



Cultural Challenges and Preservation: The Case of Higaonon of Rogongon, Iligan City

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Abstract

This paper aimed to investigate the cultural challenges and preservation of Higaonon people in Rogongon, Iligan City. Specifically, this study sought to answer the following questions; what are the cultural practices of Higaonon in Rogongon? what are the factors affecting cultural preservation of Higaonon? and how does the community respond to cultural threats? The data were gathered through a semi-structured interview of the Higaonon key informants. The research is qualitative in nature and used descriptive analysis. This study revealed that the Higaonon tribe has rituals and practices for each significant occasion. Rituals are led by the Baylan—who is the sole person in the community to perform the rituals. They have their cultural practices for weddings, planting, harvesting, welcoming guests, and imposing punishments. Moreover, the factors that affect their cultural preservation include intermarriages, generational gap of cultural knowledge, and misrepresentation. In response to the challenges in preserving their language and cultures, a joint effort between the locals and the government is being made to revitalize language and traditions of the Higaonon people.

Keywords: *cultural challenges, preservation, Rogongon, Higaonon culture and practices*

Introduction

The Philippines, an archipelago in Asia, is home to 100 estimated indigenous peoples equivalent to ten to twenty percent of the total population of the country. The Higaonon tribe, the least known among the indigenous peoples, is found in the southern Philippines, particularly in north-central Mindanao.

Culture is the integration of our thoughts and ideas. It is the embodiment of one's language, food, clothes, and religion. Culture, thus, defines the identity as humans who belong to the same group in society. Culture consists of behavioral and meaningful patterns that humans acquire through symbols. As

members of a common society, people apparently transmit their culture from one generation to the next. Culture, which can be seen in their language, literature, religious practices, and recreation, has two non-identical elements – material and non-material. Material culture refers to the entities that are related to the physical aspect of life such as clothing, food, and tools. On the other hand, non-material culture pertains to the thoughts, ideals, and beliefs – the psychological aspect of life.

Culture can be both stable and changeable. Cultural stability is achieved through the accumulated effort and organized ties between generations who maintain social stability and security of shared experiences within society and dominate nature with strength against other cultures. However, the existence of different social groups with varied cultures generally leads to cultural transfers or cultural change. The wider societies that are usually advanced in technology, economy, and politics influence the narrow ones to transform socially.

Cultural preservation plays a critical role in safeguarding the distinct identity, traditions, and values of indigenous communities worldwide. Among these communities, the Higaonon tribe of Rogongon, Iligan City, stands as a testament to the enduring richness of indigenous culture amidst the challenges posed by modernization and globalization (Garcia, 2020). The Higaonon, known for their deep spiritual connection to nature and their harmonious communal living, have upheld traditions that reflect their respect for their environment, ancestral land, and social structures. However, the rapid pace of societal changes has begun to erode many of these time-honored practices (Villanueva & Santos, 2018).

The cultural preservation efforts of the Higaonon tribe are strongly attached to their traditional knowledge systems, oral customs, rituals, and sacred practices. As stated by Lopez (2019), the predominant identity of the Higaonons is their ancestral land that serves as the foundation of their livelihood, spirituality, and cultural expressions. Despite their resilience, the tribe faces a multitude of challenges such as socio-economic pressures, which often drive them to abandon their traditional practices forcing them to transfer to modernistic enterprises (Dela Cruz, 2021).

Modern education, technology, and urbanization have brought a complex impact to cultural transmission. Younger generations are increasingly drawn to modern lifestyles, often at the expense of learning and continuing the traditions of their elders (Martinez, 2020). These issues are aggravated by a lack of government and institutional programs to keep indigenous heritage, leaving indigenous communities like the Higaonon to rely on their internal perseverance and fundamental discretion (Villanueva & Santos, 2018).

Indigenous communities like the Higaonon tribe of Rogongon, Iligan City, are custodians of rich cultural heritage that encompasses traditions, beliefs, and practices passed down through generations. However, the increasing influence of modernization, coupled with socio-economic and environmental challenges, has placed immense pressure on their ability to preserve their cultural identity (Lopez, 2019). The encroachment of modern lifestyles, urbanization, and external interventions threatens not only their practices but also the communal structures and values that form the bedrock of their culture (Villanueva & Santos, 2018).

This tribe is deeply connected to a cultural heritage rich in customs, traditions, beliefs, and practices. Despite this rich legacy, the Higaonon people face increasing challenges in preserving their heritage due to modernisation, external influences, and the declining interest of younger generations (Cajetas-Saranza, 2016; Balangiao & Walag, 2022). The tribe's traditional knowledge, such as their conflict resolution system known as *paghusay*, is at risk of being lost if not adequately documented and preserved (Ragandang, 2017).

This term paper delved into the factors affecting the cultural preservation of the Higaonon tribe in Rogongon, Iligan City. By examining the interplay between internal and external challenges, it sought to identify the strategies employed by the community to preserve their heritage. Additionally, the paper highlighted the role of external support systems, including government policies, non-governmental organizations, and academic institutions, in promoting sustainable cultural preservation. Ultimately, this study underscored the importance of preserving indigenous cultures as a means of fostering diversity, promoting social equity, and ensuring the survival of invaluable heritage for future generations (Lopez, 2019; Martinez, 2020). It also aimed to identify the cultural practices of Higaonon of Rogongon, Iligan City. Moreover, this paper also provided discussions on the challenges perceived by the locals in relation to cultural preservation and the community's response to cultural threats.

To gather the data in this study, these questions were used;

1. What are the cultural practices of Higaonon in Rogongon?
2. What are the factors affecting cultural preservation of Higaonon?
3. How does the community respond to cultural threats?

Related Literature and Studies

Indigenous cultural practices are frequently useful instruments for sustainability and environmental management. According to a study on the Pga K'nyau people of Thailand's Chiang Mai area, traditional Tha poetry is incorporated into participatory learning activities to support cultural restoration and environmental preservation. Using a Participatory Action Research (PAR) methodology, the project engaged ethnic students, environmental specialists, and local academics in the co-creation of a handbook intended to promote ecological awareness and conserve traditional knowledge. This strategy is in line with initiatives to protect the Higaonon culture in Rogongon, Iligan City, where ecological expertise is preserved through customs, oral histories, and rituals.

In her study, Cajetas-Saranza (2016) revealed the rich oral literature of Higaonons that reflects human values like patience, courage, godliness, and industry. The literature includes vivid images that appeal to the senses of the readers, as well as the interesting rituals such as the butchering of a pig to appease the spirits during celebrations; one of which is the yearly Kaamulan Festival.

The tools created are guaranteed to be broadly accepted in the community and culturally appropriate participatory framework. Furthermore, assessing the usefulness and pleasure of such instruments offers important information about their influence, a way that can guide similar projects for the Higaonon. Cultural preservation initiatives can address environmental sustainability and strengthen cultural identity at the same time by incorporating indigenous customs into formal educational programs.

The foundation of the Higaonon people's cultural legacy is their oral literature, which includes a diverse range of myths, epics, folktales, and chants that express their values, beliefs, and customs. These oral traditions serve as a mechanism for passing down indigenous knowledge, moral values, and historical memory from one generation to the next, as mentioned by Cajetas- Saranza (2016). Oral literature plays a vital role in cultural preservation, especially for indigenous groups like the Higaonon, who deal with issues like cultural deterioration brought on by modernisation and outside influences. However, the emergence of diverse culture in Esperanza, Agusan del Sur is a threat to the banishing Higaonon cultural heritage. It is the fear of the old Higaonons that sometime in the future their descendants might no longer cherish their culture and might lose their identity. The same is also being experienced by the Higaonon of Rogongon, Iligan City.

The research of Lopez (2024) has cited a number of factors which impede the preservation of indigenous cultures and systems of knowledge. These include the processes of modernisation, undervaluation of indigenous peoples in national integration programs, the intergenerational loss of traditional knowledge, and lack of political will. When, for instance, indigenous people's communication patterns are increasingly influenced by mainstream media or when they enter western educational systems, their native culture and traditions tend to weaken. Besides, IKS and IKSPs are poorly and sometimes not legally and policy-wise protected, which creates room for their abuse and neglect.

Despite these challenges, the authors of the paper reiterated the significance of combining activities such as documentation, community interventions, and incorporating their knowledge in the implementation of sustainable development programs. Such strategies ensure not only the protection of cultural heritage, but also demonstrate the importance of indigenous practices in modern-day problems including that of environmental and community sustainability.

Lopez's (2024) study has a direct connection with this paper on issues surrounding the protection of Higaonon culture in Rogongon, Iligan City, by offering a wider understanding of the environment in which such indigenous groups operate in the quest to protect their culture. Other winding efforts tend to be deficits in intergenerational learning as well as the unsurprising absences of institution, with the gaps likely to apply to the Higaonon community. Moreover, the proposed solutions, like documentation of community history and involvement of community members in the processes, are practical methods that can be utilized within your situation. Therefore, as this study attempts to address these questions, it can be concluded that Higaonon people and their culture can be complemented in a manner that contributes to the development and identity of the community.

In the study of Robiego et al. (2022), they listed down many challenges to the preservation of the culture of the Manobo community, most importantly their indigenous language. One of the challenges includes being overshadowed by the prominence of mainstream languages like Filipino and English. Also on the list is the growing influence of modern technology and media and institutional disinterestedness in indigenous education. Younger generations are forced to assimilate into the mainstream culture, and their native language proficiency and usage suffer as a result. The economic migration and exposure to urban environments further dilute the practice of traditional cultural expressions.

Despite these challenges, the study revealed several strategies employed by the Manobo community to preserve their language and culture, such as the integration of native language instruction in schools, community-based cultural activities, and the active involvement of elders in passing down traditional knowledge. Such practices underscore the importance of collective efforts in sustaining cultural heritage amidst external pressures.

The challenges and strategies identified in this study are closely related to this research on the factors influencing the preservation of Higaonon culture in Rogongon, Iligan City. Like the Manobo, the Higaonon community faces similar threats of cultural erosion due to language loss, generational gaps, and external influences. These conservation practices of the Manobo would provide insights into how community-led initiatives, reforms in education, and engaging elders can be interventions to the Higaonons. In understanding the problems and successes of the Manobo community, this research can develop approaches tailored for the specific needs and circumstances of the Higaonon people, thus making their cultural identity sustainable.

The study of Maraña et al. (2023) posited the importance of indigenous knowledge as a tool in the survival of human communities. This implies the cultural preservation that a group has. One of the battles that has been inflicting cultural preservation is the rights to their own land. Relatively, the land has

been part of the cultural identity of the people and how they cultivate their own existence. Higaonon is an ethnic tribe that conforms to nature and is heavily connected to nature. No matter how persistent they are, if not equally reciprocated with institutionalized policies that protect their own rights, particularly their ancestral lands, they are threatened. Hence, indigenous people recognize the changes in their culture over time, however, their willingness to revive their rich culture and practice what has been neglected is motivated by the support of the external institutions. This is leading to sustainability.

Buenavista (2021) described the essential components of global conservation through indigenous people and indigenous knowledge. This vital factor helps in maintaining the ongoing problem of the contemporary society of the vast changes most especially in the world order and environmental issues. The current United Nation's 17 Sustainable Development Goals can be catered through recognition and advancing the IP and their local knowledge to balance the natural system. One highlight in the paper is the ethnobotany of the Higaonon that can address the nutrition and dietary practices that can help Filipinos to regulate their rice-centered diet. Following this in favor of the sustainability concept, it does not only benefit the society in general but it empowers and elevates the cultural perspective of IP, especially their new generation.

As highlighted by Dumas (2022), the relation of land to the cultural identity of indigenous people. The ancestral territories are not just pieces of land for living but a life for them. There is a meaning hidden in maintaining their homelands in their existence. Moreover, the indigenous people have their traditional political rules and belief system and when not followed, a conflict arises and affects them more at ground. This is where they are threatened and subjected to discrimination on their own land which implicates the decision of the next generation to follow their traditions and board with what the dominating society is telling them.

Moreover, Ting et al. (2008) has mentioned the deprivation of socio-cultural and economic power of the IP due to dominating power and the programs that do not favor them in their own rights. Most of the indigent who lived before in the coastal and forcefully migrated to forest areas are due to the policies and political agenda. The continuous mobility, in negative perspective, threatens the very essence of their existence and remains the struggle in cultural maintenance.

Indigenous knowledge has a significant contribution to the development of society and survival. The paper of Botangen et al. (2017) emphasizes the knowledge conceptualized in the indigenous context can be useful to sustainability of human societies while maintaining the cultural practices at the same time preserved. In fact, social media can be a medium to relay indigenous knowledge which can be accessed by anyone. In return, awareness among individuals can help in protecting the vulnerable condition of indigeneity. Wherefore, the indigent shares their local knowledge which can be useful to the dominant community and the indigenous people can use the platform of technology without destructing or shifting their cultural identity to modern society.

Based on the article of Sabbagh et al. (2023), the successful preservation of the cultural heritage lies in the hand of multi-sectoral cooperation and capacity building of the Heritage Impact Assessment or the (HIAs). HIA is an indispensable tool offering a systematic and comprehensive approach to mitigate the impact of architectural conservation interventions of the Hijâz Railway and Madâin Sâlih Station in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The Hijâz Railway Project aims to revitalize the region, promote tourism in the areas, provide job opportunities and boost the local economy. Main points are presented to serve as a guide to a successful preservation of heritage, collaboration among stakeholders like government bodies, heritage experts, local governments and tourism authorities. Capacity building is also essential to ensure

everyone is involved to understand complexities. By reiterating the importance of HIA, economic growth and long-term preservation of cultural treasures will be achieved.

Espada (2024) did an ethnographic study on Mamanwa culture, an indigenous community located in Basey, Samar, Philippines. The study highlights the following;

First, it extensively details various facets of Mamanwa life, encompassing animistic rituals, oral traditions, social structures, economic activities, and their unique perspectives on health, shelter, and daily routines. Secondly, the findings reveal that the modern influences, educational advancements, and interactions with external groups gradually reshape traditional practices, ushering in a fusion of old and new elements. Third, it explores the effects of modernization, environmental transformations, and socio-economic pressures on their age-old traditions, beliefs, and sense of self. Finally, the Mamanwa are found to be the Philippines' oldest indigenous peoples, grapple with severe marginalization, enduring poverty, displacement from mining activities and conflicts, and discriminatory practices. The study Profoundly emphasizes the critical necessity of preserving the Mamanwa's rich heritage. The study also advocates for collaborative efforts involving the Mamanwa community, researchers, and governmental/cultural bodies to document, safeguard, and revitalize their ancestral customs. However, it also sheds light on the looming threat of language loss, as the Minamanwa dialect faces a decline due to the encroachment of dominant languages in educational and societal spheres. The implications of this research are profound, emphasizing the critical necessity of preserving the Mamanwa's rich heritage. It advocates collaborative efforts involving the Mamanwa community, researchers, and governmental/cultural bodies to document, safeguard, and revitalize their ancestral customs. By utilizing salvage ethnography, the study underscores the urgency of capturing vanishing cultures before they disappear entirely. The comprehensive documentation of their rituals and beliefs not only provides invaluable insights for future studies but also underscores the intricate dynamics of resilience, adaptation, and the ongoing challenges confronting indigenous populations in an ever-evolving world.

Verances et al. (2024) investigated sustainable tourism and city branding strategies in Indonesia and the Philippines, aiming to understand how destinations balance economic growth with cultural preservation and authenticity. Approaches were taken in both countries and a significant finding were;

1. Successful integration of digital technologies, cultural heritage into urban planning, and adaptive reuse of historical sites are highlighted as crucial elements for achieving sustainable tourism and city branding.
2. The use of digital technologies (VR, AR) to enhance the tourism experiences and reduce physical strain on sites; the integration of traditional and modern design elements in urban planning (cultural fusion); and the adaptive reuse of historical sites for contemporary purposes (hotels, museums).
3. Cultural integration, adaptive reuse, strong government policies, and active community involvement for successful sustainable tourism and city branding.

The research of Abatayo et al. (2024) on her ethnographic study documents the cultural resources and preservation practices of the Higaonon tribe focusing on the communities in Simbalan, Buenavista, Agusan del Norte, Philippines. The researchers used focus group discussions and interviews with tribal leaders and members to understand the tribe's social organization, rituals, knowledge systems, material culture, and artistic expressions.

Mayo (2023) examines the socio-cultural practices of the Dulangan Manobo in the Philippines and assesses the impact of government initiatives aimed at preserving them. The study discovered that, the Manobo actively participate in social, economic, and political activities. They have maintained strong social practices, including traditional dances, music, and ceremonies (weddings, funerals). While some

practices are consistently observed, others are fading due to external influences. Their economic practices are rooted in traditional agriculture (rice, corn) and weaving, with limited adoption of modern technologies. Their political culture emphasizes democratic leadership, community consultation, and traditional conflict resolution methods. Well-implemented and embraced Government livelihood preservation and culture conservation programs (LPCCP) are generally implemented particularly those focusing on ancestral domain delineation, sustainable development planning, cultural documentation, education, and social welfare.

However, programs focusing on crafts training, crop production, and health saw less participation. This suggests that government programs alone may not be sufficient to significantly impact deeply ingrained cultural practices. The influence of broader historical, environmental, and socio-political contexts is likely more significant. Furthermore, the study underscores the resilience of the Dulangan Manobo in safeguarding their cultural heritage amidst adversities. Although governmental initiatives provide assistance, the absence of a robust connection accentuates the necessity for nuanced and culturally attuned methods for heritage conservation. The research proposes a comprehensive approach involving education, preservation of oral traditions, backing for culturally fitting livelihood projects, acknowledgment of their governance systems, and the establishment of a cultural museum. The results stress the essentiality of a profound comprehension of the intricate dynamics influencing cultural customs and a cooperative strategy that honors the community's independence and principles.

The study underscores the rich cultural heritage, sustainable practices deeply rooted in nature, an active cultural preservation endeavors through oral traditions and festivals, and the challenges posed by modernization and external influences. Traditional dances, crafts, oral literature, sacred rituals, and sustainable farming methods intertwined with spiritual beliefs showcased their cultural legacy. The tribe diligently upholds practices such as storytelling, yearly festivities, and efforts to rejuvenate their culture, highlighting the significance of acknowledging and honoring the Higaonon heritage. Moreover, the study promotes the incorporation of Higaonon customs into national educational curricula, nurturing cultural pride, and backing indigenous traditions as essential measures for cultural conservation and broader awareness.

With globalization reaching almost every part of the world, the vibrant and diverse cultures of indigenous peoples are endangered. The legacy of the indigenous communities deserves to be preserved and protected. Melgar (2024) highlighted three ways to maintain the indigenous cultural heritage: language preservation, traditional ecological knowledge, and art and collaboration in cultural preservation. Language is one major component of cultural heritage; thus, its preservation is vital. Documentation projects, educational programs for the youth, and the use of technology can help maintain language. Another invaluable aspect of indigenous cultural heritage is the traditional ecological knowledge, which manifests centuries of wisdom and practices developed by indigenous peoples in their interactions with the environment. To preserve traditional ecological knowledge, we must support the traditional ways of the indigenous communities with regards to the environment.

In a study on cultural preservation in the face of globalization, Kiarie (2024) pointed out how globalization presents a dual-edged sword for cultural heritage preservation, offering both opportunities and challenges. On one hand, globalization facilitates cultural exchange, exposure, and awareness, allowing cultural practices and heritage sites to gain international recognition and support. On the other hand, the economic pressures and urban development associated with globalization pose significant threats to cultural heritage. Rapid urbanization, driven by global economic trends, often leads to the destruction of historic sites and the displacement of traditional communities. To offset the disadvantages

of globalization on cultural preservation, he recommended solutions: community involvement, integration of modern technologies, tourism, robust legal and policy frameworks, international cooperation, and education and public awareness.

Another study emphasized the weighty impact of preserving cultural heritage, underscoring a society's identity, sense of belongingness, intergenerational knowledge transfer, and collective understanding of the past. It explored the twofold objective of museums in balancing cultural heritage maintenance and cultural industry development, as well as strategies to address challenges between preservation and commercialization. Firstly, museums greatly help safeguard and transmit cultural heritage. Through the exhibits of artifacts, they pass down human history and culture to future generations, as well as contribute to fostering the growth of the cultural industry. Secondly, successful museum cases like the Louvre and the Kyoto National Museum prove the viable harmony between preservation and commercialization. However, issues in managing the rigidity between preservation and commercialization exist. To resolve these challenges, clear policies should be crafted, public engagement should be encouraged, and business paradigms should be innovated. Through collaboration and innovation, museums can effectively fulfill their dual mission of preservation and development, contributing to the flourishing of culture (Qj, 2023).

Коцюбівська et al. (2024) analyzed the possibilities of using artificial intelligence tools for the preservation and popularization of cultural heritage, as well as to study their impact on the efficiency of cultural institutions, such as libraries, museums and archives. Employing an interdisciplinary approach, which includes: analysis of modern AI technologies, such as natural language processing (NLP), computer vision and deep learning algorithms, as well as a review of cases of using artificial intelligence in cultural institutions, in particular the HYPERION project, they found out that "artificial intelligence is becoming an integral element of modern cultural institutions. Its use contributes to the automation of cataloguing and digitization processes; increasing the accuracy of search systems and the relevance of results; creating innovative approaches to interacting with the audience through virtual tours and personalized recommendations. In Spite of the significance, it remains essential to consider ethical challenges, particularly to ensure the validity and confidentiality of data. The incorporation of AI into cultural heritage management has a potential for the preservation and popularization that makes the culture accessible to a broader audience and to ensure its adaptation to the needs of modern society."

Yepyk et al. (2024) verified the findings of Коцюбівська et al. (2024), this study highlights the importance of digital tools and technologies particularly in recording, archiving, and in enhancing accessibility to cultural artifacts, traditions, and languages. Their results emphasize the impact of digital methods such as high-quality imaging, 3D scanning, digital reality, and enhanced reality to ensure the documentation and in captivating the experience of cultural heritage. Though the authors elaborate, the significance of addressing the challenges such as the digital obsolescence, the accessibility and the inclusivity, copyright issues, data security, and the ethical considerations in the process of digitizing cultural heritage.

Methodology

This research made use of a qualitative research design with descriptive analysis in the investigation of the factors that affecting cultural maintenance among the Higaonon tribe in Rogongon, Iligan City. The qualitative approach was selected because it offers an in-depth interpretation of the lived observations, viewpoints, and systematic exercises of the Higaonon community. Descriptive analysis

was used to provide a comprehensive and detailed examination of the data collected from the respondents.

Four primary informants in the study were used. Because of the extensive knowledge of Higaonon culture, traditions, and the challenges faced by the community, these respondents were chosen. Valuable insights into both historical and contemporary efforts at cultural preservation are the roles of these leaders and members of the community.

Providing flexibility in the investigation of the respondents' insights while preserving focus on the goals of this study, semi-structured interviews were employed to collect data. The interviews were communicative, which allowed the respondents to convey their experiences and outlooks in a convenient and open manner. An interview guide was used to ensure that key areas, including struggles to maintain the culture, techniques used in the community, and outside stakeholders' involvement, were completely included.

The interviews were taken in person in Rogongon, Iligan City. They were camcordered with the informants' consent to ensure appropriate transcription and analysis. Field notes were also taken to document non-verbal cues and contextual observations that helped the interpretation of the data.

The data that were collected from the interviews were analyzed using descriptive analysis. In this study, the analysis was done by categorizing the factors that affect the preservation of culture, strategies used by the community, and external influences. In the further refinement and interpretation, these themes provided a more holistic understanding of the problems in preserving the culture among the Higaonon.

Results and Discussions

Culture is the reservoir of experiences, beliefs systems, and traditions of a group of people. It is the common denominator among individuals living inside the parameter of one culture. The Higaonon as ethnic group and indigenous people of Mindanao, Philippines aspires to be seen and elevate its aesthetic culture and how it can contribute nationally or globally. This section presents the findings of this study on the cultural preservation of the Higaonon tribe.

Cultural Practices of Higaonon in Rogongon

Rogongon is a barangay in the highlands of Iligan City that shelters three people: Higaonon, Meranaw, and Christians. It has a land area of 35,000 hectares and borders Bukidnon, Lanao del Sur, and Iligan City.

According to one of the key informants, Rogongon is derived from the word logong, which means thunder. As a titleholder of the community, she shared several cultural practices that are present in the community.

These practices are grouped into material and non-material cultures as stated by the National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) (2024). The material cultural practices of the Higaonon in Rogongon include their clothing, food, and artifacts. Their distinct cultural attire represents their pride and identity (Cajentas-Saranza, 2016). It commonly has four vibrant colors: red which symbolizes the tribe's bravery; black, their customary law; white, which stands for purity; and yellow indicating their sincerity. Completing the attire are the *panika*, their headdress made up of chicken feathers invoking high flight of

the tribe; and the necklace. Their tribal attire is worn occasionally, particularly by the bride. The *gantang*, a wooden headgear, is another symbolic object that is reserved for a tribal leader. As for their food sustenance, the tribe is rice-centered, but more importantly, they plant root crops as supplemental food and as a source of income. In fact, Rogongon is considered to be the food basket of Iligan City and Cagayan de Oro. This supports the statement of Buenavista (2021) saying that wild food resources are essential for subsistence and livelihood income for many ethnic communities in Asia. The Higaonon in Rogongon like other Higaonon tribes in the Philippines weave artifacts such as hats, baskets, pot and glass mats, table mats, wallets, and others made from abaca. These hand-made products are sources of livelihood for the tribe, particularly the makers who usually hand them to a middleman who delivers them to the wide market, therefore, confirming Abatayo's (2024) claim that Higaonon crafts provide income for artisans and ensure the continuity of cultural practices.

Meanwhile, non-material cultures of the tribe encompass the members' beliefs and rituals. As the key informant further claimed, the Higaonons respect their *Baylan*, their religious leader, next to Magbabaya, the name of their God. The *Baylan*, exclusively male, is the only authorized leader of the tribe's rituals. He ushers the performance of *agsiwa*, the opening or welcoming speech addressed to non-Higaonon visitors of the community, *igbabasok* or the ceremonial request to start farming, and *pamalis* or a ceremonial welcome for visitors. In most rituals, a chicken is slaughtered as a sacrificial or evil-driving offering for the spirits. The informant's claim disputes Cajentas-Saranza's (2016) statement that Higaonons in Agusan butcher a pig to appease the spirits. The use of chickens instead of pigs is an innovation probably in respect to the Meranaw who co-inhabit with them in the community.

With regards to marriage, as explained further by the key informant, the groom needs not to prepare for a heavy dowry, in cash or in kind, for her bride. A Higaonon man can marry up to two wives; the first wife commonly facilitates the courtship and the negotiation with the target woman. Then, the second wife normally agrees to serve her *duwaya*, the first wife, and her husband's first family. If a husband or a wife cheats, succumbing to adultery, the *Datu*, who is recognized by the tribal council, leads the implementation of the punishment, which they call *manumbilan*, of lashing the back of the person. This proves the statement of Dumas (2022) that ethnic communities had some level of governance that may have simply been to ensure that decisions are made when necessary. Finally, the most celebrated ritual of the Higaonon tribe is the *Tinuig Kaamulan*, which is staged annually as a thanksgiving gathering. It has been mentioned in other articles written about the tribe.

Factors Affecting Cultural Preservation of Higaonon

Intermarriages. Intermarriages are a critical force in the Higaonon community of Rogongon, Iligan City. When the members of the tribe get married to outside individuals, mostly Meranaw and other non-indigenous groups, the dynamics that have been present in cultural transmission in the family and society begin to change. Although intermarriages promote social integration and connections across different cultures, there are also difficulties that lead to discontinuity in Higaonon traditions and practices.

One of the main issues with intermarriages is the loss of cultural identity. When a Higaonon marries another person from a different ethnic group, the couple often has to deal with the mixing of different cultural norms, practices, and belief systems. In many families, the dominant culture remains to be that of the other half, particularly if one or both come from more densely populated or economically well-off groups like the Meranaw. The children get immersed in this culture rather more than they would into theirs, thereby losing their awareness of and appreciation for being a Higaonon and its associated

traditions. This is in congruence with the observation of Lopez (2019) in his article Oral traditions in the Philippines: The stories of the Higaonon.

Moreover, intermarriages might dilute the sense of community in the Higaonon tribe when conserving their culture. Typically, the community plays an important role in inculcating cultural values and practices through rituals, oral traditions, and collective action. However, if the family becomes more immersed into another culture, then this family may not be that active in the communal activities of the Higaonon tribe. Consequently, this decreased participation pushes them further away from the rest of the tribe's social life, which might weaken the transmission of knowledge through generations (Alvarez, 2022).

Another challenge that intermarriages pose is the possibility of conflict in spiritual and religious practices. The Higaonons are known for their deep spiritual connection to nature and their indigenous rituals, which often involve sacred ceremonies performed by tribal leaders like the Bae or Datu. However, when intermarriages involve individuals from predominantly Islamic communities, such as the Meranaw, or other religious groups, differences in spiritual beliefs and practices may arise. These differences can bring conflict within families, thus adopting one belief system at the expense of the other. More often than not, indigenous practices are set aside and replaced by more common religious practices, such as that of the Higaonon.

Generational gap in cultural knowledge. The generational gap in cultural knowledge is an important challenge to cultural preservation in the Higaonon community of Rogongon, Iligan City. This issue has increased as younger generations become more exposed to modern education, urban lifestyles, and technology, often at the expense of learning and practicing their ancestral traditions. For the Higaonon, their knowledge of culture is being passed down orally through elders. However, young members of the community are exposed to external influences, there is a growing disconnect from these traditional sources of wisdom. According to Ragandang (2017), the tribe's traditional knowledge, such as their conflict resolution system known as *paghusay*, is at risk of being lost if not properly documented.

Rogongon, although located in the highlands of Iligan City, they also have the same experience with the people of the city in terms of technology. Younger members of the tribe are also being exposed to social media and new technologies, hence they have a conflicting mindset about their culture and identity as Higaonon. According to the informants, the elders find it somehow hard to connect with the young members of the community. In the use of language, for example, there are words from the Higaonon language that the younger members find unfamiliar. This is because of their exposure to the Visayan language, and other languages being taught in school.

One of the primary reasons for this generational gap is the change in priorities among younger Higaonon locals.. Many young people would find education, often in urban areas where they are exposed to mainstream culture, which promotes academic and technical skill over indigenous ways of knowing (Martinez, 2020).

The generational gap hinders the transfer of indigenous languages, which are significant to the Higaonon culture. It is a central pillar in preserving their identity. However, the younger Higaonon would choose to speak more in other languages such as Filipino, or even English. there is a decrease in the use of the Higaonon language, especially among the younger members of the community. According to Villanueva (2018), if there is no effort to encourage and learn the language, it will face the risk of disappearing.

Misrepresentation. Misrepresentation of Higaonon culture also poses a significant challenge in cultural preservation. One of which is when their culture is being shown in street dancing contests, cultural shows, or festivals. These events are often organized by non-Higaonon to provide entertainment for the

audience. The purpose of these presentations and performances are to celebrate their culture. However, there are inaccuracies to these performances. As a result, this raises concerns about cultural appropriation of their traditions. According to the informant, they stopped joining street dancing contests, specifically in the Diyandi Festival of Iligan City because instead of them teaching the dance to the people, they are the ones being taught. This scenario is deemed to be unacceptable by the community because they are supposed to be the ones who are more knowledgeable of their own dances and culture.

In many cases, dances, songs, and rituals are performed by non-Higaonon groups or even by Higaonon individuals who have little to no understanding of the deep cultural meanings behind the movements and gestures. These performances, stripped of their sacred significance and context, are often simplified or altered to fit the expectations of the audience or the organizers. The community's concern is that these misrepresented performances perpetuate stereotypes and trivialize their rich cultural heritage (Martinez, 2020).

What they are frustrated about, is that their cultural expressions like dances and other rituals are not forms of entertainment for the Higaonon; they are deep acts of cultural and spiritual importance. These inaccuracies in the performances and dances diminishes spiritual and cultural value (Dela Cruz, 2021). Moreover, these misrepresentations contribute to cultural distortion of the public's understanding of indigenous communities, resulting them to stereotypes or oversimplified representations.

Community Response to Cultural Threats

Higaonon is a well-preserved tribal community in the Philippines particularly in Rogongon, Iligan City. Their language belongs to the Manobo language family which is primarily spoken in the provinces of Agusan del Sur, Claveria and Bukidnon. It is also called Binukid (Camus,2024). This language was nurtured and cherished for generations and plays an important role in preserving their identity and traditions as indigenous people. They are one of the 18 Lumads, an ethnolinguistic group in the Philippines (Camus,2024). In response to the challenges in preserving their language and cultures, a joint effort is being made to revitalize language and traditions of the Higaonon people. Parents are preserving the Higaonon language by doing the storytelling and other oral traditions which instill moral lessons among young ones. Mother tongue based DepEd books were also printed to revitalize the language. The local community and the National Commission on Indigenous People or NCIP initiatives workshops to promote cultural awareness and preservation of traditional practices like dances and rituals. Sabbagh (2023) posits the successful preservation of the cultural heritage lies in the hand of multi-sectoral cooperation of all stakeholders.

Moreover, one of the informants emphasized on community resilience which can promote cultural awareness and protection of ancestral lands, which leads to the community's strong sense of identity and cultural pride. This account supports the study Espada (2024) which holds the findings of her study on Mamanwa People in Basey, Samar, Philippines that to ensure the survival of the language and culture, a need for revitalization and constant local and national government program initiatives should be implemented.

It was also observed that Higaonons are very close to nature. Nature gives them security and guidance in their day to day living. At the start of farming, they ask nature to make their crops more productive. Henceforward, Abatayo J, et al (2024), underscores the rich cultural heritage and sustainable practices deeply rooted in nature.

Conclusion

This paper shows how culturally rich the ethnic tribe of Higaonon in Rogongon is in terms of traditions, oral literature, customs, and their environmental relation to their ancestral land as indigenous people. On the other side, their cultural preservation efforts face different challenges in sustaining its culturally rich practices such as intermarriages, generational gaps in knowledge, and misrepresentation in the society. Notwithstanding the social conflict they are experiencing, the Higaonon continues to be resilient and adaptive despite the hard situation bound to them, such as engaging in community activities, reclaiming their rights and sovereignty as people, and fighting their rights towards truthful representation in mainstream society. Their practices, ranging from the rituals and dances, are more than a cultural behavior—It is the knowledge and life of how they live and adapt to the ever changing world. Pushing these to the different stakeholders of the community, private or public, including the government agencies that their functions are in support of the IP, the Higaonon people can thrive and sustained their cultural identity and transmit it to the new generation while extending knowledge to the non-natives.

Moreover, this study is dependent on qualitative information coming from four key informants of the tribe. Their observations offer insightful viewpoints, it is understood the limitations of the paper due to its scope of location studied.

Based on the qualitative data obtained from the native speakers of Higaonon, the drive to transmit the knowledge and local traditions must be fueled by the motivations of both the Higaonon and the local government to further the status and preservation. It is necessary to consider that the government must work hand in hand to the elder tribe in preparing the programs implemented particularly in enriching the school of living traditions.

Furthermore, the problems encountered in intergenerational transmission can be answered by making materials and programs that interest the young generation in order for them to embrace the essence of culture and not only by respect. Indeed, the success of sustainability of cultural preservation relies on the realization of the government that the Higaonon people themselves should carry their programs.

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