

# Atang

## - Ilocano Appeasement Ritual

ILOCANO, ILOCOS NORTE, ILOCOS SUR AND ABRA PROVINCES, NORTHWESTERN LUZON ISLAND, NORTHERN PHILIPPINES. *Even among the Ilocano sophisticates, there persists a belief of the existence of kaibaan or ansisit – tiny unseen spirits that proliferate among trees, rocks and abandoned places – and who, if befriended, could cook an endless supply of rice in earthen pots and exercise other mythical powers. However, when these are inadvertently harmed, even innocuously through a thoughtless act, such as passing through their habitat without permission, they can cause rashes, boils (kurad) and other irksome maladies.*



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WHEN SOMETHING untoward happens, a *mangangatang* – one who celebrates the *atang* or appeasement ritual – is called upon to cure the illness caused by the *kaibaan*. The manner by which this is done differs from case to case, depending on the kind of *kaibaan* involved.

The simplest of the rituals consist of an offering of grated coconut meat mixed with oil, with pieces of coconut husks and shells around it, placed in the middle of a winnowing tray. At about six o'clock in the evening, the *mangangatang* or *mangagas* (healer) brings the tray to the place where the *kaibaan* is thought to live. He then invites the spirits to partake of the offering, asking them to relieve the patient of the illness.

The second attempt at appeasement is more involved. The offering is the same, with the addition of a glass of water. However, these items must be obtained by the *mangangatang* from different houses in the community, without the owners knowing the purpose of the request. The more stringent requirement is that only the *mangangatang* can touch the items. A violation of this requirement will have a grave effect on the patient, even causing death.

(spread photos) An anib, a cloth doll hangs from the roof fronting a house to ward off evil intentions.



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When the second attempt fails, it means that the highest order of *kaibaan* is involved. The offering becomes more elaborate and includes rice cakes, a glass of water, oil from a coconut with reddish-brown husk, three pieces of rolled tobacco leaves (*dinubla*), betel-nut chew and perhaps fruit. An important component is meat from chicken that has been sacrificed on a small altar outside the house of the patient. The *mangangatang* sees to it that no blood is shed on the altar and that the altar must be cleaned before the final offering is made. After this third *atang*, the patient is certain to be cured.

JTP