

The Sagada Rice Agricultural Practices and Beliefs, 1950-2020

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ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to create a comprehensive historical account of the old indigenous practice of the Sagada Agricultural Practices from the early 1950's to 2020s' conducted in the Central Barangays of Sagada Mountain Province, which aims to identify the agricultural practices and beliefs, as well as the changes that have occurred overtime. An archival research method, participatory observation, oral history, and descriptive and qualitative methods are utilized in this study. The results of the study detail the practices and highlights the effects of changing attitudes and reduced participation within the community. It is significant as we conclude that as progress occurs in the municipality, the traditional practices and beliefs gradually fade due to modernization influenced by increasing tourism and changing attitudes of the current generation.

Keywords: Begnas, Culture, Beliefs, wet-rice cultivation, Practices and Tourism

Introduction

As the Philippines navigates economic landscape within the various cultures of Asia, it stands out as a nation that remains predominantly agrarian, a characteristic that distinguishes it from many of its more industrialized neighbors. In particular, the rural landscapes of the Mountain Province particularly the Municipality of Sagada show a unique blend of agricultural activities interwoven with its ancient rituals and practices deeply rooted in strong beliefs. These practices are integrated into the fabric of daily life, with a prevailing conviction that the omission of these rituals may affect the promise of a bountiful harvest.

The endurance of these traditions persists despite the encroachment of modernization into these areas, illustrating a deep cultural flexibility and resilience. Amidst the swift march of technology and progress, these traditional agricultural customs play a pivotal role in shaping the destiny of communities, offering a lens through which to examine the relationship between heritage, innovation, and the socioeconomic trajectory of a region.

It becomes evident that while counterparts in other regions embrace and implement new agricultural innovations, those who adhere to time-honored practices find themselves at a crossroads, grappling with the challenge of striking a delicate balance between preserving cultural heritage and embracing the advancements that propel their counterparts ahead. This introduction thus sets the stage for a comprehensive exploration of the dynamic relationship between tradition and progress in the agricultural realms of the Central Sagada, Mountain Province, offering insights into the factors that influence community destinies and the association of old beliefs with the relentless march of modernity. In this study, it will deal with the changes and continuity of the rice agricultural practice with the beliefs of Sagada Mountain Province. It will also discuss the role of tourism in the slowly changes on the performance of rituals.

Located in the upper reaches of a limestone valley, Sagada, in the Western Mountain Province lies about 1,600 meters above sea level and is 18 kilometers from the Provincial Capital at Bontoc. The valley is divided into an extensive system of ridges, caverns, and underground spring-fed creeks. Its streams form a tributary of the Chico River. This topography and its waters define the agricultural landscape of this mountain community and figure prominently in its rituals and mythology as well.

As stated by Voss, Sagada is one of the ten municipalities in Mountain Province that is home to the Kankanaey-speaking Igorot people, specifically the Applai tribe. Their primary livelihood since before the 1950s has been cultivating rice in irrigated terraces, with small streams providing ample water, allowing for two rice harvests annually. In addition to rice farming, other crops like citrus fruits, persimmons, pears, and muscovado sugar contribute to the community's income. Sagada is widely regarded as a captivating retreat in the Cordillera region, drawing tourists and travelers alike. Its natural attractions include limestone cave systems, an underground river, Echo Valley, Marlboro Country, and the famous Hanging Coffins.

Since the early 2000's, rice farming has seen a decline as tourism has become an additional economic driver for local residents. Historically, Sagada was divided both geographically and ritually into two areas: Barangay Dagdag and Barangay Demang, each featuring a sacred spring and a grove of sacred trees. The town is also divided into 12 ceremonial political wards, known as "dap-ay", with seven located in Demang and five in the combined Dagdag-Patay district.¹

¹ Joachim Voss, *Ritual/Life Sagada Photographs* (Baguio City: A-Seven Publishing, 2005), 9.

In order to gain a better understanding of the study, the following terms are defined as they are used:

Beliefs. These pertain to the strong beliefs or convictions held by an individual or a community regarding a particular situation, aspect, or undertaking. Such convictions typically stem from reasoned justifications that satisfy the believer. Positioned between knowledge and opinion, this concept characterizes the determined stance or perspective adopted by individuals concerning presented ideas.

Practices. These encompass the traditional behaviors aligned with specific beliefs and attitudes. They also denote inherited practices and customs passed down through generations, including ceremonies and rituals that are routinely upheld. This pertains to established practices with historical roots, perpetuated from one generation to the next, wielding significant influence among the community practicing them.

Begnas. This is a like community celebration equivalent to fiestas in other municipalities. The celebration involves feasting, playing gongs, dancing, and gathering of people from other barangays. It is conducted in a certain ward (*dap-ay*) that serves as host for the event.

Butchering of pigs, cooking of *tupig* (cooked rice placed in the woven leaves of sugarcane), men joining the traditional parade will wear their g-strings while women joining the feast in the *dap-ay* are wearing their "*gateng*" (locally woven cloth that serves as skirts for women). In the celebration of Begnas in the contemporary period, the members of the community may bring gifts in kind that will be used during the *dap-ay* celebration, such as the local gin, sugars, soft drinks, breads, etag, and some may donate chickens to be butchered for consumption by the men in *Dap-ay*. Visitors and tourists are also permitted to participate during the *begnas*.

This celebration is conducted annually in the different *Dap-ay* and a long-running tradition has stood the test of time, although it has been noted to be less frequent than those performed during earlier periods, such as the 1950's. It is also defined as a three-day or seven-day complex of prayers, sacrifices, and rites, performed by the community for its mutual welfare, originally following a headhunting raid, but now scheduled according to the agricultural calendar. ²

² Eugenio Bayang and W. H. Scott, "Bayang's Demang Notes: Sagada Social Studies No. 3 (March 1955)," *Philippine Sociological Review* 22, no. 1/4 (1974): 51-90, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23892243>

STUDIES ON AGRICULTURAL PRACTICES

This section reviews related studies on rice agriculture and associated rituals among various cultural communities in the Philippines. Reynolds and Granthave documented the agricultural practices of the Isnegs in the Northern Philippines, noting their use of the slash-and-burn method and diverse palay varieties for sustainable harvesting.³ Similarly, studies by Wilson and Aprieto examine the different agricultural methods of the Igorots and Visayans, respectively, revealing a deep integration of rituals and ceremonies into their farming practices.⁴ These rituals, ranging from seed roasting to elaborate sacrificial ceremonies, highlight the communities' commitment to ensuring a bountiful harvest through adherence to traditional customs.

Additionally, the review highlights the impact of significant events, such as the Mount Pinatubo eruption on the Aetas of Zambales, as observed by Esplanada and the unique irrigation techniques employed by the Bontoks in Luzon, as described by Jenks.⁵ Across these studies, a common theme emerges: the importance of ritual compliance and community involvement in the agricultural practices of these cultural groups. However, notable differences exist in how these rituals are executed, including variations in the duration of ceremonies, the number of animals sacrificed, and the level of community participation, all of which contribute to the distinctiveness of each cultural community's agricultural traditions.

The cultural community areas engage in practices related to their rice agriculture not only on the basis of tradition, but more on the reasons that they do not like to suffer the penalties imposed upon them by the spirits they believed in. The educated sector of this place still relies on the performance of practices to avoid criticism. Values espoused by the elders who adhere to these beliefs and the performance of practices are worth emulating and disobedience to them is socially unacceptable.

In a study conducted by Limangan among the Banaue people in Ifugao, she found that these farmers still adhere to rituals in rice agriculture.⁶ This belief

³ Hubert Reynolds and Fern Bobcock Grant, *The Isnegs of Northern Philippines* (Dumaguete City: University Press Inc), 30-31.

⁴ Laurence L. Wilson, *The Skyland of the Philippines, 2nd Edition* (Manila: Benipayo Press, 1995), 85.

⁵ Jerry Esplanada, "Mount Pinatubo booms with four big bangs", *The Philippine Daily Inquirer*, June 13, 1991, 8.; Albert Ernest Jenks, *The Bontoc Igorot* (Manila: Bureau of Public Printing, 1905), 88-103.

⁶ Betty Limangan, "Tribal rituals in Rice production in Banaue Ifugao" (Master's Thesis., University of Baguio, Baguio City, 1985) 48, Unpublished.

stems from their conviction that non-adherence to the rituals will result in unsuccessful harvests. She also emphasized that the native chicken is the most common sacrifice in their offerings for a productive and abundant harvest.

According to Aprieto, the Boholanos adhere to the belief that planting during the high tide ensures their plants are free from pests.⁷ Out of fear of locusts, farmers should refrain from killing them. Instead, they should catch the largest and adorn it with gold and beads before releasing it. They do this in the belief that their crops will remain free from locusts and not be infested by pests. Before harvesting, a Boholano should avoid contact with his wife and fire. Visitors are also prohibited from entering their homes, as doing so would result in rice stalks being laden with grains.

Wilson also discussed that on the agriculture practice of the Ibaloi he disclosed that this group of farmers believed that planting during the full moon will mean the farmer is inviting deers and wild pigs to eat and destroy the plants.⁸ During the dark moon, they should refrain from planting, as the moon has sunk, which suggests that the plants will also sink.

Hellemont enumerated beliefs associated with agricultural practices commonly found among the Benguet's, the Ifugao's and the people of the Mountain Province. These include the following:⁹

1. Each stage of the agricultural cycle once began should not be delayed. People have to go by the schedules. Delays in the performance of rituals will mean poor harvest.
2. In planting or harvesting, nobody is to plant nor harvest unless the schedule of the season was signified by the master field (*Bangan*). Failure of the master field to start the activity will adversely affect every farmer and poor crop production results.

In the earlier studies of William Henry Scott and Eugenio Bayang regarding the agricultural practice and the Begnas, they describe the "Lakat di De-am" as the first festival and people will offer a pig sacrifice in Mabasig. This holiday lasts three days, during which each family kills a chicken, and after this ritual, they prepare the fields for planting camotes. This is followed by the Wange ceremony, during which the community butchers a pig for

7 Pacifico N. Aprieto, *Folk Culture of the Central Visayas* (Quezon City: Philippine Armstar Co.,1986),39-42.

8 Laurence L. Wilson, *The Skyland of the Philippines 2nd Edition* (Manila: Benipayo Press, 1956), 85.

9 Raf Van Hellemont, *"A comparative and Integrated approach to the socio-economic Conditions in Benguet, Ifugao and Mountain Province"* (Baguio City: Saint Louis University,1972), 93.

sacrifice. During the Pogpogew (month of September), the *Pangat* Ceremony, in which the sacrifice ceremony again takes place in Mabasig.¹⁰

The foregoing accounts of beliefs related to the performance of agricultural practices among the groups of farmers studied, bear similarities with the present study, as these all discuss to which beliefs in their respective agricultural undertakings. The similarities were also noted in the extent to which these beliefs influence the lives of the farmers. The differences were however noted in the scope of the investigation.

Some of the foregoing studies involved all agricultural undertakings, while the present study concentrated on the rice agriculture of the Sagada people. While people involved generally were classified as cultural communities, the distinctive ways of life of these groups of people account for the other differences borne by their ways of undertaking their rice agriculture activities. The beliefs surrounding their agricultural practices and the social controls exerted by these were however found similar among almost all of them. Differences could only be noted in very simple and not so discernible activities.

Socio-Economic Effects of Beliefs Attached to Agricultural Practices

Most of the cultural communities perform and observe practices in agriculture for fear of being penalized by the spirits with a poor harvest. Nobody wants to go hungry, so by all means, they abide by the expectations of tradition and practices performed in the undertaking of rice agriculture. The fear of “*inayan*” and criticism from the community elders also binds the community to the adherence on the rituals aside from the manifestation of good harvest.

In a similar study conducted by Masegman in Bontoc, indigenous rituals and their effects on agricultural production, revealed that the community is safe from any form of calamity as long as the rituals are performed religiously by the folks.¹¹ Moreover, she said that the indoctrination of rites developed a sense of unity and love of neighbor and self-identity. On the other hand, the declining of unity among the members of the community or the clan, is the result of modernization or rejection of rituals.

¹⁰ Bayang and Scott, “Bayang’s Demang Notes,” 54.

¹¹ Josephine Masegman, “Bontoc Indigenous Rituals: Their Effects on Agriculture Production” (Master’s Thesis, Don Mariano Marcos Memorial State University, 1980) 76, Unpublished.

Masegman posed two options in the above cited account.¹² It is a choice between adhering to the native religious rites for unity and cooperation, or the acceptance of modernization or rejection of rituals for a declining unity and absence of cooperation. Indeed, for change to take effect, sacrifices have to be made in favor of a better result. Such better results cannot be immediately realized, but it has to evolve slowly, in the same manner as each tradition was imposed upon a young member of the society in the event of his birth.

The characteristic of progress denotes a typical *gesellschaft* society characterized by impersonal, secondary, contractual, and rationalized relationships as against the *gemeinschaft* society, which goes for mutual helpfulness, intimacy, familism, and strong identification with the group. Thus, The Sagadan if aiming for progress, has to slowly grow from the *gemeinschaft* orientation to the *gesellschaft* life. Alternatives need to be considered in regard to the gradual lessening of rituals and minimizing beliefs controlling the behaviors of the community folks.

The belief in the power of the environment and inanimate objects, are evident in the practice of the “*podong*”. The *lota* (soil or earth) is regarded as the guardian of all people, as it provides the means of livelihood for everyone. During ceremonies, the *lota* is invoked as a guardian who sees all that happens without anyone around.

The *teñgaos* and *Begnas* are associated with the agricultural cycle, climate and sickness. These are rituals and practices performed throughout the agricultural cycle which aim for a productive harvest. However, these do much damage not only because of the many pigs and chickens killed and the large amount of rice consumed, but also because of the growing crops left unattended.

An analysis of the economic marginalization was also discussed by the same editors, de Los Reyes and de los Reyes¹³ in the third volume of the Cordillera Schools Group Series. They stated that agriculture and productivity productions do not end up with surplus which can be used for economic and social advancement. It is a level of productivity that barely meets the essential needs. The authors provided their commentaries on their analysis of the Igorot mode of agriculture. They further elaborated that productive farmers need training, education, and updating. However, time was not spared for formal education, so they rely on traditional wisdom in maintaining the current level of production. On the present state of

¹² Masegman, “Bontoc Indigenous Rituals: Their Effects on Agriculture Production,” 76.

¹³ Angelo J. De los Reyes and Aloma M. De los Reyes, “Igorot A People Who Daily Touch the Earth and the Sky”. (Baguio City: *CSG Series, Vol.1: Ethnography*, 1987), 32-65.

agricultural lands, forest and water resources, are not supportive of production. The farms were further diminished due to insufficient irrigation water resulting from slow development.

Regarding agricultural practices, they noted that the duration of a single cropping cycle lasting six to eight months, the farm size, the land elevation, rice variety, technology, and other aspects of agricultural practices in some areas are the main factors contributing to low gross production. Agricultural technology relies on the current state of farm technology, the use of wooden tools, and carabao plowing.

The same were concurred by Bolislis¹⁴, who also mentioned that the ways of life, customs and beliefs of people were the principal causes of the slow progress of the people of Upper Apayao. He concluded that the economic and educational retardation of this group of people were basically due to their customs, beliefs and traditions.

Anoños in a similar study on the rituals on Betwagan, Sadanga came up with the following socio-economic implications of such rituals: ¹⁵

1. The traditional practice of doing almost equal work between men and women groups has accustomed husband and wife to do farm work even in the absence of one of them;
2. The practice of holding the *ap-apoy* rite after the plowing activities is not only desirable but also enjoyable to everyone, young and old, alike. It underscores the value of relaxation, equivalent to holding of social hours after some physically exhausting activities;
3. The value of working hard to earn for a living is very desirable. Positive attitudes like acceptance and willingness to do any type of hard work are valuable ingredients in the development of industry and love of manual labor.

Bulayungan made a study on the Ayangan and Hanglulu tribes of Kiangnan in an attempt to compare their beliefs and practices.¹⁶ She discovered that the Ayangan and Hanglulu tribes believe in many gods, some of whom are

¹⁴ Paquito Bolislis, "A study on Social Customs and Practices of the Isnegs". (Master's Thesis., Eastern Philippines Colleges, Baguio City, 1972), 31, Unpublished.

¹⁵ Julio A. Anongos, "The rituals of Sadanga, Mountain Province" (Master's Thesis University of Baguio, Baguio City, 1991), 118, Unpublished.

¹⁶ Mary Bulayungan, "A comparative Study of the community Resources of the Ayangan and Hanglulu Tribes of Kiangnan" (Master's Thesis, University of Baguio, Baguio City, 1972), 49-50. Unpublished.

related to natural as well as inanimate objects. When angered or displeased, these gods inflict punishment upon those concerned. They cause sickness, death, calamities, and other forms of misfortune upon those who are responsible for their anger or displeasure. Hence, the gods need to be appeased by appropriate sacrifices. The offering or failure to offer these sacrifices, are perceived as the causes of the successes or failures of agriculture and other occupational activities.

Garcia also noted the changes in the beliefs, practices, values, and attitudes of the Balakbak people from the highly traditional to quite modern outlooks and disposition.¹⁷ While in the 1920's, the Balakbaks were just like most other tribes in the mountain areas, they have changed somehow, through the years. Today, they visit hospitals, clinics and dispensaries for their health needs, and they have adopted modern principles and practices espoused by the public schools and other government agencies in the Cordillera.

Botengan observed among her people in Tocucan that the passage of time and civilization has not left the Tocucan people alone.¹⁸ Christianity was established by the American Episcopal missionaries followed by the Belgian Roman Catholic fathers. Like other cultural communities in the area, and Sagada, which is the subject of this study, almost all professed Christians are "nominal" in that they practice both the native and Christian beliefs. This process of syncretism is also evident in new ideas introduced by schools. She further elaborates that the acceptance of new religious beliefs even peripherally, indicates the people's willingness to try new ideas. The lack of total acceptance on the other hand, indicates adaptiveness to the new institutions to make their teachings more relevant to the people.

The foregoing literature and studies which are related the beliefs and practices have helped the researcher to fill in the gaps of this research paper. The ideas, opinions, and results of the former studies reviewed, were very helpful in the historical agricultural data gathered in the present study. Also, these gave her a background of all the prevailing customs and traditions particularly those with reference to the problem of investigation. While the shift from the traditional to the modern and progressive economy is taking slow influence, at least, these are still indications of change.

¹⁷ Benito Garcia, "An appraisal of the changes in the Culture of the Balakbak People from 1925-1975 and their Implications to Education" (Master's Thesis University of Baguio, Baguio City 1975) 40-43, Unpublished.

¹⁸ Kate C. Botengan, *Bontoc Lifeways: A Study in Education and Culture* (Manila: Centro Scholar University Research and Development Center 1976), 64.

THE TRADITIONAL RICE AGRICULTURAL PRACTICES AND RITUALS BY THE SAGADA PEOPLE

According to the study of Aguilar in the pre-colonial Philippines, rice held significant cultural and economic importance, as evidenced by the numerous words related to rice in early Spanish colonial dictionaries.¹⁹ Different varieties of rice were cultivated, with distinctions between flooded rice paddies and upland swidden fields. While rice was highly valued, it was not a daily staple due to insufficient production, leading to the consumption of root crops during certain seasons.



Figure 1. The rice fields taken at Balugan, Sagada

Rice was associated with social stratification, and portions of harvests were given as tribute to chiefs. The cultivation, harvesting, and consumption of rice were deeply embedded in social relationships and islanders' cosmology, involving strict rituals and taboos. Rice was considered a prestigious food, and its magical significance was reflected in practices such as harvesting panicle by panicle.

19 Filomeno V. Aguilar Jr., "Rice and Magic a Cultural History from the Precolonial World to the Present" *Philippine Studies: Historical & Ethnographic Viewpoints*, Vol. 61, No. 3, (2013): 297-330.

The belief in rice spirits required propitiation to prevent displeasure. Rice played a crucial role in feasts, rituals, and everyday meals, linking cultivation to food preparation and consumption. Rituals were performed to ensure the rice's tranquility and cooperation with humans, emphasizing its importance in sustaining life until the next harvest.

There are eight (11) identified stages of rituals in the observation of the rice cropping of the Sagadans:

These are namely, (1) the Lakat or plowing stage; (2) the Pangat (a rest day before the sowing of seeds) (3) the Kutlong (family thanksgiving) (4) the Begnas, (5) the Wange (Identification of Bangan) (6) Toned or planting period; (7) The sagangsang or installation of scarecrows (8) Begnas (9) Manapoy (invitation of Spirits) (10) Pinag-aani (harvesting period) (11) Ubaya di Ugas.

According to Lakay Polat²⁰, the elder of Dap-ay Akikis and supported by Ina Kagwet²¹, in ancient times, the Sagada community will sow the rice seeds known as "*dayday*" before the eleven stages of plowing and planting. During the "*dayday*" period farmers celebrated this by cooking the "*binaod*" (a pounded or ground rice, etag, and even dried fish that was placed in the sayote leaf also known famously as the local sagadan siopao). Banana leaf was also used during the olden times in the 1950's. The following day is referred to as '*songba*,' during which the farmers and locals sowing the seeds will sacrifice a chicken at the site of planting and hold a feast. In the process of waiting for the seeds to sprout and grow, the locals will be repairing the houses and the Begnas will follow. The lakat or plowing stage will start to be ready for the planting season.

After approximately 3-4 days, the farmer will do an inspection in the "*paddogan*" or seedbeds to check if the seeds have sprouted. This process is called "*yabyab*" a local term meaning the seeds have sprouted. If there are sprouts, they will let out the water so the roots of the "*padog*" will become firm.

Each of the eleven stages observed in rice agriculture carry with them some practices that are observed on the strong conviction that compliance or non-compliance to these would mean productive and bountiful harvest or no good harvest at all.

The lakat or start of plowing stage. In this stage the farmers will start plowing their fields. They drain their rice fields from water and turn the soil

²⁰ Interview with Esteban Bosaing, January 24, 2024.

²¹ Interview with Martha Batnag, January 25, 2024.

over before submerging these again in water. After turning out the soil, they will leave it for some time. They perform this practice based on the belief that the soil should be exposed to sunlight to eliminate soil pests, particularly worms, which they consider detrimental to rice production. Along with overturning the soil, the farmers fertilize their fields with the use of green manuring. They make use of leaves, mostly sunflower leaves. They also use pig manure known in the dialect as “*lomeng*” and with the introduction of commercial fertilizer.

Commercial fertilizers are already familiar on this period and the early 2000’s as it is readily available to the public and easy to apply. The use of these fertilizers and even the insecticides to eliminate snails and other pests are narrated by the elders. Those who could not afford the commercial fertilizers utilize the use of pig manure and the green composed leaves of the sunflower plant.



Figure 2. One of the remaining fields that was plowed in the Bangbangan Fields, part of Barangay Demang

The Kutlong. This is also known as the family thanksgiving associated with the Lakat period. All families are required to perform this on their own houses. Butchering of a chicken is a must to be consumed by the family members. During lunchtime, family members are required to eat at the house of a married children of the family. At dinner time, Kutlong shall be spent at

the house of the parents or the oldest kin of the clan whom they decided to be the host. This practice is perpetrated to strengthen closer family and clan relations. Apart from the strong bonds formed by the elders, this practice will also strengthen the connections among young children.

The Pangat. Before planting seeds, a day of rest called “*ubaya*” is observed, and a small marker known as “*binaod*” is placed at the rice field’s corner. As the planting season nears, elderly individuals position themselves each morning at sunrise, monitoring the sun's alignment with specific markers. On September 15, they declare the sacred Pangat day, marked by a farmerpriest ritually planting a few rice seeds. Between September 25 and 29, a different set of markers is used to announce Dayday, allowing the general public to sow their seeds. Finally, on October 22, the community celebrates Begnas with rituals and sacrifices dedicated to the fertility of sprouting rice.²²

Begnas. This is a communal feasting activity, hosted by the designated Dap-ay or ward, and is conducted five times a year. This Begnas associated with the planting season starts on the local calendar during the Month of February. the Begnas was named *Tangeb di Obo, sasaad ya lebek*. Followed by another Begnas during the Kiyang (Month of May) where the “*leplepas di dadawak*” and the first begnas “*Tangeb di babayas*” and also known as “*the begnas di do-ok*”. One of the most important Begnas occurs when the rice grains become heavy, golden, and fully ripened. Furthermore, this is celebrated between the Kiyang and Panaba. to contradict the do-ok pertaining to a time of the year when food is scarce, water is low, and dysentery is rife. It was defined on the study of Scott that during the do-ok, this is where the locals will experience *maddockan* due to dirty water. In the month of Bandaway (July), a customary feast is held in the community to give thanks for the good harvest. This is held after the panag-aani and community thanksgiving. In the month of Liponed (November), this is known as ‘*Begnas di Yabyab di Padog*,’ which is associated with the sowing of rice seeds. The last begnas to be conducted within the year held on the month of Inana (Month of December) is the second “*Tangeb di babayas*”. Aside from the association to agricultural practice, this is also associated with the conducts of traditional community weddings. The Central Sagada Community will have a three-day “*ubaya*”. The amam-a (community elders) will do the *panag-kakairw* (gathering of firewoods) ²³

²² William Henry Scott, *A Sagada Reader* (Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1988), 42-52.

²³ Scott, *A Sagada Reader*, 42-52.

Wange. Conducted twice a year, this is similar to a community meeting; however, the butchering of a pig is required, and the meat is distributed among the 12 Dap-ay of the Central Barangays. In this stage the social classes were identified. The first community “*Wange*” was for the “Kudo” or the lower classes status in the community and conducted at the month of August and also known as “*Wangen di Sinaba*”. The Second Wange is held on the month of November is the “*Wangen di Kadangyan*” or the people with high status on the Community. The identification of “*Bangan*” will take place on this meeting. *Bangan* is the woman who will serve as the field master to open the planting period aside from this, the role of *Bangan* in the Agricultural ritual to do the “*mankitib*”. She will eat less during the planting period so the harvest will not easily be consumed but rather lasting the whole year. A kutlong will be performed by the families and after three days will come the pinag-totoned or the planting period.



Figure 3. Begnas activity conducted at Dap-ay Bilig.

In the terms of planting camote during the period of 1950’s, this is the second festival as a big pig was butchered and the declaration of a seven-day holiday

Pinagtotoned or planting Period. After “*Bangan*” opens the planting period all field owners can go on with the rice planting after 3 days. After the opening, all farmers can plant the “padog” or do the rice planting anytime as long as the planting has officially started. Nobody should do planting if *Bangan* has not yet started.

As recounted by Scott²⁴ in December 1, 1954, the pagan Ceremony called “Wanga’n di Pagey” was performed by old Inandey of Barangay Demang, who was dressed in a yellow skirt, bright and red sweater playing the part of “Bangan” to transplant a few rice seedlings. Crowds of people were seated in the village where they could get a view of the planting. After Bangan returned to her home old men from Barangay Dagdag visit Demang side, started home across the rice fields, this is also a signal that others are free to wander in the village again.

Begnas di Panagbenga. During a specific season, after the rice stalks have been sown and begin to show signs of bearing grain, the community elders might deem it a favorable time to conduct the begnas ritual. Traditionally, this particular begnas is known as the Begnas di Panagbenga, a ceremony performed during the crucial stage when the rice begins to develop. The term “Panagbenga” in the local language is directly linked to rice, indicating its cultural significance and highlighting the importance of this stage in the agricultural cycle. These ritual stresses the community’s deep connection to their crops and their belief in the influence of auspicious timing on the success of their harvest.

The Sagangsang. After some time, when the rice plants bear their fruit, during this period, this is familiarly known as installation of scarecrows. In the olden times, the construction of scarecrows imitating the shape of humans are put into places of the rice fields mostly attacked by the Maya birds. Recycled plastic cellophanes were also used and hung end to end of the rice fields to repel the mayas. People keep themselves busy in the construction of scarecrows to prevent the ricebirds from eating their rice plants. The “*Sagangsang*” activity is designed to guard the rice plants from the rice fields which might eat their crops. This is done to disperse the maya birds and forbid them from eating the rice grains from the fields. This is also believed to restrict the rats aside from the birds.

In Payeo, Bedbed Mankayan Benguet similar practice on the use of Sagangsang was very much observed as flock of Mayas are not the only birds visiting the place. They also installed traps in the middle of ricefields for the bigger birds walking towards it such as the one they locally call “gayang” or the walking white birds.

Man-apoy. The apoy ceremony is done in the rice fields after the pan-elder has visited Todey and Gedangan. An elderly man or woman goes to his/her ricefield with cooked rice, etag, and rice wine. In the performance of the apoy, the man or woman cooks the meat by the side of the ricefield. After which,

²⁴ Scott, *A Sagada Reader*, 42-52.

he/she eats a little, inviting the spirits to partake and asking them in prayer that the crop will yield a good produce.

Pinag-aani. This stage is the harvesting period. This season marks the realization of the fruits of labor of the farmers within a six to seven months period. Families and relatives are mobilized to join the activity, young and old. The harvest season is signaled as soon as the palay grains have ripened. For each household, the first harvested palay for the season that comes home is accorded a prayer, before it is brought inside the house.

During the actual harvesting, certain prohibitions are imposed. Foremost of this is that no one should pass by a group of harvesters who just started and did not finish their breakfast. Breakfasts are prepared in one corner of the field being harvested, usually by the elderly owner. (At present, this was not already observed, harvesters can now eat breakfast at their own houses). When the group has finished their breakfast, they may be free to laugh and joke with each other. Other people may also pass by their field while they are harvesting. Generally, the first rice field harvested by the household during the season strictly follow all these, for fear of being chastised with bad luck or no good harvest in the future.

The harvesting tool also a material culture of Sagada people is called "*lakem*". The handle fits on the palm and the blades protrude between the fingers. In the present period the varieties of rice being planted was also changed from the traditional practice of *inani* using the lakem, it is done is *ginapas* using the sickle that makes the harvesting faster and more convenient for the Sagada rice farmers.

Ubaya di Ugas. These happen after the harvest the pan-elder declares an Ubaya or rest day for the rats. They pray that these rats and worms will not go to the nearby agricultural garden but rather vanish. The observation of this ubaya is strictly imposed. Anyone who violates this expects high penalties and the worst criticisms from the folks. The Begnas of community thanksgiving will follow after this; it occurs in the month of July, known as Bandaway, marking the end of the first agricultural cycle.

THE SAGADA LOCAL CALENDAR

In his study on the calendars of Northern Luzon, Scott examines the lunar and seasonal calendars of the indigenous people in the Mountain Province, Philippines, and underscores the necessity of aligning lunar and solar cycles for effective timekeeping in an agricultural context, where events are linked

to natural phenomena. He discusses the flexibility of these calendars, incorporating intercalary months to synchronize lunar and solar years.

The transition from traditional lunar calendars to the introduction of solar calendars, particularly the Sagada solar calendar (gadget), occurred during the 19th century in response to settled agriculture and external influences. The study also reflects on the cultural nuances, variations, and challenges in calendar-keeping practices among different tribes in the region, highlighting the impacts of migration, ecological shifts, and evolving agricultural techniques.

The Sagada calendar also includes a vernacular term in equivalent to the months of January to December. According to lakay Polat²⁵, these are the same to the widely used calendar since the planting season is still based on the phases of the moon. As to the number of days in February he stated that the days are the same since the calendar is based on the moon. In his account, January is known as *Kilalarw*, February as *Opok*, March as *Bakakew*, April as *Kitkiti*, May is known as *Kiyang*, June is *Panaba*, *Bandarway* is July, August is *Adogna*, September is *Pogpogew*, October is also known as *Kiling*, November is *Liponed* and lastly December is *Inana*.

The traditional rice planting by the Sagada people begins with a cycle for the first crop, which commences in Pogpogew (September). This involves the preparation of rice fields, weeding, and the establishment of seedbeds for sowing seeds. The rice stalks remaining in the field will be trampled inside the soil to serve as fertilizers aside from the weeds, composted leaves of sunflower and *lomeng*. The removal of weeds is referred to as '*pinagdadaos*' and is conducted using a sickle and a *sanggap*. During *Liponed* (November) this is when the toned, pinagt toned happens and followed by the *Begnas* on *tangeb di babayas* during the month of December.

FINDINGS

The main findings of this study are attributed to the continuity and discontinuity of certain agricultural practices in Central Sagada during the early 2000s, influenced by the accessibility of commercial fertilizers, shifts in generational attitudes, and the increase in tourism in the municipality. In the contemporary period or the present times, some of the rice fields are converted already into small gardens where farmers plant different vegetables alternative for rice plants. As one of the significant findings from the elders and farmers who participated in the oral history, according to their

²⁵ Interview with Esteban Bosaing, January 24, 2024.

recall, there has been a gradual decline in wet rice cultivation in Sagada Mountain Province since the start of the year 2000's.

One contributing factor to this decline is the impact of tourism activities. While tourism has always been present in the municipality, it experienced significant growth in the 2000s, attracting both local and international tourists. In 2010's, it was noted that residents began working as tour guides, leading to the neglect of rice fields in the Bangbangan area. Tour guiding starts to be the main source of economic needs for individuals in the central Barangays leading to the lack of manpower to do the manual plowing of the fields. Even the female population who are supposedly in charge of planting also joined trainings to serve as tour guides in the municipality adding to the drastic change in wet rice cultivation in the four central barangays, particularly barangay Demang and Dagdag.

In relation to this, Ina Kagwet stated that modernization has influenced the younger generation's perception, leading them to view tour guiding as an easy way to earn money since payment is received at the end of the day, whereas planting requires significant time and effort to tend the fields. As a consequence, a substantial portion of the rice fields in Bangbangan is left untended, with some being converted into agricultural farms and only a few remains to be field planted with rice. (*Jessie Boone Bosaing and Esteban Bosaing, 2024*)²⁶ The adjustments in the livestock inventory and the less rigid adherence to traditional agricultural rituals may signify an adaptation to the economic and social changes introduced by increased tourism. The community appears to be adopting a delicate balance between preserving cultural practices and accommodating the demands of a burgeoning tourism industry, which has, in turn, influenced the dynamics of traditional rice agriculture in Sagada.

This corroborates with the study of *Positive and Negative Impacts of Tourism on Culture: A Critical Review of Examples from the Contemporary Literature* by Md Shahzalal that he cited in the Pokhara-Ghandruk community in Nepal the traditional fashion, behavior, and lifestyle of young Gurungs have been severely affected by tourism. In the case of Central Sagada, tourism affected the Agricultural farming causing it to lessen down, and also affecting the culture since some of it was not already observed or performed in the community. It also contributes in the behavior of individuals viewing the easier way for the source of monetary needs.

²⁶ Interview with Jessie Boone & Esteban Bosaing, January 24, 2024.



Figure 4. The Converted Rice fields into Agricultural Lands in Barangay Demang, part of Bangbangan Ricefields

Some of the traditional rituals associated with rice agriculture in Sagada persist through time, remaining unchanged as they are carefully transmitted across generations and safeguarded by the community's elders though it was observed already to be in a minimal way and not as mandatory as before. The celebration of "*kutlong*" in relation to agricultural practice that was conducted per household was observed as a continuity of tradition²⁷ (*Esteban Bosaing, 2024*). The butchering of chicken and the family bonding still remains in the Sagadan Family as an indication also of an abundant harvest for the families. The traditional allocation of one chicken for the "*Pangat*" also highlights the continued adherence to cultural practices despite the evolving landscape. The adherence to these rituals still yields several positive outcomes, such as serving as symbols of enduring familial and clan bonds. Additionally, this practice instills values such as punctuality, respect for elders and fostering discipline among the community. This also promote cooperation and solidarity, reinforcing the community's connection to its cultural foundations.

This was supported by the statement of Limangan²⁸ among the Banaue people in Ifugao, she found out that these farmers still follow rituals in rice agriculture. This is because they still believe that non-adherence to the rituals will result to unsuccessful harvests. She also stressed that the native

²⁷ Interview with Esteban Bosaing, January 24, 2024.

²⁸ Limangan, "Tribal rituals in Rice production in Banaue Ifugao," 48.

chicken is the most common sacrifice in their offerings for productive and abundant harvest.

In the study of Acabado²⁹ among the Ifugao's, he noted that after World War II, many Ifugao began migrating to lowland areas and abroad for paid work due to the increasing need for monetary income. This migration, along with the perception of farming as a low-status job, led to a decline in the prestige of traditional Ifugao farming practices which is similar to the soaring tourism in the municipality. However, in the past decade, there has been a resurgence of Ifugao identity despite integration into Philippine society and globalization. This revival is reflected in the renewed emphasis on the rice terraces and rituals related to farming. Today, the Ifugao practice both intensive and extensive agriculture, along with the cultivation of trees and garden horticulture, including crops like mangos, avocados, and coffee.

Figure 5. The Converted Rice fields into Agricultural Lands in Barangay Demang, part of Bangbangan Rice Fields.



Conversely, economic implications are evident in this study specially those who are working outside the municipality and this is significantly present in the 1950's but it gradually decreases as modernization comes in the community. Extended agricultural holidays impede economic development, while the financial burden of performing rituals and the resistance to adopting new agricultural innovations clash with traditional practices, affecting economic progress.

²⁹ Stephen Acabado, "The Ifugao agricultural landscapes: Agro-cultural complexes and the intensification debate" *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*.43 no. 3, (October 2012): 500-522

In the older period, the declaration of “*tengao*” or rest day takes three days to seven days specially during the “*lakat*” period which takes three-day and a butchering of pig and chicken as a sacrifice. The second ceremony called “*Wange*” takes seven days and requires another big pig to be sacrificed for the abundance of harvest. Lastly, the third ceremony called “*pangat*” requires another three-day holiday and every household is required to butcher chicken before going out to plow in the fields.

In the earlier study of Scott, in adherence to these rituals between the 1950’s to the 1970’s the individual maintained a livestock inventory that included six chickens, with three kept in the house and three in the field. Additionally, there were three piglets, each two months old, as part of the livestock.³⁰ Furthermore, there were ten small pigs designated for half of the town, indicating a communal or shared ownership arrangement. Moreover, the individual was responsible for overseeing ten chickens specifically allocated to his particular ward, known as “*dap-ay*”.

The implication of the pigs and chicken during the 1950’s is viewed as heavy in the lower bracket of society or the “*kodo*”, however, adherence to the customary traditions persists that they tend to comply and work hard to achieve for it. Even if it taxing to the pocket there is no room for complaint as non-adherence to these beliefs will court the ire of the gods that will result to the poor harvest.³¹ These implications were supported by the study of Esplanada in the Aetas of Zambales and the study of Jenks in the Bontok people that across these studies, a common theme emerges: the importance of ritual compliance and community involvement in the agricultural practices of these cultural groups. However, there are notable differences in how these rituals are executed, including variations in the duration of ceremonies, the number of animals sacrificed, and the level of community participation, which contribute to the distinctiveness of each cultural community’s agricultural traditions.

This was also supported by the study of Patingan on the socio-economic effects of rituals among the Bontoks where he stated that some of the rituals are taxing to the pocket of the community and the long holiday declaration of *tengao*, impedes economic development that usually affects those that are working at the government sector.³² In the present period, it was observed that the *tengao* or *ubaya* that requires three days was lowered down to one day. The people who are working outside the municipality are also allowed to go out of the community. But still, the educated sector of this place still

³⁰ Scott, *A Sagada Reader*, 42-52.

³¹ Interview with Joseph Cadiogan, January 24, 2024.

³² Allen Patingan, “The Socio-Economic effects of Rituals Among the Bontoks” (PhD Diss., University of Baguio, Baguio City, 1998), 48, Unpublished.

leans on the performance of practices to avoid being criticized. Values professed by the elders who lean to these beliefs and the performance of practices are worth emulating and disobedience to them is socially not acceptable. As Igorots we instill to us the value of “*inayan*” basically a blanket term that refers to all deeds that are considered bad, evil, taboo, and unethical as written by Feliciano.³³

Furthermore, it is noteworthy that the strict observance of the Begnas period for each agricultural cycle has also declined. This was fully observed that no “*begnas*” ceremonies have been conducted in the whole municipality of Sagada during the height of the COVID-19 Pandemic. The begnas as notably discussed by Ama Polat was also lessened from the traditional five Begnas throughout the year to at least 1 or 2 depends on the availability of dap-ay pan elders to conduct the “*tangeb*” or closing of every traditional ritual in connection with the agricultural cycle.³⁴ The “*Bangan*” or field master opener was also noted to be removed in the year 2000’s when modernization comes in with the connection of the booming tourism in the community. This suggests a departure from the meticulous timing and rituals associated with agricultural activities, possibly influenced by the changing dynamics and demands brought about by the booming tourism sector and again by the changing attitudes of the current generation as some of the elders are also not participating the performance of the ritual activities. In the present agriculture another notable change is observed such as the removal of traditional activities on the during the Lakat period. The traditional use of “*lomeng*” was not observed in the early 2000’s due to the demand and availability of the commercial Fertilizers.

This was corroborated again with the study of *Positive and Negative Impacts of Tourism on Culture: A Critical Review of Examples from the Contemporary Literature* of Md Shahzalal that cited the study of Pandey (1995) that in the Pokhara-Ghandruk community in Nepal, the traditional fashion, behavior, and lifestyle of young Gurungs have been severely affected by tourism. In the case of Sagada community, in these findings it affected the cultural performance of ritual, from religiously performance to slowly contributing factor to the decline. In the introduction of commercial fertilizers in the community, Md Shahzalal also defines this as hybrid culture or adaptation and borrowing of artificial elements and adding them to the traditional way.³⁵

³³ Daniel Ted Feliciano, “*The Concept of “Inayan” Among the Igorots*” Blog, December 12, 2019. <http://www.cordilleransun.com/2019/12/the-concept-of-inayan-among-igorots.html>.

³⁴ Interview with Esteban Bosaing, January 24, 2024.

³⁵ Md Shahzalal, “Positive and Negative Impacts of Tourism on Culture: A Critical Review of Examples from the Contemporary Literature.” *Journal of Tourism, Hospitality and Sports* 20 (2016): 30-34.

Lastly, another significant change in in the old studies of Scott conducted regarding the agricultural practices in Sagada, the Rice farming begins on the Month of Pogpogew also known as September on the modern Calendar and the harvesting ends in the Month May-July (a period of kassiyani or ani known as “*Latab*”) and was not already observed on the present rice farming of the Sagada People. An implication of this is the change is in the variety of rice planted in Sagada was changed from the “*ginolot*” and topeng that requires traditional harvesting using the “*lakem*” it is replaced by the varieties of such as *Taiwan rice*, and *gagapasen* that can be easily harvested using the sickle.

This was supported by the study of Aguilar, the rice farmers in San Lorenzo, about half of whom own the small plots they cultivate (usually less than a hectare), prioritize planting rice varieties that yield high production.³⁶ Taste is not a primary concern for them. As a result, even though an organic farmer in the community advocates for traditional rice varieties, which are known to be more flavorful than modern ones, the local farmers focus on productivity and food security. Hence, the shift in the variety is also a trend to adapt to the changing weather conditions and the persistent problem of pests like rats.

CONCLUSION

The findings from this study highlights the significant cultural and agricultural implications stemming from modernization, tourism, and shifts in community priorities in Central Sagada. The most immediate impact is the decline in traditional wet rice cultivation due to the rise of tourism, which has led to many community members prioritizing tour guiding over agricultural work. This shift has resulted in neglected rice fields, with some being converted into vegetable gardens. The diminished adherence to agricultural rituals, such as the “*begnas*” and other ceremonies, signals a weakening of traditional cultural practices as the younger generation adopts more modern ways of earning a living, favoring immediate economic benefits over the labor-intensive and slow-yielding farming practices. Culturally, the implications are reflective. Some traditional rituals associated with rice cultivation in Sagada have stood the test of time, the rituals like the “*kutlong*” that has the only cultural continuity passed down through generations and serving as pillars of community identity. These rituals not only signify familial and clan bonds but also instill values of discipline, cooperation, and solidarity among the people.

³⁶ Aguilar, “Rice and Magic a Cultural History,” 297-330.

The replacement of traditional rice varieties with higher-yield, easier-to-harvest ones reflects a gradual erosion of cultural heritage. Though some rituals, like the butchering of chickens, persist, they are performed less frequently and with less community-wide participation. This change affects community cohesion and values like discipline, respect for elders, and cooperation, which were traditionally reinforced through these shared practices. The incorporation of modern elements, such as commercial fertilizers, also represents a shift toward a “hybrid culture”, where traditional practices are being replaced or adapted to new economic realities.

The decline in rice agriculture is further emphasized in the shift from a comprehensive livestock inventory to a more modest one, with a focus on one chicken for the *Kutlong* and one pig for the *Wange*. From the livestock management of the 1970s to 2010, characterized by a diverse array of chickens and pigs distributed among households, there has been a noticeable transformation. The current livestock practices reflect a more streamlined approach, possibly influenced by the changing economic and social dynamics.

From the agricultural perspective, the abandonment of traditional farming techniques and the shift to easier crops, alongside the introduction of modern agricultural inputs, represent a move toward efficiency and economic gain. However, these changes also indicate a loss of biodiversity and traditional knowledge tied to rice farming, with consequences for long-term food security and the preservation of local farming varieties. Thus, while tourism has brought economic opportunities, it has also disrupted the delicate balance between cultural preservation and modernization, leading to the gradual decline of traditional agricultural and cultural practices in Sagada.

The history of rice agriculture in Sagada, Mountain Province, Philippines, with cultural rituals, economic dynamics, and the evolving landscape of tourism. The surge in tourism activities from the 2000s is not the only reason but also the shift on agriculture focusing on the conversion of fields to agricultural lands. With locals engaging in tourism-related work and employment outside the community including the government, the once meticulously tended rice fields have been left neglected affecting the performance of the old rituals. This also impacts the lessening of the performance in *Begnas* as this is connected to the agricultural calendar.

It is a recommendation on the study to look for the following on the major shifts and adjustments in the performance of rituals during the COVID-19 pandemic and are there significant effects on the non-performance of the traditional rituals. A conduct of deeper study if the livelihood or status of the community have been affected by non-performance of the ritual.

The continuity and revitalization of traditional agricultural practices in Central Sagada, particularly rice cultivation, amidst the pressures of tourism and changing socio-economic conditions, necessitate a varied approach. Promoting sustainable agricultural practices is important as they serve as a heritage of a cultural area like Sagada, with a focus on organic farming and the revival of culturally significant rice varieties like “ginolot” and “topeng”. Integrating traditional knowledge with modern agricultural techniques through community-led workshops can support this transition, while financial and technical assistance from government and NGO programs would further empower farmers.

To mitigate the impacts of tourism, strategies should be devised to diversify tourism activities, particularly by promoting agricultural tourism, thus aligning tourism with the preservation of traditional farming. Municipal policies that encourage locals to balance farming with tourism-related work will be essential. Moreover, cultural education initiatives, such as the documentation of agricultural rituals and intergenerational storytelling, are vital to ensuring the transmission of cultural knowledge. Addressing economic challenges also requires balancing the cultural importance of rituals with the economic realities faced by farmers, such as through the modification of financially burdensome rituals and the provision of alternative income streams, including value-added agricultural products. Collaborations with government and NGOs, coupled with policy advocacy, can support the dual objectives of agricultural preservation and socio-economic development.

Furthermore, tourism training programs focused on cultural awareness and organizing cultural festivals can help ensure that tourism fosters respect for local customs and traditions. Continuous research and monitoring are necessary to track the effects of tourism on traditional agriculture, informing adaptive policies as the socio-economic landscape progresses. Ultimately, balancing tourism with the preservation of traditional agricultural practices in Sagada requires a comprehensive, community-driven strategy that addresses both cultural heritage conservation and economic sustainability.

The overarching theme is one of adaptation—a delicate balance between preserving cultural heritage and accommodating the demands of a booming tourism industry. As Sagada progresses on its economic landscape, the challenge lies in sustaining its cultural traditions while embracing the opportunities and changes brought about by tourism. The evolving dynamics present both economic challenges and opportunities, emphasizing the need for a deeper approach to ensure the preservation of cultural identity alongside economic development. *

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