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Title: Ifugao Traditional House: A System of Culture -Nature-Architecture

The Ifugao traditional house is an architectural icon in the Philippines. The design along with associated cultural and environmental practices is unique to the Ifugao people as one of their tangible heritage representation. The construction of an Ifugao traditional house is a system of culture, nature, and architecture. One cannot build without respect to nature and culture that provides the construction materials from the forest and the cultural ingenuity attached with it. Hence, the continuing collapse of Ifugao traditional houses demerits indigenous practices and natural conservation of the woodlots and forests embedded in Ifugao rice terraces system.



The Ifugao people are endowed with skills in handicrafts, woodcarving, and wooden architecture, sourcing the materials from the forest. This requires them to sustain the forest that provides food, lumber, and water to the village. It is also a sign of reverence to the ancestral spirits, deities, and fairies that dwell in the forest who are believed to bless and provide the resources for the people. One cannot cut a century old tree or hunt without offerings and prayers. An Ifugao traditional elite who intends to carve a *hagabi* (prestige bench) is required to hold many days of rituals and prayers to beseech the spirit dwellers before cutting the tree. It is also a practice that before cutting a tree, more trees must be planted. To determine the rituals related to the traditional houses, a native priest was invited to share his knowledge on the required rituals related to the wooden native houses. *Rituals associated with Ifugao traditional house:*

Ritual	Translation	Description
<i>Hogop</i>	Ifugao house blessing ritual	House blessing ritual to ask the deities for prosperity and good health for the occupants of the newly constructed house.
<i>Hongan di Bale</i>	Welfare ritual	The <i>mumbaki</i> (native priest) performs the ritual by going around the house praying for blessing in every part, corner, and level for stronghold and longevity.
<i>Baltung</i>	Chanting and stamping performance	A chanting performance that narrates the construction of the house.
<i>Balog</i>	Prestige ritual	A woodcarving of Ifugao symbol (e.g. lizard, man) is placed inside the house then the prestige ritual is performed.
<i>Agamid</i>	Thanksgiving	Performed after a month of the <i>hogop</i> where 2-3 pigs and 6 chickens are slaughtered as offerings.

The Ifugao traditional house does not only serve as an abode but more importantly as a rice granary. It is also used as *agamang* or dormitory for unmarried boys and girls who usually gather for merry making and knowledge transfer venue from the elders. Under the house, it is where almost all Ifugao rituals are performed including wake nights of a deceased villager. Recently, because of abandonment and of its cultural value, some traditional houses are now utilized as home stay for tourists. Since the house is collapsible and reassembled, it is also exported to other areas in the country and this contributes to the reduction in the number of traditional houses in Ifugao.



Since 2016, the Ifugao team has been working on understanding the multi-functionality of the Ifugao traditional houses not only of its usage but mostly the values and practices associated from and to it such as forest management for its construction, rituals for its longevity, and the empathetic perception of the people for cultural preservation. Recent separate studies were conducted to look into the traditional houses in the heritage municipalities of Ifugao Province namely Mayoyao, Kiangan and Hungduan. The study in Kiangan revealed that most of the wooden traditional houses are more than 90 years old. However, 25% are not being used anymore and are abandoned and in a damaged state. The longevity of the wooden houses raised the question of what kind of wood was used. Thus, another study was conducted to identify the tree species that were used in the construction of the durable traditional houses.



There were 32 tree species that were identified that are used in house parts of the traditional native house where 17 species are endemic, 13 are indigenous and two are exotic. With the continuing loss of biodiversity in the Ifugao

forest system that are caused by unregulated floral poaching and tree cutting for woodcarving industry and the replacement/abandonment of traditional native houses, these tree species are also deemed threatened along with the culture and rituals associated in built heritage construction.

In a community workshop conducted with the village leaders of Kiangan, the status of the traditional houses was presented. Data shows that in 1929, the number of native houses in three villages was 321 and in 2019, the number was 207 native houses in 13 villages.

Feeling concerned with the reduction of native houses, one village leader said, “We need to lobby in the local government for cultural property protection. Maybe we should have ordinances to stop the sale of houses to outsiders”.

Another leader argued, “Some of our residents do not realize the value of the native houses that is why they abandon it. We should help in making them realize that it is part of our heritage. Some days our children will know the native house only through pictures.”



Further discussion led to a number of action points. Actions to be taken include the consultation with the house owners for refurbishment of wood structures; push for ordinances in the local government for cultural property protection; education (formal education and community) on native house conservation; regular community tree planting and establishment of nursery of indigenous tree species used in traditional house construction/repair. Finally, in a consensus, the group envisioned that the community needs to restore the traditional houses for its adaptive and multi-functional usage.

Using the action plan as a springboard, the Ifugao team is working on consolidating the actual status of the traditional houses for future policy recommendation for its conservation including indigenous tree species propagation. As an Agreen initiative and as a university outreach activity, preparations are done for the establishment of an indigenous tree species nursery, that would be established in an elementary school. It will be used as an educational tool/facility for the school children, and at the same time, as a source of planting materials for the whole community of Kiangan. ###

