BONTOC, MOUNTAIN PROVINCE, NORTHERN LUZON ISLAND, NORTHERN PHILIPPINES. In times of inter-group conflicts, the ancient peoples, especially in the Cordilleras of northern Luzon, enter into a mutual agreement to maintain peace. This is referred to as fechen among the Bontoc of Mountain Province.

OVERSHADOWED by the voluminous media take on the Kalinga budong or peace pact, it is not commonly known that major ethno-linguistic groups of the Philippines have their own version of inter-group patterns for peaceful relations. The fechen of the Bontoc of Mountain Province is one of these. This amity contract emerges initially from an inter-personal agreement (aliwid) between two community leaders (pangollo), one from each village (ili). Each acts as the host and guardian for the other and his friends when they come to visit or to trade.

The increase in population later on made things more complicated when the interweaving of relationships between groups exacerbated the need for peaceful co-existence. The aliwid developed into the peace pact – fechen. However, it is no longer made between two ili, but between two Bontoc wards (ato, ator). Structurally, the ward is the male dormitory but it operates as the political unit in the village organization.

When one ato wants to enter into a pact with another ato, the pangollos of an ili meet in the ato to select the pact holder. Once selected, the pact holder then sends a messenger to the other ato; usually the person has affinal or other close relationships with the other ato. He then eats and drinks there, thus becoming the protected guest of the other pangollo. He then expresses the proposal for a peace pact. The pangollos of the other ato then meet to discuss the proposal. If the result is positive, the messenger returns to his own ato and proclaims the day set for the pact holding. They prepare a feast of glutinous rice, tenofo (dried meat) and basi (sugarcane wine).

On the set day, if omens are good, they go to the other ato, bringing food and drink. They are welcomed with the beating of gongs. The fechen begins with an old man (am’a’a) reciting prayers. Men from each ato pour their basi into the same vessel (damagnana). Into this basi, the two prospective pact holders drop their palting (steel with which they strike flints). Then all drink: first the pact holders, the pangollos, then all the others follow. Four cups are used, two from each group. When the drinking is done, each pact holder takes up the other’s palting. Then they all eat. The food brought by the visitors is eaten by the host and vice versa.

The leading pangollo of the visitors delivers a speech and asks who among the hosts will be the pact holder. The lead pangollo of the hosts replies in a speech, naming the pact holder. He then in turn asks who will be the pact holder (fedohing) of the other ato. He is named and the pact holders exchange spears and make speeches affirming the peace pact. Shaking his spear, each proclaims that he who injures one of the other side will taste this spear. The areas affected by the pact are defined and the people are called upon to help the pact holders in keeping the peace. The ceremony occupies most of the day. In the evening, there is feasting, drinking and dancing late into the night.

The next day, the pact holders perform the pag to get the omens. Then, gongs are beaten, a chicken killed and the palis is performed by the pact holders, who eat the chicken. On the third day, a couple of pigs are killed and the palting is performed. There is general merrymaking each afternoon and evening. The fourth day is the big celebration day. Five to ten pigs are killed and large quantities of rice and vegetables are cooked. Everyone in the ili is invited. There is general merrymaking. The highlight of the celebration is when a colorful procession of girls brings in great trays of tenofo, tobacco and plenty of tapey (rice wine). The festivities last well into the morning. In the evening, a tengao (day of rest) is announced for the next day. This ends the ceremony and the peace pact is in force. The guests depart bringing with them meat shares and other gifts.

In a symbolic exchange of spears, two Bontoc leaders as pact holders, seal peaceful relations between their respective communities.