

**REVIVING THE HANUNUO AND BUHID MANGYAN SYLLABIC SCRIPTS
OF THE PHILIPPINES**

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Students of my era were taught that long before the Spanish conquistadors came in 1521, the inhabitants of the islands had numerous traditions and trade relations with other neighboring Asian countries. However, no teacher ever said that when the Spaniards came to colonize the islands the natives already had a system of writing. In fact, in the early 1600s, Fr. Pedro Chirino, SJ (1604) claimed that there was barely a man, and much less a woman, who cannot read and write in letters proper to the Island of Manila. Still, most Filipinos today don't even know that historical documents, archeological artifacts, and the discovery of the ancient Philippine scripts, have proven that Filipinos already possessed an established system of writing before the 16th century. But this unique mark of a flourishing civilization – literacy – is neither well known nor appreciated by my fellow Filipinos. This is why I am passionate about my work at the Mangyan Heritage Center.

But I am getting ahead of my story. Let us go back to the 1600s when Spanish friars risked their lives and traveled halfway around the world to save souls for their God. While living in the islands, they documented over a dozen pre-Spanish syllabic scripts. This eventually led to the publication of the *Doctrina Christiana* in the year 1593 as part of their mission of Christianization. Thinking that the script was the same all over the islands, the friars wrote this book using the Tagalog syllabic script called *baybayin* (Meyer, Schadenberg, & Foy, 1895). Unbeknownst to them, several regions had their own syllabic scripts with distinct differences: the Ilocanos and the Pangasinenses in the North, the Kapampangans in Central Luzon, The Mangyans of Mindoro in Southern Luzon, the Tagbanuas and Palaw-ans of Palawan Island in the West, the Visayans, and the other ethnolinguistic groups who did not mix much with each other. Even indigenous peoples from the same island have their respective Hanunuo Mangyan

and Buhid Mangyan scripts. This is why the Mangyan Heritage Center accepts this challenge of reviving these two endangered scripts.

Mangyan is the collective name for the eight distinct indigenous groups living in the Island of Mindoro, with an estimated population of close to 100,000 or nearly 10% of the total population of the island (Census, 2010). Mindoro is the seventh largest island in the Philippines with its total land area of 10,572 km², divided into two provinces, Oriental and Occidental Mindoro. It is around 140 km. southwest of Manila. The lowlanders drove the peace-loving Mangyans to the central mountainous regions of the island covering both provinces since the island was divided into East and West only in 1950. Each indigenous Mangyan group has its own distinctive language and cultural traditions, though only the Buhid and Hanunuo Mangyans who live on the Southern part of Mindoro have their own syllabic writing system.

Explorations on Philippine Scripts and the Discovery of the Mangyan Scripts.

Most Southeast Asian scripts including the Mangyan scripts originated from the Brahmi script of India. Brahmi script types emerged due to the rise of Buddhism and its expansion to neighboring countries in Asia (Postma, 1974) before the age of discovery and colonization.

The relationship between Mangyan and other Southeast Asian syllabic scripts is evident in the 1.) system of indicating vowel change, 2.) writing material used and the direction of writing, 3.) shape of the characters, and 4.) certain typographical peculiarities. One notable resemblance is the presence of diacritic marks which denote phonetic change in a character (e.g., short vowel “a”, short vowel “e/i”, “o/u”, etc.). These marks are placed near the character or attached to it. In

the case of the Hanunuo-Mangyan script, the only diacritic marks used are those expressing short vowel “e/i” and “o/u” (Postma, 1974).

Buhid	e/i 𑀓	o/u 𑀔	be/bi 𑀕	bo/bu 𑀖	ke/ki 𑀗	ko/ku 𑀘	de/di 𑀙	do/du 𑀚
Hanunuo	e/i 𑀓	o/u 𑀔	be/bi 𑀕	bo/bu 𑀖	ke/ki 𑀗	ko/ku 𑀘	de/di 𑀙	do/du 𑀚

Figure 1: Samples of the Buhid and Hanunuo Mangyan syllabic scripts with diacritic marks.

900 A.D. The discovery of the LCI.

The Laguna Copperplate Inscription (LCI) is the earliest known document that originated from the Philippines. This 900 A.D. document contains a mixture of Sanskrit, Old Javanese, Old-Malay, and Old-Tagalog languages. Discovered in 1989 at Lumbang River at Laguna de Bay, it was deciphered a year later by Antoon Postma, a Dutch anthropologist and an expert on Philippine scripts. According to Postma (1992), the LCI is a legal certificate of debt acquittal incurred by a high-ranking person.

On the other hand, the oldest bamboo artifacts existing today bearing the Mangyan scripts are only more than a century old. This is because indigenous peoples used perishable materials in writing. The Mangyans used to write on *lukas* - bamboo containers for tobacco leaves, lime and other sundry items. The script is also etched on their bow and arrow, traditional musical instruments (e.g., guitar, violin, etc.); and woven on their baskets made of palm leaves. It can likewise be seen on the bamboo posts and walls of their home or on bamboo plants along the trail (Postma, 1971).

17th Century: Diminishing use of IP scripts.

When the Spaniards introduced the Roman alphabet in the 17th century, it took less than a century for the natives to give up their syllabic scripts in favor of the more popular alphabet. However, historical documents attest that as late as 1792, the old syllabic writing was still in use by the Mangyans of Southeastern Mindoro. Official documents stored in Manila bore their signatures in the syllabic script (Meyer, Schadenberg and Foy, 2000).

Out of all the regions and the 110 indigenous peoples (IPs) groups in the Philippines, only the Hanunuo and Buhid Mangyan of Mindoro, together with the Tagbanua and Palaw-an of Palawan Island, kept alive their pre-Spanish syllabic scripts. The preservation of their scripts was largely due to their isolation from the Christianized Filipinos. To recognize the priceless contribution of these indigenous groups in preserving an important intangible cultural treasure of the Filipino people, and to prevent its eventual extinction, these were declared as National Cultural Treasures in 1997. Two years later, on October 6, 1999, they were inscribed in the Memory of the World Registers of UNESCO (United Nations Scientific and Cultural Organization) (Postma, 2002).

Late 1900s. Unearthed inscriptions.

In 1894, a series of explorations on the island of Mindoro was conducted by Dr. A. Schadenberg, with assistance of local officials in Mindoro. He collected numerous bamboo tubes engraved with Mangyan inscriptions and deposited them in the Dresden Museum in Germany. These bamboo inscriptions were thoroughly studied by W. Foy and his findings were published in 1895

Since the Mangyans engraved their traditional poems, called *ambahan*, on bamboo plants, tubes and lime containers, researchers and scholars were able to study the system of writing practiced by these indigenous peoples.

Dr. Jose Rizal and his interest in the Mangyan Scripts.

It is worth mentioning that no less than the Philippine national hero, Dr. Jose Rizal received an original copy of the 1895 Meyer, et.al. publication while on exile in Dapitan in 1896. It was given as a gift, most probably from Meyer with whom he had been corresponding at that time. Rizal expressed interest to conduct further studies and to learn the script based on his letter to his Austrian friend and Filipinologist Ferdinand Blumentritt, who had written documents about Mindoro. Unfortunately, this did not materialize because Rizal was executed before the end of 1896. In the year 2000, after more than a century, this in-depth study on the Mangyan writings was translated into English by Postma (Meyer, Schadenberg and Foy, 2000).

1900s Continuous explorations on Mangyan scripts.

Another important documentation on the Mangyan scripts was conducted by Major Fletcher Gardner, an American stationed in the Philippines from 1904 to 1905. Gardner collected hundreds of bamboo tubes and slats engraved with Mangyan and Tagbanua inscriptions. Dozens of these, mostly containing the Mangyan *ambahan*, were transcribed by two Hanunuo Mangyans and translated into Tagalog and English with the help of Don Ildefonso and Don Eusebio Maliwanag – both residents of Mansalay, Oriental Mindoro.

The Gardner collections are now preserved at the Library of Congress in Washington D.C., Witte Museum in Texas, University of Michigan, and other places. More Mangyan and Tagbanua bamboo inscriptions were also collected by Gardner in 1905 through the request of E.E. Ayer from Chicago who was then in the Philippines. The Ayer Collection of bamboo inscriptions are now housed at the Newberry Library in Chicago (Gardner and Maliwanag, 1939).

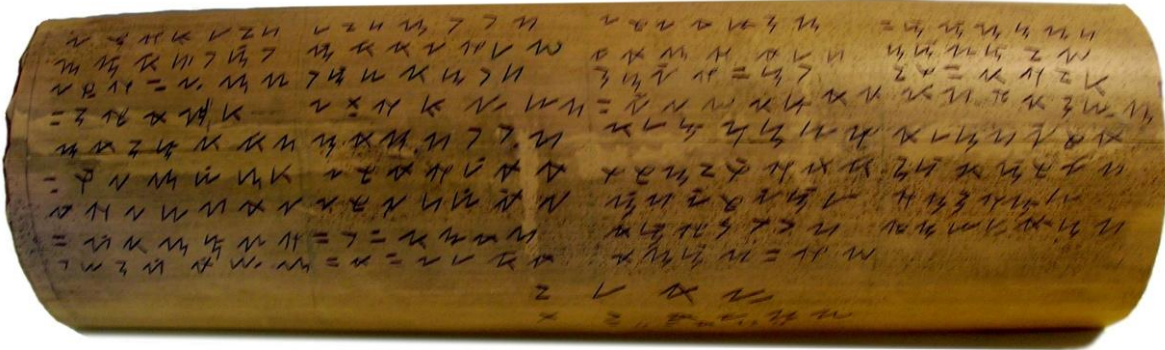


Figure 2: Photo of one of Gardner's Bamboo Collection stored at the Library of Congress, Washington D.C., taken on September, 2005 by E. Catapang.

In 1965 Antoon Postma, a Dutch missionary priest from the Society of the Divine Word who arrived in the Philippines in 1958, decided to live in Panaytayan, an upland Hanunuo Mangyan village in Oriental Mindoro. Being an anthropologist and linguist, he conducted an in-depth documentation on the Mangyan scripts and the *ambahan*. He became a fluent speaker of the Hanunuo Mangyan language and extensively studied the archaic language of the *ambahan*. He was able to transcribe and translate into English the *ambahans* inscribed on bamboos.

21st Century. The youth and the Mangyan Scripts.

Today, the Hanunuo and Buhid Mangyan syllabic scripts, including the *ambahan*, are in danger of vanishing. The younger generation is no longer interested in their indigenous way of writing, nor learning the *ambahan* language. Only the elders know how to write in their original scripts, and few are composing new *ambahans*.

Current Mechanisms Utilized to Promote Mangyan Scripts Writing.

The introduction of the Primer to Mangyan Script.

With the aim of keeping alive the Mangyan syllabic scripts among the younger generation, Postma wrote a *Primer to Mangyan Script* in 1986. This served as resource material in teaching the Mangyan script - also known as Surat Mangyan - to public elementary pupils in Mangyan villages. The reproduction of the *Primer* was made possible through the support of Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA).

Adopting pamudpod and some alterations.

Postma introduced the use of a “cutting off” symbol called *pamudpod* to solve the inherent problem of the final consonant in a syllable. The hooked-shaped sign is similar in form and function to the one used in Balinese and Javanese scripts as evidenced in the Laguna Copperplate Inscription of 900 A.D.

In the traditional way of writing - without using a *pamudpod*, the word “baha” (flood) in Mangyan script could be read as “bahag” (loincloth) or “bahay” (house). In the figure below, the word “Mangyan,” in the traditional open-syllable way of writing consists of two characters, “ma” and “ya.” The word “maya” could also be read as “*mayad*” (Mangyan word for good) instead of “*Mangyan*”. If this is written with *pamudpod*, four characters are utilized – “ma”, “nga”, “ya” and “na”. Thus, according to Postma (1986), the use of *pamudpod* to cut off the extra vowel “a” will guarantee the faultless spelling of the Mangyan language, or any Philippine language.



Figure 3: The word “Mangyan” in the open-syllable traditional way of writing and the Postma introduced way of writing using a pamudpod

In addition Postma, together with a few Mangyan script writers at that time, decided to adopt the Buhid’s “ra” character because the Hanunuo character for the “ra” is similar to the “la”. The main reason is to avoid confusion when the script is taught to the youth (Postma 1986).

Mangyan Scripts curriculum inclusion.

In 1987 the Mangyan Mission, a church-based non-government organization in Oriental Mindoro, established the Mangyan Education Center. As a result, the teaching of Mangyan culture and the Hanunuo Mangyan syllabic script became part of the curriculum of this formal secondary school. Hanunuo Mangyan students in the surrounding villages and other municipalities avail of this formal secondary education exclusively for them. Volunteers and missionaries taught the Surat Mangyan in formal and non-formal schools founded and supported by the Mangyan Mission in several Hanunuo Mangyan villages. Moreover, the Mangyan Mission head, Fr. Ewald Dinter, SVD, a German missionary priest, strongly advocates the propagation of the script among Mangyan students. He makes sure that all students staying at the Mt. Tabor Mangyan Formation Center, a dormitory in Calapan City for college students from the different Mangyan tribes, learn the Mangyan scripts before they graduate in college.

The Case of the Buhid Script.

On the other hand, studies on the Buhid writing system proved that the Northern Buhid and Southern Buhid use different syllabic scripts. The Southern Buhids have similar syllabic script with the Hanunuo Mangyans because they are in geographical proximity to each other, unlike the Northern Buhids whose script is distinct from the Hanunuo Mangyan script. Postma’s documentation of the Buhid and Hanunuo Mangyan scripts shows that the characters are generally angular in shape. However, there are indications that a more rounded shape was in use at an earlier stage. The reason for the angular shape of the contemporary Mangyan scripts is the use of bamboo as writing material which is abundant in Mangyan communities. It is difficult to make carved characters while using a knife to inscribe on bamboos (Postma, 1974).

	Northern Buhid		Hanunuo & Southern Buhid			Northern Buhid		Hanunuo & Southern Buhid	
	Old	New	Old	New		Old	New	Old	New
A	ʌ	ʌ	ʌ	ʌ	MANGYAN SCRIPTS OF MINDORO	Na	ㄩ	ㄩ	ㄩ
i	ʌ	ʌ	ʌ	ʌ		Ni	ㄩ	ㄩ	ㄩ
o	ʌ	ʌ	ʌ	ʌ		No	ㄩ	ㄩ	ㄩ
Ba	ʌ	ʌ	ʌ	ʌ		NGa	ㄩ	ㄩ	ㄩ
Bi	ʌ	ʌ	ʌ	ʌ		NGi	ㄩ	ㄩ	ㄩ
Bo	ʌ	ʌ	ʌ	ʌ		NGo	ㄩ	ㄩ	ㄩ
Da	ʌ	ʌ	ʌ	ʌ		Pa	ㄩ	ㄩ	ㄩ
Di	ʌ	ʌ	ʌ	ʌ		Pi	ㄩ	ㄩ	ㄩ
Do	ʌ	ʌ	ʌ	ʌ		Po	ㄩ	ㄩ	ㄩ
Ga	ʌ	ʌ	ʌ	ʌ		Ra	ㄩ	ㄩ	ㄩ
Gi	ʌ	ʌ	ʌ	ʌ		Ri	ㄩ	ㄩ	ㄩ
Go	ʌ	ʌ	ʌ	ʌ		Ro	ㄩ	ㄩ	ㄩ
Ha	ʌ	ʌ	ʌ	ʌ		Sa	ㄩ	ㄩ	ㄩ
Hi	ʌ	ʌ	ʌ	ʌ		Si	ㄩ	ㄩ	ㄩ
Ho	ʌ	ʌ	ʌ	ʌ		So	ㄩ	ㄩ	ㄩ
Ka	ʌ	ʌ	ʌ	ʌ		Ta	ㄩ	ㄩ	ㄩ
Ki	ʌ	ʌ	ʌ	ʌ		Ti	ㄩ	ㄩ	ㄩ
Ko	ʌ	ʌ	ʌ	ʌ		To	ㄩ	ㄩ	ㄩ
La	ʌ	ʌ	ʌ	ʌ		Wa	ㄩ	ㄩ	ㄩ
Li	ʌ	ʌ	ʌ	ʌ		Wi	ㄩ	ㄩ	ㄩ
Lo	ʌ	ʌ	ʌ	ʌ	Wo	ㄩ	ㄩ	ㄩ	
Ma	ʌ	ʌ	ʌ	ʌ	Ya	ㄩ	ㄩ	ㄩ	
Mi	ʌ	ʌ	ʌ	ʌ	Yi	ㄩ	ㄩ	ㄩ	
Mo	ʌ	ʌ	ʌ	ʌ	Yo	ㄩ	ㄩ	ㄩ	

Figure 4: Northern Buhid and Hanunuo Mangyan Scripts, (Postma,1968). From *Annotated Mangyan Bibliography 1570-1988* ((p.218), by A. Postma, 1988, . Mansalay, Oriental Mindoro, Phils.: M.A.R.C.

Three years after the National Museum declared the Mangyan scripts as National Cultural Treasures, it implemented a project on the documentation, preservation and propagation of the Buhid syllabic script. The project was conceptualized to consist of three phases for one year, namely: 1) documentation of the Buhid syllabic script and mapping of the script writers, 2) teaching of the script, and 3) holding of a syllabic script writing contest. The first two phases were undertaken but fell short of the target goals and the third phase was not implemented because of financial constraints and other reasons. Thus, the propagation of the Buhid script was not sustained (National Museum of the Philippines, 2000).

MHC is born.

In 2000, Filipino American Jesuit volunteer Quint Delgado Fansler joined hands with Postma and Dinter to establish the Mangyan Heritage Center, Inc. (MHC). This non-profit private organization primarily aims to safeguard, promote and keep alive the rich and distinct cultural heritage of the indigenous peoples of Mindoro. The MHC maintains a comprehensive collection of documents on the Mangyans built upon the collection of Postma from the Mangyan Research Center (MRC) in the mountain village of Panaytayan. To make it more accessible to researchers, the MHC library is located in Calapan City, the provincial capital. For the past 13 years, the MHC has worked to raise awareness on the Mangyan and to revive the Mangyan syllabic scripts and the *ambahan*. It has also fully digitized its collection of Mangyan documents, including more than 20,000 recorded Mangyan poems and over 5,000 photographs depicting Mangyan life and culture.

Updated Mangyan Script Primer.

Two years after MHC's establishment, the Primer to the Hanunuo Mangyan Script was updated and 2,000 copies were printed and distributed in Mangyan schools. In 2013, the Primer to the Hanunuo Mangyan Script was totally revised and distributed in the same schools including newly opened Hanunuo Mangyan schools.

Community consultations and validation.

Prior to the revision of the Primer, samples were gathered and community consultations and validations were conducted with the Hanunuo Mangyan Tribal Organization - *Pinagkausahan Hanunuo sa Daga Ginurang* (PHADAG). Eventually, the elders who are also the script writers, agreed that the original Hanunuo Mangyan “ra” character should be taught instead of the borrowed “ra” from the Buhid script. Still distinct from “la” and including the diacritic marks (*kudlit*) for the “re/ri” and “ro/tu,” this would avoid confusion of the pupils who will be learning the script. The use of the pamudpod to complete the final consonant in a syllable was unanimously approved for easier understanding by the Mangyan youth. The leaders also endorsed the use of the Primer in all Hanunuo Mangyan schools and encouraged the youth to learn the Surat Mangyan (Postma, 2013).

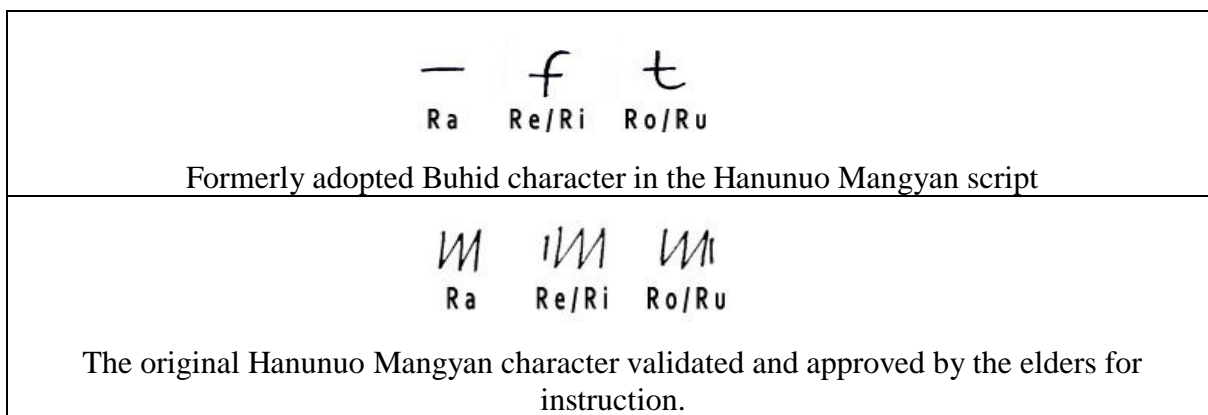


Figure 5: The Buhid and Hanunuo Mangyan “ra, re/ri, ro/ru”.

These participatory consultations with the PHADAG on updating the Surat Mangyan resulted in a strengthened partnership between the organization and the MHC. This also showed MHC'S cultural sensitivity and respect of their indigenous knowledge and culture, eventually leading to a more sustainable relationship with open communication and shared decision-making.

External support for Surat Mangyan propagation.

It is interesting to note the Mangyan elders' sincere desire to revive their script and their request that it be taught in more public elementary schools in the upland Hanunuo Mangyan communities. Following this request, the MHC tapped Mangyan volunteers to teach the Surat Mangyan on a regular basis in selected Hanunuo Mangyan schools starting in 2012. Mangyan cultural practices and the *ambahan* are integrated in the teaching of the Surat Mangyan. The teachers underwent workshops on indigenous teaching strategies and module-making.

This school-year 2013-2014 the script is being taught in 10 selected Hanunuo Mangyan schools with a total population of more than 2,000 pupils. This was made possible through the support of the National Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCCA), the Embassy of the United States of America in Manila and a local non-government organization, The Ala-Ala Foundation. In partnership with the Mangyan Mission and the Hanunuo Mangyan Peoples Organization-PHADAG, the Department of Education (DepEd) endorsed the teaching of the script from Grades One to Six for one hour per week. This is in line with the K to 12 Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education Program of the DepEd (Mangyan Heritage Center, 2013). It is also worth mentioning that the DepEd now gives importance to indigenous education through its newly created office - Indigenous Peoples Education Office (IPSEO). Thus, Indigenous

Knowledge, Systems and Practices (IKSP) are integrated into the curriculum of IP schools in the Philippines.

Apart from the external resources for Mangyan Script education, the MHC also recognizes the volunteerism and the skills of the culture bearers who now teach the syllabic script to the young Mangyans. Because their efforts are continuous and dedicated, today's Mangyan youth are now more interested and are gaining proficiency in script writing.

The Mangyan of Mindoro: Myth and Meaning travelling exhibit.

The MHC promotes the Surat Mangyan all over the country. A photo exhibit mounted by the MHC entitled "The Mangyan of Mindoro: Myth and Meaning" has travelled to over 60 educational institutions and museums nationwide since 2006. The exhibit tries to dispel common myths on the Mangyan, one of which is the belief that Mangyans are illiterate and uncivilized. This has been proven otherwise because they have their own writing system and a rich oral literature. A popular feature of the exhibit is writing one's name by using a laminated syllabic card with instructions on how to write in Hanunuo Mangyan script. MHC staff and trustees also lecture on the Surat Mangyan and *ambahan*. Mangyan crafts, books and T-shirts with Mangyan script design are also sold at the exhibits. Proceeds of which are for scholarships and MHC's culture related projects.

Gaining international recognition.

The Surat Mangyan and the *ambahan* were promoted in other countries as well. Two *ambahans* written in Surat Mangyan were featured in the Philippine pavilion at the World Expo in Aichi, Japan in 2005 with the theme Nature's Wisdom. The Surat Mangyan was side by side the

poem's translation in Japanese calligraphy at the façade of the Philippine pavilion (MHC, 2005). Likewise, in the 2008 World Expo in Zaragoza, Spain with the theme Water and Sustainable Development, three *ambahans* were also featured in the Philippine pavilion, in Spanish, English and Surat Mangyan. In both expos, the Philippine pavilion was awarded a gold prize for design (Mangyan Heritage Center, 2008).

Publication of ambahans in academic books.

Recently, two *ambahans* written in the Mangyan script with translations in Filipino and English were published in the Quest English Workbook for Grade 7 (Wright, et.al, 2013). Students all over the country who will be using this workbook will be able to learn indigenous poetry and the Mangyan syllabic script which have mutually existed for centuries. The inclusion of the two *ambahans* was made possible through the MHC's coordination with the publisher and the Hanunuo Mangyan Peoples Organization – PHADAG. The leaders gave their free, prior and informed consent (FPIC) for the publication. A benefit-sharing agreement was made between PHADAG and the publisher since the *ambahan* and the Mangyan scripts are intellectual properties of the Hanunuo Mangyans. The FPIC is required under the Indigenous Peoples Rights Act of 1997, also known as Republic Act 8371, to recognize, protect and promote the rights of some 110 IP groups in the Philippines with a total population of 11 million (National Commission for Indigenous Peoples, 2014) or roughly 12% of the 92 million population of the country (Census 2010).

Other MHC undertakings.

On the entrance wall of the Museo Pambata in Manila is a huge map of the Philippines made of tiles painted by various individuals who made donations to this children's museum. Approximately where Mindoro is located are nine tiles which feature Mangyan *ambahans* written in the Surat Mangyan with decorations. Museum docents point out these tiles to visitors since they are the biggest grouping and the most attractive. .

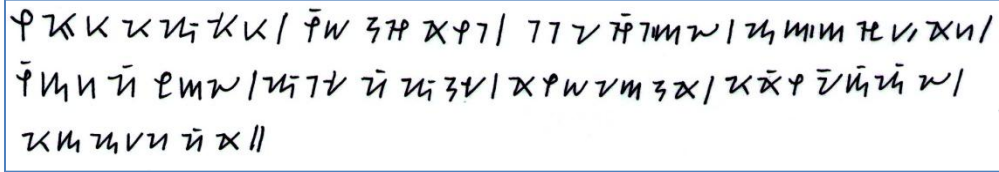
To further promote the Mangyan scripts, efforts were undertaken by the MHC for the inclusion of the Surat Mangyan in signage in Mindoro but still subject to consultations and approval from the Mangyan leaders and elders. Some establishments have already included the Surat Mangyan in their signage.

The MHC website, www.mangyan.org has a separate page with selected *ambahans* in Surat Mangyan with Filipino and English translations.

At present, the MHC is conducting a mapping of the script writers among the Northern Buhid. The leaders and the elders want the Buhid script to be validated and approved by them and a primer to the Buhid script developed. They also hope that their syllabic script will be taught in Buhid schools one day.

Much more has to be done to keep both the scripts and the *ambahan* alive. Traditionally, parents and elders do not teach their children directly. They wait until the child asks to be taught. Today, the Mangyan elders are now more open to the propagation of their rich cultural heritage particularly their literary heritage. Thus, there is much hope that this *ambahan* - one of the two, written in the living indigenous script of the Hanunuo Mangyans at the façade of the Philippine

pavilion at the World Expo in Aichi Japan in 2005 – as well as the more than 20,000 documented ambahans - will be kept alive for the future generation.



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<i>Katpungan pagsudungan</i>	At this hour of the dark night
<i>Kita una magkaban</i>	we are still together now
<i>Babaw apnig bariwan</i>	on the woven sleeping-mat.
<i>Saruray no humagan</i>	But when the sun rises soon,
<i>Kiblagan yi kuramwan</i>	and the stars become detached,
<i>Sulbadan yi suudan</i>	our bond might break up too.
<i>Magkabta araw uman</i>	When we'll ever meet again,
<i>Pamidkan dimlisig wan</i>	it is not with mortal eyes,
<i>Patlay saghaya yi man</i>	but the eye-sight of the soul.

Figure 6: Ambahan 237. From *Mangyan Treasures*, (p. 126), by A. Postma, 2005 (3rd ed.), Oriental Mindoro, Phils: Mangyan Heritage Center.

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