BAGUIO: A MULTI-ETHNIC CITY
AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE IBALOY
AS AN ETHNIC MINORITY

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BAGUIO: A MULTI-ETHNIC CITY AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE IBALOY AS AN ETHNIC MINORITY*

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Introduction

Baguio is reached via a mountain climb from the lowlands, starting from the plains of Pangasinan and La Union to a pine-clad plateau 5,000 feet above sea level. Situated 250 kilometers north of Manila, Baguio has developed into a multi-ethnic city with a “highly migrant” population (Rood, et. al. 1987). The 1987 population figures list 146,186 permanent residents (NEDA); of this number, only one-fourth were born in the area. Ilocanos now make up most of the population (43%), followed by Pangasinenses (13.3%), Tagalogs (11.3%), and members of the upland populations (23%). Of the latter, the Ibaloy, the indigenous ethnic group of Baguio, comprise only 10%. The rest of the city’s population includes those with other ethnic origins, such as Bikolano, Pampango, and Visayan. Muslims from Mindanao are the latest addition to the Baguio ethnic pot.

The Ibaloy tribe is the ethnic group native to Baguio and most of Benguet, and are considered to have closer linguistic affinities with the lowland Pangasinenses that with any other Cordillera group. Before the turn of the century and up to the 1920s, the Baguio areas was predominantly cattle grazing country called estancias (see Tapang, 1985). The economy was based primarily on gold trading, cattle raising, and some agriculture. Gold was traded for cattle, horses, iron, salt, cotton cloth, and other goods which were not produces in the highlands. The Baguio Ibaloy baknang, referred to by W.H. Scott (1982:135) as “petty plutocrats,” had trading partners in Pangasinan, La Union, and Ilocos Sur, and such trade relationships date back in time to the prehispanic period.

Baguio’s original name was Kafagway (grassy clearing), incorporating an allusion to the center of the Baguio basin (at the present day Burnham Park area, extending to the Baguio City Hall). The Ibaloy term bag-yu refers to a slimy water plant with floating leaves, known in Tagalog as lumot. This was the name given to the watery floor of the Kisad valley. Some ethnic place names are still retained in some Baguio streets such as Chanum (water), Kayang (high place), Otek (small), Chugum (windy), and Abanao (wide). Some of these indigenous names have been changed by post-1960 politicians.

How did Baguio develop into a multi-ethnic city, and what happened to the original population of Ibaloys who controlled the natural resources and politics of the area? To understand these social developments they must be viewed from a historical perspective. In this view we take into account historical events, personalities, colonial policies, and the human and natural resources which are part and parcel of the whole picture of ethnic diversity.

Two important historical events contributed to the discovery of Baguio by the Spaniards and Americans. First was the Spanish conquistadores’ search for the much talked about Igorot gold, which was a magnet that drew the Spaniards to the Cordillera. Second was the American colonialists’ search for a health station.
In Search of Igorot Gold

In 1572, Miguel de Legaspi’s grandson, the conquistador Juan de Salcedo, explored the Ilocos coast and learned about the riches gold mines in the interior of Igorot country. However, he merely skirted the Cordillera in his expedition to explore the north of Manila. Another Spanish military expedition headed by Don Alonzo Martin Quirante entered Ibaloy territory in 1624 in search of the much-vaunted Igorot gold. Quirante reached the site of what was later to be known as the famous Fianza gold mines. He returned to Manila with 5,600 kilograms of ore carried in 400 baskets, which were sent to Mexico for assaying.

For 200 years the Spaniards governed Benguet area through military contingents called Comandancia Politico Militar, holding headquarters at Agoo, La Union. From 1754-1759 the Agustinians tried to Christianize the natives (partly through force), but failed. In 1846, comandante Guillermo Galvey led forty-five exploratory and punitive expeditions to punish the natives who refused to pay taxes, and especially for undermining the Spanish tobacco monopoly (Scott, 1975:126). Galvey established a Comandancia at La Trinidad (so named after his wife) and Pulito of Kafagway was appointed by the Spaniards as the first Kapitan of Benguet. The Galvey expedition recorded that they found twenty houses in the Baguio area (specifically around the present Burnham site).

Most of the succeeding comandantes were said to be cruel, exacting exorbitant taxes and demanding free labor from the Ibaloyans. The kapitan was held responsible for the non-execution of the comandante’s orders. Thus, in 1895, not one single Christian, either old or young, was found among the natives of Baguio. Villagers referred to and described during Father Vivar’s time have become bare hillsides of pasturelands. The site where Tongdo, the gold-trading center and mission station, is vaguely remembered by informants during the time of Scheerer (1975:198).

In Search of Igorot Gold

After the Spanish-American War, through the Philippine Revolution, information from Spaniards who claimed to have been in the area described a place up in the northern Philippine highlands with a temperate climate, where frost on the ground occurred at certain months of the year. Dean C. Worcester, who was then Secretary of the Interior, became interested in this information and checked out Spanish records which confirms this report (Worcester, 1914: 449-450).

The first Americans to set foot in the Baguio area were members of the 48th Infantry (predominantly blacks) commanded by Captain John Buck. The area was first designated a mountain post before the infantry returned to San Fernando, La Union. In the same year, Worcester, who was then a member of the Taft Commission, led a party of Americans in a preliminary survey of a site in the mountains of Benguet that might serve as a rest and recreation station for the American colonials. They arrived in La Trinidad and were invited to the home of Otto Scheeerer in Kafagway. Scheerer was a German national who had sold his business assets in
Manila and moved to Baguio for health reasons upon his doctor’s advice. He completely recovered and became interested in Ibaloy culture which prompted the American administrators to invite him to serve the government as Provincial Secretary of Benguet. Scheerer later joined the faculty of the University of the Philippines, heading its Department of Philippine Languages from 1924 until his retirement in 1929.

The Ibaloy of Baguio

Old informants recall that 27 Ibaloy families originally occupied areas of the Baguio locality. Some of the members of these families, such as Cuidno Carantes, has ownership rights to tracts of land in the Session road area, Assumption road, and parts within what is now the St. Louis University campus. Mateo Cariño had the largest number of landholdings, parts of which the whole area of Burnham Park and the City Hall site he later donated to the city (Hamada, 1988). However, when 174 hectares of his pasture land were expropriated by the American for Camp John Hay, Mateo Cariño protested and fought the legal battle all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court and won. This case was a landmark decision which recognized indigenous land rights (see Cariño vs. Insular Government in Bagamaspad and Pawid, 1985: 253-257).

The notable Ibaloy families originally associated with geographic areas in Baguio were Cariño, Piraso, Makay, Ismek (Smith), Suello, Dimas, Tagde (Tangle), among others who owned rights to the Session Road areas, Pacdal, Guisad, Lucban, Kennon Road area, Loakan, Irisan, Asin Road area, Bening, Aurora Hill, Pinsao, Ambiong, and other sites in the city (Hamada, 1988 - interview).

During the first decade of the American administration, the Ibaloy landowners were required to declare their property and have their lands surveyed. Some families, such as Carantes and Cariño, complied; but a majority failed to declare their lands for a number of reasons apart from not understanding why they had to pay taxes on land which they owned, though these were not all being used by them. These were the large estancias which belonged to a group of kinsmen baknang head. Thus, all lands which were not registered by the Ibaloy were Public Land under the newly introduced land tenure system.

Baguio caught the imagination and interest of the early American colonialists, primarily as a health station. Fervent boosters and promoters were Dean Worcester, Luke Wright, William Howard Taft, Cameron Forbes, William Pack, David Barrows, and E.A. Eckman. Together with Filipinos they endeavored to make Baguio a model city high up in the hills. This American vision of making Baguio a model city is the setting for the attraction of multi-ethnic migrants in the unfolding of the development of the city of Baguio.

Setting Up the Administrative Government

In 1900 Benguet became the first Civil government to be established anywhere in the Philippines. Mr. H. P. Whitsmarsh was appointed civil governor of Benguet and the capital was set up in Baguio. It took only a short time before Baguio was established as the summer capital
in 1903. It was established as a chartered city in 1909 through Act No. 1963, authored by Justice George Malcolm (after whom the Malcolm Square in Baguio was named). Forty-five square kilometers of exquisite scenery, forming the township of Baguio, were purchased from the indigenous owners, although there are claims that these purchases have not yet been fully paid. the famous architect and landscaper Daniel Burnham laid out this area in a plan which might comfortably anticipate a population growing to 25,000.

In 1906 the administrative government has to develop and support the city by auctioning public lands, to attract more people to take up permanent residency. Industrial concerns in Manila bought estates for their staff. City lots, homes, and business places were rapidly erected. In 1906 the rest and recreation center at Camp John Hay was opened to visitors. The present Mansion House, Country Club, and a modern hospital were finished in 1908. The Teacher’s Camp, which was constructed in the same year made it possible for teachers from all over the Philippines to convene during the summer months to exchange experiences, attend lectures, and enjoy the climate (Worcester, 1914).

Wealthy Filipino-Spanish families such as the Legardas, Palmas, Roceses, Ayalas, Elizaldes, Roxases, Romulos, and many others bought residential lots for their summer retreat. Civil servants from Manila came to Baguio for a three month session in the hills, from mid February to June (Fry, 1983:70). Baguio’s Session Road earned its mane from being the place where summer sessions of the national legislature were more frequently held. In 1907, in order to boost Baguio as the summer capital, Governor General Cameron Forbes allocated land reservations to various government offices such as the Bureau of Education at Teacher’s Camp, the Bureau of Works at Engineer’s Hill, the Pines Hotel, the University of the Philippines, the Court of Appeals and Supreme Court compounds, and to forest and watershed reserves. Meanwhile churches and schools were also being built. Religious denominations such as the Jesuits (at Mirador Hill), the Dominicans (at Dominican Hill), the CICM Belgian Fathers, the Anglicans, Methodists, Baptists, and other groups obtained their lands through purchase, and a few through donations from the Ibaloy owners.

The establishment of the administrative government brought the need for filling up office staff requirements. During this period the earliest known Pampango group arrived in Baguio (sometime in 1910) together with a group of Ilocano professionals. They stayed on to become permanent residents of Baguio.

The opening of the Kennon, Naguilian, and the Halsema Roads to vehicular traffic ushered in the rapid and continuous migration from the highlands and the lowlands.

**Kennon Road Construction**

In 1905 the Kennon Road was completed as a shorter route from Baguio to Manila, cutting travel time down to 28-30 hours overland. Before the opening of the Kennon Road it took a day’s journey by sea and another day’s journey up the hills by way of the Naguilian trail on horseback.
There were 46 nationalities represented in the Kennon road workforce. Of these different nationalities a contingency of Japanese and Chinese workers were recruited in this project, including Filipinos with varied ethnic origins (Reed, 1976:162-163). Some of the Japanese and Chinese workers, who were farmers themselves, quickly assessed the potential of the area as suitable for farming and stayed on; some eventually married local brides and made their mark in the city. One of the Cariños (Josefa) married Reukitze Hamada, who worked with the Heald Lumber Company and also owned the first Japanese store in Baguio. One of Reukitze’s sons is Sinai Hamada, who was once editor of the Philippine Collegian. Sinai is a lawyer, writer, poet, and founder of the Baguio Midland Courier. At present he is also the founder and owner of the Cordillera Post, one of Baguio’s local newspapers.

The construction of the Kennon Road also attracted to Baguio the ascendants of the present day Chinese community (mostly Cantonese) who were originally employed as carpenters, masons, blacksmiths, and cooks. They later on moved into the retail trade, set up bakeries, restaurants, and served the mining communities and lowland visitors during the summer months. A good number of intermarriages took place between Chinese and Kankanaey women.

Halsema Road

The construction of the Halsema Road (Mountain Trail) in 1931, named after the engineer, and outstanding mayor of Baguio City (1922 - 1937), opened the main artery of transportation from Baguio to the northern Cordillera. An important consideration in the building of the Mountain Trail was to link as quickly as possible the administrative centers of Bontoc, Lubuagan, and Kiangan with Baguio for more effective and efficient control of the Cordillera (Bagamaspad and Pawid, 1985:238).

The availability of transportation along the Halsema Road attracted a few enterprising Chinese and Kankanaey farmers in the 1950s; they went on to engage in temperate vegetable farming. In the 1970s, communities along the Halsema highway began to develop around the commercial vegetable farms. The locus of vegetable farming shifted from La Trinidad to the Mountain Trail. The accessibility to transportation has encouraged the opening up of more need for labor on these farms has attracted migrants not only from the Cordillera provinces but also from the lowlands, and even from as far as the Visayas. Some of these laborers have intermarried with members of local ethnic groups.

The accessibility of transportation through the Halsema Road has also allowed the mobility of individuals from fairly isolated subsistence communities to come to Baguio to engage in wage labor in the mines, in private or government construction work; others take on odd jobs. The need for cash to send their children to college has also forced some unwilling parents to move out of the subsistence communities to seek cash-paying jobs in Baguio City.
Corporate Mining Attracts Migrants

Corporate mining has been a significant factor in the migrants’ desire to participate in the cash economy of the Benguet and Baguio areas. Various ethnic groups from the highlands and the lowlands are represented in the labor force of several Benguet mines.

During the first two decades of this century, before the corporate mines were established, many Americans who stayed over after the Spanish-American War and the Philippine Revolution went into prospecting for gold in the Benguet region. Eventually, a good number of these prospectors married local women, a majority from the Kankanaey ethnic group of the Suyoc-Mankayan area (O’Dowd, 1948). Some of the mining claims that were staked belonged to the natives who worked them for many generations before the coming of any white man. Since many of the Ibaloys did not understand all the procedures and requirements of the alien mining laws many “defaulted” and lost their rights.

With the opening of the Kennon road the transporting of heavy equipment for the mines was made possible. The Mining corporations set up their mining plants, and mining activities were especially marked during the mining boom in 1933-1936, when thousands of laborers were recruited to work in Baguio Gold mines, Atok Big Wedge, Balatoc, Acupan, Antamok, and Itogon mines. Miners came from diverse ethnic backgrounds, predominantly from Pangasinan, Ilocos, and from the different Cordillera communities. As a result of the corporate mining activities it became essential for logging companies to supply the mines with timber for their tunnels. Laborer were again recruited from the different groups already mentioned earlier.

Construction Boom

Baguio City saw a construction boom, with the rapid building of city offices, government buildings, public utilities, and parks. To finance these projects a resolution was passed in 1906, authorizing the sale of lots in public auctions, and the Commission Act 1527 then allocated the proceeds for the improvement of the townsite. The employment opportunities for skilled labor were filled by Japanese, Chinese, and lowland migrants who were employed as carpenters, masons, painters, cooks, bakers, seamstresses and tailors. Among the available white collar jobs filled were positions for clerks, accountants, salesmen, and teachers; these also attracted people from outside the Baguio-Benguet area.

Trade

Trading activities have also contributed to the migration of ethnic groups from various places. The opening of the Kennon and Halsema Roads encouraged trade, since goods could be transported by vehicle instead of by bull cart and human pack horse. A significant number of Batangueños came to Baguio as traders and many stayed on to set up stores in the late 1920s and early 1930s. After the Second World War, during the time that Ramon Mitra Sr. was congressman of Baguio and Benguet, another group came to Baguio. A significant addition was
the coming of the East Indian merchants to Baguio in the 1930s. Some stayed on to continue operating department stores, and a few have become active members of the Baguio community. The Pampango traders followed after the Second World War to set up business; they were primarily engaged in shoe retail and the sale of army surplus goods. Through 1960-1980, a gradual increase in the number of Manila Chinese businessmen of Fukienese ancestry, arrived in Baguio to set up hardware store, hotels, and restaurants.

**Baguio as an Educational Center**

After the Second World War Baguio added to its reputation as tourist spot, health resort, and home of temperate vegetables, another distinction: as a prime educational center in northern Philippines.

In 1946 the Baguio Colleges Foundation was established, followed by other local colleges, and within twenty years the city had earned the distinction of being a university town. The excellent reputation of its private schools, the comparative peace, relative lower cost of education, and natural beauty of the environment made Baguio an attractive alternative to Manila.

Baguio has a student population of 96,000; of this number, 50% are transient students (NEDA, 1987). The student population does not only include diversified ethnic groups from all over the Philippines but foreign students as well. The Baguio universities have students from Thailand, Nigeria, Iran, Jordan, Lebanon, the United States, and other countries. They come to study here since the medium of instruction is English; also, the cost of education is relatively lower when compared to that in the United States or other foreign countries. Many of these students who enroll in the different universities and colleges in Baguio choose to specialize in the fields of medicine, dentistry, and engineering. A few have married Filipinos and have added to Baguio’s character as an ethnic melting pot.
Conclusions

It has been 88 years since the wide estancias of Kafagway, and what now encompasses the city of Baguio, have been transformed into a forest of shanties, where stands of pine and wild oak once stood. The frost which used to occur during the months of December through February, is gone—and this is primarily attributed to deforestation. The population has multiplied to twelve times the number projected by the early administrators. This has led to problems in relation to water supply, land use, city services, infrastructures, public facilities, and law enforcement. At present, the population easily peaks to 350,000 during the long weekends, the Holy Week, and the summer seasons.

The story of the historical exodus of multi-ethnic groups of Baguio cannot be viewed separately from the story of the alienation of the Ibaloy from their land, their cattle, and their gold trade, which they once controlled.

The gold rush from 1901-1930, and the American introduction of an alien law to control mineral resources and land, have negatively affected many Ibaloy land holdings and mining rights. While the Americans guaranteed equal rights before the law, (i.e., equal access to the courts), the same legal order was not properly understood in its entirety and therefore not really availed of by the concerned Ibaloys. when the American businessmen took over the gold mines, they deprived the Ibaloy of their traditional trade base. The Ibaloys were not able to rapidly adjust to trade without a gold base. And the gold trade, which was traditionally the source of many Ibaloy fortunes, passed onto non-Ibaloy or alien hands.

The expropriation, sale, and donation of large estates, and the development of Baguio as a city rendered the raising of cattle in the heart of the city impractical. Cattle, as the traditional form of wealth and prestige among the Ibaloy, had lost much of its significance after the War. It had been traditionally a store of value and medium of exchange. Beef was sold for ready cash in the butcher shops or used in exchange for labor rendered. The herd was the very basis for the occupancy of the forest land and the reciprocal relationship of a specially stratified people (Bagamaspad and Pawid, 1985:231). The banishment of cattle from the city had slowly moved outward to peripheral grazing areas, until the Second World War when the Ibaloy cattle enterprise was virtually dead.

At the outset of the American administration the Ibaloy could not contribute to the development of Baguio, except perhaps by the giving up of most of their lands. Since the administration needed people who were trained in administrative work, the Ibaloy could not compete for or engage in these management activities then. Thus, offices were manned by Americans and lowland Filipinos. During this period the Americans developed a strong program to educate the Ibaloy through the colonial policy of free education. As promised by Governor Pack, immediate remuneration for learned skills was provided by employment in government programs of agriculture, animal husbandry, health, education, and infrastructure. The result was an increased enrollment in courses for training teachers, nurses, foresters, agriculturists, engineers, and medical officers. Government scholarships were offered for the same courses. The “educated” were effective agents of change; they popularizes the view that looked down
upon tradition or even encouraged its outright rejection in favor of a western-oriented school culture (Bagamaspad and Pawid, 1985).

Changes brought about by the rapid developments were just too much for the traditional Ibaloy to handle, who found no parallels at all in their cultural experience. The rapid development of infrastructures and the need for large quantities of goods and services could not be satisfied by the Ibaloy alone. Thus, recruitment from elsewhere was necessary to fulfill the needs of the city. Without the gold-base trading of the Ibaloy which supported his cattle, created and maintained his status, the whole traditional system of the *baknang* slowly collapsed.

From 1909 to 1942, the Ibaloy lead family members did not participate in the administrative government which was dominated by Americans and trained lowlanders. During this period there were very few trained Ibaloy administrators to fill the offices.

In 1942, however, Dr. Jose Cariño became city councilman, followed by Maximo Carantes who was elected councilor of Baguio city in 1945. In 1946 - 1952, Baguio city has its first Ibaloy mayor in the person of Dr. Jose Cariño. Eugene Pucay, who comes from one of the distinguished Ibaloy families, was elected councilor of the city in 1953. After these short political careers it became difficult for the descendants of the Ibaloy to compete in this multi-ethnic city, where now they feel as minorities in their own homeland.

Baguio is no longer an Ibaloy settlement. Non-Ibaloy compose the larger part of the population, and the present status of the traditional *baknang* families (such as the Cariños and Caranteses) is now largely based only on their name.
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