The Genealogy and Settlement History of the Licoy Indigenous Group of Paracelis in Mountain Province

Each family has a fascinating and unique story. Each tribe has a cherished culture and history. What’s yours? We remember our heritage through oral histories, photos or items about loved ones, clan records and family stories. Whether you are of your clan’s first or 13th known generation, connect yesterday, today and tomorrow.

Smelling fresh air and feeling the silence of nature – nothing beats these.
Let us travel through time with the *i-Licoy* (Licoy people) to uncover their clan and family histories and their beautiful, nostalgic stories that shaped Licoy ancestral history.

On the night of 22 July 2022, we, the members of the Philippine Program of Tebtebba, set out to the van terminal with our backpacks for our much longed-for trip to Paracelis, Mountain Province, Philippines. At the cockcrow of July 23, we arrived in Paracelis to join the *i-Licoy* in their research presentation later during the said day. We reached the inn where we booked just in time for around four hours of rest, then washed up and had a welcoming hearty breakfast before proceeding to the venue which was about five kilometers away.

The sun shone brightly while we enjoyed the tricycle ride going to the workshop/meeting site. Although some of us have visited Paracelis several times, the captivating scenery never failed to amaze us each time; the beauty and *grandeur* of the sea of clouds, the sunrise and the landscape were always irresistible to capture.

In Amolong Elementary School, we were welcomed by the Licoy research team, elders, and leaders eager to present the outputs they gathered from June to July 2022. The Licoy research team could trace the *i-Licoy* roots up to the tenth generation, mostly from the Balasso-Ginodan clan. However, according to stories, the *i-Licoy* descended from the two brothers, Barawag and Binaray, who were believed to have possessed some strange powers. Allegedly, Barawag could use the *balliwos* (wood used as a sugar cane crasher/presser) to fight enemies and when he got wounded, he healed his wound by just blowing. Another story of him tells that when there was a snake which lived in Abbubuto that bit and killed many people, the people went to Barawag and challenged

A spectacular sunrise as nature unfolds its beauty.
The Elders and leaders of the Licoy ethnic group are all ears – “Who are our ascendants?”

him, saying that they will believe him only if he would be able to kill the snake that killed many people. Barawag then went to fight and killed the snake.

During the meeting, members of different prominent clans and families were identified as well. The Licoy settlement pattern was also discussed. Indeed, it was a productive day. Determined to saturate the genealogy, another session was set after a week of continued research.

Day after day, we met with identified elders of the Licoy community to listen to their beautiful stories on their genealogy and early settlement pattern, amazed at how incredible that these elders could still remember pre-and-post World War II conditions.

According to the Licoy elders, the place got its name, Licoy, from a tool made from cattle horn with spiral design which is used in making garments from the bark of the torak tree. Among the more than 12 ethnolinguistic groups residing in the municipality of Paracelis, the Ga’dang and the Licoy people are the recognized original settlers of the area, having their ancestral domains there. However, it was only in the 21st century that awareness on their collective rights to an ancestral domain was re-awakened when Antonio Cayyog, the Indigenous People Mandatory Representative (IPMR) of 2012 to 2015, called for the strengthening of indigenous peoples’ organizations within Paracelis and pushed for the recognition of the ancestral domains of the two original settlers of the municipality.
On the early afternoon of our third day, we decided to step out of our comfort zones in the pursuit of adventure to explore one of the municipality’s natural resources, the famous Malinsawang Falls, for a possible resource mapping. Conquering seven out of the Malinsawang Falls’ formidable nine waterfalls is an incredible feat since we were not certified mountaineers. We had to trek through a chain of fields, step on big and small rocks on streams, and fearlessly climb hills before reaching each of the cascades. The cool clean waters were simply enticing, so we were in for a refreshing dip after an arduous yet exciting trek.
Twin falls, another part of Malinsawang waterfalls.

A short refreshing plunge into one of the falls of Malinsawang.
The fourth day was to be another big adventure as we expected to meet up with more elders and leaders in Bunot, another barangay (an administrative and territorial district forming the smallest local government in the country) of Paracelis, situated farther from Licoy. We travelled from Poblacion to Bunot via pick-up truck for the first half of the journey and then brisk-walked (for more than one hour) for the other half. We reached the first house for a well-deserved rest as we were greeted by very amiable and hospitable people who generously served us with bananas and fresh buko (coconut) to quench our thirst and satisfy our hunger.
After lunch, we convened at Bacarri National Trade Agricultural School Extension, located also in Bunot. The meeting and presentation of outputs extended until dusk. We were provided with data on additional clans in the Licoy genealogy and on the early settlement patterns. The enthusiasm of the Licoy people was infectious.

Tracing one’s genealogy is important for “educational purposes, to know more about the cultural life of ancestors and to trace the whereabouts of relatives and clan members, and to assist one another in times of need,” pointed out by Erwin Casiw, one of Licoy’s elders. “[Doing so allows us] to establish the fact that there was indeed a community of people who established permanent settlement with their own culture, customs, and traditions distinct from other indigenous groups, to put in remembrance their legacy and transmit to the next generation,” added Rogelio Banggot, another elder.

The i-Licoy were all eyes and ears during the gathering at Bacarri National Trade Agricultural School Extension in Bunot.

Bidding goodbye to our host family, Mr and Mrs Mario Dangangao, in Bunot.
The next day was set for our travel back to Poblacion. We started our hike down the mountain but after about 30 minutes walking, we saw the tree branches and leaves swaying together with the electric lines. Feeling quite dizzy, we learned that there was a 7.0 intensity earthquake, with its epicenter in the province of Abra*, which was some 200 kilometers away from our location.

Luckily, we found a perfect spot to have a rest while listening to the stories of 67-year-old Alejandro Basiwal, a retired religious leader, and his sister Virginia Bunnol, 74, about the settlement history of the i-Licoy in sitio (territorial enclave) Bila in Bunot.

*Lending an ear to Alejandro Basiwal as he relates the early settlement history of Licoy people in sitio Bila.

*Abra, like Mountain Province, is a province belonging to the Cordilleran Administrative Region in the northern part of the Philippines.
Punctuating our one-week stay in Paracelis and victoriously capping off the research phase of our initiative was a final meeting with the Licoy clan to wrap up the week’s activities held at Canabo Elementary School. Earlier in the morning before the meeting, we visited another natural resource, the Canabo Falls, around one-kilometer trek from the said school along rice fields, hills, rocks on streams. Indeed, the best view comes after the hardest climb - lo and behold! - the majestic Canabo falls! The refreshing waters cascaded like heavenly drizzles from the top of the mountain around 100-feet high. One can just stand on the small cave on its base and have a free invigorating shower.
The final meeting included a summary of the research findings and presentation of the enhanced Constitution and By-laws of the Ganak da iLicoy. The genealogy presented started from late 1700s covering parts of until the tenth generation. The partially established ancestral domain of the Licoy tribe covers 20 clustered sitios of barangay Poblacion. However, some elders claimed that the said domain cross-cuts areas of barangay Bunot, particularly its upper areas, but there are current disputes in these areas among three tribal groups of Licoy, Pangol and Madukayan.

Since the organization of Ganak da i-Licoy, the Indigenous Peoples Organization (IPO) governing the Licoy indigenous group, elders and officers have been attending meetings to discuss various issues on these territorial claims and to resolve boundary disputes. The result of the said meetings, however, reduced the land area of the indigenous community to approximately 80 percent of the Poblacion area, allegedly because some parts were already occupied by other settlers and business establishments.

Moreover, Bunot is still up for negotiations with those residing now in the said area, predominantly composed of Madukayan people.

“Resource allocation from Tebtebba and its donor partners, coupled with the cooperation of various stakeholders, is key to the achievement of relevant and reliable results [of this initiative],” declared Roger Lambino, Tebtebba’s focal person for the said Licoy project, as he stressed the significance of maintaining proper and sustained communication, cooperation, and coordination among the key actors involved in the identification and delineation of the ancestral domain of the Licoy people, and in establishing the family trees of their clans.

Each family has a story. Each tribe has a cherished culture and history. What’s yours? Share them, too.

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