



THE IFUGAO ETHNOCULTURAL THANKSGIVING PRACTICES TOWARDS FOSTERING CULTURAL IDENTITY

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ABSTRACT

The colonial encounters of the Ifugaos reveal the significant factors leading to the cultural changes that transformed Ifugao society. Recognizing the impact of colonial influences on their culture, they institutionalized some of their traditional practices as a thanksgiving gathering to ensure cultural continuity. This study examines the role of the Ifugao ethnocultural thanksgiving practices in fostering cultural identity within a changing cultural context. It provides an avenue for the ethnic groups in Ifugao to understand, learn, express, and value their cultural forms of life, critically develop their cultural identity, and actively influence the changes in their cultural horizon. It is argued that the contemporary ethnocultural thanksgiving social practices of the Ifugaos are imperative to the persistence of Ifugao culture and an integral part of their harmonious social relations.

INTRODUCTION

The era of colonialism has changed the cultural landscape of many subjugated communities. The fateful encounter led to the emergence of the indigenous social category, often associated with displeasing connotations of 'primitivity' which justified assimilationist policies resulting in exploitation and privileging of the colonialist's position (Dahre, 2020). In the Philippines, the imbalance of power relations and thinking resulted in the persistence of an internalized sense of inferiority compared to foreign culture, an elitist-driven rule that privileges the upper class of society in holding political power, and loss of cultural identity (Quimpo, 2002; Constantino, 1978; Rhoel Cruz, 2019). Colonialism was successful in the Philippines because of the superior military power that easily imposed control and the deliberate political strategies in uprooting the shared cultural forms of life that held together the early Indigenous communities. Whether the colonialist objective of assimilation was aggressive, subtle, or benevolent, communities that are forcibly displaced and alienated from their culture are implicated in relying on unbalanced relationships, accepting a subservient position, tolerating injustices, and even coerced into participating in embedding unjust colonial structures. Although it seems that the persistence of colonial influences is impossible to remove or disembed, the increasing awareness and efforts to circumvent its negative effects are optimistic in bringing incremental change loosening its grip on the Filipino people and society.

In the Cordillera region of the Philippines, among the indigenous groups with a long history of relentless resistance to foreign rule are the Ifugaos. The colonial encounters of the indigenous Ifugaos naturally forced adaptation for their survival. Stephen Acabado and Marlon Martin (2022) described the impact of the colonial encounter which resulted in the transformation of Ifugao as Pericolonial, "the areas where military conquests were unsuccessful, but the effects of the conquest in nearby regions and the subsequent colonialism appear to have changed the lives of the Indigenous populations." The first colonial encounter of the Ifugaos with the Spanish empire led to the intensification of economic and social activities as a response to the need for more resources and better strategies in resisting the subjugations. When the Americans followed and managed diplomatic relations with the Ifugaos, they facilitated the founding of the Ifugao province (Jenista, 1987). The establishment of new statutory laws, modern economic industries, educational institutions, medical care, military units, and churches accelerated the transformation of Ifugao society. While it was viewed as progress, the experience of cultural changes became evident with an increasing awareness and recurring worry of cultural loss and identity crisis (Medina). For this reason, the traditional culture of the Ifugaos must keep up with the aggressive changes that continue to

pose a challenge to their collective identity and cultural survival.

The role of the government and educational institutions is crucial in providing the necessary support and programs for the conservation of the Ifugao cultural heritage and the indigenous knowledge systems and practices. For instance, the government implementation of the Indigenous Peoples Rights Act (IPRA) serves as an instrument to guarantee the rights and protection of Indigenous peoples. The IPRA promotes cultural freedom and expression which is a precondition for indigenous groups like the Ifugaos to determine possible ways to enhance and enrich their culture without discrimination. The National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP), a mandated office to implement the IPRA along with the Provincial Local Government Unit of Ifugao (PLGUI) provides the funds and programs to maintain Ifugao heritage, particularly the rice terraces which are symbolic of Ifugao culture. Moreover, the significance of indigenous pedagogy in educational institutions and the collection of Ifugao literature allows an in-depth understanding of the Ifugaos on their culture and gain wider participation in heritage conservation (Baustista, 2014; Acabado, 2020). However, government funds are sometimes insufficient while educational institutions teach cultural knowledge and practices limited for inter-municipality competitions (Jiang, 2016). It is not enough to simply rely only on external factors to ensure the cultural continuity of the Ifugaos when the fundamental role of ensuring the continual relevance of culture relies on its members.

Encouraging an internal sense of valuing the Ifugao culture and identity is a challenging task. It is the institutionalized traditional practice of the Ifugaos which serves as a thanksgiving social gathering of culture and identity that provides an avenue for the Ifugaos to learn, express, and impart their culture within a changing cultural landscape. This study aims to elucidate how the institutionalized ethnocultural thanksgiving practices of the Ifugaos foster cultural identity and ensure the resiliency of their culture. Through social practice, the Ifugao people can determine the limits and possibilities of their cultural horizon and actively find ways to refine, enrich, and generate common goals for their cultural development.

A glimpse of Ifugao culture

Ifugao is a place located in the Cordillera Administrative Region of the Philippines. It is well known for the rice culture and beauty of Banaue rice terraces which was considered among the seven wonders of the world and which UNESCO describes as emblematic of harmony between humanity and the landscape (Acabado, Martin & Lauer, 2014). The province of Ifugao consists of 11 municipalities: Banaue, Hungduan, Kiangan, Lagawe, Lamut, Mayoyao, Alfonso Lista, Aginaldo, Hingyon, Tinoc, Asipulo, and Lagawe as the provincial capital. There are three major ethnolinguistic tribes, namely Ayangan, Tuwali, and Henanga (Enkiwe-Abayao, 2003). They are collectively known outside the Cordillera as the Indigenous Igorots but they prefer to call themselves by their place of origin "Ipugo" or Ifugao which means "from the hill" (Dulawan, 1967; Dumia, 1979). In the narrowest sense, they refer to themselves according to their linguistic affinities such as iTuwali, iAyangan, iHenanga, or iKalanguya.

The origins of Ifugaos are recounted in Beyer's Waves of Migration, by Felix Keesing, and Roy Franklin Barton (UNESCO, 2008; Acabado, Martin, & Lauer, 2020). The narratives claimed that the Ifugaos were primarily migrants from another area. According to Beyer, they came from the first and second wave of Malays in Southeastern Asia while Keesing claimed that they were migrants from Central Cagayan when the Spanish rule made them retreat to the mountains in Ifugao. For Barton, he claimed that they are displaced Negrito migrants settling together from different directions. Although this would mean that Ifugaos are primarily migrants, the Ifugaos believed that they are ancestrally related and are bound to their homeland. The story of their origin according to the Provincial Local Government Unit (PLGU) of Ifugao,

Wigan and Bugan are the ancestors of the Ifugaos who had lived in a village called Kiyangan (now Kiangan). They are believed to be children of deities in Kabunyan or the Skyworld. By some force of circumstance and with the consent of their father, Wigan and Bugan married each other and went to live in Daya or the Western world where they begot two boys and three girls. Years after, their descendants inhabited the Ifugao world. After the occurrence of a great flood, it is believed that only Kabigat and his sister Bugan survived. Eventually, they married each other and settled in Kiyangan where they had many children (PLGUI, 2019).

The early Ifugao people's way of life is deeply permeated by their traditional religion. According to Roy Franklin Barton (1919), "Ifugao religion is a mixture of an exceedingly complex polytheism, ancestor worship, and a mythology that is used as an instrument of magic". Barton's interaction with the Ifugaos made him record at least 1,500 deities of different gods, demons, monsters, imps, and spirits. Their chief God is called "Mah-nongan" and according to Lambrecht (1962) "the supreme being is a kind of good fellow, who is so harmless that he need not be invoked at." Myths are recounted in Ifugao ceremonies and rituals which invoke their gods and ancestors. It is the performance of the sacrificial ritual prayer called "baki" that serves as the core of Ifugao ceremonies and rituals (Atienza, 1994; Kinnud, 2019). It is only rightly performed by an Ifugao native priest or "Mumbaki" to mark the different stages of their lives from birth to death. He becomes the mediator between the people and the deities for observing rituals and certain requests.

There are two different categories of rituals in Ifugao, "Hongang di page" or rice rituals, and "Hongang di matagu" or rituals for persons (Kinnud, 2019). On one hand, the rice rituals correspond to a myth where Liddum, a god of the skyworld gave rice plants to the two brothers Wigan and Kabigat in exchange for their knowledge about making fire. Out of gratitude to the given rice plant which is known as "Tinawon", the two brothers promised to offer rice rituals and particularly made the terraces for planting only rice plants. In general, the rice rituals are performed according to the phases of planting until post-harvest. The celebration also includes their dance "Tayo", accompanied by the beating of the gongs and drinking of rice wines. On the other hand, the rituals for persons are commonly performed for well-being depending on the social status of the Ifugao person. They have a social hierarchy in terms of rice fields, "Kadangyans" (elite class) are the upper ranks who own most of the vast rice fields, "Nawotwot" (poor) refers to those who do not own rice fields and who do not have access enough rice yields for a year, and "Tagu" (middle class) refers to those who have rice fields but does not compare to the "Kadangyans". According to Richard Kinnud (2019), the highest ritual for persons is "Dinupdup, a category of the hongang di tagu ritual for well-being which the wealthy (kadangyan) resort to, in the face of grave or lingering and unexplained illness. This particular ritual spanned two days for its first part, and another day for the Alim di Buhbuh, which was performed three days later". Meanwhile, the least is the "pamaag dah baki" which simply means reciting the ritual prayers.

The social organization of the Ifugaos is structured under a bilateral kinship system that reaches up to the fourth ascending generation including their dead ancestors (Acabado and Martin, 2022). Barton (1919) elaborately described the role of ancestor worship in the Ifugao religion and traditional practices within which it is believed that the dead ancestors' spirits can work in their favor whether in blessings or bringing justice. The strong kinship relations can be also observed in the Ifugao house setting where it is gathered proximately close to their kin compared to their neighbors in Mt. province where the tribal communities are usually gathered in one place. In the account of Lambrecht (1962), anarchy defines Ifugao society and each takes pleasure in control over their families. Marriage to other clans and kinship groups is considered an alliance and an extended family network (Hutierrez, 1973). Cooperation was expected because they have synchronized according to the planting seasons and relying on their agricultural systems requires intensive hard labor. For instance, the "Ubbu" and "Baddang" which is a traditional practice for communal cooperation in field-related works have greatly developed the Ifugao landscape, particularly the rice terraces.

Meanwhile, social behavior was regulated through the strict implementation of customary laws and practices on properties, inheritance, water rights, and family rules. It is the role of the "Monkalun" or go-between that resolves conflicts among the Ifugaos. According to Barton (1919), "His duty and his interest are for a peaceful settlement. He receives a fee called lukba or liwa. To the end of peaceful settlement, he exhausts every art of Ifugao diplomacy. He wheedles, coaxes, flatters, threatens, drives, scolds, insinuates. He beats down the demands of the plaintiffs or prosecution, and bolsters up the proposals of the defendants until a point be reached at which the two parties may compromise". The primary education of the Ifugaos is called "Tugun di aamod" which means advice or instructions from their parents, grandparents, and ancestors. It is believed that the customary laws are from their great teacher Lidi-um, a deity of Skyworld (Dumia, 1979). The "tugun" teaches the "paniyo" or taboo, a religious superstition of proper and improper conduct to avoid creating disharmony in the community because breaking the taboo was believed to be a crime that not only could inflict serious harm but could also cause unfortunate events such as illness and even poor harvest. Although Barton (1919) has described the thinking of the Ifugaos regarding some taboos as primitive, illogical, impertinent, and immaterial, he acknowledged the practical empiricism of the Ifugao customary laws which greatly originated from taboos.

Colonial Encounters

There are important colonial encounters that led to the contemporary development of the Ifugao cultural landscape. First is the pericolonial transformation of Ifugao due to early contacts with the lowlands and the initial colonial encounter with the Spanish military expeditions (Acabado & Martin, 2022). It resulted in economic and political intensification that created the rice terraces in Ifugao. Second, the successful pacification of the American administration of the existing tribal conflicts in Ifugaos (Jenista, 1989). Social order was established through the building of trails, schools, medical care, military units, and the implementation of statutory laws. Due to the American officers' successful diplomatic and friendly relations, the Ifugaos eventually accepted and accommodated colonial imports leading to the founding of a more stable provincial government in Ifugao. Third, the Japanese invasion interrupted the ongoing developments in Ifugao resulting in widespread destruction of establishments (Dumia, 1979). They occupied Ifugao for at least three years incorporating their culture and language through formal education.

The pericolonial transformation of Ifugao described the diffusion of colonial influences even without being conquered (Acabado & Martin, 2022). There are two important reasons, the economic and political intensification that happened when the Ifugaos tried to resist colonial rule. The early Ifugaos were originally dependent on taro cultivation but the contact with the lowlands resulted in the shift to wet rice cultivation and hence the widespread construction of the rice terraces. The presence of agricultural products and trade ware ceramics found in the Old Kiyangan Village where the earliest settlement of the Ifugaos is located suggests trade activities between the lowlands and the Ifugaos. It overturns the common narrative from previous studies of Beyer and Barton claiming that the rice terraces in Ifugao were maintained for at least 2000 years (Maher, 1973). It implies that the Ifugaos are isolated having a culture untainted until the colonial encounter. On the other hand, socio-political intensification happened as the Ifugaos learned to centralize and organize their forces to continue resisting foreign rule. The relentless attack of the Ifugaos disrupted any brief time of

Spanish colonial control so that after 150 years of Spanish military expeditions, it was declared a failure (Jenista, 1989). In this sense, the impact of colonial pressure has disrupted and changed the way Ifugaos have lived. It is the strong sense of self-determination that continued to drive the Ifugaos to have a sense of control over their community, land, and culture.

The arrival of the Americans marked the second colonial encounter that changed the Ifugao society. After the prolonged hostile relationship of the Ifugaos with the Spaniards, the Americans followed and managed diplomatic and friendly relations at the end of their administration (Jenista, 1989). Although the initial encounter was also marked by active warfare, the striking impression went beyond military superiority. Knowing the tenacity of the Ifugaos and the Spaniards' failure to impose control, the Americans adopted a diplomatic and friendly approach to effectively gain a good impression and accommodation in Ifugao. It was the successful role of the Americans in resolving the tribal conflicts in Ifugao that the people became dependent and confident with the American administration. Later on, the establishment of educational institutions, medical care, military constabulary units, churches, and even political procedures was accepted without aggressive opposition. The American judicial system was gradually implemented with the help of the American leaders and Ifugao elders who mediated the new statutory laws with the existing Ifugao customs. The new implementation of social order transformed the Ifugao society resulting in the discontinued headhunting practices and blood debt conflicts of the Ifugaos.

After the American administration left the Philippines for the transition to an independent government, the Ifugao remained a unified and self-governing province. It was interrupted during the Japanese invasion which managed to reach Ifugao in 1942. Many civilians were caught in the middle of an active warfare between the Filipino-American guerilla force and the Japanese military. The attrition continued until the surrender of Japanese General Yamashita at Kiangang in 1945. According to Mariano Dumia (1979), "It was a nightmare period for all Ifugaos concerned- a continues struggle for survival against the ruthless Japanese Conquerors on one hand and vindictive guerillas on the other." The Ifugaos were again oriented toward survival but after the restoration and rebuilding, the Ifugao became a province commencing socio-economic developments including the intensification of educational and political activities.

Privileging colonial influences

Colonialism opened up new advanced knowledge that created a horizon of possibilities for the Ifugaos to improve their thinking and social condition. Although the influence of colonialism is multifaceted, the most notable and visible change was the entry of the facets of Western modern culture particularly the economic industry, educational institutions, and Christian churches. If it weren't for the relentless resistance of the early Ifugaos, they would have been forcibly assimilated into the colonialist culture. The Ifugaos had the fortunate opportunity to exercise their cultural freedom while understanding and learning new modes of social life under diplomatic relations. However, the accommodation of colonial influences was still according to the colonialist objective of assimilating the Ifugaos. The shift in perspective was tailored to eventually favor the colonialist position. The Ifugaos were seen as naked savages, primitive, and barbaric who needed to be civilized hence they should even be grateful for the colonial initiatives for improving Ifugao society. However, it overlooked the potential trajectory of their traditional culture and instead privileges the enormous colonial influences which unfortunately contributed to a one-sided perspective leading to the decline of interest among the younger generation of the Ifugaos in their traditional culture.

First, the image of success and progress was sought beyond the traditional way of life implying that the cultural forms of life are antiquated. The influences of modern economic enterprise provided other modes of life to Ifugaos apart from their traditional wet-rice cultivation, livestock domestication, and land cultivation (Jocson, 2018). There are already many establishments of different business enterprises that provide services and goods in Ifugao and while it is not necessarily bad, the shift towards the modern economic industry contributed to the difficulty in maintaining the Ifugao cultural forms of life. It is important to understand that the Ifugaos relied on the "muyong" (privately owned forest), "uma" (swidden cultivation), and "payoh" (pond field) to provide resources for their community (Acabado & Martin, 2022). These areas are integral to the culture of the Ifugaos. For instance, they value the "muyong" which provides them with materials for creating cultural artifacts such as the "Bale" (house), "Bulul" (wood carving of the Ifugao rice god), and "Hagabi" (wooden bench of the Kadangyans, the elite class of Ifugao society). Meanwhile, the "Uma" and "Payoh" signify the rice culture of the Ifugaos and their social hierarchical organization. Intricate rituals are performed with each segment of rice planting. For instance, the ritual called "kulpi" is performed after all the ricefield work is done (Hohulin & Hohulin, 2014). Also, the possession of rice yields and rice terraces determines the hierarchical status of an Ifugao. In particular, the wealthy or the "Kadangyans" have the most possession of rice terraces while the opposite refers to the "nawotwot" or those low in status in Ifugao society (Acabado & Martin, 2022). The culture of the Ifugaos is no different from their way of life but it cannot keep up with the economic enterprise as a profitable source of income. There are already Ifugao migrants who admitted that they found better life conditions and opportunities outside their places in Ifugao (Nantes, Maslang, & Damayon, 2022). It is not bad to embrace the modern economic industry or find other modes of life, the problem is the resulting cultural alienation when anything traditional is considered against progressive development. It is indicative of a deep-rooted colonial mentality or an internalized sense of cultural inferiority compared to foreign culture.

Second, the establishment of education aimed at facilitating the assimilation of the Ifugaos has undermined the teaching of their

indigenous knowledge systems and practices. According to Acabado and Martin (2020), the failure of Spanish subjugation in Ifugao was superseded by the coming of the American administration which immediately initiated the benevolent assimilation. For Istvan Meszaros, "From the first school-days under the soldier-teachers to the present, Philippine history books have portrayed America as a benevolent nation who came here only to save us from Spain and to spread amongst us the boons of liberty and democracy" (Constantino, 1978). Indeed, the diplomatic approach of the Americans merited their accommodation in Ifugao and the pacification of the existing tribal conflicts gained the trust of the Ifugaos to the extent that they became dependent on the American administration to resolve their problems. In the book "The White Apos: American Governors in the Cordillera Central" by Frank Lawrence Jenista, several instances showed the effective leadership of the Americans in dealing with the concerns of the Ifugaos. They taught the early Ifugaos particularly the chieftains to assist in the different offices of their administration initiating the introduction of salaried employment (Jenista, 1989). It shifted the traditional roles of the Ifugaos from rice farming and land cultivation while also demonizing their culture or relegating traditional practices as superstitious (Acabado & Martin, 2022). This has resulted in the little attention and priority given to indigenous pedagogy (Enkiwe-Abayao, 2010). Again, it overlooked the potential of indigenous knowledge systems and practices like the skills, beliefs, knowledge, and philosophies developed by societies with long histories of interaction with their natural environments (Macusi et al., 2023). Instead, the educational system prolonged the lack of understanding of the Ifugaos on their history and cultural identity.

Third, the missionaries aimed to convert all the Ifugaos to Christianity shifting their traditional prayers, practices, and rituals towards Christian worship. They relegated some traditional beliefs and practices as paganistic, witchcraft, or simply impractical and unethical to continue. For instance, the concepts of honor and pride are proven in head-hunting practices and the belief in blood debt revenge to satisfy the spirit of a murdered kin. There are also traditional beliefs surrounding illness like traditional healing practices but the coming of more effective medical care and practice gradually reduced the preferences towards traditional ways (Enkiwe-Abayao, 2001). Even the ritual prayer "baki" performed by a "mumbaki" or an Ifugao native priest was considered superstitious when ritual sacrifices were proven to be ineffective (Jiang, 2016). According to Acabado and Martin (2022), "Ritual offerings are believed to bring a range of benefits including an abundance of crops and domestic animals, good health, success in hunting, physical safety, and protection from misfortune." We can find the intricate ritual processes in almost every Ifugao sacrificial offering but setting aside the details, Christianity was successful because it was made acceptable to the Ifugaos. For one thing, the missionaries find resemblances of Christian prayer blessings with the Ifugao rice rituals of thanksgiving (Lambrecht, 1963). The early Ifugaos believed in the favor of their gods which is why they performed rituals for thanksgiving but it was the avenue for the missionaries to provide Christian prayers for blessings as a substitute. Another reason is the effectiveness and efficiency of the Christian religion in Ifugao. The traditional ritual prayer "baki" was replaced with a novena and Sunday Mass for it is already accepted as an easier way that requires minimal sacrificial resources (Jiang 2016; Von Rotz, 2018).

According to Jocson (2018), the Christian way of life has resulted even in the abandonment of the traditional beliefs particularly in the Ayangan and Tawali ethnolinguistic groups in Ifugao. However, Von Rotz (2016) insisted that the persistent presence of some other faunal sacrifices like burial rituals (bogwa), weddings (uyauyu), elderly ceremonies (hongga), and other prestige rites for Kadangyan such as "hagabi", "ballihong", and "kolot" are indicative of religious syncretism. She stated, "The cultural pluralism of current Ifugao society suggests then that the parts of culture and ritual that survive are often the most practical ones; faunal sacrifices remain because they not only have social and religious significance in kinship bonds and ancestor and deity veneration, but they also just as importantly reinforce community via the act of eating together". There are also few existing "mumbaki" who are bearers of the Ifugao traditional religion and it seems that the Ifugaos no longer wanted to learn from them even when they are already at the point of extinction. The conversion of the Ifugaos is already accomplished due to their strong preference towards the Christian way of life but in hindsight, there is a stigma of paganistic objectification of any continuing attachment to the traditional beliefs and practices.

The alleviation of the living conditions of the Ifugaos convinced them to accept the benevolent colonial institutions. Once accommodated and accepted, the institutions of modern industries, education, and Christian religions provide a structure for social control. It challenged the usual way of life of the Ifugaos but they proved to be flexible adapting to the new modes of social life. This implies that social interaction will continue to bring changes in Ifugao society. In this sense, cultural continuity should be understood as a development or a moving forward instead of recovering past cultural traditions and practices to satisfy the nostalgia of having a genuine culture. It is not to disregard the unbalanced and unregulated colonial influences but to navigate or influence the changes in their social reality without totally disconnecting from their cultural roots. It is the institutionalized ethnocultural thanksgiving practice of the Ifugaos that attempts to strike a balance between promoting their cultural background and accommodating progressive facets of Western modern culture. The ethnocultural thanksgiving practices of the Ifugaos provide an avenue for fostering their cultural identity within a changing cultural landscape.

Ifugao Ethnocultural Thanksgiving Practices

According to Dimitri Ginev (2018), "Social practice is a repeated network of collective actions, organized around shared patterns, norms, and rules". We can understand a social practice in isolation through its activities that are guided by motives and intentions. However, understanding social practice within an interrelated network of practices reveals the broader established cultural context

and meanings upon which individuals form and acquire certain ways of life. In this view, the institutionalized ethnocultural thanksgiving practices of the Ifugaos are certainly intended and motivated to enhance the cultural elements of Ifugao culture, foster cultural identity, and ensure cultural continuity. It is true in the attempt to highlight the culture and tradition of the Ifugaos through agro-tourism and industrial fair, culinary arts competition, photo exhibit, public services, performing arts competition, ethnic skills competition, debate challenges, cultural parade, and fashion show featuring Ifugao-woven-inspired creations (UNESCO, 2008). The institutionalized ethnocultural thanksgiving practices of the Ifugaos are Gotad, Kulpi, Uрпиh, Tungo, Igkhumtad, Keleng, Ammung, Apar, and Rambakan.

The main ethnocultural thanksgiving practice of the Ifugaos is "Gotad". It was chosen as the celebration for the founding of Ifugao province when the Division Law of the old Mountain Province was approved in 1966. "Gotad" simply means a large gathering of people but traditionally, it refers to a part of the prestige wedding celebration "Uya-uy". According to Florida Robles, "the Gotad festival is modeled after the "uya-uy," an Ifugao prestige ritual required for a couple to be elevated to the kadangyan (noble) status". The "Uya-uy" is part of the stages of a passage ritual for being acknowledged as a "Kadangyan". A Kadangyan refers to a class of Ifugaos who performed prestige rituals and it generally means being rich or wealthy (Hohulin & Hohulin, 2014). Christopher Roldan (2018) elaborately described the stages of Ifugao Kadangyan's prestige rituals namely, Kolot, Barlihong, Uya-uy, Barlog, and Hagabi. In the first stage, "Kolot" refers to the first haircut of a boy born from a Kadangyan family to signify his passage to manhood. The second stage "Barlihong" is a form of "Uya-uy" where a boy or girl is wedded to a "buru", a supernatural deity of wealth. The third is "Uya-uy", a prestige wedding ceremony of a Kadangyan. When a non-kadangyan marries a Kadangyan, he/she is elevated to match the "Kadangyan" status. The fourth stage is "Barlog" which refers to the construction of a house that uses thick and large wood as beams with a carving that signifies wealth. Finally, the ritual "Hagabi" refers to a bench typically made from a chosen tree trunk as an ultimate display and symbol of prestige status. Each ritual stage takes days and requires many resources to feed the community. In the "Uya-uy" ritual stage, the climaxing day is referred to as "Gotad" (Hohulin & Hohulin, 2014).

Gotad was adopted as the provincial celebration of Ifugao plausibly because it is about the elevation of status corresponding to the establishment of Ifugao as a province. This does not mean all Ifugaos are now acclaimed as wealthy or Kadangyans but it refers to the responsibility that the status holds. According to Christopher Roldan (2018), "The kadangyan hold the elite status because of wealth, land ownership, prestige and command over the agricultural system". Thus, the "Gotad" celebration signifies their collective responsibility as a people over their land, resources, and culture. "Gotad" is also celebrated in the municipalities of Kiangan and Hingyon as their "Punhanaan" or thanksgiving gathering. It often starts with the tradition of "Dog-al" which means to drive away someone or something that disturbs peace and silence. "Dog-al" as an opening ritual for "Gotad" was meant to drive away whatever was harmful and pernicious to their community. The "Gotad" ends with "Punhidaan" where all present in the celebration are invited to a public lunch. Even Ifugaos abroad particularly in the UK and London have managed to organize a celebration of "Gotad". It is a celebration of expressing the Ifugao identity and culture.

Some of the ethnocultural thanksgiving practices of the Ifugaos are dedicated to their rice culture which has sustained the Ifugao generations. For instance, "Kulpi" and "Uрпиh" are part of the "Hongan di page" or rice rituals referring to the celebration after rice planting in an agricultural area is completed. In general, the rice rituals are performed according to the phases of rice cultivation, starting from the preparations until post-harvest. It is closely related to their traditional religion and social organization. It corresponds to a myth where Liddum, a god of the skyworld gave rice plants to the two brothers Wigan and Kabigat in exchange for their knowledge about making fire. Out of gratitude to the given rice plant which is known as "Tinawon", the two brothers promised to offer rice rituals and particularly made the terraces exclusively for the rice plants. Meanwhile, the hierarchical social organization of the Ifugaos is measured in terms of the amount of rice yields. The "Kadangyans" in the abovementioned (elite class) are the upper ranks who own most of the vast rice fields, "Nawotwot" (poor) refers to those who do not own rice fields and who do not have enough rice yields for a year, and "Tagu" (middle class) refers to those who have rice fields but does not compare to the "Kadangyans". As a contemporary ethnocultural thanksgiving practice, it aims to recognize the Ifugao farmer's resilient contribution to preserving the rice culture of the Ifugaos. The Ifugaos owed their ancestors their agricultural systems and lands hence the way they have cared, valued, and passed down must be respected, recognized, and continued. The fact that the international community has even recognized the beauty and significance of the rice terraces as a living cultural heritage worthy among the wonders of the world, the Ifugaos must continue to be stewards of nature promoting an intimate relationship with the environment.

Other forms of the ethnocultural thanksgiving of the Ifugaos are intended to promote cultural values. For instance, the municipality of Mayoyao celebrates "Igkhumtad" wherein the extraordinary strength, skills, and achievement of the hero Aliguyon in the Ifugao epic story are remembered. It is based on the "Hudhud" chant considered a masterpiece of the oral and intangible heritage of humanity in the Philippine Registry of Cultural Properties. According to Michele Dulay (2015), "Hudhud is a form and manner of chanting stories among the Ifugao people. The chant talks about ancestral heroes, customary law, religious beliefs, and traditional practices, and reflects the importance of rice cultivation". The epic story of Aliguyon narrates his glorious battle with Pumbakhayon which ended with a draw gaining their respect for each other. Today, the Hudhud chants are occasionally sung or competed in thanksgiving

practices as a means to maintain their oral tradition (Dulay, 2015). The "Ilgkhumtad" social gathering focuses on competitions, songs, dances, and cultural performances. Similarly, an ethnocultural thanksgiving practice of Aguinaldo called "Apar" which refers to the hunting camp for wild animals or fish became an avenue to highlight their indigenous skills and values through competitions and exhibitions. In the past, the municipality of Aguinaldo co-celebrated the "Ilgkhumtad" because they were originally from Mayoyao. However, when Aguinaldo became an independent municipality, "Apar" was institutionalized in 2011 as their ethnocultural thanksgiving celebration.

Some of the ethnocultural thanksgiving practices of the Ifugaos are focused on the gathering itself modifying its original meaning to appropriate the intended purpose of the social practice. In particular, Alfonso Lista celebrates "Ammung" which according to the Local Government of Alfonso Lista, "Ammung is a Ga'ddang term for meeting or gathering together." However, there is a different account of "Ammung" by UNESCO (2008) which refers to the traditional ritual gathering performed within three days after a child is born and a native priest or "Mumbaki" offers a prayer for the well-being of the newborn. This understanding comes from the ethnolinguistic groups that reside in Kiangan, where the oldest settlements of the Ifugaos are located. According to Jenny Xia (2018), "Ammung" is part of the traditional infant care practice of the Ifugaos. It is more precise to consider that the celebration of "Ammung" in the municipality of Alfonso Lista is related to the Gaddangs, an ethnolinguistic group residing mostly in the Cagayan valley who were among the first settlers at Alfonso Lista which was originally known as Potia. It is appropriate that "Ammung" became an ethnocultural thanksgiving practice of Alfonso Lista because the gathering includes their neighboring ethnolinguistic groups from Mt. Province and Isabela. Similarly, the municipality of Lamut celebrates "Rambakan" which is an Ilokano term that means to feast or celebrate. The celebration includes a sports fest and cultural performances. It is only appropriate that Ammung and Rambakan provide an avenue not just for the Ifugaos but even for the different ethnic groups in their neighboring provinces like Mt province and Isabela which is near Alfonso lista and Nueva Vizcaya which is near Lamut. The municipality of Hungduan celebrates "Tungo", a traditional call for non-working days after the first rain breaks the spell of a long drought. The Ifugaos in the municipality of Hungduan tried to revive their traditional practice by institutionalizing it as their ethnocultural gathering celebration. Meanwhile, the municipality of Tinoc celebrates "Keleng" which is traditionally performed by the Kalanguya ethnolinguistic group. "Keleng" is a prestige rite to mark a villager's entry to the village elite. Some other descriptions of Keleng are thanksgiving feast after harvest.

Fostering cultural identity

We are all cultural bearers and culture according to Clifford Geertz (1973) is "a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life." Culture is both a thing of the past and present that determines our identity not by our actions but by virtue of one's grandparents who created our informational environment (Barnard, 2010). Fundamentally, we always find ourselves already within a cultural milieu or at least in the narrow sense, a member of a cultural community. This kind of societal culture provides us with conceptual resources for understanding the world, ourselves, and our relations within which we find meaningful ways of life through a common language, territory, history, practices, norms, and beliefs (Kymlicka, 1995). These are not essential properties of cultural identity but their relational aspects that can change over time through various ways of social interactions (Heersmink, 2021). The dialogical nature of our identity means we cannot simply create ourselves alone or think about our identity in a purely disengaged mode of thinking because it must find its expression through acting it out and being recognized in the social world (Taylor, 1994). We express ourselves often giving reasons for our actions and through dialogical exchanges, we further articulate and verify our commitments and beliefs. In this sense, we learn and acquire new kinds of knowledge upon which we generate better outlooks and judgments to guide and shape our behavior for a meaningful life and relationships.

However, the advent of colonialism has made cultural identity its principal enemy (Kane, 1982). The objective was to shatter the shared forms of life to make the subjugated cultural communities subservient to colonial rule. The homogenization of culture followed to establish cultural standardization where socio-political and economic developments aim to aggravate colonial dependence. In the case of the Ifugaos, colonial dependence on the American administration did not last but the resulting impact was persistent. according to Jocson (2018), "The cultural brainwashing and its effects on the Ifugao youth have been "traumatic, sad and painful," with most of the Ifugao becoming strangers to their ancestral traditions and values due to their adaptation and adoption of influences from standardized schooling and other religions". Cultural identity is opposed to colonial objectives because the right to cultural identity means allowing people to develop their own ways of life (Kane, 1982). A single uniform culture is inconceivable but it does not mean that harmonious coexistence is impossible in diversity. Instead, we can learn from each other because plurality and diversity provide us with a plenitude of how people deal with the human condition.

According to Richard Heersmink (2021), cultural identity can be characterized in terms of membership in a cultural community that has a common history or collective memories and a materialized identity expression in institutions, social practices, and artifacts. In this case, fostering cultural identity means inducing strong cultural awareness of the shared memories that bind the community and allowing cultural expression through institutions, practices, and artifacts. There are collective memories or historical events that shape the social reality of the people in a community. For instance, the building of symbolic artifacts like monuments and establish-

ments of institutions such as museums to commemorate the important persons and events that contributed greatly to their community. In Ifugao society, the unique and multifaceted experiences of their colonial encounters and their gradual adaptation to new modes of life are indispensable to their contemporary social situation. Meanwhile, social practices are effective ways of transmitting cultural expressions through the active and ongoing engagement of the members. According to Alivizatou (2012), the cross-cultural dialogues between traditional practices and modern ways have been very successful in the persistence of cultures like the Maori *ma-rae* and *kapa haka* or the performance of *sandroings* in Port Vila. Hence, the Ifugao culture can be grasped in the deliberate expression of their identity which is through their ethnocultural thanksgiving practices that carry their collective memories and shared understandings. The interaction among the members of a cultural community creates a sense of belongingness that encourages a strong cultural attachment and motivates cultural continuity.

More importantly, the ethnocultural thanksgiving practice of the Ifugaos balances the privileging of colonial influences and at the same time encourages cultural pride among the Ifugaos instead of demonizing or undermining the potential positive outlook that their traditional culture can contribute to their community. The willingness and openness of the Ifugaos to participate in the social practice will deliberately determine the cultural values that they must learn and promote. It is not simply for tourism, entertainment, or aesthetic presentations because their social practice wants to induce the Ifugaos a sense of gratitude towards the sacrifices of their ancestors who were the source of their cultural heritage and the reason for their present social condition. Promoting cultural values means taking pride in the past and recognizing it as a source of valuable lessons instead of feeling ashamed due to the persisting prejudices from colonial objectification. For instance, the expression of identity through performing arts encourages the younger generation of Ifugaos to learn, participate, and express their cultural identity without being ashamed and ridiculed. It provides an avenue for learning and imparting the Ifugao Indigenous knowledge and skills through social engagement and cultural competitions and services. As long as the Ifugao people gather to understand their cultural background, recognize their cultural integrity, and participate in their social practice, then the community will continue to take their cultural attachment for the generations to come.

Conclusion

The demands of daily cultural interactions bring us to the importance of identifying and understanding the timely relevance of the cultural traditions, values, beliefs, and practices that are deliberately promoted to encourage an internal sense of valuing culture. A one-sided perspective that privileges any one culture over the others does not promote genuine growth and development. Learning from each other through cross-cultural dialogue affirms the integrity and value of each culture in providing people with meaningful ways of life. The role of the government is to support the people of cultural communities by securing their rights and providing opportunities but the perpetuation of culture lies in the capacity of the members to continue fostering cultural identity. The present Ifugao ethnocultural thanksgiving practices serve as a vantage point for the experience of current and future Ifugao generations of their cultural identity. It is looking at the limits and possibilities of our cultural horizons and making room for maturity and progress that allows the creative production of individual and collective identity.

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