From the sixteenth century to the founding of the postwar Philippine Republic, successive waves of foreign invaders had systematically undermined the very foundations of Philippine indigenous traditions, in the process depriving us of the most potent symbols of our identity as a people. The colonizers are now gone. Yet, sadly, Filipinos themselves continue to degrade what the Spaniards and the Americans have not succeeded in wiping out completely. Mainstream Filipinos, especially the moneyed elite have almost completely succumbed to the lure of Hollywood, Broadway, MTV, video games, cyberspace, and other cheap thrills to the detriment of serious thought and reflection, spiritual concerns and more creative forms of expression still found in abundance among our cultural communities who have managed to preserve their ancient ways of life against all odds.

A nation can only be erected on the basis of self-respect, on a sense of self-worth and dignity. Without pride in our own cultural heritage and achievements, there will be no unifying force in our society for social cohesion and unity that is indispensable for nationhood. For being Filipino means pride in being Filipino.

And pride in being Filipino is synonymous with confidence in our positive achievements, the basis of which is our precious intangible cultural heritage. The collective expressions of our indigenous traditions’ multifaceted creativity, breadth of skills, and depth of knowledge constitute a bedrock of strength that is indispensable in nation-building. Highlighting the indigenous, what is truly ours, or what is innate in us is to declare to the world what is uniquely Filipino – that which makes us distinct as a people.

The Filipinos will be presented as creators, innovators and bearers of collective wisdom rather than as imitators and passive consumers. In this way, we call attention to our intrinsic dignity and worth and enhance our self-respect. It is a way of dignifying our people, a significant direction in healing and unifying a nation.

Therefore, I wholeheartedly commend this collection of ICH encompassing all the five domains as defined by UNESCO. This guidebook is a celebration of our indigenous, ancient yet contemporary heritage of creative genius and a testament to the profound sources of our cultural identity.

Paradigms to the living bearers of our indigenous wisdom documented in this collection. They are the heroic guardians of our treasure troves of knowledge systems, skills and practices!

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Intangible: adj.
Incapable of being perceived by the senses; of being realized or defined; incorporeal; imprecise or unclear to the mind; essence; formal cause of things; that which makes a thing what it is.

It is the unseen that makes palpable things more cogent realities; or those that are in themselves essentially abstract; or in transience, expressed in perceivable things; existing in the mind, or in the conceiving of things. By its very essence, intangible cultural heritage is always undergoing transformation, being a process in nature. Therefore, it is in danger of disappearing if not nurtured or if allowed to become incompatible with the way the culture-bearing society functions. It is impossible to think of anything that does not have an intangible aspect. There are even times when it is all there is to it. It can be the language of a people that might recede into oblivion when overwhelmed by the dominance of others; or a chant in the rites of an indigenous religion of a society slowly being subsumed into Christianity or Islam; or a lullaby that remains only in a mother’s lingering memory; the intricacies of a dance while transcending; the rituals of an offering to an anthropomorphized deity; the knowledge of the constellation of stars that mark the season of planting; or the process of weaving a blanket in colors appropriate to wrap one’s self in against the cold or the oncoming of death.

These are the things that define the ways of life of a people in a contiguous and circumscribed environment and make them distinct from all others. These make up social identity which, although constantly in flux, maintains a continuity that makes recognizable terms that constitute a separate culture. Actually, these are generic norms made up of individual expressions that vary from one another but still form a canonical stream recognizable as a single identifiable whole – just as all the voices in a chorus, raised in one symphonic song, reflect the personalities of the different singers. When a conductor raises the level of interpretation and transforms the piece from a lyrical sylvan tone into flamboyant jazz, the song is altered and yet remains the same. So it is that through the ages a continuity of change stream the altering expressions of faces that remain the same. Changes are just as important as the immobility and preservation of the status quo, because these indicate the vibrancy of living cultures. Safeguarding the changes that allow these to remain viable permit cultures to develop in accordance with the needs of the culture-bearing society.

Societal changes take place in the marginal areas of society where new values are generated. These are later absorbed by the larger masses of the population and become the established norm when found to be compatible. This is not always the case, however. When the new value created is too distant from the existing ones to be immediately absorbed, or due to inertia, lack of attention, or when it is otherwise undervalued – it is relegated only to memory where it fragments. Care becomes necessary to nurture the value back to life so that the culture may benefit from its vibrancy.

There are myriads of these new values constantly emerging, contributing to evolving norms in a single society. That there are different cultures within a single society makes it more complex. In the Philippines, there are at least eighty major ethno-linguistic groups. Not one of these groups