

PSYCHOLOGY OF THE ATULU POTTERS OF CAGAYAN, PHILIPPINES



AS MANIFESTED IN THEIR TRADITION

by Artemio C. Barbosa

The term tradition, like culture has been used too often and in so many contexts (Shanklin: 1981) that, as Shils (1971) suggests, it may no longer have any meaning at all. In other perspective, Shanklin, (1981:86) suggests that there is no reason to attempt to arrive at a single meaning for the term. She believes that there is every reason to explore its implications rather than to use it as a common-place term surrounded by hazy, ideal assumptions.

Generally, anthropologists emphasize two general pictures of tradition. One is "a tradition" which in literature often means a time-honored custom, and the other is "traditions" which is often associated with pre-conquest or pre-colonial past. With these perspectives the meaning of tradition gives us **specification** with unspecified assumptions.

In the anthropological literature tradition has been segmented into two categories: one of this is the passive idea of tradition borrowed from the theoretical literature of social science; the second is the active, indigenous use of tradition recorded in ethnographic literature (Shanklin: 1981).

Williams (1976) points out two definitions delineating traditions as a set of time-honored, respected beliefs, and tradition as an active process in which beliefs are handed down from father to son, and require only two generations to become traditions.

In the seminal paper of Shanklin (1981), she made a review of the development of passive and active traditions as distinct analytic terms.

Durkheim (1983), Weber (1964), Marx and Engels (1972) and Tonnies (1887) were the first people who applied tradition in their work, as a passive force, thus establishing and introducing this term to social scientists.

In the early sixties R. Redfield applied the passive use of tradition in Anthropology through his book "The Little Community and Peasant Society and Culture". He outlined the use of tradition in two ways: one, as a general classificatory term denoting two interacting levels within

civilizations, the great and little traditions; and two, as a component of the folk-urban continuum.

While social scientists were figuring out the theoretical attributes of the active sense of tradition, cultural and social anthropologists were noting its indigenous active uses.

As pointed out earlier, tradition in the passive context functions as a storage device which when further analyzed would inhibit innovation. On the active side, however, ethnographers see tradition as a tool that can evaluate current circumstances to explain why things are as they are and in some instances to conceal or obscure innovations.

From the above review or discussion Shanklin abstracted two important research directions: the evaluative use of tradition and the sanctifying use of tradition. Both directions have internal and external aspects. She further emphasized that implicit within both these directions is the assumption that tradition has a storage function with respect to selected traits only and not to a fullness of antique behaviors. These traits need not be "old" or even indigenous.

Anthropologists are closer to their subjects' daily lives and more aware of contradictions and controversies than most other scientists. It is not surprising that ethnographers have recorded many different uses of tradition. What is surprising is that these uses have gone so long without being systematized (Shanklin: 1981).

My intention in this paper is to picture the concept of tradition based on the psychology among the Atulu potters of Cagayan who are one of the ethnic groups in the Philippines. Out of the 128 ethno-linguistic groups in the country, it is the Atulu potters who have been practicing traditional pottery-making within their community. Cohen (1976) points out the concept of tradition in an ethnic community by defining it "as a collection of people who share some patterns of normative behavior, or culture, and who form a part of a common social system..." He further explained that "ethnicity" refers to the degree of conformity to these collective norms in the course of social interaction.

PHILIPPINE POTTERY IN PERSPECTIVE

Pottery is one of the most enduring artifacts. It has withstood centuries as shown by many archaeological diggings (Chiong: 1974). During the thousands of years of contacts, direct and indirect with Asia and Southeast

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An old potter collecting her share of clay early in the morning.

Asia, the Filipino people have selected and elaborated trait complexes which were a part of the inflow and outflow of traditions in the islands. Culture and social patterns were not adopted en toto. Then, as now, specific and external influences were borrowed and reshaped to conform with existing and developing institutions, values and beliefs. They have also been modified in response to local needs which gave way to the emergence of elaborated ways of doing, believing and thinking (Fox: 1976).

The extensive development of pottery can be traced back to about 6,000 years ago when influences were felt both from the south and north. Early Filipino pottery had pleasing forms, many decorated with incised and impressed patterns. The wide range in forms and the great variety of designs, however, have been intimately linked with the elaborate rituals and social life of ancient Filipinos (Chiong: 1974).

There is a long history of pottery making in the Philippines and various anthropologists have presented technical descriptions of various ceramic industries though they did not articulate on the psychology of the potters.

Scattered data about pottery are in the writing of Jenks (1905), Cole (1922), and Garvan (1931) who did some non-systematic studies. In some studies attempts are made to describe the sequence of manufacture of all types of earthenwares because a number of relationships exists between the activities of the potter and the parts of the pot.

Exponents of this are Solheim II (1951), Foster (1956), Szanton (1963), Scheans (1965, 1969, 1977), Hart (1954) and Longacre (n.d.). Among these pottery authors only Scheans and Longacre have given us the idea that in traditional pottery artistic differences stem not from the goals or functions but from technique, method, and processes of production.

Scheans (1977) in his *Filipino Market Potteries* emphasized that ethnographically, his research concerned itself with both the technological aspects-materials, techniques of manufacture, forms, decoration, and uses as well as the social aspects wherein he touched on the division of labor, specialization, status and training of potters including the patterns of distribution.

Chiong (1974) hypothesized that it is also possible

that the methods of manufacture used by contemporary potters are associated with the early methods of the past indicating cultural continuity which could be a part of a long chain of cultural pottery tradition that changed very slowly through the years. It is also possible, according to Solheim (1964), that from form and decoration, modern Filipino potters' products could be equated with a specific prehistoric potter. Chiong's paper is designed to produce a specific body of ethnographic data - a survey of contemporary lowland Filipino earthenware industries - that would directly be applicable to a range of archaeological problems in the Philippines and elsewhere. It also hopes to aid future archaeological research by identifying the different types of earthenware and possibly determining the methods of manufacture of prehistoric potteries which appear to have changed little in technique (Scheans: 1977, 1968).

The arrival of trade ceramics from South China, Vietnam and Thailand literally replaced the Filipino-made earthenwares that were used for rituals (Chiong: 1974, Fox: 1976, Evangelista: 1965, Peralta: 1982, Jocano: 1975). Locally-made products were thus restricted to the unattractive, crude and simple articles, purely utilitarian in nature.

THE SOCIAL NETWORK

Iguig is a very small town within the jurisdiction of Cagayan province, Northern Philippines. Cagayan is 487 kilometers from Manila and is linked with regular commercial buses and airflights.

Iguig was founded by Rev. Fr. Ambrosio de la Madre de Dios on December 26, 1607 though the record shows that the church was founded or established in 1604 (B & R, 31:273). One point that is worth mentioning regarding the construction of the church is that bricks used were locally manufactured in the nearby sitios of Salamagui, Ajat and Nattanzan. Prior to the coming of the Spaniards in the Cagayan area, the people were already engaged in pottery industry.

The group inhabiting the Iguig settlement had been variously called Itawes, Itawit, Itawi, Itawiq, Itavez and Itabes (Llamzon: 1978). The most common term applied and accepted by the people themselves and in the ethnographic literature is Itawis which is also used to refer to the language of the group.

The area is generally open savannah with patches of trees scattered along the road within the community. Rice

fields are found mostly near the settlement, as are the vegetable gardens. Rice is the main staple, with corn substituting it sometimes as a secondary staple. Fish abound in the river and streams, and could easily be caught, while the supply of meat for food is always available since a majority of the people raise domesticated animals for this purpose.

The municipality of Iguig is composed of 20 barrios and Atulu, the subject area, is the only barrio that is presently engaged in the traditional pottery industry. Presently, there are 129 households in Atulu, of which 79 or 61% are involved in pottery manufacture, while 50 or 39% generally are in pottery production (Cuevas: 1981).

In the study of any social network in a given social system, the discussion of its kinship system is necessary in order to find out what linkages are involved in order to allow a particular system to work without changing the nature of the network. The Atulu potters view the function of kinship (unconsciously or consciously) according to how they have been religiously exercising it since time immemorial. To them kinship maintains stability and order in their society. It also provides the individual with some sort of psychological defense in the thought that during crises there are people on whom he could count. And lastly, any one borne into this network of kinship relationships assumes a status that gradually internationalizes his role through the socialization and education imposed, for the most part, by people around him.

The family may be the smallest unit in society, but it is the most fundamental and the most basic, constituting as it does the very foundation of the community (Jocano: 1984). The basic units or building blocks of Philippine social organization are the elementary family which includes the father, mother, and children. It also includes the bilaterally extended family which embraces all relatives of the father and the mother (Fox:n.d.). In kin relationships terms are applied to safeguard one's standing in the society. Breaking and bypassing this terminology may result in social ostracism or misunderstanding on the part of the interacting parties.

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF THE POTTERS AND THEIR LEARNING PROCESS

General consideration suggests that the pottery learning process developed as man started understanding his physical environment. He learned to manipulate things

that nature offered. As this process moved onward, his adaptation became pronounced to the extent that he masterminded the creation of tools and utensils for his everyday needs. Thus the simple utilization of clay that triggered the development of an extensive ceramic technology tells us a story of technological progress. When we look at a piece of pottery today, the evidence of the intelligence which man used to handle materials and his understanding of their potentials become clear. There is a limitation of course when we look far back into its context because as we see a product we could not disregard the fact that the properties of the pottery are affected by the quality of available ceramic materials. We come to accept that no matter how intelligent and skillful a potter is, he is limited by the available natural resources.

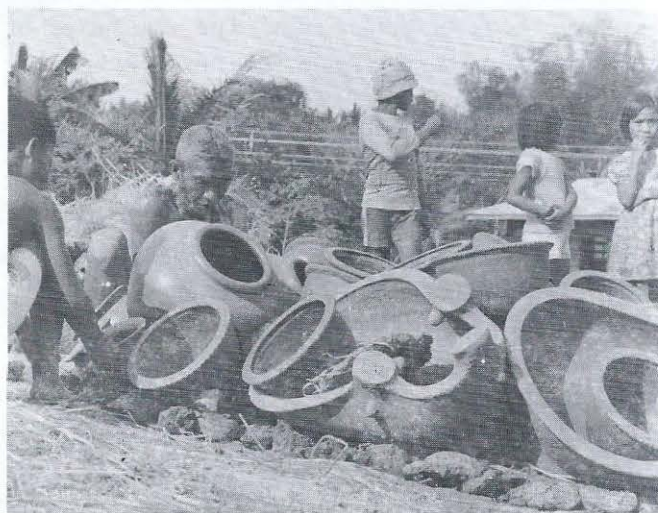
Any one attempting to embark on the ceramic industry has to be properly oriented on this traditional concept, together with the standards and preferences. Only then shall he understand and appreciate the whys and wherefors of the workmanship and avoid the trails and errors of production.

Presently, two springs of procedural learning process exist in Atulu. First is the involvement of the mother who is the expert potter and the interested daughter or any relative residing in the household. Another is that of the mother-in-law (a residence of Atulu) and the daughter-in-law relationship. These are cases when sons of potters marry outsiders who are eventually brought back to live in the community. As a general rule, the new in-law begins to adapt and learn things that would benefit herself, her new family, and most specially her husband's family.

The mother-and-daughter learning process has been noted as the most common and effective method in creating good work force in the household. Informants believe that the method of imparting skill to the daughter is one of the oldest practice observed in their ceramic tradition.

In the above process, as the child grows, she is encouraged to give a hand in any household undertaking. Since the household activity is geared towards pottery production, the child develops a liking as he experiences the processes of the family's effort to augment income for everyday survival. Upon reaching adolescence and puberty, she has accumulated enough observation and experience to enable herself to transform her ideas about ceramic technology into practice. Only then does the mother give her all-out support to teach the child the rudimentary process of the technology. As a point of clarification, the

potters in Atulu, do not force their children to engage as full-time potters, though they insist that the children know the mechanics of the technology. My own survey shows that in a household with eleven members, two active potters could be found. A general average of two potters in each household has been established.



A father and son team preparing and sticking the ready to fire pots. Children on the background are always found snooping around this stage if not working in their respective households.

As said earlier, the traditional technique and style are imparted only to the interested child in the family or to a relative living within the household. Full attention is given by the potter to the child as soon as she sits down with her and starts working with her materials. This process becomes routinized up to the time when the potter is certain that she could leave the child alone to work her way. According to my informants, generally the new practitioner learns the complete method usually between the ages of 12 to 21 years.

The last type of learning process is the relationship between the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law. In this situation, the method of learning is accelerated according to the daughter-in-law's initiative and motivation. The Atulu group of practitioners usually look to the new member in the household not merely as an economic asset but also for social and behavioral stability. In the rural community, the context regarding the role playing of in-laws is very complicated considering that in the Philippine society the word of the in-law is given more weight than that of his or her own parents.

For any household kinship or family ties play an important role in the society and culture of the community. It is a common practice that any male member marrying an outsider is required by tradition to settle with his parents' household, or within the community. Although the practice prevails, some couples leave the community upon saving some money needed for their own house construction in a place of their own choice. Again, this trend does not hold true in a situation where a piece of the family landholding in the community is given to the couple so that they can build their own house. Nevertheless, while their own house has not yet materialized, the couple live under the roof of the husband's parents. During this stage, as a matter of convenience, the wife now gives her all-out support to be accepted and integrated into the core of the close family ties in the household. As her husband works to earn a living, the wife sees to it that she offers a hand, especially when it is geared towards generating or augmenting income.

In this social process, the daughter-in-law ventures to learn the ceramic technology. This is not to say that she accepted to embrace the learning process disregarding any other option that she alone knows. As a new member of the community, she wants to develop the trust of the people, and this could only be achieved by engaging in this particular work where she could attain a better profile in the community. As a homeostatic mechanism in the household, she submits herself to whatever endeavor the family is undertaking. Unless she observes properly the above indicators of a healthy relationship, the confidence of everybody in the family will not be cemented completely.

The learning process of pot-making is not only confined to women but is extended to the male line in the household. Presently, there is a distinction of vessel specialization along the sexual lines. All informants point out that there are vessels that are exclusively made by female potters while some are produced by male potters.

Of some interest is the number of male potters in the community. Their presence is due to the fact that male potters are needed in producing big vessels. This task may again be compared to other contemporary potters who delegate this task to the male potters. It is noteworthy to mention that female potters are in charge of producing small and medium size vessels. It is only when the males are pre-occupied in the farm or other work that the women also make the big ones. We see here a specialization along the lines of sex in vessel-type productions.

Regardless of educational attainment the Atulu practitioners are still dictated upon by their attitudes and

beliefs regarding supernatural influences. This is common among the traditional potters of the world. It is an assumption that experiences in the belief system affect their development. It is not surprising that potters attribute accidents to supernatural causes and have a variety of taboos with regard to the ceramic production.

Maher (1981) while doing fieldwork in the Bugnay District, Ifugao, stated that in transporting the raw clay omens must be considered. He added thus: "if their path is crossed by a bird called *ido*, or a snake, or if an *ido*, is heard to cry rapidly, the venture must be postponed. If, on the other hand, the red bird cries only three times, it is a sign that the trip will go well and the pots may be made without damage" (1981:229). Longacre also pointed out in his study with the Kalinga potters that "if a pot breaks in the house it is taken to the midden on the north side of the community and carefully placed under a tree or bush. They do so because they believe that a pot has a spirit too" (n.d.:64). These beliefs do not only hold true with Filipino potters, the behavior is universal. Whenever possible, the social scientist plays a very important role in noting or analyzing this mechanism as perceived by his informants. As originally narrated by the informants, the following accounts are some of their beliefs associated with pottery manufacture :

1. Most of the villagers, especially the pottery practitioners, believe that all places are inhabited by different sets of spirits. They classify them into good and evil. In the Atulu belief system the more commonly mentioned among the two are the evil spirits. As a practice, they believe that the clay source in Atulu is inhabited by evil spirits, and in order not to offend them a sacrifice is performed. This ritual is usually done by the potter when opening a new clay source. An invocation of the spirit is said while a small pot with coins and clay is buried on the spot intended to gather the clay. As interpreted by the potters themselves, the prayer enhances the quality of the clay while the pot is the mediator between the evil spirits and the potter for appeasement to spare the latter from any ill fate.

2. In the learning stage, the beginner usually undergoes a right of passage. The process is performed in order that when working with the clay, any remains or spells from its owner (the malevolent spirit) are completely eliminated. To break the spell the beginner is required to eat a mixture of clay and rice cakes. Non-compliance with this ritual will result in continuous breakage of pots and failing health on the part of the new practitioner.

3. Laughing at a beginner is discouraged because the insult will result in producing bad articles and create a large number of breakage on the pots.

4. A conceiving potter must refrain from touching any raw material and working in the production of pots. Though the pot is not affected, it is common belief that the child in the womb becomes the recipient of influences which is attributed to the two elements needed in the production of pottery: water and clay. According to the informants, constant working with water while shaping the pot creates coldness in the nerves of the potter's hands and this is transmitted to the womb. Upon reaching the womb, the cold creates physiological effect on the child. The clay, as said earlier, is inhabited by spirits. To avoid the chance of allowing the child to be possessed by spirits, she must refrain from any work in the production of potteries. After the birth of the child, the mother rests for several months not only to recuperate but also to give her adequate time to take care of the child and to protect him from the forces of evil spirits. One should not be surprised to see a child with some amulets or charms pinned onto his clothes to ward off evil forces.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

As presented in this paper, I have given the reader a micro level concept of the psychology of the Atulu potters' organizational set up and how they behave towards



In the absence of the husband the wife performs the task of pounding the clay to achieve its plasticity and porosity. The pregnant woman on the left, an in law, is discouraged from joining any clay activity. This is a practice that is religiously observed.

this. One will notice that social controls exist in order not to break the relationship between the close family ties and the spiritual world. Again, all the social mechanisms that bind the community, boils down into the people's choice of embracing and perpetuating their tradition

What has this tradition to do with the community and the people?. As an outsider's point of view, based on the premise of the ethnic data I have gathered and solicited from the potters, tradition is the integrating factor that dictates their relationship in organizing the family units of their common good and legitimately relate this to the larger system in the overall organization which is the community.

As we went through this paper, we saw the family as the agent involved in solidifying their kindred system and forcing the foundation of the community as conceived from generation to generation.

Although change is continual, the Atulu potters still maintain the force in preserving their tradition, customs and beliefs. Interviews with non-potters always indicated that pottery manufacture is a dying industry but this statement does not hold true in the traditional pottery making. Despite unfavourable factors such as low prestige in work and income and the feeling that the work is messy, the majority of potters do not abandon their work.

In conclusion, the institutionalization of social relations is the determining criterion that characterizes the Atulu traditional system as distinct in nature. As stressed by Firth (1951) in his **Elements of Social Organization**. "... any attempt in the systematic ordering of social organization is expressed by acts of choice and decision." He further emphasized thus; "... room for variation from what has happened is apparently similar to the circumstances in the past. Time enters here. The situation before the exercise of choice is different from that afterwards..." Time enters also as a factor in the development of the implications of decision and consequent action. Structural forms set a precedent and provide a limitation to the range of...alternatives that make for variability. A person chooses, consciously or unconsciously, which course he will follow. His decision will affect the future structural alignment."

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An enterprise of mother and in-laws working and sharing efforts in the firing of pots, a very common scene in the community.

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