

Pinunnog as an Indigenous Meat Preservation Practice: A Descriptive Phenomenological Study among the Hanglulo Tribe in Ifugao, Philippines

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ABSTRACT

Indigenous food preservation practices play a critical role in food security, cultural continuity, and ecological sustainability. Despite growing scholarly interest in Indigenous food systems, limited studies have explored how traditional food preservation practices are experienced and understood by Indigenous communities themselves. This study examined Pinunnog, an Indigenous meat preservation practice of the Hanglulo Tribe in Amduntog, Asipulo, Ifugao, Philippines. Guided by Husserlian descriptive phenomenology, the study employed in-depth semi-structured interviews with purposively selected community members. Data were analyzed using Colaizzi's seven-step phenomenological method. Findings revealed five essential experiential structures: (1) Pinunnog as embodied continuity of Indigenous foodways; (2)

Pinunnog as tacit and relational knowing; (3) Pinunnog as relational and intersubjective practice; (4) Pinunnog as an ethical practice of sustenance and care; and (5) Pinunnog as lived vulnerability and intergenerational responsibility. The findings demonstrate that Pinunnog is not merely a method of preserving meat but a culturally embedded practice through which identity, social relationships, care, and cultural continuity are sustained. The study contributes to Indigenous foodways scholarship by demonstrating the value of phenomenological inquiry in understanding Indigenous Knowledge Systems beyond technical or heritage-centered accounts.

Keywords: *Pinunnog, Indigenous Foodways, Indigenous Knowledge Systems, Phenomenology, Hanglulo Tribe, Ifugao*

INTRODUCTION

Indigenous food systems are increasingly recognized as important contributors to sustainable food security, cultural continuity, and environmental stewardship. Across Indigenous societies, food preservation practices represent more than subsistence strategies; they function as repositories of traditional ecological knowledge, cultural identity, and social relationships. Contemporary scholarship has emphasized that Indigenous foodways constitute complex systems through which communities maintain resilience in the face of social, environmental, and economic changes.

In the Philippine Cordillera region, traditional food preservation practices such as smoked and cured meat products continue to play significant roles in household subsistence, ritual activities, and community celebrations. Existing studies have documented their cultural and nutritional significance. However, much of the literature primarily focuses on technical processes, food safety considerations, and sensory properties. Consequently,

limited attention has been given to how Indigenous communities themselves experience and interpret these practices as part of their everyday lives.

Recent studies have further highlighted increasing threats to Indigenous Knowledge Systems due to modernization, migration, changing socio-economic conditions, and declining participation of younger generations in traditional practices. These developments underscore the urgency of documenting and understanding Indigenous food preservation practices before valuable cultural knowledge is lost.

One such practice is Pinunnog, an Indigenous method of meat preservation practiced by the Hanglulo Tribe in Amduntog, Asipulo, Ifugao. Despite its cultural significance within the community, Pinunnog remains largely undocumented in academic literature. Moreover, no known phenomenological studies have examined the lived experiences associated with this practice. This study addresses this gap by exploring how members of the Hanglulo Tribe experience, understand, and give meaning to Pinunnog within their lifeworld.

Objective of the Study

This study aimed to explore and describe the lived experiences of members of the Hanglulo Tribe regarding Pinunnog as an Indigenous meat preservation practice and to uncover its essential meaning within the community.

METHODS

Research Design

This study employed Husserlian descriptive phenomenology to investigate the essence of Pinunnog as experienced by members of the Hanglulo Tribe. Descriptive phenomenology was selected because it enables the rigorous exploration of lived experiences while minimizing researcher assumptions through phenomenological reduction and bracketing.

Research Setting

The study was conducted in Amduntog, Asipulo, Ifugao, Philippines, within the ancestral domain of the Hanglulo Tribe. The setting was selected because Pinunnog remains actively practiced and transmitted within the community.

Participants

Purposive sampling was employed to select participants who possessed extensive experience and knowledge of Pinunnog. Inclusion criteria required participants to be recognized community members actively involved in the practice or transmission of Pinunnog knowledge.

Data Collection

Data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews. Interview questions focused on participants' experiences, meanings, knowledge transmission processes, and cultural understandings of Pinunnog. Interviews were conducted in culturally appropriate settings after obtaining informed consent from participants.

Data Analysis

Interview data were analyzed following Colaizzi's seven-step phenomenological method. Significant statements were extracted and coded, formulated meanings were developed, themes were clustered, and an exhaustive description of the phenomenon was generated. Member checking was employed to ensure accuracy and credibility of interpretations.

Trustworthiness

Credibility was established through prolonged engagement, member checking, and peer debriefing. Dependability and confirmability were strengthened through audit trails and reflexive journaling. Transferability was addressed through rich description of the research context and participants.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical principles of informed consent, confidentiality, voluntary participation, and respect for Indigenous cultural protocols were observed throughout

RESULTS

Theme 1: Pinunnog as Embodied Continuity of Indigenous Foodways

Participants consistently described Pinunnog as a practice learned through observation, participation, and continuous engagement with family and community members. One participant stated:

"I am still young when I observed how my parents and the elders in the community prepare and make Pinunnog. When I grew up I joined the elders and my parents by helping in the preparation of ingredients until I learned how to make Pinunnog"

Another participant explained:

"I learned from my parents and grandparents how to make Pinunnog for I joined them in butchering the pig, preparing the pig stomach to be used and in chopping manually the meat and the ingredients then in combining the ingredients with correct mixture up to the smoking of the Pinunnog]."

These statements demonstrate that Pinunnog knowledge is acquired through embodied participation rather than formal instruction. Rather than receiving formal instruction, individuals acquired knowledge gradually through embodied involvement in meat preservation activities. Learning occurred through repetitive practice, sensory observation, and participation in domestic and communal food preparation processes.

The participants emphasized that knowing how to perform Pinunnog was inseparable from doing it. Skills, techniques, and judgments were developed through repeated bodily engagement with the materials, processes, and environmental conditions associated with meat preservation. Consequently, Pinunnog was experienced not only as a preservation method but also as a living expression of Indigenous foodways sustained across generations.

Theme 2: Pinunnog as Tacit and Relational Knowing

Participants described their knowledge of Pinunnog as largely experiential and difficult to articulate through explicit rules. Mastery depended on an accumulated understanding of environmental conditions, the quality of materials, and subtle sensory indicators acquired through experience. One participant stated:

"I saw my parents and grandparents make Pinunnog. I always helped by cutting the ingredients including ginger, garlic and mixed the right amount of salt for good taste of the Pinnunnog."

Another participant shared that:

"I chopped guava tree or "Tuwol" tree for firewood every time my parents prepare Pinunnog since my grandfather told me that this kind of trees used for smoking will give tastier flavor to the Pinunnog"

Knowledge was relational because it emerged through interactions with family members, elders, livestock, natural resources, and environmental contexts. Rather than existing as isolated technical information, knowledge was embedded within relationships and everyday practice. Participants emphasized that successful preservation depended upon attentiveness, intuition, observation, and responsiveness to changing circumstances.

These accounts reveal that Pinunnog operates as a form of tacit Indigenous knowledge that is cultivated through lived engagement rather than formalized instruction.

Theme 3: Pinunnog as Relational and Intersubjective Practice

Participants repeatedly described Pinunnog as a communal practice involving cooperation among family members and community participants. Activities associated with slaughtering, preparing, preserving, and sharing meat were rarely undertaken in isolation. One participant shared:

“We help each other in the preparation of the materials and the ingredients. At home, my parents and some elders in the community butcher the pig, some cut the meat into small pieces, I help wash the intestine while my older brother prepare the firewood for smoking. My mother and cousins help in putting the prepared meat with ingredients inside the washed intestine.”

Another participant explained that”

“When we prepare Pinunnog, we always seek the help of our neighbors and the members of our family since it is a difficult task if done alone.”

The practice fostered social interaction, collective labor, and mutual assistance. Participants noted that moments of food preparation often became opportunities for cultural transmission, storytelling, and reinforcement of kinship ties. Through shared experiences, individuals developed common understandings regarding the significance of Pinunnog within community life.

These findings suggest that Pinunnog functions not only as a food preservation method but also as a social practice through which communal relationships are maintained and strengthened

Theme 4: Pinunnog as an Ethical Practice of Sustenance and Care

Participants emphasized the role of Pinunnog in ensuring food availability during periods of scarcity, household need, and communal gatherings. The preservation of meat was viewed as an expression of responsibility toward family members and community welfare. This was shared by one participant saying that:

“We preserve meat through Pinunnog to ensure that there is food for visitors or relatives coming to our home. Also, as flavor to the soup of viand prepared during “ubbu”

One participant also explained:

“I make Pinunnog when my wife is near to give birth so that she will have preserved and ready food with ginger that will make her strong for faster recovery and for more milk production for the baby.”

The practice demonstrated concern for the future needs of others by ensuring that food resources remained available beyond immediate consumption. Participants described Pinunnog as reflecting values of sharing, reciprocity, and care that characterized community life.

For the Hanglulo people, preserving food was not solely an economic or practical activity but also a moral responsibility linked to sustaining family welfare and community well-being.

Theme 5: Pinunnog as Lived Vulnerability and Intergenerational Responsibility

Participants expressed concern regarding the future continuity of Pinunnog. They observed that younger generations were increasingly exposed to modernization, migration, formal education, and alternative food systems that reduced engagement with traditional practices. One participant said:

“We made pinunnog and prepared as viand for my children and grandchildren so that they will be used with the taste, appreciate it and long to learn how to make Pinunnog”

“My children are exposed to fried food and easy to prepare food but I make sure to prepare Pinunnog during family gatherings so that they will not forget the taste of Pinunnog and always apply the value of sharing food and preserving our native food.”

Another participant answered:

“I always teach and remind my children to learn the exact measurement of ingredients to maintain the good taste of the Pinunnog, though they don't join me most of the time in the preparation.”

This perceived decline created a sense of vulnerability regarding the long-term preservation of Indigenous knowledge. Participants described a responsibility to actively transmit knowledge and skills to younger community members. Cultural continuity was viewed as dependent upon everyday acts of teaching, participation, and practice.

The findings indicate that Pinunnog is simultaneously experienced as a source of cultural pride and as a cultural tradition requiring deliberate efforts to ensure its survival.

Essential Structure of the Phenomenon

Across participants' narratives, the essence of Pinunnog emerged as an embodied, relational, and culturally sustaining Indigenous foodway. Pinunnog transcends its practical purpose of preserving meat and becomes a medium through which knowledge, identity, care, and community continuity are enacted and maintained. The phenomenon is characterized by embodied learning, relational knowing, communal participation, ethical responsibility, and intergenerational commitment. Collectively, these dimensions reveal Pinunnog as a living Indigenous practice through which the Hanglulo people sustain both food security and cultural resilience.

DISCUSSION

Embodied Continuity of Indigenous Foodways

The findings reveal that Pinunnog knowledge is acquired primarily through observation, repeated participation, and bodily engagement with preservation practices rather than through formal teaching. This mode of learning reflects Indigenous pedagogical traditions in which knowledge is embedded in everyday practice and transmitted through direct experience. Participants described learning as a gradual process of participation within family and community contexts, suggesting that cultural continuity is sustained through lived engagement.

practice, and transmission rather than merely a collection of information. Berkes emphasized that Indigenous knowledge systems are maintained through continuous participation in cultural activities and interactions with local environments rather than through formalized instruction alone. The findings further extend Indigenous foodways scholarship by demonstrating that continuity is embodied in routine food practices that connect past, present, and future generations. [[books.google.com](#)], [[api.pageplace.de](#)]

Tacit and Relational Dimensions of Indigenous Knowledge

Participants described Pinunnog knowledge as experiential and difficult to articulate through explicit verbal explanations. Knowledge was derived from observation of environmental conditions, sensory assessment, and accumulated practical experience.

This finding supports Indigenous knowledge scholarship that views knowledge as relational, situated, and context dependent. Berkes noted that traditional ecological knowledge is rooted in interactions among people, environment, practice, and belief systems. The findings suggest that successful Pinunnog preparation depends on ecological attentiveness and long-term participation rather than on the memorization of procedural rules. Such knowledge is continually refined through engagement with both social and environmental contexts. [[books.google.com](#)], [[taylorfrancis.com](#)]

Pinunnog as a Relational and Intersubjective Practice

Participants described Pinunnog as a communal undertaking characterized by cooperation, shared labor, storytelling, and collective participation. The practice therefore functions not only as a preservation technique but also as a mechanism through which social relationships are created and maintained.

This finding resonates with contemporary Indigenous food systems literature emphasizing the social and cultural dimensions of food. Indigenous food systems are increasingly recognized as important spaces for cultural resurgence, relationship building, and community identity formation. Lowitt highlighted that Indigenous food systems are not solely concerned with food production but also with the renewal of relationships, cultural identity, and collective well-being. Within the Hanglulo community, Pinunnog serves as a relational process that reinforces social cohesion while simultaneously safeguarding cultural knowledge. [[canadianfo...aterloo.ca](#)], [[canadianfo...aterloo.ca](#)]

Ethics of Care and Sustenance

The findings reveal that Pinunnog is experienced as an ethical practice grounded in responsibility, reciprocity, and care for others. Participants emphasized the importance of preserving meat to ensure future food availability and support family and community welfare. This theme reflects Indigenous perspectives that view food systems as moral systems as much as subsistence systems. FAO reports on Indigenous food systems emphasize that Indigenous food practices are often embedded within communal responsibilities, reciprocal relationships, and collective stewardship of resources. Thus, Pinunnog represents an expression of ethical responsibility through which individuals contribute to the welfare and resilience of the broader community. The preservation of food is therefore simultaneously an act of sustenance and an act of care. [[consciousf...ystems.org](#)], [[openknowle...ge.fao.org](#)]

Cultural Vulnerability and Intergenerational Responsibility

Participants expressed concern regarding the declining participation of younger generations in Pinunnog practices and perceived this trend as a threat to cultural continuity. These concerns reflect broader challenges confronting Indigenous Knowledge Systems in many communities worldwide.

Recent literature documents the vulnerability of Indigenous knowledge in contexts of modernization, migration, formal schooling, and changing economic conditions. FAO's global assessments of Indigenous food systems emphasize the importance of traditional knowledge transmission for ensuring cultural resilience and sustainability. The current study extends this literature by demonstrating how community members experience knowledge loss not simply as a cultural issue but as an existential concern linked to identity, memory, and

collective continuity. The responsibility to teach younger generations emerged as a deeply lived commitment rather than merely a practical necessity. [[consciousf...ystems.org](#)], [[openknowle...ge.fao.org](#)]

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