

RICE RITUALS AND THE CONTINUITY OF IFUGAO INTANGIBLE HERITAGE

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INTRODUCTION

The Ifugao people of the Philippines are custodians of a very rich intangible heritage, deeply rooted in their agricultural practices and belief systems. Central to this heritage are rice rituals, which embody the Ifugao's spiritual connection to their environment and their pantheistic belief system known as the *Baki*. These rituals not only sustain agricultural productivity but also serve as repositories of cultural identity and oral traditions. However, the continuity of these rituals faces growing challenges that threaten their transmission to future generations.

One of the most pressing challenges is climate change, which has significantly altered weather patterns, leading to unpredictable rainfall, prolonged droughts, and increased pest infestations. These environmental changes disrupt the agricultural cycles that the rice rituals are meant to safeguard, making it difficult for farmers to adhere to traditional planting and harvesting schedules. As climate change accelerates, the viability of the Ifugao Rice Terraces—a UNESCO World Heritage Site—also comes under threat, further complicating the conditions necessary for maintaining these rituals.

Additionally, shifting economic realities have contributed to the decline of rice rituals. Many younger Ifugaos are choosing alternative livelihoods over traditional farming due to the financial instability of terrace agriculture. The lure of wage labor, education-driven migration, and modernization have led to a decline in the number of farmers willing to uphold ritual practices. Without active practitioners, the knowledge and performance of rice rituals risk fading into obscurity.

Compounding these threats is the increasing influence of new religions, particularly Christianity, which has discouraged or outright condemned the practice of *Baki* among many Ifugao communities. As religious conversions continue, younger

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generations may grow detached from the spiritual significance of rice rituals, further diminishing their role in community life. While some efforts have been made to reconcile Christian beliefs with indigenous traditions, the tension between ancestral rituals and newer religious frameworks remains a critical factor in the erosion of Ifugao intangible heritage.

This paper examines the integral role of rice rituals in the Ifugao terraces, the challenges faced in ensuring their continuity, and the interplay with the conservation of the rice terraces. Part of the discussion includes the wider Ifugao community values upon which conservation initiatives should be based. By exploring these factors, it seeks to highlight the urgent need for adaptive strategies that balance tradition with modernity, ensuring the survival of these invaluable cultural practices.

BAKI: THE TRADITIONAL BELIEF SYSTEM OF THE IFUGAOS

The *Baki* is the indigenous spiritual belief system of the Ifugao people in the northern Philippines. It is an animistic and pantheistic tradition based on the belief in numerous deities, ancestral spirits, and nature spirits that influence various aspects of life, including agriculture, health, warfare, and social harmony. These rituals are performed on significant occasions and during key stages of rice cultivation (Dulawan, 1985). The *Baki* comprises a vast collection of rites and prayers that form the core of Ifugao mythology, narrating stories of gods, goddesses, supernatural beings, ancestors, and natural forces (Dumia, 1979). The performance of these rites entails prayers and chants, including the lengthy *Hudhud* (Dulawan, 2005; Stanyukovich, 2003, 2006) and *Alim* (Del Rosario, 2003; De Santos, 2013).

During ritual performances, the *mumbaki* calls upon the ancestors and an extensive pantheon of over a thousand gods and goddesses, believed to inhabit every corner of the Ifugao universe. Barton (1930) described the immense number of divinities in Ifugao cosmology as awe-inspiring and comparable to the grandeur of their renowned terraced rice fields. These divine beings originate from the Skyworld (*Kabunian*), the Underworld (*Nunda'ul*), the Easternworld (*Lagud*), and the Westernworld (*Daya*). Additionally, other groups of deities exist in the spaces between and beyond these realms, sometimes interacting with mortals in the Earthworld (*Pugaw*). *Pugaw* is the realm where humans settled, identifying themselves as *iPugaw*, meaning 'from' or 'place of origin.' Over time, *iPugaw* evolved into Ifugao, signifying the people of the earth and distinguishing them from inhabitants of other cosmic regions, such as *Ikabunian*, *Ilagud*, and *Idaya*, among others (Salvador-Amores & Martin, 2024).

Categories of *Baki* Rituals

Ifugao rituals are broadly categorized into two types:

1. *Hongan di Tagu* (Rituals for Persons): These rituals are performed to address the spiritual and physical well-being of individuals within the community.
2. *Hongan di Page* (Rituals for Rice): These are integral to the agricultural cycle, ensuring the successful cultivation and harvest of rice.

The *Mumbaki*

Central to the performance of rice rituals are the *mumbaki*, or ritual specialists, who serve as custodians of Ifugao spiritual and cultural heritage. These culture bearers are not only repositories of oral traditions and intricate *baki* knowledge but also act as intermediaries between the community and the divine. Their role is deeply embedded in Ifugao cosmology, where they mediate between humans, ancestors, and deities to ensure agricultural fertility, social harmony, and spiritual well-being.

Ancestral Lineage and Transmission of Knowledge

The tradition of becoming a *mumbaki* is often passed down along kinship lines, typically from father to son, although there were historical accounts of women *mumbaki* who played vital roles in rice ritual performance. The transmission of knowledge follows a rigorous process of memorization, apprenticeship, and participation in actual rituals under the guidance of elder *mumbaki*. The chants, prayers, and ritual sequences are complex and must be learned through years of immersion.

At one time, nearly every Ifugao man was a *mumbaki*, or there was at least one within every extended family. This ensured that the knowledge of *baki* remained widespread and accessible within the community. However, as modernization, Christianity, and formal education have taken root in Ifugao society, the number of practicing *mumbaki* has dwindled significantly, with most practitioners today being elders over the age of 60.

Being a *mumbaki* is not merely a role acquired through training; it is considered an ordained calling by the gods. Some individuals are believed to possess an innate spiritual connection or are chosen through signs, dreams, or divine intervention. A deep sense of responsibility accompanies this role, as the *mumbaki* must uphold the traditions of their ancestors, guide the community in times of crisis, and maintain the sacred balance between the spiritual and physical worlds.

Their responsibilities extend beyond rituals for rice cultivation to healing ceremo-

nies, conflict mediation, and major life events such as birth, marriage, and death. The presence of a *mumbaki* in these ceremonies affirms the interconnectedness of the Ifugao people with their ancestors and deities, reinforcing their cultural identity and the sacredness of their agricultural landscape.

With the dwindling number of *mumbaki*, Ifugao communities face the challenge of preserving this vital institution. Efforts to document their chants and rituals, encourage younger generations to apprentice under elders, and integrate *baki* knowledge into cultural revitalization programs are essential in ensuring that the role of the *mumbaki* continues for future generations.

Key Features of the *Baki* Religion:

1. **Pantheon of Deities and Spirits:** The Ifugaos believe in a complex hierarchy of superior gods, spirits, deities associated with natural elements, and spirits of ancestors who continue to influence the living.
2. **Rituals and Offerings:** The *baki* rituals are sacred ceremonies performed by *mumbaki* (shamans or ritual specialists) to seek divine favor, heal the sick, ensure agricultural prosperity, or ward off misfortune. These rituals involve chants, animal sacrifices (such as chickens or pigs), and the invocation of spirits.
3. **Agricultural and Life-Cycle Ties:** Many *baki* rituals are directly tied to the rice cycle, including planting, harvesting, and thanksgiving ceremonies. Others mark important life events such as birth, marriage, and death.
4. **Oral Tradition:** The *baki* system is passed down orally through generations. It includes epic stories, prayers, and chants that preserve Ifugao history, ethics, and cosmology.
5. **Challenges and Decline:** With the spread of Christianity and modernization, the practice of *baki* has significantly declined. Many Ifugao people, especially younger generations, have converted to Christianity, leading to reduced participation in traditional rituals. However, efforts continue to preserve and document *baki* as part of Ifugao cultural heritage.

RICE RITUALS ACROSS THE AGRICULTURAL CYCLE

The rice cultivation process in Ifugao is marked by a series of rituals, each corresponding to a specific phase (Figure 1):

1. **Terraces Construction:** Rituals ensure the harmonious relationship between humans and nature in shaping the landscape.
2. **Sowing of Seeds:** Invocations and offerings are made to promote fertility.
3. **Transplanting:** Rituals seek blessings for the healthy growth of rice plants.
4. **Weeding:** Rituals are performed to protect crops from harm, man-made or natural.
5. **Pest Protection:** Offerings are made to safeguard the plants against pests.

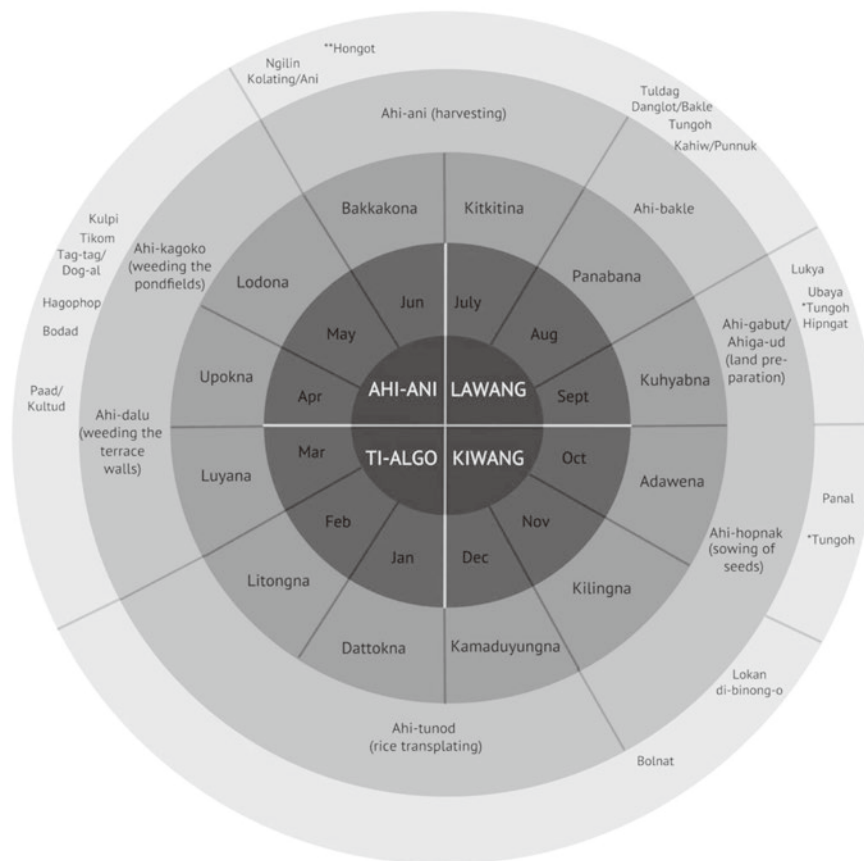


Figure 1 The Traditional Ifugao agricultural calendar
(Outermost ring indicates the rice rituals corresponding to the work phase in the 2nd ring; 3rd ring indicates the Ifugao month, 4th ring Gregorian months, 5th the four seasons of the agricultural year (Source: SITMo))

6. **Harvest:** Gratitude is expressed to the gods and spirits for a successful harvest.
7. **Post-Harvest:** Rituals mark the storage and celebration of the rice yield.

Each ritual involves the invocation of specific gods or groups of gods from the Ifugao pantheon, who are considered superior entities. Sacrifices, often involving pigs or chickens, are made to honor these deities.

Rice Rituals and Related Practices as Repositories of Intangible Heritage

The rice rituals of the Ifugao are not merely agricultural practices but are expressions of cultural identity. Notably, the *Hudhud* Chants and the *Punnuk* are used below as examples being UNESCO-listed attributes of the Rice Terraces of the Philippine Cordilleras:

1. The *Hudhud* is not by itself a ritual but a component of the planting and harvest rituals. It is an epic chant of the Ifugao, recounting the legendary exploits of culture heroes and performed during significant life events such

as rice planting and harvest, rites of passage, and funerals. Predominantly chanted by the *munhaw-e* (lead singer) with a chorus (*mun-abbuy*), *Hudhud* follows a call-and-response style and features themes of love, marriage, wealth, and Ifugao virtues. Though primarily romantic in nature, some versions, like the *Hudhud di Kolot* for a boy's first haircut, are strictly ceremonial. Rich in figurative language and poetic devices, these chants emphasize customary laws, religious beliefs, and the significance of rice cultivation. Traditionally performed by elderly women, the *Hudhud* is at risk due to the decline in manual rice farming, religious conversion, and the decreasing number of narrators. Recognized by UNESCO as a Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity in 2001 and inscribed on the Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2008, its survival depends on revitalization efforts to engage younger generations and sustain the oral tradition.

2. *Punnuk* is a traditional post-harvest ritual performed exclusively by the Ifugaos of Hapao in Hungduan, Ifugao. Recognized by UNESCO under the Tugging Ritual category (along with other tugging rituals in Southeast Asia) in its Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage. *Punnuk* marks the successful completion of the agricultural cycle and reinforces communal harmony. *Punnuk* is a symbolic water tugging contest involving three communities—Hapao, Baang, and Nungulunan—who engage in a spirited competition along the Hapao River. Participants pull on a long, vine-like rope called *pakid* while attempting to wrest control of a carved wooden effigy known as *kina-ag*, which represents fertility and abundance. The playful struggle in the river is believed to bring good fortune and cleanse the participants of misfortunes from the previous planting season.

Despite its deep cultural significance, *Punnuk* is under threat due to the dwindling number of *mumbaki* (ritual specialists) in Hapao who traditionally oversee and officiate the ceremony. As modernization and religious conversion diminish the role of indigenous spiritual leaders, fewer individuals possess the knowledge and authority to conduct *Punnuk* with its full ritual depth. Furthermore, the ritual's increasing revival for tourism purposes presents challenges to its cultural integrity and authenticity. While tourism initiatives provide economic incentives and raise awareness of Ifugao traditions, they also risk transforming *Punnuk* into a staged performance rather than a sacred communal event.

For *Punnuk* to remain a living tradition rather than a cultural showcase, efforts must balance its revitalization with the preservation of its original meaning. This requires strengthening the role of the *mumbaki*, fostering intergenerational knowledge transfer, and ensuring that community-led initiatives maintain the ritual's spiritual and social essence beyond its appeal to visitors.

Several other rice rituals accompany the different phases of the agricultural seasons of the terraces including the *Kolating* or harvest feast, the *Kulpi* or Field Holiday observed after all fields have been planted, the *Bakle* or post-harvest thanksgiving ritual.

THE STATE OF CONSERVATION OF THE IFUGAO RICE TERRACES AND ITS IMPACT ON INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE

The Ifugao Rice Terraces, designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1995, are not just a remarkable feat of engineering but also a living cultural landscape deeply intertwined with Ifugao intangible cultural heritage (ICH), particularly rice rituals. However, their conservation faces significant challenges that threaten both their physical integrity and the survival of traditional knowledge and practices.

- **Abandonment and Neglect:** Urban migration and shifting economic priorities have led to the abandonment of many terraces, causing their gradual degradation. As younger generations move to cities for education and employment, fewer individuals remain to practise traditional terrace farming. This not only results in physical deterioration—collapsed terrace walls, overgrown fields, and disrupted irrigation—but also leads to the loss of indigenous knowledge on terrace construction, maintenance, and associated rituals such as *baki* (prayer offerings) and *punnuk* (post-harvest celebrations). Without active engagement in these agricultural traditions, the transmission of oral histories, spiritual connections, and customary laws linked to the terraces weakens over time.
- **Impact of Modern Agricultural Practices:** The introduction of high-yield rice varieties, chemical fertilizers, and mechanized farming threatens the sustainability of traditional Ifugao agriculture. While these modern practices promise increased productivity, they disrupt the natural balance of the terraces' centuries-old hydrological system, degrade soil fertility, and replace indigenous rice species that hold cultural and ritual significance. Traditional rice farming is deeply linked to Ifugao belief systems, where each stage of cultivation—from land preparation to harvest—is accompanied by sacred rituals led by *mumbaki* (ritual specialists). The erosion of traditional farming methods thus diminishes the necessity for these rituals, accelerating the decline of Ifugao ICH.
- **Climate Shifts and Natural Hazards:** The Ifugao Rice Terraces are highly susceptible to the effects of climate change, including erratic weather patterns, prolonged droughts, and extreme rainfall. Excessive rain leads to landslides, soil erosion, and the collapse of terrace walls, while droughts cause water shortages, disrupt the irrigation system, and reduce rice yields. These environmental challenges make traditional farming increasingly difficult, discouraging younger generations from continuing the practice. Furthermore, climate-induced damage to the terraces directly affects ritual continuity—many ceremonies are tied to specific agricultural cycles, and when farming is disrupted, so too are the

sacred rites that sustain Ifugao spiritual and communal life.

- **Cultural Shifts and Changing Values:** Urbanization and globalization have contributed to a weakening of cultural ties between younger Ifugaos and their ancestral lands. The communal labor system that once maintained the terraces is fading, as fewer people see value in subsistence farming compared to modern economic opportunities. This cultural shift erodes the social cohesion necessary for collective terrace upkeep, and by extension, the rice rituals that reinforce Ifugao identity and spirituality. With fewer practitioners engaged in traditional agriculture, ICH such as *hudhud* (epic chants sung during harvest), *kolating* or the harvest ritual itself are performed less frequently, making them vulnerable to extinction.

BROADER IMPLICATIONS FOR IFUGAO ICH

Studies emphasize that the sustainability of the rice terraces relies on intricate hydrological and ecological balances, maintained through indigenous knowledge passed down through generations. When these balances are disrupted—whether by abandonment, climate change, or modern agricultural shifts—the terraces’ tangible structure and the ICH they embody are simultaneously placed at risk. The decline of traditional farming weakens the collective memory and spiritual connections that define Ifugao identity.

To ensure the survival of both the terraces and the rituals linked to them, conservation strategies must integrate environmental restoration, cultural revitalization, and economic sustainability. Strengthening intergenerational knowledge transfer, supporting *mumbaki* and other tradition-bearers, and fostering local pride in Ifugao heritage are essential steps in preserving the interconnected legacy of the Ifugao Rice Terraces and their ICH.

Challenges to the Continuity of Ifugao ICH

The continuity of Ifugao ICH, particularly rice rituals, is under significant threat due to various socio-cultural, economic, and environmental challenges. These challenges, while distinct, are interconnected, reinforcing the decline of traditional practices and knowledge systems.

Loss of Indigenous Knowledge: A Declining Cultural Transmission

The diminishing interest among younger generations in Ifugao rice rituals signals a weakening transmission of indigenous knowledge. Migration for education and employment, coupled with the increasing influence of modern lifestyles, has reduced opportunities for intergenerational learning. Traditionally, knowledge was passed down through participation in rituals and oral storytelling, but with fewer young Ifugaos engaging in agricultural work, exposure to these practices has dras-

tically decreased. Without active practitioners, the intricate chants, ceremonies, and spiritual meanings behind the rituals risk fading into obscurity. This cultural disconnection highlights the urgent need for educational and community initiatives that encourage youth participation and engagement with their ancestral heritage.

Changes in Agricultural Practices: Disrupting the Ritual-Environment Nexus

Traditional Ifugao agriculture is deeply intertwined with spiritual beliefs and ritualistic practices, yet modern advancements have disrupted this relationship. The introduction of high-yield rice varieties, chemical fertilizers, and mechanized farming methods has altered the traditional rice cycle, reducing the reliance on rituals that once ensured agricultural success. While these changes increase efficiency and productivity, they simultaneously erode the cultural significance of farming, shifting the focus from community-driven, spiritually guided agriculture to market-oriented production. This transition challenges the continuity of Ifugao rice rituals, as they become increasingly detached from the evolving agricultural landscape.

Aging Mumbaki: The Disappearance of Ritual Specialists

The role of the *mumbaki* (ritual specialists) is crucial to the performance and preservation of rice rituals. However, as the current generation of *mumbaki* ages, there is a significant decline in the number of apprentices willing to take on this sacred role. The reluctance of younger Ifugaos to become *mumbaki* can be attributed to multiple factors, including religious shifts (particularly the spread of Christianity, which discourages indigenous spiritual practices), the demanding nature of training, and the perception that such roles hold less relevance in modern society. Without new ritual specialists to carry forward the knowledge and spiritual leadership, the continuity of *baki* rituals is at serious risk.

Climate Change: An Existential Threat to Rituals and Landscape

Perhaps the most pressing and uncontrollable challenge is climate change, which directly affects both the rice terraces and the agricultural cycles that the rituals are meant to uphold. Unpredictable weather patterns have disrupted planting and harvesting schedules, weakening the effectiveness of rituals that rely on stable agricultural rhythms. Excessive rainfall leads to landslides, soil erosion, and terrace collapses, while prolonged droughts cause soil degradation and water shortages, making rice cultivation increasingly difficult. As the terraces deteriorate, the rituals associated with their upkeep and fertility lose their physical and cultural foundation. Climate change thus exacerbates existing threats, accelerating the erosion of Ifugao intangible heritage.

Analysis of Issues

The threats to the continuity of rice rituals and the Ifugao Rice Terraces can be examined through ecological, sociocultural, and economic perspectives. Understanding these challenges in a logical and chronological manner allows for a clearer grasp of their interconnections and the need for holistic conservation strategies.

1. **Ecological Degradation:** The introduction of modern agricultural methods, such as monoculture and chemical-based farming, has disrupted the ecological balance that traditional techniques once maintained. Historically, Ifugao farming relied on diversified planting, natural irrigation systems, and organic fertilizers that ensured long-term soil fertility and water sustainability. However, contemporary practices have led to biodiversity loss, soil depletion, and reduced water retention in the terraces. Over time, these ecological disturbances have made it more difficult for farmers to sustain their traditional farming methods, setting off a chain reaction that impacts cultural and economic aspects of the terraces.
2. **Sociocultural Dynamics:** As ecological degradation makes traditional farming less viable, sociocultural shifts further exacerbate the problem. Urbanization, migration, and globalization have led to a weakening of cultural identity among younger generations. Surveys indicate a declining interest in traditional practices, with only a small percentage of youth engaging in terrace farming or participating in rice rituals. Additionally, modernization has altered lifestyle preferences, encouraging younger Ifugaos to seek alternative livelihoods in urban centers rather than continuing ancestral traditions. This generational gap results in a loss of oral traditions, ritual practices, and indigenous knowledge, making cultural preservation increasingly challenging.
3. **Economic Pressures:** The culmination of ecological degradation and sociocultural shifts has resulted in significant economic pressures. Traditional farming in the terraces is becoming less financially viable due to reduced yields, high maintenance costs, and market competition from commercial agricultural industries. Younger generations, seeing limited economic prospects in rice terrace farming, opt for employment in more lucrative sectors. Without sufficient financial incentives or support systems, many Ifugao families struggle to justify the labor-intensive upkeep of the terraces, leading to neglect and abandonment.

In summary, ecological degradation disrupts the environmental foundation of the terraces, which in turn influences sociocultural shifts by discouraging youth participation in traditional practices. These changes collectively contribute to economic difficulties that make terrace farming and ritual observances increas-

ingly unsustainable. Addressing these interconnected challenges requires an integrated conservation approach that considers environmental sustainability, cultural revitalization, and economic incentives to ensure the long-term survival of the Ifugao Rice Terraces and their associated rituals.

The Need for Adaptive Strategies

The Ifugao rice rituals are not just agricultural customs but integral components of Ifugao identity and cultural heritage. Addressing the challenges to their continuity requires a multifaceted approach that balances tradition with modernity. Revitalization efforts could include:

- Strengthening indigenous education programs to reintegrate traditional knowledge into formal and informal learning systems.
- Encouraging sustainable agricultural practices that align with both ecological preservation and cultural continuity.
- Supporting the transmission of ritual knowledge by creating community-led initiatives that engage younger generations in *baki* practices.
- Implementing climate adaptation strategies to protect the physical integrity of the rice terraces, ensuring that their associated rituals remain viable.

By taking these steps, the Ifugao people can work toward safeguarding their intangible heritage while adapting to the realities of the modern world. The survival of these rice rituals is not just a cultural necessity but a testament to the resilience of indigenous traditions in the face of change.

COMMUNITY VALUES AS FOUNDATION OF THE RICE TERRACES AND ITS ASSOCIATED ICH

The Ifugao Rice Terraces are an exceptional example of a living cultural landscape that embodies both tangible and intangible heritage. Their conservation must go beyond physical restoration to include the cultural values, knowledge systems, and communal traditions that sustain them. A values-based assessment of the terraces highlights four key aspects: *Tawid* (Heritage Value), *Tanud* (Economic Value), *Ki-ohaan* (Community Solidarity Value), and *Tugun* (Indigenous Knowledge Value). Each of these plays a crucial role in Ifugao ICH conservation, particularly in preserving traditional rice rituals. Just as UNESCO requires the presence of Outstanding Universal Values (OUV) for World Heritage properties, these community values as identified by the Ifugao communities themselves (Martin et al., 2024) are the underlying reasons in the continued maintenance of the Rice Terraces of the Philippine Cordilleras.

These four interconnected values are fundamental to the enduring existence of the terraces and their associated cultural practices, which have persisted for over

four centuries. The continued survival of the terraces depends on the preservation of these values. If these cultural values are lost, the terraces may face neglect, leading to their eventual disappearance and abandonment. Thus, safeguarding these values is essential for ensuring the long-term sustainability of the Ifugao Rice Terraces and its intangible components.

***Tawid* (Heritage Value) and the Preservation of Rice Rituals**

Tawid signifies the deep ancestral and cultural connection the Ifugao people have with their rice terraces and everything it represents. A legacy, something inherited and something to pass down to the next generations. *Tawid* captures this moral sense of intergenerational responsibility. The terraces are not just agricultural structures but also sacred spaces where rice rituals such as the *baki* are performed to honor ancestral spirits and deities. These rituals are integral to Ifugao identity, reinforcing their connection to the land and their ancestors. To ensure the continuity of *Tawid*, conservation efforts must prioritize the documentation and transmission of rice rituals through cultural education, community-led ritual reenactments, and local policy support that integrates traditional ceremonies into official heritage protection programs.

***Tanud* (Economic Value) and the Role of Rituals in Sustainable Agriculture**

Tanud underscores the economic importance of the terraces, both in traditional agricultural practices and modern tourism. The cultivation of heirloom rice varieties is deeply intertwined with ritualistic offerings and ceremonies that guide planting and harvesting cycles. These rituals not only ensure agricultural sustainability but also reinforce spiritual and ecological balance. As tourism increasingly contributes to the Ifugao economy, integrating rice rituals into sustainable tourism models—such as eco-cultural tours and heritage festivals—can generate economic benefits while safeguarding ICH. Policies that promote ethical tourism and provide incentives for local communities to preserve rice rituals can help balance economic growth with cultural sustainability.

***Ki-ohaan* (Community Solidarity Value) and the Social Significance of Rice Rituals**

The communal labor system is central to the maintenance of the rice terraces, with rice rituals serving as vital social glue. Ceremonies such as *punnuk*, a post-harvest thanksgiving ritual, reinforce social cohesion and collective identity. However, changing social dynamics threaten the continuity of these traditions. Conservation strategies should focus on revitalizing these communal rice rituals by integrating them into educational programs, local festivals, and governance structures. Encouraging youth participation through storytelling, hands-on ritual

demonstrations, and mentorship programs with elders can sustain the communal values embedded in these traditions.

***Tugun* (Indigenous Knowledge Value) and the Ritualistic Transmission of Agricultural Wisdom**

Tugun refers to the indigenous knowledge system that governs the terraces' construction, maintenance, and environmental harmony, including the sacred rituals associated with planting, water management, and harvest celebrations. These rituals embody Ifugao cosmology and ecological wisdom, serving as an essential means of transmitting agricultural knowledge. However, modernization and external influences pose threats to their survival. To preserve *Tugun*, conservation efforts should include community-driven documentation of rice rituals, integration of indigenous ecological practices into school curricula, and institutional recognition of ritual knowledge as a fundamental aspect of sustainable agriculture. Collaborations with academic institutions and policymakers can help formalize the protection and continuation of these rituals.

CONCLUSION

The Ifugao Rice Terraces are more than just a landscape—they represent a dynamic and evolving cultural heritage system. Effective conservation must integrate physical restoration with the safeguarding of rice rituals that sustain their meaning and function. Community participation, strong policy support, and inter-generational transmission of these rituals are essential for ensuring that *Tawid*, *Tanud*, *Ki-oaan*, and *Tugun* continue to define the Ifugao identity. By fostering sustainable economic practices, reinforcing communal traditions, and institutionalizing indigenous knowledge through sacred rituals, the Ifugao people can maintain the resilience and cultural richness of their heritage in the face of modern challenges.

However, the continued existence of these terraces and their associated ICH faces significant threats, including ecological degradation, sociocultural shifts, and economic pressures. The introduction of modern agricultural practices, urban migration, and declining interest in traditional customs have contributed to the erosion of indigenous knowledge and rituals. While conservation efforts have been undertaken, including UNESCO recognition and community-led initiatives, these challenges necessitate a more holistic and sustained approach.

To ensure the long-term survival of the terraces and their associated ICH, conservation strategies must emphasize ecological sustainability, cultural revitalization, and economic viability. Strengthening local governance structures, integrating heritage education into school curricula, and promoting sustainable tourism

models can create an environment where rice rituals and traditional knowledge continue to thrive. Additionally, financial incentives and policy frameworks should support traditional terrace farming, making it a viable livelihood for future generations. By addressing these issues with a multi-faceted approach, the Ifugao people, along with policymakers and cultural advocates, can safeguard the terraces not only as an agricultural marvel but as a living testimony to their rich heritage and enduring identity.

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