

**Selling the Cordilleran: How Commodification of Culture
Creates New Authenticities in Tam-awan Village, Philippines**

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ABSTRACT

This thesis will narrate the story of the commodification of the Cordilleran culture in Tam-awan Village, a local space that “outsiders” such as Filipino National Artist Benedicto “BenCab” Cabrera and other artists have transformed into a “living museum” that is based on their own perspective of the Cordilleras. Using postcolonial and critical approaches, my research will focus on Tam-awan’s concept of a “living museum” to problematize the correlation between authenticity and the process of preservation, exhibition, commodification and mummification of a culture. I will explain how cultural preservation, when enabled by commodification, results not into the maintenance of the said culture but instead, the birth of a new culture, and hence, the creation of new authenticities based on the icons and memories of the traditional one. To understand this phenomenon, the commodification process and issues on authenticity will be examined from (1) the Cordillerans’ standpoint as regards their active participation, negotiation, and collaboration in the process of commodifying their own way of life and (2) the perspective of the museumgoers or the consumers of the commodified culture. In a sense, this thesis is a criticism of the presumptions on “tradition” and “authenticity” as I will reinterpret the meanings of those two notions in the context of the commodification of a marginalized culture in the postcolonial Philippines.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Baguio City, considered as one of the most popular tourist destinations in the Philippines, is like my second home in my country. For the past ten years, I have been frequenting this mountain city at the heart of Cordilleran ¹ province for its cool weather and abundance of pine trees. Visiting the city always gives me a sense of refuge; it gives me a feeling of escape from the stress caused by living in Manila. It has also become a place for me to write my researches, spend my holidays, relax and reflect on life.

As a young historian during my early 20s, in visiting this century-old colonial city I also get instant gratification from its vibrancy and “authenticity.” The city’s conscious effort to keep its traditions in spite of its colonial history and overwhelming Americanness continue to fascinate me up till now. Though the area where the city currently stands has been inhabited by the Cordillerans (specifically by the Ibalois) prior to colonization, Baguio City as Filipinos know it today was founded by the Americans in the early 1900s and was established as a hill station for American soldiers and administrators seeking to rejuvenate and escape tropical heat (Cariño, 51). In spite of its colonial past, ² the city was able to keep the icons and images of the Cordilleran culture. Hence, it is local and global in a sense as you will see modern buildings that exhibit local architectures, restaurants that hang crafts and paintings to showcase Cordilleran festivities, and idols/gods of various ethno-linguistic groups displayed as furniture ornaments.

¹ A collective name for all the ethnolinguistic groups in the mountain province in the Philippines.

² It must be noted that in spite of the heavy Americanization of the Filipinos in the early 1900s, there were American colonial policies in the Cordilleras that encouraged the preservation of the traditions of the Cordillerans.

Two years ago, I had this peculiar experience in Baguio City that made me see the city in a different light. That experience made me realize that for the past ten years that I have been visiting the place, it dawned on me that I failed to recognize the existence of a long-standing issue in the said city. Or perhaps I have been noticing it but because of my over familiarity with the place and the phenomenon I will discuss, I might just have neglected it and treated it as something very “normal.” And from this experience the story of my research begins.

As I was showing to a foreign friend the beauty of the Mines View Park in Baguio City, we encountered an old lady who asked us to have our picture taken while wearing their traditional dress. In exchange of wearing their traditional dress for a short while and having our picture taken, she asked us to pay 50 Pesos each (approximately one US Dollar). I was reluctant to wear their traditional clothes, as I believe that by doing so I am objectifying their culture. My friend, on the other hand, was so enthusiastic about it and she ended up wearing their clothes and had her picture taken. While my friend was having her pictures taken, I took the opportunity to explain to the old woman my reasons for not wearing their traditional outfit. I told her that I respect and value their traditions and customs so much to the point that I refuse any forms of objectification of their culture. To my surprise, in the midst of our seemingly casual conversation, she overtly expressed annoyance, frustration, and antagonism toward my conviction. At first, I thought that perhaps she just disliked me because she failed to earn money from me. For that reason, as the day passed, I did my best to forget about the experience. But until the time that we returned to our hotel, I found myself still pondering about the experience. I realized that in spite of being a Filipino, in spite of my historical knowledge of the city, and in spite of my mastery of navigating all its streets, it became clear to me that my failure to understand her was obviously a result of being an outsider to their culture. The experience made me realize that I failed to see their traditions and customs in

their perspectives. Upon realizing all these things, I started inquiring about how they see traditions in the contemporary, globalizing world. I began asking myself why commodification of culture exists in Baguio City and began exploring how it is being manifested in the different ways and levels. The conversation I had with the old woman made me realize how much culture has been commodified in Baguio City.

Large-scale tourism paved way to an overwhelming commercialization of Baguio's history and heritage. This phenomenon has had obvious tremendous impact on the daily activities and wellbeing of its residents, particularly the marginalized indigenous people residing in the city. Now, the question that begs to be answered is, how will I study and elaborate more on the said phenomenon? I searched for particular spaces in Baguio City where culture commodification was undeniably present and I ended up identifying one of my favorite tourist destinations in the city as my field of research: the Tam-awan Village.

Identifying Tam-awan Village as the focal point of my inquiry led me to exploring the issue of commodification of culture to another related concern: the concern on authenticity. It became apparent to me that like Tam-awan Village, in selling the Cordilleran culture in most ethnic tourist destinations in Baguio City, the exchange value of the cultural material or performance that they are selling heavily relies on its presumed authenticity. The culture that they make available for mass consumption has been modified to suit the desire of their market. So while the Cordillerans sell items or dances that use references from the Cordilleran past, I realized that in the process of selling the "authenticity" of their culture they are rather selling new authenticities. This phenomenon of creating and selling new authenticities will be discussed in great detail in this thesis.

Thus, I ended up seeing the connection between commodification and authenticity. It has become the theme of my thesis.

Banking on the ideas that the Cordilleran's local culture is their most valuable asset and that commodification of their culture is one of the consequences of the prevailing capitalist system in the Philippines, my thesis will show how the commodification of their way of life does not necessarily preserve their culture but rather mummifies and transforms it. I will discuss how mummification of culture, when enabled by commodification, leads not to the recreation of the past life but rather the creation of new cultures and authenticities. Using the postcolonial and critical approaches, my research will focus on Tam-awan's concept of a "living museum" to problematize the correlation between authenticity and the process of preservation, exhibition, commodification and mummification of a local culture. My goal is to look at how the Cordillerans and the tourists, through commodification process, reinterpret meanings of "traditional" and "authentic" in different contexts, but mostly in the postcolonial context of the Philippines.

It is imperative to emphasize the things that come with the colonial experience of the Filipinos for it has created for them a set of images and expectations of what the Cordilleran culture is and who the Cordilleran people are.³ As I will address later, expectations are crucial in understanding people's notions of "authentic" culture for when it is not met by performers or by the museum itself, it sparks questions on the performers' or the museum's "authenticity" or its faithfulness to the presumed Cordilleran culture.

³ Museums such as the Tam-awan Village could function as one of the common sites where former colonies attempt to break free from their colonial past and celebrate their culture that existed prior to the Westerner's interference in their politics, economy, and culture. But it is also curious to observe that Tam-awan Village, in spite of its attempt to positively promote "deeper understanding, respect and pride in the cultural heritage of the Cordillera people" (Tam-awan Village, n.d.), seems to contribute to the persistence of the colonial stereotypes about the Cordillerans and further reinforces the highland-lowland divide in the country.

In deconstructing the concepts “tradition” and “authenticity” in relation to the process of culture commodification, in this thesis I will answer the question: *How do commodification of culture and the country’s colonial past create authenticities?* Also, I will seek answers to the following research questions:

- How do the Cordillerans see and treat their traditions and culture?
- How do the Cordillerans perceive their commodification of their culture?
- What happens to the Cordilleran culture as it goes through the process of commodification?
- How are commercialized performances of the Cordilleran heritage enacted by the Cordillerans? How do its audiences perceive it?
- How do questions on authenticity arise among Filipinos who see or experience the performance of commodified rituals or dances in Tam-awan Village?
- Who determines authenticity? Is authenticity needed? If so, who needs authenticity? What does it satisfy?

To answer these questions, I conducted my field research in Baguio City, Philippines in order to witness and understand how meanings of “traditional” and “authentic” shift as it go through commodification and mummification. I went to Tam-awan Village several times as a tourist from November 2016 to April 2017 and stayed in Baguio City (and in the said museum) as an anthropologist from July to August 2017. I conducted archival researches, individual and group interviews, and ethnographic observations. I have documented the things I observed and studied in the field: I filmed videos of the performances of the Cordillerans, recorded my interviews with the museum performers, some tourists, and other

employees of the museum, and took notes of information that I deemed significant in my study. Everyone who I interviewed during my visits and stay were informed of my intentions and they have granted me permission to document, conduct research and use the information I have gathered for my own purposes.

1.1 LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1.1 Culture Commodification and New Authenticities in Postcolonial Contexts

Tourism plays a big role in constructing an image of people who are marginalized by colonialism. It serves as a venue for greater understanding and awareness of the “othered” population in a society. Furthermore, as Ryan Chris and Michelle Aicken write in their book *Indigenous Tourism: The Commodification and Management of Culture* (2005), tourism can be viewed as a “means by which those people aspire to economic and political power for self advancement, and as a place of dialogue between and within differing worldviews” (p. 4). Chris and Aicken (2005) expound on this argument by discussing the reasons behind Australian Aboriginal people’s exhibition of their festivals to narrate a “counter story” to colonial histories (p. 4). Since the aboriginal people have been culturally marginalized and economically dislodged, promoting their culture and heritage would consequently mean commodifying their way of living in order to survive and adapt to the modern capitalist system (Chris and Aicken, 2005, p. 6).

Survival, as Cambridge Dictionary defines it, means, “continuing to exist” or “wanting to continue to exist.”⁴ The desire to survive arises when something threatens to end one’s

⁴ www.dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary

existence. Marginalized cultures are always on the verge of disappearance in highly globalized, capitalistic societies and hence, the need for preserving their cultures. Sylvia Kleinert, in her article *‘Keeping up the Culture’: Gunai Engagements with Tourism* (2012), examines how assimilation through tourism becomes a means for Aboriginal culture’s survival. Kleinert (p. 86) explains in her article how the Aboriginal tourism, on the one hand, signifies “encounter with a ‘primitive’ other” for the tourist or non-aborigines, and on the other hand, “keeping up the culture” for the aborigines themselves. Kleinert (2012) also provides an explanation to the role of tourism in the recognition and representation of the previously unrecognized and unrepresented in the Australian national discourse (p. 86). Tourism, according to Kleinert (2012), “provides a critical insight into the representation and recognition of aboriginal identities at a time when assimilation policies sought to render aborigines invisible” (p. 86). In a similar fashion, Tam-awan Village embraces the role in promoting the marginalized Cordilleran culture. Cordilleran culture, as I have mentioned earlier, has long been marginalized not just by the Westerners but also by the dominating lowlanders, who occupy most of the seats in the Philippine national government. Tam-awan Village believes that in its own way, through exhibiting Cordilleran culture, conducting national workshops, and hosting activities that raises awareness and involvement among Cordillerans, they are able to keep the Cordilleran culture alive and make other Filipinos gain a deeper appreciation of such culture. But what Kleinert failed to see in her research about some consequences of keeping up an indigenous culture, which I will elaborate in my research, is the fact that preserving and promoting marginalized culture could also reinforce exclusion. Exclusion, both as a cause and effect of culture commodification, will only be partly discussed ⁵ to show how such phenomenon affects meanings of “tradition” and “authenticity.” As I have witnessed several times in my fieldwork in Tam-awan Village, in

⁵ Discussing the inclusion-exclusion issue will be a different topic altogether.

spite of the pro-Cordilleran objectives of the museum, the presentation of the rituals and life of the Cordillerans in the museum has instead promoted tourist gaze. Such gaze logically encourages the continuation of the colonial stereotypes of and among the Cordillerans and thus essentially defeating the intended purpose of the museum.

Consequently, commodification and objectification of culture and the continuation of the colonial stereotypes result to the transformation of a community's structure. E. Wanda George and Donald Reid explain in their article *The Power of Tourism: A Metamorphosis of Community Culture* (2005) that culture commodification logically results in the death of the traditions and the birth of a new culture based on the icons of the traditional one (p. 88). Tourism commodification involves a two-fold process. The first process, according to George and Reid (2005), entails summarizing the "long-standing culture into series of icons and markers" which often is revisionist and romanticized in nature to appeal to the tourists (p. 93). The mummification process will then follow as the represented culture "gets frozen in time and subsequently is no longer a living, changing, and adapting culture" (George and Reid, 2005, p. 93). This is what they describe as the "death-rebirth-like process," which reproduces a culture founded not on the constructs of the "original culture" but on survival (George and Reid, 2005, p. 88). In presenting the case of Tam-awan Village, I will see if commodification of culture leads to the same results as described by George and Reid. However, George and Reid's article primarily centers on a culture's vulnerability. They took the discussion further as they posited that while local culture could be a community's most valuable asset, commodification of it may also "impede a community's efforts to achieve sustainability" and leads to exploitation (George and Reid, 2005, p. 88). The choice of words of the authors shows their negative perception on commodification; a perception that I will not share in this thesis. My discussion on the phenomenon of culture commodification will

revolve around the shifts of meanings or the discourses of “tradition,” “modernity,” and “authenticity.”

Ruth Ellen Gruber’s *Beyond Virtually Jewish: New Authenticities and Real Imaginary Spaces in Europe* (2009) proves to be helpful in setting George and Reid’s “death-rebirth-like process” in the discourse of authenticity. In her discussion of both the “‘virtually Jewish’ and ‘imaginary western’ realms,” (p. 489) she brings to mind the concern on authenticity on spaces that simulates the past through the creation of physical spaces that recreates imagined past environments. In her work, she starts her discussion about “new authenticities” by referring to Umberto Eco’s “Travels in Hyperreality” (p. 490) as she sees the described recreation as a necessity to absorb history. She writes, quoting Umberto Eco, “for historical information to be absorbed, it has to assume the aspect of reincarnation” (p. 490). To her, this reincarnation leads to “instances where ‘absolute reality is offered as real presence’” (p. 490). Then in quoting Umberto Eco she takes the discussion of the virtually Jewish and the imaginary Wild West phenomena a step further by asserting that these two things deal with constructs or reconstructions, which are often stereotypes of what was being signified (p. 490). Gruber (2009) perfectly sums up the framework that my thesis upholds when I discuss the birth of a new culture:

I believe that what we actually have is the creation of “new authenticities” – things, places, and experiences that in themselves are real, with all the trappings of reality, but are quite different from the “realities” on which they are modeled or that they are attempting to evoke. This process, which can be seen as “creating” something new in itself rather than “re-creating” something that once existed, has led to the formation of its own models, stereotypes, modes of behavior, and even traditions (p. 490-491).

Similarly, David Lowenthal, in his book *The Past is a Foreign Country* (1985), also refers to “imagined pasts” in his discussion of nostalgia and the humanity’s “age-old dream of

recovering or returning to the past” (p. xix). Retrieving or reliving the past has long been a major preoccupation of people and because of this phenomenon it has become a trend to reincarnate past life (p. 18-19) and profit from nostalgia (p. 4). But how can we relive the past when the past is lived in a context of its own? This irony is brilliantly captured by Lowenthal (1985) as he writes:

However faithfully we preserve, however authentically we restore, however deeply we immerse ourselves in bygone times, life back then was based on ways of being and believing incommensurable with our own. The past’s difference is, indeed, one of its charms: no one would yearn for it if it merely replicated the present. But we cannot help but view and celebrate it through present-day lenses (p. xvi).

Lowenthal, in a sense, also describes the rebirth process I was describing earlier. Since the past is a foreign country, in “preserving the past” with the objective of “reliving” it, you do not necessarily relive the past but rather you experience and celebrate the present – a present which merely uses references from an imagined, reconstructed past.

1.1.2 On Identity, Authenticity, Tradition and Performances

To make studying of the discourses of “tradition,” “modernity,” and “authenticity” feasible, it is necessary to identify observable manifestations of those three concepts. A big part of the discussion of “tradition,” “modernity,” and “authenticity” in this thesis will revolve around the performances of tradition by the Tam-awan Village performers, for it is them who actually make the museum a “living” one. For this reason observing performances of ethnicity and social identity in ethnic tourism destinations like the Tam-awan Village makes a good case in understanding the notions of authenticity and tradition. To set my discussion about the Tam-awan Village performers and the online discourse on the concepts of

authenticity, tradition, and performances, it would be necessary to situate these concepts in its bigger sociological discourse.

Steph Lawler, in her book *Identity: Sociological Perspectives* (2008), explains how the West creates a distinction between “being an (authentic) identity” and “doing an identity (performing)” (p. 101) and debunks it by citing the works of several scholars, most notably Erving Goffman and Judith Butler, as both Goffman and Butler see identity as something that is always done and achieved, rather than innate (Lawler, 2008, p. 104). For instance, in addressing the issue on “being an identity (authenticity),” Lawler echoes Goffman as she explains why it is wrong to distinguish between ‘true’ and ‘false’ performances. Lawler (2008) argues that the distinction should instead be between “convincing and unconvincing performances: between those that ‘work’ and those that do not” (p. 107). Ethnic performances, regardless of its commitment or detachment to older traditions, are still ethnic performances. Authenticity of performances only surfaces as a concern to tourists or museumgoers when their expectations and perspectives of “authentic” indigenous rituals and dances are not met, and thus, become unconvinced of the performance they witness.

This tension between convincing and unconvincing performances is a result of differing perspective of tradition among those who perform the culture and those who witness the performed culture. As Richard Jenkins writes in his book *Social identity* (1996), internal and external dialectic impacts people’s social identification. Hence, it could be understood that perspectives on ethnic performances, which I treat as a significant determinant of a social identity, is generally affected by the discourses that are both internal and external to one’s culture.

“Authenticity” of the performance of the Cordilleran dancers are also questioned when the younger Cordillerans themselves deviate from the “original” Cordilleran rituals and dances (i.e. reducing a two hour ritual to 15 minutes). But as I argue, indigenous rituals or dances, whenever performed by younger generations of Cordillerans in a manner that do not adhere to the way rituals or dances are performed by older generations, remain to be a manifestation of Cordilleran identity. For everything that is performed, whether staged or not, are constitutive of one’s “true” identity. I draw this logic from Butler’s argument about Rivière’s theory of “femininity as masquerade” and Goffman’s dramaturgy. Judith Butler, in her book *Gender Trouble* (1990), questions what is being masked by the masquerade (p. 71) and posits that, “genuine womanliness and the ‘masquerade’ are the same (p. 72). She explains that, “the mask does not hide, but constitutes the person” (Lawler, 2008, p. 114) and this somehow reiterates Goffman’s dramaturgy, as Goffman argues that performances, far from masking the “true person”, are what make us persons (Lawler, 2008, p. 106).

For the Cordillerans, changing the way by which a ritual or dance is performed is in a sense a form of negotiating one’s identity. Negotiating one’s identity as well as embodying or rejecting stereotypes contribute to how identity or ethnicity is performed for an audience. Carol Silverman, in her book *Romani Routes: Cultural Politics and Balkan Music in Diaspora* (2012), explains how Romani identity is stereotyped, negotiated and performed in the context of capitalism and transnational migration. Silverman’s narrative on how Romani performers negotiate their identity and strategically use stereotypes (and at the same time resist certain representations of themselves) in their performances (p. 7) will be useful in understanding the process of commodification of the Cordilleran culture.

Negotiating one's identity also creates shift in meanings of tradition. Analyzing these shifts has been done by Analyn Salvador-Amores in her book *Tapping Ink, Tattooing identities: Tradition and Modernity in Contemporary Kalinga Society, North Luzon, Philippines* (2013), where she deconstructed the meanings of "tradition," "modern," and "authentic" in the context of the "transformation and engagement of the Kalinga tattoos with technology, mobility, diaspora, and globalization" (p. 8). Meanings of "tradition" and "modern," as Salvador-Amores (2013) describes, "shifted in mutual interaction in the context of the Butbut tattoos" (p. 8). I treat her book as a useful reference in dealing with the discourses on tradition, modernity, and authenticity in the Philippine setting. Salvador-Amores, in defining tradition, quotes Handler and Linnekin (1984), "tradition resembles less an artefactual assemblage than a process of thought – an ongoing interpretation of the past" (p. 274) and links it with Wagner's (1975) definition that it "involves a continual process of self-modification or "dialectical invention" (p. 9). She looks at tradition as something fluid and dynamic as it changes in time, depending on the cultural, social, and economic needs of the bearers of such traditions (Salvador-Amores, 2013, p. 8-9). Commodification of culture, in a sense, is a manifestation of tradition's continuous revival or reinvention (Salvador-Amores, 2013, p. 10).

What also captured my interest in studying issues on the authenticity of commodified culture or heritage is the contradiction between the fluidity of tradition and "the sense of timelessness of authenticity" (Salamandra, 2004, p. 16). But in the same way, like tradition, the definition of authenticity tends to be fluid as well. Christa Salamandra, in her book, *A New Old Damascus: Authenticity and Distinction in Urban Syria* (2004), provides different ways of defining and interpreting authenticity, depending on who uses, receives, needs, or determines authenticity. For instance, authenticity "becomes a means of controlling representation" in

the context of identity politics (Salamandra, 2004, p. 16) while in the context of Western art markets, authenticity relates to “authentic primitive pieces” which are “untouched by history and contact with the West” (Salamandra, 2004, p. 16). In connecting my work with Salamandra’s framework, in Tam-awan Village, as I will explain further in the next chapters of my thesis, I found out that the performers of the commodified Cordilleran culture and their audiences would have different take on the authenticity (or inauthenticity) of the performers’ cultural performances. In this thesis, I also trace various ways of constructing and determining “authenticities” in the different forms of commodified Cordilleran culture.

1.1.3 Analyzing Online Discourses of Authentic and Traditional Performances

Since a section in this research will be dedicated on analyzing the online discourse of authenticity which the videos of the performances of the Tam-awan Village performers has generated, it would then be necessary to discuss works which I will refer to in analyzing the online discourse of “authentic” and “traditional” performance: Jean Baudrillard’s *Simulacra and Simulation* (1981) and Stuart Hall’s *Encoding/Decoding* (1999).

In this thesis I treat YouTube as a constructed world where cultural materials are transformed into online texts whenever they are documented and posted. Jean Baudrillard’s *Simulacra and Simulation* (1981) challenges the notion of the “true” and the “real.” In his work, he invalidates the distinction between the object and its representation and argues that constructed worlds have no referent in any “reality” except their own (p. 6-7). His claims put “reality” into question especially when a cultural material or representation is constructed online. Since reality of constructed texts is self-referential, it can be argued that the “authenticity” of “traditional” performances, when posted and discussed online, are also self-

referential. Hence, those who participate in the production and reproduction of the online discourse of authentic cultural/traditional performance, regardless of its offline referent, perceive the online discourse of such performance as the “real” definition of an authentic cultural/traditional performance.

Self-referential reality of constructed texts could also be analyzed using Stuart Hall’s *Encoding/Decoding* (1999) since “the 'message form' is the necessary 'form of appearance' of an event (p. 509) and the meaning of this message is affected by its medium and the structures in which the message originated and in which it is received. While Hall focuses on the equivalence (or the lack of it) of meanings in transmitting messages from the source to its receiver and discusses how these messages are interpreted from three different positions namely the dominant-hegemonic, negotiated, and oppositional, his work remains to be relevant in my study for it provides a perspective which enables media scholars to understand how meanings of texts could be understood in the message or text’s and the encoders’ positionality. As Hall (1999) argues, the signifiers and the way they signify could be observed as fragments of ideology (p. 513). Such is the case for the videos of the Tam-awan Village Performers – the way netizens comment on and interpret their performances are reflective of the netizens’ ideology. Picking up from Hall, I argue that what is regarded as authentic by netizens mainly depend on their positionality in decoding the documented and/or posted videos of the Cordilleran performances.

1.2 Methodology

As I build on Gruber’s “new authenticities,” in this thesis I adopt George and Reid’s usage of commodification and mummification processes in looking at tourism, and use critical

analysis in reading the shifts of meanings of and deconstructing the concepts of “traditional” and “authentic” in those two processes. I will discuss how Cordilleran culture is commodified in Tam-awan Village and see how the museum and the Cordillerans construct meanings of “traditional” and “authentic” in the commodification phase and reinterprets them in the mummification phase. I will also examine other Filipinos’ (especially those who visited the museum or has seen and commented on the videos of the performances of the Tam-awan Village performers on YouTube) idea of “traditional” and “authentic” and see if there are intersection and/or disconnection with the museum and the Cordillerans’ meanings of these two words. I will explain how the use of references from older traditions, when situated in the context of commodification, leads to the production of new authenticities.

While I will focus much on what is contemporary, I also aim to contextualize my deconstructionist reading of the meanings of “traditional” and “authentic” in the post/colonial background of Baguio City. This is to ensure that my research is grounded in the time and space that the commodification and mummification process I will describe is situated. This is also to recognize the fact that the country’s long colonial history has affected Filipinos’ general conception of “traditional and “authentic” and thus sets a classical dichotomy between what is “traditional” and “modern.” Following Salvador-Amores, I will also debunk this dichotomy as I treat tradition in this thesis as something fluid – a component of a culture that constantly changes over time.

As I have mentioned earlier, I have been to Tam-awan Village in several occasions both as a tourist and as an anthropologist. I entered the museum as a tourist several times, revisiting sites, artifacts, and artworks that the museum’s map identifies as places or things to appreciate. I would sometimes do the tour alone when I wanted to do a deeper examination of

what was being exhibited. I then followed groups of visitors and at times made friends with them to observe how they interact with the things they consume in the museum. I also joined other visitors in watching performances held in the museum and even participated in the dances in instances that the performers invited the crowd to dance with them. In July to August 2017, I revisited the museum and introduced myself as anthropologist/researcher. I rented an “authentic” Cordilleran hut inside the museum and stayed there to do an ethnographic research for a month. I spent most of my time sharing experiences with or observing the museumgoers, eating and chatting with the museum employees, especially the performers, and appreciating the harmony of nature, culture, music, and art in the said museum. On top of asking permission to use the information that I will be collecting from them, I have also informed them of the documentation I have done as a tourist.

Nevertheless, even though I make a distinction between my visits as a “tourist” and as an “anthropologist,” it must be noted that I also observed the museum as an anthropologist at times when I participated as a tourist. Participant observation enables researchers to learn about the “activities of the people under study in the natural setting” through “observing and participating in those activities” on a daily basis (Kawulich, 2005). As I interact with the performers and museum employees and administrators, I was able to observe their activities and examine several modes of commodification they consciously and unconsciously conduct. I was also able to internalize the narrative that the museum created for its visitors and connected it to both the museum’s and the visitors’ conception of the “traditional” and “authentic.”

A month of doing ethnography also enabled me to identify personal, historical, sociological, and economic factors, which made the said commodification inevitable among members of

the Cordilleran community. Conducting selective and focused observations helped me see Cordillerans' perspective with regard to their active participation, negotiation, and collaboration in the production of a commodified and mummified Cordilleran culture. I also conducted several semi-structured interviews with the tourists, Tam-awan Village performers and other museum employees with the objective of collecting more qualitative data. I employed the semi-structured interview as one of my methods to ask my interviewee/s open-ended questions. Drawing from Lioness Ayres (2012), semi-structured interview is preferred for two reasons: (1) semi-structured interviews give researchers "more control over the topics of the interview" because in contrast to unstructured interviews, it allow researchers to come up with questions before meeting the interviewee/s, and (2) in semi-structured interviews there are "no fixed range of responses to each question" compared to structured interviews that use closed questions. Based on my experience, semi-structured interviews give me a better understanding of my interviewees' perspectives and motivations because in spite of the fact that my guide questions create an outline for inquiry, interviewee/s had more freedom to express their thoughts in their own terms and hence make me know more than what I just asked.

Since it is also important to understand how "authenticity" of the Cordilleran culture becomes questionable among those who consume the commodified culture (for it also adds up to the construction of what "traditional" or "authentic" culture is for Filipinos), I have also used YouTube videos posted by Filipinos that show the performance of the Tam-awan Village performers. By analyzing the comments sections in several uploaded documentation of the dancer's performances on YouTube and by cross-referencing those to the interviews I have conducted I will be explaining how performances become inauthentic or unconvincing to some Filipinos. Other manifestations of the commodification of the Cordilleran culture such

as the sale of replicas of their gods and other icons and its relation to the “authenticity” concerns will also be addressed in this thesis.

CHAPTER 2: SELLING THE CORDILLERAN CULTURE IN A “LIVING” MUSEUM

Tam-awan Village, situated in the northwestern outskirts of Baguio City, is a “living museum” visualized to promote community awareness and showcase indigenous Cordilleran customs and traditions. The brainchild of Filipino artists and philanthropists, most notably, National Artist Benedicto “BenCab” Cabrera, the museum does not only exhibit Cordilleran art and make you experience sleeping in an “authentic” Cordilleran house; it also gives you a picture of a typical highlander village where you can experience snippets of their indigenous festivities and dances alike.

Chanum Foundation, Inc. founded the museum with the installation of “authentic” Cordilleran houses in the land where it currently stands, with the vision of creating a typical Cordilleran village accessible to “lowlanders who have yet to visit the interiors of the Cordillera” (Kasilag, 1996, p. 1). The first three Cordilleran huts in the museum, as the Chanum Foundation explains in their website, were transported from Banga-an, Ifugao and were reconstructed in Tam-awan Village. They boast that they solely used original materials in rebuilding the huts and it was the “traditional artisans” who “reconstructed the houses and laid them out resembling the design of a traditional Cordillera Village” (www.tam-awanvillage.com/welcome). Presently, they house nine Cordilleran huts, all of which are named after the areas where the museum acquired them. From the province of Ifugao, they acquired the Bangaan hut, Anaba hut, Batad hut, Dukligan hut, Kinakin hut, and Nagor hut and from the province of Kalinga they got the Luccong (see **figure 1**) and Bugnay huts (www.tam-awanvillage.com/welcome). Those who desire to experience living in these huts are accommodated by the museum for the cost of 500 PHP (approximately 10 USD) per night

per person. The only exception is the Bugnay hut, which serves as one of the village's galleries (www.tam-awanvillage.com/welcome).



Figure 1. The Luccong hut (ca. 1923), which classifies as a binayon hut (traditional octagonal hut), is one of the three surviving binayon houses in the Butbut area in the Cordillera Region. According to the plaque displayed in front of the hut, this binayon hut was considered a dwelling place for the rich Kalingas (one of the ethnic groups who live in the Cordillera). Photo taken by the author.

Other than the huts, it also features a Dap-ay (see **figure 2**), a stone-paved gathering place where elders from the Cordilleras usually discuss important village concerns (Kasilag, 1996, p. 2). The museum also has the following: an art gallery and crafts shop, a coffee shop, a fishpond, eco-tours for trekkers, martial arts demonstrations, art workshops, livelihood and crafts demonstrations such as weaving, paper-making, woodcarving, printmaking, bamboo crafts, rice-wine making, solar drawing, and batik printing (Kasilag, 1996, p. 2). Most importantly, the museum also gives the tourists opportunities to interact with Cordillera performers and artists. To experience all these, adults are asked to pay 50 PHP (approximately 1 USD) for the entrance and 30 PHP and 20 PHP for students and children respectively. For the workshops, people are charged 450 PHP (approximately 9 USD) each.



Figure 2. A copy of a Dap-ay. People are allowed to build a bonfire in this area. Building a bonfire will cost the visitors 120 PHP (approximately 2.40 USD). Photo taken by the author.

Different modes of culture's commodification of in Tam-awan Village could be observed right from the very entrance (which also serves as its exit too) until the cultural show area of the village. In the entrance of the museum, museumgoers are welcomed by artworks such as the "Gecko over Tam-awan," a relief piece with the Tam-awan logo flanked by two lizards (lizards believed to be a Cordilleran symbol of prosperity and good fortune) and the "Pat-ong," a relief piece that shows a traditional Cordilleran dance that is performed with a traditional musical instrument called *gang-za* (a local gong), both giving museumgoers an idea of what to see and expect inside Tam-awan Village (see **figure 3**). The next thing that the visitors will see as they head to the cultural show area and the café is the pile of Cordilleran traditional clothes, which they are encouraged to borrow and wear in exchange of some "donations" (see **figure 4**). In front of it is the souvenir shop that sells Cordilleran clothes and linen, Cordilleran musical instruments, key chains and refrigerator magnets that features reliefs of Cordilleran people, huts, and gods (see **figures 5 and 6**). Miniature replicas

of their gods and deities are also being sold (see **figure 7**). Beside the souvenir shop are art galleries (see **figure 8**) that house paintings about the Cordillerans whose prices range from 6,000 PHP (approximately 120 USD) to 50,000 PHP (approximately 1000 USD).



Figure 3. The “Gecko over Tam-awan” (bottom left) and the “Pat-ong” (bottom right). Photo taken by the author.



Figure 4. Tourists are expected to give donations when they try these traditional clothes on. In other tourist destinations in Baguio City such as the Mines View Park and Botanical Garden, people are required to pay at least 50 PHP (approximately 1 USD) to wear them. Photo taken by the author.



Figure 5. Tam-awan Village's souvenir shop. Photo taken by the author.



Figure 6. Refrigerator magnets that have reliefs of things that represents the Cordilleras. Photo taken by the author.



Figure 7. A miniature reproduction of the Ifugao rice god, Bul-ul. In the museum it is generally regarded as a Cordilleran god. Photo taken by the author.



Figure 8. Inside the Bugnay Gallery. Photo taken by the author.

After passing through the souvenir shop and the art galleries, museumgoers will reach the cultural show area where they can choose to stay in the “Ugnayan Gallery” (literally translated as the gallery to connect, see **figure 9**) and wait for the young Cordillerans who call themselves as the Tam-awan Village In-House Performing Group to exhibit traditional dances (see **figure 10**). These Cordillerans perform in the museum every Saturday and features dances that come from different ethnic groups in the Cordillera Region. The Tam-awan Village In-House Performing Group stay in one corner for almost the entire duration of the museum hours, waiting for visitors to gather around them. Once a large enough group has formed, they would begin playing their traditional instruments and perform segments of their ritualistic dances. During the encounter, museumgoers are encouraged to surround the performers and as I noticed, most of the audience would stay in the Ugnayan Gallery for it offers a good view for taking pictures and/or videos of the Cordilleran performers.

Also, as I have observed, the Tam-awan Village In-House Performing Group would often perform three to four dances per session. They commonly perform Kalinga's "Sakpaya," and some community dances such as Ifugao's "Dinnuy-a," Balbalan, Kalinga's "Tadek," and Mountain Province's "Ballangbang."⁶ In the last performance, which usually is the "Ballangbang," members of the audience are invited by the Tam-awan Village In-House Performing Group to participate and dance with them. After the performance, the Cordilleran performers would tell the audience that it would be fine to take pictures with them (see **figure 11** and **12**). Pictorials, as I have observed, also creates opportunity for the museumgoers to give donations to the performers.



Figure 9. The Ugnayan Gallery. Photo taken by the author.

⁶ Ballangbang is the most common dance in the Mountain Province. In this dance, there are five or more male gong players female dancers could range from a single dancer to more than 10 (www.icbe.eu/accordion-b/level-2/677-ethnic-dances-in-mountain-province). The male gong players move in a circular direction as each participant synchronizes their steps with other dancers. The women dancers follow the male leader but if the females have their own female leader, they are expected to follow their the female one.



Figure 10. The Tam-awan Village In-House Performing Group. Photo taken by the author.



Figure 11. A tourist taking a “groufie” (a group selfie) with the Tam-awan Village In-House Performing Group. Photo taken by the author.



Figure 12. The Cultural Show Area and the Ugnayan Gallery are usually more crowded at peak hours. Photo taken by the author.

Note that in this thesis a separate discussion will be dedicated for the performers for it is them who primarily make the museum a “living” one. Also, much of the authenticity concerns that I problematize in this thesis revolve around their performances and presentations.

As the visitors near the end of the tour in Tam-awan Village, they are expected to have a broader picture of the Cordilleran culture, which as I argue in this thesis, often results in the reinforcement of the colonial stereotypes⁷ of the Cordillerans and the continuation of the preexisting ignorance of most lowland Filipinos of the differences of the various ethnic groups in the Cordillera Region. Meanwhile, in analyzing the map of the Tam-awan Village (see **figure 13**), the commodification of the Cordilleran culture mostly happens in the space near the entrance/exit (lower right part of the map). Activities and material culture that can be bought are strategically located in that area since most of the foot traffic is directed in that area.

⁷ Details of the stereotypes associated to the Cordillerans will be discussed in the next chapter.

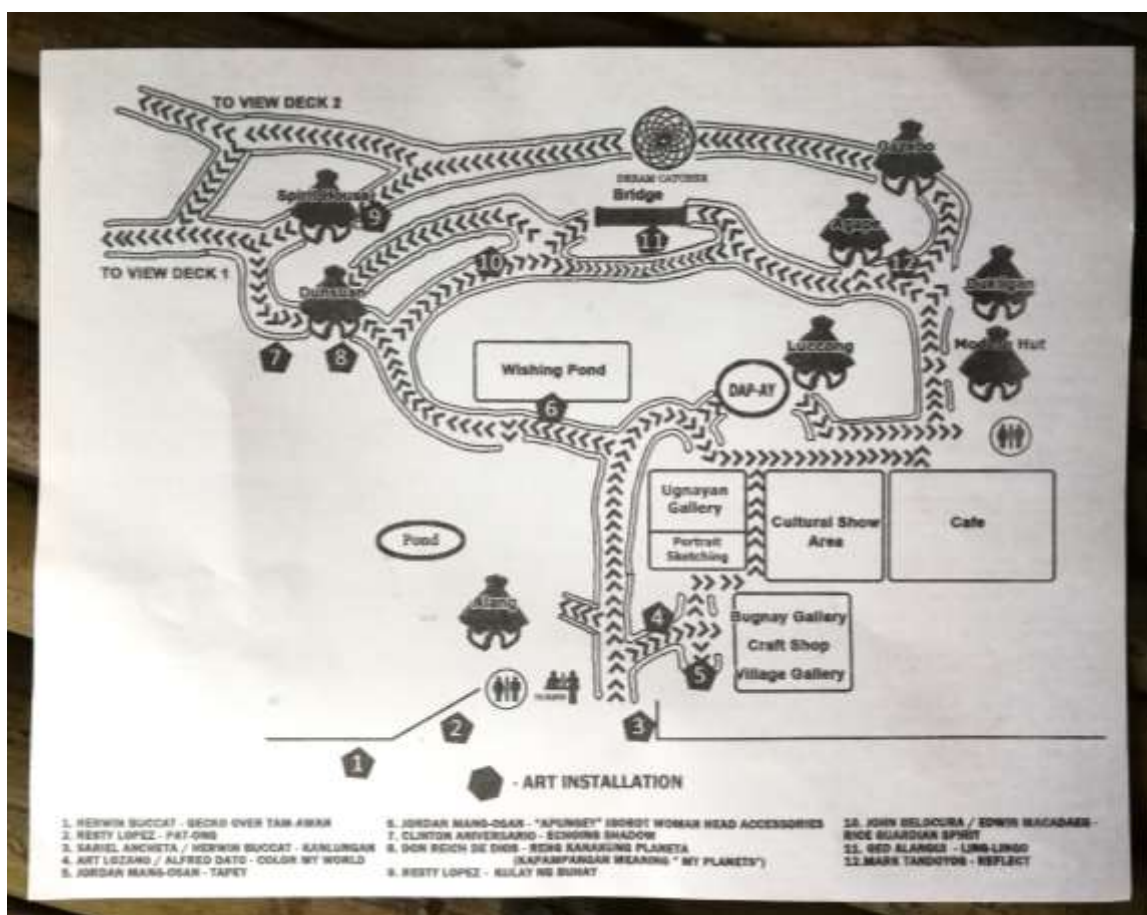


Figure 13. The map of the Tam-awan Village that the museum provides to its visitors. Photo taken by the author.

2.1 Selling the Inauthentic?

In their website, the Tam-awan Village emphasizes the authenticity of their Cordilleran huts.

The museum (www.tam-awanvillage.com/welcome/), in describing the huts that are in their possession:

An Ifugao house is compact and though deceptively simple, its architecture is quite sophisticated. Built by clever mortise makers without nails or hardware, it exemplifies the exactness of Ifugao construction.

Even in their brochures, visitors are warned, “our huts are all authentic and likewise follow Cordilleran architecture which may have lower ceilings and beams” (Tam-awan Village, n.d.). But staying in the Dukligan hut for a month made me notice that nails were actually used by those who reconstructed the hut (see **figure 14**).



Figure 14. Nails I found in one of the Dukligan hut’s beams. Photo taken by the author.

If there are probable authenticity issues on the huts, the commercial nature of the performances of the Tam-awan Village In-House Performing Group also put their exhibition in the same bad light. Furthermore, Cordillerans in reality no longer wear traditional clothes on a normal basis. People from the Cordillera Region wear clothes that any other “modern” person would wear these days. The practice among Cordillerans nowadays is to wear their traditional clothes only when they would perform for a public. In the museum, whether it is raining or not, the young Cordillerans who perform for the museumgoers wear the traditional

clothes the entire day. They only change to their typical daily clothes when the last visitor exits the museum.



Figure 15. The Tam-awan Village In-House Performing Group, dancing for an audience in spite of the ugly weather. Photo taken by the author.

These are some of my initial concerns and findings on Tam-awan Village’s claim to authenticity when I did my fieldwork in the museum in July and August 2017. Inauthenticity, as Alex Neill (1999) defines, “invariably marks flaw or failing in whatever it characterizes” (p. 197). But after a month of stay, I realized that the question on the authenticity of the commodified Cordilleran culture should not center on its “flaws.” The real issue on

authenticity does not lie on the existence of nails in “authentic” Cordilleran huts, in the clothes that they encourage people to wear (in exchange of some donations), or in the fact that the Cordillerans no longer wear the clothes their ancestors normally did. The real concern lies on how authenticity should be perceived in the context of a fast-changing world and how the use of the Cordilleran as a collective name to pertain to all cultures and traditions that originates from the entire region affects authenticity.

In the next chapter I will first address the need to understand the Cordilleran’s use and appropriation of the “Cordilleran identity” in displaying their culture. Doing so will help in tracing how the meaning of authenticity and tradition changes in our contemporary world.

CHAPTER 3: THE CORDILLERAN: AN ADOPTED ARTIFICIAL TOTALITY

Discussing issues of authenticity on the Cordilleran tradition as exhibited in Tam-awan Village entail understanding the following: (1) the colonial roots of the name, Cordilleran, and (2) the role and effect of commodification of material culture and performed tradition in the adoption of the Cordilleran identity. Once the context of the adopted identity has been established, the flaws or the truthfulness of the exhibited Cordilleran culture in Tam-awan Village would be much more traceable.

3.1 The Problematic Colonial Roots

Cordilleran is a collective name for all people belonging to different ethnic groups in the Cordilleran Administrative Region, the mountainous region of the Northern Philippines (see **figure 16**). The Cordillerans come from different provinces in the said region with each province having its own dominant ethnic group: Itnegs in Abra, Isnags in Apayao, the Ibalois, Kankanaeys, and Kalanguya in Benguet, the Ifugaos in Ifugao, the Kalingas in Kalinga, the Kankanaeys, Aplai, Balangao, and Bontoks ⁸ in Mountain Province (Belen, 1990, p. 7). The artificiality of the name must be noted for it did not originate from the local population. Outsiders among the Cordillerans, particularly Western colonizers, coined the term Cordilleran and it consequently comes with some stereotypes created by the Westerners about the indigenous people. Interestingly, in spite of being an independent nation for almost a century now, because of the colonial origins of this collective name, the term Cordilleran continues to carry colonial stereotypes among Filipinos.

⁸ The name Bontok pertains to the people while Bontoc pertains to the city where most Bontoks reside.



Figure 16. The map of the Cordilleran Administrative Region. Taken from: www.ati.da.gov.ph/ati-car/content/area-coverage

The fascination for and perceptions with Cordilleran culture has been greatly influenced by the country's colonial past. Western colonialism in the Philippines, as well as in other former Western colonies, has created various depictions of indigenous peoples such as "primitive," "backward," "unhygienic," "barbaric," and "savage." Colonial governments contrasted Western civilization and "modernity" with the "primitive" and "backward" culture of their subjects to conveniently justify their colonial agendas to conquer and modernize. Such depictions have also exoticized⁹ the indigenous population in the country. For instance, when the Americans showcased their newly acquired Philippines in the St. Louis World Fair in Missouri in 1904 (see **figure 17**), the Cordillerans, who they described as "dog-eating Igorots," were made to perform their rituals and other aspects of their culture, which were then portrayed as the Filipino culture (Clevenger, 2000). While the intention of the U.S. in

⁹ Carbonell (2000) defines exoticism as displacement, the strangeness enacted by difference that stands as a representation for the whole (p. 51).

hosting the exhibit was to show the world that they had become an imperial power (Sit, 2008, p. 1), with the way they exhibited the Cordillerans they have created a stereotype of the Filipino people: a group of brown-skinned, dog-eating, primitive, and uncivilized half-naked men and women from the Pacific. Visitors of the St. Louis World Fair were not sufficiently informed that the Cordilleran culture is only one among many cultures in the Philippines.



Figure 17. One of the souvenirs during the 1904 St. Louis World Fair. It features an Igorot (a Cordilleran) wearing his traditional costume. Taken from: www.asamnews.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/1904-St.-Louise-Worlds-Fair-Philippines1.jpeg

Meanwhile, among Filipinos the same perception on indigenous Cordilleran culture prevailed in the 1900s, especially to those who received American colonial education in the country and/or had access to Western media texts. Because of the American colonial propaganda, Filipinos learned the colonial depictions of the Cordillerans and, as I will argue in this thesis, such depictions, among others, have influenced their expectations and notions of an “authentic” Cordilleran culture.

Adoption of the colonial “primitive” stereotypes of the highlanders by the Cordillerans themselves is particularly manifested during “live” exhibition of Cordilleran dances in Tam-awan Village. While the traditional dance itself acts as the core of the exhibited “primitivity,” the wearing of traditional clothes and the use of traditional musical instruments help them in projecting a “primitive” image of themselves. As I gathered from the interviews I have conducted with some museumgoers, the entire performance are perceived as truly “Cordilleran” since the presentation contains most of their expected elements of things that are distinctly highlander or “Cordilleran.”¹⁰

The demeanor of lowlander museumgoers toward the dance and the performers when they participate in the dances are also indicative of how much they believe the authenticity of the performance that they experience. Since they perceive the performance as true to Cordilleran traditions, the lowlanders continue to manifest discriminatory attitudes toward the highlanders when they interact with the performers or when they comment on the performances. For instance, I have observed that some museumgoers that participate in the dances actually mock the steps, which the Tam-awan Village In-House Performing Group teaches them. There were some instances when some members of the audience would tease their friends who participate in the performance and laughingly call them “Igorot” (another discriminatory term that pertains to the mountain people). Following Goffman’s idea on the taken-for-grantedness of communicative rules, here I describe a seamless interaction in playing roles in a way that goes as expected where rules are not contested and questioned by both the performers and the audience.

¹⁰ Interview with tourists, August 12, 2017.

3.2 A Side Note on Culture's Commodification

Though in spite of the negative light that the phenomenon I described earlier shows, as I have observed, the phenomenon swings to the favor of both parties economically: the museum performers for instance have been willing to capitalize on their marginality to earn money, while the museumgoers have been willing to pay and donate money to the performers which may be interpreted as acts to show that they are in a better position in society or perhaps reassure their belongingness in the historically “more-privileged” lowland culture. An interview I conducted last August 12, 2017 with the Tam-awan Village In-House Performing Group confirms my claim. During my fieldwork I found out that those who perform in Tam-awan Village are college students who are mostly from schools in La Trinidad, a town very close to Baguio City. Some of them admitted to me that even though they support the museum’s objective in promoting Cordilleran culture, they primarily see their job as a means to support their studies.¹¹ One of the members who do not want his name to be mentioned in my thesis told me, “I am here for my livelihood because we are students.”¹² They also told me that they don’t see themselves keeping such jobs when they have eventually earned their college degrees.¹³ This kind of perspective toward work in the tourism industry brings to mind Toney Thomas’ discussion on primary and secondary occupation shift in his essay entitled *Rural Tourism in the Vulnerable Economy: The Community Perception* (2009). In this work Thomas (2009) remarks that some communities look at tourism as a “temporary tool for survival” rather than “a major sector of development” (p. 11-12).

¹¹ Interview with Tam-awan Village In-House Performing Group, August 12, 2017.

¹² “Nandito ako para sa kabuhayan dahil estudyante kami.” (Interview with Tam-awan Village In-House Performing Group, August 12, 2017)

¹³ Interview with Tam-awan Village In-House Performing Group, August 12, 2017.

To this end, I argue that it is imperative to understand the Philippines' colonial past for it sets the tone for the commodification of the marginalized cultures in the country. This marginalized culture, when commodified, is consumed by museumgoers and other types of consumers for its authenticity (hence the marketing of the authenticity of the exhibited Cordilleran culture in the museum). Also, it must be emphasized the museum's visitors find authenticity in the "inferiority" and "primitivity" ¹⁴ of the Cordilleran culture. For instance, museumgoers will not be willing to donate money to the Tam-awan Village In-House Performing Group if they are unconvinced with the group's performance of marginality or with their Cordilleran-ness. As I have explained earlier, most of the museumgoers I have spoken with are convinced with the authenticity of the performances and the material culture that are exhibited in the museum for it satisfy their expectation of the culture of the Cordilleran people ¹⁵ – an expectation that has been developed in the context of colonial (mis)education.

The museum's use of the name Cordilleran as an identity does not only give a recall to its colonial roots, but also results in the mixing of different cultures of the various ethnic groups in the Cordilleran region. But in stating the issue on mixing I do not intend to argue that it leads to the exhibition of "inauthentic" materials and tradition in the museum. What I propose in this thesis is that such phenomenon leads to the *production of new authenticities – the birth of a new culture founded on the adoption and negotiation of identities*.

¹⁴ The perspectives created by colonial exoticization of Filipinos, when adopted by Filipinos themselves, reinforce the country's highland-lowland divide. This divide put the lowlanders in a seemingly superior position since unlike the highlanders, they have been subjugated to the Western rule and have been mostly converted to Catholicism and sent to schools and thus, "civilized." For the highlanders (or the Cordillerans), exoticization conducted by Filipinos themselves led to the production and reproduction of their "primitive" stereotypes for centuries

¹⁵ Interview with tourists, August 12, 2017.

3.3 The Creation of New Culture and Authenticities

This section will focus on explaining two key points: (1) the adoption of the “Cordilleran” as an identity and its commodification implied the mixing of all cultures in the Cordillera Region into one and it resulted to the creation of new authenticities, and (2) cultural preservation, when enabled by commodification, results not into the maintenance of the said culture but instead, the birth of a new culture based on the icons and memories of the traditional one.

An outcome of this commodifying and negotiating culture and identity is the fusion of performances, icons, deities, etc. of various ethnic groups into one single entity, the Cordilleran. The Tam-awan Village’s exhibition of Bul-uls or rice gods inside the alang or the Bontoc rice granary (see **figures 18 and 19**) near the exit of the museum could serve as the best example for this phenomenon. While it is true that agriculture is the main economic activity for most ethnic groups in the Cordillera Region, the Bul-ul and the alang actually originate from two different ethnic groups: the Bul-ul comes from the Ifugao, while the Alang is a rice granary of the Bontoks. Tam-awan Village, in this sense, has mixed two different cultures into one exhibit, which they portray as Cordilleran. And as I gathered in my fieldwork, most lowland museumgoers, when they see this display, would not even recognize this “flaw.” They just see it as something distinctly “Cordilleran” – an exhibit that is neither Ifugao nor Bontok. The visitors find it authentic as well, for it meets what they expect as embodiments of the Cordilleran culture.¹⁶

¹⁶ Interview with tourists, August 12, 2017.



Figure 18. An alang (ca. 1950) housing three Bul-uls. Photo taken by the author.



Figure 19. Bul-uls or the rice gods of the Ifugaos. Photo taken by the author.

Outsiders among the Cordillerans who are participants in the production of Cordilleran art in Tam-awan Village also contribute to the reinforcement of the mixed Cordilleran culture. For instance, Tam-awan Village's in-house artists, Art Lozano and Alfred Dato, describe their work "Color My World" (see **figure 20**), a giant lizard, as an artwork inspired by

Cordillerans' belief that a lizard brings luck to people. They explain that it “represents good fortune, long life, and a prosperous livelihood” (Tam-awan Village, n.d.). Adopting this belief, they also tell the museumgoers that the artwork is “set at the main entrance of the village to give good tidings to all who enter as well as blessings to those who leave [the museum]” (Tam-awan Village, n.d.) the museum. According to the artists, lizards could be found in “carved covers including that of coffins in the Mountain Province.” While the artists identify the origin of the carvings from the Mountain Province, they regard the belief as Cordilleran, not as Bontok, which essentially is the biggest ethnic group in the Mountain Province.



Figure 20. The tail of Lozano's and Dato's giant lizard. This artwork is located beside the stairs that leads to the souvenir shop and the art galleries. Photo taken by the author.

The same thing could be said with the dances performed by the Tam-awan Village In-House Performing Group. Even though they mention the source cultures of the dances that they perform, since they are in-house performers of the Tam-awan Village, they collaborate with the museum and automatically adopt the manner in which the museum has decided to

commodify and classify the indigenous cultures. As Dominique Kulallad, the Tam-awan Village In-House Performing Group leader, was explaining to me how Tam-awan Village helps in preserving and promoting their culture, he has also implied that what was being promoted by the museum was a merged Cordilleran culture:

Tam-awan [Village] is a big help because it merges diverse communities that are apart from each other. The place has become a natural reserve. Every aspect of our way of living before can still be experienced. The trend here [in the museum] is like how life was before. It adds to [the museumgoers] knowledge.¹⁷

He explained that showcasing the life in their communities in the past gives museumgoers knowledge about them. Hence, in representing the group's standpoint on the matter of what was being showcased was a merged culture, he told me that they find no issue with how the museum exhibits a merged Cordilleran culture.¹⁸ They have embraced the identity and also expressed no animosity as to how the museum exhibits them as part of the whole Tam-awan Village experience. He told me:

Yes, we are like exhibits, but we are happy with what we do and we are able to showcase our culture.¹⁹

He adds that they find it enjoyable to contribute in changing people's perspective of them:

¹⁷ "Malaki ang tulong ng Tam-awan [Village] dahil [yung] parang diverse na community namin sa magkakalayong lugar, parang pinag-iisa dito. Parang naging natural reserve na rin yung lugar dito. Parang lahat naeexperience pa rin yung buhay noon. Talagang yung trend dito, yung parang buhay dati talaga. Nakakadagdag ng knowledge." (Interview with Dominique Kulallad and the Tam-awan Village In-House Performing Group, August 12, 2017)

¹⁸ Interview with Dominique Kulallad and the Tam-awan Village In-House Performing Group, August 12, 2017.

¹⁹ "Oo parang exhibit kami, pero masaya naman kami sa ginagawa namin at naishoshowcase namin ang kultura namin." (Interview with Dominique Kulallad and the Tam-awan Village In-House Performing Group, August 12, 2017)

It is fun to perform especially when a lot of people are watching. [We see that] People's perspectives about Igorots are changed. Before, we are just seen (as people) with tails and are dirty.²⁰

While other performers admitted that they come to the museum for the earnings they get from performing,²¹ Dominique, in representing the group, asserts that one of their main motivations to dance in front of a public is to assure the continuation of their culture and raise awareness of the Cordilleran culture among outsiders.²² And in so doing, the group has negotiated their identity and accepted an artificial identity.

In embracing this artificial identity, the knowledge that they share to museumgoers about them is no longer the same cultures, which they intended to preserve. Their cultures are presented to visitors as something that come from one source culture. With the manner by which they choose to perform their dances and traditions, (and in the same way the museum presents the Cordilleran culture), they have created a new culture and hence, new authenticity – an authenticity that is rooted not on the structures of their diverse ethnicities but rather on the structures of our modern capitalist society.

But to be effective in producing new authenticities, icons and memories of the traditional one are still appropriated, as it was the case in Tam-awan Village. So in preserving the indigenous culture, what the museum actually did was mummify the culture and in so doing they have

²⁰ Masaya magperform lalo na kapag mas maraming nanonood. [Tingin naming ay] Nag-iiba yung tingin nila sa Igorot. Tingin nila dati may buntot, marumi (Interview with Dominique Kulallad and the Tam-awan Village In-House Performing Group, August 12, 2017).

²¹ Performing ethnic dances proves to be profitable for these young Cordillerans. According to Dominique Kulallad, at the end of their work day they would split among themselves all the money donated by visitors. On regular days, each member would end up bringing home around 500 to 800 PHP (approximately 10 USD to 16 USD). Receiving 500 PHP compensation for a day of hard work is already considered generous in Cordillera Region's standard. During peak seasons (during summer or national holidays), each member receives at least 1500 PHP (approximately 30 USD).

²² Interview with the Tam-awan Village In-House Performing Group, August 12, 2017.

instead created a new culture. Ruth Gruber (2009, p. 490), in describing new authenticities, explains “things, places, and experiences” are in themselves real, with “all the trappings of reality.” Thus, in “re-creating something that once existed,” something new is created – something that leads to “the formation of its own models, stereotypes, modes of behavior, and even traditions” (Gruber, 2009, p. 491).

CHAPTER 4: THE LEGITIMACY AND AUTHENTICITY OF THE PERFORMANCE OF A COMMODIFIED CULTURAL FORM

Drawing from the data I gathered from my fieldwork, it appears that when preservation of a marginalized culture in a postcolonial country such as the Philippines is enabled by commodification and commercialization, one of the most probable actions of the institution exhibiting that culture is to maintain colonial stereotypes to meet the expectations of its consumers. Such is true for the Tam-awan Village In-House Performing Group. Since commodification of their culture has become a tactic to financially survive, the local people has maintained the colonial stereotypes and negotiated their identities by embracing the artificial collective identity. But consequently, commodifying their culture through embracing an artificial identity evokes questions on the authenticity of the showcased culture. Issues on authenticity of the performances of the Tam-awan Village In-House Performing Group mainly center on two interrelated questions: (1) legitimacy of the performers to perform the ethnic dances and (2) the faithfulness of the performances to its origins, both of which I will discuss in this chapter.

4.1 Issues on Legitimacy and Authenticity

The question on the legitimacy of the members in performing traditional ethnic dances is a question of their origin. The composition of the membership of the Tam-awan Village is as complex and diverse as the ethnicities existing in the Cordillera Region. Their current leader, Dominique, a 22 year-old college student who lives in La Trinidad (a town close to Baguio City), traces his roots from the Mountain Province but identifies his parents as Kalinga. Other

members trace their roots from Bontoc, Benguet, and Baguio City. Below is a list of their members who have agreed to have their names, ages, and origins published in my thesis:

Name	Age	Origin
Dominique Kulallad	22	Kalinga
May-Ann Fatoyog	21	Mountain Province and Benguet
Aldrin Chewacheo	21	Bontoc
Ghovie Awingan Bang-towan	23	Baguio City
Johana Joy Tudlong	21	Mountain Province and Benguet
Mark Celo	21	Benguet

Some of them would have mixed origins and this phenomenon might be a case particular to Baguio City and the towns near it. Since there are more opportunities in big, touristic cities or regional centers like Baguio City, it has consistently attracted large numbers of migrants not just from the Cordillera Administrative Region but also from various lowland regions. As a matter of fact, according to a statistics published in 1987 by National Economic Development Authority of the Philippines (NEDA), only one-fourth of the population of Baguio City was born in the area (Prill-Brett, 1996, p. 1). And since several indigenous peoples belonging to different ethnic groups have inhabited the Baguio City, it then follows that employees of different companies or businesses in the city are also multi-ethnic. As my informants claim, because of the multi-ethnic character of the city, a significant number of younger Cordillerans no longer belong to a single ethnic group – it has become a norm for different ethnic groups to intermarry.²³

The varied composition of membership of the Tam-awan Village In-House Performing Group definitely impacts the group in different respects as I have derived from the interviews and observation I have conducted: (1) their ancestry determines the selection of what they

²³ Interview with the Tam-awan Village In-House Performing Group, August 5, 2017.

perform for the museumgoers, and (2) to those who are knowledgeable or who pays attention to the details of their performances, having a member belonging to the ethnic group where the ethnic dance they perform originates from gives legitimacy to their performance. But the merging of different ethnicities in one performing group lead to authenticity issues among essentialist outsiders who have a “better” understanding of the differences of cultures in the Cordilleras. For instance, when their group performs a snippet of a specific ethnic group’s dance (lets say the Kalingas), the authenticity of their performance could be put into question for some members of the group do not necessarily originate from the source culture of the particular dance that has been performed.

But central to the question of legitimacy and authenticity is the question on *who* determines legitimacy and authenticity. The Tam-awan Village In-House Performing Group find themselves as producers of authentic Cordilleran culture because in spite of coming from different ethnic groups in the Cordillera Region, the fact remains that they have embraced the Cordilleran identity as exhibited and embodied in the museum. If the concern on legitimacy and authenticity will be based on the perception of the visitors, as I gathered from my fieldwork, most visitors also consider the performances of the Tam-awan Village In-House Performing Group legitimate, and hence, authentic, since the expectations of the visitors on the performances are usually easily met due to their limited knowledge about the indigenous people of the Cordillera Region. Museumgoers express no concerns as to which tribe or ethnic group each member originates from.²⁴ Museumgoers see them not as individuals who come from different ethnic groups; they view the performers as members of one big ethnic group – they call them Igorots, Cordilleran, or sometimes, Ifugao (confusing the collective

²⁴ Interview with tourists, August 12, 2017.

name Igorot with Ifugao).²⁵ An affirmation of the visitors being convinced with the performance and the legitimacy of the performers are the amount of donation they receive from the audience. Donations, which are collected in what the Tam-awan Village In-House Performing Group call as their “mahiwigang kahon” (translated as “magic box,” see **figure 21**) or “pangkabuhayan package” (literaly translated as “livelihood package”), are given by those visitors who believe that these performers do not possess enough money or resources – a general lowlander view of the members of the ethnic minorities in the Philippines.



Figure 21. The Tam-awan Village Performer’s “magic box.” Photo taken by the author.

Although most people see the performances authentic, its commercial nature also makes some people see inauthenticity in the performances. There are museumgoers that are conscious that the performances are artificial because they know that the dances they experience or witness are supposed to be danced during festivities or special occasions.²⁶

²⁵ Interview with tourists, August 12, 2017.

²⁶ Interview with tourists, August 12, 2017.

This logic of contradiction proves the fluidity of the meaning of authenticity – that it is dynamic and ever changing, a characteristic that could be attributed to its positionality.

But it should also be mentioned that the artificiality of the performance does not only bank on its function in the museum. What the museumgoers do not realize is that what they witness during encounters are just snippets of the “traditional.” For instance, as Dominique ²⁷ shared with me, most young people from his hometown only know one traditional dance. No one taught him the steps of the traditional dances from his hometown; he only learned the steps just by observing the other people or other groups dance during their festivities. Quoting him:

It is like we only know one dance before, just the one from the Mountain Province. In our community, there were many groups. Like we live in Trinidad and there are many groups in Trinidad to whom we learn dances. We are never taught the dance for us to absorb it. In short, we just watch it. When you know the steps a little, and then (we realize) there were lacking (steps), that is when we ask someone to teach as the actual dance. ²⁸

Another member of the group, May-Ann, shares with me that she mostly learned the steps of most traditional dance she performs from observing performances during weddings. ²⁹ In retrospect, the Kalinga dance that Dominique and the other members of his group perform, are steps that they mainly recall from their observations of some traditional dances performed by other groups. While it is true that most cultural learning happens by observation and imitation, what I try to point out in emphasizing the manner by which the Tam-awan Village

²⁷ “Parang iisang sayaw lang alam namin noon, yung Mountain Province lang. Sa community namin, may mga grupo-grupo. Kunwari, nakatira kami sa Trinidad, maraming grupo doon, so doon na namin natutunan yung sayaw. Hindi na talaga tinuturo sa amin para iabsorb. Kumbaga pinapanood na lang namin. Kapag medyo alam mo, tapos may kulang, papaturo mo na lang sa mga mismong nagsasayaw.” (Interview with Dominique Kulallad, August 12, 2017)

²⁸ Interview with Dominique Kulallad and other members of the Tam-awan In-house Performing Group, August 12, 2017.

²⁹ Interview with May-Ann Fatoyog and other members of the Tam-awan In-house Performing Group, August 12, 2017.

In-House Performers learned how to perform the traditional dances of different ethnic groups in the Cordillera Region is that it could be identified as a source of authenticity issue on their performance since they present themselves as the actual bearers of the dances which they perform to the museumgoers.

Add to this the fact that since they are performing in a museum where visitors are not expected to stay for more than an hour, the dancers are then compelled to reduce the “traditional” dance from an hour to five minutes. For instance, the community dance “Ballangbang” could last for several minutes (for as long as the gong players continue to play music), making it a perfect dance for mass participation as people who dances it can join or exit the performance as it goes on. Other males participating in the festivity can also replace tired male gong players. Meanwhile, in the Tam-awan Village, Ballangbang only lasts for almost two minutes, and female visitors can even try playing the gongs. In this context of commodification, I would like to refer again to my earlier point – that the performers essentially create and perform new dances or new traditions – dances or traditions based on the steps and gestures of the older one but at the same time new because it is adjusted and performed for a different purpose.

Interestingly, the nuances in the performances and the classification of the dances of the Tam-awan Village In-House Performing Group are more observed by its consumers when the performances are documented and posted online. As a result, it opens larger discussions on the authenticity of the performance of an ethnic tradition. While there are some videos of Tam-awan Village In-House Performing Group on YouTube where the viewers’ comments reflect the same perception among live audiences on the young Cordillerans’ performances (that there is no doubt that the performance is “truly” Cordilleran or Igorot), it is striking to

see that in the online world, there are also some dominant discourses where in the source culture of the dances that the Tam-awan Village In-House Performing Group perform is criticized or corrected. In the next section, I will discuss how authenticity of Tam-awan Village In-House Performing Group's performances is perceived in an online community created by YouTube.

4.2 Authenticity Issues on Cultural Performances Posted Online

YouTube, as a platform, enables people to have a voice for they envision the world as “a better place when we listen, share and build community through our stories.”³⁰ For thirteen years, it has provided a medium for everyone to post personal, entertainment, or instructional videos where everyone could comment or share their thoughts and insights. For museumgoers, it became a tool for documenting their experience and sharing their experience to a public domain. In this section I will focus on the videos posted by people who have documented the performances of the Tam-awan Village In-House Performing Group, as well as the comments of those people who viewed their documentation, for analyzing these materials also add to the discourse of “authenticity” of the commodified Cordilleran culture.

Most of the videos posted on YouTube usually feature the short dances of the Tam-awan Village In-House Performing Group. Videos that usually receive the highest number of comments are those who commit mistakes in naming the origin of the dance, which the Tam-awan Village In-House Performing Group act. Because of the user-generated nature of YouTube, it appears that people who are knowledgeable of the diversity of the Cordilleran rituals would correct those people who comment wrongly about the performance. Or in some

³⁰ www.youtube.com/yt/about

instances, other users often bash some YouTube users who post the videos and attribute the documented performance to a wrong ethnic group. For instance, a post entitled “Ifugao Cordillera Tribal Dance” ³¹ in 2015 shows the Tam-awan Village In-House Performing Group dancing a Kalinga dance and one of the users commented, “This is not an Ifugao Dance, it must be Mountain Province” and another user remarked, “It should be Kalinga.” ³²

Another YouTube video ³³ in 2013 shares similar issue; a user posted a performance of the Tam-awan Village In-House Performing Group dance in April of that year and called the performance “Benguet dance,” perhaps because the museum is located at the heart of the Benguet province. Two users commented that it was not Benguet but rather Kalinga. Noteworthy is a user who commented not on the title but the performance itself, saying that “You guys perform random dances and you mix up all the cultural dances in the Cordillera. In effect it diminishes the originality and the uniqueness of each cultures in the Cordilleras. PS Don’t mess up.” ³⁴

Other videos such as the “Igorot performance at Tam-awan Village, Baguio City,” ³⁵ “Igorot cultural dance,” ³⁶ and “Young Igorots dancing Canao Pt. 1,” ³⁷ that do not contain negative comments feature the same performances. They also hold the same caption for the videos, pertaining to different Cordilleran dances collectively as Igorot. As I observed, because of the lack of knowledge of the museumgoers about the difference between several Cordilleran ethnic groups, they would tend to brand the performance collectively as Ifugao, Igorot, or

³¹ www.youtube.com/watch?v=bufEkpr9h6g

³² “Kalinga ah dapat”

³³ Paras, “Kalinga (cultural) dance performed in Baguio City,” www.youtube.com/watch?v=ocLpq029UA8

³⁴ “Kung ano ano ang sinasayaw. nyo pinaghahalo nyo ang cultural dance ng cordillera. Nawawala tuloy Yong originality and the uniqueness. PS don't mess up”

³⁵ www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kvj8gZXPdUQ

³⁶ www.youtube.com/watch?v=opl1GVs1QQw

³⁷ www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vy6ZkE6t4s4

Cordilleran. This situation also leads to authenticity issues, for some viewers who are more aware of the differences in the performances will say that the performances of the Tam-awan Village In-House Performing Group are not “true” to their origins. Following Lawler (2008), authenticity issues arise when the viewers’ expectation is not met – and in this case expectations of what “Igorot” performance is which has been greatly influenced by the country’s highland-lowland divide and its colonial education.

YouTube posts and comments on the performances of the young Cordillerans in Tam-awan Village is also reflective of most Filipinos’ limited understanding of the Cordilleran culture. The posts and comments reaffirm my earlier claim that because a generalized reductionist perspective of these indigenous people was created by colonialism, Filipinos would often generally brand them as Igorots. They don’t normally distinguish Ifugaos from the Kalingas, the Ibalois, or the Kankanaeys. To them, everyone from the mountain province is merely a big group of mountain people.

Through following Baudrillard’s idea of the self-referentiality of meanings in constructed worlds, it could be said that perception and understanding about a media text (in this case, the videos of the Tam-awan Village In-House Performing Group) on YouTube are highly dependent on the dominating discourse in its comment section. We can determine people’s notion of an authentic or traditional performance even just by studying the thread of comments on a particular documented performance. Because of YouTube’s intent to make videos accessible and shareable to the public, the comment section becomes a rich resource to learn how people create meanings within that dimension and, for the purpose of this research, it also becomes a tool to know people’s perception on authenticity and tradition. The number of likes (and dislikes) show how people agree (or disagree) with other people, and hence give

scholars an opportunity to determine which reading of a particular media text could be treated as the current dominant reading of that text.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

Colonialism and capitalism have economically and politically dislodged the marginalized people and made them be perceived as “different” in the society for centuries. Commodification of culture will naturally be the most viable option for them to survive for they are left with nothing but their culture to capitalize on. This phenomenon enabled me to explore issues on authenticities too, for commodification, as I have discussed in my thesis, has undeniably had an impact on the perception and use of authenticity.

In this thesis I have chosen to study the commodification of the Cordilleran culture in the Philippines – a culture that has been marginalized for centuries not just by former colonizers but also by lowlander Filipinos. But in studying the commodification of the Cordilleran culture in relation to authenticity, it is imperative to understand the intricacy and complexities of their identity for it has a bearing on the perceptions of authenticities in the country. The Cordilleran, as an identity, is artificial for it has developed outside the Cordilleran community. The Cordilleran identity, being a product of a larger orientalist reproduction of Westerner’s imagination of the East, reflects reductionist perception of the Cordillerans. But it must be noted that the Cordillerans themselves adopt these stereotypes when it serves their purpose or needs. Colonial stereotypes are maintained by the indigenous population to further their own marketing agenda and hence, as commodification of their culture has become a tactic to financially survive, the local people has negotiated their identities by embracing the artificial collective identity.

As the museum adopted the term Cordilleran as a name to collectively pertain to all ethnic groups in the Cordilleran region, it has also created a new way of looking at the material

culture as well as the performed tradition of the indigenous people. Dances, songs, and deities have become mixed, and hence, have led to the birth of a new culture that is not specifically Itneg, Isnag, Ibaloi, Kankanaey, Ifugao, Kalinga, or Bontok but rather a collective Cordilleran culture.

Origin and legitimacy are the usual focal points of concern on the authenticity of the commodified Cordilleran culture. As my research shows, it is no longer important if the performers, for instance, come from various ethnic groups because the museumgoers see them as a group who belongs to one cultural group, which is the Cordilleran. In this regard, the audience has given legitimacy to the identity the museum and the performers have reinforced, embraced, and negotiated.

To conclude, I would like to reemphasize the two key points of my thesis: (1) In retrospect, heritage, other than its role as an identity marker or a local/national symbol, also becomes a resource because of commercialization and capitalism and (2) when preserving a culture, that culture is also transformed. Reiterating the dynamism of culture gives an impression that issues on the authenticity of the commodified Cordilleran culture are poorly founded since every time a culture is preserved and exhibited, it becomes a different culture of its own, existing in the context of its own realms and reality. In commodifying their own culture they create new “traditions” which, in a sense, is an authentic culture by itself and hence, the term, new authenticities.

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