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## **The Authenticity of Cultural Ways of Life: A Hermeneutic of the Ifugao Social Practice *Gotad***

*Joernie Mar U. Bistol*<sup>1</sup>

### **ABSTRACT**

*This study examines the Ifugao Gotad cultural practice to distinguish the valued transcendent meaning and the normative values that are faithfully lived. It builds on Ginev's hermeneutic theory of social practices that determines the nexus of authenticity in human agency participating in configured practices. It is argued that an integral and authentic identity is achieved through reflexive appropriation of possibilities in routinized practices of everyday life and heeding the call of the cultural lifeform's transcendent authority. In doing so, the study first shows how a hermeneutic of social practices provides an explanatory view of our culture. Second, the study examines how the hermeneutic of social practices allows the determination of human subjectivity and the cultural lifeform as existentially authentic or inauthentic. Lastly, a hermeneutic of the Ifugao cultural Gotad practice reveals the authenticity of the cultural lifeform through the members heeding the call of its transcendent meaning and authority. The reconfiguration of the traditional Ifugao Gotad practice into an institutionalized ethnocultural thanksgiving gathering represents the contemporary Ifugao cultural way of life, re-establishes and recontextualizes the people's agency in the face of competing ways of life, encourages the people to continue to find ways of ensuring*

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<sup>1</sup> **Joernie Mar Bistol** earned his Bachelor's degree in Philosophy at San Pablo Major Seminary, Baguio City. Currently, he is pursuing a Master's degree program in philosophy at the School of Advance Studies (SAS), Saint Louis University, Baguio City, Philippines. His main interest is in the philosophy of culture and Indigenous philosophies.

*their well-being, allows the members to resolve tensions arising from conflicting ways of life, and rediscover their cultural rootedness.*

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## **1. Introduction**

Human existence is being in social practices (Ginev 2018). We are all engaged in practices in any shape or form, whether it is personal or social. There are unique assemblages of social practices that constitute and reveal ways of life and identity. It refers to a particular group of people's cultural life form, an encompassing way of thinking, feeling, and behaving in the present (Javier 2018). It is where we are brought up and, in the process of enculturation, learn to acquire a cultural identity.

Understanding human existence cannot avoid culture that contextualizes human agency. It is not unfamiliar to anthropology and the philosophy of culture. In the former, Kottak distinguishes the sociocultural, archeological, biological, and linguistic studies in anthropology, which informs our understanding of the differences between human societies and cultures (Kottak 2011). In the latter, culture is a horizon of meaning upon which individuals make use of conceptual resources in their interpretive experience and linguistic communications (Lafont 2005). Particularly, philosophical hermeneutics affirms the role of culture in the historical progression of human consciousness that implicates individuals within an already stream and web of interlocution. In both instances, the human being is a meaning-making and self-interpreting animal.

The theoretical view of culture lets us see that we share sets of values, ideas, and judgments and that any changes may influence the whole social life and practices of cultural communities (Javier 2018). For instance, there are interrelated social practices that reveal a way of life, and they will only make sense when they are understood in the context of their configurations (Ginev 2019). Some actions, when isolated, seem to appear ordinary and mundane, but in view of their cultural context, they may provide us with

nuances in understanding the world. It is instructive to our observation that what we are doing together shapes our moral and intellectual sentiments.

One of the important roles of cultural practices is precisely to bring cultural consciousness to the surface level and for the members to understand and take gratitude for what ties our community together. Our source and measure of moral and intellectual solidarity is always referential to our culture. However, individuals tend to be overdetermined by social practices, while social practices seem to be taken for granted in the individualistic pursuit of self-realization. This leads to the issue of how we can get a hold of a genuine sense of subjectivity, balancing the influence of culture and the pursuit of fullness. It becomes more challenging when we encounter diverging ways of life that demand the resolution of differences.

The study contributes to a perspective of how authenticity is achieved through heeding the call of our cultural lifeform transcendental authority. Our membership in a cultural group is not simply a taken-for-granted label but an adherence to a consistent existential possibility. In the context of Ifugao society, the reception of modern secular conditions resulted in the reconfiguration of the Gotad practice, which aims to anchor the Ifugaos' authentic self in a cultural way of life. The study is a modest attempt to distinguish the nature of Ifugao culture and the relevant normative values that they continue to choose as an existential possibility.

## **2. A Hermeneutic of Cultural Practices**

A philosophical hermeneutic approach to culture can provide us with an existential understanding of a shared way of life, particularly the transcendent authority of the cultural life form, which allows the determination of the authenticity of human subjectivity and the cultural life form. In this case, philosophy allows us to gain insights into how our cultural frameworks shape our understanding of ourselves and the world. It is characterized by unrestricted speculation about the reality of the world, human existence, and social arrangements (Russell 1972). It is no longer about acquiring knowledge but questioning and seeking certainty and truth, even in the most obvious or elusive aspect of reality.

Philosophy makes it clear that culture is something close and too familiar to us and that we are dealing with an inquiry that is a process of self-understanding. For instance, Plato's suspicion of convention and social

norms in his time is guided by his familiar understanding of his culture. He was committed to a rational discourse, or what he calls dialectic, with the hope of influencing and facilitating his vision of change. In this case, philosophy must realize its place as reactionary (Rennesland 2021). It is through a reflexive attitude that we critically engage with cultural expressions of human subjectivity, the wisdom we adhere to, and the values we constantly practice in our shared ways of life.

We can proceed better to an evaluative mode of inquiry of social normativity in cultural practices if we are aware of the explanatory view of its cultural thought. In this case, anthropological and sociological studies can provide us with a readily understanding of a cultural way of life. However, an ontological conceptualization of the transcendental authority of a cultural lifeform has to proceed through a hermeneutic inquiry. It has to move beyond the thick descriptions of ethnographic works, and thus, it is a double hermeneutic or an interpretation of interpretations. The hermeneutic tradition was initially concerned with text interpretations, but it evolved in the social sciences and philosophical tradition as an interpretive procedure and a region of inquiry (Smith 2004). In particular, hermeneutics in Anglo-Saxon philosophy signifies the epistemological problems of the validity and objectivity of textual interpretation and translation. In Philosophy, Heidegger considers interpretation to be primordially a mode of being or part of the human condition that is relative to a concrete historical setting (Dobos 2010). It is the unsurprising idea in philosophy that man is simply a self-interpreting animal.

As an outlook of the world, hermeneutics treats reality like a text that is readable and already constituted in meaning (Ginev 2011). The hermeneutical method is viewed as a circle between parts and the whole. To understand a linguistic expression means to look at details within its broader context, and in the same way, one cannot understand the context without going through the details. Thus, a hermeneutic philosophy of social practice demonstrates how a particular practice is understood in terms of the interrelatedness of social practices, which can disclose cultural meanings and ways of life. Ginev described it as our existential hermeneutic situation upon which meaning articulation proceeds from our ineluctably being in social practices.

We can understand the interplay of the normative forces and the influence of human agency in social practices through the sociological and philosophical distinction between human agency and action against social

structures. It is among the significant debates on social normativity and order (Scott 2006). On the one hand, the study of interpretive sciences identifies normative forces as those that typically sanction agential behavior in social life (Ginev 2019). The role of the social structure points to “the normative frameworks in which norms for performing social roles take shape, the semiotic-communicative codes of social integration” (Ginev 2018, 66). On the other hand, it is always the priority of human subjectivity that we find in social theories. For instance, the self’s dialogical nature emerges from an inescapable cultural background (Taylor 1989). Self-understanding remains intersubjective and relational so that no matter how we think about ourselves, it only finds its legitimacy when expressed and recognized by others (Taylor 1991).

However, the driving force of human social life is not exclusively traced to either human agency or social normativity. Against the tendency of a teleological determination, Ginev argued for a remainder or a phenomenon to be saved in the interplay of human agency in concert with configured practices. He refers to the ontological conceptualization of interrelated practices that constitute an emancipated way of life, creating its routine everydayness (Ginev 2018). It is because we all have to deal with empirical and transcendental concerns since human agents will inevitably encounter all sorts of normative patterns, beliefs, and various practices beyond their determination.

The idea of human subjectivity and intersubjective relations in the articulation of meaning is retained, but the ontological claim about the trans-subjective reality of socio-cultural practices needs to be made more explicit. It is the endogenous reflexivity of the practice that calls for the practitioners to immerse in a kind of life (Ginev 2018). When practitioners situate themselves in ensembles of configured practices, the practice has its reflexivity that specifies a form of life. This is typically understood within the normative frame of the social practice. But again, normative forces do not account for themselves as already existing either in the social structure or are determined by collective motives and agency. Instead, it is an ontological account within the hermeneutic situation that fore-structures understanding.

Ginev makes it clear that human agency and social normativity are related in ecstatic unity. It is a characteristic of being in social practices to which the idea of hermeneutic situation has expounded this unity. Understanding is always influenced by pre-existing fore-structures such as

preconceptions and prejudices that cannot be entirely stripped out of the process of interpretation within a historical concrete setting (Heidegger 1999). Through reflexive decisions, we can further develop and revise our preconceptions and perspectives. For Ginev, the being of meaning is in the ongoing fore-structuring of human actants' understanding of the potentiality for being in social practice. He avoids the causal determination of social normativity by prioritizing possibilities that constitute the trans-subjective reality of the practices. Instead of tracing social normativity in agency and assuming it as something operating behind agential behavior, it is an ecstatic unity (Ginev 2018). He tried to account for the pre-normative force or the non-normative aspect that fore-structures understanding in what becomes articulated when the practitioners engage in practices entering into configurations that open up a cultural life form's horizon of possibilities.

One of the important consequences of Ginev's view is infusing the existential analytic in the hermeneutic of social practices in order to disclose the people's choice of a consistent existential possibility within a cultural lifeform. He allows the cultural lifeform and the cultural bearers to be determined in the sense of authenticity and inauthenticity in everyday social life. All in view of how interrelated practices are emancipated cultural life forms capable of creating its everydayness. He goes as far as claiming that there is nothing beyond the projected horizon of possibilities laid out in our cultural lifeform. This is a valid point of departure to look at further how we come to acquire an authentic self and form of life.

### **3. Authenticity of the Self and Cultural Form of Life**

Ginev not only allows the self but also cultural life forms to be determined as authentic or inauthentic through a hermeneutic of social practices. To proceed with his view, authenticity was one of the significant developments related to modern individualism. Taylor makes a helpful understanding of the development of authenticity and why it remains crucial to a meaningful life. Although Heidegger's view of authenticity is directly linked to Ginev's determination of the authenticity of cultural life forms, Taylor's account of the conditions of human subjectivity will help us understand the authenticity bequeathed by modern culture of inwardness. Meanwhile, Heidegger's perspective on authenticity will be more refined in Ginev's

view of an emancipated way of life. All are linked to the idea of culture as something that contextualizes human agency.

Centering on the self is one of the developments of our modern secular age. Taylor puts in context how society moves from a primitive porous self towards a civilized buffered self (Taylor 2007). The distinction is not a deliberate discrimination but an explanatory attempt. The former lives in a magical and enchanted world. Unbelief was unthinkable. He described the primitive self as porous or vulnerable to deified cosmic forces. The social boundary is not defined between human and non-human entities, including the overlap of the mind and the world. On the other hand, modern secular conditions have opened new realms of possibilities. Unbelief and belief are simultaneously a possibility in a society. He described the emergence of the buffered self as being capable of disengaged thinking and instrumental rationality. This characterizes the centering of the self, which is “individualism of self-fulfillment” (Taylor 1991, 14).

For good reasons, self-fulfillment relates to authenticity, but unfortunately, it tends to get superficial. Taylor traced the internalization of the moral force in Descartes’s radical disengaged thinking (Taylor 1989). Reason rules the self, but its hegemony is not to discard desires but to subsume them under the force of reason. Rational control has become the source and measure of self-esteem and dignity, which depends on doing what we judge as the best course of action and practice. In other words, mastery of rational thinking makes us see things as instrumental and moves us toward heuristic and procedural judgment as the basis of our actions. The significance of the individual’s control and freedom in looking for a sense of fulfillment was the prelude to the talk about authenticity.

For Taylor, authenticity is a moral ideal that we all share in any time and space. There is an impulse to be true to oneself coming from the call of our conscience and moral feelings (Taylor 1991). Self-exploration does not go about rationally objectifying the self but instead allows the individual to find his originality. It is directed to a profound balance that does justice to our nature as humans instead of lamenting our failure in fashioning ourselves according to an impersonal standard of order and good. No one apart from ourselves can lead our lives (Taylor 1991).

This immediately calls attention to the implication that valuation falls under the subject’s determination. There is a naïve restriction that no one has the right to question how we lead our lives. For Taylor, it is a slippery slope that we might fall and be misled to think that our quest for authenticity

will deprive each other of talking about our ideal commitments. While we become in touch with our moral feelings, it does not mean that it is not answerable to reason (Taylor 1991; Smith 1994). The moral ideal of authenticity is not a disengaged process of self-understanding but a dialogical relation within a horizon of significance that provides our basic valuation of things. From this view, the thread of our culture becomes more vivid and robust.

Meanwhile, Heidegger's view of authenticity is about commitment to an ideal and confronting possibilities that resist the tendency of becoming anonymous in everyday life (Heidegger 1999). We need to realize that we are not just a genuine expression of our self-making but also called for a greater purpose. Heeding the call of conscience frees us from the suppression of routine life and conformity. The call of conscience comes about in our deepest desire for a temporal and meaningful existence. It does not depart from how Taylor characterizes the quest for authenticity because it has an individualistic character. However, Taylor leans towards the dialogical self. Nevertheless, they acknowledge the social as the condition for the emergence of authentic selves.

For Ginev, authenticity is not the continuous awareness and resistance to everyday life. We cannot avoid routine life. Authenticity is not just simply emerging out of the crowd but taking upon the possibilities along the lines "laid out by certain paradigmatic stories circulating in our cultural world" (Guignon 2006, 287). Ginev accentuates the role of cultural life forms and practices and affirms that the shift toward authenticity can only be guided by reflexivity. It is a matter of personal choice according to the possibilities laid out in our thrownness. The everydayness of human existence is not some discreet and separate arbitrary activities. There are paradigmatic socially accepted behaviors. A personal choice that wills authenticity could only be maintained within an authentic cultural life form capable of creating its everydayness (Ginev 2018). Authenticity is not exclusively an individual agential enterprise, but it is in concert with the practice's horizon of possibilities.

The consequence of Ginev's view reiterates that cultural lifeform is not some reified object of thought or a free-floating entity that is simply ready to be internalized. Appropriating a possibility within the horizon of a cultural life form "resists the leveling and unificationists everydayness of average existence" (Ginev 2018, 1545). Each decision will always be subsumed into a routine everydayness, but such decisions should be

consistent with the transcendent meaning of the cultural lifeform. The transcendent meaning is often the most abstract and general view of human fullness. It provides an inexhaustible way for the cultural bearers to actualize into their daily lives. Ginev provides a good example of a ceremonial and exegetical practice that discloses a religious life that hinges on a transcendent meaning that sanctions righteous behavior but can never be expressed completely (Ginev 2019).

Individuals participate in a life form that projects an ultimate meaning and transcendent meaning to human existence. For Ginev, it is the potentiality for being or existential possibilities within the configured ensemble of interrelated practices that the ultimate meaning of a life form resides. In this case, “mutual reinforcement of the articulation of lifeform’s ultimate meaning and the constitution of the everydayness of configured practices defines the characteristic hermeneutic situation of the lifeform’s articulation” (Ginev 2019, 142-143). The potentiality for being that it projects drives the ongoing process of contextualization and recontextualization of agency within a social world. For this reason, cultural life forms are not static, and identity is a continuous process of actualizing possibilities through engagement with configured practices.

Ginev acknowledged the sociological process, but he insists that it remains the individuals who determine the constitution of meaning in their participation with practices. Cultural changes can be traced in the deliberate reconfiguration of practices, which allows other existential possibilities to be open and anticipated within the framework of their culture. By contrast, cultural changes by way of an external authority that imposes, controls, and manipulates the process of articulation can never be a free choice that elicits an authentic self and form of life. In this way, we can look into social practices that represent a way of life and the transcendent meaning they hold for a group of people living faithfully within the possibilities of their heritage. This is sufficient to provide an explanatory view of the transcendental authority and meaning of a cultural lifeform as a basis for a positive re-evaluation and re-articulation of cultural thought.

#### **4. Institutionalization of the Ifugao traditional practice *Gotad***

It is not uncommon for significant social practices to be institutionalized in a society. In institutional theory, “a system of action is said to be institutionalized to the extent that actors in an ongoing relation oriented

their action to a common set of normative standards and value patterns.” (Cooper et al. 2008, 676). It is an activity where agents or actors adopt normative patterns that find their legitimacy in certain social and political contexts. In the social constructionist view, institutionalization involves the “emergence, maintenance, and transmission of social order” (Burger and Luckmann 1966, 70). It is a habituation of human activity, and therefore, reality is constructed through social processes and practices in everyday life (Berger and Luckmann 1966).

The primacy of linguistic expressions and communication results in the objectification and typification of the world and others. Hence, we know and understand how things usually go. In this case, language is experienced as external to the self as it typifies everyday life (Medina 2003). It is something we learn in the shared and common meanings that structure everyday life. Social order and stability are necessary because human existence moves beyond typifications and pragmatic motives for survival. It is through the habituation of human activities and various typifications that an institutionalized pattern of conduct is formed. It is a directed and specialized human activity that is subsumed under control (Berger and Luckmann 1966). This repeated, cumulative, and reciprocal process becomes objective and is treated as a social reality.

Ginev claims that even habituation is grounded in facticity, particularly in the interrelatedness of practices (Ginev 2018). We can maintain that the institutionalization of practices holds normative patterns that the practitioners are able to internalize and externalize, but this is also guided by the agent’s subjectivity and the practice’s trans-subjective reality. In other words, people will come to know that certain practices disclose a form of life aside from the fashioned reasons or intentions that a practice is configured. More importantly, it points to a transcendent meaning that sanctions the agential behavior of the practitioners.

In the context of the Ifugaos, the entry of modern institutions and different worldviews from colonial encounters have changed their everyday lives, including their cultural practices. The Ifugao’s social reality is virtually not the same as in the past (Medina 2003). In the institutionalization of their traditional ritual practices, new modes of possibilities are incorporated. The reconfiguration of traditional practices has resulted in changes in the normative patterns being more defined and explicit. This is consistent with the hermeneutic theory of practices that

suggests the appropriation of possibilities and the ongoing meaning articulation that contextualizes and recontextualizes agency.

One of the most important cultural practices in contemporary Ifugao society is their founding provincial celebration, *Gotad* (Lihgawon 2022). It was originally part of *Uya-uy*, a ritual prestige wedding celebration. It is when someone is elevated to the status of *Kadangyan*, or wealthy person. At present, *Gotad*, as a provincial fest, is meant to enhance the elements of the Ifugao culture and identity (Sembrano 2016). It typically involves “gottadan (ethnic parade), traditional sports, hudhud chanting, ethnic dances, and songs, gong beating and winemaking, among others” (UNESCO 2008, 40). It spans for a few days to allow the expression of the variety of Indigenous knowledge, systems, and practices through thanksgiving gathering of culture and identity.

The shift of understanding and reconfiguration of the practice of *Gotad* from a prestige wedding rite to a Provincial celebration corresponds to the elevation of the status of Ifugao as a province. The *Kadangyans* do not simply hold status because of the abundance of their resources. They are primarily entrusted with great responsibility and authority for their agricultural systems and social relations (Roldan 2018). In this sense, adopting *Gotad* signifies the establishment or elevation of Ifugao as a province, explicitly affirming its authority over its land and culture.

Moreover, the *Gotad* practice is an exemplary celebration of the ongoing reconciliation of different cultural influences. Within the province, different ethnic tribes of Ifugao, such as the *IAYangan*, *ITuwali*, *Ihenanga*, and *IKalanguya*, have come together to recognize each other’s valuable contribution to enriching their culture. While the *Gotad* practice was fashioned towards cultural awareness and encouraged the younger generation to an internalized sense of valuing their culture, it has become increasingly political, economic, and secular activity. The institutionalization of the *Gotad* shows how the people move from their view of social totality towards the disentanglement of the dimensions of social life.

Unless the people realize the transcendent meaning of their culture in their social practices, their social totality will be freed from its entanglement and become autonomous in determining the life of the people. It is not bad that life has become easily identified in terms of political, professional, economic, and technological life. Still, it is better to realize that it is an open possibility to find its complementarity or consistency to the nature of their

cultural lifeform. If not, then it becomes a regulative force that will make the people reject virulent practices that risk the existence of their culture.

### **5. *Gotad* as *Punhanaan*: Understanding the Transcendent Meaning**

The Ifugao *Gotad* can be understood as a *Punhanaan* practice. The familiar local term helps in elucidating how the Ifugao social practices are thought and expressed. It might be an unpopular term or even unfamiliar to most younger generations of Ifugaos. However, the nature of language, according to Taylor, is “Making new purposes possible, new levels of behavior, new meanings” (Taylor 2016, 4). It is a modest attempt to understand how *Punhanaan* captures the meaning of the reconfigured traditional practice. A closer look at the etymology of *Punhanaan* brings us to the idea of good. It comes from the root word *hana*, which, according to Lambrecht (1978),

“Hana” is a predicative affirmation followed by the conjunction *ta*, or *t*, a being eliminated (cf. under *ta* (2), or under *t*). In current speech as well as in *hudhud* chant, *hana ta* (*hana't*) introduces that which the speaker or the soloist wishes to approve for it means, “it is good that”, and is the equivalent of *maphod ta* (cf. under *pohod*); if *hana* is reduplicated, its meaning is, in some way, reinforced, eg. : *hanahanat imbangad na* ( cf. under *bangad*) *Bugan*, “it is really good that he brought *Bugan* (his wife) at home.

In Hohulin’s account, it could also mean an invocation for something good, such that *hana ot* means “may it be so” (Hohulin and Hohulin 2016, 300). Lambrecht and Hohulin relate the word to *maphod*, which describes any experience, person, or thing as good. In response to what is good, *munhana* is an expression of gratitude or recognition and valuing of a certain good. In the early observation of Florent Joseph Sals, he claimed that the early Ifugaos did not know gratitude because they were ignorant of strangers’ kindness and benighted by their lack of encounters with other civilizations (Sals 1955). The expectation of Joseph Sals might be gestures of gratitude, but he immediately pointed out that the ways of the early Ifugaos in acknowledging a favor or benefit typically evoking gratitude were saying, “I will remember it” (Sals 1955, 83).

However, it should not be taken as a reason for the seemingly ungrateful attitude of the Ifugaos when they do not remember it or they do not give an immediate exchange and show expressive gestures. For

instance, the Ifugaos' recognition of the *maphod* is manifested in their unique expression of ritual thanksgiving celebrations. It is important to note that kindness or goodness in their interpersonal relationship is deemed natural or expected as they operate in a close kinship bond. This explains why anyone in their tribe can expect help from his community in times of need and difficulties, like their practice of *baddang* and *ubbu*. If gratitude is understood as indebtedness, it is directed to the community because of their communal cooperation for one person or a certain family in need. The reciprocity does not end because they do not see their practice as an equivalent exchange but as an intergenerational commitment or a continuous way of fulfilling their sense of gratitude to everyone present during their time of need. In this view, the individuals' expressions and actions are always oriented to the good of the community.

When *munhana* is nominalized by the prefix *pun*, which expresses the manner or reason for an action, *Punhanaan*, signifies an avenue of thanksgiving or recognizing the good. It was particularly exemplified when Ifugao became a province, and they institutionalized their traditional practice of *Gotad* as a thanksgiving gathering of cultural identity (Lihgawon 2022). It expresses their self-determination and hope for cultural continuity. It comes from their strong sentiments of gratitude and loyalty to their inherited culture and identity. It is not a surprise that all the municipalities followed and institutionalized other traditional practices that would appropriately signify their cultural values. The ethnocultural thanksgiving practices of the Ifugaos are the following: *Gotad ad Hingyon*, *Gotad ad Kiangan*, *Igkhumtad ad Majawjaw*, *Rambakan jay Lamut*, *Ammung ad Alfonso Lista*, *Kulpi ad Asipulo*, *Kulpi ad Lagawe*, *Urpah ad Banaue*, *Apar ad Aguinaldo*, *Keleng di Tinec*, and *Tungoh ad Hungduan* (UNESCO 2008). The practices emphasized the aspects of Ifugao culture to deliberately promote cultural values and knowledge for the present and future Ifugao generations.

In plain language, the Ifugao *Gotad* practice as *Punhanaan* reveals that it is fashioned to ensure the well-being of the community. However, arriving at the idea is inevitable and, for some, unsurprising. Still, it should be made explicit that the transcendent meaning of the Ifugao cultural way of life is well-being. Its peculiarity is how religious belief and tradition confer its significance. Human culture is at once and will continue to be social and religious. Javier states, "There is no culture without religion. There is no religion without culture" (Javier 2018, 53). Understandably, the

Ifugaos primarily understood well-being in ritual practices. The study of Remme demonstrates how the Ifugao's extended sociality is constantly renewing the plurality of their relations through ritual celebrations (Remme 2017).

The injunction of the community is the renewal of relations because it serves as the condition of well-being to be expressed and achieved. It is characterized by maintaining relations through the strict observation of traditions and proper ritual sacrifices. The idea is simple and practical; the people cannot celebrate or live in an atmosphere of hostile relationships. While ritual celebrations are a common characteristic of primitive life, relating it to *Punhanaan* makes it an existential attitude that is open to creating, renewing, and valuing relations as a measure of attunement to harmony. In another sense, Enkiwe-abayao describes the desired way of the Ifugao *henanga* tribe as *ap-aphochan chi pi'takhuwan*, which means having abundant resources, practical needs, traditional knowledge, and life skills (Enkiwe-Abayao 2010). It is true for all the Ifugaos since it refers to a good way to be, but it also points to the most important part of Ifugao life, the sustenance of family and community relations. Even in death, the renewal of relations continues. This is exemplified in the practice of knowing kinship ties. It means knowing the *nun-apuh* or ancestor's spirits, which is considered a significant characteristic of the Ifugao sense of being so that a person's death does not end with its possibilities because his life is remembered, celebrated, and continually made part of the community in any ritual celebrations (Remme 2017).

The *Gotad* practice was adopted from a particular ritual gathering, which marks the important events and stages of their temporal existence to strengthen their communal ties practically. Thus, the idea of well-being is fundamentally experiential and understood from how they conduct themselves according to their beliefs and relations. In this case, there is something proverbial in Ifugao society in terms of how they relate and understand that their behavior is harmonious and desirable. In view of the *Gotad* practice, the people participate in not just one single practice but interrelated practices that have a certain emergent relational value. This demonstrates that the expression of well-being as a transcendent meaning is open to new formations and re-configurations of the normative forces and existential possibilities. It happens in the cultural members' orientation, anticipation, and expectations to secure their cultural continuity and social cohesion.

### **5.1. Heeding the Transcendent Authority**

Towards the modern social transformation of Ifugao society, the disentanglement of the social domains of life has become deliberate. The new generation is delivered in a context of diverging interests of the life forms. Life is no longer tied to the traditional religious framework and domain of possibility, which makes it necessary to maintain solidarity in any attempt at cultural survival. People today can find other modes of life outside their places. Societies are becoming multicultural and multireligious because “traditional standards, contrasts, groups, boundaries, and identities are opening up, reaching out, and also breaking down” (Javier 2018, 52).

On a positive note, even if the Gotad practice was meant to highlight the cultural elements of Ifugao culture, it encouraged modern progressive developments that would enrich the place. However, there are significant studies that are critical to the modern social transformations of Ifugao. Tensions arise between cultural ways of life and the trends following modern secular progress. The proliferation of different institutions and the outpouring of other cultural influences has elicited a mistaken view that reduced the Ifugao culture as antiquated (Jocson 2018; Nantes et al. 2022). Historically, the Ifugao colonial encounters introduced Western culture through a new social order in terms of political organization, economic industry, education, and Christian life.

The Ifugaos did not risk rigidity, but there are conflicting forms of life that need to be resolved. To be clear, reconciling different cultural lives presupposes a genuine encounter to allow one culture to be transformed by another. It is not about domination and assimilation that results in the dissolution of other ways of life. To reconcile outside influences with the Ifugao culture is clear. There are impacts of colonial history and daily intercultural exchanges that challenge the cultural way of life. The important thing is to heed the call of the cultural life form’s transcendent authority. It comes from the ethos of the culture and the ultimate meaning it projects for the members. Thus, the measure of cultural continuity is not to crystallize or substitute the culture, but it lies in the continuous expression of the transcendent meaning of the culture.

We do not only participate in one but in various cultural life forms, hence the proliferation of the “Self I-positions” within which the Self encounters others, including various ways of life (Ginev 2019, 201). In this case, it is up to the individual to come to terms with the plurality of his I-

positions that correspond to different forms of life, and it would be enriching for the cultural form of life if individuals choose to take it as their horizon of existential possibilities and appropriate it as their way of life. For instance, the *Gotad* practice encourages the well-being of the community in each relational dimension of social life. This means that any virulent practice that disintegrates and destroys environmental, communal, and spiritual relations shall be rejected. For instance, excessive capitalizing on environmental resources at the expense of their rice fields, demonization of culture for Christian conversion, distortion of cultural identity to assimilate into the dominant culture, and modern self-priority that is indifferent or above community life.

## **5.2. Cultural Values in Practice**

The existential possibilities in the Ifugao way of life can be made explicit in the choices of the people to retain their traditions. We can observe that their rice culture appeared consistent in the repeated practice of *Gotad*. Their rice culture is the reason why Ifugao became well-known outside of the place. UNESCO (2008) considers the rice terraces to be a testament to the unity of humanity and the landscape. Its ingenuity may strike us with awe and inspiration to value humanity's common heritage. Most importantly, it retains the sentiments and solidarity of the community that have grown throughout their history. The *Gotad* practice makes this understanding vivid through a deliberate promotion of faith and obedience to keeping traditions, communal cooperation, and collective responsibility. In this way, we can understand how cultural values are constantly being practiced.

The importance of keeping their heritage cannot be divorced from the Ifugao identity. Culture is dynamic, and traditions change, but it does not mean it is diminishing the cultural way of life. Even the reconfiguration or abandoning of practices and old beliefs is a process of anticipation and expectation from the cultural members. A cultural lifeform meets its end when it no longer offers a potentiality for being, which is absurd because it remains inexhaustible (Ginev 2019). The shattering of cultural lifeforms can only be forced by an external authority. Thus, it is only right that the *Gotad* retains the valued traditional practices as a viable existential possibility. Some would secularize culture and assume that it is still efficient as a humanistic principle, but it becomes diminished by the lack of sentiments among the people.

The Ifugaos ritualized the phases of rice planting to properly enact their relation to their god with reverence and gratitude. This requires faith that after renewing good relations, the deities will confer abundance and peace to the community. That is why obedience to follow the ritual celebrations and the taboos properly is strictly observed. However, Christianity superseded the traditional belief. Today, the *Gotad* practice allows interreligious worship from all the various Christian churches. Although it allows their belief in God to be expressed in different faith communities, their spirituality unites them in their desire for God’s providence and protection.

Meanwhile, communal cooperation is valued as true living in the community—for instance, *ubbu* and *baddang*. The former refers to laborious work for maintenance and utilizing rice fields. Here, environmental relations are fundamentally grounded in pragmatic survival and care that arises from loss or displacement. However, it can also be motivated through a sense of attachment, like gratitude to their ancestors and loyalty to their community. In the latter practice, it is a more encompassing way of helping individuals or families. It is a virtue common among the Indigenous groups in the Cordillera region, which is “a sharing of burden to finish a communal task” and for the members to “come out from his/her comfort zone to help in the community concern, problem, or issue” (Placido 2024, 175). This links their collective responsibility for their environmental and communal relations.

Each is an important member of the community. It is almost a single entity that is sensitive to each other’s needs. Their institutionalized *Gotad* practice shows how people can develop communal cooperation in different ways. It can be a collaboration and concerted effort of political, economic, and educational institutions. The important thing is that the shift in understanding retains the relational values of communal cooperation and collective responsibility, which allows the Ifugaos to find ways to ensure the well-being of their community. It would imply that the Ifugao sense of subjectivity is not entirely individualistic, but it always finds its source of strength and motivation in the community that raised him or her.

### **5.3. Rediscovering Cultural Rootedness**

The *Gotad* practice is a part of self-determination, consolidating the people’s aspirations on cultural, political, and economic developments. It is not just to alleviate their condition but also to let the Ifugao people

determine the future of their culture and community. In this case, the present generation's engagement in the *Punhanaan* social practice helps them to deliberately identify the relevant beliefs, values, and norms that would remain a positive aspect of their identity. While not all the Ifugao traditions are considered good and practical in the present, the same could also be said for accommodating other influences. It is rediscovering their cultural roots that provides an avenue for a balanced and selective process of cultural change and will contribute to the maturity and development of the Ifugao community.

The transcendent meaning of well-being is not to claim an absurd point that people should go back to their traditional cultural mode of thinking. Instead, we must be keen to look at the historical connections, the existential validity, and the practicality of our cultural practices amidst the emerging issues and possibilities of life. Even if the process leads to changes that require a shift in understanding and practices, this should not only be done through raising the standard of their living but also accompanied by growth and refinement of understanding that extends to promote the welfare of other people and future generations.

People are initially concerned at the level they are uncomfortable with, and it takes compromise and initiative to engage in practice and internalize normative forces that make agential behavior inclined toward the well-being of the community. It is not a problem for people who understand the value of promoting the common good and have pride in their culture. However, it is no longer obvious how individual actions have repercussions for the whole community. The impact of individual choices is felt almost immediately in Ifugao's previous social life. The transcendent meaning of well-being encompasses every dimension of relations, but the challenge today is how each relation becomes freed and proceeds to dictate the lives of the people. It is more tragic when people are disconnected from their cultural roots because the sacrifices and efforts of their ancestors will be brought to naught if the present cannot value what they share and do not find meaning in what they are doing together.

## **6. Conclusion**

The *Gotad* cultural practice of the Ifugaos is paradigmatic to a profound existential concern as people realize that there is a reality beyond their intentional participation in social practices. We always participate in social

practices, and seeing the role of culture in this way can encourage members towards a deeper self-understanding and aspire for cultural continuity. It signals the reflexive aspect of cultural practice that there is a transcendent meaning it hopes to inscribe to the members. This is possible because human culture provides a plenitude for how people address the vicissitudes of life. It also calls for the member's reflexivity towards an authentic mode of life that is faithful in enriching their cultural identity. It is inevitable because human existence is always motivated by the pursuit of meaning and value.

The relevance of a hermeneutic of social practices is not limited to an explanatory view of authentic cultural life forms. From the point of view of the cultural bearers, it is the ground upon which individuals measure other cultural influences as desirable or pernicious. Also, the functional values and efficient practices of a cultural community can be navigated towards positive social action. In the case of the relevance of the Ifugao *Gotad* practice, it will remain indicative of the Ifugao expression of well-being. Their values of keeping faith and traditions, gratitude and loyalty, communal cooperation, and collective responsibility can be navigated toward a normative approach to interculturality. There is a need to find complementary values that would encourage people's sentiments towards wider solidarity of human cultures. It starts with an explanatory view and continuous practice and articulation of our own.

Thus, we can influence the changes in the normative forces of our culture as long as they come from our anticipation and expectations. A rigid cultural practice that often treats outside influences as a threat prevents the emergence of profound possibilities. While change is too risky, the openness of knowledge and practice exchanges provides an avenue for social transformations. It requires receptivity and creativity to reinvent oneself with the ingenuity of each cultural influence. This can be through the reconfiguration of cultural practice or institutionalization of new practices so that the members can be guided by the transcendent meaning and normative forces of their culture.

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