



# RETHINKING HISTORY, CONSERVING HERITAGE

## ARCHAEOLOGY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN IFUGAO, PHILIPPINES

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The rugged landscapes of the Philippine Cordilleras have long been a focus of anthropologists due to the variability of ethnolinguistic groups in the region and the fierce resistance of highland populations to colonizing forces from the lowlands. Of the seven major ethnolinguistic groups, the Ifugao is the most studied, primarily because of their extensive rice terraces (Figure 1). Since 2012, the Ifugao Archaeological Project (IAP)<sup>1</sup> has been working with Ifugao communities to address issues of archaeological interest, such as landscape and community formation, as well as issues related to colonial legacies of knowledge construction, the dissemination of archaeological and ethnographic knowledge, and ways to combat the continuing circulation of inaccurate historical information.

In 1995, UNESCO placed the Ifugao rice terraces (Figure 2) in the List of World Heritage sites. This listing recognizes the “absolute blending of the physical socio-cultural, economic, religious, and political environments,” describing the terraces as “a living cultural landscape of unparalleled beauty” (UNESCO 2014). Not only are the rice terraces a testimony to the ingenuity and intelligence of the Ifugao in transforming this mountainous landscape, they also represent an enduring balance between the environment and the Ifugao community, whose members cooperate together to develop and sustain the terraces. The UNESCO recognition has also emphasized the idea that these agricultural monuments are at least 2,000 years old, a belief instilled in generations of Filipinos but refuted by archaeological investigations.

Local wisdom and nationalist sentiments would have us uphold this longstanding belief in the age of the Ifugao Rice Terraces, espoused by pioneer anthropologists of the Philippines Roy F. Barton (1919) and Henry Otley Beyer (1955). Recent findings by the IAP (Acabado 2009, 2012), however, have provided new information driving us to rethink this proposed date, primarily because of the dearth of archaeological data to support the “long history” model. Evidence is now pointing to a relatively more recent history of Cordillera rice terracing traditions—a “short history” model grounded on ethnographic, ethnohistoric, archaeological, and paleoenvironmental datasets.

The “long history” model is partly a product of the now widely rejected “Waves of Migration” theory of the peopling of the Philippines (Beyer 1948). Yet both the “long history” model and the “Waves of Migration” theory are still being taught in Philippine elementary and public high schools. These models also assume that the builders of the terraces—in this case, the Ifugao—were unchanging for 2,000 years.

A shorter history of the terraces does not diminish their value as a UNESCO World Heritage Site; rather, it reinforces an awareness of the technological and cultural sophistication of the people who constructed the terraces. This sophistication allowed the Ifugao to rapidly modify their landscape to fill valley after valley with terraced rice fields within 200 years. We should lay to rest the antiquity debates. They only exoticize highland peoples. Moreover, the differences that we see today between highland inhabitants and lowland populations are products of history and colonialism. It is more important for us that we acknowledge that we are in danger of losing these historical and cultural monuments and that we have a responsibility to take part in preserving our heritage. Most importantly, we have to acknowledge the value of community involvement in our scholarly research and conservation and development programs in the region.

Our paper emphasizes the importance of community engagement, especially because historical knowledge in the Philippines is still largely a colonial legacy. We propose that community involvement is vital in the dissemination of new knowledge. In our work, this is highlighted by community skepticism of the younger dating of the rice terraces, especially when all tourism brochures and history textbooks celebrate the antiquity of the agricultural fields. We also explore the colonial legacies of knowledge construction and how this knowledge becomes ingrained in our ideas of the past. In the case of the Philippines, archaeological models proposed at the turn of the twentieth century by American archaeologists and anthropologists have been difficult to supplant. In this paper, we present the impact of our archaeological work in Ifugao, which has contributed to a serious reconsideration of the dominant conceptions of history and

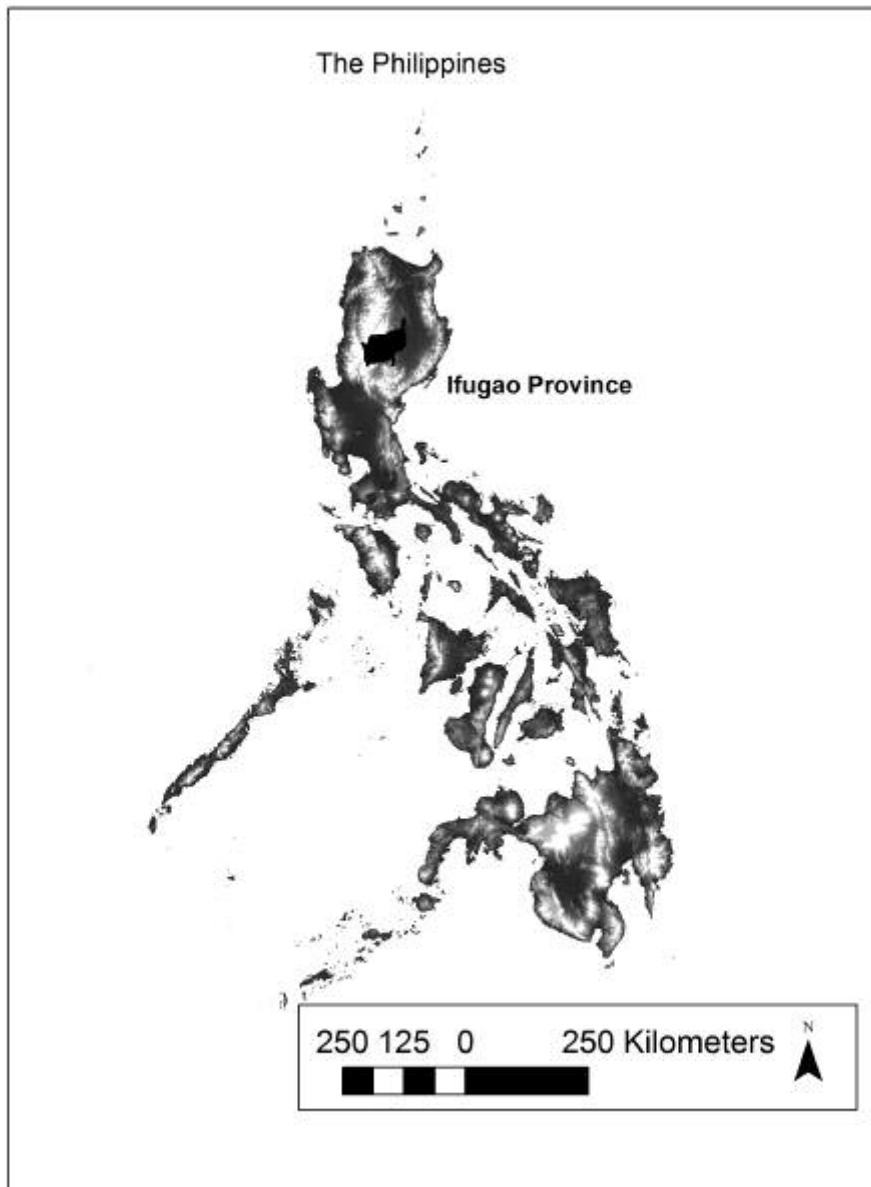


Figure 1. Map of the Philippines with the Ifugao Province highlighted.

history-making in the Philippines. This article presents a short version of Philippine history, of our archaeological work at the UNESCO World Heritage Sites of Ifugao, Philippines, and of how community engagement enhances our research agenda.

#### **A Model for Community Archaeology**

Although the younger dating of the terraces might be a shock to

most Filipinos and Ifugao communities, the involvement of Ifugao stakeholders in the IAP makes the dissemination of sensitive findings easier. The IAP promotes and encourages community participation in all aspects of the research program.

Community archaeology entails a partnership between local people and trained archaeologists in the conduct of archaeological investigations. Community participation aims to both



Figure 2. Rice terraces in Battad, Ifugao.

humanize and end the exclusive control that “colonial archaeology” has had over the interpretation of the material past. In the IAP, local stakeholders’ participation intends to serve as a catalyst for renewed community interest in their nearly forgotten past and to encourage them to play a more active role in conserving their heritage.

The IAP’s objectives were primarily borne out of the need to date the Ifugao Rice Terraces and to resolve divergent academic discourses on the antiquity of these cultural monuments. However, preliminary consultations with community members brought out associated issues that demanded inclusion in the research if the results were to be of any significance to the Ifugaos. Even at the onset, the community was involved in the identification of the project objectives (Figure 3).

Since the project’s implementation plans were conceptualized in collaboration with local government units, national conservation agencies, and the Save the Ifugao Terraces Movement (SITMo), a grassroots conservation NGO, both legal and customary consent processes were obtained without any contentious opposition from the communities. Several consultations with descendant communities and current project site inhabitants were conducted to obtain legal consent, as mandated by the Free and Prior Informed Consent (FPIC) guidelines of the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP) for research being done in indigenous peoples’ ancestral domains.

Participation in the site excavations was encouraged in order to involve local peoples in the archaeological excavations. Site visits by local students and interested members of the community provided onsite lessons on local history and provoked a deeper understanding of their heritage (Figure 4). Public education on the processes of archaeology and participatory analysis of resulting discoveries serve to involve the local community as active partners and not merely as objects of the research. Free access to the project site also considerably helps in dispelling the notion that archaeologists are secretly treasure hunters searching for “Yamashita’s Gold,” among other troves.

In matters of policy, community involvement in archaeological processes can generate proactive measures from local government units in Ifugao that contend with ambiguous and ill-informed guidelines on cultural resources management. These are complicated by provincial national agendas for heritage conservation, the demands of mass tourism, and the World Heritage Status of the Ifugao Rice Terraces. Participatory archaeology in the Ifugao Rice Terraces should give foremost consideration to local decision makers in developing innovative and sustainable responses to this culturally evolving landscape and its dynamically changing social context.

The field seasons of the IAP culminate in a public presentation of preliminary findings, during which different sectors of the community are invited to listen and critique initial discoveries.



Figure 3. A group Mumbaki (Ifugao religious specialists) performing a ritual.

Things usually get interesting when archaeologists present material evidence apparently lost in the cultural memory of the community. This triggers a surge of recollections that usually work both ways to validate the archaeologists' empirical assumptions and the community's fading reminiscence of a forgotten aspect of their heritage. For the modern Ifugao who stands on the threshold of cultural loss, community archaeology serves as an aid to self-discovery and revitalized ethnic identity. Recent archaeological work has also encouraged the modern Ifugao to reconsider their place in Philippine history making.

### Rethinking Philippine History

Philippine narratives, especially those that tell of the origins of Filipinos, are still based on the Waves of Migration theory, popularized by H.O. Beyer, considered the founder of Philippine Anthropology. The model was initially introduced by Spanish friars early in the Spanish colonial period. Ferdinand Blumentritt, an Austrian scholar during the Spanish-era Philippines, refined the model in 1882 (Scott 1994). Beyer's theory was the first model developed to explain the origins of peoples

who settled the islands that now comprise the Philippines. The model claims that a succession of different groups arrived in waves, with varying biological and cultural sophistication; there was a very specific racial typology, with each wave getting lighter and lighter as the level of culture got "higher and higher." On this model, the dark-skinned pygmies that Beyer classified as the Negritos were the first group to inhabit the islands. They currently inhabit interior mountain ranges across the Philippine archipelago because, as Beyer postulated, of their "inferior culture." They were pushed to the mountains when a second group arrived, identified by Beyer as the Indonesian A and B. The last group, the Malays, arrived in three successive waves, the last group appearing just before contact with Europeans. The last wave was eventually Islamized and Christianized. They settled the lowlands, thereby pushing the Indonesians and the first two waves of Malays to the mountains. The first two waves of Malays were not converted to either Islam or Christianity.

The dating of the construction of the Cordillera terraces was based on this model, according to which the Ifugao were considered as the second wave of Malays who were pushed up to the



Figure 4. St. Joseph School senior students receiving mapping instructions from Charmaine Ledesma.

mountains when the final, third wave of Malays settled the lowlands. Some historians interpret this model as a colonial strategy to indoctrinate Filipinos as peace-loving people who would avoid confrontation when a new group arrives. Not only does this model propagate the idea that Filipinos peacefully moved out of the way of newcomers, but it also says that nothing new ever developed or invented in the Philippines. Filipinos were just passive observers, waiting for someone from the outside to bring in new material and cultural innovations.

Archaeologists have proposed several alternatives to the Waves of Migration theory, based on archaeological data and sound modeling. Foremost of these alternatives are Solheim's Nusantao (1988, 2006) and Bellwood's Austronesian Hypothesis (1984). Still, a number of Philippine elementary and high school textbooks (e.g., Anda 2010; Rama et al 2006) use the outdated model proposed by Beyer.

### Original Filipinos

Historical narratives of the Cordillera assume that highland peoples were isolated and "untainted" by European, or even by lowland, hegemonic culture. The highland peoples then become the emblematic stereotype of "original Filipinos," a

label that is ethnocentric because it also denotes unchanging culture through centuries of existence. What the IAP now tells us is that the Ifugao of the Old Kiyangan Village had active and intense contacts with lowland and other highland groups, especially during the Spanish colonial period. In fact, rapid social differentiation coincided with the arrival of the Spanish in northern Luzon. What we are seeing in Ifugao are parallel patterns to what we see in Spanish colonies in the Americas. We also observe that once the lowlands of the Philippines were firmly hispanicized, Filipino lowland traders became de facto colonizers of the highlands, a pattern that is still present.

The dichotomy between highland and lowland Philippines is also largely constructed in this historical footnote, suggesting that the northern highland Philippines resisted Spanish domination. Even though Spanish cultural footprints in the province are scant, owing to the failure of the colonial power to establish a permanent presence in the region, there are major economic and political shifts in the highlands that coincided with the arrival of the Spanish in the northern Philippines. The recent findings of the IAP indicate that landscape modification (terraced wet-rice cultivation) intensified between ca. A.D. 1600 and A.D. 1800, suggesting an increased demand for food, which indicates population growth. This period also shows increased

social differentiation and apparent elite formation as a means of maintaining their position in the society. Although the Spanish colonial government never controlled the interior of the Philippine Cordillera, the economic and political transformations in the region were dramatic, likely due to the Spanish presence in the lowlands. Excavations from the Old Kiyangan Village (Kiangang, Ifugao) also indicate that the settlement had continuous contact and interaction with lowland groups and other highland groups between ca. A.D. 1600 and late A.D. 1800, refuting the idea of isolation. For example, imported glass beads and tradeware ceramics recovered from the site show that the region was globally connected.

### The Ifugao Archaeological Project

Since the IAP was launched in 2012, community engagement has been at the forefront of the research program's goals. We hope that the engagement of different Ifugao communities in the past field seasons and those to come will promote social cohesion among the relatively divided Ifugao groups who have diverse views of their cultural origins. The archaeological discoveries served as a catalyst for community debates and a stimulus to wider public participation in heritage conservation. The project inspired the establishment of a community heritage library in one public school to serve as repository for all published literature on the Ifugao and perhaps for some artifacts from the archaeological sites. The plan for the library is to involve Ifugaos and Ifugaos at heart, here and abroad, to contribute to the collection of published works on Ifugao culture, history, and society. This will facilitate research for students, scholars, and enthusiasts. The involvement of local students also serves the purpose of spurring interest in the disciplines of history and sociocultural studies, courses not normally of consequence to young Ifugaos.

In the larger picture, we hope that the findings of the IAP spur changes in Philippine history curricula. The dominant archaeological model of the peopling of the islands is very ethnocentric and reinforces the misconception of biological differences among Filipino groups. In fact, the Indigenous Peoples Rights Act of 1997 (Philippines) (R.A. 8371) relied on this model for classifying Philippine ethnolinguistic groups.

Our experience collaborating with the communities has been gratifying. We now feel that the results of our work are not just buried in academic journals and that communities appreciate our work, especially when all stakeholders are involved in all aspects of the research project. *Haggiyo!*

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### Note

1. Acabado and Martin are co-directors of the Ifugao Archaeological Project (IAP) while Lauer serves as the field supervisor of the field school. The IAP is a collaborative research program between the Save the Ifugao Terraces Movement, Inc., the National Museum of the Philippines, the Archaeological Studies Program at the University of the Philippines, Kiangang and Hungduan Local Government Units, and the University of California-Los Angeles. Mary Jane Louise Bolunia (NM), Grace Barretto-Tesoro (UP-ASP), and John A. Peterson of the University of Guam are co-directors of the IAP. Funding from the National Science Foundation (U.S.), National Geographic Society, Institute for Field Research, and the National Museum of the Philippines helped support this research program.