

Hudhud Epic Chant

IFUGAO, IFUGAO PROVINCE, NORTHERN LUZON ISLAND, NORTHERN PHILIPPINES. *This is chanted in seven of the eleven municipalities of the Ifugao province. There are different versions in the province, mostly chanted and rarely recited, in the various dialects. Some of the words are archaic and presently not understood. The Hudhud is now inscribed in the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity having been declared a Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity in 2001. It was declared a National Cultural Treasure of the Philippines by the National Museum in 2001 and a Provincial Cultural Treasure by the Ifugao province in 2007.*



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(left) Ifugao woman harvester in traditional skirt and contemporary sweatshirt. Her harvesting knife dangles from her right wrist. (opposite page) Ifugao mountain terrace farmers harvest rice by hand, stem by stem, while breaking the tedium by chanting the epic, Hudhud.

THE HUDHUD IS NOT a ritual-associated chant. It is actually a manner of chanting stories. The epic is chanted by a group, usually composed of women, only on four occasions: while harvesting rice, weeding the fields, during wakes and re-burials where the bones of the dead are honored.

There are at least two hundred Hudhud narratives and as many variations depending on the *munhaw-e* (lead chanter). Chanting can take many hours for single sessions. The predominant theme is Ifugao wealth, heroism, love and marriage. It usually ends with the male protagonists marrying each others' sisters.

The origin of the Hudhud is unknown, although tradition holds that it originated in the old settlement of Kiangan, Ifugao province. But it is certain that it was handed down by the Ifugao forebears. One of the oldest versions is said to have been ascribed on the "Rock of Pumbakhayon" which may be found in the Ambabag area in Kiangan.

The *munhaw-e*, usually a woman, sets the tone and tempo of a Hudhud story with a long hum. Then she begins the introductory lines of the story. The rest of the chorus (*munhudbud*) take up the lead at a cued moment and chant the choral parts. They stop at an appropriate moment to allow the *munhaw-e* to resume the narrative part of the next lines. The *munhaw-e*'s part contains the story, while that of the *munhudbud* are only repetitions or replications of syllables, words or phrases from the lines of the *munhaw-e*. Usually, only adult women perform this chant, although occasionally, there are men who lead or join the chorus. Children who know the particular narrative join in too.

The Hudhud is an integral part of the cultural traditions of the Ifugao. It survived to the present day in spite of the introduction of Christianity among the Ifugao because it is not associated with indigenous ritual. It serves as one of the organizing principles that bind Ifugao society and gives the people a specific character and identity.