

Change and Continuity of Cañao, Atang, and Hilot in Lower Dagsian, Baguio City

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Abstract:

Traditional practices are integral to cultural identity, preserving historical and spiritual values that connect individuals to their ancestry and community. In the Philippines, these practices encompass different rituals, beliefs, and customs passed down through generations.

This study explores the continuity and transformation of traditional healing practices in Lower Dagsian, Baguio City, focusing on the influence of migration and religion on these practices. Through a qualitative method, the researchers gathered data from long-term residents using “pakikipagkwentuhan” (informal storytelling) and semi-structured interviews. Data analysis involves identifying key patterns related to the persistence and adaptation of cañao, “hilot,” and “atang” amidst migration and religion.

Findings indicate that while these practices have been simplified and integrated with Christian rituals, they play a significant role in the community’s cultural identity. The study revealed that migration has contributed to the blending of cultural traditions, while the introduction of Christianity has reshaped traditional rituals, particularly cañao, into a more syncretic form. Despite these changes, the continued practice of these rituals reflects the resilience of cultural identity amidst evolving socio-cultural contexts.

Keywords: Traditional practices, Migration, Religion, Syncretism, Change, Continuity, Adaptation

Introduction

The Philippines is known for its rich and diverse cultural heritage, encompassing spiritual, material, intellectual, and emotional elements that define its societal groups. This rich heritage is embodied in traditional practices, beliefs, and rituals passed down through generations. Among these practices are the rituals of cañao, hilot, and atang, which have long been central to the identity of communities in the Cordillera region (Andres, 1994).

In the Cordillera, cañao (ritual feasts), hilot (traditional healing), and atang (offerings) reflect a deep connection to nature, the spiritual realm, and communal ties. The cañao, traditionally performed by the Kankanaey and Ibaloi peoples, serves as a communal celebration involving animal sacrifices, dances, and offerings to honor ancestors and deities. The hilot, a traditional healing method, integrates physical touch, herbal remedies, and spiritual guidance. Meanwhile, the atang, a ritual offering, symbolizes remembrance and respect for the departed, reflecting the community's intimate ties to their ancestors.

However, these traditional practices continuously face significant challenges in today’s society. People in a society have transformed, adapted, and innovated their traditional practices within a framework that continues to have meaning and resonance (Jefremovas, 2007).

Studies show that migration and religion were two powerful forces affecting such rituals' continuity and transformation. Migrants have introduced new cultural norms and disrupted the societal environment of a

specific community. They also introduced new ideas, values, and practices. Similarly, the rise of Christianity led to the integration of indigenous and religious practices, resulting in hybrid forms of rituals or hybrid cultural expressions (Garbin, 2018; Staubli, 2016; Bava and Capone, 2010).

In Lower Dagsian, a barangay of Baguio City, these effects of migration and religion are particularly evident. Migration has brought diverse cultural influences into the community, while religion has reshaped the spiritual framework within which traditions are practiced. These changes raise critical questions about the balance between continuity and adaptation in preserving cultural heritage.

Therefore, this study aims to explore the continuity and change of *cañao*, *hilot*, and *atang* in Lower Dagsian, examining how migration and religion influence these practices. By understanding these factors, this research seeks to contribute to a broader discourse on cultural resilience and adaptation in a rapidly changing society.

Framework of the Study

There are theories for studying change and continuity in traditional practices. Cultural Adaptation Theory and Syncretism Theory provide a lens for analyzing the interplay of continuity and change in the traditional practices, *cañao*, *pilot*, and *atang* in the context of migration and religion.

Cultural Adaptation Theory examines how individuals and groups adjust their cultural practices and behaviors when exposed to new cultural contexts. Berry outlines processes such as assimilation, integration, separation, and marginalization, which occur as people navigate changes in their sociocultural environments. This theory is particularly relevant to the study as the migration of individuals into Lower Dagsian introduces diverse cultural norms and practices, necessitating the adaptation of traditional rituals to align with an urban, multicultural, and predominantly Christian environment. The simplification of *cañao* and the blending of *hilot* with modern wellness practices illustrate adaptive strategies employed by the community to sustain traditions while accommodating new influences (Berry,).

On the other hand, Syncretism Theory explores how distinct cultural or religious traditions merge to form new, hybrid practices. Often applied in the context of religious and cultural exchanges, the theory highlights how elements of different belief systems combine to create continuity in the face of transformation. This framework is evident in the study through the integration of Christian elements like Christian prayers into indigenous rituals like *cañao* and *atang*. Such blending demonstrates the community's ability to maintain cultural identity while embracing external influences (Shaw et al. 1994). The study conceptualizes that traditional practices are influenced by two major factors: migration and religion. Migration introduces diverse cultural influences that necessitate the adaptation of traditional practices to new socio-economic and physical environments, while religion, particularly Christianity, transforms indigenous practices by integrating them into its doctrinal framework, resulting in syncretic traditions. Traditional practices exhibit continuity through cultural resilience and change through adaptation, including simplification, blending with modern practices, and syncretism. This dynamic interplay between external factors and the cultural agency of the community emphasizes the balance between preserving heritage and adapting to contemporary realities.

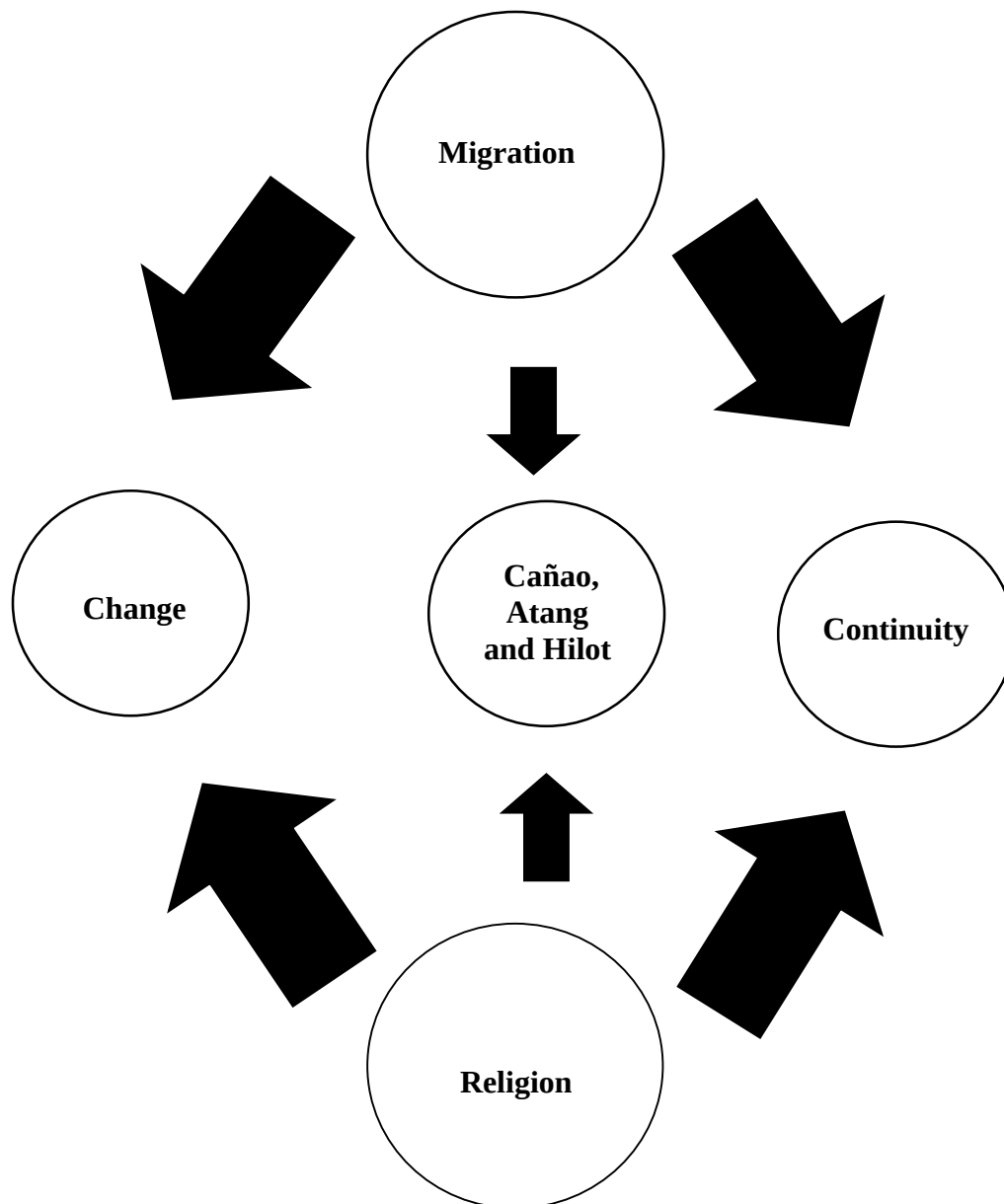


Diagram 1: Conceptual Framework of the Study

The conceptual framework illustrates how traditional practices in Lower Dagsian, such as cañao, hilot, and atang, are influenced by migration and religion, leading to either continuity or change. The center of the framework is traditional practices, which are directly affected by the dual forces of migration and religion.

Migration affects traditional practices by altering the social and physical environment of rituals. This often leads to the relocation of traditional leaders, such as the mambunong (ritual specialists), and the modification or complete abandonment of certain rituals due to the lack of communal spaces and resources. The migration process forces traditional practices to adapt to urban lifestyles, which can erode their original meaning and structure.

Religion, on the other hand, exerts a dual influence on these practices. The introduction of Christianity, in particular, has led to significant changes, including the diminishing role of traditional spiritual leaders and the reinterpretation of rituals to align with Christian teachings. Despite these challenges, it facilitates

continuity by integrating Christian elements into traditional practices. For example, rituals such as the *cañao* have incorporated Christian prayers, creating a syncretic form that allows the tradition to remain relevant in a modern, religious context.

The framework explicitly identifies two outcomes of these influences: change and continuity. Migration and religion can lead to change by simplifying, modifying, or abandoning certain practices. At the same time, they can foster continuity through adaptation and integration, preserving the essence of these traditions within new social and cultural frameworks. The arrows connecting migration, religion, and traditional practices to both change and continuity reflect the dynamic and bidirectional nature of these influences, emphasizing that tradition is not static but evolves in response to external factors.

Statement of the Problem

The study aims to address the following research questions to understand the impact of migration and religion on the traditional practices of *cañao*, *hilot*, and *atang* in Lower Dagsian, Baguio City:

1. How have these traditional practices *cañao*, *hilot*, and *atang* in Lower Dagsian been preserved or altered over time?
2. In what ways has migration influenced the evolution of these practices?
3. How has religion shaped the continuity or transformation of these traditions?

Methodology

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative research approach to explore the continuity and change in the traditional practices of *cañao*, *hilot*, and *atang* in Lower Dagsian, Baguio City. It focused on the lived experiences and narratives of long-term residents.

Locale of the Study

The study was conducted in Lower Dagsian, a barangay in Baguio City, Benguet. It is located approximately three kilometers east of the city center, Lower Dagsian is composed of four puroks and two extensions. Approximately 30 kilometers from the main hospital, Baguio General Hospital (BGH). It has a diverse demographic due to migration, and as a part of a chartered city, it is an ideal setting for studying the impact of sociocultural changes on traditional practices.



Figure 1: Aerial Map of Barangay Lower Dagsian

Participants

The study's participants are residents who have lived in Lower Dagsian for more than 20 years. Their long-term residency provides valuable insights into the historical and contemporary dynamics of the community's traditional practices. Purposive sampling was used to select individuals with firsthand knowledge and experiences relevant to the research.

Data Collection

The data collection methods utilized in this study include pakikipagkwentuhan and informal interviews. Pakikipagkwentuhan is an Indigenous qualitative approach that involves informal storytelling and conversations, creating a relaxed and comfortable environment for participants to share their personal experiences. This method enabled the collection of rich, contextual data regarding traditional practices and their evolution over time. In addition, informal interviews were conducted using a semi-structured format to delve deeper into specific aspects of the research questions. These interviews explored topics such as the cultural significance of cañao, hilot, and atang, the changes observed in these practices over time, and the perceived influence of migration and religion.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was employed to identify recurring patterns and themes within the data. The analysis focused on three primary areas: the continuity and adaptation of traditional practices, the influence of migration on cultural evolution, and the role of religion in transforming these rituals. This analytical approach provided a comprehensive understanding of how traditional practices in Lower Dagsian have persisted or changed in the context of socio-cultural shifts.

Results and Discussion

The findings of this study highlight both the continuity and transformation of traditional practices in Lower Dagsian in response to migration and religious influences.

Continuity and Adaptation of Practices

Despite living in the city, certain elements of traditional practices have been preserved. Participants emphasized the enduring significance of *cañao*, which remains a vital community celebration and a means of honoring ancestors, although its frequency has declined due to the city's living constraints. Many participants shared that some aspects of *hilot*, such as the use of herbal remedies, are still practiced, particularly by elders, despite the proximity and availability of modern healthcare facilities. Similarly, the ritual of “*atang*” continues to be observed by families, although it is often simplified or blended with Christian prayer traditions.

Traditions have also emerged as these practices evolve in urban settings. For instance, *cañao* ceremonies now often incorporate Christian blessings alongside indigenous rituals, reflecting a syncretic approach. Younger generations have adapted *hilot* techniques, blending traditional methods with modern wellness practices like massage therapy. This adaptability ensures that these traditions remain relevant even in changing socio-cultural contexts.

“Importante ti *cañao* ta isu ti panawen nga umay ti umili nga makirambak ken makipagrikna, isu ti ar-arameden iti umili no adda baro nga balay ken panaglagip iti natay, karo dagitoy Ibaloi, isu da ti kangrunaan nga agar-aramed, nga mambunong ti mangiserbe” (*Cañao* is important to the community because that is the time wherein the residents will express their sympathy or happiness for the individual. We usually conduct *cañao* during blessings and death anniversaries, mostly the Ibalois (one of the Ethnolinguistic groups in the Cordillera) are the ones who still practice *cañao* with the presence of the mambunong.) Uncle El said (not his real name).

“Nu kaspagaringan kunada nga, kasla diyay balay enya, no kaspagaringan barbaro daytoy, ipartian da diyay, ngem nu awan ti mambunong, kasla aramiden mi nga keht naaramid, awan met ti nakin-amu nga agkararag ditoy nga kasla dagadjay mambunong. Nu ada mambunong, aramiden da, ngem nu awan aramiden mi ladta, ngem han mi aramiden dyay ar-aramed iti mambunong, ikararag mi ladta diretso ti Diyos, isurot me iti relihiyon me” (For example, the blessing of a new house, the people butcher pig for it, if there is a “mambunong” (ritual specialists) present, the mambunong will do his practices. If there are no “mambunong” (ritual specialists) we are the ones who lead the ceremony but not following what the mambunong does, we pray and direct it to God, following our religion.) Uncle El added (not his real name).

Influence of Migration

Migration in Baguio City started in the early 1900s, even before it became a chartered city in 1909, because of the large labor force required to build a city from scratch. In the 1930s, a second wave of migration was spurred by a mining boom. After World War II and in the 1950s, indigenous migrants started to settle in the city (Cariño et al., 2022). Migration has brought both challenges and opportunities to the preservation of traditional practices. Migration impacts tradition by introducing new cultural characteristics and ideas, which can alter existing practices and beliefs. This blending of cultures enhances cultural diversity as communities adapt and evolve their traditions in response to the influences brought by migrants (Sanja et al., 2010). Participants noted that migration has introduced diverse cultural influences, leading to the dilution of some rituals, as newer residents may not share the same cultural heritage. Moreover, the limited availability of traditional practitioners, such as the mambunong (ritual specialists), has resulted in simplified versions of rituals. One elder expressed concern that the absence of a mambunong compromises the authenticity of certain ceremonies.

“Dyay mambunong, awan ti mambunong dito ta awanen , nagawid dan, napan dan ijay ili, sunga nu agparte kami, awanen diyay, hanmin iapplikar ti aramed ti mambunong,” (There are no more mambunong in the community, they went back to their ili (hometown) so if we conduct a feast or butcher we no longer follow what the mambunong does.) Uncle El shared (not his real name).

“No kasapulan me iti talaga nga mambunong unno jay kunada nga agserbe, apan kami edjay Loakan ken edjay Ambiong,” (If we really need the help of a mambunong, we seek the help of the mambunong in Loakan or in Ambiong.) Aunt Lagra said (not her real name).

However, migration has also fostered resilience within the community. Migrant groups have adopted local traditions, creating a shared sense of identity within the barangay. Interactions between indigenous residents and migrant populations have facilitated cultural exchanges, enriching the practices. For example, one immigrant participant shared an experience of enthusiastically joining cañao celebrations, contributing to the sense of inclusivity and unity.

“Kapag nagkakaroon ng cañao ang aming kapitbahay, sina Tita Mary, dumadalo kami. Naranasan ko doon na sumali sa pagkatay ng baboy at sa sinasabi nila na watwat. At noong patapos na ang selebrasyon, sumama ako doon sa aking pamangkin sa pagsasayaw ng Tayaw ba ang tawag doon,” (If our neighbor, Aunt Mary, conducts cañao, we actually join and help in the butchering and in the watwat. When the celebration was ending, I joined my nephew in experiencing the dance tayaw.) Manung John stated (not his real name).

Rituals like the cañao may be simplified or abandoned due to the absence of traditional spaces or practitioners, such as the mambunong (ritual specialists), who often remain in rural provinces. Yet, these adaptations also showcase cultural resilience, as communities find ways to preserve their identity while navigating new environments (Afable, 2010).

Role of Religion

Religion has played a significant role in transforming traditional rituals. Today, most of the residents belong to the churches of Anglican, Born Again Christian, Baptist, and other denominations. The introduction of Christianity has reshaped practices such as cañao, where prayers to ancestors are now replaced or supplemented by invocations to God.

“Wen ta tay naamwan tayo sasao ti Apo, bayamun dayta gumastos, nangina ti watwat. Haanen ya, nu man pay agparte ta ngem ni Apo Dios ti pakikamangan,” Aunt Vi stated (not her real name).

Some participants observed that faith-based healing has gradually replaced certain aspects of hilot, particularly among devout Christian families. This shift highlights how religious beliefs have influenced health and healing practices.

“Kut tata daytoy nga nangyari kunyak, nagadu ti inpakita ni Apo Diyos, ti inmuna idjay , danum kun lana, day ti inmuna nga inpakita ni Apo Diyos, Lord, ananwek daytoy nga danum? syempre inpakita na kunyak, amu mun adjayen, day inted ni Apo nga talentom amu men nga diyay ti sign en , di manen maturog ak kasjay ladta, panay good, awan tay nangisit, awan ti dakes, panay lang bible, igigemak ti bible nga agkarkarag ak ti nalalawa nga dagdaa, halimbawa, dayta nga daga kut awn makita , ada kunyak nga agkarkarag nga nakangato ti imak daymet ti nagrurugianak , awan ti arameden ni Apo Diyos nga dakes,” (Whatever happened to me, God showed me so much. First, there was water or oil, that's what God first showed me. Lord, what is this water? Of course, it was shown to me, where I should go, the talent given by God, that's the sign. I didn't sleep well that night, everything was good, there was no darkness, no evil, just the Bible. The Bible was what I was holding onto, the many wonders I saw. For example, that land,

if you look, you cannot see anything, but I have, I am raising my hand praying, that is where I started, God will not do anything evil.) Lola Rosa narrated (not her real name).

A notable theme in the findings is the emergence of syncretism, where traditional and religious practices are blended. For instance, many families continue to offer food (atang) to ancestors but accompany this ritual with Christian prayers, illustrating cultural adaptation. This blending reflects the community's ability to navigate and reconcile their indigenous heritage with new religious influences. One participant described how their family balances these practices to honor their ancestral traditions and Christian faith. "Ta isu meht iti arameden da nanang ko edi, ag-atang, agparte da iti manok ken iayab da iti espiritu, agi-atang nak meht ngem nayunak laeng iti kararag ken Apo," (That's what my grandmother used to do, she would offer, divide the chicken and offer it to the spirit, I would also offer but I will add prayers to God.) Aunt Lagra answered (not her real name).

The atang ritual serves as a way for the indigenous people to remember and honor their deceased loved ones. It is a food offering ritual for the dead, symbolizing remembrance and connection with their ancestors. It emphasized the communion of saints and the importance of honoring departed loved ones (Corpuz, 2020).

Migration and religion, therefore, are central forces influencing the traditional practices of Benguet. Migration disrupts traditional environments and introduces new cultural norms, while religion provides a stabilizing framework for continuity and adaptation. In Lower Dagsian, these dynamics manifest in ways the rituals are maintained, altered, or abandoned, revealing a complex interplay between heritage and modernity (Pascual, 2015).

Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Summary

This study explored the continuity and transformation of the traditional practices of cañao, hilot, and atang in Lower Dagsian, Baguio City, focusing on the roles of migration and religion as influencing factors. Using qualitative methods, including pakikipagkwentuhan and informal interviews with long-term residents, the research uncovered rich narratives about the adaptation of these traditions over time.

The findings revealed that while parts of these practices persist, significant transformations and changes have occurred. Migration has introduced cultural diversity, reshaping communal rituals and practices. Religion, particularly the rise of Christianity, has further modified these traditions, blending indigenous beliefs with Christian doctrines. Despite these changes, the community demonstrates cultural resilience through the adaptation and integration of traditional and contemporary elements.

The findings of the study were:

1. The Cañao Ritual as a Symbol of Communal Unity with Christian Integration

The cañao ritual remains central to community identity, fostering unity and honoring ancestors. However, its practice has been simplified, with ceremonies now less frequent and often adapted due to modern lifestyles. While the core of the ritual remains intact, there has been a notable integration of Christian elements, such as the addition of Christian prayers or blessings alongside traditional offerings. This syncretism allows the cañao to maintain its communal function while adapting to the religious changes within the community, illustrating how indigenous practices can evolve while preserving their foundational social role.

2. Adaptation of Hilot with Modern Wellness Practices and Shift Towards Faith-Healing

The hilot tradition, once deeply intertwined with spiritual healing, has adapted by incorporating modern

wellness techniques, such as massage therapy. While traditional methods, like herbal remedies, persist, the spiritual dimension of hilot has diminished, leading to a focus on physical health. This shift reflects broader societal changes, where the practice has become more aligned with alternative health trends, blurring the lines between traditional healing and contemporary wellness practices. The remaining spiritual aspects now coexist with concepts of faith-healing, indicating a redefined but enduring role for hilot in community health.

3. Atang Ritual's Persistence and Christian Syncretism

The atang ritual, traditionally an offering to ancestors for protection, continues as a family practice, though it has been modified to include Christian prayers. This syncretism, where Christian invocations replace or accompany ancestral prayers, highlights a blending of indigenous and Christian traditions. The ritual's adaptation to incorporate Christian elements reflects the community's ability to maintain its traditional practices while aligning them with evolving religious beliefs. This transformation ensures that atang remains meaningful to the community, reinforcing the resilience of cultural practices through adaptation.

Conclusions

Based on the findings that were gathered, the following conclusions were drawn:

1. There is continuity amidst change. Traditional practices like cañao, hilot, and atang exhibit preservation and transformation. Core elements remain, but adaptations reflect the community's ability to navigate socio-cultural shifts.
2. Migration has both disrupted and enriched traditional practices. While the dilution of rituals is evident, the exchange of cultural ideas has also fostered innovation and resilience within the community.
3. Christianity has significantly influenced these traditions, resulting in syncretic practices that integrate indigenous rituals with Christian beliefs. This highlights the dynamic nature of tradition as a response to external forces.

Recommendations

In the light of the abovementioned findings, the following recommendations are generated:

1. Conduct systematic documentation of cañao, hilot, and atang, including their historical context and current adaptations, to ensure these practices are preserved for future generations.
2. Promote awareness among younger generations about the cultural significance of these traditions through community workshops, storytelling sessions, and intergenerational dialogues.
3. Encourage programs that foster the integration of migrant and indigenous communities to create shared cultural experiences, emphasizing the importance of maintaining heritage while embracing diversity.
4. Work with religious leaders to explore ways to honor and integrate indigenous practices within Christian frameworks, fostering a respectful dialogue between tradition and modern religious practices.
5. Provide incentives and recognition for traditional healers and ritual specialists to encourage the transmission of knowledge and ensure the availability of these cultural resources.

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