



## The Traditional Tugging Ritual of the Philippines<sup>9</sup>

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One of the ethnic games played in many parts of the Philippines is similar to the game of tug-of-war. However, the game, which has different variations, is called by different local names such as *magbalut* (Yakan of Basilan), *guguyyod* (various places in the Cordilleras of Northern Luzon), *suongan* (Mangyan of Mindoro), *goruyodan* (Hanunoo Mangyan of Mindoro), *culliot* (Batangueño of Batangas and Ilocano of Nueva Ecija), *bonlotay* (Cebuano of Cebu), *dinoron* or pushing with bamboo pole, *hilahang lubid* or pulling using rope, and *hilahan* or human tug-of-war.

But among these ethnic games, only one has so far been identified as part of an agricultural rite—the *punnuk*. The *punnuk* is the traditional tugging ritual of the Tuwali, one of the two major subgroups of the ethno linguistic group Ifugao, living in Barangay Hapao in the municipality of Hungduan in Ifugao Province (Interim Report, 2013).

### 1. *The Ifugao*

One of the six provinces of the Cordillera Administrative Region (CAR), situated in the Philippines' North Central Luzon, Ifugao is a landlocked watershed province bounded by a mountain range to the north and west that tempers into undulating hills towards the south and the east. The Ifugao (Ifugaw, Ipugao, Ypugao, Hilipan, and Quiangan) are

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<sup>9</sup> In the Philippines, tug-of-war shall be referred to as “tugging ritual” to differentiate it from the tug-of-war game.

known for their spectacular *payoh* or rice terraces found in the nine upland municipalities with the most famous terraces found in Mayaoyao and Banaue, where entire mountainsides are constructed like giant steps.

The people living in Ifugao Province are also called Ifugao. The Ifugao language groups are: Tawali; Ayangan; and, a third intrusion into the area, Kalanguya. The interaction of Kalanguya with Tawali resulted in a dialectical variations recognised as Hanglulu, again of which there are variations like the Keley-i, Yattukca, and Dikkalay.

Tawali has at least eighteen variants:

1. Ilag-aw-Munkanape
2. Ibunne
3. Munkigoj-a
4. Mun-alyon
5. Mungano/Mungkalyoj
6. Kala
7. Yattuka
8. Ipakawol
9. Imuntabiong
10. Ihaliap
11. Iboliwong
12. Lumbabag
13. Dikkalay
14. Ikamandag
15. Ibannawol
16. Icambulo
17. Igohang
18. Ihapo

The Ayangan has four variants:

1. lolilicon
2. lalimit
3. Ihananga
4. Iguinohon

The Hanglulu has two variants (mixed grouping- Amduntug-Asipulo) of Asipulo:

1. Yattuka(closer to Tawali) of Amduntug

## 2. Keley-i (Dikkalay, closer to Kalanguya) of Tinoc

The Kalanguya has three variants:

1. Iddaya
2. Itabuy
3. Itinec

The basic subsistence technologies for the Ifugao are wet rice cultivation in massive rice terraces covering entire mountainsides and dry cultivation for other crops like sweet potatoes. During off seasons, the terraces are planted with vegetables. Some amount of food gathering is still practiced, along with minimal hunting in the remaining forested areas. One subgroup is noted for its wood carving—usually associated with rituals—and all the others are involved in weaving.

The Ifugao are famous for their very complex indigenous religion marked by a cosmology that includes hundreds of deities. There are elaborate rituals that accompany personal and social events, participated in by choirs of ritual practitioners who are almost all adult males. The Ifugao are famous, too, for their prodigious oral epic literature.

## ***2. The Ifugao Agricultural Cycle***

As early as 1545 to 1000 BCE in Bannawol, the present town of Banaue, there is evidence of residential occupation in the area. By the seventh century, through the period between 1195 and 1380 CE, in Bungahalian and Nabyun, respectively, the presence of terraces have been reported, but between 1486 and 1788 CE in Bocos, Banaue, there was definitely a rapid expansion of terraces with the rise of rice cultivation.

The terraces are fragile in construction so much that no draft animal, like the carabao, can be used to plow the field. Instead the soil is cultivated by hand using wooden spades. Rice is planted at the beginning of the year and harvested around June.

The fragileness of the environment and the human agricultural technology is reflected in the Ifugao cultural attempts to control it through means of numerous rituals they associate with cultivation. This is not surprising since the Ifugao traditional religion has a pantheon of deities, numbering at least two thousand.

Harold Conklin, the American anthropologist who began extensive ethnoecological research in Ifugao in the early 1960s, published the results of his investigation in his book, *Ethnographic Atlas of Ifugao*. Although his research did not cover the entire province of Ifugao and mainly concentrated in the North Central Ifugao agricultural district of