



“Play” in *Gopas* Ritual in Kalinga Province, Philippines¹

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Abstract

In the municipality of Pasil, Kalinga, Philippines, the practice of performing *gopas* rite persists to this day. A shaman, called *mangogopas*, conducts the ritual to give a person a guardian spirit. It consists of complicated processes with elements and activities that have symbolic meanings. However, in the last part of the ritual’s climax, there is an unnamed segment where the shaman and her assistant seem to relax, act irreverently, or play like children. While illustrating the *gopas* rite process, this article sheds light on how this ostensibly meaningless “play” portion paradoxically manifests significance as liminal space because it allows participants to obtain new understanding of their social order. This article points out that this part of the ritual highlights and differentiates both the symbolic and the substantial elements in the people’s daily life.

Keywords: ritual, play, traditional medicine

Introduction

SHAMANIC studies since the 1980s has developed a new paradigm by regarding shamanism, including such practice as spirit possession, as a universal religious phenomenon. Such perspective rejects a narrow, classical

understanding of shamanism as nothing more than an ancient art of ecstasy (Yamada 1998, p. 107). The problem of shamanic studies in anthropology lies in the premise that “shamanism pertains to healing” (Okuno 1998, p. 327). It is the scholars and practitioners of modern medicine—which tends to equate the human body with a machine—who raised a question why a shaman, who does not seem to be a “rational medical scientist,” could cure sickness, as a point of departure for their researches. Since the middle of the 20th century, shamanic studies has been influenced by such a question of modern medicine, and research has tended to focus on the shaman’s conduct as an act of medical treatment and in terms of “medical effectiveness” from the point of view of modern medical science (ibid., p. 332). Therefore, deconstructing such framework and renewing sociocultural analysis are necessary in shamanic studies.

Okuno warns us that such terms as “treatment” and “medical effectiveness” have been used indiscriminately in shamanic studies. Keeping Okuno’s caution in mind that we must use these terms more carefully from the perspective of social science, this paper inquires into the meaning of “play” through an analysis of the *gopas* ritual in the municipality of Pasil, province of Kalinga in northern Philippines.

The *gopas* ritual is usually conducted to introduce a guardian spirit to a sick person. It takes two days to perform this ritual. Each segment is meaningful and complicated. This paper focuses on a portion after the ritual’s climax where the shaman and her assistant, both old women, “played” innocently like children. In this play segment of the ritual, they toyed with some pork cuts, joked and laughed like children, amusing the participating audience. Obviously peculiar, this process had a different atmosphere from the rest of the ritual. So what function or meaning does this play have when it does not seem to be as serious and significant as the other parts of the ritual? Why is a play included toward the last part of the ritual?

This paper discusses the function of such act of play, which is ostensibly considered bereft of meaning in the midst of a meaningful process of the ritual. This can be a step toward understanding the Pasil

residents’ notion of sickness and the function of the *gopas* ritual not necessarily in terms of its scientific medical effectiveness but in terms of its sociocultural meaning.

Belief system of Pasil residents

General view of Pasil, Kalinga, Philippines

The province of Kalinga is located in the steep mountainous region of Northern Luzon. Its adjoining provinces are Cagayan, Abra, Mountain Province, and Apayao. The province consists of seven municipalities² and a capital city, Tabuk. The municipality of Pasil, the fieldwork site of this study, is one of its municipalities. Pasil has 14 barangays,³ with a population of about 10,080 in 2007.⁴ The dry season is from March to May, and the rainy season is from June to February.

According to local oral accounts, the residents of Pasil believed in a supreme god, Kabunyan. However, since Christianity was introduced in Bulanao, Tabuk area, in 1783 (Sugguiyao 1990, p. 13), most of the population have been Christianized, either as Roman Catholics or Protestants. Slash-and-burn farming, paddy rice and dry-land rice cultivation, and hunting and gathering remain their major sources of livelihood. However, as the need for currency increased, they began to seek cash incomes, too. Today, some run mall *sari-sari* stores and others work for municipal offices or schools. The new trend is to work in cities (e.g., Tabuk, Baguio, or Manila) or abroad (e.g., Taiwan, South Korea, Singapore, or the Middle East). In addition, not a small number of the population of Pasil work in mines, as Pasil possesses rich mineral resources such as gold, silver, and copper. At one time, it had the largest mine in the province.

Belief system of Pasil folks

Under Spanish rule, which lasted more than 300 years, Roman Catholicism spread across the Philippine archipelago. When American

rule started in 1902, Protestant missionaries began evangelizing different parts of the country, including Northern Luzon. Today, most Kalingas are Christians. Small churches are present even in remote areas of the province. Nevertheless, it is observed that traditional animistic beliefs in supernatural beings are ingrained in the religious views of Pasil folks. Such beliefs correspond with various aspects of their daily lives. Misfortunes or catastrophes, such as sickness or accident, are explained as having been caused by supernatural beings, thus they pay careful attention to get along with these beings in their daily lives.

The supernatural beings that Pasil folks talked about can be grouped roughly into two: the supreme god Kabunyan, or Apo Dios (God the Father), called with the Christianized terminology; and the various kinds of spirits known as *alan*. God exists somewhere far from the people while *alan* spirits roam around the community and sometimes make direct contact with the villagers.

During my stay in Pasil, the local people seldom mentioned the name Kabunyan; instead, they usually referred to Apo Dios, the term for the Christian God. In Pasil, it is believed that those who engage in criminal or immoral behavior, such as robbery, are deviating from the social norm and shall be punished by Apo Dios in some way—for instance, by getting sick.

On the other hand, the term “*alan*” is used to refer to all kinds of spirits in general. *Alan* includes the spirits of the dead (*kakkalading*), the souls of people who are about to die or have just died (*kadudua*), bad spirits, and guardian spirits. A *kadudua* can be called *kakkalading* about a year after one’s death, although I did not find any person who could clearly explain the difference between these two terms.

It is believed by some Pasil villagers that the soul of the dead does not go to heaven immediately after death but roam around the area where the person lived. In the event the dead has something to tell the living, its spirit attempts to contact the living by “talking” to them. It is believed that such action of the spirit of the dead can bring about illness to those who are contacted. One of my informants once conversed with the spirit of

her son who had died of an accident. When one of her daughters got sick, the spirit of her son appeared and said, “Put *bayas* [sugarcane wine] at the entrance of the house.” So she did, and after a while her daughter got well.

A dead spirit resembles a human being, some of my informants explained. Those who have seen spirits say that they wear white or black clothes, while a *kadudua* wears a skirt or loincloth of Kalinga pattern. Such traditional clothes—namely, a skirt or loincloth of Kalinga pattern—are obviously relevant to Kalinga custom.

Alan also includes bad spirits. It is said that they are the spirits of people who committed crimes or practiced sorcery during their lifetime. Some of them have specific names, and they usually inhabit in the watersides. The bad alan is said to roam around the villages, too. Some specific spots within and outside the village are identified by the villagers as *ngilin*, the place where bad spirits are believed to inhabit. At those spots, there are quite a few rumors or tales about alan: “An alan hurled stones at us while we were passing there” or “Somebody saw many babies floating in that spring.” An interviewee described the bad spirits as being very tall, having downy feather-like hair, possessing blue and shiny eyes, long nosed, bearded, sporting long and curly hair, and dark brown skinned. They sometimes appear in the form of an animal, such as pig or horse, and can mislead people into the forests or to a faraway land, or cause sickness.

A family with a newborn baby takes great precautions against bad spirits because it is believed that babies are easily affected by them; a spirit’s mischief can cause the soul of a baby to leave its body. That is why we can see *paksiw*, crossed sticks made of *paul*, a type of plant, at the entrance of each house where there is a newborn. Visitors from far away are expected to refrain from entering a house with *paksiw* by its entrance because it is possible that they have passed a *ngilin* and the bad spirits there have followed them. If a visitor visits a newborn and the baby cries unusually or gets sick, people call the baby’s condition *nangilin*, explaining that it was caused by the bad spirits that had followed the visitor from

elsewhere. In this way, Pasil residents protect themselves against bad spirits and avoid getting sick in their daily lives.

Besides bad spirits and spirits of the dead, alao also includes guardian deities such as *sangasang* or *pudayan*, which is associated with a sacred spot at the entrance of a hamlet, or *odong*, a guardian deity that some families or houses inherit.

The *sangasang* or *pudayan* guardian deity protects the hamlet. *Sangasang* is regarded as a type of weapon in the event of tribal wars. It is believed that *sangasang* saves a hamlet from enemy attacks by causing the enemy—that is, the evil outsider—sickness with severe abdominal pain, headache, excessive perspiration, systemic numb sensation, or a loss of rationality (Sugguiyao 1990, p. 94). Even the villagers can be harmed by *sangasang* and can get sick in case they urinate or spit on *sangasang*, intentional or not. Sometimes the *sangasang* appears in the form of an animal, such as monkey, and misleads people on their way. Bones of carabao, chicken, pig, or dog are placed as markers of *sangasang* spots. However, in recent years, the villagers seldom observe this practice anymore; as a result, it is hard for both villagers and outsiders to identify the location of *sangasang*.

Some families and houses inherit the guardian deity *odong*. The *odong* is called *gopas* when children inherit it from their parents, and it is called *kusisi* or *allot* when the house itself inherits it.

The literal meaning of *gopas* in Pinasil, the Pasil language, is “to cut a cloth with a knife.” The belief in and practice of *gopas* inheritance is said to have originated from Biga, Tabuk, according to a shaman who can conduct the ritual to settle the sickness caused by *gopas*. It has spread to other areas through increasing intertribal marriages. Currently, Barangay Cagaluan of Pasil is famous for *gopas* inheritance, and the shaman who can conduct a *gopas* ritual is a native of the place.

Kusisi or *allot* refers to the guardian spirit inherited by the house itself. However, the number of houses holding *kusisi/allot* has been gradually decreasing.

At the kitchen of the houses that have inherited kusisi/allot or those of the families who have inherited gopas, there are tiny dwellings set aside for the guardian spirits—generally in a corner of the ceiling. The tiny house for the kusisi guardian spirit is made of coconut shells, and the house for the gopas guardian spirit, called *bagikatan*, is made of crossed sticks of a plant called paul, on which chicken foot, piece of white cloth, *tongaton* (bamboo stamping tube), and betel nuts are suspended.

Taboos exist in inheriting odong. Odong holders, residents, and visitors must observe such taboos. At houses holding kusisi, sitting on certain spots, such as the entrance or the threshold, is prohibited. It is believed that sitting on those spots can cause a person sickness with unusual itchiness or abdominal swelling. Also, odong holders must share some meat—that of carabao, cow, pig, or chicken—with the guardian spirits before every meal that includes meat. It is believed that if an odong holder forgets to offer meat prior to the meal, the guardian spirits would get angry and cause him illness. Only the family members can heal such sickness caused by kusisi by conducting *sap-oy* (literally “to blow”) by shouting “foooi” and by beating the affected parts with a broom or plastering saliva.

For gopas holders, some types of food are considered taboo—namely, dog, eel, frog, bat, or lizard. It is said that the gopas holders’ guardian spirits would cause them to get ill if they broke the taboo. Sometimes the spirits may cause sickness for other reasons like demanding something from the gopas holders. The gopas shaman, called *manggogopas*, can cure such sickness by conducting a gopas ritual.

As mentioned earlier, it is often observed that the cause of sickness or death is often attributed to supernatural beings even today when modern medicine is practiced in Pasil. In the next section, I will present in detail a gopas ritual, which is usually conducted to heal sickness of a gopas holder caused by guardian spirits.

Gopas ritual

General information on the ritual

In this section I illustrate the sequence of a gopas ritual as performed before me for two days in January 2010. Most of the details of the ritual presented here are based on my participatory observation, my own memory, notes taken by my two research assistants (Ellen and June), and photographs and video. The information was cross-checked when I attended another gopas ritual for a sick person in Barangay Balinciagao Norte on November 26, 2010. The sequence of this ritual was fairly identical to that I observed earlier.

The gopas ritual, as a rule, is conducted to appease the anger of the guardian spirit that is believed to have caused the illness of a gopas holder or his/her child. If the child had not become a gopas holder prior to the ritual, he or she will be given a guardian spirit and becomes a gopas holder after the ritual.

When a Japanese male visitor in Pasil pleaded a gopas shaman to give him a gopas inheritance, the shaman suggested that I take the ritual with him because the subject of the ritual should usually be a male and female pair.⁵ I therefore had a chance to be the subject of a gopas ritual during my stay in Pasil.

The gopas ritual was conducted on 28 January 2010 from about 6:00 pm to midnight and on 29 January 2010 from 5:00 am to 3:00 pm. It was performed in the house of one of my research assistants, June, in Barangay Balinciagao Norte, Pasil. Through arrangements made by my assistants, I invited Ina⁶ Bang-on, a woman about 90 years of age from the nearby barangay of Cagaluan, to lead the ritual. Ina Anggo and Ina Immina, both women about 70 years of age from the adjacent barangay of Balinciagao Sur, as requested by Ina Bang-on, served as her assistants. In Pasil today, there is only one shaman who can perform gopas (manggogopas), and there are four elderly women who can assist her as far as I know. The purpose of the gopas ritual done for “A” and me was to provide us with gopas guardian spirits and to pray for our health and

Table 1. Items prepared for the ritual

English	Pinasil	Number of pieces
native pig	<i>bolok</i>	1
native chicken	<i>manok</i>	2
rice	<i>binayu</i>	
glutinous rice	<i>daikot</i>	
rice plant	<i>oyak</i>	
rattan string	<i>iwoy</i>	4
blanket	<i>ulos</i>	2
Kalinga-designed skirt	<i>kain</i>	2
Kalinga-designed belt	<i>takyed</i>	2
floor mat	<i>obok</i>	1
porcelain bowl	<i>malukong</i>	2
coconut oil	<i>lana</i>	
a piece of white cloth		1
small knife	<i>gipen</i>	1
small balls	<i>aplog and alubo</i>	1 each
small mortar	<i>lusong</i>	1
gold earring		1
plastic bowl		10
<i>baliliko</i> shells	<i>baliliko</i>	1 set
small metallic tube	<i>likop</i>	1
<i>lawod</i> leaves	<i>lawod</i>	
coconut leaves	<i>bain</i>	
betel nuts	<i>buwa</i>	
house of spirits	<i>bagikatan</i>	1
basket	<i>damos</i>	1
flat gongs	<i>gangsa</i>	1 set
bamboo musical instruments	<i>tongatong</i>	1 set
salt	<i>asin</i>	
sugar	<i>inti</i>	
coffee	<i>kapi</i>	
vinegar	<i>suka</i>	
alcohol ⁷		
kerosene		

prosperity. Since I had not held gopas before then, the gopas for the children of the gopas holders was simulated prior to the performance of the ritual. Several items needed for the ritual were prepared (see Table 1).

Ritual processes⁸

The gopas ritual largely consists of four parts: *wodwod*, *apalin*, *battolay*, and *kallising*. Between *battolay* and *kallising*, there is a segment where the shaman and her assistants seemed to relax and play like children. The people around also relaxed and laughed while watching them. This segment does not seem to have a particular name. It is in this segment of the ritual that I find elements of play.

Wodwod

The gopas ritual started about 6 pm through midnight on January 28, 2010. Only the first part of the ritual, *wodwod*,⁹ was performed on the first day. The *wodwod* consists of nine segments. Below is the sequence of these segments.

1. Buyon (searching)

Buyon was performed to decide which guardian spirit would be in charge of “A” and me. Ina Bang-on asked the spirits about this by putting a small ball (*aplog*) on a metallic tube (*likop*) on top of the uncooked rice (*binayu*) in a bowl (*malukong*).

2. Sap-oy (blowing)

Ina Bang-on rubbed coconut oil on my forehead and on that of “A,” calling the names of the selected guardian spirits respectively for us.

3. Songa (applying animal blood on the affected body part)

Songa was performed after Ina Bang-on had cut the throat of a native chicken with a knife and kept its blood in a bowl. She held the dead

Table 2. Processes of the *gopas* ritual

First day			
I. Wodwod			
6 pm	1	<i>buyon</i>	Select the guardian spirits for me and “A.”
	2	<i>sap-oy</i>	Call on the two selected guardian spirits respectively.
	3	<i>songa</i>	Apply chicken blood on me and “A.”
	4	<i>mangan si daikot</i>	Have some cooked glutinous rice.
	5	<i>doydoy</i>	Prepare rattan strings and some items.
	6	<i>singising</i>	Recite and chant.
	7	<i>mangan si manok</i>	Have cooked chicken and some rice.
	8	<i>alisig</i>	Do <i>sap-oy</i> for health and play instruments.
Midnight	9	<i>inodon</i>	Dance and kick the pig.
Second day			
II. Apalin			
Dawn			
7 am	1	apalin	Do <i>sap-oy</i> and carry the pig outside.
	2	*cooking the pig *telling the omen *hanging <i>tugon</i>	
	3	<i>mamalliyat</i>	Prepare for items
III. Battolay			
Noon	1	<i>singising</i>	Recite and chant.
	2	<i>makalat</i>	Follow the gold earring.
	3	<i>mangan si bolok.</i>	Have cooked pig and some rice.
	4	playing with <i>bosal</i> *removing the rattan strings and all items	Play with <i>bosal</i> .
IV. Kallising			
3 pm		<i>kallising</i>	Turn and draw the bowls to my body.
		*cleaning	

* Unnamed segments of the ritual.

chicken and pressed it on my knee and recited, “Inugan [the name of my guardian spirit], go to Japan with Tomoko [my name]!”

4. Mangan si daikot (eating glutinous rice)

After songa, we ate glutinous rice without any sugar. It is considered taboo to add sugar to the glutinous rice to be eaten during this ritual.

5. Doydoy (preparations)

Rattan strings were tied near the ceiling, and some rice plants and a living native chicken were hung over the rattan strings.

6. Singising (hitting bowl with a knife and to chant)

Ina Bang-on chanted, hitting the bowl with a small knife, while her assistant shook baliliko shells. In this part, Ina Bang-on called on the guardian spirits and pleaded with them for our health. She also entreated them to stay in their own house (bagikatan).

7. Mangan si manok (eating chicken)

After singising, we ate cooked chicken and some rice.

8. Alisig¹⁰

After eating chicken, “A” and I sat on the floor mat, and male participants started playing gongs and bamboo musical instruments while Ina Bang-on put lawod leaves, coconut leaves, and takyed belt on our backs.

9. Inodon (old ritual)

“A” and I remained seated on the mat. Male participants kept playing the musical instruments. Ina did singising, and Ina Anggo shook baliliko shells and lusong behind us. A takyed was placed between a living native pig lying down in a corner of the room and the floor mat where “A” and I

were sitting. Then Ina Bang-on ordered us to stand up with her. She tightened the takyed around our waists, and the two of us danced, making a circle. After a while, I kicked the pig while we were dancing; this action indicates the transfer of our sickness to the pig, according to Ina Bang-on. When the dance was finished, Ina Bang-on placed the Kalinga-designed skirt (*kain*) over the pig. This concluded the *wodwod*, the first part of the ritual; it was already midnight by then. As we left June’s house, Ina Bang-on reminded us to return before sunrise.

On the second day, the *gopas* ritual continued. Three “named” parts of the *gopas* ritual were performed on this day: *apalin*, *battolay*, and *kallising*. The play segment, the focus of this paper, took place in the afternoon of this day, between *battolay* and *kallising* toward the end of the ritual.

Complying with what Ina Bang-on told us, “A” and I returned before sunrise. Ina Bang-on, her assistants, and my research assistant Ellen slept at June’s house. The other villagers returned to the venue after sunrise.

Apalin

1. Apalin (to touch the pain or the affected body part)

At first Ina Bang-on prepared some water in a bowl and sprinkled some over the native pig lying in the corner; the pig’s ear flapped, which, Ina said, indicated that “A” and I would be healthy. She also stroked our feet with her wet hand and recited, “Go out! Wish they would be healthy even after they have returned to Japan.” Then she moved to a fireplace and threw the rest of the water into it, saying, “Wish they would never get sick. Wish they would have more crops and domestic animals.” At the end of this part, the male neighbors carried the pig outside the house.

2. Cooking the pig; telling the omen; hanging *tugon*

At the break of dawn the male neighbors started to carve and cook the pig; the female neighbors cooked special glutinous rice for *gopas* called

tinibalo. The male neighbors cut the pig's throat with a knife and collected its blood in a bowl. They broiled the pig over the fire, scraped the burnt hair off, and started to carve it very carefully, complying with Ina Anggo's strict instructions. The men looked very serious, for they were expected to carve and chop the pig accurately. Ina Anggo scolded them from time to time when they made mistakes. The internal organs of the pig, except for the liver, were cooked for "a snack with alcohol" for the men, and the meat was chopped into pieces to be cooked and served to the participants later. Some parts were left uncooked to be given to Ina Bang-on.¹¹ Some other parts were set aside to be used in the ritual later, and some pieces of the uncooked meat (*pain* or abdominal oblique muscle, and *butik* or intercostal muscles) were to be hung at the entrance as a sign (*tugon*) of a *gopas* ritual for guardian spirits.

The liver and *apdu* (one of the internal organs) were put in a washtub so that Ina Bang-on could discern an omen from them. We had a good omen. She said that "A" and I were healthy, and she would have another *gopas* ritual for a child in the near future. After that, the liver was cooked to be used during the ritual later.

3. Mamalliyat (starting)

During the cooking of the pig and *tinibalo*, some items—such as *kain*, blanket, *lawod* leaves, and coconut leaves—were hung over the rattan strings near the ceiling in the room.

Battolay¹²

This is the climax of the *gopas* ritual. The following four segments comprise this part of the ritual.

1. Singising

At the beginning, "A" and I were seated on the floor mat. Ina Bang-on did singising behind us while Ina Anggo shook *baliliko* shells.

2. Makalat¹³

As male neighbors played the gongs, “A” and I danced, stepping forward and backward in a circular formation. After a while, one of the male neighbors, holding a gold earring as though showing off, joined our dance. Ina Bang-on aggressively followed him to get the gold earring; however, she fainted before doing so. She told me later that she was not conscious while following him and that her body was not hers.

3. Mangan si bolok (eating the pig meat)

Around noon, all the participants ate cooked meat of the pig and some rice outside the house.

4. Playing with bosal (pig’s nose, right ear, right foot, and tail, which are considered unimportant pork parts)

After eating, Ina Bang-on and Ina Anggo seemed to start “playing.” This segment consists of four subsegments: *upoop*,¹⁴ *tungali* (nose flute), *mantilyo* (hammer), and “scrambling the pig’s liver” (no local term is designated for this subsegment). During *upoop*, Ina Bang-on and Ina Anggo inserted coconut sticks into the nose and ears of the pig. This is done to prevent us from getting sick with a cold, mouth itchiness, tongue disease, or poor hearing. During *tungali*, Ina Bang-on and Ina Anggo imitated the action of playing the nose flute (*tungali*) with the pig’s tail. This was to prevent us from catching a cold. During *mantilyo*, they tap the chunk of liver with a pig’s leg, which was done to prevent us from getting sick with a headache and general body aches. Lastly, they scrambled the pig’s liver and cooked glutinous rice. Ina Bang-on and Ina Anggo performed these four segments of the ritual; interestingly enough, they seemed to be playing like children. In the next section, I discuss this aspect of the ritual. It is noted that after this play segment, all the rattan strings tied near the ceiling and the items suspended over them were removed.

Kallising¹⁵

This is the last part of the gopas ritual. Ten plastic bowls were placed in front of “A” and me as we sat on the floor mat. Ina Bang-on told me to hold the bowls with the fingers of both hands and then turn the bowls clockwise and counterclockwise five times each. As soon as I finished turning them, I had to catch the ten bowls in my arms and bring them to my body as Ina Bang-on tried to take the bowls.

The lesson from this part of the ritual is to remind us not to worry about our daily needs, such as money or food. One of my informants who inherited gopas explained that kallising is performed to get our kadudua (soul) back to our body. Finally, Ina Bang-on tied a bead necklace around each of our necks.

Thus concluded the gopas ritual. Ina’s assistant tied together the bamboo musical instruments (tongatong) played during the ritual and the bagikatan (a house for my guardian spirit) with the rattan strings removed from the ceiling. The bagikatan must be hung on the ceiling in my house, and I need to offer my guardian spirit a piece of meat every time I eat meat myself. Moreover, I am no longer allowed to eat some kind of food such as eel, bat, dog, frog, lizard, *pais* (distributed meat on funeral to take home), and *kulidaw* (a kind of red fish found in the river). Breaking these taboos would arouse my guardian spirit’s anger and could cause me to get ill.

The function of play in the gopas ritual

This section reflects on the play segment performed toward the end of the gopas ritual. The segment contains elements of imitation and is performed comically. Having no ritualistic categorical label, this segment may ostensibly be considered less “formal,” thus less “important.” However, I suggest that this segment of play paradoxically contains certain importance to the gopas ritual and to the daily community life of Pasil, as it serves as transitional time/space between the ritualistic and non-ritualistic domains.

Play and liminality

A play is neither a work nor a serious and realistic action. Keiji Iwata states the following on the occurrence of a play:

First, the “play” exists outside the tempo-spatial domain of daily life. It occurs at the border between two worlds, such as the sacred and the profane, or at the “shore.” The formation of “play” is not yet clear whether the daily is tempted to become the non-daily or whether the non-daily is moved to become the daily; nevertheless, the boundary between two worlds seems to be the place where play occurs. (1986, p. 132; English translation by this author)

Iwata’s notion of boundary as locus of play is relevant to the notion of liminality by Victor W. Turner. Although Turner did not use the term “play,” he illuminated on the shift between the extraordinary tempo-space and the ordinary one around rituals. Turner regards liminality as the time and space deviated from the normal modes of social actions under an ordinary established structure (Turner 1969, p. 167). He developed the notion of “*communitas*” to explain an unusual social condition that occurs at a particular moment and deviates from the norms of the existing social structure. *Communitas* “emerges recognizably in the liminal period, is of society as an unstructured or rudimentarily structured and relatively undifferentiated *comitatus*, community, or even communion of equal individuals who submit together to the general authority of the ritual elders” (ibid., p. 96). Turner distinguishes two main types of ritual in liminality: “rituals of status elevation” and “rituals of status reversal.” In rituals of status elevation, the ritual subject or novice is being conveyed irreversibly from a lower to a higher position in an institutionalized system. However, in rituals of status reversal, groups or categories of persons who habitually occupy low status positions in the social structure are positively enjoined to exercise ritual authority over their superiors, who in turn must accept with goodwill their ritual degradation (ibid., p. 167). By making the low high and the high low, they reaffirm the hierarchical principle, and this

kind of ritual brings social structure and *communitas* into the correct mutual relationship once again (*ibid.*, p. 167, 178). As Turner notes, rituals of status reversal are often practiced with robust behaviors, and structural regularity is underlined by such paradoxes.

Since *communitas* can potentially alter the existing social order, Schultz and Lavenda (1993) suggest that “*communitas* should be created in a short period and can be recognized in a play” (Schultz & Lavenda 1993, p. 162). They also suggest that in moving from daily life to time and space of a play, it is necessary for us to shift our mode of communication to “meta-communication,” a more abstract mode of communication (*ibid.*, p. 137). According to Schultz and Lavenda, there are two types of meta-communication in a play. One is flaming—that is, “setting the cognizable border around a behavior and manifesting it as a play.” The other is, quoting Handelman, criticizing for substances of daily life (*ibid.*). A play temporally enables us to reify a fictitious setting regarded as deviation from the social norm. Thus the play can present us an alternative viewpoint different from the norms in a certain structured social system. Therefore a play can be a threatening action to the established norm since it can reveal an alternative order and norm. Schultz and Lavenda suggest that it is in order to get rid of the risk that we often narrate the play as “not serious action,” “a false,” “an imitation,” “a fiction,” or “a fantasy” (*ibid.*, p. 138).

The function of play

The playful segment toward the end of *battolay* of the *gopas* ritual was conducted to the amusement of the neighbors who participated in it, in contrast to the other parts of the ritual that were conducted with seriousness and solemnity. This segment made not only me but also my research assistant Ellen, who is from Pasil, confused. When I asked her whether she has any ideas about the meaning of the segment, she said to me in Tagalog, “*Hindi ko rin alam, e. Parang naglalaro sila, ’no? Bakit kaya naglalaro?*” (I don’t know, either. They seemed to be playing. I wonder why they are playing.) I propose that this play embodies “a vacancy of meaning,” which can be paradoxically the source of meanings of the rite.

As mentioned earlier, the playing part in the last part of *battolay* in the *gopas* ritual consists of four actions: *upoop*, *tungali*, *mantilyo*, and the scrambling of the pig’s liver and cooked glutinous rice.

Iwata’s proposition that play occurs at the boundary between two domains is applicable to our understanding of the function of play in the *gopas* ritual. It was after this playing ritual that all the items hanging in the room, which symbolically demarcated the ritualistic time/space, were removed, and then the final process, *kallising*, was conducted. During this playful part of the ritual, ritualistic functions, which are embodied in the solemnity of the other parts of the ritual, were seemingly absent. In discussing *communitas*, Turner pointed out that status reversal at the liminality could reaffirm the existing social structure, such as the principles of a hierarchical system. In this respect, it can be suggested that “playing” reifies a *communitas*, whose social structure deviates from the existing one.

I further propose that “playing” implies “a vacancy of meaning” in addition to status reversal and social disorder. As noted earlier, Iwata’s discussion of play is relevant in examining the play in the *gopas* ritual as it considers that play takes place at the boundary between the ritual as an extraordinary domain, and the daily life, before and after the ritual, as an ordinary domain. Play, which does not belong to the extraordinary domain or the ordinary one, and therefore holds an ambiguous status, reifies a time and place where persons involved in it are free from the constraints of the norms of the daily life context as well as those of the non-daily, ritualistic one. In addition, the play can also reify a unique time/space that has “a vacancy of meaning,” which ostensibly has neither symbolic nor substantial meaning. Because of the vacancy of meaning, probably, this play segment has no name unlike the other processes of the ritual. This play, when seen as a vacancy of meaning, can paradoxically highlight both symbolic meanings of various elements in the ritual and substantial ones in daily life, and can be the source of the complicated meanings expressed during the *gopas* ritual.

Conclusion

This paper presented that the gopas ritual as practiced in the Municipality of Pasil, Kalinga Province, Philippines, particularly its playing segment performed by two old women, reaffirmed the social norms of the locality. In addition, this paper indicated that the play, ostensibly expressing nothing, could highlight both symbolic meanings of various elements in the ritual and substantial ones in daily life. It also proposed that the play could be the source of the complicated meanings expressed during the ritual.

The gopas ritual, which is usually practiced to heal the sickness of gopas holders, may be regarded as a “healing ritual” in terms of the conventional medical anthropological framework modeled after modern medicine. During the ritual, however, the healing effect of medical treatment, which analysts or researchers may expect, cannot necessarily be realized. In addition, we can find that Pasil folks view the illness within the framework of their own knowledge system, which is different from that of modern medicine. Therefore, it is not appropriate to regard the gopas ritual as a “healing ritual”, as the local notion of “healing” is *not* something equivalent to that of medical treatment in modern medicine.

As Okuno points out, from now on Shamanic Studies should deconstruct the study framework modeled after modern medicine as has been practiced, and instead should be analyzed from the viewpoint of those in the field. I emphasize in this paper that it is important to develop the study of shamanism and ritual from anthropological perspectives. Particularly, it is significant to understand sickness within the knowledge system of Pasil folks, in correspondence with the details of the ritual.

Notes

- 1 This paper is a largely revised and translated version of my paper “Firipin Karinga-shu no gopas girei ni okeru asobi” [Play in gopas ritual in Kalinga Province, Philippines], *Ajia taiheiyou ronsou (Bulletin of Asia-Pacific Studies)*, 19 (Ajia taiheiyou kenkyu-kai, Osaka).

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- 2 A municipality is an administrative unit under a province in the Philippines. The seven municipalities of Kalinga are Pasil, Balbalan, Lubuagan, Pinukpuk, Tanudan, Tinglayan, and Rizal.
- 3 Barangay is the smallest administrative unit in the Philippines. Pasil is composed of following barangays: Balinciagao Norte, Balinciagao Sur, Magsilay, Ableg, Cagaluan, Guina-ang, Balatoc, Malucsad, Pugong, Galdang, Bagtayan, Colayo, Dalupa, and Dangtalan. The spelling of these place names is as given in “The Municipal Comprehensive Land Use Plan and the Zoning Ordinance of the Municipality of Pasil.”
- 4 National Statistic Office, <http://www.census.gov.ph/data/census2007/index.html>.
- 5 Usually, the male and female pair is chosen from among siblings.
- 6 In Kalinga, the appellation “Ina” (mother) is used to address not only one’s mother but also an old woman.
- 7 I served some alcohol to participating male neighbors after our ritual since they pleaded me to do so. They were not allowed to drink during the ritual.
- 8 The meanings of some segments and the symbolic meanings of some items were not clearly explained by the manggogopas and her assistants when asked. They often said, “I don’t know the meaning. As this part should be done in this way, I just do it like this!”

- 9 The literal meaning of wodwod is unknown.
- 10 The literal meaning of alisig is unknown.
- 11 Those parts are *bai* (“iliopsoas”), *kubo* (abdominal part), *butik* (intercostal muscle), *palatang* (chin), and *lapa* (shoulder). They were strung in rattan and hung at a fireplace until Ina Bang-on took them to her house after the ritual.
- 12 The literal meaning of battolay is unknown.
- 13 The literal meaning of makalat is unknown.
- 14 The literal meaning of upoop is unknown.
- 15 The literal meaning of kallising is unknown.

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