

Al Dente

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English Composition I - Achieving Expertise

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Glimpse into the Experts.

Traditions II

Case study: Living Human Treasures

*. . . We are to be proud
of our Elizabethan English:
"varsity", for example,
is grass-roots stuff with us;*

*we "deem" or we "allow"
when we suppose
and some cherished archaisms
are correct Shakespearean.*

*Not to speak of the furred
consonants of lowlanders
shuttling obstinately
between bawn and mossland . . .*

Seamus Heaney (1939-2013)

One is easily lost in the search of experts and constantly the scientists¹, the finance wizards², the doctors³, the renowned CEOs⁴ and more, keep failing us. Yet, we all are in safe waters while looking for an expert within those designated as “Living Human Treasures.”

The title of “Living Human Treasures,” proposed by UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) is only indicative, among several systems in

¹ Stanley Pons and Martin Fleischmann announced to a hungry scientific world that they discovered cold fusion in 1989. Pons and Fleischmann withdrew their paper from *Nature* magazine and refused to answer questions, they never gave enough details of the experiment to allow others to replicate it, and more than 20 years later no one has been able to replicate their results.

² ‘Why Corporate Fraud Is On The Rise’. Forbes. Web. 10 June 2014.

³ Dr. Farid Fata misdiagnosed patients with cancer to justify unnecessary treatments and gave chemotherapy to end of life patients who couldn't benefit from the treatment. federal agents raided Fata's Oakland Township mansion where paperwork and personal belongings were boxed up also the FBI raided Fata's offices across metro Detroit. He is accused of submitting fraudulent claims to Medicare, raking in \$35 million in a two-year period.

⁴ ‘Top 10 Crooked CEOs’. Time. 9 June 2009. Web. 10 June 2014.

existence, there are already varieties of titles: Master of Art (France), Bearer of Popular Craft Tradition (Czech Republic), National Living Treasure (Republic of Korea), Holder of an Important Intangible Cultural Property (Japan and Republic of Korea). In this report, we are going to use the terms that UNESCO defines as (00031EN, 3):

Living Human Treasures are persons who possess to a very high degree the knowledge and skills required for performing or re-creating specific elements of the intangible cultural heritage.

...

Intangible cultural heritage, or living heritage, consists of practices and expressions, as well as the knowledge, skills and values associated therewith, that communities and groups recognize as part of their cultural heritage.

The careful reader will notice the inclusion of the term "intangible" in the above definition. The achievements and the human progress derived from intangibles, from knowledge; being the ideas which motivate people to create heritage, material or immaterial. A dissertation about the tangible or intangible, or if it is presently an interdependence between them, in the context of cultural heritage, escapes the scope of this humble essay, but still, an interesting work in this regard can be reached at (Bouchenaki). Also, the above notion about Living Human Treasures should be familiar to us —expert (Merriam-Webster; Wordnet)— and perhaps the only to be added is the idea of being recognized as part of the people' cultural heritage. This addition seems important because hitherto the concept 'expert' was linked to one individual or to one group that keep up know how. Now, the society is the one that bonds the knowledge and the ability not only in the individual, but

also in the community as the rightful origin, therefore, an expert individual is not a self success, rather, is a consequence of the cultural heritage taking place on him.



Figure 1. In 1950, the Government of Japan began to designate certain individuals or groups who are bearers of important intangible cultural assets as living national treasures. The title is awarded to masters of crafts that include wood-block printing, papermaking, basket weaving, swordsmithing, and pottery, and to renowned actors and musicians of traditional performances. ©Agency of Cultural Affairs.

<http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/?cp=JP&pg=00311&topic=lht>



Figure 2. The “Maître d’art” Jean Dominique Fleury, painter on glass, among its apprentices. © Alexis Lecomte, Ministère de la Culture – France.

<http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/?cp=FR&pg=00311&topic=lht>.



Figure 3. Uwang Ahadas, a Filipino Living Treasure teaching and transmitting gabbang. © R.S. Rastrollo.

<http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/?cp=PH&pg=00311&topic=lht>



Figure 4. Art work by Bruce Onobrakpeya, “Living Human Treasure” craftsman of Nigeria. © UNESCO.

<http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/?cp=NG&pg=00311&topic=lht>.
(Perspective corrected by the author).

As mere illustrative examples, the above images show cases of Living Human Treasures and/or their works from Japan, France, Philippines, and Nigeria.

We must arrive to some intermediate closes and give answers in order to be able to understand the overall concept of the living human treasures and the reason why they are, in a broad sense of its meaning, experts, and not just accidents (...)

How did culture get up? Once the mental life is insinuated, arise the ability to observe, to distinguish and to imagine. Things are there, but can only be useful if they are modified to adapt them to the satisfaction of a need. First, there is an individual that takes a stone, sees it, touches it, spins it and hits it against another stone and continues with another, again and again, and thus until to obtain a satisfactory result. Others mimic the task. Apprentices are multiplied and also the amount of stones converted into utensils. There was born more than just a type of activity; the culture was born and the knowledge's objects⁵.

One allows it's accurate to say that the genesis of the culture and its continuous enrichment, is predominantly a individual work and this capability is not equally distributed; there are those who have been favored more than others. But it seems true that it would be impossible without the existence of a grouping human that keeps alive the set of all the contributions, which is the environment conducive and stimulating, favourable to the exercise of intelligence, to the flight of imagination and creativity. The tradition and the culture are not genetically inherited —inborn— rather are transmitted —acquired. To properly recognize culture or knowledge as a transmitted heritage, one must also recognize the individual who is the carrier of it as such, in this manner, the

⁵ The objects of knowledge could be considered an arrow, a rupestrian paint, a poem, a architectural monument, an mathematical theorem. Any human product of knowledge.

same heritage is understood as the weft in which the individual and the knowledge are woven and where the community attires with that fabric.

“We never think entirely alone: we think in company, in a vast collaboration; we work with the workers of the past and of the present.” (Sertillanges 145). The living human treasures, besides having the knowledge and expertise that distinguish them, have the appreciation of their own people that recognize them as a value to be preserved and be passed on and they are required to transmit their knowledge and skills to future generations.

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The quest for the "message" of cultural properties has become more important. Over the past thirty years, the concept of cultural heritage has been continually broadened and the concepts of tangibles as the architectural or the urban constructions and the transformation of natural landscapes through human intervention are more and more connected to questions of identity. It requires us to identify the ethical values, social customs, beliefs or myths of which intangible heritage is the sign and expression.

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