

Fechen

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.*



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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 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 (*damaguana*). 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 (*fedobing*) of the other *ato*. He is named and the pact holders exchange spears and make speeches affirming the peace pact. Shaking his spear, each proclaim 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 *eyag* 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 *palogpeg* is performed. There is general merry-making 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.

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

JTP