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Tingguian Culture as Communicated through Women's Traditional Attire

Louwela Mae B. Aggacid and Bryan R. Realgo*

Department of Languages and Literature, Mariano Marcos State University, Ilocos Norte, 2900, Philippines

(*Corresponding author's e-mail: brrealgo@mmsu.edu.ph)

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Abstract

Cultural appropriation often occurs in traditional attire, particularly those belonging to Indigenous Communities. This qualitative study, framed within the semiotic communication tradition, aimed to identify the different symbolic elements in Tingguian women's traditional attire and investigated the symbolic meanings associated with each component. The study was conducted through field observation and semi-structured interviews in the Tingguian Community in Nueva Era, Ilocos Norte, Philippines, and strictly followed the procedures outlined by the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP). Through the rigors of Charles Sander Pierce's semiotics, the findings of the study revealed the presence of six symbolic elements, namely: (a) straight lines, (b) triangles, (c) flower symbols, (d) ovals, (e) circles, and (f) checkered patterns. The study found that these symbolic elements communicated two main symbolic meanings: (a) beliefs towards community prosperity, which means emphasizing the values of unity, cooperation, and mutual assistance; and (b) spiritual beliefs, which means reinforcing rituals aimed at ensuring the protection of individuals within the community. Overall, this semiotic study revealed that traditional attire is not only a piece of clothing among indigenous peoples, but it also represents their Tingguian identity.

Keywords: Semiotics, Tingguian, Symbolic elements, Symbolic meanings, Cultural heritage

Introduction

The use of clothing is a communicative practice, as this has been prominently known as a form of non-verbal language. Madison (2018) states that in fashion, clothing is a trend that reflects behavior, mindset, and circumstances, from the observed presence of the colors, the textile used, and most importantly, the attached elements that enhance the message the clothing aims to communicate. People use clothing as a vital instrument that helps them represent and communicate their culture and values that were inherited in their community. Moreover, Dergisi (2021) added that clothing has meanings and purposes, such as showing its role in communication, from introducing an individual's aesthetic person to helping the formation of identity. When it comes to representing cultural orientations through clothing, traditional clothing, according to Vivithkeyoonvong et al. (2021), refers to a type of clothing that holds the most various aesthetic values and meanings for each pattern created. When clothes are viewed as a symbol, the intricate design components that go beyond mere aesthetics can be appreciated. Starting with the beautifully attached patterns or elements, colors, and styles in clothing, these can convey deeper philosophical meanings and can even carry hidden messages.

There are over 476 million indigenous peoples (IP) worldwide, accounting for 6.2 percent of the global population. A United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) article reports, the Philippines is the home of over 17 million indigenous peoples, who make up 110 ethnolinguistic groups. This includes the Tingguians in Ilocos and the Cordillera.

According to Meghannobrein (2019), the idea of clothing textiles containing meaning and power has been held by every indigenous group around the world; this simply demonstrates that fashion through clothing and tradition cannot be separated, and that indigenous traditional clothing serves as an extension of rich history

and culture. Clothing communicates to serve as an open narrative for more profound thought in the form of different elements; these are now the designs and patterns attached to the fabrics. Clothing is one of the most apparent cultural representations that teaches people about the place's culture and history.

Traditional clothing is one way an indigenous community expresses its own identity. Indigenous peoples create tribally specific clothing to express belonging, enter ceremonies, and reflect their values and culture (Edrich, 2021; Larsson, 2014).

However, some individuals exploit this identity unethically through what is commonly referred to as cultural appropriation. There are also reported practices in the fashion industry that are using indigenous symbols and designs inappropriately (Fashion Revolution, 2021; Ustandag, 2014). The significance of recognizing and respecting indigenous peoples, particularly awareness and education on cultural appropriation, exploitation, and commercialization of their attire, is paramount. This underscores the importance of understanding and acknowledging these vulnerable groups and the unique cultural heritage they possess.

The Tingguians in Nueva Era, Ilocos Norte, like other IPs, incorporate symbolic elements into their clothing that communicate important aspects of their culture and identity. These elements serve as a visual representation of their traditions, beliefs, and values, showcasing the uniqueness and diversity of their cultural heritage. To further understand Tingguian clothing and what it communicates, this study employed Charles Sander Pierce's semiotics as a guide in the analysis. As looking into the signs and symbols and their meaning are the primary objectives of the study, semiotics is the most appropriate framework. As Craig (1999) discusses, communication is theorized semiotically through the intersubjective mediation of signs such as the elements present in the Tingguian clothing. With this study, it is hoped that a better understanding of Tingguian culture is recorded to limit the gradual erosion of cultural knowledge, the misinterpretation of cultural expressions, and the research gap on Tingguian culture, specifically their traditional attire.

Theoretical framework

The examination of signs, symbols, and meanings is the central focus of semiotics. While numerous scholars and theorists have approached this field differently, they share a common goal: to develop a comprehensive understanding of signification and to uncover the meanings behind signs and symbols.

For this study, Charles Sander Pierce's theory serves as the primary guide for analyzing the three typologies of signs in semiotics: icons, indexes, and symbols. Icons are characterized by a clear physical connection between the signifier and its meaning. Indexes possess a factual relationship between the signifier and the signified. In contrast, symbols lack any inherent resemblance between the signifier and the signified; instead, the relationship must be learned culturally. To strengthen the theoretical foundation of this research communicationally, it acknowledges Craig (1999) , who included semiotics as one of the seven traditions of communication. According to him, the problems of communication in the semiotic tradition are primarily problems of (re)presentation and transmission of meaning, of gaps between subjectivities that can be bridged, if only imperfectly, using shared systems of signs.

To deepen theoretical engagement, this study also draws from social semiotics and cultural mythologies. Social semiotics emphasizes that signs do not exist in isolation but emerge from social contexts, cultural histories, and power relations. As argued by Kress and Hodge (1988) , the meaning of signs is motivated, shaped by the interests and practices of social groups, which allows multiple or even conflicting interpretations to coexist. Recent work on affordances in sign-making (Kress, 2022) also highlights that modes such as textiles and visual motifs limit and enable specific readings, which is directly relevant to analyzing woven attire.

Furthermore, Roland Barthes' concept of myth provides another interpretive layer. For Barthes (1972), myths are second- order sign systems where cultural signs are naturalized and accepted as self-evident truths.

By combining Peircean semiotics with social semiotics and Barthesian mythologies, this study establishes a more rigorous framework that acknowledges ambiguities, overlaps, and contradictions in symbolic interpretation. This framework strengthens

the analysis of Tingguian attire by situating it within both the internal cultural logic of the community and broader semiotic traditions that highlight how meaning is produced, contested, and sustained.

Drawing from Peircean semiotics, social semiotics, and Barthesian mythologies. This study aimed to answer the research questions: (1) what are the symbolic elements in the Tingguian's attire? and (2) what are the symbolic meanings that are communicated through the symbolic elements?

Related studies

Clothing textiles are imbued with meaning and power across all indigenous groups worldwide. Customary clothing, which is hereditary, continues to be used by indigenous communities today, reflecting the unique characteristics of their local culture (Rachman, et al., 2019; Meghannobrein, 2019). Wearing specific clothing and engaging in activities give meaning to objects. Indigenous clothing facilitates communication, shapes aesthetic perceptions, and contributes to identity formation, expressing not only gender and class but also broader cultural orientations. Each traditional garment features unique patterns with distinct aesthetic values and meanings (Mogus, 2021; Dergisi, 2021; Vivithkeyoonvong et al., 2021). Indigenous textiles offer a window into the vibrant cultural heritage of a nation, showcasing and embodying the unique identities of each tribe. These textiles reflect the distinct personalities, lifestyles, cultural traditions, religious beliefs, and rituals of the communities that create them. Through their intricate designs and patterns, indigenous textiles not only serve as artistic expressions but also as vital narratives that convey the history and values of the tribes, preserving their legacies for future generations. Each piece tells a story, connecting the past with the present and highlighting the diversity and richness of the country's cultural landscape (Das, 2019; Tobias, 2022; Al-Shehri & Dabbagh, 2021).

Semiotics is the study of signs, focusing on their functionality, interactions, and how meanings are encoded and decoded. It offers a framework for understanding meaning, cognition, culture, behavior, and the complexities of life (Ranchman et al., 2019; Najafi & Abbas, 2014; Smith-Shank, 1995). Semiotics focuses on the intersubjective mediation of signs, which facilitates the use of language and various sign systems to bridge different perspectives. Leech and Onwuegbuzie, as cited in Riera (2008), describe semiotics as a science that explores the connections between signs—such as spoken language and written text—and their specific meanings.

Ranchman et al. (2019) expand on this by noting that semiotics not only examine the nature of signs but also investigate their functionality and the processes involved in their delivery and reception. Foote, as referenced by Najafi and Abbas (2014), emphasizes the importance of studying how meanings are encoded and decoded through signs and symbols. Smith-Shank (1995) further characterizes semiotics as a comprehensive approach to understanding meaning, cognition, culture, behavior, and life itself, highlighting its role in uncovering hidden meanings within signs and symbols.

Methodology

In obtaining the data, a participant field observation was conducted in the Tingguian community in Nueva Era, Ilocos Norte, Philippines. The researchers visited the community and documented their traditional attire through descriptive notes. In the process, the traditional attire was documented using a camera to capture visual elements. Meanwhile, the researchers noted the community's narratives, which featured traditional attire, in a record book. To further the understanding of the elements and meanings associated with the traditional attire, a semi-structured interview was conducted with eight (8) participants who were knowledgeable of Tingguian traditional attire and culture. The participants include two (2) female elders, one (1) male elder, three (3) female Indigenous Peoples Mandatory Representatives (IPMRs), one (1) male IPMR, and one (1) Indigenous Peoples (IP) Leader. The participants were selected using purposive sampling, which, according to Cresswell and Plano Clark, as cited by Palinkas et al. (2016), involves identifying and selecting individuals that are exceptionally knowledgeable about or experienced with a phenomenon of interest.

The data-gathering procedure commenced after the documents from the National Commission of Indigenous Peoples (NCIP), the Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Practices (IKSPs), and Customary Laws

(CLs), and the Research and Documentation Guidelines of 2012 were obtained. This is to ensure that the research was conducted with care and respect for the indigenous community, its values, and its cultural practices. In addition, a research ethics review board of a state university in the Northern Philippines approved all the procedures conducted in the study. Informed consent was obtained from all the human participants involved in the study.

Data analysis

After documenting all the information gathered from the community documentation and participants' narratives, the researchers undertook a comprehensive analysis of the data using Peirce's theory of semiotics. This theory asserts that anything can function as a sign if it is interpreted as representing something beyond its main existence within a specific context. This perspective is crucial for understanding how meaning is constructed and conveyed in various forms of communication, particularly in cultural expressions such as attire.

Using the documented traditional attire through photographs, the researchers applied Peirce's semiotic framework, particularly the classification of signs into three distinct categories: icon, index, and symbol.

The researchers began by identifying the icon, which refers to the physical resemblance of the attire to the object it represents. For example, skirts, bottoms, and other garments are used to complete the attire. Next, the researchers identified the index, which signifies evidence of what is being represented. In this context, index are signs that denote an object directly affected by it. For instance, specific patterns or colors in clothing may visually evoke specific natural elements or cultural motifs, establishing a direct connection between the attire and its representation.

Finally, the researchers delved into the interpretation of symbols, which encompass the culturally learned knowledge associated with the concepts they represent over time. Symbols carry deeper meanings that are often rooted in historical, social, and cultural contexts. During this process, the community narratives recorded by the researchers during the participant field observation, as well as the selected knowledgeable participants, were considered to provide valuable insights that deepened the understanding and explanation of the symbolic elements and meanings associated with their traditional attire.

Validation

Following the guidelines established by NCIP for conducting formal studies, the researcher complied with Section 8. 14, which pertains to Output Validation. During this process, the researcher presented the interpreted data facilitated by the Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Practices (IKSP) team to the participating community members. The Tingguian community members expressed their consensus on the findings, and no modifications were requested regarding the researcher's interpretations.

By involving the IKSP team and participants in the validation of the data, the researchers reinforced the importance of community engagement in the research process, thereby enhancing the credibility and relevance of the findings. The unanimous agreement among community members further underscores the accuracy and acceptance of the interpretations presented.

Findings and discussion

Tingguian attire

Indigenous people showcase their culture through traditional clothing, which symbolizes their cultural identity. These garments effectively convey the cultural identity and beliefs of individuals from Nueva Era, particularly the Tingguian community. The study identified six key symbolic elements present in the traditional attire of women; these include: straight lines, triangles, flower symbols, ovals, circles, and checkered patterns. The various garments of the Tingguian attire include the following:

The Tingguian community of the Nueva Era, both the Indaya and Inlaud communities, only wears one style of attire for every formal, special occasion, whether within or outside their community as shown in Figure 1. The attire communicates cultural identity by weaving together multiple symbolic registers into one coherent visual statement. Rather than functioning as isolated garments, each component — blouse, skirt, sash, and accessories — operates in semiotic relation to the others, forming a total attire system that encodes both prosperity and spirituality. This holistic semiotic

role of clothing is similar in other Cordillera communities where ritual attire is treated as a cultural text performed in weddings, funerals, and agricultural ceremonies (Salvador-Amores, 2014).

Tingguian community maintains one canonical style for all formal occasions and reflects an emphasis on cohesion and unity. This practice contrasts with groups such as the T'boli of Mindanao, whose ceremonial T'nalak cloth varies in design according to dream-inspired motifs (Garcia & Biana, 2024; Santos, 2005). Nonetheless, both traditions demonstrate how a single style of attire can become emblematic of ethnic identity and continuity, functioning as a portable archive of cultural memory.

Internationally, practices of consolidating symbolic attire as a single ethnic identity marker are seen in Navajo weaving traditions in North America, where specific blanket styles embody communal cosmology and prosperity (Yohe, 2012), and in Andean weaving traditions in Peru, where community-specific patterns are standardized for ceremonial functions (Arnold & Yapita, 2006).

Pinningitan. In the Inlaud culture, a specific garment known as Pinningitan is an integral part of their traditional attire. The Pinningitan is a rectangular piece of fabric that measures approximately one to two meters in length as shown in Figure 2. It is primarily worn by wrapping it around the waist, functioning as a bottom garment or a skirt. The design of the Pinningitan is characterized by simplicity, featuring straight lines as its symbolic element that is incorporated into the fabric. The fabric itself is made of cotton linen and is predominantly white, with subtle accents of red, blue, and yellow.

The straight lines of the Pinningitan are more than decorative, they serve as semiotic encodings of continuity, direction, and stability. Elders interpret these motifs as representations of life paths and the unbroken transmission of heritage, making the garment both a practical clothing piece and a symbolic statement. Similar interpretations have been recorded in Cordillera textiles where linear motifs signify journeys, rice terraces, and community linkages (Salvador-Amores, 2014). In Abra weaving, linear designs are also linked to fertility and agricultural fields, underscoring their role as symbols of livelihood and prosperity (Bose & Talledo, 2015). The use of linear elements in textiles is also present in various IP communities in other parts of the world. In Navajo weaving traditions, long lines woven into blankets function as "spirit-lines" — intentional openings that ensure spiritual balance and protection for the weaver and wearer (Yohe, 2012). Likewise, in Andean communities, linear bands in traditional weaving often encode agricultural cycles, cosmological pathways, and the transmission of ancestral knowledge (Arnold & Yapita, 2006). These parallels indicate that the Pinningitan's straight lines reflect a global indigenous practice where geometric simplicity carries profound social and cosmological meanings.

Figure 1 Women's Tingguian Attire as a whole

Figure 2 Pinningitan

Figure 3 Akken

Akken. Figure 3 shows an Akken a rectangular garment that measures approximately one to two meters in length used by Tingguian of the Indaya. Wrapped around the waist, it serves as a bottom garment or skirt that extends down to the wearer's tibia. This skirt is crafted from crocheted fabric, providing both functionality and warmth. Featuring triangle lines as its symbolic element incorporated into the fabric. The dominant color of the skirt is black, while accents of red, white, green, and yellow can also be found. Additionally, metal beads are incorporated into the design, enhancing the overall beauty of the skirt.

The triangular motifs in the Akken symbolize fertility, agricultural abundance, and the connection of the community to the land. Elders interpret the upward-pointing triangles as visual metaphors for rice plants and mountain peaks, both central to Tingguian livelihood. This interpretation aligns with textile studies in Abra, where triangular patterns are linked to planting and harvest cycles, reinforcing the cloth's role as a material archive of agricultural practices (Bose & Talledo, 2015). In other Cordillera studies, similar triangular motifs appear in woven skirts and blankets, where they symbolize rice terraces and ancestral protection (Salvador-Amores, 2014).

The use of triangles also communicates social hierarchy and protection. In many Philippine weaving traditions, triangular and diamond-shaped figures are associated with status and spiritual safeguarding (De Las Peñas & Salvador-Amores, 2016). The incorporation of metal beads in the Akken enhances this protective symbolism, as metallic elements are often viewed as barriers against malevolent spirits.

Internationally, in Andean weaving, triangular and stepped motifs are symbolic of mountains, fertility, and the cyclical renewal of life (Arnold & Yapita, 2006). Similarly, Southeast Asian weaving traditions, such as those in Laos and Indonesia, embed triangular motifs in skirts and sashes to represent fertility, cosmological balance, and ancestral guardianship (Maxwell, 2014).

Ringgi. The Tingguian women of Inlaud use Rinngi as shown in Figures 4 and 5. Rinngi is a second-generation line of their apparel, serving as their top garment. The material is a net-type or organdy fabric in white with red lace attached, used during community events. In addition, in Figure 5, the Tingguian also produced a modernized version of the top garment as an alternative for Ringgi; the material and design used were based on and matched their Pinningitan, and they use this whenever they are going to attend occasions outside their community or when they visit other municipalities.

The Ringgi is significant not only as a garment of modesty but also as a visible marker of social identity and cultural adaptability. Its white base fabric symbolizes purity and respect, while the red lace embodies vitality and communal energy. Such color symbolism aligns with Cordillera attire, where red and white garments are worn in weddings and agricultural rituals as metaphors of fertility and renewal (Salvador-Amores, 2014).

The modernized version of the Ringgi demonstrates the dynamic character of Tingguian culture: by adapting fabrics and designs that resemble the Pinningitan, the community preserves symbolic continuity while negotiating modern contexts. This echoes practices among the Ifugao and Kalinga, where indigenous blouses and skirts have been redesigned for contemporary use but still carry ancestral motifs (De Las Peñas & Salvador-Amores, 2016).

Internationally, this adaptive strategy resonates with the Andean poncho and blouse traditions, where modern textiles continue to incorporate ancestral motifs and colors as expressions of both cultural pride and resilience (Arnold & Yapita, 2006). Similarly, Southeast Asian groups such as the Hmong and Lao integrate embroidered panels into modern blouses to retain symbolic identity while participating in intercultural exchanges (Maxwell, 2014). The Ringgi therefore exemplifies how attire functions as both a repository of tradition and a flexible medium for expressing cultural identity in shifting social environments.

Figure 4 Ringgi (Second Generation)

Figure 5 Top Garment (Third Generation)

Figure 6 Allap (Modernized Version)

Figure 7 Allap (Woven Version)

Allap. The modernized version, used by the Tingguian of Inlaud, features a vibrant color palette dominated by red, with shades of brown, blue, and yellow. The fabric and design are manufactured using various technologies. On the other hand, the Allap in Figure 7 features a dominant blue color, complemented by shades of red and yellow. This Allap is a handmade, woven version that has been passed down through two generations—both Allaps in figures 6 and 7 measure at least one to two meters long, rectangularly.

Allap functions as more than an accessory; it signifies vitality, communal identity, and intergenerational continuity. The dominance of red in the modernized version represents vigor and fertility, while blue and yellow reflect harmony and abundance. Such chromatic symbolism aligns with Cordillera weaving traditions, where specific colors denote ritual functions and community roles (Salvador- Amores, 2014) . The woven version, passed down across generations, illustrates how the Allap operates as a tangible heritage object, embodying both familial lineage and collective memory.

The contrast between the modernized Allap and the traditional woven version highlights the community's capacity to adapt tradition to contemporary contexts while safeguarding ancestral forms. This mirrors practices among the T'boli, whose T'nalak cloth is reproduced both through traditional backstrap looms and adapted versions made with modern textile technologies (Garcia & Biana, 2024). Among the Abra weavers, similarly, handmade textiles are prized as authentic cultural markers even as machine-produced variants circulate in markets (Bose & Talledo, 2015).

International comparisons reveal that such dual production systems are not unique to the Tingguian. In Andean weaving, handmade ponchos and sashes are maintained for ceremonial use, while machine-made versions circulate for everyday or commercial purposes (Arnold & Yapita, 2006). In Navajo traditions, woven blankets embody sacred meanings when handmade, whereas industrial reproductions are often stripped of their ritual connotations (Yohe, 2012). These parallels suggest that the Allap's dual existence — modernized and traditional — reflects a global indigenous strategy to balance cultural preservation with economic and social adaptability.

Accessories

This part introduces the various accessories worn by the women of Tingguian. The entirety of the Tingguian attire is appreciated through its wholeness, which includes the use of appropriate accessories.

Figure 8 Paluket (Headpiece)

Figure 9 Paluket (Necklace)

Figure 10 Necklace (Dumadan)

Paluket. The headdress as shown in figure 8 and necklace as shown in figure 9 are referred to as Paluket in the Inlaud culture. Different marble, beads, and metal designs and forms are used to create these two accessories. Symbolic features such as oval marbles, round beads, and metal flowers embellish the Paluket pieces. The beads' complex color variations help to create a calming combination that captures the spirit of the native peoples. Beyond aesthetic expression, the Paluket also functions as a ritual and protective object. Elders interpret the oval marbles (Lubsag) as symbols of continuity and protection, while circular beads (Ngila, Kiring) are associated with harmony and cyclical renewal. These interpretations align with practices in other Philippine communities, such as the Bagobo and Mandaya, who wear beaded regalia as mediators in healing and ritual practices (Maceda, 1998). Meanwhile, Kalinga accessories incorporate beads and metal ornaments that serve as amulets for warding off spirits and affirming clan ties (Salvador-Amores, 2014).

Comparative evidence also strengthens this interpretation. The T'boli of South Cotabato use beaded headdresses not only as adornment but also as sacred items linked to their dream-weaving cosmology (Garcia & Biana, 2024). Internationally, Navajo jewelry traditions similarly embed spiritual significance in beadwork and turquoise stones, which are believed to protect the wearer (Yohe, 2012). In the Andes, beaded and metal adornments incorporated into ritual attire are considered conduits between humans and deities

(Arnold & Yapita, 2006). African beadwork traditions also parallel this by treating beads as communicators of identity, protection, and spiritual balance (Kriger, 2006).

Dumadan. Figure 10 shows a Dumadan, it is derived from the term Kadaanan, which means old ornaments. These necklaces are crafted using a variety of styles and shapes of marbles, beads, and stones. The emphasis is often placed on incorporating vibrant colors, which adds a lively and dynamic element to the necklaces. Dumadan is not only an adornment but also a cultural repository that embodies ancestral continuity. By naming the necklace Kadaanan ("old ornaments"), the Tingguian emphasize its role as a heritage object that connects the present to the past. Its vibrant colors symbolize vitality, abundance, and the dynamism of community life. This symbolism echoes Kalinga beadwork, where multicolored necklaces are worn in rituals to signify fertility, status, and protection (Salvador-Amores, 2014). Similarly, among the Ifugao, heirloom necklaces (hagabi ornaments) are passed down as family treasures that represent prestige and communal solidarity (Bulatao-Jayme, 2010).

The Dumadan's use of beads and stones also aligns with southern Philippine traditions. Bagobo necklaces often incorporate glass beads and natural stones believed to possess protective powers during rituals (Maceda, 1998). This demonstrates a wider Philippine indigenous pattern where necklaces function as both decorative and spiritual objects.

Comparatively, necklaces across indigenous cultures share this dual role. Navajo beadwork and stone jewelry, particularly turquoise pieces, are believed to provide spiritual balance and ancestral protection (Yohe, 2012). In Andean communities, necklaces made of beads and seeds are worn in ceremonies as mediators between humans and mountain deities (Arnold & Yapita, 2006). African beadwork traditions also highlight necklaces as conveyors of identity, lineage, and protective symbolism (Kriger, 2006).

Balsay. This bracelet as shown in Figure 11 is from the Inlaud Community of Tingguian, which is predominantly black with hints of yellow, brown, and green circular beads created in at least six distinct varieties of beads. Its scope most likely covers the Tingguian elder's half to whole arm. Balsay is more than an ornamental bracelet, its size and elaborate bead composition signal both status and protection. Covering half to the entire arm, signifies authority and the wearer's connection to ancestral lineage. The color scheme carries symbolic weight: black represents strength and protection, yellow vitality, brown the earth and fertility, and green the renewal of life. Similar chromatic associations are evident in Kalinga beadwork, where bracelets of contrasting colors are worn during rituals to symbolize fertility and social prestige (Salvador-Amores, 2014).

The multiplicity of bead varieties in the Balsay illustrates the Tingguian principle of unity in diversity, where individual beads represent distinct social ties but, when combined, form a cohesive cultural identity. This resonates with Ifugao heirloom ornaments, where bead bracelets are passed down as communal assets embodying kinship and continuity (Bulatao- Jayme, 2010). Bagobo traditions also feature large, layered bead bracelets worn during rituals, interpreted as protective amulets and social markers (Maceda, 1998).

International studies confirm this dual role of bracelets as status symbols and spiritual devices. In Navajo traditions, silver and bead bracelets are worn for protection and as cosmological markers (Yohe, 2012). In Andean weaving cultures, bead bracelets are incorporated into ceremonial attire as signs of fertility and reciprocity between humans and deities (Arnold & Yapita, 2006). African beadwork also emphasizes bracelets as signifiers of rank, identity, and spiritual safeguarding (Kriger, 2006).

Figure 11 Bracelet (Balsay)

Figure 12 (Bracelet) Batbata

Batbata. This bracelet as shown in Figure 12 is from the Indaya Community of Tingguian. It is crafted using a variety of styles and shapes of marbles, beads, and stones, the same with their necklace. It is placed incorporating vibrant colors, which adds a lively and dynamic connection with the necklace.

The Batbata complements the Dumadan necklace, forming a symbolic pair that expresses harmony between the upper and lower body adornments. The use of multicolored beads signifies vitality and unity, while the circular motifs emphasize wholeness and continuity. Among Tingguian elders, the Batbata is also viewed as a protective charm that guards the wearer during rituals and gatherings. Similar symbolic interpretations are found in Kalinga and Ifugao traditions, where bracelets function not only as ornaments but as heirloom amulets representing lineage and ancestral blessings (Salvador-Amores, 2014; Bulatao-Jayme, 2010). Bagobo and

T· boli communities also incorporate colorful bead bracelets in their regalia, each color believed to correspond to spiritual protection and community ties (Maceda, 1998; Garcia & Biana, 2024).

Comparative evidence reinforces these meanings. In Navajo culture, bracelets made of beads and turquoise are understood as conduits of balance and ancestral guidance (Yohe, 2012). In Andean communities, bead bracelets are worn during fertility rituals and symbolize reciprocity between humans and deities (Arnold & Yapita, 2006). African beadwork likewise imbues bracelets with meanings of rank, lineage, and spiritual protection (Kriger, 2006). These international cases highlight that bracelets such as the Batbata serve as cultural texts, encoding both communal prosperity and individual spiritual safety.

Understanding semiotically the symbolic elements

Applying Pierce·s theory of semiotics and using the classification of signs (icon, index, symbol), the researchers delved deeper into the intricate layers of meaning embedded in Tingguian attire. This approach not only enhances understanding of the attire's aesthetic qualities but also reveals the profound cultural narratives and values that these garments communicate.

Figure 13 Pinningitan (skirt) and top Garment; Inlaud

Icon. The icon is the top garment and skirt called Pinningitan as shown in Figure 13.

Index. The index in the image refers to the colors and straight lines attached to the cloth. The colors red, blue, and yellow represent the Philippine flag, which is depicted as a straight line. Additionally, the lines in the image resemble those found in rainbows, which symbolize direction, light, and color for people. Furthermore, the long lines in the image are associated with long lives.

Symbol. The symbolic meaning attached to the cloth represents the whole culture of Tingguians residing in Inlaud, Nueva Era. According to one of female elder participant, the colored straight lines used by the Tingguian people in the Nueva Era in their attire inculcated a role of bringing light to the community and others. The participant added the long straight lines also represent the desire to live longer.

The Tingguian people incorporate long straight lines in their garments to symbolize their aspirations for vitality and well- being. These elements represent direction, light, and color, with elders from the Inlaud community likening them to rainbows, which signify guidance, inspiration, and unity. Rainbows symbolize hope and inclusivity, reminding individuals of the beauty in diversity.

The Pinningitan exemplifies the triadic relation of icon, index, and symbol. As an icon, the straight lines visually resemble rainbows and pathways, embodying the natural and cosmological order. As an index, the use of red, blue, and yellow points to both national identity (colors of the Philippine flag) and to ritual associations of vitality and protection, comparing with Cordillera weaving traditions (Salvador- Amores, 2014). As a symbol, the Pinningitan condenses Tingguian collective memory and cultural pride, since its meaning is socially constructed and transmitted across generations. This multi- layered reading reveals that Tingguian attire cannot be reduced to ornamentation but instead encodes both tangible and intangible values.

Comparable practices strengthen this interpretation. In Taiwan, the Seediq tribe's woven lines are linked to ancestral pathways, signifying the continuity of kinship and spirituality (Chiu, 2018). Among the Ifugao of the Cordillera, linear motifs in woven skirts serve as symbolic "paths" connecting humans to ancestors and deities (Bulatao-Jayme, 2010). In Andean ponchos, linear and geometric designs are considered cosmic diagrams representing order and reciprocity (Arnold & Yapita, 2006). Navajo weaving traditions similarly interpret linear patterns as reflections of harmony and balance within their cosmology (Yohe, 2012). Even among the Maori of New Zealand, linear tattoo and textile motifs symbolize genealogical lines, affirming continuity of life and collective identity (Smith, 2012).

Figure 14 Akken (Skirt); Indaya

Icon. The icon in figure 14 is a skirt.

Index. The index in the picture is the triangle-shaped embroidery in skirt; this triangle communicates livelihood and way of life, specifically farming. The Tingguian tribe in Indaya believes that before harvesting, they need to put or hang a red or green cloth.

Symbol. The symbol attached to the skirt serves the purpose of instilling pride in the original culture that was established. This implies that the symbol holds significance in representing and honoring the cultural heritage and traditions of a particular community or group.

According to a female elder participant, the skirt is a representation of both celebrating and preserving cultural roots. The triangle design on their loom-woven skirt symbolizes a rice plant, associated with green and red colors, which color a particular practice and belief. Some elder participants state that before harvesting, they

must hang red or green cloth because they believe that doing so will result in a good harvest.

From a semiotic standpoint, the Akken operates as an icon (the triangular embroidery resembles a rice plant), an index (the presence of green and red points to agricultural rituals of harvest preparation), and a symbol (its socially shared meaning of prosperity and fertility). This triadic structure shows that the skirt is not merely functional attire but a medium of agricultural cosmology and identity.

Similar practices can be found in other Philippine IP communities. The Ifugao use woven rice motifs in their garments as ritual indicators of agricultural abundance, closely tied to their rice terraces worldview (Dulawan, 2001). The Abra Tingguian also embed agrarian motifs such as frogs and lizards into their designs to represent fertility and good harvests (Jose, 2015). Among the T'boli, agricultural symbols appear in T'nalak textiles, believed to be inspired by dream weavers as blessings for the harvest (Garcia & Biana, 2024).

Internationally, the Andean ponchos often integrate triangular and stepped motifs representing mountains and agricultural terraces, functioning as both cosmograms and agrarian prayers (Arnold & Yapita, 2006). Navajo weavers also encode agricultural symbols into blankets, with stepped and triangular motifs representing rain, corn, and fertility cycles (Yohe, 2012). In Southeast Asia, Lao and Hmong weaving traditions include triangular rice and fertility symbols that, like the Tingguian's Akken, blend cosmology with livelihood (Maxwell, 2014).

Figure 15 Allap (cloth prop); Inlaud

Icon. The icon in figure 15 is called Allap.

Index. The index from the picture refers to the symbol in a checkered form.

Symbol. Symbolic meaning in the usage of this cloth, as this is always present on any occasion, and to the production of the many garments shows the skill of the women Tingguian elders in weaving.

As explained by a female IPMR participant, the utilization of the Allap, which features a checkered symbol, holds significance in the context of courtship among the Tingguian. The pattern checkered is a symbol because it can contain contrasting colors and prominence; however, the IPMR participant added that the lines forming the checkered pattern have no meaning, that this is a design for the use of the Allap. However, the Allap itself has an overall symbolic meaning that is deeply rooted in the culture surrounding its production. Carrying on, anything that is a checkered symbol is or can be used as an Allap during courtships; this serves as a means for them to express their pride at being a Tingguian.

The Allap is a significant symbol of pride and honor for the Tingguian elders, reflecting their determination. The weaving process showcases the skill and patience of Tingguian women, resulting in meticulously crafted traditional attire. In Nueva Era, the Allap plays a vital role in the Tadek festival dance, allowing performers to express emotions and stories through the fabric. More than just a prop, Allap also embodies cultural significance, as its creation is a communal activity where women share knowledge and stories, reinforcing its deep-rooted value in their heritage.

Furthermore, Allap operates as an icon (a checkered pattern that visually represents balance and contrast), as an index (its presence in courtship rituals and festivals points to social identity and continuity), and as a symbol (collectively agreed upon as a sign of Tingguian pride and artistry). This layered interpretation illustrates how even a simple textile pattern can encode deep communal meanings.

Comparative practices affirm these insights. In Abra, checkered textiles are incorporated into traditional skirts as metaphors of balance and duality in social relationships (Bose & Talledo, 2015). Ifugao weaving integrates plaid-like motifs in ritual cloths used during harvest festivals, signifying reciprocity and community solidarity (Dulawan, 2001). The Kalinga also employ patterned woven cloths in courtship and marriage dances, where textiles operate as communicative symbols between families (Salvador-Amores, 2014). Among the T'boli, clothes used in dances embody dream-inspired designs that link aesthetics with spirituality (Garcia & Biana, 2024).

Internationally, Andean communities use checkered or plaid weaving in ritual ponchos, representing agricultural dualities (male/female, sun/moon) and reciprocity (Arnold & Yapita, 2006). African dance traditions also integrate patterned cloths as communicative props in ceremonies, symbolizing fertility, vitality, and group identity (Kriger, 2006). In Southeast Asia, Lao and Hmong festival textiles employ checkered motifs during courtship dances, paralleling the Tingguian's use of the Allap in Tadek (Maxwell, 2014). These cross-cultural parallels suggest that the Allap, while uniquely Tingguian, reflects a widespread indigenous practice of embedding communal pride, ritual meaning, and identity in dance cloths.

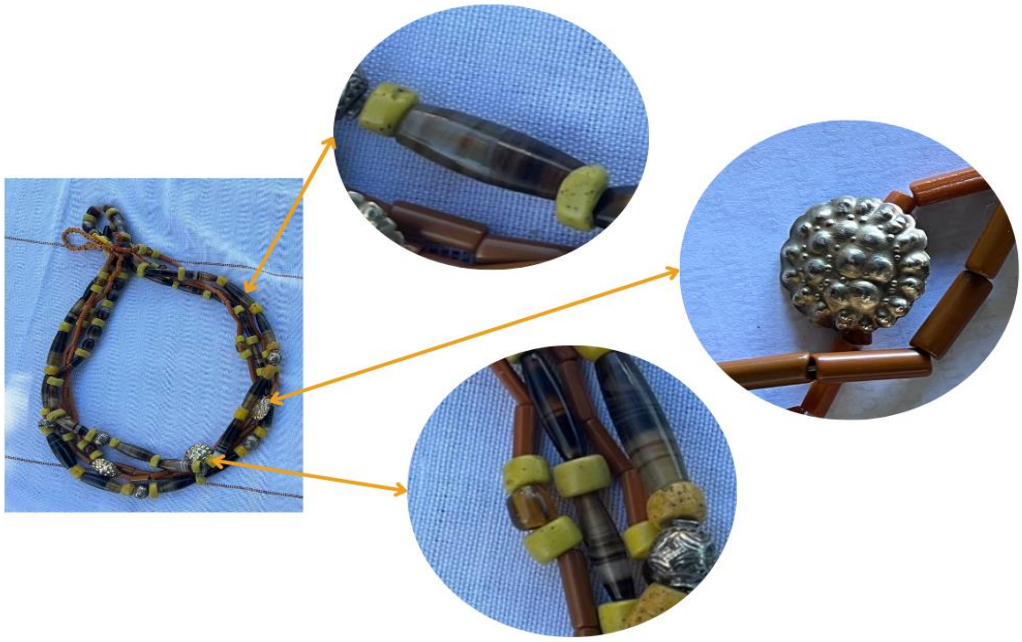

Figure 16 Paluket (Inlaud)

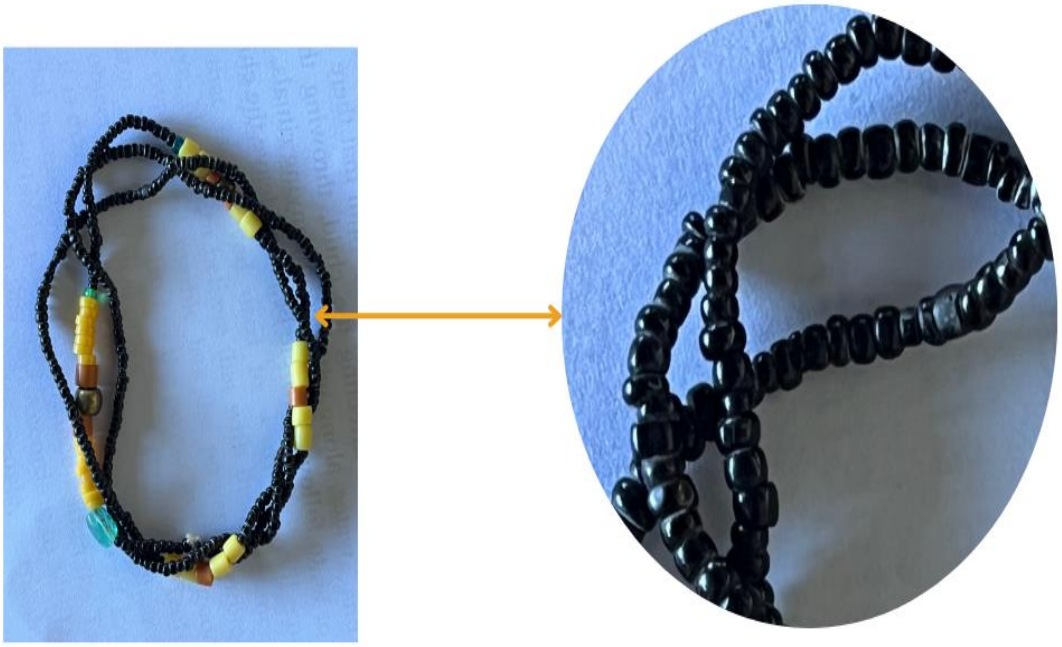

Figure 17 Balsay (Inlaud)

Icon. The icon in figure 16 is a headpiece called Paluket.

Index. The index in the figure refers to the shapes of the beads, marbles, and metals; the presence of flower-like metal indicates that an individual, regardless of generation, has a bright future ahead of them, and an oval- shaped marble corresponds to longevity and benevolence. Finally, small and big circle beads indicate that, although individuals or the number of people is small, they consider the future of the world to be vast.

Symbol. The symbolic meaning of Paluket is the presence of unity. Paluket embodies unity and shows a united tribe that makes the community continually foster more. By also wearing these accessories, individuals honor and preserve their cultural heritage, ensuring that traditional practices and craftsmanship are not forgotten. This helps the community to maintain a sense of continuity and connection with the past.

A female elder participant states that the flower-like metal symbolizes a bright future, embodying growth and nourishment. This representation fosters a mindset of hope and potential within the Tingguian tribe, encouraging a vision of success and fulfillment. Flowers, admired for their beauty, also serve as powerful symbols of growth. Meanwhile, an IPMR female participant notes, different flowers carry unique meanings, with the daffodil, as highlighted by Nelson (2023), symbolizing hope, renewal, and the promise of a brighter future, reinforcing the significance of the flower-like metal in Tingguian culture.

On the other hand, the oval- shaped marble, as believed by a female elder participant, corresponds to longevity and benevolence. The oblong shape of the marble serves as a visual representation of longevity. It symbolizes the idea that life is a series of interconnected moments, each contributing to the overall tapestry of existence. The elongated form also signifies the potential for growth and progress, emphasizing the importance of continuous learning and development throughout one's lifespan. This symbolism encourages individuals to cultivate inner strength and perseverance, enabling them to navigate the complexities of life with grace and fortitude.

Lastly, female elder participant mentioned that the small and big circle beads indicate that even though the number of individuals or people is small, they consider themselves good or positive, thinking that is beneficial for both their future and the world, encompassing vast possibilities. The participant shared: "… this indicates that despite the limited number of individuals, spanning from our ancestors to the present, our collective mindset towards the future and the well-being of the entire world remains positive."

The circle bead symbolizes individuals who, despite being small in stature or influence, possess a strong positive mindset. It highlights that size or status does not define one's potential to make a positive impact. Those with a positive outlook can overcome challenges, find solutions, and inspire others, serving as beacons of hope. Their stories are a reminder that anyone, regardless of perceived limitations, can create a better future through the power of positive thinking.

Semiotically, the Paluket operates as an icon (its shapes—flowers, ovals, and circles—visually resemble natural and cosmic forms), as an index (the specific use of shapes points to social aspirations such as growth, longevity, and unity), and as a symbol (its shared interpretation across the community makes it a collective emblem of Tingguian identity). This triadic analysis shows that the Paluket transcends decoration and functions as a living text of values, beliefs, and aspirations.

Philippine parallels strengthen this analysis. The Kalinga wear beaded headdresses with floral and circular motifs as protective charms and markers of social identity (Salvador- Amores, 2014). Ifugao heirloom ornaments likewise include bead and stone headpieces that represent longevity and ancestral blessings (Bulatao-Jayme, 2010). Bagobo and T'boli headdresses, adorned with metal and beads, are not only aesthetic but also ritual devices linking individuals to spirits (Maceda, 1998; Garcia & Biana, 2024).

International comparisons reveal similar symbolic logics. In Andean traditions, floral and geometric bead motifs on headdresses signify fertility, reciprocity, and future abundance (Arnold & Yapita, 2006). Navajo beadwork integrates circular patterns to embody cosmological balance and protection (Yohe, 2012). Maori head adornments also embed floral designs as genealogical markers linking individuals to their ancestral line (Smith, 2012). African beadwork traditions reinforce this by using floral and circular motifs to convey unity, continuity, and resilience (Kriger, 2006).

Icon. The icon in figure 17 is a bracelet.

Index. The index in the image refers to the shapes of the beads; the small circles, which are associated with the Paluket, describe small people and a small population; all are one.

Symbol. The symbolic meaning of the bracelet is that the family or neighborhood is coherent and understand each other, despite being from different ethnicities or from different places.

The small beads tacked together represent a tight bond or connection, a bracelet that consists of many sets if it covers half or under the elder's arm. The small circles, which are also associated with the meaning of their Paluket, describe small people and a small population, but are all considered as one. This means that regardless of your province of origin and whether you are married to a Tingguian, you are considered family and will not be treated differently, as stated by an IPMR participant.

A bracelet that symbolizes a tight bond and connection holds significant meaning in fostering and celebrating relationships. The accessory serves as a tangible reminder of the deep connection shared between individuals, whether it be between friends, family members, or romantic partners. The symbolism behind such a bracelet goes beyond its physical presence, representing the emotional ties and support that bind people together. The bracelet made up of small circular beads symbolizes connection in a profound and meaningful way. Each bead represents an individual, and when strung together, they form a unified whole, representing the interconnectedness of relationships.

The circular shape of the beads signifies the continuous and unbroken nature of the bond shared between individuals. It represents the idea that connections are not limited by time, distance, or differences but rather endure. One female IPMR participant shared: "…anyone who is an Ilokano or from any other tribe, whether they are Tingguian or not, born here or not, will always have this. We adore, we befriend, and we show kindness to each other regardless of who you are or where you're from."

From a semiotic perspective, the Balsay functions as an icon (the circle beads resemble people connected in unity), as an index (their arrangement indicates inclusive kinship practices that transcend ethnic boundaries), and as a symbol (its socially constructed meaning embodies the Tingguian value of communal solidarity and hospitality). This triadic interpretation highlights the bracelet as a cultural metaphor for inclusivity.

This interpretation resonates with other Philippine traditions. Ifugao and Kalinga communities use bead bracelets as heirlooms symbolizing kinship and continuity across generations (Bulatao-Jayme, 2010; Salvador-Amores, 2014). Among the Bagobo, beadwork bracelets are exchanged during rituals to reinforce community ties and inter-tribal relations (Maceda, 1998). Such parallels affirm that the Balsay expresses both belonging and social cohesion.

International comparisons also reinforce this meaning. In Andean communities, woven and beaded bracelets represent ayni (reciprocity), affirming mutual support within and across families (Arnold & Yapita, 2006). Navajo bead bracelets similarly symbolize protection and kinship ties, reflecting the circular continuity of life (Yohe, 2012). African beadwork traditions frequently employ circular bracelets as emblems of unity and collective strength (Kriger, 2006).

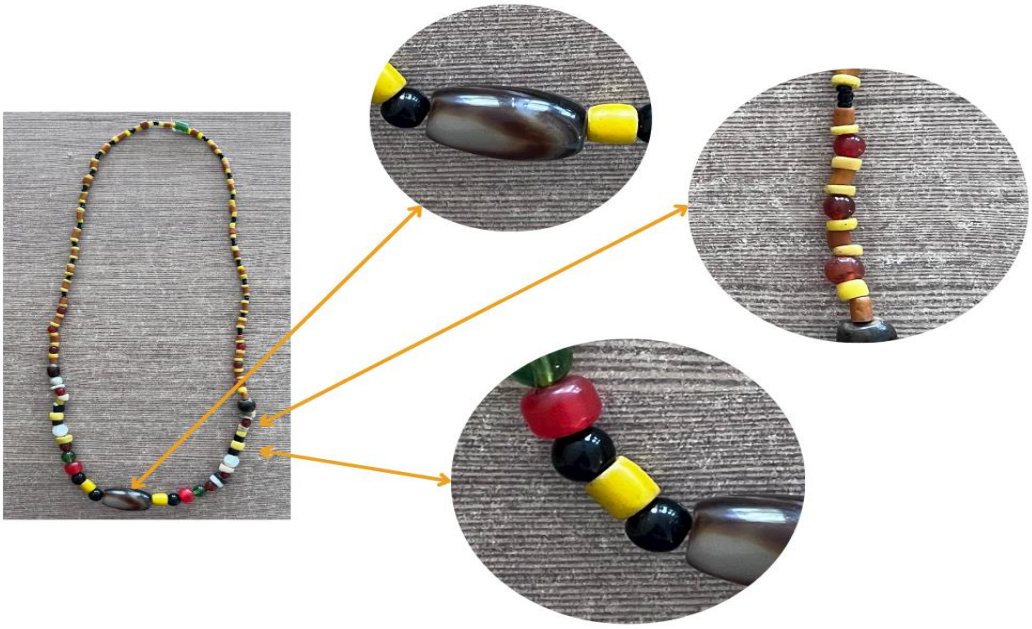

Figure 18 Paluket (Indaya)

Icon. The icon in figure 18 is a necklace.

Index. In the given picture, the indexes refer to the shapes of the materials used in both the necklace and bracelet, specifically focusing on three objects. The first object is a circular orange bead item known as Kiring. This object holds cultural significance as it is believed to be blessed and used as a form of protection against evil spirits. The second object is an oval-shaped marble called Lubsag. In the Tingguian tradition, this bead plays a significant role in courtship rituals. When a man seeks the blessing of a girl's family and proposes marriage, he presents her with the Kiring bead. The girl is then given time to decide. If she accepts the proposal, she keeps the Kiring bead as a symbol of their commitment. However, if she declines, she returns the bead to the man. Lastly, there is another circular yellow bead known as Ngila. This bead is believed to have the power to summon evil spirits that may be attached to someone's body. It serves as a form of protection against these spirits.

Symbol. The symbols in these objects, with their specific shapes and cultural significance, contribute to the symbolic meaning within the Tingguian culture. The accessory is made of many different types of materials, and the first material is an oval-shaped marble called Lubsag attached to the bracelet like an amulet that is believed used to ward off evil spirits and has the power to protect its owner from danger or harm. Thus, this also has the power to bring good luck to the wearer, as it is an object with magical properties. It provides feelings of comfort and protection. It is made and passed down by the ancestors of their elders.

The second element is a circular orange bead known as Kiring. This symbolic element holds great significance within the Tingguian culture and continues to be practiced to this day. According to a male elder participant, they believe that the circular orange bead

plays a crucial role in courtships and proposals within relationships.

In their belief system, when a man seeks the hand of a woman, it is customary for him to present her with a bracelet containing the circular orange bead as a symbol of respect. The circular shape of the bead represents giving the woman time to make her decision regarding the proposal, whether she accepts or declines. The Tingguian people believe that if the woman returns the bracelet after a few days, it signifies her unwillingness to be tied to the man. However, if she chooses to keep the bracelet, it indicates her desire to be with the man and shows her commitment. Following this exchange, both sets of parents will engage in discussions to determine the next steps in the relationship.

Lastly, there is another circular bead, but yellow, known as Ngila. This symbolic element is believed to possess the power to summon evil spirits that may be attached to someone's body. While the oval-shaped marble is believed to ward off evil spirits, the symbolic meaning behind the circular shape of the Ngila is that it can capture the attention of these malevolent entities. According to the informant, their elders shared a story that highlights the significance of the Ngila in their culture. The Ngila is believed to have the ability to remove evil spirits that linger or follow an individual. One of these rituals involves throwing the circular yellow bead into the water with the belief that the evil spirit will follow the bead. The male elder participant added: "…throwing the ngila into the water can invite spirits. When a child is sick and traditional remedies have not been effective in curing the illness, the elders would perform this ritual or practice." They believe that if the elders are certain that there is a spirit lingering that is affecting the child, throwing the ngila into the water, along with accompanying rituals, will lead the spirit to follow the circle bead and leave the child.

Like Putnam et al. 's (2020) interpretation, Fabella (2021) stated that circles are thought to symbolize unity, order, and the universe itself. They can also represent celestial bodies or natural forces.

The Paluket (Indaya) embodies Peirce·s triadic framework. As an icon, the circular and oval beads visually resemble natural forms such as planets or seeds. As an index, their specific ritual use (courtship, protection, healing) points to social practices of union, fertility, and safeguarding life. As a symbol, these meanings are collectively agreed upon within the Tingguian community and passed down through tradition, reinforcing group identity and continuity.

Philippine parallels strengthen this interpretation. In Kalinga society, heirloom beads are used in courtship and bride-price negotiations, symbolizing wealth and continuity (Salvador-Amores, 2014). Ifugao rituals employ bead necklaces and marbles as protective charms during agricultural and fertility rites (Bulatao-Jayme, 2010). Among the Bagobo and T·boli, beaded accessories serve as amulets and as markers of social exchange during marriages and festivals (Maceda, 1998; Garcia & Biana, 2024).

International studies reveal similar functions. In Andean traditions, beads and marbles are exchanged in courtship rituals as material symbols of reciprocity and commitment (Arnold & Yapita, 2006). Navajo beadwork often employs circular turquoise stones as both protective devices and representations of harmony and cosmic balance (Yohe, 2012). Maori jewelry also integrates circular and oval forms carved in bone or stone, symbolizing life cycles, fertility, and ancestral ties (Smith, 2012). African bead traditions similarly treat circular bead necklaces as conveyors of fertility, protection, and spiritual harmony (Kriger, 2006).

Prosperity and spirituality as symbolic meanings

The application of semiotics found that symbolic elements found in Tingguian attire collectively communicate two primary symbolic meanings: (a) beliefs towards community prosperity, and (b) spiritual beliefs.

Community Prosperity

The symbolic system embedded in Tingguian women·s attire encodes collective strategies for material reproduction, social cooperation, and intergenerational transmission of craft knowledge. The recurring geometric elements — straight lines, triangles, and checkered patterns — operate as formal devices that represent agricultural lifeways (planting, harvest cycles), coordinated labor practices, and the technical mastery of weaving that contributes to household and

communal economies. In this way, textile form functions as a material mnemonic for subsistence knowledge and a public statement of competence and resourcefulness. (De Las Peñas et al., 2018; Jose, 2015).

These prosperity meanings are multi-layered. At one level the motifs serve as indexes of livelihood (triangles = rice, linear friezes = fields or terraces); at another level they become symbols of communal aspiration (repeated patterns as statements of continuity, checkered modules as emblems of coordinated labor). The craftsmanship evident in extended garments (e.g., Allap, Pinningitan) also acts as social capital: highly skilled woven pieces signal technique, time investment, and the ability to contribute to exchange networks or ritual obligations — all of which strengthen household economies and social standing (De Las Peñas et al., 2018; Bose & Talledo, 2015).

Comparative evidence corroborates this interpretation. Highland Philippines textile studies document similar formal encodings of agricultural and social life: Ifugao and Kalinga cloths visually map rice terraces, ritual cycles, and clan affiliations (Salvador-Amores, 2014; Dulawan, 2001). The T·boli T·nalak links dream-inspired designs to communal well-being and ecological practice (Garcia & Biana, 2024). Internationally, Andean and Navajo textile traditions likewise encode agricultural cosmologies and subsistence knowledge into geometric motifs — showing that weaving commonly operates cross-culturally as a technology for encoding and transmitting livelihood knowledge (Arnold & Yapita, 2006; Yohe, 2012).

Interpreting Tingguian motifs as statements about prosperity requires a method that connects formal analysis (symmetry, motif class) to ethnographic data (use, ritual context, informant testimony). Doing so demonstrates that attire is a practical technology for sustaining community welfare — both materially (through craft economies) and socially (through reciprocity and status) (De Las Peñas et al., 2018).

Spirituality

The symbolic system of Tingguian attire simultaneously embeds spiritual logics: beads, amulets, circular motifs, and specific color usages operate in ritual, healing, and courtship practices and thus mediate relations with ancestors and non-human agents. Objects such as the Lubsag (oval marbles), Kiring (orange beads), and Ngila (yellow beads) are not decorative extras but ritual technologies: they are used in proposals, protection rites, and healing rituals that make spiritual claims about protection, longevity, and communal balance. This ritual functionality is reported in community validation interviews and corroborates ethnographies of Philippine groups where beads and textiles are performative mediators in sacred practice (Maceda, 1998; Bulatao-Jayme, 2010).

These spiritual meanings reflect polyvalent semiotics. A motif that is read as an index of livelihood in one context (e.g., a triangle indicating rice) may, in ceremonial contexts, be ritual speech — invoking protection for the harvest, ancestral blessing, or fertility. Applying a hybrid semiotic lens (Peirce + social semiotics) helps explain this polyvalence: motifs have affordances shaped by material technique (loom constraints, coloring practices) and by socio-ritual conventions that naturalize meanings into mythic registers (Hodge & Kress, 1988; Bezemer, 2023).

Comparatively, T·boli weaving expresses spiritual revelation through dream-derived motifs (Garcia & Biana, 2024). Kalinga and Ifugao accessories are explicitly used in rites to avert harm and secure fertility (Salvador-Amores, 2014; Bulatao-Jayme, 2010). Globally, Navajo spirit-lines, Andean ritual cloths, and Oceanic/Maori adornments show that textiles and beads commonly function as conduits between human and non-human spheres (Yohe, 2012; Arnold & Yapita, 2006; Smith, 2012). These parallels reinforce that Tingguian spiritual uses of attire are part of a widespread indigenous practice of materializing cosmology in wearable form.

Recognizing the spiritual dimension requires the researcher to treat textile objects as active participants in ritual sequences (not merely passive signs). Ethnographic triangulation — combining motif analysis, multiple informants, and observation of ritual use — strengthens claims about ritual meaning and reduces over-reliance on isolated anecdotes. (Garcia & Biana, 2024; Yohe, 2012).

Conclusions and recommendations

In the indigenous culture, traditional attire is more than just a set of clothing; it is a way of expressing identity through the richness of cultural heritage. This semiotic study revealed that the symbolic elements in the traditional attire of the Tingguian convey specific messages related to the community's beliefs and values. Specifically, community prosperity and spirituality. This demonstrates that, although these elements are not easily distinguishable, they are not merely decorative; instead, they serve as powerful reminders of the values and beliefs integral to the Tingguian way of life. Through these elements, the Tingguian people express their reverence for their community's well-being and their connection to the spiritual realm, creating a rich tapestry of meaning within their traditional attire. Tingguian attire manifests a fused semiotic economy in which prosperity and spirituality are mutually reinforcing. Motifs encode subsistence practices while also being mobilized ritually to protect, bless, and reproduce those very practices. To substantiate these claims further, subsequent analyses should map motif form (geometry, color) , production technique (loom type, dyes) , and social context (ritual, every day, performance) . Doing so will produce a triangulated account that situates the Tingguian semiotic system within both local Philippine traditions and broader trans-regional patterns of indigenous textile semiotics.

The study only focuses on the Tingguians of Ilocos Norte, Philippines; thus, it is recommended that future studies focus on exploring the other IP communities in the province, such as Isnag, Imalawa-Isnag, Yapayao, Isnag-Apayao, and Snag-Yapayao. Aside from their traditional attire, it is also recommended to look at their other tangible cultural heritage that contains symbolic elements. Furthermore, the process of knowledge sharing within the IP communities with the young members is an interesting research topic to explore.

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