre is that of non-epic funeral chants spread outside the *hudhud* area of Ifugao.

The most interesting directions in oral tradition studies of the Philippines are found in the works of Nicole Revel. Among them are the notion of “multiple drafts” in epic performance (1996) and the study of environmental knowledge as expressed in oral tradition, or “flowers of speech” (1990-92), inspired by the path-breaking works of Harold C. Conklin. Revel’s holistic approach, based on thirty years of field studies of the Palawan epics, has resulted in stereoscopic vision of oral tradition and the society that produced it.

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