

THE EXISTENCE AND NATURE OF *PILE*

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ABSTRACT

Getting first hand information about the existence of the *pile* would help clear the confusion between the medical practice and culture due to the several unexplainable phenomena surrounding its nature and how it works. The study was conducted to found out the nature of *pile* and how it works, how it gets transferred from one generation to another and it's positive and negative. The study is qualitative. Whatever information uncovered in the study was reported using the descriptive method.

The study focused on the natural setting with the *pile* owners, victims and affiliates as the direct sources of data. Primary communication through face to face interviews was done with persons having *pile*, those who were victims of the *pile*, and those who have knowledge about *pile*, due to their affiliation to *pile* owners. The respondents freely told / narrated their stories or versions. A personal immersion was also done by the researcher in the actual households of the respondents to document their ways of life and any unusual routines in their lives because of their *pile*. Actual narrations by the respondents were quoted as actual data gathered.

Understanding the true essence of the *pile* as a culture leads to the conclusion that it is not altogether bad. The study showed that *pile* is an abstract but potent power bestowed only to a chosen member/s of a clan. It gets transferred through a dream where those bestowed experience being bitten by a dog or cat. The *pile* can attack anybody- the unlawful or even the innocent ones. The positive aspects of the *pile* include the fact that *pile* healer is not allowed to receive any monetary reward from the victim for it is their gift to do service to others. Victims of *pile* get cured by simply seeking and approaching the person endowed with the power to heal.

KEYWORDS: Culture, Ifugao Culture, Indigenous Culture, *Mun-agba*, *Pile*

INTRODUCTION

Culture defines people's national identity and expresses a nation's freedom of belief and expression. It mirrors and shapes our values, beliefs and aspirations as a people. It is our link to our past and remains a useful guide for what is yet to come. For these reasons and more, it is our duty to preserve and conserve our historical and cultural heritage.

Article XIV Section 17, of the 1987 Philippine constitution states that state shall recognize, respect and protect the rights of the indigenous cultural communities to preserve and develop their cultures, traditions and institutions. It shall consider these rights in the formulation of national plans and policies. Section 18 under the same article also states that "the state shall encourage and support researches and studies of arts and culture."

Known as the "The Indigenous peoples Rights act (IPRA) of 1997 provides that the state shall respect recognize and protect the right of all indigenous Peoples to preserve and protect their culture, traditions and institutions." (RA 8371, 1997)

As people of the earth, we have diverse cultures and beliefs that are somehow similar or different from other places. Cultural practices however, can be beneficial or destructive, advantageous or disadvantageous to the people.

Beneficial and advantageous cultures are those anchored on being generous, helpful, humble, cooperative, gracious, thankful and kind. Destructive cultures are those anchored on jealousy, envy, pride and arrogance, ostentatious spending, greed, desire to destroy or to end lives and the desire to revenge. Department of education (DepEd) Order 2004 mandates the preservation and practice of desirable or beneficial cultural practices. The dearth of cultural practices however, restrains the free flow of practices for the reasons the even advantageous practices such as magic spells, witchcrafts and the like are very much part of the people's culture.

The belief in witchcraft and its practice seem to have been widespread in the past. Historical narrations state that both in ancient Egypt and in Babylonia, witchcraft played a conspicuous part. In the Ifugao culture, witchcraft is not popular term, and is not being practiced. However, the ancient Ifugao's have their own distinct beliefs and practices. Among the more popular practices of selected people is their possession of "*pile*". This is an unnatural power endowed to people by their ancestors. The *pile* works in different ways. People get victimized through kind of spell or sickness. The effects may be instant or felt hours or day after. The victim may suffer from sudden grave stomach upset, an immobilized arm or leg, a bulging sex organ, unbearable itchiness on the skin, scabies or total immobility, yet upon examination; the doctors pronounces all systems of the human body are normal. Desperate with such situations, the victims of these unexplainable happenings seek the help of a diviner, (the *mun- agba*). The *mun-agba* is a person endowed with unnatural powers to make out, through his "third eye" or extra sensory perception what triggered a person's suffering or illness (personal communication, M. Dulawan, researcher of the NCCA). Very often, this *mun-agba* finds out that the person with physical problem or illness is either really naturally sick, *natomyo* (the spirits of the dead noticed and said something of the person concerned), cursed (*idut*), demon possessed or beaten by the *pile*. Depending upon the diagnosis, the *Mun-agba* recommends what needs to be done or performed following certain cultural practices. If the curse is *pile*, the person is advised to seek a person who has been bestowed (by the forefather's spirits) with the power to heal. Surprisingly, the healing could be instant!

Although the *pile* has beneficial contributions by instilling discipline among the people in the community, it also gives undue suffering and stress even among the innocent, such as babies and young children. It's because the *pile's* works cannot always be controlled even to those who have been endowed with it. It becomes unexplainable that even the innocent get punished for the faults of their family or clan members. Take the case of a seven year old boy, who experienced swelling on his penis. He was brought to a clinic for a check-up and the medical doctor prescribed him an ointment for its application, but the more application was made, the more the child felt itchiness and pain in his sex organ. These were indications of *pile* bite. To cure the child, his parents brought him to a gifted healer with a third eye and unnatural healing power. She prayed and invoked *maknongan*, the supreme God for His intervention. Then she made a soft blow into the child. An hour later, the boy's condition was back to normal.

This healer was not endowed by *pile*, and is a devout Catholic. When healing, she usually emphasizes "*ikamang na makinongan*" (ask God's intervention). Thus, through God's intercession, she can diagnose what is wrong with a person or even cure any illnesses, even by those caused by *pile*.

The foregoing stories and statement may sound unbelievable. But those who experienced it do not raise doubts about it and the community people seem to accept it as part of culture. The good and the bad effects that *pile* seem to inflict upon the people gives the researcher the desire to study deeper into the extraordinary phenomena. Accurate knowledge on the existence and nature of *pile* may help clarify a lot of presumptions, whether it is of value or a curse. The advantages and disadvantages of *pile* are issues at hand. Do people favor its existence? Should this be perpetuated, curbed or fully eradicated? These questions necessitated the conduct of this study.

Education has greatly influenced the personal lives of millions of people. Coupled with modernized information technologies, one could hardly believe that tradition and culture would intrude into the modernized society. Modernization has greatly improved our ways of life. However, amidst, modernization, certain things happen that even science could not decipher. The existence of *pile* until today continues to be a source of confusion between medical practice and culture.

Even if *pile* is being viewed by the early advocates of Christianity, adjudged as inhumane and ungodly practice, it is still very important to search for the truth. It is on this aspect that the researcher would like to perform first-hand interview pertinent to *pile*, inclusive is advantages and disadvantages and its implications to human behavior. Whether the *pile* is contributing to people's restraint in doing something bad, or abhorred by the victims, remains to be answered. Knowledge and understanding of the *pile* would add to the pool of knowledge needed where culture in social science is concerned. It may also lead people in the educational and scientific sectors to explore into the unknown or make inquiries into this seemingly extraordinary power. In the end, the questions as to whether the practice of the *pile* must be continued or discarded would have been answered.

The researcher had based her work on the aspects of *pile*. The positive aspects imply that there are benefits and values derived from having a *pile*. It is neutral when the benefits equal the drawbacks of having *pile*. Data was derived from the narrations of the respondents. Based on the narrations and actual observations, data was correspondingly classified and quantified according to the aspect where these belong.

The main objective of this study is to gather information on the existence and nature of the *pile* and how it works. The results may be the basis for the establishment of educational values such as the practice of honesty and respect for people's properties.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study is qualitative. The researcher made use of primary communication through face to face personal interviews persons having *pile*, due to their affiliation to *pile* owners. The researcher immersed herself in actual household contact with the people with *pile*.

The study was conducted in the municipality of Kiangán, Ifugao, Philippines. The study was limited to the statements and stories of those who have *pile* and those who have practiced the gift of healing. Respondents came from six barangays of Kiangán, Ifugao namely: Pindongan, Ambabag, Mabbalat, *Baa-* ay, Patukan and Linda. It is in these barangays where most of the people having to do with *pile* live. Likewise with the victims of *pile*.

Memory banking was used in the gathering of data. A guide questionnaire for the key informants was utilized during personal interviews. The tape recorder and camera were use to document the interviews with old folks and other people knowledgeable of the *pile*. Triangulation using three groups of informants (*pile* owner, victims and witnesses to the occurrences) was applied to determine the reliability and validity of the data. Trustworthiness of the work was of foremost consideration. All narrations with positive aspects were separated from negative aspects.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The Existence of *Pile*

The existence of *pile* is an accepted fact among the Ifugaos, particularly to the people of Kiangán due to several incidents proving its presence. The *pile* in itself is abstract. It is not visible, thus one cannot easily tell who has or does not have *pile*. Those with *pile* get identified by their power to remove the spell or curse bestowed to an individual. However, some owners have their particular symbol or representation of their *pile*. Very, often, the *pile* is represented by distinct

stone. This may be housed in a tiny hut built for the purpose, or kept in a safe place in the house. To some owners, this representation has to be offered a “*baki*” annually or given a bath in a special *balunglung* (wooden tub). The *baki* or a ritual has to be performed in order to reactivate the *pile*’s potency or power.

How *Pile* Gets Transferred

The *pile* can get transferred to the next generation through a number of ways. If intentionally wanted, a *baki* has to be performed asking one’s forefathers to bestow on him/her that particular possession. Most often, it gets transferred through a dream. The selected one, received the *pile* when he/she gets beaten by a cat or dog or both in his dream. These are symbols of *pile*. The *pile* has always been claimed to be a watchdog or protector of the family’s properties, thus the cat or the dog in the dream appropriately symbolizes *pile*.

The Nature of *Pile* and How it Works

The *pile* has been used by the Ifugao ancestors as the ‘military power’ that protected their lives and properties against evil doers and stealers. To show that certain property is restricted, a kind of warning sign against intruders such as knotted grass “*Miscanthus chinensis*” tops are mounted on the restricted area such as fruit tree areas and other similar properties. When one sees this sign, the person is supposed to avoid any mischievous inclination such as stealing or destruction of whatever is in the restricted area. Many fall victims of the *pile* because they snub this symbol as a sign of foolishness and continue to do as they wish. Thus they experience the effects of their misdeeds.

The effects of *pile* bites on people are varied. It ranges from simple immobility to grave illness. But people endowed with the *pile* are also endowed with the power to heal or to eliminate evil spell or curse cast by evil people on others. This power takes effect in different ways: As mentioned by a key informant, “saying a short prayer and touching the affected area simultaneously blow away the evil spell on the victim can be done.” Others also cure by chewing *moma* (betel nut) then rubbing the first juice to the affected area of the victim with any narration of prayer.

Positive Aspect of *Pile*

The *pile* has been considered as guardian to the Ifugao ancestors in the olden times because they prevent people from doing evil things such as stealing or destroying properties. It was also the indigenous way of healing people with physical problems or sickness especially those caused by magic spells or curses by enraged individuals who fell victims of stealing or destruction. According to R. Guimptan, (personal communication, January 6, 2009), key informant, Ambabag, Kiangnan, farmer and former Barangay Captain, (“*Pile* is very important to instill discipline among individuals in the society. It is needed to sustain peace and order in the community. The *pile* often bites stealers, the undisciplined, the ill-mannered and the disrespectful”)

Furthermore, M. Dulawan, (personal communication, January 6, 2009), an expert in Ifugao culture, cited an example related to the case of Aguinaya nak Ginultiman of Linda, Kiangnan, Ifugao. “Aguinaya (brother of Aliguyon nak Ginultiman) had a pomelo orchard near their family house. One time, a woman, without asking permission went there with the intention of picking some fruits.

As she was getting a pomelo, her hand stuck to the fruit and she became immobilized. Her outstretched hand remained holding the fruit. It was how Aguinaya caught her in the act of stealing. Knowing that she had been there for quite some time, Aguinaya concluded her punishment was served. She uttered a brief prayer and the woman was back to normal.”

Negative Aspect of the *Pile*

Although the *pile* has beneficial contributions by instilling discipline among the people in the community, it also gives undue suffering and stress even among the innocent, such as babies and young children. It’s because the *pile’s* works cannot always be controlled even by those who have been endowed with it. It becomes unexplainable that even the innocent get punished for the faults of their family or clan members. Take the case of a two year old girl. As stated by her mother: “she was just two years old when boil appears on her forehead. I noticed that each day, another boil would add up until it was like a crown on her head.

She was brought for a medical checkup and the doctor pronounced that her blood is dirty. Medicines were given and were taken religiously, but the boils were still fresh on her forehead. An old woman in the community who noticed the extraordinary appearance of the wound commented that “*kinalat man di pileh, eyu –ot pahap ud*” (that’s *pile* bite; you better bring her for a treatment blow). We tracked the *pile’s* owner who was the late grandfather of another community member. He apologized for the unfortunate situation, but explained that he did not plan what happened. He uttered a short prayer to the responsible spirits and made a soft blow on the child. After some hours, the boils started to disappear.”

How Victims of *Pile* Get Cured

In an interview with another key informant, F. Tayaban (personal conversation, January 13, 2009) he mentioned the things to be prepared when healing follows Alcoholic drinks or Rice wine (*bayah*) – if the person who heals is somewhat fond of *bayah* or alcoholic drinks as do his ancestors. *Moma* (betel nut), *Hapid, apul* (lime) – if the person who will heal must have to chew betel nut to produce betel nut juice to be touched on the victim. As provided by R. Tayaban and E. Allaga of Ambabag (personal conversation, January 14, 2009) who practice *Pile*, narrations also have to accompany the healing process. The most popular narrations are the following as translated in English on the other column:

Table 1

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Hantun bagol min mipudung an makimata, makitakle, makihuki, makipuhu, makiolong, maki-inga, makipago, makiluhluh-ip, makimagat, makiyoyok, makilopyak, maki-ulu, makibagi, huhuni. Dakau ken an ginumta, nabyukan / naltoban /minyung an makimolgay manok ya baboy na</i> (mention the ancestors who own the <i>pile</i>) <i>Alamon, Allaga, Agustin ta han-ot ta kumat nahpangat yu na pinanguluna, pangat kud uwanin ap-apu yu.</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You deity who causes illness/pain on eyes, arms, legs, heart, nose, ears, breast, solar plexus, fingers, underarms, head, sex organs, Women’s breast. You would have been seasoned, tested in making well the old and young as well as the chickens and pigs – Alamon (son of Allaga), Agustin (son of Tayaban) – I ask that what you have been doing in the past will be like what I your descendant do now.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Dakayun aapu/aamod (ngadanon hanadan aammod a nalpuwannanpile) homkon yu tun imbabale yu / inap-apu yu. Tun init – an yun ha-on an pudung teyan haon an imbabale yu mangi-at/mangi hap-ud. Aamod, dalay –upan yu ahan tudan imbabale yu / inap-apu yu tapnu mumbangabangad di bolat ya laman hanta makaan nanhulubit nan kiyaki. Dalay – upan yu ahan hituwe apu dida, aamod te dakayuy mundalay – up hi ine-en datuwe.</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You our ancestors/ elders: (name ancestors from whom the <i>pile</i> originated) take pity your descendant to whom bequeathed his power because I, your child now perform this rite. Ancestors, make well this-your child/grandchild so that his/her skin and flesh get cured, freed from pain and itchiness. Ease away the miseries of these-your descendants because you our ancestors discern the nature of these things.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Hap-udam tun mahakit an pukol/adol (ngadanon nan mundogo) an pudung da (ngadanon nan nunpungkate an aammod an waday pile da) Aginaya nak Guinultiman ta ad uwanin algo ya makaan di hakit nan pukol/adol (ngadanon nan nakalat di pile)</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Blow Away. dispel this painful shoulder/body of (name the deceased ancestor/s with <i>pile</i>), Aginaya daughter of Ginultiman, so that today the pain be taken away from the shoulder / body of (name of the victim).

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The *pile* exists until today. Those with *pile* get identified by their power to remove the spell or curse bestowed to an individual. However, some owners have their particular symbol or representation of their *pile*. Very often, the *pile* is represented by a distinct stone. This may be housed in a tiny hut built for the purpose, or kept in a safe place by the owner. To some owners, this representation has to be offered a *baki* annually or given a bath in a special *balunglung* (wooden tub). The *baki* or ritual has to be performed in order to reactivate the *pile*'s potency or power.

The *pile* gets transferred from one generation to another. People with *pile* get their possession through a dream where they experience being bitten by a dog or a cat. These Animals are representations of the *pile*.

The *pile* in itself is abstract. It is not visible, thus one cannot easily tell who has or does not have *pile*. The *pile* has been used by the Ifugao ancestors as the military power that protected their lives and properties against evil doers and stealers. Its ability to bite and make people suffer through illnesses is potent. Works of the *pile* are deciphered if the illness is instant and extraordinary. Scabies is a popular indication of a *pile* bite. Its nature though is different. The skin problem has watery characteristics around the corners that worsen when medicine is applied. Headaches, immobility and swelling are also common *pile* bite indications.

The positive aspects of the *pile* are more on the healing process. Those endowed with the power to heal make people return to normal even if the bad deed is not their making. They heal even those who fell victims of magic spells even curses. Other positive aspects are the values attached to getting cured of *pile* bites. Knowing the causes of one's being bitten makes people realize that they have to get disciplined, develop concern for others and become honest and polite. The Negative aspects consist of affecting even those who are innocent. Babies and young children get affected when the *pile* or unseen spirits utter comments on them (*matomyo*).

Victims of *pile* get cured by the *pile* practitioners who invoke the intercession of their ancestors. They heal anyone who approaches them as take this as their social obligation. They also perform curing practices even to strangers who affliction was caused by other evil doers.

The implications of *pile* as a culture to education include awareness in the formation of values particularly discipline, helpfulness, respect, honesty, generosity, frugality, concern for others and a sense of moral obligation to help others.

Recommendations

With the foregoing conclusions, the following recommendations are drawn:

- More studies on the *pile* should be encouraged for better understanding and to perpetuate discipline.
- The implications of *pile* as a culture to education that include awareness in the formation of values particularly helpfulness, respect, honesty, generosity, frugality, concern for others and a sense of moral obligation to help others, be integrated in appropriate subjects in the curriculum.
- Though it is not recommended that the young generations of today to acquire the power of *pile*, and practice it themselves, the positive and negative values can be documented for the young and other readers to be aware of what is bad and good.
- The ultimate intentions of harboring the *pile* seem to be within the circle of traditional values.

- Since people have become Christianized, the intercession of the most powerful and omnipotent God must be sought at all times.
- Since the traditional way of healing is anchored on certain beliefs, educational institutions should take the lead to provide redirections through diagnostic studies.

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