Understanding the Materiality of Death Rituals in Bontoc Society, Northern Philippines

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ABSTRACT

This paper argues that to understand death rituals in Bontoc society as a validation of social status and expression of Bontok ethnic identity, an approach should consider the nonmaterial as well as the materiality evident in the performance of the rituals. The death rituals involve a variety of objects (such as *sangachil* or death chair, funerary blankets), lamentations (*antowey*), and material goods consistently provided by the community to access the ritual's symbolic qualities. All these provide intrinsic and extrinsic benefits to the deceased and bereaved members of the family. Despite the dominance of Christianity and appreciation of modern culture in central Bontoc, traditional mortuary practices still persist to strengthen communal relationships through ritual participation. This paper makes no generalizations on Bontok practice but focuses on a localized version of the death rituals in specific areas in Bontoc, more particularly the elaborate rituals carried out for deceased elderly women of the *kachangyan*.

Keywords: Bontoc society, death rituals, *kachangyan*, materiality, ethnic identity

INTRODUCTION

In Bontoc,[1] Northern Luzon (Figure 1), specifically in the villages of the Bontoc *ili*, Omfeg, Chakchakan, Tokukan, and in Samoki, traditional death rituals are still performed despite the widespread conversion to Christianity and intermarriage with lowlanders.

En route to Kalinga to conduct fieldwork in 2010, I chanced upon a funeral in the village of Chakchakan in Bontoc, Mountain Province. I was invited by the elders to attend and observe the elaborate rituals and preparations done for the deceased member of the family. With a keen interest to document this practice, I returned to Bontoc to conduct further research in 2016. On this occasion, I attended the

Figure 1. Bontoc Map

funeral of a female Bontok elder in Samoki and was able to observe in greater detail the intricacies in the practice of death rituals. During her wake, the deceased was clothed in death garments—the white *lamma* (upper garment) and the dark *kinain* (wrap-around skirt) associated with the *kachangyan* (affluent families in traditional Bontoc society), and was positioned on a *sangachil* (death chair) (Figure 2). The elderly men performed the rituals, while the women chanted the *antowey,* the lamentations for the dead. According to the bereaved family, they had to wait for relatives from the United States to arrive in the *ili* (village) before they could "declare" that their mother was already "dead." These two occasions sparked my interest in death rituals practiced in the Cordillera.

Figure 2. A deceased Bontoc elder clothed in her death garments — the white *lamma* (upper garment) and the dark *kinain* (wrap-around skirt) associated with the *kachangyan* (affluent families in traditional Bontok society), and was positioned on a sangachil (death chair). (Photograph by AV Salvador-Amores, 2016)

How do the Bontok interpret death rituals? How do these processes remain important in understanding the materiality of death rituals? Have there been changes in the performances of death rituals? These interrelated questions are what this paper seeks to address using

a material culture approach in an examination of how the materiality of the death ritual is central to ritual practice of the Bontok.

Anthropologist Webb Keane writes that religion, "must be exteriorized in some way, for example, in words, gestures, objects, or practices, in order to be transmitted from one mind to another" (2008, 12). This "materialized study of religion […] begins with the assumption that things, their use, their valuation, and their appeal are not something added to a religion, but rather inextricable from it" (Meyer and Houtman 2012, 7). The approach is concerned with how human beings engage material things to render the performance of the ritual efficacious, or for the intended outcome of the ritual to be achieved. Furthermore, Meyer and Houtman (2012, 4) underscore that "championing materiality signals the need to pay attention to a real, material world of objects and a texture of lived, embodied experience." Further, Daniel Miller posits that "the importance of this physicality of the artifacts derives from its ability thereby to act as a bridge, not only between the mental and the physical worlds, but also, more unexpectedly, between consciousness and the unconscious" (Miller 1987, 99).

Bontok death rituals involve a variety of objects (e.g., sangachil or death chair, funerary blankets), lamentations (*antowey*), and other material goods consistently provided by the community to access the ritual's symbolic qualities. All these provide intrinsic and extrinsic benefits to the deceased and bereaved members of the family. Using materiality as a lens to view the performance of death rituals involves the interweaving of words (e.g., *antowey*—songs for the dead, ritual chants, and prayers), material goods, textiles, and ritual action in a consolidation of relations between people and things in practice. These elements are interlinked, inseparable, and all essential in the conduct of death rituals to achieve ritual efficacy. Through ritual performance, the deceased member of Bontoc society is assured of a smooth passage to the afterlife because the family has diligently complied with the requisites of the ritual, and no untoward incidents occurred in the preparation and performance of the rites. In addition, this approach likewise reveals how the materiality of objects is relevant in understanding death rituals in Bontoc as a validation of the kachangyan social status and as expressions of Bontok ethnic identity.

The earliest publication that records information on death in Bontoc society is recorded in Albert Jenks' *The Bontoc Igorot* (1905), which contains a brief description of the funerary ritual of Som'kad, the oldest man in Bontoc and an affluent elder of the *ator* (a place for communal activity) of Luwakan. Here, the Bontok death ritual is described as carried out "not sorrowfully… [with] a feature of everydayness" (Jenks 1905, 74).

> They closed the old man's eyes, washed his body and put on it the blue burial robe with the white *'anito'* figures woven in it

Figure 3. The sangachil (death chair) used by the kachangyan (affluent class) in Bontoc society (Photograph by Albert Jenks, *The Bontoc Igorot*, 1905, Plate no. 41).

> as a stripe. They fashioned a crude, high black chair with a low seat, a *sung-'a-chil,* and bound the dead man in it, fastening him by bands about the waist, the arms, and head—the vegetal band entirely covering the entire mouth. His hands were laid in his lap. The chair was set up before the door of the house, with the corpse facing out. Four nights and days it remained there in full sight of those who passed. (Jenks 1905, 75)

The largely ethnographic account mentions materials and objects used in the performance of the ritual but does not examine the role these objects in achieving efficacy of the ritual performance. There is a brief mention of the *sangachil* (Figure 3), the *fo-ot*, a raveling of white

Figure 4. The pine coffin otherwise known as the *erlek* used to inter the corpse in Bontoc (Photograph by Albert Jenks, *The Bontoc Igorot*, Plate no. 42).

cloth for covering the eyes, and another piece of white cloth for laying on the head of the deceased, the pine coffin (Figure 4), cursory mention of the burial attires appropriate for deceased men and women, and the ground where the deceased Som'kad was buried (Jenks 1905, 78–79).

Other extant studies have focused on other aspects of Bontok life and death ritual practices. Ana Labrador's "Representation of Bontok Identity in Museums and in Central Bontoc, Northern Philippines" (2000) highlights how community ties are strengthened during this specific ritual event. Dinah Omengan's *Death and Beyond: Burial Practices and Beliefs of the Igorots of Sagada* (2004) documents the varied rituals, taboos, and practices along with the associated objects with death observed in Sagada. Omengan posits that the observance of traditional burial practices had its advantages such as the perpetuation of values among the young but nonetheless also notes disadvantages of the practice such as the imposition of taboos on the bereaved, sanitation problems caused by the exposed corpse, and the extravagance in the performance of the rituals among others (Omengan 2004, 138–40).

By focusing on the materiality of death rituals, this paper elucidates how paraphernalia associated with the practice objects ensure ritual efficacy by establishing a connection between the living *(fib-iyag)* and the dead *(natey)*—the physical and the spiritual world.

Bontok Death Rituals

Bontok death rituals are centered on certain norms and values expressed in wealth and materiality. The chronological sequence of the death rituals is as follows: (a) preparation for death (b) funeral rites and (c) the post-funeral rites that could last from three to seven days.[2] (Table 1)

Table 1. Chronology of Bontok death rituals.

Rituals Performed	Brief Description
mangmang	Ritual prayers and butchering of pigs are done to pronounce the death of the person and announce this to the public.
sukusug	This ritual pertains exclusively to death rituals led by a respected elder in the family or from the community. Chickens are butchered at nighttime. Only members of the immediate family take part in this ritual.
fernas	This ritual lasts from early morning following the death until the burial. Animal offerings such as pigs and chickens are butchered during death ceremonies, which may now be participated in by relatives and other members of the family.
tukad	Otherwise known as *putad* (literally means "to cut"), the ritual involved apportioning pieces of cloth from the unsewn shroud are cut and distributed to the immediate family members, most especially to the grandchildren.
alulos	This ritual signals the end of funeral rites. Pigs are butchered and shared with the community.

When death occurs, the relatives are immediately notified. The proclamation of death can only be made when all the children (and relatives) have arrived. The ritual of *mangmang* is then performed so that the individual can be officially pronounced dead and the demise is announced to the public. This notice to the community of the event of death in the family is accompanied by the butchering of animals (De Vera 2011, 98).

In the afternoon of the day that the individual is pronounced dead *(naifaag-cha)*, the close kin bathe the corpse with a warm decoction of guava leaves. According to the elders, no embalming chemicals

Figure 5. As soon as the sangachil is completed, it is positioned facing the entrance of the house (Photograph by AV Salvador-Amores, 2016).

are used to keep the body pure so that the spirit of the deceased will be able to enter the home of the ancestors. The absence of chemicals causes the body to bloat, which according to Bontok belief brings good luck to the family (De Vera 2011, 99). A respected elder in the community performs the ritual of *sukusug*, the butchering of chickens, and only immediate family members can take part in the ritual.

Textiles and other materials requested by the deceased elder when the latter was still living are gathered and prepared. Among these are the burial blankets commissioned in advance from elderly women weavers in Can-eo, another village in Bontoc, and a set of burial clothes woven traditionally on a back-strap loom and

specifically made for use as funerary garb. Properly dressed in burial clothes, the corpse is then wrapped in a *fanchala*, the shroud or blanket for the dead.

The men then prepare the sangachil (funerary chair made of pine branches to hold the cadaver in a sitting position), and a pig is offered to the *anito* (soul) of the deceased. As soon as the sangachil is completed, it is positioned facing the entrance of the house (Figure 5). The *annako* (mourning song) of the old men and women then begins. Here, relatives and close kin pay their last respects to the deceased through the *inching-ag*, dirges or personal messages and lamentations that are sung to the dead. The wake lasts from three to five days or more for the kachangyan. The ritual of *fernas,* which entails the butchering of animals (pigs and chickens) is performed and everyone is enjoined to partake in the ritual.

On the day of the interment, a pig is butchered. The men remove the corpse from the sangachil and lay the body in the *erlek* (also known as *kaung*), the pine log coffin (Figure 6). The face of the deceased is left uncovered, except for the white cotton threads called *fo-ot* that are laid over the eyes. A small, white cloth called *to-chong* is also laid on the head of the corpse. The deceased kachangyan is then wrapped in blankets: the *pinakawha, pinagpagan, fayaong* and *fanchala.*

Before the *erlek* (pine bole coffin) is sealed, the ritual of *tukad* is done. Here, pieces of cloth from the unsewn shroud are cut and distributed to two or three grandchildren. This memento from the deceased is believed to give consolation to the bereaved, as well as give them the will to move on after the loss. After the *tukad*, the coffin is carried out of the house. At this point, sisters, brothers, children, and the living spouse are instructed by the elders to turn away so that the spirit of the dead will not clamor for help and possess them. The deceased is made to face the east (*lunukan chi akhew*), where the sun rises so that the next morning, upon "waking up," she/he would be greeted by the ancestors.

Meanwhile, the women prepare the basket of *pakhey* or rice bundles and carry these on their head during the procession to the final resting place of the deceased elder (Figure 7). Each basket contains four to six bundles of rice. These are a symbolic offering or gift *(senget)* for the recently deceased to bring to their ancestors.

The *panungsungan*, clay pots containing cooked rice and boiled meat, and *tapuey* (rice-wine) for the deceased are also brought along during the procession. Family members are forbidden to join the procession to the burial site, as it is believed that doing so will invite another death in the family (De Vera 2011). Finally, when the last piece of earth has been placed on the burial mound, the *panungsungan* is left near the tomb. A respected male elder in the community then leads the prayers for the safe journey of the deceased in the afterlife. The baskets

Figure 6. The men remove the corpse from the sangachil and lay the body in the *erlek* (also known as *kaung*), the pine log coffin (Photograph by AV Salvador-Amores, 2016).

Figure 7. The women prepare the basket of *pakhey* or rice bundles and carry these on their head during the procession to the final resting place of the deceased elder. (Photograph by AV Salvador-Amores, 2016)

of *pakhey* are carried by the women back home or redistributed to the other members of the community to symbolize blessings of abundance for the family of the deceased, and for the community as well.

After the burial, a ceremonial cleansing for the family members by washing of the hands and faces is performed. The sangachil is placed in the sweet potato garden and left to rot. Sometimes it is thrown into the river. Family members perform the *alulos* on the following day. During this ritual, animals are butchered as offerings for the recently deceased and their ancestors. This final rite marks the end of the death rituals.

Materiality of Death Rituals

Death is occasion for members of Bontoc society and their descendants to confront two concerns: first, the preparations that need to be done for the individual's transition from being a living and social person to a nonmaterial existence; and second, the need for proper observance of death rituals so that the spirit of the deceased will journey smoothly into the afterlife. This dual process highlights the transformative borderline between the material and incorporeal in cultural and cosmological constructions. As such, material objects are relevant for the transition of the deceased to an ancestor *(anito)*. The sacrifice of animals, use of ritual objects, and ritualization of the dead accomplish the staging of the dead person and the *persona.* Relatives and kin of the deceased provide the requisite markers of wealth. While respect is accorded to the deceased kachangyan, generosity also serves as a marker of affluence and prestige. The materiality of these objects represents a recollection of ethnic identity, status, wealth, connectivity with ancestors, and provides access to the symbolic qualities of the ritual.

***Sangachil* (Death Chair) and *Erlek* (Pinewood Coffin)**

The Bontok elders believe that while the body has not yet been interred, the spirit of the dead still mingles with the living. The sangachil (or *sangadil*), the wooden chair positioned facing the entrance of the house on which the corpse is seated, plays an important role in the complex ritual language. The sangachil was also used among the Ibaloy, Ifugao, and Kalinga.

Jenks (1905) wrote that only the important persons such as the elders of the kachangyan class, heads of families and villages were allowed to use the sangachil. In addition, if the predecessors used the sangachil in the past, then descendants should also do the same. Failure to follow would anger the ancestors, resulting in bad luck and misfortune to the bereaved family (Botengan 2004, 74). Even in

Figure 8. In Manabo, Abra, a *butaka* (long-armed chair) was used as a death chair for a revered Itneg elder, Lakay Domasing, to signify his status as *kadangyan* among the Itneg. (Photograph by AV Salvador-Amores, 2018)

death, the Bontok believe that the validation of social status of the kachangyan is achieved through the performance of complex rituals, and more importantly the visible display of identity markers such as the sangachil and intricately designed funerary textiles. These are markers of stature and merit that will ensure that the ancestors in the afterlife will welcome the spirit of the deceased.

In Bontoc society, the use of the sangachil is a sign of deep respect for the deceased elder. Even when physically dead, the elders witnessing the death ritual believe that the dead still "breathes." While the deceased is on the death chair, his or her mouth is covered with *ukop*, a bark cloth from the *balete* tree (*Ficus benjamina* Linn.) to keep his or her "last breath" before the body is placed inside the *erlek* (pine coffin). This is then removed after the dead has been placed in the coffin to allow the deceased to "breathe" in the afterlife.

More recently in Abra, a *butaka* (long-armed chair) was used as a death chair for a revered Itneg elder, Lakay Domasing, to signify his status as *kadangyan* (affluent class) (Figure 8). In the past, the acquisition of a *butaka* involved great expense and effort, as this item of furniture was something that only the *kadangyan* could afford. As such, the *butaka* has evolved to be indicative of high social status. In instances where a chair could not be obtained, the *teytey* (a ladder) made of wood was used. Deceased members of the lower ranks of society were wrapped in mats, and not in multiple layers of blankets.

The *erlek* (pine coffin, also known as *kaung*) is prepared in advance. Even before death, the kachangyan already fabricate the coffin from a pine bole measuring about five feet long and about two and a half

feet wide (Figure 9). It is cut lengthwise into two equal halves, which are then hollowed out (Cawed 1972, 35). The preparation of the *erlek* entails costs that only the Bontoc kachangyan could afford. Again, the individual's stature, identity and social position are emphasized in this way.

While the use of the *erlek* is in decline in contemporary Bontoc society, there are still a few artisans who make these sarcophagi. Today, some families who follow the traditional ways of burying the dead and who can afford the cost still prefer to use the *erlek*. In Bontoc *poblacion* (town center), where the communities are highly Christianized, most of the families use coffins fabricated using pine wood planks for their dead.

Figure 9. Despite the advent of Christianity, the *erlek* (pine coffin) is still being made by a few families in Bontoc. Only the affluent kachangyan can afford to be interred in the erlek and follow traditional practices in burying the dead. (Photograph by AV Salvador-Amores, 2019)

Funeral Textiles: Connectivity to the Ancestral Spirits

Aside from the sangachil, another marker of Bontok kachangyan status is the use of specific textiles at death. Garments and textiles that are wrapped and buried with the deceased add to the completeness of a funeral observance. The textiles, along with butchered animals, rice wine, and others, are made as offerings for the dead. As such, a careful selection of funerary textiles is made so as not to offend the spirit of the deceased.

The choice of funerary clothes also signifies the status of the one who has died. Young weavers from Bontoc and Samoki are engaged in

weaving colorful textiles, while the weaving of burial clothes is solely the activity of predominantly widowed elderly women in Bontoc. The women elders possess the knowledge of the symbolism of designs, the arrangement of motifs, the color of the threads, and lightweight material for weaving to be used specifically for the deceased. They believe that wearing of the proper funerary attire and the wrapping of specific blankets will facilitate the smooth journey of the spirit of the deceased to the afterlife.

In traditional Bontoc society, the funeral attire of the Bontok is dictated by social status and what their predecessors wore to the grave in the past. As observed in the Chakchakan, Omfeg, and Samoki villages in Bontoc, the deceased elder from the kachangyan class are completely garbed in elaborate funeral regalia unlike the *pusi* (lower class), who are dressed in plain garments.

> Women wear a *facho et lamma* (upper garment), a *lufid ay kinain* (skirt), and a *wakes ay inandulo* (belt). While there are many kinds of colorful skirts used by the Bontoc women, for the deceased, the main color for the skirt is indigo (bluish-black) or black representing darkness or death. (De Las Peñas and Salvador-Amores 2016, 93)

The funerary garb is finely woven and adorned with X marks called *mata-mata* (diamond forms that represent the rice mortar), and *palay* (rice) grains in accordance with the number of days of funeral wake, which typically lasts for three, five or seven days, as odd numbers are considered as auspicious.

On the other hand, deceased *kadangyan* men wear an upper garment that is also predominantly black or dark colored. The design of the fine upper garment is referred to as *finungalawan* and is symbolic of the wearer's social standing. The pattern usually depicts a row of human figures alternating with boat-like motifs (Labrador 2013, 154–55). The blue burial robe has the white *anito* figures woven in it as a stripe (Jenks 1905, 75).

Blankets (*ewes)* are another important component of death rituals, and the complexity of the designs of the burial blankets is given premium because these are likewise indicative of the status and identity of the wearer. Tradition likewise stipulates that if an ancestor used a particular type of blanket in the past, a descendant must use the same. This practice is based on the belief that the blanket enables the spirits of ancestors to recognize the deceased in the afterlife.

A dead kachangyan requires several *ewes* (blankets): the *pinakawha, pinagpagan fanchala* and *fayaong*, and most importantly a *finangurawan* (for the male) or *lew-es* (for the female) (De Las Peñas and Salvador-Amores 2016).

> The *inewes* is draped on the shoulders for a deceased male or female *kachangyan*, or alternatively hanged on the background if the deceased is on a *sangachil* (death chair). A plain wide white *wanes ay inawing* or *chinangta* (loin cloth) is usually paired with the upper garment. They would only regard a male *kachangyan* corpse as appropriately attired for the journey to the afterlife when dressed with the *wanes ay inawing* and adorned with the *finungalawan* design. The woven lines found on the loincloth also denote the number of days of the wake accorded to their status as *kachangyan*. (De Las Peñas and Salvador-Amores 2016)

According to the elders, the number of blankets used for wrapping the body of the deceased also marks the deceased individual's affluence and social standing. In some cases, two blankets are used to represent the blankets used by deceased parents who come from two different villages and ethnic origins in the Cordillera. Since specialist weavers must be commissioned to produce these customized textiles, acquisition entails great expense which only kachangyan can afford.

Ewes pinakawha (also called *pakawha, "kawha"* refers to the center of the blanket). Traditionally, this elaborately designed blanket was used to wrap the dead body but with the advent of Christianity, this is now usually folded and placed inside the coffin of the deceased kachangyan. The *pakhawa* is adorned with *mata-mata* and *tiktiko* motifs. The *mata-mata* done in supplementary weft, are colored white, yellow and green. The white and yellow threads are used to highlight the *bituwon* (stars). The effect is an elaborate star design that appears on both ends of the *pakhawa*, joined together by parallel lines woven in red that run through the center. The design of the fabric includes figures of arrowheads or spears, referred to as *shukyong* by the Bontok, to symbolize protection. However, in some northern Luzon communities these figures represent the ancestors in the afterlife.

Pinagpagan is a woven blanket that is also used to wrap the dead along with the *pinakawha:*

> The identifying feature of the *pinagpagan* is the white and black colors at the center. The upper and lower panels are usually a combination of red and black. The dominant frieze design pattern consists of *matmata* and *tiktiko* motifs. The depiction of a snake following a human is common to denote good omen or luck both for the living relatives of the deceased. (De Las Peñas and Salvador-Amores 2016, 96)

According to Labrador (1998), the deceased ancestor manifests as a snake and is providential for the family of the deceased who are then blessed with good fortune, well-being, and smooth interpersonal relations among the kin. The deliberate use of red-colored thread for the *mata-mata* is called *pud-ok*, which signifies light. This "guiding

light" or "eyes of the ancestors" leads the spirit of the recently deceased in the journey to the beyond.

Fanchala. The *fanchala* is a white plain-woven blanket used to wrap the dead. It has black lines at the center to indicate the number of days for the funeral wake. The rank of the person who passed on is indicated by the number of bands which varies from one, three, or five. Although a *fanchala* with one band is used by the *pusi*, a kachangyan may be wrapped with this blanket as the outermost layer after being wrapped in other blankets.

Fayaong. The *fayaong* is usually blue with a white band running across the blanket. There are no repeating patterns or designs. In Ibaloy communities, this blanket with a similar pattern is also known as *kinteg*. Like the *fanchala,* the *fayaong* is also used in some instances as the final blanket layer with which to wrap the body of the kachangyan.

Perhaps, the most important part of a Bontok death ritual is the *putad* (literally means "to cut"). Here, the blankets are apportioned, with several parts allocated for the descendants and other portions for the dead. This ritual is only performed for deceased elders. The corpse is covered or wrapped before burial with the panel/s allocated for the dead, while panel/s allotted for the descendants are cut into smaller pieces with a sharp knife for distribution as mementos for the children and grandchildren, material reminders of their deceased relative. Very often, the pieces are stitched to the very first clothes of a newborn baby, attached to a *lufid* (woman's skirt), stitched to infants' pillow covers, and cloth diapers worn by the children or grandchildren. These segments of burial cloth thus become symbols that establish continuity from one generation to the next.

Material Goods as Rituals Offerings

In Bontok death ritual, there are important offerings that need to be made to the dead and their ancestors. One is the butchered animals in the sequence of death rituals. These include pigs and water buffalos, the *panungsungan,* the clay pot that contains the rice, meat, and rice wine *(tapuey),* and the baskets of *pakhey* (rice) carried by women in the procession to the burial site of the deceased and back to the latter's home in the village. One reported account of this event notes that when the procession reached the house of the dead, the women symbolically shifted the rice bundles from an upright position to a sideways position (De Vera 2011, 105) to indicate that the offerings had been made. The rice bundles used in the funeral march are then redistributed to the community to signify continuous abundance and wealth to come. Aside from a visual display of wealth, ritual participation in this particular event also re-establishes community ties.

The ritualization of action and material culture are part of the cosmological and ideological settings that relate people within the community and the living with their ancestors who have passed on. Animal offerings serve practical functions but more so, bear symbolic value. According to a Bontok elder, the ritualization of material objects satisfies the "requirements" of the ancestors in the *papatayan* or the abode of the ancestors. Material objects are metaphorical offerings to remember, honor, and appease the dead. In return, living descendants are assured of good fortune, well-being, and comfort.

Today, although the influence of Christianity is apparent on the conduct of traditional Bontok rituals, there is still interplay of the old and new. Notably, there has been a decline in the use of the sangachil or the *erlek,* and families have opted to use coffins instead. Families have increasingly opted for shorter durations for the wake, and the traditional burial clothing is folded and placed inside the coffins instead of used to wrap the deceased.

The obvious explanation for these changes is the acculturation to Christian beliefs. Another is the practical consideration of the expenditure that the rituals entail. An examination of the ritual economy of death will reveal that the costs are high when one buries a kachangyan.

CONCLUSION

In Bontoc society, the material objects used in the death rituals enable a safe and speedy journey to the afterlife for the spirit of the recently deceased. These objects also function to ward off evil and allow access to blessings, and as such, likewise benefit the living. As observed, mortuary rituals accorded to the kachangyan also reassert their social status and re-inscribe social relations within the family and the community. This reaffirms the cohesion and solidarity of the community at the time of crisis in the event of death.

The materiality in Bontok death rituals is evident and suggests a material agency embedded in the death rituals. Material culture remains a tool for memory production and the perpetuation of ethnic identity such as symbolizing Bontok practices, social position, as well as memorializing the dead person. Within the context of the death rituals, the material objects are also deployed as metaphors for the dead person's abilities, attributes, and stature.

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END NOTES

1. In this paper, I use Bontoc to refer to the place, and Bontok to the people.
2. The following section is an account of the death rituals as described in various sources and observed both in Chakchakan and Samoki in Bontoc, Mt. Province. Women from the villages explained the preparations that needed to be done for the dead and elucidated on observations that I documented.

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