Culture Areas of the Seven Tribes of Bukidnon

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Abstract

This study investigated the ways of life of the Indigenous Peoples (IPs) of Bukidnon in the different cultural areas. Specifically, it focused on the practices and beliefs of the IPs from birth to death, namely, on religion, ritual, marriage, giving birth and health and death. A comparison of the practices and beliefs across the seven tribes was done to generate themes. Interview and focus group discussion (FGD) were conducted to gather the data from among the key informants of the tribes and its members. Findings show that majority of the IPs of the seven tribes are Catholic in religion. All of them practice the conduct of a ritual which they call “pamuhat” in many activities of their life. The IPs choose their own partners for marriage; there are a few tribes who still practice the “duay” or having more than one wife. Majority of the mothers give birth at home with the assistance of a “mangunguyamo.” In curing certain illnesses, the IPs make use of herbal plants and trees. A “baylan” or a ritualist makes a prayer to heal sick members of the tribe. As to taking care of the dead, majority of the tribes do not practice embalming. The dreams and aspirations of the IPs are to be educated and to have a stable income; and to preserve their tribe.

Keywords: indigenous peoples, ways of life, culture areas

Introduction

A deeper understanding and appreciation of the ways of life of the Indigenous Peoples (IPs) at present can be achieved by studying their traditional practices. As the original inhabitants of the society, they hold various truths and beliefs that explain their present status. Their continued existence serves as an evidence of their longevity. Thus, members of the larger society should be aware of and appreciate their unique ways of life.

The ways of life of a group of people “include everything relating to customs, beliefs and other things that have been passed on to us for generations, as well as various forms of artistic creations” (Karsten & Kuntzel, 2007). From this definition, it can be seen that each group of people is distinct from the other.

The indigenous peoples of the world are the marginalized groups among all societies. Aside from the fact that they are minority group, they are also among the poorest and deprived group of people. According to the Indigenous World (2006), “Indigenous peoples remain on the margins of society: they are poorer, less educated, die at a younger age, are much more likely to commit suicide, and are generally in worse health than the rest of population.

Studies on the status of the IPs all over the world have been the focus of many scholars especially in the field of education, sociology, anthropology, economics, health and politics. In America, Psacharopoulos and Patrinos (1994) established that indigenous people are poorer than the non-
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indigenous population. The study provided a comprehensive analysis of the socioeconomic conditions of indigenous peoples in the four Latin American countries with the largest indigenous populations. In another study, Hall and Patrinos (2006) found that while programs have been launched to improve access to health care and education, indigenous peoples still consistently account for the highest and “stickiest” poverty rates in the region.

The IPs are very much related to the environment. Land, river and forest have been their main source of living. Mankiller (2009) stated in her article A Celebration of Pacific Culture (CSQ Issue 33.1) that “that indigenous people have the benefit of being regularly reminded of their responsibilities to the land by stories and ceremonies. They remain close to the land, not only in the way they live, but in their hearts and in the way they view the world.” Aside from this she further said that “Indigenous Peoples also share a fragmented but still-present a sense of responsibility for one another. Cooperation always has been necessary for the survival of tribal people, and even today cooperation takes precedence over competition in more traditional communities. It is really quite miraculous that a sense of sharing and reciprocity continues into the 21st century given the staggering amount of adversity Indigenous Peoples have faced. In many communities, the most respected people are not those who have amassed great material wealth or achieved great personal success. The greatest respect is reserved for those who help other people, those who understand that their lives play themselves out within a set of reciprocal relationships.”

The World Bank, in its operational Policy 4.10, uses the term “indigenous peoples” to refer to a distinct, vulnerable, social and cultural group possessing the following characteristics in varying degrees: (a) self-identification as members of a distinct indigenous cultural group and recognition of this identity by others; (b) collective attachment to geographically distinct habitats or ancestral territories; (c) customary cultural, economic, social, or political institutions that are separate from those of the dominant society and cultural; and (d) an indigenous language, often different from the official language of the country or region.

In the Philippines, the term “indigenous peoples” is defined by Republic Act No. 8371, otherwise known as the Indigenous Peoples Rights Act of 1997. Thus, IPRA defines “indigenous peoples” (IPs) or “indigenous cultural communities” (ICCs) as: “a group of people or homogenous societies identified by self-ascription and ascription by others, who have continuously lived as organized community on communally-bounded and defined territory, and who have, under claims of ownership since time immemorial, occupied, possessed and utilized such territories, sharing common bonds of language, customs, traditions and other distinctive cultural traits, or who have, through resistance to political, social and cultural inroads of colonization, non-indigenous regions and cultures, became historically differentiated from the majority of Filipinos.”

The definitions of the IPs show us that this group of people share a distinctive culture far different from the rest of the population. Binford (1967) and Harris (1968) said, “Culture is a system of socially transmitted behavior patterns that relate human communities to their ecological settings, namely technologies, and modes of economic, political organization, social grouping, religious beliefs, practices and so on. The culture concept has come down to behavior
patterns associated with particular groups of people– their customs or their way of life.”

To study the different culture areas of a group of people will lead to a better understanding of their present condition. The focus of this study is on the selected group of IPs in the Province of Bukidnon, specifically those belonging to the seven tribes, namely the Bukidnon, Higaonon, Manobo, Matigsalog, Talaandig, Tigwahanon and Umayamnon tribes. The varied characteristics of the IPs selected in this study provide an array of cultural similarities and differences. These are important inputs to policy makers.

Objectives of the Study

This study is conducted to determine the similarities and differences of the seven tribes in terms of the different culture areas and to know their dreams and aspirations as a tribe. Specifically, the study covers the following culture areas: religion, ritual, marriage, child birth, health practices, and death.

Methodology

This descriptive study utilized a purposive sampling method to identify the respondents. The researcher was assisted by the Office of the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP) as well as the Provincial Indigenous Communities Affairs Office Office of Bukidnon (PICAO). The head of the latter office provided key informants for each tribe, who are the “Datu” or tribal leaders. The Indigenous Peoples Act Free and Informed Prior Consent is needed before the conduct of the study as mandated by law. The tribal leaders facilitated the identification of the members of the tribe who would be willing to be respondents.

The respondents were chosen by the Datu. Prior to the conduct of the interview, the respondents were already informed they will be interviewed. The respondents were gathered in their session hall. But for those tribes without a session hall the respondents were gathered in an open area with a shade.

Before the actual conduct of the interview, a ritual (pamuhat) was conducted. This was the IPs’ way to ask permission from the spirits so that the interview will be successful. With the help of the members of the council of elders, the Datu initiated the ritual. The researcher utilized semi-structured interview through a focus group discussion (FGD). Conducting a focus group discussion according to Denzin and Lincoln (2000) is “essentially a qualitative data gathering technique that relies upon the systematic questioning of several individuals simultaneously in a formal or informal setting.” This technique will result in a
collective synergy that helps to explore and clarify participants’ perceptions that may not be as readily accessible in a one-on-one interview (Krueger & Casey, 2000).

A questionnaire was used to answer the problems in the study as well as to get their profile. During FGD, more information was drawn out. The discussion was enriched with the information that was gathered out of the exchange of ideas. Frequency count and percentage were used to present and analyze the data.

This study was conducted in the province of Bukidnon from June 2011 to December 2011. The following municipalities are the specific areas of the study: Dalwangan (Bukidnon), Impasugong (Higaonon), San Fernando (Tigwahanon), Cabanglasan (Umayamnon), Pigtaurangan (Manobo), Lantapan (Talaandig) and Sinuda (Matigsalog). Five of these municipalities belong to the second district and two from the third district. The tribes herein selected are mostly located near the main poblacion of the different municipalities. There are other tribes that belong to the seven tribes but are located in the hinterlands of Bukidnon. But due to safety and inaccessibility issues, they were not included in this study.

The respondents of the study were the heads of the seven tribes also called as “Datu,” the heads of families and family members. The heads of the seven tribes served as key informants as they were the most credible persons to tell about the culture of the tribe. There were 290 respondents representing one household. The distribution of respondents per tribe is presented in Table 1. The age and sex profile of the respondents are presented in Graphs 1 and 2, respectively.

In terms of sex, majority of the respondents were females as can be seen from the graph above. It is only the Higaonon and Manobo tribes in which males and females were almost of the same number.

As to age, the chart shows that majority of the respondents of each tribe belong to ages 21-40. This means that the IPs are in their productive age. The Bukidnon, Higaonon, Talaandig and the Tigwahanon tribes have respondents aged 71-90. This implies that these tribes have surpassed the estimated lifespan of human beings as estimated by the World Bank Organization (2012) which is 68.

Results

Bukidnon

The Bukidnon tribe is located in Daraguyan, Dalwangan, Bukidnon. This is around 30 minutes from the main poblacion. They speak the Binukid dialect. Farming is their main means of livelihood. Among the products they produce are corn, palay, vegetables and abaca fiber. Courtship and marriage among the Bukidnon are brought about by parental arrangements. Polygamy is practiced among married men. The Bukidnons are known for their interest in arts and handicraft. They have dances for every occasion like planting rice, harvesting or marriage. They also make colorful costume jewelries and accessories made of ornamental materials.

Higaonon

The Higaonon tribe is located in Sumitra, Impasug-ong, Bukidnon. This is around 30 minutes from the poblacion. Their houses, mostly made of wood, are located in the middle of a pineapple plantation. The tribesmen derive their means of living from working in the field as laborers of the pineapple plantation owned by a multinational company. The practice of polygamy is no longer evident among the tribe.

Manobo

The Manobo or “Menuvu” tribe is located in Pigtaurangan, Pangantucan,
Table 1
*Distribution of Respondents per Tribe*

| Tribe      | Number |
|------------|--------|
| Bukidnon   | 51     |
| Higanon    | 29     |
| Manobo     | 29     |
| Matigsalog | 51     |
| Talaandig  | 52     |
| Tigwahanon | 46     |
| Umayamnon  | 32     |
| **Total**  | **290**|

Graph 1
*Respondents Grouped according to Sex*

![Graph showing distribution of respondents by sex per tribe]

Graph 2
*Respondents Grouped according to Age*

![Graph showing distribution of respondents by age and tribe]
Bukidnon. This is situated along the Napalit river opposite Mt. Kalatungan Range, the sixth highest mountain in the country. To reach the area, one has to walk around five kilometers from the main road. The road is bumpy and needs a four-wheel-drive vehicle to be able to pass through. Motorcycles are the most common means of transportation. There are also horses that are used as means of transportation.

In terms of governance, a Datu is the head of the tribe. He is elected through the council of elders composed of senior members of the tribe. Among the qualities needed to become a Datu are the following: bloodline (he is a son of a datu), ability, knowledge and wisdom of the tribe’s culture, generosity and the ability to settle conflicts. According to the Datu, the ability to settle conflicts is very important because as much as possible they avoid occurrence of physical violence. There are times when conflicts will result to killings.

The tribe conducts a general assembly or “panag-ulambong”. Around 80% of the tribesmen are poor as evidenced by their monthly income. As to educational attainment, only 20% have reached high school education.

Matigsalog

The Matigsalug tribe is located in Sinsuda, boundary of Bukidnon and Davao City. This is 66 kilometers from Malaybalay City or around one and a half hours. Getting here is not a problem because it can be reached using the main highway which is asphalted. Matigsalug is a term which means “people along the river Salug”. Typical dwellings are made of wood with only one room. Their comfort room is also made of wood with no bowl but a wood with a hole on top of a deep excavated land. This is just around one square meter in area.

The tribal leaders participate in local governance. Some were elected as councilors (kagawad) in the local level and others work in the Barangay. Conflict settlement is done amicably through the tribal chieftain. It is the Datu (father) who will look for his successor from among his sons, the one who has the ability to lead and settle conflicts among tribesmen. The practice of polygamy still exists among the tribe. One can have as many as 13 wives. Each of the wives has her own hut “payag”, the size depends on the number of children.

Tigwahanon

The Tigwahanon tribe is located in Lawatan, Municipaliry of San Fernando, Bukidnon. According to some researchers, the term Tigwahanon may have been derived from “guwa” (scattered) or from the Tigwa River. They were originally living in the nearby mountains of San Fernando. The Tigwa river served as the main source of their livelihood. The area where they originally came from was forestal. They have no problem as to food as they can always go hunting and gather plants that can be eaten. The existing conflict between the leftist group and the government military troops has brought danger to their lives. They have no choice but to go down to the lowland and start their new life there. They have nothing to start with but just rely on the little piece of land the local government had given them. The relocation had caused major changes in their economic life. They are now farm laborers earning a meager amount.

Umayamnon

The Umayamnon tribe identified in this study is located in Cabulohan, Cabanglasan, Bukidnon. This is around one and a half hours travel using private ride from Malaybalay City. The Umayamnon express their gesture of welcoming visitors by an ethnic dance. Farming is their means of livelihood.
Others work as laborers in nearby rice fields. The establishment of churches from different religious denominations contributed to the conversion of some members of the tribe.

**On Religion**

The Graph 4 shows that majority of the IPs are Christians. They believe in the creator as God and call him “Magbabaya”. They also believe that the world is controlled by spirits and that all the good and bad events are caused by the spirits. One of the respondents said, “we believe in God as the creator of the universe and that everything that happens is of God’s will.”

As can be seen from the Graph 5, majority of the respondents are Catholics. It is only the Umayamnon tribe where majority are Born Again and many of the respondents are either Adventist, Baptist and Pentecostal. According to one head of the seven tribes, “we cannot prevent the members of the tribes to become members of other religion. Much as we want to keep them practicing the traditional beliefs of the tribe, they are free to choose which religion they want to belong.” Majority of the IPs today now belong to the Catholic religion which is 70%. This was followed by the Pentecostal at 17.7%. The rest belong to Born Again, Baptist, Iglesia ni Cristo and others.

**On Ritual**

All of the seven tribes perform a ritual “pamuhat.” The Datu heads the ritual through a prayer and chanting. The tribes prepare a table covered with red and white cloth. On top of it are wine, biscuits, candy, cigarette, and coins. The other elders also take turns to pray in their own dialect. After the ritual, the tribal members join together for a “panampulot” or a joint eating. The chicken that was offered was cooked in boiling water with no salt. During the panampulot this will then be added salt and spices. The “panampulot” signifies a festivity of togetherness.

**On Marriage**

The graph below shows that almost all the IPs of the seven tribes choose their own partners for marriage. The tradition where...
parents will be the one to choose for their children is not practiced anymore.

**On Child Birth**

Majority of the IPs’ wives give birth at home as shown in the graph above. This has been their practice ever since. Majority give birth through the assistance of a midwife or “hilot” as shown in the Chart. There were even some who delivered their children on their own. There are no hospitals or maternity clinics located near the tribal area as they are located far from the municipality. They have to walk around 5 kilometers before they can reach the barangay hall which has the Rural Health Unit.

**On Childbirth Assistance**

Majority (86%) of the tribes give birth through the assistance of a “mangunguyamo” or someone expert in giving birth. In the Visayan dialect it is called “hilot”. The remaining 14% or only one of the tribes seek the assistance of a midwife to assist.

**On Health Practices**

As shown in Graph 9, majority of the IPs make use of the natural way of curing certain illness e.g. using plants and herbs. The presence of Barangay Health Centers introduced them to the use of synthetic medicines. Other means of curing illnesses are done through a prayer or a ritual performed by the herbalist. Even if there are already Rural Health Units near their area, majority of the IPs still make use of traditional practices to cure certain illnesses. These come in the form of roots, leaves and bark of trees. Some of these have names while others were not named. Among the common illnesses that the IPs have are colds, cough and fever. When asked whether or not they seek assistance of a doctor, majority of the members of the tribes said only in severe cases when the illness can no longer be cured with the use of herbs. Aside from this, they said they also have no money to pay for the hospital. When asked if it could be possible to commercialize this medicine so they can earn, they said “it is against their culture.”

**On Death and Burial**

Majority of the IPs do not embalm their dead. They bury the body within 24 hours. It is only the Bukidnon and Umayamnon tribes who practice embalming.

**Discussion**

**On Religion**

Religious belief has been a distinguishing factor of the IPs. Although the tribes believe in one God (magbabaya), they believe in spirits that oversee their daily lives. According to them, “we have spirits that live in the water, the trees and in the air and they are responsible for the success of our endeavors.” The conversion of the members of the tribes to other religious beliefs is evident in their membership with different religious denominations. According to the Datu of the Umayamnon tribe, “the establishment of churches near their community has contributed to the conversion of the members of our tribe, we cannot stop them”. He further said, “because of this there is a decrease in the number of tribesmen who are really practicing traditional beliefs.” This result could mean that the ways of life of the indigenous peoples have also changed because they are now shaped by the doctrines in their respective religious denominations.
On Ritual

“The conduct of ritual among the IPs is a reflection of our beliefs to the Almighty God whom we call as ‘Magbabaya’,” said the head of the Higaonon tribe. According to a Bukidnon, “all activities and situations in our life like marriage, planting, harvesting, birth and sickness, are conducted by a ritual.” According to tribal leaders, “we conduct rituals to give thanks and to ask help from the Almighty God and the spirits to help us in our endeavor.” According to the head of the Talaandig tribe “we believe in different spirits- Spirit of the Harvest and Spirit of Sickness among others, but we only have one God.” According to a head of the tribe “ritual is a vital part of our lives, this is our source of life.” Even before this study was conducted, a ritual was made to ask permission from the spirits to conduct this study as well as give guidance that everything will turn out well. This result could mean that all the Indigenous Peoples in Bukidnon including those we have not included in the study also conduct a similar ritual.

All the tribes have similar preparation for the ritual. Native chickens are offered representing a purpose. One is “pandandig sa law’ng makakagahum” or shelter from the Almighty. The other one is “Pandingding” ‘pananpod kanato sa atong makita og dili makita’ (shield us from what we see and what we cannot see.) They make use of red and white cloth around one meter each and placed on the table. The white cloth signifies “putli” (purity). The red cloth signifies blood. Above it are biscuits, candies and red wine which serve as an offering. These will be eaten after the ritual or “pamuhat.” The Bukidnon, Tigwahanon, Umayamnon, and Manobo tribes make use of beetle sliced thinly and wrapped in leaves and arranged in a plate.

The Bukidnon, Matigsalog, Umayamnon and Tigwahanon tribes have the same practice of dipping a chicken feather to the blood of the chicken and writing it on our palm. This accordingly, will give us good luck and better understanding of the research. The Matigsalog and the Umayamnon and Tigwahanon tribes have the same practice.
of fanning the feather of the dead chicken over our head. This was supposed to guide us and be free from bad spirits.

All the seven tribes make use of one-peso coin as symbol of acceptance to the tribe. The coins are either placed on the plate or arranged in a straight line as the Higaonon does. The Umayamnon on the other hand, arrange the coins in a V form. Among the seven tribes, it is the Manobo tribe in which the ritual differs. This is because they include one chick as offering during the ritual side by side with the chicken.

On Marriage

Among the seven tribes, the Matigsalog and Manobo tribes are still practicing “duay” or having more than one wife. The reason for this is that the wife feels the need of a help mate to attend to the needs of the husband. It is the wife who searches for a woman as second wife. When asked as to how the husband will attend to the wife’s needs, they said that the husband will provide the sign if he wants to spend the night with her. For example, he will place his clothing (jacket and pants) outside the hut or house of the wife. This will signify that the husband will be sleeping with her. With the presence of cellular phones today, the husband will just text the wife. As to whether the wives have any conflict in this arrangement, they answered no because they understand and they will have their time with him on another day. There is no schedule to be followed, they will just wait when the husband will sleep with her. It could be possible that the husband can sleep with one wife for a couple of days.

One practice that is notable related with the “duay” is that if a woman will express her love toward the man then he should not refuse. It will put the woman to shame if she will be turned down.

On Child Delivery

Findings about child delivery showed that many of the mothers still deliver at home with the assistance of a “manguguyamo” (midwife). This has been their practice and they have not encountered any problems in connection with this. One reason for this is that they are far from the hospital and aside from that they have no money to pay for hospital bills. In rural areas and the other

Graph 6
Choice of Partner for Marriage

![Graph 6](image-url)
communities, giving birth has been made through the assistance of a “hilot” or midwife. This has also been the practice for women in the rural areas and hinterlands because they have no money to pay for the hospital. Because of this, the government, through the Department of Health, included in its strategies in implementing the Reproductive Health Policy by 2015 the training of birth attendants “hilot” to become part of the professional medical teams assigned to rural areas.

On Childbirth

As to childbirth mortality rate, there were only isolated cases. Majority of the women gave birth to healthy babies in spite of the lack of maternal health care. In the Talaandig tribe for example, there were many new born babies and all of them are physically healthy as can be seen from their body built. They are not frail and thin. When asked as to how this happened, the mothers said they breastfeed their babies. They do not feed them with infant formula.

On Health

Majority of the IPs rely so much on herbal medicine to cure certain illnesses is a manifestation on their strong belief in nature. According to the elders, sickness is caused by bad spirits which can be cured by the herbalist through “tayhop”. When they were asked whether they have plans to commercialize the herbs so they can have an income, they said no because it will destroy their culture.

Generally, although the IPs are not exposed to various health preventive measures and health enhancing products, they are healthy and have longer life span. According to WHO estimates, at least 80% of the population in developing countries rely on traditional healing systems as their primary source of care.

On Death

Traditionally, the IPs do not practice embalming as this is against their customary laws. Within 24 hours from the death of the person, burial takes place. When asked why they said it will become a “double kill.” This means that if the person is already dead and will again undergo embalming, they will die twice. In some areas, transporting the dead body to another place, especially crossing a river is prohibited. Accordingly, the dead body will be buried in the place where he died. This belief shows how the IPs regard their dead with high respect.
Graph 8
*Childbirth Assistant*

Graph 9
*Health Practices Using Natural, Synthetic and Other Cures*
As to the dreams and aspirations of the IPs, common to the tribe is the attainment of education to get rid of poverty. According to the Datu of the Manobo tribe, “we really wish that there will be scholarships for our children because we cannot really support their schooling”. A member of the council of elders of the Matigsalog tribe also inquired “could it be possible to bring education to our area?” Another member of the Higanon tribe expressed: “I wish that I can send my children to college because I have finished elementary grade and was not able to pursue high school.” With these dreams, it is evident that the indigenous peoples put value on education. They also want that there will be IPs who will occupy positions in the government. As one respondent said, “We, the IPs have no voice in the government affairs.” Another respondent wishes that the IPs be given livelihood. One respondent said, “Ma’am, when are you coming back? When I asked why? he said, “because we want to have an income generating activity like goat raising to help us earn income and not just rely on labor.” I brought up the possibility of opening a small business, but the Datu said, “We are not interested in business, it will destroy our culture.” He further said, “We practice sharing whatever we have to other members of the tribe. If one family does not have something to eat we will give him food and vice versa.” “Even in the land we work on, if one member has no work, we will divide the area for tilling so that he can also have an income.” From this information, it can be said that the IPs have a deep concern for each other. They practice the habit of sharing. This concurs with the finding of Mankiller (2009) who observed “that a sense of sharing and reciprocity continues into the 21st century given the staggering amount of adversity Indigenous Peoples have faced.”

Another Datu said “I really wish that our tribe will not vanish but will be preserved especially our culture despite the fact that we are already decreasing in number. When asked if they considered themselves poor they said, “we are poor
financially but we are rich in love; it is the love for each other that will sustain us and our tribe.”

Conclusion

Although the seven tribes are located in the different areas of the province, their ways of life are similar as can be seen from the different culture areas considered in this study. In the area of religion, although they have already been exposed to different religious denominations, they still believe in the existence of spirits that affect their daily activities. All the seven tribes continue to engage in rituals. The “duay” practice is no longer widely practiced except for a few tribal leaders who still adhere to it. Giving birth with the help of a “manguguyamo” will continue as the IPs adhere to it is a safe and economical practice. The use of herbal medicines to cure certain illnesses will remain a tradition even with the presence of the health centers. The IPs practice burying their dead within the day and they have a high respect for the dead. The dreams and aspirations of the IPs are socio-economic in nature. They long for government support to help them uplift their social and economic status. They do not want to be rich, what they want is just to survive. They want to continue the legacy that their forefathers have started. In the light of these findings, the government has a vast opportunity to help through the line agencies like the Department of Social Welfare and Development and the Department of Education.

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