



Punnuk: Closing the Harvest Season with the Tug-of-War along the River Hapao

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I. General description

The punnuk is a tug-of-war game among members of three communities in barangay Hapao, town of Hungduan in the province of Ifugao. The several-round competition is held at the River Hapao. It is the final activity in the **huowah** or ritual-activities observed after the completion of harvest. The enactment of the punnuk formally puts to a close the agricultural cycle, and signals the beginning of a new one upon its consummation.

II. The huowah

A. Baki and Inum

The two ritual activities in the huowah that precede the **punnuk** are: the **baki** and the **inum**. Both are sponsored by the **dumupag** or designated lead family in the harvest. Both are enacted on the same day and at the ground floor area of the traditional house of the dumupag. The first in the huowah is the baki which is performed in the morning. It is a ritual divination with 3-5 chickens (sometimes includes a pig) as sacrifice. It is presided over by village priest/s or **mumbaki** who chants expressions of gratitude to the gods for the harvest and to the ancestors (reciting names of 3-5 generations) for the rice fields bequeathed to the present generation particularly those of the dumupag. The mumbaki, the members of the family of the dumupag, and the community members in attendance all partake of the cooked meat as lunch. The second ritual activity following the baki is the **inum** or the drinking of rice wine. Three jars of varying sizes are brought out by the dumupag. They all contain rice wine or **bayah** prepared by the dumupag. The mumbaki

invites the ancestors of the dumupag and his/her spouse from 4-6 generations by chanting their names one by one to partake of the wine. The mumbaki is given the honors to open the jars and have the first taste starting with the large jar or **binouwangon**— around 2.5 feet tall, then the medium-sized jar or **dinoaman**, and finally the **guling** which is a foot-high jar but contains the best tasting rice wine amongst the three. The community members in attendance then partake of the wine but only from the largest jar. The shouts of revelry emanating from the house of the dumupag signal the rest of the community to join the booze till late in the night.

B. Punnuk

The third and the last of the huowah ritual-activity is the punnuk. It is held on the day after the baki and inum. It is the tug-of-war participated in by members of three communities - young and old, men and women alike. Traditionally, the able bodied men, whether young or old, join the actual tug-of-war in the river and the women whether young or old, content themselves joining the march to the river embankment where they cheer their village mates and jeer or taunt the members of the opposing or rival communities.

The contending groups converge at the **hipukana**, the area where two rivers, Hapao River and a tributary river, meet.

1. Material Elements: Tinaggu and the Pakid

The punnuk tug-of-war features two important material elements: these are the **tinaggu** (also called **kina-ag**) and the **pakid**. The tinaggu is a figure made up of rice stalks and tightly bundled with vines. The figure often resembles the scare-crow but there are other forms such as a large monitor lizard or a figure resembling a monkey. It is the object thrown into the middle part of the river and the subject of tugging between two opposing groups that are situated on opposite sides of the river across the current. Each of the groups uses a pakid which is a branch of the tree of three to five meters in length to pull the tinaggu to their side. The pakid is a stem of the **attoba** (also called atolba) tree (*Callicarpa formosana* Rolfe family Lamiaceae) which is known for its durability. The men who gather the tree will look for the one with a root that is formed like a hook so that upon being struck against the tinaggu it gets stuck and firmly hitched and from there the tugging between the contending groups ensues. The stem should have a circumference of around three inches for it to be easily grasped by the participants. The first group to pull the tinaggu to their side is the winner.

2. Production of the tinaggu is done three days before the punnuk while the pakid is gathered days before the event as the attoba tree where it is taken grows predominantly in the forest hills, far from the communities. Often times, the tree for the punnuk has been reserved prior to the harvest period to give them time to look for the longest tree. The longer the tree, the more men can join in the pulling during the tug-of-war. Both the

tinaggu and the pakid are prepared by the men of each participating community. At least two pieces each of tinaggu and pakid are prepared and brought to the river for the tug-of-war. In the event that there is a tie and necessitates another round to decide the game, or when a pakid gets destroyed there is a ready replacement.

III. The Setting

A. Geographic/Physical

The Hungduan is a municipality of Ifugao bounded in the northwest by Mountain Province and in the southwest by Benguet. Among the nine **barangays** that comprise Hungduan, only Hapao Proper, Nungulunan, and Banga-an are known to practice the punnuk. The three barangays are situated at the central area of Hungduan and are distinctive for their impressive expanse of terraced fields all with stone-walling. The whole area is formed like a wide elongated basin with its southern flanks so expansive and gradually elevated in contrast to its western and southwestern flanks which are steep. The River Hapao traverses the very midst of the site. The waters rumble through large smooth-surfaced stones, and swiftly flow from the heights of Mt. Alawitan and Mt. Polis, and fed by small tributaries from Mt Kapiligan.

B. The People and their Main Economic Activity

The members of the three communities belong to the Tawali ethno-linguistic group, just like the greater number of the population in Hungduan. They are ingrained rice-agriculturists. Their stone-walled terraced fields grand and expansive are the tangible lasting testaments of a hardy and ingenuous people. And their living traditions such as the huowah – baki, inum, and the punnuk, all centered on their rice agriculture, are intangible heritage practices that have endured through generations. The agricultural cycle centered on the traditional rice variety, usually starts with the sowing of chosen rice grains or **pinung-o** in October or early November and followed by the preparation of rice fields prior to the replanting of seedlings from the seedbeds in early December. So that by May the grains form and then ripen till golden yellow and harvest would then commence in late June or early July.

C. The Social Structure

The society is stratified. Those occupying the upper ranks are the **kadangyan** or the traditional rich families owning several large terraced fields that are inherited from ancestors. In the agricultural cycle, work on the rice fields of the kadangyan is given precedence over those of the other members of the community owning small plots. There is a dumupag or the designated family from the kadangyan class who leads in all agricultural activities particularly the huowah or post harvest ritual-activities. The dumupag is chosen through consensus by the village elders and the mumbaki or village priests, on the basis of the extent of rice fields owned and social stature held in the

traditional society. The dumupag necessarily emanates from the kadangyan family that owns the widest and biggest number of rice fields which are believed to be the oldest among the terraced fields in the area. Being the lead family, the dumupag has the exclusive privilege to declare the commencement of harvest and calls on everyone in the community to join the harvest starting off with his/her rice fields. Only after harvest is completed in the rice fields of the dumupag can the **umuonub** or the family with the second largest rice fields start harvest in his/her rice fields. Then it is followed by the **mikatuo** or the family with the third largest rice fields, followed by the **makap-at** or the family/families with the fourth largest rice fields. In all the foregoing, harvesting is a cooperative labor shared by the community members along with the respective owners of the rice fields. A harvester receives five bundles of rice from the rice field owner in exchange for a day's work. Only after the rice crops of the makap-at are harvested will the small rice field-owners harvest their crops. And since the fields of the latter are small, harvesting can be done simply by them.

IV. The Enactment of the Punnuk

A. Community participation; colorful and celebratory

At around nine o'clock in the morning, the members of the three communities, joining the punnuk, start marching through the rice-terraced embankments towards the direction of the River Hapao. The predominant red color of their traditional attire is a stunning contrast to the greenish vegetation in the surroundings. Red colored leaves of the **dong-a** (also called dongla) (*Cordyline fruticosa* (L.) A. Chev. family Agavaceae), believed to be attractive to the gods, are embellished on their heads. The tinaggu is swayed and the pakid is constantly raised by the men carrying them while a bunch of the dong-a is waved by the rest of the participants to the tempo of boastful shouting, goading and cheering in unison by the participants.

B. Imploring blessings from the gods

The cheering and exchange of pointed criticisms to put down the confidence of the opposite group/s becomes more feverish as the participants approach the river embankment. The first two groups arriving at the designated area in the river are the first to compete in the tug-of-war. But before the game begins, a participant called **munggopah** from one of the competing groups recites a 4-line prayer imploring blessings from the gods: **Daya**, of the sky, **Laud**, of the sea, and **Bago** the god of the earth, not just for a good game but also for their community's health and well being. And this would be promptly followed by a recitation of another 4-line verse from the munggopah of the opposing group also addressed to the gods imploring that bounty and good luck shine on them.

C. The Game, tug-of-war

After the versifications, a tinaggu is then thrown at the very midst of the river by one of the opposing groups and in a split of a second their pakid strike the tinaggu and get stuck on it, and the tugging ensues. The constant pulling by each group invites deafening shouts and cheers from those on the river embankment eagerly hoping for a victory on their side. The group that pulls with greater, concerted strength can bring the tinaggu closer to their side, sometimes even pulling along the opposing group, and attaining victory in the game. The winning team then faces-off with the remaining group for another round of game. The challenges to another round/s can go on as long as there is still a tinaggu to pick and pull, and until everyone gets tired.

D. The winner and the losers

Whoever wins the most number of rounds in the tug-of-war is declared the over-all champion, not only in the punnuk but of the entire harvest season. The losers go home feeling forlorn as it is generally believed that their harvest would be easily consumed and thus will not last till the next harvest season while those in the winning side are all euphoric, oozing with confidence that the forthcoming year would indeed be a year of plenty and that their rice granary will always be full if not replenished every time.

Further demonstrate sportsmanship and camaraderie, the men who still have the strength to spend engage in a wrestling game called **bultong** or **dopap** before everybody takes a bath in the river.

V. Significance of the traditions related to harvest, and the huowah –baki, inum, and punnuk

- **religious** - as shown in the rituals of baki, inum and in the recitation of verses at the river to thank the gods for the harvest and implore the gods' continued assistance in the life of the community for the whole year;
- **revelry and celebration** - as observed in the inum, during the march along the terraced fields, and in the dedicated cheering especially at the tug-of-war games;
- **sportsmanship** in the tug-of war for both winners and losers;
- **unity and efficiency as a community** as seen in the speedy production of the tinaggu, the procurement of the pakid, and in the enactment of the punnuk, the marching synchronized to the tempo of their chants punctuated by shouts of "Hagioh!" as they negotiate the undulating embankments of the terrace fields leading to the river, the cheering in unison by village-mates and the show of strength in the entire enactment of the game;
- **discipline in the strict observance of taboos** such as abstaining from eating leafy vegetables, delicate shells, and fishes during the entire duration of harvest by the entire members of the community and none bathing for the dumupag and mumbaki during the entire duration of the huowah. The leafy vegetables are not

regarded as auspicious food since they shrink when cooked, and also the delicate shellfish are shunned due to their easily crushed shell covering. It is believed that those characteristics could have similar effect on the harvest such as easy depletion or destruction. The smell of fish is said to be disdained by the gods and therefore avoided. Pods such as beans can be served for food since they expand when cooked and this characteristic could be equated to the multiplication of harvest.

- **systematized sharing of labor in the fields** for efficiency in harvest, and deter the spoilage of crops;
- **high consciousness re traditions** is very apparent among community members (young and old, women and men), the mumbaki, the village elders, kadangyan and the *dumupag* especially seen in the practice or observance of community traditions especially those related to the agricultural life as demonstrated in the religious observance of rituals and continuous enactment of the huowah – baki, inum, and the punnuk. Through continuous observance and/or enactment, the **transfer** of the traditions to the younger generations is ensured;
- and the unparalleled dedication of the **government officials in the town and barangay levels** such as the Mayor, barangay officers and particularly the municipal tourism officer to their **responsibility in safeguarding** the huowah particularly the punnuk from waning or being commoditized and distorted through unscrupulous interventions, and from falling into the trap of pure spectacle or show for tourists' consumption. The officials lead the community members in raising their guard on the entry of dissemination of non-traditional rice varieties that necessitate the application of chemical pesticides and fertilizers. Non-organic farming and non-endemic varieties of rice and other plants will greatly affect the gains attained in the safeguarding and propagation of intangible cultural heritage such as the punnuk.

* Data Gathered from the Following People Interviewed on March 16 to 17, 2013
Hapao Centro, Hungduan in Ifugao:

Village Elders:

Lucio Adamme of Barangay Baang, 80 years old

Romeo Buddihon of Barangay Baang, 82 years old

Pedro Mang-uhan of Barangay Nungulunan, 60 years old

Mumbaki:

Bandao Atolba of Pangah-an, Barangay Hapao, 90 years old

Rosa Atolba, Wife of Mumbaki Bandaw Atolba, also of Pangah-an, Hapao

Village Elders and Mumbaki:

Antonio Bumangabang, Barangay Hapao Proper, 79 years old

Gano Napadawan, Barangay Hapao, 84 years old

Victor Melong (Mandulyaw, native name) Barangay Hapao, 78 years old

Dumupag:

Elena Pangiwan Uyammi, 62 years old

Husband of Dumupag, Jose Uyammi, 61 years old

Caretaker of Inheritor's Rice Fields:

Monalisa Bimuyag, and

Husband of Monalisa, Mr. Rey Bimuyag

Local Government Officials:

Ramon Gayadang, Barangay Captain of Hapao Proper, 49 years old

Joseph Nakake, former Councilor of Hapao Proper, and mumbaki 59 years old

Rowena Sicat, Municipal Tourism Officer of Hungduan, 38 years old

Note: The writer herself observed the entire harvest period and the huowah, and witnessed part of the punnuk while in Hapao in 1976.

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