

OUR IGOROT HERITAGE

What is it in our Culture that We Want to Pass on the Next Generation?

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A. View of Our Igorot Belief

That there exists Unseen Beings - called Spirits is innate/ absolute belief of the Igorots. They believe in many spirits and that ONE among them is the highest and powerful who made the sun, moon, stars, and the earth with all the elements and creatures.

Of all the creatures, Man has spirit. When he dies, his spirit joins the other spirits in the sky world or IKADAYA-AN.

Spirits of people who just died, believed to be still roaming the world/earth, and can join the ancestors in the sky world after passing a period of purification in this world. Spirits of ancestors that have gone to the sky world may come down to the world of the living as they wish. (And so, we did perform yesterday a one-minute silent prayer in memory of our late father, brother and friend Rex Botengan. If we pay attention, we will sense his spirit as we continue to build the dreams of the IQ, IIC and IGO - these were his legacies to the Igorots around the world. And here in Switzerland, the 3rd ICBE consultation invited him again and he is welcome. His spirit remains among us to guide our safest way and help us with our challenges and that we will have more Igorot gatherings like this to come. In honouring him, we honour the best of ourselves, "the best of us was in R. B.").

Igorots - They believe in Supernatural beings whom they designated by the common term KABUNYAN which can be distinguished as god proper, who has existed from all eternity.

KABUNYAN denotes divinity and power and the highest of all the gods.

So when the native priest "man-ated" or "manbonong" says in a ritual prayer - "sik-a ay Lumawig ay kabunyan," it does not reduce the rank and power concept of kabunyan to that of the inferior deities. The name Kabunyan is also used as a term for the Supreme Being even in the Christian sense. Even today, in all life's situations but especially in thanksgiving and in misfortune, APO DIOS is invoked either in the form of KABUNYAN.

When the people suffer illness, bereavement and sorrow, the Igorots pray, look up to the sky for help from the KABUNYAN trusting him as protector and comforter.

For almost 400 years we were aware that we have attracted the attention of foreign conquerors - the Spaniards; they called the natives "pagans" although the natives did not accept being called pagans because they believe in God.

For three centuries our ancestors resisted invasion and enslavement and how so-called inferior beings were able to repulse the superior forces under God and King. In the end, we accepted the God and rejected the King.

The pagan worship does not find relevance in the Igorot belief system. In fact, it has been a taboo to have images in our home for the purpose of worship, except for the love of art. Hence to understand the foreign idea, the worship of idols, images, temples, and sacred places are flatly paganism and the worshipers are called pagans.

While the natives in the area revere (to regard with deep respect, love etc.) nature such as the sun, moon, stars, lightning, thunder and other constellation and with various belief and superstitions, they believe in the Supernatural power.

And they believe that there exists numerous spirits collectively called ANITOS that emanate in the underworld - that live in the ocean, rivers, lakes, springs, caves, rocks, ravines, bushy trees, shrubs, mountains (NANTE-ES BILIG) and in the ground.

At the same time, these Spirits and deities who own the land and its resources such that users would have to consult them before engaging in economic activity.

In connection with the environment, it shows respect of Nature. (As a tradition, a few drops of wine is poured and offered to the spirits before drinking, or say a prayer to the spirit before cutting a tree for a reasonable purpose and etc.)

And these underworld spirits when offended, trespassed and brushed aside could be violent thereby inflicting illness, death and misfortune to man. It is further believed that these spirits can be manipulated by man to his advantage and the people strive to win the favour of the spirits using prayers and material offerings in a ritual.

It can be said that the belief system and rituals of the Igorots are dictated by a belief in spirits which is handed from generation to generation.

- B. Rituals - as integral part of the belief system are dispensed or recommended by the ``mansib-ok``-Igorot priest and the elders, according to their specific religious use.

The religious concepts of the Igorots, at the turn of the century, was still that one could not speak of a religion. Since religion actually plays an important role in the life of the Igorots, their attitude and relation to the spirits (anitos & others) is the basis of a religious disposition that fills their entire life or at least influences it. All customs are observed when a house is built, when rice is harvested, at birth, illness, a wedding or death, to mention a few, which are supported by religious power. (For example, a religious service is very important at death; the numbers were slightly lower for marriage. Although Igorots are known to live simple and frugal lives, elaborate rituals performed on a wedding day signify respect and recognition for the family.)

Performance of rituals must have a cause and a purpose. Igorots in their beliefs of appeasing the spirits to avoid and be free of misfortune inflicted upon man resulted in a belief system, which became the basis of the HEALING and THANKSGIVING rituals.

However, actual practices and procedures vary among family clans (because of their ``puli / ugalii`` in the family circle in a community), but having the same purpose.

The holding of ``canyao`` (a sacred ceremony) and feasting which last for days during which a chicken, a pig, cow or carabao, is offered depends upon the economic status of family involved.

And the celebration of rituals follows or is dependent on the formation of the moon, as interpreted to conform its ritual purposes in order to be effective.

The first quarter - Beska is the best period, in the belief that the moon progresses to a next cycle wherein the full moon, the celebrating family looks to a progressive and prosperous life.

The Igorot priest plays the important role in a ritual, (through the use of *tapey* —rice wine) the native priest can call the spirits and bridge the communication between the spirit and celebrating family or individual performing the ritual. The native priest ritual prayers and presence of ritual animals and material offerings are requisites rendered to be acceptable to the spirits to whom it is offered.

In almost all the Igorot prayers during canyao and rituals, Sky world spirits, KABUNYAN and spirits of the ancestors are called to come to bless or join in the prayer for the living family and bring about peace, protection and guidance, good health and to mediate cure or solve problems, for long life, prosperity and happiness to the celebrating family.

Actually, in cases of ritual performances to be done, it can not be passed directly to the younger generation, anytime whatsoever when their parents are still alive. Elders often say; "It's up to them... in the future", ``Uway pay man en da-eda`` (Reference Person - Pualino Martin, Beckel, La Trinidad).

- C. Yet, in spite of everything, since its beginning, the positive effects of the traditional customs, beliefs and rituals as exerted; the reflected good effects shows close relationship and unity among families and neighbours. In cases of canyao, death rituals - relatives, neighbours and friends are ready to give a helping hand. They sacrifice their time and effort without compensation.

All household families are obliged to give donations called *supon*. The collection is spent during the wake period. It helps in the solution of some personal or family problems such as illness, misunderstanding, anxiety - the effect may be psychological in nature.

``GIMONG``a self-help or practice of sharing and lending a cooperative labour is preserved.

ON the other hand, the negative effects reflected are such:

The animals and expenses incurred in the canao and rituals usually drain the family of financial resources and so investment and education is neglected.

In these particular communities in Igorot land, like other remote areas, progress and the lifestyle of the people has been greatly influenced by their traditional customs and beliefs, which usually inhibit and prevent them from accepting and adapting more advance ways of living. Since these beliefs, values and superstitions have been practiced through generations, it runs deep and requires time and education to attain change and development.

``Change as Product of Education`` and its the way to modification.

Beliefs and cultural values which are adapted to the present lifestyle should be preserved while those that do not conform but hamper growth and development must be eliminated. The result of advance science and technology is within our midst and only education, as the most effective instrument, can make people understand these fact and events.

We all go through suffering and joy, death and resurrection, at one stage or another. The energy that keeps us going in the midst of this common human cycle, is the presence of Kabunyan and our ancestor's spirit in us.

Here we are and to create hope, we try to feel freer to explore each other's beliefs and practices. We don't have to go back to deep ``Ka-igorotan`` belief. We can go back to our own roots and sources. (``ad-da kadatayo iti tu-rhed ken a-nos``).

The clear ``yearning for something beyond`` - a funny mixture of what we have in modern times which is still a religious sensibility, but a loss of the tradition and the knowledge base.

We thank you KABUNYAN for these days of Igorot togetherness in Switzerland.

Matago-tago tako am-in!!!