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Pamana uso pa ba?: Acculturation and the peril of Assimilation to the Surat Mangyan and Ambahan of the Hanunuo-Mangyan of Sitio Calibang, Tanawan and Sinugbuan, Brgy, Panaytayan, Mansalay Oriental Mindoro

Eugene Victoriano De Guzman

Mindoro State University

eugedeguzman@yahoo.com

Abstract. It is a grand narrative that culture yields identity, but what if the acculturation of a particular indigenous group fails to be balanced? Would it be at the edge of cultural assimilation? This account ends to determine the status quo of the Surat Mangyan and Ambahan of the Hanunuo-Mangyan of Sito Calibang, Tanawan, and Sinugbuan, Brgy. Panaytayan, Mansalay Oriental Mindoro. Through an Anthropological inquiry, this paper determined the relevance of Surat Mangyan and Ambahan in conducting their rites and in day-to-day parlance among their small-scale community. It even went further to gauge the knowledge of Hanunuo-Mangyan [of the mentioned Sitios] regarding the nature and significance of Surat Mangyan in their cultural identity. As a kind of Anthropological qualitative research, this paper also discussed some characteristics of culture appropriate to explicate the existing condition of Surat Mangyan and Ambahan. Thus, the nature of this piece is both narrative and expository. By analyzing and interpreting, this paper concluded that while the Hanunuo-Mangyan [of the said Sitios] manage to entertain the culture of Tagalog/English language within their culture viz. language (acculturation), there is a possible threat of assimilation of Ambahan and Surat Mangyan since most of the interviewed Hanunuo-Mangyan asserted that they have inadequate knowledge on how to conduct such cultural practices among themselves. Yet, they are fully aware of the significance of Ambahan and Surat Mangyan as cultural treasures.

Keywords. Amabahan, Surat Mangyan, Hanunuo-Mangyan, Enculturation, Assimilation, Anthropological Inquiry, Cultural Identity

Introduction:

The world culture is derived from the latin word “*culture*” which means care, or *cultus* which means “civilization” (Pilapis, E. 2007, 41). This yields from the reality that has a long period of dependency and has to be taken care of by the people around him. This means to say culture refers to practices, norms and belief which are being practiced, respected and appreciated by the people who lives in a particular community.

David B. Brinkerhoff and Lynn K. White once said that the whole idea of culture is that it provides a blueprint for living, a pattern to follow (Javier, J. et al. 2002, 85). Indeed, culture has a vital role in the very existence of every individual. Through culture a person can

construct their own distinct identity, belief, and way of life. Culture shapes and guide people's understanding of reality and meaning of existence. Culture can be understood in various perspective in other disciplines. Such in Philosophy, Leonardo Mercado one of the recognized Filipino Philosophers defined culture as a dynamic system of socially acquired and socially shared ideas according to which an interacting group of human beings is to adapt itself to its physical, social, and ideational environment (Mercado, L. 2005, 103). Sociology on the other hand, understood culture as the languages, customs, norms, knowledge, and collective identities and memories enhanced by members of all social groups that make their social being meaningful. American dictionary of Psychology explained that culture is the set of Language, beliefs, traditions, and other behaviors that are inherited from the previous generation and continuously handed over to the present generation within any social group. Whatever discipline may define it, culture is always about the collectivity of the individual within their environment that shapes their worldview.

Culture has a various characteristic or social processes; (1) Assimilation, (2) Acculturation, and (3) Amalgamation. Assimilation is accepting and considering a new culture as part of the existing culture. But whenever any similar culture tends to overlap with the newly introduced culture, such old culture is replaced with the new one. Meanwhile, acculturation Acculturation is a cultural process of embracing a new culture, but this newly introduced culture does not necessarily replace the existing culture. The current culture continues to exist, and together with the new culture. The former does not replace the former. Lastly, Amalgamation is the process of culture that pertains to the complete blending of two cultures, which produces a new kind of culture. Amalgamation usually occurs when two cultures are equally familiar and compatible to the point that both cultures merge - creating something new (Frando, M. and Isip, L. 2019)

Mangyan as the natives of Mindoro possessing such culture is not exempted to the various social processes of culture. In one way or another, in a specific or collective sense, there are aspects of culture which respectively undergo such processes.

Mangyan is a collective name for the native of Mindoro – both Oriental and Occidental (Postma, A. 1965, 360). Mangyan is composed of eight indigenous group – Iraya, Alangan, Tadyawan, Hanunuo, Buhid, Tawbuid, Bangon and Ratagnon (Postma, A. 1970; Kueh, J. 2022). Hanunuo-Mangyan is the focus of this discussion since they possess a culture superior to that of the other tribes. They practiced a writing system of their own and possess a body of literature made up of poems, proverbs, and songs – their famous account in literature is the Ambahan (Postma A. 1965, 360). Ambahan is a chanted poetry of the Hanunuo-Mangyan scripted on bamboo slats in the Surat-Mangyan – the native writing system of Hanunuo-Mangyan (Pitigo, R. 2012). They use Ambahan for their personal and political affairs. It is a means of communication or even courtship at the same can be a storage of laws and norms. There are two kinds of Ambahan the written and the spoken. The spoken one is usually presented by a Hanunuo-Mangyan reciting an Ambahan in front of the multitude.

As modern technology and linguistics introduced to the Hanunuo-Mangyan of Oriental Mindoro. Their cultural language and literature has been affected by such kind of advent. Tagalog/English language and Roman alphabet was introduced to them. They embrace such practices while still appreciating Ambahan and Surat Mangyan. Yet, time comes when the so-called Tagalog Culture overshadows the Mangyan Culture. That is why some Gurangons are terrified that their culture might be totally gone. Despite such there are institutions or personal incentives that promote and aims to protect the significance of Ambahan and Surat Mangyan to

Hanunuo-Mangyan Culture. The Mangyan appreciated it and in the book of bamboo whisper, Wili Umhom – a Mangyan elder express his appreciation and sentiment regarding Ambahan. He said,

“Matatanda na kami, nais naming ipabatid sa lahat kung ano ang kahalagahan ng ambahan.

Ang ambahan ay isang pamamaraan para ituro sa mga anak ang pangalan ng mga ibon, bundok, punongkahoy, mga halaman, insekto at iba pa. Ito rin ay isang pamamaraan sa pagpapatulog ng bata. Ginagamit din ang ambahan sa pakikipag-usap, kung may nais sabihin, nais hingin at panliligaw.

Sa panahon ngayon, kaming matatandang Mangyan ay labis na nababahala at napapaisip sa kabataang nakapag-aral na. Marahil, dahil sa awiting natutuhan sa mga di-Mangyan ay mukhang hindi na sila interesado sa Ambahan. Madali silang maimpluwensyahan ng kulturang di-Mangyan.

Kaya ang hiling sa kabataang Mangyan ay ingatan at ipagmalaki natin ang yaman ng kulturang Mangyan, kasama na ang ambahan. Ito ay ating minana pa sa ating ninuno. Huwag nating kalimutan o ikahiya ito. Pag-aralan natin at siguraduhing may tamang kaalaman tayo sa ating kultura, hindi lang sa salita. Isabuhay natin at pagyamanin. Ipagtanggol kung kinakailangan. Ituro natin sa mga susunod pang henerasyon para hindi mawala kailanman.

Ang pagpapaunlad ng ating kultura ay kailangan manggaling mismo sa ating mga Mangyan. Pag-aralan man ito ng ibang tao, makarating man sa ibang panig ng mundo ang yaman ng ating kultura, tayo pa rin ang nagmamay-ari at mangangalaga nito. Ang kaluluwa ng ating kultura ay hindi mawawala sa atin. Hindi ito maaaring angkinin ng ibang di-Mangyan sa ating mga Mangyan. Huwag nating hayaang maglaho ang pagkakilanlan sa atin bilang isang Mangyan tulad ng ating sariling wika, kasuotan, panitikan gaya ng Surat Mangyan, Ambahan, Urukay, Adahiyo, at iba pang kaugaliang Mangyan. Pangalagaan natin ang integridad ng ating kultura.

Ang mga katutubo sa iba’t ibang panig ng ating bansa at iba’t ibang panig ng mundo ay may mayaman at natatangi ring kultura. Maari rin tayong matuto sa kultura ng iba ngunit hindi kailangang kalimutan ang sariling kultura.

Nagpapasalamat rin kami sa mga taong wagas ang pagtulong sa amin para pagyamanin at mapanatiling buhay ang aming kultura. Sa mga taong kinikilala at iginagalang ang aming kultura at hindi kami pinagsasamantalahan.”

Wili Umhom
Hanunuo-Mangyan Elder
(Bamboo Whisper 2017, 229)

Antoon Postma (1995, 60) said that embracing other culture is necessary for the development of one’s culture. That is why he proposed to integrate Surat Mangyan and Ambahan to the formal school curriculum together with Tagalog/English Language. Acculturation is a necessary tendency of a particular community. It is an interaction between cultures, yet the danger of assimilation is undeniable.

Elucidating this fact about Hanunuo-Mangyan, Surat Mangyan and Ambahan. The subsequent part of this account aimed to provide an empirical and tangible basis to support such a truth. By visiting Sitio Calibang, Tanawan and Sinugbuan, Brgy. Panaytayan, the researcher conducted an interview and synthesized the data to make the objective possible.

Objective of the Study – This research aimed to determine the status quo of Ambahan and Surat Mangyan at Sitio Calibang, Tanawan, Sinugbuan Brgy. Panaytayan, Mansalay Oriental Mindoro, Philippines in the lens of Social process of culture.

Materials and Methods – This research used an Anthropological Inquiry as a research method. Anthropological Inquiry is a variety of Inquiry in research method. It is an inquiry that possesses Anthropological characteristics. This kind of Inquiry served the very purpose of Anthropology that it deals with socio-cultural questions requiring empirical investigation to discover social and cultural truth. Scientific research is conducted by gathering information for analysis and interpretation. Conclusions and synthesis are drawn by logical, critical, and objective treatment of established facts (Banaag, L. 2016, 3).

To conduct the interview to the selected Sitios of Panaytayan, the researcher consciously and intentionally went to Sitio Calibang and Tanawan last September 15-16, 2024 and January 10-12, 2024 – the same date when the researcher reached Sitio Sinugbuan. The intention of that activity was to gather data for the proposed Project called AWATI – a five year extension program the will help the Hanunuo-Mangyan to develop a certain aspect of their well-being in terms of Education, Livelihood, Tourism, Agriculture, and Civic Management.

The participants of this research are the twelve Hanunuo-Mangyan aged from 40-90 yrs. old. Five of them are residing from Sitio Calibang, Brgy. Panaytayan Oriental Mindoro, Four of them from Sitio Tanawan Brgy. Panaytayan Oriental Mindoro and lasty, three of them are come Sitio Sinugbuan, Panaytayan Oriental Mindoro.

As to conform to research ethics, the respective identity of the participants is concealed. With this regard, they are known to be Hanunuo-Mangyan 1 to Hanunuo-Mangyan 12. The term is used to show respect for their cultural affiliation.

For the purpose of linguistic consideration, the questionnaire was translated in Tagalog. The participants were asked the following questions related to: Ambahan.

1. *Alam ba ninyo kung ano ang “ambahan”?* (Do you know Ambahan?)
 2. *Marunong po ba kayo mag-ambahan?* (Do you know to do Amabahan?)
 3. *Naniniwala ba kayong mahalaga ang pagpapasa ng kaalaman tungkol sa ambahan sa susunod na henerasyon?* (Do you believe that it is important to teach Ambahan to the coming/younger generation?)
 4. *Mayroon bang pormal na pagsasanay o pagtuturo tungkol sa ambahan sa inyong komunidad?* (Is there formal training or education about Ambahan in your community?)
 5. *Naririnig ba ninyo ang ambahan sa mga seremonya o espesyal na okasyon sa inyong lugar?* (Do you hear ambahan during ceremonies or special occasions in your area?)
 6. *Mayroon ba kayong natatandaan na nagturo ng ambahan mula sa inyong mga ninuno?* (Do you remember anyone who taught Ambahan from your ancestors?)
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1. *Alam ba ninyo ang mga pangunahing titik o simbolo sa Surat Mangyan?* (Do you know the main letters or symbols in Surat Mangyan?)
 2. *Ginagamit ba ninyo ang Surat Mangyan sa inyong pang-araw-araw na pagsulat?* (Do you use Surat Mangyan in your daily writing?)
 3. *Naniniwala ba kayong mahalaga ang pagpapasa ng kaalaman tungkol sa Surat Mangyan sa susunod na henerasyon?* (Do you believe it is important to teach Surat Mangyan to the next generation?)

4. *Mayroon ba kayong natatandaan na nagturo ng Surat Mangyan mula sa inyong mga ninuno?* (Do you remember anyone who taught Surat Mangyan from your ancestors?)

5. *May pormal na edukasyon o pagtuturo ba tungkol sa Surat Mangyan sa inyong komunidad?* (Is there formal education or teaching about Surat Mangyan in your community?)

These questions were synthesized through an objective interpretation of the researcher. The answers are presented and summarized through a narrative form.

Result and Discussion – This chapter/section includes data, discussion, and findings. The data were gathered to meet the objective of this account – to determine the status quo of Ambahan and Surat Mangyan on the selected Sitios of Brgy. Panaytayan, Oriental Mindoro and to examine whether there is a threat of Cultural Assimilation to Ambahan and Surat Mangyan. Ambahan:

1. *Alam ba ninyo kung ano ang “ambahan”?* (Do you know Ambahan?)

In this item, among the twelve (12) Hanunuo-Mangyan participants twelve (12) of them answered that Ambahan is a form of poetry which is occasionally sung. Hanunuo-Mangyan 1 asserted that “*Ito ay tula minsan kanta*”. Hanunuo-Mangyan 4-6 supported this by saying that “*Tula na kinakanta*”.

This answer testifies that the Hanunuo-Mangyan of Sito Calibang, Tanawan and Sinugbuan of Brgy. Panaytayan Oriental Mindoro are aware of what Ambahan is.

2. *Marunong po ba kayo mag-ambahan?* (Do you know to do Amabahan?)

Six (6) out of twelve (12) Hanunuo-Mangyan from the selected Sitio of Brgy. Panaytayan, Mansalay, Oriental Mindoro answered that they don’t know how to do Ambahan. Hanunuo-Mangyan 8 said that “*Hindi ako marunong, hindi ako tinuruan*”. Hanunuo-Mangyan 10 insisted that “*Hindi, ung iba may alam pero hindi naga-ambahan*”. The rest of the constituent of the eight plainly answered, “*Hindi ako marunong*”.

Meanwhile, the remaining half of the group – the another six (6) Hanunuo-Mangyan admitted that they have a *little* knowledge on how to do an Ambahan and in the spoken way only. Hanunuo-Mangyan 9 said, “*Marunong mag-ambahan pero salita lang*”. Hanunuo-Mangyan 11 follows “*Hindi masyado*”. Then, the remaining claims that “*Marunong pero kunti lang*”.

This data provided a statistical bases that 50% among the 12 (twelve) Hanunuo-Mangyan respondent have a “*little*” knowledge on how to do an Ambahan.

3. *Naniniwala ba kayong mahalaga ang pagpapasa ng kaalaman tungkol sa ambahan sa susunod na henerasyon?* (Do you believe that it is important to teach Ambahan to the coming/younger generation?)

Twelve (12) out of twelve (12) Hanunuo-Mangyan of the selected Sitios of Brgy. Panaytayan, Mansalay Oriental Mindoro are convinced that Ambahan should be taught to the next generation of Hanunuo-Mangyan as it is part of their culture and identity. To some answers, “*Oo mahalaga talaga, sapagkat ito ang pagkakilanlan namin*”, “*Oo Mahalaga talaga, pamana ito sa amin ng ninuno namin*”, “*Oo Kailangan para matuto sila ng aming kultura*”, “*Oo, Mahalaga kultara kasi ito*”, “*Oo, sobrang halaga, pagkakilanlan ng mangyan un e*”, “*Oo Mahalaga, sapagkat dun kami kilala*” and “*Oo, dapat lang kasi kilala kami dun*”.

4. *Mayroon bang pormal na pagsasanay o pagtuturo tungkol sa ambahan sa inyong komunidad?* (Is there formal training or education about Ambahan in your community?)

Eleven (11) out of Twelve (12) Hanunuo-Mangyan respondents from the selected Sitios of Brgy. Panaytayan, Mansalay, Oriental Mindoro said that there is no existing formal education or training regarding the Ambahan. Some of them said, “*Wala, ung iba natutuo lang sa pag gaya*”, and “*Wala naman, ung iba natutuo lang dahil nakikita at naririnig nila*”. But one (1) of the twelve (12) members said that there is a school – Mangyan Education Center wherein Ambahan is being taught yet it is not in their Sitio.

This data provided evidence that in the Sitio Calibang, Tanawan, and Sinugbuan of Brgy. Panaytayan, Mansalay, Oriental Mindoro Ambahan has no official and formal way of teaching, Hanunuo-Mangyans learn Ambahan through observation or through their Gurangons.

5. *Naririnig ba ninyo ang ambahan sa mga seremonya o espesyal na okasyon sa inyong lugar?* (Do you hear ambahan during ceremonies or special occasions in your area?)

Twelve (12) out of Twelve (12) Hanunuo- Mangyan of the selected Sitios of Brgy. Panaytayan, Mansalay, Oriental Mindoro said that they “*seldom*” witness or hear Ambahan during ceremonies or special occasions. To mention some statement of the Hanunuo-Mangyan they said, “*Madalang, pag may kasiyahan lang*”, “*Minsan lang pag naga ambahan ung mga gurangon*”, and “*Minsan lang*”.

6. *Mayroon ba kayong natatandaan na nagturo ng ambahan mula sa inyong mga ninuno?* (Do you remember anyone who taught Ambahan from your ancestors?)

Four (4) out of Twelve (12) Hanunuo- Mangyan of the selected Sitios of Brgy. Panaytayan, Mansalay, Oriental Mindoro admitted that they don’t remember any one from their ancestors who taught Ambahan, “*Wala hindi man sila ga turo busy sa kaingin*”, “*Wala, Naririnig lang sa mga gurangon*”, and “*Wala, naririnig ko lang*”.

Meanwhile, the remaining eight (8) out of Twelve (12) Hanunuo- Mangyan of the selected Sitios of Brgy. Panaytayan, Mansalay, Oriental Mindoro proudly affirmed that they remember some of their ancestors teaching Ambahan yet they already forgot what kind of Ambahan – specific poem they have learned, “*Oo, Ung mga gurangon noon kaso (pero) limot na*”, “*Meron ung mga matatandaan noon kaso limot na*”, “*Meron din kaso kakaunti na lang alam ko*”, and “*Meron Noong una ng mga gurangon pero limot na din*”.

Surat Mangyan:

1. *Alam ba ninyo ang mga pangunahing titik o simbolo sa Surat Mangyan?* (Do you know the main letters or symbols in Surat Mangyan?)

Twelve (12) out of twelve (12) Hanunuo- Mangyan of the selected Sitios of Brgy. Panaytayan, Mansalay, Oriental Mindoro asserted that they have a *little* knowledge about the fundamental elements of Surat Mangyan, as a matter of fact, they only know the letter of their name in Surat Mangyan, “*Oo marunong pero pangalan ko lang*”, “*Meron naman kaunti*”, “*Oo pero titik lang pangalan ko*”, and “*Pangalan ko lang ung iba hindi na*”.

2. *Ginagamit ba ninyo ang Surat Mangyan sa inyong pang-araw-araw na pagsulat?* (Do you use Surat Mangyan in your daily writing?)

Three (3) out of twelve (12) Hanunuo- Mangyan of the selected Sitios of Brgy. Panaytayan, Mansalay, Oriental Mindoro claimed that “*seldom*” use Ambahan in quotidian living, “*Madalang na*”, “*Madalang lang*”, and “*Madalang ung pantagalog (roman letters) na din*” On the other hand, the remaining nine (9) out of the twelve (12) Hanunuo- Mangyan of the selected Sitios of Brgy. Panaytayan, Mansalay, Oriental Mindoro admitted that they don’t use Surat Mangyan in their day-to-day life, “*Hindi ung pantagalog na din sa pagkat un*

natutunan nila”, “Hindi na madalas”, “Hindi na, ung iba pag may naga pagawa bracelet”, and “Hindi na, natutunan na ng mga bata ay ung pantagalog”.

3. *Naniniwala ba kayong mahalaga ang pagpapasa ng kaalaman tungkol sa Surat Mangyan sa susunod na henerasyon? (Do you believe it is important to teach Surat Mangyan to the next generation?)*

The Twelve (12) members of the Hanunuo- Mangyan of the selected Sitios of Brgy. Panaytayan, Mansalay, Oriental Mindoro made a unanimous answer that it is vital for the younger generation of Hanunuo-Mangyan to learn the Surat Mangyan , *“Oo, mahalaga un ang aming pagkakilanlan”, “Oo, mahalaga parte ng aming kultura”, “Oo, dahil amin un”, “Oo, mahalaga”, “Oo, dapat lang”, “Mahalaga talaga sapagkat un ang sulat namin”, “Mahalaga dahil dun kami kilala”, and “Mahalaga dahil kultura namin un”.*

4. *Mayroon ba kayong natatandaan na nagturo ng Surat Mangyan mula sa inyong mga ninuno? (Do you remember anyone who taught Surat Mangyan from your ancestors?)*

The Twelve (12) members of the Hanunuo- Mangyan of the selected Sitios of Brgy. Panaytayan, Mansalay, Oriental Mindoro proclaimed that they remembered someone from their ancestors who taught Ambahan but not in full detail, mostly just the letter of their names, *“Oo ung mga gurangon noon tinuro pangalan ko”, “Kaunti lang noon”, “Meron din naman kaunti lang”, “Wala masyado pero meron”, “Meron pero kaunti lang”, “Madalang, pero naturuan ako noon kaunti lang”, “Oo, pero ang pinakaalam ko lang ay ung pangalan ko”, “Nagturo din minsan”, “Minsan lang noon”, “Minsan lang”, “Meron pero kaunti lang”, and “Pangalan ko lang alam ko noon”.*

5. *May pormal na edukasyon o pagtuturo ba tungkol sa Surat Mangyan sa inyong komunidad?*

(Is there formal education or teaching about Surat Mangyan in your community?) Parallel to the data from Ambahan, Eleven (11) out of Twelve (12) Hanunuo-Mangyan respondents from the selected Sitios of Brgy. Panaytayan, Mansalay, Oriental Mindoro said that there is no existing formal education or training regarding the Ambahan. Some of them said, *“Wala minsan mga gurangon lang din”, “Wala ung mga magulang lang namin”, “Wala, natutuo lang sa pagtingin”, “Wala, tingin tingin lang”, and “Wala, hindi man naturo”.*

But one (1) of the twelve (12) members said that there is a school – Mangyan Education Center wherein Surat Mangyan is being taught yet it is not in their Sitio.

Conclusion and Recommendations: The data above gave a support to the claim that Surat Mangyan and Ambahan, little-by-little, are in the peril of Cultural Assimilation. Although, the Twelve, Hanunuo-Mangyan know the nature of Ambahan and Surat Mangyan and its innate significance to their cultural identity. There is still a lack at their end particular on the execution of Ambahan and Surat Mangyan. They have a little knowledge of about it. If that is the case, that they only have little knowledge about Ambahan and Surat Mangyan and the number of those Hanunuo-Mangyans (Gurangons) who teach Ambahan and Surat Mangyan are decreasing, include the no existence of formal education about Ambahan and Surat Mangyan. What and how would cultural legacy of Ambahan and Surat Mangyan be bequeathed.

These finding yields (recommends) to stablished community-driven-initiative – LGU, NGO, and other private/public institution for cultural preservation viz. observance of Ambahan and Surat Mangyan practice among Mangyan Communities.

For the next researcher, I, the researcher recommends to make a research about the factors affecting the significance of Ambahan and Surat Mangyan.

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