



WHATOK (TATTOOE): THE AESTHETIC EXPRESSION OF TRADITIONAL KALINGA BEAUTY

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Abstract *Whatok firmly anchored to indigenous values on the skin by creating a visual mosaic rooted in traditional practice. These tattoos not only satisfied the need for display and personal accomplishment; they also embodied religious beliefs about the relationships between humans, animals, spirits, and the ancestors who controlled human destiny and the surrounding world.*

Records on the Kalinga Whatok are very inadequate and merely make vague statements, thus this study was primarily conceived to identify the whatok process and tools used in indigenous tattooing; notate the different Kalinga tattoo designs and determine the cultural significant symbolic implication of the whatok(tattoo) motif. The study employed the descriptive ethnographic approach, unstructured interviews and documentary analysis of the different designs of traditional whatok of the Kalinga. The study revealed a distinctly cultural ethnocentric department. whatok designs in Kalinga are best understood within the context of headhunting. These are visually powerful rendering of symmetry and unity of design, and serve as an archive of culture for the group and most designs are combinations of natural phenomena and artifacts; The design and amount of man's tattoo is proportional to his status as a warrior; Tattoos for women are for aesthetics; and Tattoos are for protection, good fortune, well-being and cultural identity.

Keywords: *Whatok, Aesthetic Expression, Traditional Kalinga Beauty*

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

For thousands of years, indigenous people around the world marked their bodies with skin-stitched tattoos. This painful form of body art was not just the latest fashion; it was a visual language that exposed an individual's desires and fears as well as ancient cultural values and ancestral ties that were written on the body (Krutak, 2001).

Nearly, all indigenous people who tattooed practiced shamanism which is the oldest human spiritual religion born at the dawn of time. Death was the first teacher, the edge beyond which life ended and wonder began. Shamanistic religion was nurtured by mystery and



magic, but it was also born of the hunt and of the harvest, and from the need on the part of humans to rationalize the fact that they had to kill that which they most revered: plants, animals, and sometimes other men who competed for resources or whose souls provided magical benefits. (Billiet, 1974)

Mythology developed out of these associations as an expression of the covenant between humans, their environment, and everything contained within it. But more importantly, it was a means of eliminating the guilt of the hunt, whether human or animal, and maintaining a certain essential balance between the living and the spirits of the dead. After all, shamanism is animism; the belief that all life - whether animal, vegetable, or human - is endowed with a spiritual life force. Spirits living in these objects were always propitiated and never offended. Sacrificial offerings, especially those made in blood, were like financial transactions that satisfied spirits because they were essentially "paid off" for lending their services to humankind or to satisfy debts like infractions of a moral code which most indigenous peoples around the world observed. For example, the heavily tattooed Iban of Borneo respect adat or the accepted code of conduct, manners, and conventions that governs all life. Adat safeguards the state of human and spiritual affairs in which all parts of the universe are healthy and tranquil and in balance. Breaches of adat disturb this state and are visited by "fines" or contributions to the ritual necessary to restore the balance and to allay the wrath of individuals, the community, or of the deities. (Magannon, 1997)

In most part of the cordillera, back during the "dark ages" of headhunting and tribal wars, these skin-deep markings symbolize rank, power, and respect among warriors. Some tattoos were believed to protect the individuals from evil spirits which may cause sickness. For females, lasses were transformed to lovely ladies through this tattoos which were merely ornaments that beautifies these women. These are like the modern day bracelets, earrings, and necklaces, but of course, are irremovable. The painstaking art of tattooing has played a major role in culture and tradition, not only in Kalinga, but also the many peoples of the Cordillera, and we're about to get a taste of this blood from and painful tradition. (Salvador, 2002)

In Kalinga, tattooing is an important vehicle for expressing and reinforcing the psychological dimensions of life, health, warfare, religion, and death. It is a cultural practice deeply rooted within the memory of the Kalinga's ancestral life and embodies personal, social, ecological,



and metaphysical values through a wide array of visual tattoo symbolism, tattooing and tattoo patterns and designs in Kalinga are best understood within the context of aesthetic geometrical expression of beauty, it is an extant culture among a distinct group in the Kalinga. Wang ud, the only living Manfakatok of Buscalan is found in the most isolated and remotest area in the province of, where Kalinga the village is enclosed by a long mountain range.

Furthermore, Kalinga skin-stitched tattoos firmly anchored to the indigenous values on the skin by creating a visual mosaic rooted in traditional practice. These tattoos not only satisfied the need for display and personal accomplishment; they also embodied religious beliefs about the relationships between humans, animals, spirits, and the ancestors who controlled human destiny and the surrounding world. Thus, as a system of tools and techniques by which indigenous people used to relate to their environment, community, and culture, skin-stitched tattooing expressed the many ways in which indigenous people attempted to control their bodies, lives, and experiences.

CULTURAL RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This study looked into the Indigenous Kalinga whatok and its aesthetic expression of Beauty; specifically, it sought answers to the following objectives:

1. Identify the whatok tools and process used in indigenous tattooing ;
2. Identify the different tattoo designs, and its cultural significant symbolic implication of the whatok motif.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

To have a better understanding of the concepts pertaining to the study, the researchers presented the following readings which were reviewed from different authorities.

In 2006, Floydelia R. Diasen, the former governor of the Province of Kalinga drafted an executive order encouraging the participation of the entire province to observe indigenous month with the Whatok as its highlight. It stated that this celebration is "meant to engender the Kalinga's pride of identity- the *Whatok* and to enrich their foundation to stand on their own ethnicity anchoring their dreams and aspiration to the positive dynamic aspect of culture and time tested traditions." In her speech to the vast crowds that were present she stated: "We must not shy away from the lessons we have learned in the old days and let us



be proud of our ethnic roots for its from looking back into who we once were that we become more enlightened with where and who we must be in the future."

According to (Salvador, 2002), though tattoo motif did hold an iconic allure, others were believed to have had magical power and purpose. For example, three vertical bands tattooed on the cheeks of St. Lawrence Island, Alaska women were thought to induce fertility, while other configurations of markings were believed to protect them from unseen enemies or illnesses borne from evil spirits. Still more designs were thought to attract prey animals and even men. The Thompson River Salish (Nlaka'pamux) of Canada also tattooed for ornamental purposes, but they sometimes inscribed their bodies with thread and needle to show courage, to acquire strength, to or to display enduring fidelity and love in marriage. The Nlaka'pamux also marked their bodies to ward off death and sickness or to acquire a guardian spirit sadly; however, skin-stitched tattooing has largely disappeared in the world along with its practitioners. In Canada, only one Inuit woman living on King William Island retains her elaborate facial and body tattoos. And to date, just a handful of Siberian Yupik and Chukchi women in Siberia continue to wear similar indelible markings

As mentioned by (Krutak, 2001) Tattooing has always been a creative process and depending on local environmental and cosmological forms and meanings, tattooing techniques were quite varied. Each pigment brush was carved with a crest animal that imparted supernatural protection to the design thus created. Other indigenes like the Ainu of Japan and several Native American groups in California like the Hupa preferred obsidian lancets with which to slice open the skin; afterwards a sooty pigment was rubbed into the raw wounds until the skin felt like it was "on fire." Both groups practiced medicinal forms of tattooing and also more supernatural forms aimed at blocking evil spirits from entering the orifices of the body. Amazonian groups preferred various varieties of palm thorns to prick-in their tattoos, while the pre-Columbian Chimú seemingly skin-stitched their tattoos with animal bone or conch needles attached to sinew or vegetable threads - such tools have been found in mummy bundles.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

According to the *Oxford Dictionary of Critical Terms*, the word *tattoo* first appeared in Captain Cook's written accounts in First Voyage (1769) in Tahiti Island. The word denotes the markings found on the skin of Polynesians (Tahiti, Samoan and Tongan): "both sexes



paint their bodies; this is done by inlaying the colour of black under their skin in such a manner that it becomes indelible.” Furthermore, *tattoo* is also characterized by a “painful operation to form permanent marks or designs found on the skin by puncturing it and inserting a pigment or pigments.” Other variations of *tattoo* include *tatu*, *tatau*, and *tataou*, as the expression for “to strike or to stamp.”

In the Philippines, the general term for tattoos is *batok*, and, in some places, *patik*: this meant the marking of snakes or lizards or any design printed or stamped on (Scott 20). Among the different groups found in Northern Luzon, the word *whiing/whatok* (in Kalinga), *fatek* (Bontoc) and *fatok* (Benguet) were all derived from the sound of the tapping of the stick to the tattoo instrument which pierces the skin. The word *tek (tik)* translates: “to hit slowly.” This is differentiated from *batek* (pronounced as *battik*) in Indonesia and Malaysia, which refers to an intricate textile technique developed in the early 9th – 10th century. *Batik* is a method of applying colored designs to a cloth surface. The process entails the use of wax to cover the designs not to be dyed. When dyed, the covered parts resist the dye. For more than one color, sequences of dyeing and waxing are used. *Whatok* is the Kalinga term for the traditional tattoos, or inscriptions found on their skin. The *whatok* of the Kalinga are known for their symmetry and elaborate tattoo designs. They may also have the largest number of surviving practitioners of the tradition from the Bontoc, Ifugao, Tingguian and Ibaloy in the Mountain Provinces. The tattoos on their body are the only living testament of the practice of traditional tattooing.

The theory on the symbolic approach to culture inevitably leads to concern with meanings: “if culture is symbolic, then it follows that it is used to create and convey meanings since that is the purpose of symbols” For instance, Victor Turner asserts that to understand the cultural life requires isolating symbols, identifying their meanings, and showing how symbols resonate within a specific, dynamic cultural context. Turner developed the idea of *communitas*, which involved social integration associated with the power of symbols. This approach focused on the ways in which public ritual, particularly in initiation rites, reinforced a sense of solidarity, and, in some cases, provided a source of cultural change. (Turner, 1967)

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The study of *whatok* is the repository of memories and life histories of the wearer because this cutaneous bodily achieve is spatial and visual. It contains experiences and processes as



an explicit means of identity and memory. It may also be utilized in devising indigenized learning materials for students and teachers awareness promotion, formulating guidelines for conservation, and most importantly, revitalization of an age-old but functional. "For heritage is how one generation shapes, preserves and maintains the past, in the process of preparing and enhancing the present for future generations" (Manuel R. Salak III) and preservation of cultural heritage needs documentation of existing ethnic cultural practices in everyday living. This is the challenge and opportunity deciphers in the IPED (Indigenous People Education),

METHODOLOGY

This study was limited to the determination of the aesthetic expression of traditional Kalinga beauty with the application of some basic geometrical figures. The primary respondent of the study is Fang-ud, a 94 year old and one of the province living traditional whatok artist or *mamfakatok* , and other tattooed person in the province. The paper utilized the descriptive ethnographic method of research Data gathering was done through informal interviews. The interviews were done in t Butbut dialect for better comprehension of the respondents, ocular observation and documentary analysis of the tattooed persons in Buscalan, Tinglayan and other tattooed persons in Kalinga were also done, and records of existing studies and experiences of tattooed individuals, plus knowledge and feedbacks from the researcher immersion in the locale of the study to substantiate data gathered from the respondents.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data gathered were presented, analyzed and interpreted in this section

A. The Whatok Tools and Process

A.1. The Whatok Tools

Whatok is characterized by the marking, decorating and designing on a material permanently, Whatok is done through hand-tapped pricking, the traditional method of tattooing done by a *manfakatok* (tattoo artist) in the village. The hand-tapping kit is comprised of a coconut bowl to mix a pigment of soot and water, an orange thorn needle (*siit*) attached to the end of a small bamboo stick, and another short stick used to tap the thorn into the skin. Some *manfakatok* (tattoo artist) used *kisi* which was a water buffalo horn bent by fire that held four razor sharp orange or lemon needles at its base; A wooden



stencil that held intricate patterns for the arms; pine soot for ink, pomelo torn for a needle, a bamboo stick to hold the needle and a hammering stick see figures.



Va'a (Coconut bowl)



Kisi&siit (bamboo stick&lemon thorn)



Anus (wooden stencil)

A.2. The whatok Process

1. At first, the tattoo artist prepares the ink by scraping the soot from under the pot and mixing it with a little water.
2. Then she readies the bamboo stick in which she will insert the pomelo thorn or gisi (kisi)
3. Before she starts puncturing the skin, she first puts a stencil of the design which usually starts with two lines to indicate the length and position of the tattoo. To prepare the first designs on the skin, Whang-ud uses the uyot, a dried rice stalk bent into a triangle and use as a stencil for marking tattoo patterns. The uyot is dipped lightly in black charcoal ink and press on the surface of the skin. Now she is ready to do her masterpiece.
4. After dipping the needle into the ink, Fang-ud holds the stick with the needle on one hand so that when the hammer strikes, the needle would be driven into the epidermis and then spring back to its position above the skin, and lengthy and painful process begins.
5. After she finishes one part, she rubs the wound with the ink. The amount of time Fang-ud takes to finish the work depends on the size of the tattoo, but on the average it takes about one-and-a-half hours.



Scraped soot from the pot



bamboo stick pomelo thorn



stencil design



Thorn driven in the epidermis



The desired design

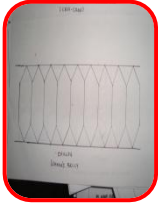
B. Intricate Tattoo Design and Cultural Significant Implications of the Kalinga Whatok

In the foregoing discussion of the geometric designs and meaning of tattoos, this study does not follow a mechanistic approach in understanding the signification of tattoos. It focuses rather on what traditional tattoo signifies. The art of Kalinga whatok is a visual powerful rendering of symmetry and unity of designs. For women, getting a tattoo is the standard of beauty, while for men, getting a tattoo is synonymous with strength and prestige related to headhunting. Thus the following are the comprehensive discussion of the different designs of whatok, the geometrical figures present in every creation and its cultural significant implications to the life of the tattooed individual.



Tinulipao / hinurpong (Snakeskin/Python scale Design)

Of all Kalinga tattoo motifs, python scales seem to dominate. Both creatures were considered "friends of the warriors" (*fulon chi mangayaw*) and are believed to be earthly messengers of the most powerful Kalinga deity- *Kabunian* - the Creator of all things. The snakeskin pattern provides camouflage to enable a warrior to remain undetected and safe from enemies. It also serve as talisman and body armor against enemy attack or protect the women from the spirit of the enemies of the blood feud (*lalapuan*) or enemies of warring groups. *Tinulipao* pattern contains magical powers that protect men and women from all physical and spiritual dangers. It is the motif that informs the wearer and onlookers that "ancestors stick together" as one tight community to protect the person. Many women proclaimed that their skin didn't wrinkle if fortified with these designs and that their beautiful body tattoos increased their fertility.



TABWHAD DESIGN

Inar-Archan

Chillag

Inong-oo

(Ladder Design)

(Snakes' Belly Design)

(Coiled Snake Design)

Tabwhad (Snake Design) and **Buaya** (Crocodile Design)

This pattern is also found on the men's whiing. There are also other local names for it, one of which is *chillag* (the pattern on a snake's belly); *inar-archan*, the designs resemble waves but are derived from the stone steps and ladders that women navigate to enter the rice terraces and agricultural fields, it also pertains to the river (*chawwang*) and mountains (*whilig*) that a person crossed to get to a certain village. There are also other versions of snake patterns with meanings that depend on the wearer. The elderly men say that the warrior who has the coiled design (*inong-oo*) is a person who does not give way in face to combat. Some as with crocodile, the armored skin with dorsal pointed scales is thick and rugged and provides some protection. This pattern along with those of the snake and centipede, are also found on the arasag (men's shield) ensure protection. The crocodile design also functions as a border for other patterns. Moreover, triangles are associated with sharp and dangerous objects, such as daggers or teeth, which protect the person wearing them. Among the Butbut and Kalinga, the tabwhad (snakes or pythons), buaya, (crocodiles), and gayyaman (centipedes) are seen as symbols of protection (*sayaknib*) and good fortune (*kapiya*) and serve as talismans (*sanib*). The designs are believed to deflect spears and axes and give magical protection to the shield's bearer.



Ginayyagayaman (Centipede Design)

The centipede (Gayyaman) tattoo is one of the most powerful spiritual guide that will protect people of Kalinga. Of all Kalinga tattoo motifs, centipedes and python scales seem to dominate. Both creatures were considered "friends of the warriors" (*fulon chi mangayaw*) and are believed to be earthly messengers of the most powerful Kalinga deity (Kabunian).



Centipedes were considered to be the powerful spiritual and protective guides. When they were tattooed upon a man's skin, the warrior was believed to gain the insect's attributes: He moved faster and he became more aggressive like the predatory animal. But these tattoos also transformed the man in a physical sense because his reddened skin and black tattoos symbolized the red and black coloration of the centipede itself. Whang Od recounted a Kalinga myth where a centipede was responsible for helping warriors take human heads like the insect takes its prey. The centipede is a sacred symbol for Kalinga warriors who regard it as a good omen based on the belief that if a centipede walks on your head all the way down to your foot; you are assured for a long life.



Panyat Design

Lusong Design

"Lafi" & Ergaw Design

Tinalatalaw/Sina-sao (Hourglass/Rice Mortar/ Rice Bundle/Criss Cross Design)

The designs can be placed horizontally or vertically on the arms. The hourglass tattoo design or the *tinatalaaw* (which literally means "day" to signify the passage). The tattoo is composed of an unfilled and a blackened part to represent "day" and "night" respectively. There are different meanings attached to it depending on how Kalinga people relate to their tattoos. For other Kalinga people, the design is likened to *Lusong (Rice mortar)* to signify the wealth of the person tattooed or the affluence of the family to which she belongs. Some elderly women also refer to this design as bundles of rice (*panyat*). However, the visual, contextual, and material pieces of evidence suggest that the design probably alludes to the spirit shield and the rice mortar that were meant to provide temporal as well as divine protection, an idea confirmed by Butbut tattooed elders. Besides its obvious association with agricultural fertility and sustenance, the rice mortar is employed as a means of communing with the supernatural in a host of rituals throughout the life cycle. An inverted rice mortar is traditionally used as a table for the spirits who always want to attend the ceremonies. On a side note, Butbut women recall that at their tattooing sessions, the manwhatok turned the rice mortar to its side on the ground so that they could rest an arm between the rice mortar's two sections.



Pachok (Zigzag Design)

This design represents the well established river (*pachok/chawwang*) winding its way through the land. The design is different than the zigzagged lines of other water symbols, although it carries similar meanings and, as with all water, it is a necessity for the continuation of life. It was formerly tattooed on men, but now is found only on a few elderly women of the province.



Sinagkikao/Sinokray (Alternate lines Design)

The tattoos share geometric visual designs with the *baag* (loincloth for men) and the *kain* (skirt for women). It will be observed that *whatok* creates an illusion of an upper garment. The *sinokray* tattoo of the women, translates to “the sleeves of the shirt” which is an extension of the women’s *kain*. The tattoos were considered as cheap and inexpensive garment as early as the 1920s. Many of the women recall that, during important occasions such as *cañaos* (feasts), their tattoos are their best “costumes.”



Fongol (Necklace Design)

Beads are considered as precious heirlooms of affluent Kalinga families and are passed from generation to generation. Beads are highly valued in Kalinga, as they provide a medium of exchange and adornment for both sexes. Fongol were tattooed bands of various designs. Generally, they were worn around the arms by women, these design was made with border lines and simpler patterns. “fongol”, which refers to expensive neck beads worn by



wealthy Kalingas. The most expensive beads are called, in her dialect, each beads was made of gold rolled in amber. The fongol tattoo design refers to the affluence, wealth or prosperity of the wearer. Beads were often worn around the neck and also on the arms. To have "fongol" tattoo design was like having expensive beads permanently adorning the skin. In fact, those who were abundantly tattooed were usually those who could afford to pay for their tattoos. There were several designs used for fongol tattoo design, including triangles, plants, water, and diamonds.



Igam/Khaman (Spear Design)

The design is usually worn by high-ranking warriors who have killed more than two men. The antiquity and symbolism of the symbolism of the motif is questionable because several elders who possess the tattoo told me that it does not, in fact it represent the traditional head-taking device of the old days. Displaying traditional headhunting weapons the spear and head-ax designs. The motif at the center of the chest (bridging his sternum) were believed to "block the pathway of his of his enemy. The *khaman* is used to brandish the head of the enemy. This is an important "badge" that clearly identifies the warrior. The protuberance arching outwards above his navel are the horns of the carabao; a symbol of a "war leader." The "V" connecting the horns symbolizes "victory" Fanah's tattoo consists of three sloping lines: each were said to represent the number of enemies he killed – three. Whang-Od told me that these lines also symbolized the outstretched wings of the eagle – like a man swooping down on his prey.

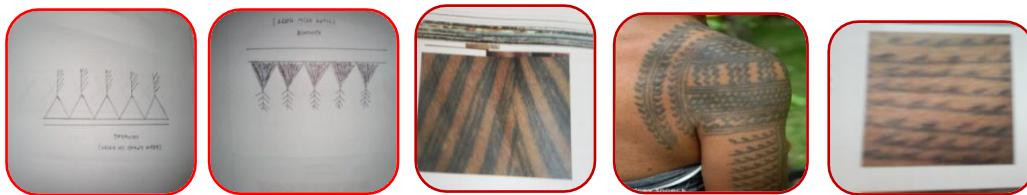


Ginayyagayyang (Eagle Design)

The most important tattoo any Kalinga man could own was the biking or chest tattoo which was the mark of a true warrior. It consisted of several branching lines that began on the



belly and moved upwards and outwards across the shoulders and down the arms. The *gayang design* is a headhunter's emblems. Gayang was the Lord of Birds" and the messenger of a creator (Kabunian). The Old Lubo warrior (mingor) his entire chest tattoo (biking) represents in abstract form the outstretched wings of the eagle. Tattooing starts at the back of the hand and the wrists. The first kill is denoted with stripe patterns which appear like tie band called *gulot*, or *pinupungol*. The term *munggolot* refers to the chief of the headhunting raid and literally means the "cutter of the head", so when the *gulot* tattoo is earned, this means that the person has killed someone or has become a "headtaker." Those who have killed two individuals have tattoo patterns on their hands. Warriors who have killed ten or more are the individuals who are permitted to wear the chest tattoos and other elaborate insignias (like the head axe) at the side of their stomach, back, thighs and legs and even the cheeks to connote unrivalled bravery of a warrior in a certain village. Tattooing increases in proportion to the number of heads or participation in headhunting forays.



Inam-am/Nilawhat (Fern Design)

Some of the tattooed elderly woman recalls that in the course of life, being able to conceive (to grow) was deemed important and they attributed this to the efficacy of a particular tattoo design. The fern plant (*inam-am*) pattern grows like a *sinangat* and the woman believed that the fertility can be attained by getting tattooed with the *whinunga* ("to bear fruit", *bunga* is fruit in Tagalog). The design is based on the fond of a fern, which the elders say also enables the bearer to avoid *manchipus* (giving birth to a stillborn baby) during childbirth (*aganak*). As mention earlier, the tattoos make the women fertile (*umanak*), strong and healthy (*humayugwa*), and able to bear children (*matataku*).



Inucha-uchan ("Like Rain" Design)



The inucha-uchan design is the symbol for Approval for headhunting. Rain is also considered as valued blessing to the farmers of Kalinga families during *pinag uuma* (*kaingin system*).



Lin-lingao/ Chung-it/ Chu-ing (X Mark Design)

Before the advent of modern medicine, many Kalinga had small marks tattooed on their necks to cure goiter. The *lin-lingao* is tattooed before women marry their partners. *Linlingao* provide protection from the *alan*, or spirits that dwell in the village, especially right after a headhunt. These are believed to be spirits of the enemies killed by the warriors, that the spirits will come and take revenge by “taking their children away.” the spirits are believed to be the cause of sudden and unexplained deaths of children and infants. Furthermore, the spirit of a deceased grandparent or another near relative is also believed to have the ability to make a child ill, so that the child may join him in the afterworld. In order to “scare” and “drive the spirits away,” the women have themselves tattooed, not only on their bodies but also their faces. The *lin-lingao* (x-marks) “confuse” the spirits, as the spirits then are unable to recognize the person they want to exact revenge on. The *whatok*, in a way, is a means to deceive the nasty spirits and impede their maneuverings, and to foster the belief that the *lin-lingao* and other rites are effective means of protection.

The *lin-lingao* is intended to shelter the woman and the child from malevolent powers and to ensure good health. When the child reaches two or three years old, he or she is made to undergo the *gammid*, the traditional manner by which grandparents recognize and accept a grandchild. The child is brought to the grandfather’s paternal house, where the grandfather tenders a small party and gives a gift to the child. The gift is usually a necklace of beads to be treasured by the child for the rest of his life.

CONCLUSION

1. Most designs are combinations of natural phenomena and artifacts;
2. The design and amount of man’s tattoo is proportional to his status as a warrior;
3. Tattoos for women are for aesthetics; and
4. Tattoos are for protection, good fortune, well-being and cultural identity



RECOMMENDATION

1. No tourist of any nationality should be given tattoo, unless they have deep connection to the people, respect the Kalinga people, and truly understand the history and cultural meanings of the tattoo.
2. The Kalinga whatok has regained significance today, thus the Kalinga People should continue to renew the appreciation of traditional tattoos as means of reinventing identities in urban areas of Kalinga.

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