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Basi a Nakaisigudan: Axiological Relevance of Basi in the Present-day lives of Piddigeños

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ABSTRACT

Basi is a fermented wine extracted from sugarcane that is prominent in the province of Ilocos Norte. The product is particularly known in Piddig, the town where Basi Revolt started during the Spanish Regime. This study focused into the axiological relevance of basi in the present-day lives of Piddigeños. This ethnographic research also aimed to explore the historical evolution of basi in Piddig; understand and identify the challenges or threats to the tradition of basi in Piddig, and obtain insights from the Piddigeños about the future of basi. The research instrument revolved around (1) the production and evolution of basi; (2) life events where basi is being served; (3) the relevance of basi in the future; (4) threats and challenges to basi; (5) perception of the young generation to the traditional alcoholic beverage; (6) values that can be derived from personal experiences with basi. Using the thematic method of analysing data, results revealed that the axiological relevance of basi for Piddigeños are manifested in different dimensions of the society that includes (1) intergenerational transmission; (2) production process continuation; (3) cultural identity; (4) social cohesion; and (5) economic livelihood. Basi, being a cultural symbol, should be given importance such that the government and local should initiate its continuation through collaboration.

INTRODUCTION

Basi is one of the traditional alcoholic beverages of the Philippines, making it a promising industry in the country. Today, basi has evolved from a mere community beverage to an export quality product, as exemplified in some privately owned brands of basi from the various provinces of the Ilocos Region (Oyson, 2018). In 1521, Spanish colonizers took control of the entire archipelago making it the Philippine Islands. The following centuries were filled with conflicts and social unrest. The regulation of basi production instituted a monopoly in the production and sale of the beverage. The town of Piddig is considered as the center of basi making industry in Ilocos Norte, was the hardest hit town in the province. According to the study of Antonio (2014), Piddigeños and other Ilocanos have basi as one of the only few and free pleasures available to them. Making it a vital part of social gatherings such as the end of day's work, a celebration of birth, marriage, offerings to deities, funerals, and among others. The monopoly and banning of the production of basi by the locals was a major disruption to the Ilocano way of life. Today, basi is almost a dying industry due to the lack of makers and prominent knowledge on the said beverage. This study aims to look into the axiological relevance of basi in the present-day lives of Piddigeños. This study aims to explore the historical evolution of basi in Piddig, examine its present-day relevance, and understand the challenges and future prospects of the tradition. By delving into the axiological significance of basi, this research contributes to the preservation and promotion of cultural heritage in Piddig. It also provides insights for academic institutions and serves as a foundation for further studies on traditional alcoholic beverages and their cultural significance.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Basi is one of the traditional alcoholic beverages of the Philippines, making it a promising industry in the country. Today, basi has evolved from a mere community beverage to an export quality product, as exemplified in some privately owned brands of basi from the various provinces of the Ilocos Region (Oyson, 2018).

In 1521, Spanish colonizers took control of the entire archipelago making it the Philippine Islands. The following centuries were filled with conflicts and social unrest. The regulation of basi production instituted a monopoly in the production and sale of the beverage. The town of Piddig is considered as the center of basi making industry in Ilocos Norte, was the hardest hit town in the province.

Pedro Mateo and Saralogo Ambaristo led a revolt on September 16, 1807. The forces of Piddig led by Mateo and Ambaristo, marched down to the nearby towns of Laoag, San Nicolas, Paoay, Batac, Dingras, and Badoc. Setting out a victorious series of attacks on these towns moved the people to join their cause and rally behind them against the monopoly of the basi production. The force continued to march to Vigan, the center of government in the Ilocos region. Unknowingly, the Vigan troops were prepared and were deployed in the Bantaoay River located in San Ildefonso, two towns away from Vigan. The leaders of Vigan knew that the Bantaoay river features a deep water and took advantage of this feature as a natural barrier against the advancing rebel troops. The bolo, bows and arrows, and a few guns arming the rebels was no match for the arsenal of Vigan arming each soldier with a musket and six cannons. The river of Bantaoay was described to have turned red because of the bullets

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that fired against the rebels as they attempted to cross the river. Hundreds of bodies floated, resulting in nothing as simply, victory for the Vigan troops. The leaders of the rebellion were arrested and were pronounced guilty of sedition and rebellion and were sentenced to die by hanging and later on decapitation (Agoncillo, 2012).

The Basi Revolt was a unique revolt because it revolved around the Ilocano's love for basi threaded with their desire to be free from injustices and abuses of the Spaniards (Guerrero, 2017). Eventually, basi did not just become a beverage for Ilocanos but also a symbol of the resistance and the move for freedom against the Spaniards. After the events of the Basi Revolt, it took 81 years before the entire country banded together to free themselves from the oppression of the colonizers.

According to the study of Antonio (2014), Piddigeños and other Ilocanos have basi as one of the only few and free pleasures available to them. Making it a vital part of social gatherings such as end of day's work, celebration of birth, marriage, offerings to deities, funeral, and among others. The monopoly and banning of the production of basi by the locals was a major disruption to the Ilocano way of life, which the people of Piddig were more than willing to fight and die for.

The Spaniards stopped the locals from producing basi because they want to monopolize the industry which will benefit them more. In an interview with Mario Tejada, former Sangguniang Bayan Member of Piddig and a history enthusiast, narrated that locals were even prohibited to drink the most preserved basi. These are the few reasons on why Piddigeños were so angry. This act became detrimental to their livelihood and personal life.

Today, even with innovation and its best qualities, basi is almost a dying industry as exemplified by the low number of producers in the province, and the lack of sense of history and knowledge among the youth on basi, especially in the municipality of Piddig, the home of the basi, and the Basi Revolt.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Design

The study utilized an ethnographic research design. The ethnographic approach is a research method that involves observing and describing the culture of a specific group of people (Curry *et al.*, 2009). By using this approach, the researchers were able to achieve the purpose of their study by observing and identifying the common characteristics of the current situation. Data collected are through observations, and interviews, which are used to conclude how societies and individuals function (University of Virginia, 2024).

Locale of the Study

The study was conducted in the municipality of Piddig, mainly in the barangays of Mangitayag, Abucay, Tonoton, Dupitac, and Estancia. The identified municipality is the center for basi making industry in the province of Ilocos

Norte. The barangays are the few remaining barangays with actual producers of basi.

The study employed the purposive sampling technique, which is a non-probability sampling method chosen based on the characteristics of the population and the study's objectives (Mays, 2010). This method was utilized because there were a limited number of actual basi producers, individuals who use basi in their daily activities, and those who incorporate basi in ritualistic functions such as birth, marriage, and funeral ceremonies.

Data Gathering Procedure

Before the study commenced, the researchers sought the assistance of the barangay captains in identifying the producers in their respective jurisdictions. The barangay captains were also solicited for their permission to conduct the study in their barangays.

The study utilized a structured interview guide composed of six qualitative questions. The collection of data started with the transmittal of a letter of request to respondents. The research instrument revolves around (1) the production and evolution basi; (2) life events where basi is being served; (3) the relevance of basi in the future; (4) threats and challenges to the tradition of basi; (5) perception of the young generation to the tradition of basi; (6) values that can be derived from personal experiences with basi. The questions were translated into Ilokano (Ilokano language) during the interview session for easier contextualization. The researchers also sought permission from the respondents for an audio recording for the data gathering.

To gain a deeper understanding of the Ilocano responses, the researchers translated them in order to comprehend their narratives more effectively. In order to achieve the research objectives, the researchers conducted a thematic analysis to assess the significance of basi in the lives of the people from Piddig.

The data collected from the study utilized the 6-phase coding framework from Clarke and Braun (2013). The framework includes the following phases: (1) familiarization of data; (2) generation of codes; (3) combining codes into themes; (4) reviewing of themes; (5) determining significance of themes and; (6) reporting of findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The axiological relevance of basi for Piddigeños can be explained in different dimensions such as (1) intergenerational transmission; (2) production process continuation; (3) cultural identity; (4) social cohesion; and (5) economic livelihood. These themes were derived from the provided insights of the respondents through the use of codes in their responses.

Intergenerational Transmission

Customs are meant to be transmitted orally or via practice from one generation to the next. Intergenerational transmission refers to the transmission of cultural ideas

like values, beliefs, knowledges, and practices from one generation to another (Tam, 2015). This is particularly true for accepted norms within a group, like the proper way to produce basi. Different Piddigeños contend that preserving traditions guarantees societal continuity while also fostering socialization. The elder generations discussed their insights and experiences with basi production, emphasizing its historical significance. In the findings, it was emphasized that basi was the most popular liquor at the earlier times in Piddig, as indicated by the following responses:

Respondent 1

“Masintirko idi, masintir dagiti tattao idi, awan dagiti liquour, ad-adda nga ad-addo ti basi. Awan dagitay gin, mas adda ti basi ken tay suka. Ata, dayta unas idi ket (maaramid) a suka ken basi. Isu’t parparwaren dagiti agdapidapil.”

[I have observed before, and even other people, that there was no other kind of liquor available, basi was the prominent liquor available to us. Because sugarcane produces vinegar and basi.

Another respondent stated that technology has become a factor for the decline of the production of basi in the locality rendering it removed from the memory of the people.

Respondent 9

“Idi haan pay a sikat iti technology, nagaget a nga agaramid dagiti Piddigeños iti basi idi ununana a panawen. Ngem itan, no agdamagka no assino ti agararamid, awan maibaga iti taon. Uray pay agdamagka iti nagannak, awan agararamiden kasta iti sungbatda.”

[When technology is not yet widely used, Piddigeños make basi every time. But nowadays, people do not even know who among them makes basi. Even if you ask the elders, they would answer “no one makes it anymore.”] According to Gisela Trommsdorff (2008), transmission of culture is vital for the continuity of a society because connections between members of different generations allows the maintenance of practice and traditions over generations.

The intergenerational transmission of cultural practices, exemplified by the production of basi, is essential for preserving traditions and ensuring societal continuity in Piddig. Studies on intergenerational relations and cultural transmission highlight the significance of passing down values, beliefs, knowledge, and practices from one generation to the next (Trommsdorff, 2008). Elder generations in Piddig who have cherished and practiced basi production emphasize its historical importance as the predominant liquor of their era.

Production Process Continuation

The information gathered also provided insights into the basi manufacturing process. Dadapilan is used in the panagdapil process, which involves extracting sugarcane juice. Following the extraction process, the juice is boiled

in a big pot. They add unique elements such as samak (Macaranga tanarius) or binunga tree bark and leaves. Using the burnay (jars), it is fermented while being aged. Respondent 1 elaborated the juice extraction process wherein they said that the sugarcane stem will be put between the wooden extractor called dadapilan. After that, they will cook the extracted juice and with more processing, the juice will become either basi or molasses.

Respondent 1

“Agdapil, tay iserrekda ti unas idiay dadapilan, sadanto iluto tay bennal. Ilutodanton, tunukwan inggananton nga agbalin a basi. Tay basi mailuton sa tay bennalna. Mababayag nga mailuto tay tagapulot. Maipan to iti burnay tapnon agkaro.”

[The process of dapil is when the sugarcane is inserted into the mill to extract its juice. After which, this would be called the bennal, cooked in the large vat. The process of cooking tagapulot or molasses is longer. While the cooled bennal would be placed in ceramic jars to ferment to become basi.]

Similarly, respondent 2 shared the same process of making basi and molasses, but they added buyuboy or a polished coconut shell in fetching the fermented sugarcane juice. They also added that when the basi will turn into sugarcane vinegar if it is fermented longer than the common period of basi fermentation.

Respondent 2

“Mabaybayag ti proseso ti tagapulot ngem basi. Bennal metlang tay maluto, pagburekenda, ipapudotda, rekaduanda. Kalpasanna, makaluban ti usa ken maikan ti bulong ti samak. Kasta idi ti ubbingkami. Adda pay idi no ramananda, takwenda ti buyuboy.”

[The process of cooking tagapulot is longer than basi. The boiled extract of the sugarcane is both called bennal for the tagapulot and the basi. For the basi, they would heat the bennal, let it boil and add the other ingredients including the leaves of samak, then they would cover it. To taste the basi, they would use a buyuboy (a dipper made from coconut shell), that is how they do it when we were children.]

Respondent 3

“Agharvest da ti unas, usarenda ti nuang. Maminsanda laeng agmula ti makatawen. Tay fermentationna, depende no` mabaybayagan agbalin a suka.”

[They would harvest the sugarcane, they use the carabao. The planting of sugarcane takes a year. The fermentation on the other hand depends, the longer it is stored, it would then become vinegar.]

However, regarding the sugarcane vinegar, respondent 3 believed that public market is selling machine-processed vinegar which is cheaper but in low quality wherein they prefer using artificial ingredients.

Respondent 3

“Kaadwan met ngamin itan ket imitation. Ti mostly a

rekado ket bunga, bulong, ken ukis ti samak.

[Most of the [basi] today are already imitations. The common ingredients of these are the leaves and the bark of the samak.]

Furthermore, respondent 4 elaborated the refined procedure of adding the Samak leaves and skin in the fermentation which turns the basi into basi vinegar or suka't basi.

Respondent 4

“No madapilen, ipanko idiy sinublan. Lutwek metlang didiay. Ipapudotko, sako dalusan. No madalusan ton, ipanko tay rekadona nga ukis, ukis ti samak. Malebbek. Tay ukisna daytoy (points to a Samak tree). Malebbek, iso ti pangpakulay, pangpalabbaga. Santo mapalabes ti tallo nga aldaw, rekadwak ton. Ti ilaokko, bunga ken bulong ti samak.”

[Once milled, I would put it in the sinublan (the cooking vat) where I'll cook it, heat it and then clean it of the scum. Once cleaned, I'll put in the ingredients which includes the ground bark of samak. It would also serve as the coloring agent for the basi. After three days, I will put additional ingredients such as the leaves and fruits of the samak tree.]

On the other hand, a respondent classified the two types of basi: the basi which is made of fermentation, and the arak ti basi made of the collected moist from the slow-boiled parek (waste product of the basi). The arak ti basi is collected through the collection of steam from the boiling process of the parek (waste product of the basi) Another respondent also said that arak ti basi is expensive than the basi (fermented).

Respondent 3

“Ti arak ti basi (puraw/white wine), iso tay agapo ti parrek ti basi. Lutwen metlang, tay ling-et ket agasasok latta. Madimo met parubruban didiay. Nangingina ta naririgat nga aramiden.”

[The arak ti basi (a by-product of the basi), came from the sediments/remains of the basi after it has been fermented. It would be heated to produce steam and the steam would be collected through an inner vat inside the larger vat. It should be cook in a slow fire, unless it would ruin the process. Arak ti basi is more expensive than the regular basi because it is harder to make.]

Respondent 4 explained the removal of the considered dirt or unnecessary particles which appears in the cooking process or while it is boiling. Also, they shared the preservation method of the basi such that:

Respondent 4

“No dikadi mapukan ti unasen, dapilenmin. Tay katasna, ikabilmi ti sinublan ta nu agtapaw tay rugitnan, tay lablabna, ikatenmi met nukwan. [Ta] mamin-ano a daras, nadalos nukwan.”

[Once the sugarcane is harvested, it would then go to the mill (pagdapilan), and then it would be put in the sinublan and would be cleaned of the scum which floats to the top.

After a few moments, it would be clear of scum.]

Respondent 6

“Sa nu kuan, agkulay met nukwan. Santo maikabil met iti burnayen, sami reppet. Mapalabes ti maysa wenna dua nga aldaw, laokanmi ti bulong ken bunga ti samak.”

[Once done, it would turn the color because of the samak. Then it would be transferred to burnay (ceramic jars). It would be tightly closed. Then after a few days, it will be added with the leaves and fruits of the samak.]

The continuation of basi production is vital for preserving the uniqueness and quality of basi produced in Piddig. In this manner, a standardized process of preparation and fermentation process will be passed down from generation to generation. Moreover, this will distinguish the differences of basi made in the different areas in Ilocos Region.

Cultural Identity and Social Cohesion

The cultural and spiritual feature of basi is one of its axiological relevance in the present era. In addition to being a traditional beverage, basi is essential to Piddig people's cultural customs. However, it is rarely served and utilized at special occasions and celebrations today.

Despite the prevalence of modern beverages, it is often but not widely used as a traditional alcoholic beverage during fiestas, birthdays, weddings, and other ceremonies. It is also involved in practices of suma and gulgol. According to Magpali (2019), gulgol is the cleansing ceremony considered a living tradition of the Ilocanos that has survived in modern times. This ceremony is often done under the situations described below and performed in different ways depending on the situation. While suma is the removal of venom, rabies and tetanus from a wound by using a specialized black stone. Basi is highly associated with spiritual beliefs and practices of Piddigeños as reiterated by the responses:

Respondent 1

“Awan metten. Awanen. Idi a ket birthday, kasar. Importante ket idiy kasar. Iso didiay tay mangatangda. Addanto met tay inumenda inton madama ti pangan. Iso ti pagsasangwan dagitay mamartek. Idtoy Mangitayag ket awan pulosen. Ti minatay, pangatang laeng.”

[None anymore. None. Before, it was used widely during birthdays and weddings. But most importantly during weddings because it is served and also as “atang” (offering). And also, it would be served to the guests (drunkards). Here in Mangitayag, we no longer use it. It is only used during funerals.]

One of the respondents stated that the only purpose of the basi that they observed nowadays is solely for the purposes of funeral and that it is no longer used in other socialization activities in the society.

Respondent 2

“Parasuma, para golgol. Governed tayon ti babarro nga araken. Usarenda pay no agpaagas, nu agdamrosda.

Awanen, no malpas ti trabaho ti malem. Ti lang agusaren ket dagitay talaga nga karrubana ti basi. Icustomize da payen, timplaenda payen.”

[It is only used for old rituals, such as suma, and golgol (funeral rites done after the interment, participated by the family). It is also used for healing. It is no longer served after a day’s work. Those who do are from the neighborhood who make them only.]

Respondent 3 stated that foreigners who comes into their homes is often greeted with a drink of basi. These foreigners come from different places such as Hawaii, USA.

Respondent 3

“Depende sir no adda pasken nga padaya wenna minatayan. Depende pay no dagitay Hawaiiano, agsangpet, agbasida met.”

[It depends if there are celebrations, or funerals. Also, it is consumed by balikbayans from Hawaii. They would drink basi.]

Respondent 4

“Ti lang pakakitak a pakausaran paylaeng ti basi ket no adda matay. Inumen dagitay mayat no madama punsyon man kasta met ton aldaw ti pamumpon ket mausar a paggulgol. Kasta met no adda agkakasar, addada latta umininom ti basi.”

[The only event where basi is used nowadays in during funerals. This wine is being served during interment services and used only for post-funeral services. This is also used in weddings where it is served.]

The result of the study of Ursulum (2007) on the Status and Prospects of the Basi Industry in Ilocos Sur also asserts that basi is used for offering during a quack doctor’s healing ceremony. This is a proof that basi is relevant in spiritual and cultural practices not only in Ilocos Norte but also in other parts of the Ilocos Region. Basi was also mentioned earlier to be served during fiestas so as with other social gatherings as mentioned in the response:

Respondent 1

“No fiesta ti Piddig ken no Tan-ok [festival] ngem awan iti produkto nga basi a maipakita.”

[I only see it during the town festival of Piddig and the Tan-Ok Festival (a celebration in the province of Ilocos Norte), but basi is rarely presented as a product of the town.]

On the other hand, respondents mentioned that basi is no longer widely being sold in the markets which may have resulted to the fast decline of basi in the memory of Piddigeños.

Basi is becoming less and less available. The presence of imported alcoholic beverages and the inclinations of the younger generation were the primary causes of its decrease in the previously described events as highlighted by some of the respondents saying:

Respondent 1

“Production ti introduced nga liquour. Siguro, naimimas dagitay babaron, dagitay distilled kesa daytoy fermented. Mapainommokad pay met ti agtutubo ti basi met, uray kasano imasnan nga ibagbagatayo.”

[Maybe the new ones, the distilled ones (alcoholic beverages) are better than the fermented ones. Do you think you can still make the youth drink the basi even if we say it’s delicious.]

Respondent 4

Celebration of fiesta in the town, panangited kadagiti balikbayans, simmangpet a naggapo abroad. Bisita yanti balbalay.

[I only see it during the town festival of Piddig, and given as a souvenir to balikbayans who visits our homes. But basi is rarely presented as a product of the town.]

According to Gray Group International (2020), social cohesion fosters unity and harmony among communities. The organization join forces with people from around the world to obtain insights and perspectives. It promotes a sense of belonging and strong relationships between people within the society that create a strong and resilient society. Thus, basi also symbolizes the strong bonds and connection of Piddigenos that is vital for their community to thrive.

Economic Livelihood

The economic impact of the basi is correlated with its availability. The respondents reaffirmed that they require additional income in order to survive because their earnings from basi are insufficient. The responses show that simply producing basi is insufficient to sustain them and their families. Also, sugarcane is labor-intensive crop making people choose the crops that are easier to grow. Respondents stated that the period of planting sugarcane is too long for farmers, giving fewer opportunities on land use, as stated:

Respondent 1

“Ti unas maminsanka lang agmula ti unas. Iso siguro mauma ti tao nga agmula. Maatiwanda ti amilyarna, maatiwda ti cropping. Ti pampamay-an pay ti daduman ket harvesten da, puuranda, abunwandan tapnon agsulbod, ngem basbassit ton.”

[We can only harvest sugarcane once a year.. Perhaps this is why people became bored with planting. Some harvest them, burn them, and fertilize them so that they re-sprout, however it grows lesser crops.]

Respondent 2

“Daytoy ngamin, natuok ngamin ti ubrana. Ado ubrana. Syempre padak met a lumallakay ti tattaon. Haan met kabaalanen. Agmulada sabalin. Ta ti ngamin unas, maminsan lang ti makatawen. No ngamin mais kada pagay, masecond crop’n.”

[This is a painful job. People like me are also getting older, means I can neither do it anymore. Sugarcane only grows

once a year. But if it's corn or rice, it can be harvested twice.]

Moreover, another respondent shared that it is not applicable to reuse the field right after the harvesting, giving them additional wait time.

Respondent 3

“No agmulaka kadaytoy koma, next year manen. No maharvestmon, ‘dimo paylang mabalina mulaan ti sabali. Mabalinko met a biagen ngem nakukuttong ti kayonan. Agmakatawen nukwa manen.”

[Planting sugarcane takes a year. After the harvest the field cannot be immediately used. I can reuse the field right after the harvest but it will lesser in yield.]

The axiological relevance of basi to the present-day lives of Piddigeños serves as a cultural symbol, an element in spiritual practices, and a traditional practice connecting one generation from another. However, while it is very important, its extinction is a huge threat for the town of Piddig. The government that holds the great responsibility for keeping it alive should take action. Highlighted by some of the responses such as those who have hoped for the provision of a land and farm inputs for sugarcane was never given.

One of the recommendations of the study of Ursulum (2007) is for the need to promote the basi industry, the needs of the basi producers should be addressed with the intervention of the LGU's and business sector in the Ilocos Sur context. This goes the same in Ilocos Norte, particularly in Piddig.

In Piddig's history and culture, basi is in fact extremely significant. It is the oldest alcoholic beverage known in town. Not without reason, they are well-known for ‘The Home of Basi Revolt’. It is imperative to address the decrease in both production and availability while there is still potential for its preservation. To protect the process of producing basi, their most valued product, the people and the government should collaborate. Afterall, basi is their town's identity.

Summary

The study delves into the historical and cultural significance of basi, a traditional fermented wine made from sugarcane juice prominent in the Ilocos Region, particularly in Ilocos Norte. Basi has evolved from a community beverage to an export-quality product, symbolizing the resistance and fight for freedom against Spanish colonization. The Basi Revolt of 1807, led by Pedro Mateo and Saralogo Ambaristo, exemplifies the Ilocano's love for basi and their desire to be free from Spanish injustices. Today, basi faces challenges like a declining industry, lack of historical knowledge among the youth, and limited producers in the province.

CONCLUSION

The axiological relevance of basi in the lives of Piddigeños encompasses intergenerational transmission, production process continuation, cultural identity, social cohesion,

and economic livelihood. Basi serves as a cultural symbol, a spiritual element, and a tradition connecting generations. However, its extinction poses a significant threat to Piddig's heritage. The government and local initiatives are crucial in preserving and promoting the basi-making tradition. Collaboration between stakeholders is essential to safeguard basi, a vital component of Piddig's history and culture. Efforts to support basi producers, educate the youth, and promote the basi industry are imperative for its preservation and cultural significance in the Ilocos Region. The continuation of basi making is highly relevant to the community in terms of its livelihood, cultural heritage and communal solidarity.

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