

**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

# Identification and Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) of Tabaco City, Philippines, through Cultural Mapping

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**Abstract**

Safeguarding intangible cultural heritage (ICH) includes identification, documentation, research, preservation, protection, promotion, enhancement, and transmission through formal and non-formal education. This paper identified the conditions and status of the intangible cultural heritage (ICH) of Tabaco City, Philippines, identified the threats to the preservation of ICH, and determined the measures taken to safeguard the ICH. It utilized purposive sampling and adopted the Cultural Mapping of the NCCA in the documentation and identification of ICH in Tabaco City that employed ethnography through community immersion and non-participant observation applying the Filipino psychology, focused group discussion, and unstructured interviews in data collection. Findings revealed that ICH in Tabaco City is under threat due to many ICH practitioners' death and old age, a rising lack of interest in ICH among the youth, and the influences of foreign culture. However, measures were put in place to safeguard ICH. The living practitioners of ICH in Tabaco City pass on their knowledge and traditional skills to the next generations by sustaining traditional blacksmithing, pedicab making, folk medicine, and native cuisines. Furthermore, ICH is promoted by generating awareness through various tourism activities. This paper also recommends the establishment of a school for living tradition that may teach the younger generations of the ICH in Tabaco City. Likewise, mainstreaming indigenous knowledge into the curriculum must be done so that the younger generations can derive valuable lessons from studying ICH. Lastly, the local government must adopt policies through local legislation to ensure the preservation, promotion, and protection of ICH and their living human treasures.

**KEYWORDS:**

Intangible cultural heritage, safeguarding ICH, threats in ICH, living human treasures, Tabaco City

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

Intangible cultural heritage (ICH), also known as living heritage, refers to the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, and skills passed down through generations by immersion and practice that provide communities a distinct sense of identity (UNESCO, 2003). The immaterial manifestations of culture are represented by the living heritage and are vital for cultural diversity (Lenzerini, 2011). ICH has been elaborated into several domains, including oral traditions and expressions, performing arts, social practices, festive events, knowledge, nature, and the universe. Considering the importance of ICH in providing

the community with a sense of pride and uniqueness and as a driver of sustainable development, the world recognizes that it is imperative to safeguard ICH because safeguarding ICH guarantees creativity. Also, documenting ICH means preserving the past and accessing the future (UNESCO, 2003). Safeguarding of ICH also includes adopting measures such as identification, documentation, research, preservation, protection, promotion, enhancement, transmission through formal and non-formal education, and the revitalization of various aspects of such heritage (Kurin, 2007).

Consequently, the transmission of ICH means that appropriate training, whether formal or informal, through direct or traditional apprenticeship, is vital to ensure its preservation and safeguarding. An ICH can be safeguarded and preserved if it is transmitted by living human treasures. Living human treasures are individuals who exhibit a high level of knowledge and abilities necessary for performing or reproducing certain parts of intangible cultural heritage (Akyol, 2018). ICH is a living heritage; thus, safeguarding ICH requires strengthening and reinforcing the diverse circumstances necessary for its continuous evolution, interpretation, and transmission to future generations (UNESCO, 2003).

Moreover, documentation is also one of the effective measures for safeguarding ICH. Documentation can be done by adopting legal measures and providing technical, administrative, and financial support (Kurin, 2007). Arantes (2012) also noted that documentation and promotion of ICH had been proven to be effective measures in safeguarding ICH. However, Khan (2018) asserted that documentation of ICH necessitates a distinct methodology to preserve it, and good documentation must be committed to transmitting the knowledge to future generations to understand better and appreciate it. There have also been various projects initiated for the documentation of ICH. For instance, the Philippines has documented numerous ICHs in the country. For example, the “Hudhud” Chant and “Punnuk” rituals of the Ifugao and Darangen Epics of Maranao have been documented and inscribed in the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

On the other hand, the promotion of ICH also means raising awareness. ICH promotion could regularly organize performance demonstrations and introduce ICH into educational curricula. Another approach to safeguard ICH is through cultural mapping. As defined, cultural mapping is a systematic process that aims to document and record the heritage assets or resources of the community (Rabang, 2015). It is a process that describes the community’s support and their relationship to raise awareness, develop plans and pass legislation that would solve problematic issues (Network, 2010). Cook and Taylor (2013) define cultural mapping as “a method that aims to identify, record, and use cultural resources and activities to develop communities. It is also an approach in which communities map what is significant or relevant to them.

At present, the National Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCCA), having the responsibility to safeguard, develop, and promote Filipino culture through policies and programs, has established a cultural mapping program to help Local Government Units (LGUs) to preserve and enrich the Filipino culture, as well to maintain an inventory of cultural properties.

Consequently, Tabaco City, Philippines, has a vibrant cultural heritage. The city has a tangible and intangible heritage reservoir that needs documentation, protection, and promotion from the government and other stakeholders. For this reason, a cultural mapping project was conducted that aimed to identify, record the city’s cultural heritage, and eventually safeguard its ICH through documentation, identification, and promotion. This paper documented and identified the intangible cultural heritage (ICH) of Tabaco City, Philippines. It also determined the status/condition of the documented ICH, identified the practice’s constraints/threats/challenges, and chose the measures taken to safeguard the ICH.

## 2 | METHODOLOGY

This paper adopted the Cultural Mapping approach of the NCCA in the documentation and identification of ICH in Tabaco City. It employed ethnography through community immersion and non-participant observation as methods in the cultural mapping (Horquilla, et al., 2019). Ethnography through community immersion, applying the Sikolohiyang Filipino or Filipino Psychology (Pua Marcelino, 2000), Focused Group Discussion, and Unstructured Interviews were the main methods of Data Collection. Further, this paper also utilized purposive sampling as its sampling technique because it purposively identified the kinds of intangible heritage that need to be mapped. Purposive sampling is most appropriate for conducting qualitative studies and gathering data from the people who possess the best knowledge about the study (Elo et al., 2014). Data were qualitatively analyzed through the thematic analysis by Braun and Clarke (2006).

Critical informants of this paper are the members of the community who have the knowledge and skills required in ICH. The key informants should have at least resided in the community for 15 years and possess the knowledge and skills of ICH in the community. The study was conducted in Tabaco City, Philippines. The instrument used in gathering data was the NCCA form for mapping intangible cultural heritage or ICH.

### 3 | RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### 3.1 | Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) in Tabaco City; Their status and conditions

Intangible cultural heritage has five domains: oral traditions and expressions, performing arts, social practices, festive events, knowledge, nature, and the universe. Table 1 presents the Oral Tradition and Expressions.

Oral traditions and expressions as forms of intangible culture refer to proverbs, riddles, tales, legends, myths, epic songs and poems, charms, chants, and folk songs. As can be gleaned from Table 1, there are five intangible cultural heritages under oral traditions and expression. These are the Legend of "Natunawan" Island, Legend of Tabaco City, Origins of the Barangay Names in Tabaco City, "Pabasa or Pasyon," and Superstitious beliefs.

The Legend of "Natunawan" Island and Legend of Tabaco City are two legends. These legends, a folklore genre, are transmitted by the older generation of storytellers to the younger generations. The Legend of "Natunawan" talks about how the "Natunawan" Island in Tabaco City, Philippines, was formed. At the same time, the Legend of Tabaco City is also oral literature that explains how Tabaco City got its name. Similarly, The Origin of the Barangay Names in Tabaco City- is a collection of folk tales that explains the etymology of the terms and the local history of the barangays in Tabaco City, Philippines.

**TABLE 1** Oral Tradition and Expressions

Name of Elements	Type	Description/ Summary of the Element
The Legend of "Natunawan"	Legend	The Legend of "Natunawan" is a folk legend, a form of oral literature in Tabaco City that talks about how the "Natunawan" Island in Tabaco City was formed.
The Legend of Tabaco City	Legend	The Legend of Tabaco City is an oral piece of literature that explains how Tabaco City got its name.
The Origin of the Barangay Names in Tabaco City	Folk Tales	A collection of folk narratives that explains the etymology of the names as well as the local history of the barangays in Tabaco City

Folklore is essential in the community. Bascom (1965) asserts that folklore entertains, validates culture, educates, and maintains social conformity. People in the community tell and retell folk stories for entertainment because it provides a random experience that amuses the listeners and evokes their imagination.

In the same manner, folklore was an educational device used to transmit information and wisdom about human experiences. It was an original form of education that conveyed society's social values and morals. Further, legends and folk tales still exist because they have recurring themes. They have been instrumental in teaching and reinforcing the morals and values of the community. In particular, the Legend of "Natunawan" Island highlights the importance of prayer and faith in God. On the other hand, the Legend of Tabaco City provides an opportunity to understand the social and cultural identity of Tabaco City, Philippines. Moreover, the folk tales on the origin of the Barangay Names in Tabaco City were considered a truthful historical account of the remote past.

However, modernized and old folks who carry the traditions threaten oral literature such as legend and folk tales. Paguio and Dela Rosa (2019) noted that the preservation of oral literature is threatened due to exposure to foreign cultures like media and other sources. Also, elders who are knowledgeable about oral literature may have already forgotten this intangible culture. Knowledge and Practices Concerning Nature and the Universe include men's knowledge, skills, and practices due to their natural environment. These are expressed through language, oral traditions, feelings of attachment towards a place, memories, spirituality, and worldview. Table 2 shows the Knowledge and Practices Concerning Nature and the Universe.

In terms of Knowledge and Practices Concerning Nature and the Universe, this paper documented "santigwar" as a traditional healing practice in Tabaco, City, Philippines. Traditional healing refers to the rules, knowledge, and beliefs associated with healing and wellness using rituals, herbs, animals, and minerals (Esperat et al., 2020).

"Santigwar" is a part of the traditional healing practice in Tabaco, City, Philippines, that its residents perpetuate despite the advances in medical science. Folks are predisposed to this kind of healing ritual, believing that an unseen spirit has been offended,

**TABLE 2** Knowledge and Practices Concerning Nature and the Universe.

Name of Elements	Type	Description/ Summary of the Element
Santigwar	Traditional healing system	A standard/indigenous healing that serves as a mantra for healing. It is a form of supernatural healing that uses various materials depending upon the healer. It is used to diagnose the cause of an illness, especially if the disease or reason for the disease is mysterious.
Superstitious beliefs	Superstitious beliefs	This is a collection of indigenous beliefs about an impending eruption of Mt. Mayon Volcano and some thoughts on folk healing and miracles.

which caused the disorder. Traditional healing pertains to the health practices, approaches, knowledge, and beliefs associated with healing and wellness using ceremonies, plant, animal, or mineral-based medicines, therapies, or physical techniques.

Various types of "santigwar" are documented in Tabaco City, Philippines. The types of this healing practice depend on the materials used by the folk healer. "Santigwar sa Plato," "Santigwar sa Kandila," and "Santigwar in Absentia" as the most forms of this healing practice. For instance, the "Santigwar sa Plato" is done using a plate and a candle to diagnose the cause of the patient's sickness. Through this method, the healer draws three crosses using special oil on the plate and then places the plate on top of the candle's flame, causing sooth to gather on the plate, thus forming objects or forms on the plate. The healer would then analyze the forms or shapes and reveal the cause of the sickness.

On the other hand, "Santigwar sa Kandila" is performed using a candle, spoon, and water basin. The healer would cut the candle into small pieces, put it on a spoon, and then place it on its flame, causing it to melt. The healer would analyze the shapes/forms of the candle and interpret them. Lastly, the "Santigwar in Absentia" is done if the patient cannot personally appear to the healer. This healing procedure is usually performed on bed-ridden patients confined in a hospital or even those living outside the country. The healer uses the used clothing or picture of the patient in performing "Santigwar in Absentia."

"Santigwar" can only be performed by a folk healer respected for their craft and whom the community believes in their power to heal. Common among the folk healers is that they underwent the process of shamanism. It means that before the folk healers were endowed with the ability to heal, they felt seriously ill. Their ability to heal is a gift from God. Not everyone can become a folk healer. One must be called to heal and undergo the process of shamanism. Other healers also become an apprentice to their parents or relatives from whom they learned their craft for healing.

It can be noted that with the advancement in medical science in the community, people from all walks of life, including the educated, poor, or rich, are still predisposed to this healing practice. Esperat et al. (2020) noted that people from all walks of life, including the educated, rich, and poor individuals, seek consultation from traditional healers. Folk healers have been a part of the Philippine Health Care Delivery System. Filipinos consider the albularyo as the primary dispensers of health care in folk medicine and are referred to as the general practitioners (Galan, 2018). "Santigwar" is considered a diagnostic and therapeutic tool for Albularyos or folk healers (Cerio, 2020). It is a traditional practice to diagnose and treat various kinds of illnesses. As a therapeutic technique, "santigwar" induces the healer to turn into divination to persuade the aggrieved elementals or supernatural beings to sympathize with the ill person (Arriola, 2011).

"Santigwar," as a form of indigenous or traditional healing, continues to be practiced in the Tabaco City, especially in rural areas; it has become a tradition of some families to seek first the help of a folk healer before seeking the use of medical doctors. The folks perpetuate this healing practice because it is cheaper, especially if the patient does not have sufficient money for the medication or treatment. It could also be noted that the presence of folk healers and the inaccessibility to the hospitals or nearby clinics cause the residents to uphold this healing practice.

Similarly, superstitious beliefs handed down from generation to generation are still relevant in Tabaco City. Folks have developed various superstitious beliefs about the impending eruption of Mt. Mayon Volcano, beliefs about folk healing, and thoughts on miracles. This implied that residents of Tabaco City, Philippines, still embrace superstitions because these superstitious beliefs are believed to affect or help them in their everyday lives.

Traditional craftsmanship is another intangible cultural heritage documented in Tabaco City (Table 3). Traditional craftsmanship refers to the skills and knowledge involved in craftsmanship than the products themselves (UNESCO, 2003). Tabaco City,

Philippines, is a design producer and a quality "Tabak" or bolo in the Bicol Region. According to the legend, Tabaco City got its name from "Tabak" or bolo- a metal produced by skilled artisan blacksmiths.

**TABLE 3** Traditional Craftmanship

Name of Elements	Type	Description/ Summary of the Element
Tabak Making (Pagibo nin Tabak)	Smithing	A traditional art of making a bolo
Pedicab Making (Pagibo nin Padyak)	Metallurgy/ Smithing	The art of making a pedicab

The traditional art of blacksmithing continues to emerge through the conventional blacksmiths or "Panday," Figure 1 - Figure 4 who hold the classic art of blacksmithing. These conventional artisans have been devoted to forging blades of all shapes.



**FIGURE 1** Traditional blacksmiths or “panday” alternately hammer on the flaming steel to shape it into a “tabak” or bolo.

However, the tradition of blacksmithing in the place may soon lose due to the waning generations. The skilled blacksmiths are not getting any younger, some are afflicted with sickness, and the younger generations have not taken an interest in the tradition. Younger generations who are supposed to sustain the traditional metal craft industry have not taken an interest in it because it is challenging and dangerous. Also, some older blacksmiths do not encourage their children to be involved in the traditional metal craft because of the health risk that it may impose.

On the other hand, Tabaco City is famous for its eco-friendly mode of transportation, which is known as the “padyak” or pedicab. It is a three-wheeled pedal-driven vehicle locally serving as the city’s primary means of public transportation. “Padyaks” have been locally assembled lean and light vehicles. Tabaco City has been known as the “padyak capital.” The use of padyak has been replicated in other areas of the country.

As can also be gleaned from Table 4, there are a lot of social practices and traditional cuisines in Tabaco City. UNESCO defines social practices, rituals, and festive events that involve unique forms that include worship rites; rites of passage; birth, wedding, and funeral rituals, legal systems, traditional games, kinship and ritual kinship rituals, settlement patterns, culinary traditions, seasonal ceremonies and practices such as hunting, fishing and gathering practices and many more. Native cuisines include "binutong," "maracasotes," and "tilmuk. Worship rite which is “Kristiyanong Turog” and “Perdon” (Patawad) was mapped and documented.



**FIGURE 2** The “molye”- a piece of metal scrap is heated in burning coals to soften the steel so that the blacksmith can manipulate and re-shape the steel into its desired.



**FIGURE 3** The blade is polished to ensure that only a perfect “Tabak” or bolo is produced in the workshop. Photo by Zane Abegail Gonzales.

### 3.2 | Threats in the Preservation of ICH of Tabaco City, Philippines

The danger of vanishing intangible cultural heritage due to the declining number of practitioners and the growing disinterest of younger generations is considered a significant threat to preserving intangible cultural heritage (ICH).

It was noted that the tradition of blacksmithing in Tabaco City might soon lose due to the aging generations of blacksmiths. These traditional blacksmiths are not getting any younger. Some of them are also afflicted with sickness. The younger generations who are supposed to sustain the conventional metal craft industry have not been interested in the tradition. Also, some blacksmiths do not encourage their children to be involved in the traditional metal craft due to the health risk that it may pose.

On the other hand, Folk literature is also threatened to disappear due to the old age of storytellers or narrators. Imran (2020) identified the types of storytellers that may affect the transmission of oral literature. These storytellers are described as enthusiastic and careful, yet forgetful, careless, hurried, and creative. She also noted that the life span of a folk narrative mainly depends on the type of narration and its generational transmission. If many narrators are forgetful, hurried, and careless, parts of the records could be lost in generational transmission. Similarly, Paguio & Dela Rosa (2019) also revealed that exposure to foreign culture, the indifference of the younger generations, especially the youth, to learn oral literature, and being forgetful by





**FIGURE 4** “Pag-polo”. The finished product is placed with a handle or “polo”

**TABLE 4** Oral Tradition and Expressions

Name of Elements	Type	Description/ Summary of the Element
Binutong	Cuisine	It is a popular breakfast or merienda. It is made from glutinous rice and coconut milk wrapped in banana leaves. The term “binutong” came from “butong,” which means tie the knot. The banana leaves were covered and bound to give the “binutong” savory and delightful flavor.
Marcasotes	Cuisine	“Marcasotes” is a steamed cake cooked in handmade paper bags. It is cooked in huge clay pots lined with cut banana bark, giving it delightfully unique firewood- smoked aftertaste and aroma.
Tilmuk	Cuisine	Inulukan is a variant made from river crabs (ulok) wrapped in pumpkin leaves and cooked in coconut milk and other spices.
Kristiyanong Turog and Perdon (Patawad)	Worship rites	It is a religious tradition performed by a procession at dawn and dusk. It is a tradition practiced when there is an impending calamity or bad weather, such as the eruption of the Mayon volcano, typhoon, or flood.

the elders are some of the threats to the preservation of oral literature. Therefore, if the younger generations will not show any interest in perpetuating oral tradition, this will eventually die.

Filipino cuisine depicts a rich cultural heritage. Filipino cuisines reflect the identity of the Filipinos and are an integral part of their culture (Florendo, 2019). It has also become an essential part of Filipino culture. However, it is observed that the Filipino palate or Filipino taste for native cuisines has been replaced by ethnic cuisine due to the influences of other cultures. The taste for Filipino traditional cuisine has begun to be replaced by a preference for ethnic cuisine (Florendo, 2019).

### 3.3 | Measures for safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH)

According to UNESCO, ICH must be relevant to the community to make it alive. Thus, it must be recreated and transferred from one generation to another. There is a risk that ICH could die or disappear, but safeguarding ICH could ensure its preservation of ICH. Efforts to conserve cultural heritage are based on what we value and transmit to future generations. Intangible cultural

legacy does not lie in the cultural and artistic expression itself but the wealth of information and skills passed down from generation to generation (David, 2013).

The declining number of practitioners and the disinterest of younger generations in the ICH are seen as threats to the existence and preservation of intangible cultural heritage. The death of the carriers of the traditions would mean the disappearance of the practice. To safeguard ICH, transmission through non-formal education is still observed. For instance, there are still blacksmiths in Tabaco City trying their best to sustain blacksmithing as the traditional livelihood. There are still several blacksmiths who patiently teach their children to acquire the necessary conventional skills. Similarly, some residents support native cuisine as their traditional livelihood to ensure that the tradition of native cuisine is transmitted to the new generations.

In terms of Oral literature, the older generation of storytellers keeps telling and retelling oral narratives to their children. In this way, the oral histories are passed to younger generations for preservation. Older generations also transmit local knowledge embedded in their superstitious beliefs to the younger generations. The transmission of ICH to the new generations from the living human treasures is an effective way to preserve it. The residing human treasures refer to people with a high degree of knowledge and skills necessary for performing or recreating specific elements of the intangible cultural heritage (Pinar, 2018). According to UNESCO, to preserve ICH is to maintain it in a living form by ensuring its transmission to the new generations. Thus, the practitioners of ICH in Tabaco City transmit is one of the practical approaches to safeguarding ICH. Similarly, efforts have been exerted to promote ICH in Tabaco City. For instance, an annual celebration showcasing the artistry of the traditional blacksmiths of Tabaco in producing their very own cutleries, especially the “Tabak” or bolo, is believed to be where the city got its conducted through a tourism festival called “Tabak Festival.” The said festival comprises various activities to preserve Tabaco City’s rich cultural heritage. These activities are undertaken to promote ICH. It is considered one of the effective measures to safeguard ICH because promoting ICH means raising awareness. It could be done by regularly organizing performance demonstrations and introducing ICH into educational curricula (UNESCO, 2003).

## 4 | CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

ICH in Tabaco City, Philippines, is under threat due to their practitioners’ death and old age, a rising lack of interest in ICH among the youth, and the influences of foreign culture. Thus, ICH of Tabaco City, Philippines, needs immediate safeguarding. Safeguarding measures were already put in place to preserve and safeguard ICH. For instance, the living practitioners of ICH in Tabaco City pass on their knowledge and traditional skills to the next generations by sustaining traditional blacksmithing, folk medicine, and native cuisines. Furthermore, ICH is promoted by generating awareness through various tourism activities.

This paper also recommends that Tabaco City establish a school of living tradition to ensure the safeguarding and preservation of ICH. The school for living tradition may teach the younger generations in the Tabaco City of the ICH, especially the traditional blacksmithing by which the place is famous. Further, mainstreaming indigenous knowledge into the curriculum must be done so that the younger generations can derive valuable lessons from studying ICH. Further research and in-depth documentation of ICH must be conducted. Lastly, the Local Government of Tabaco must adopt policies through local legislation to ensure the preservation, promotion, and protection of ICH and their living human treasures.

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