

Anthropological Perspectives on the Philippine Collection of the Field Museum: Material Culture, Collection and Igorot Identity

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ABSTRACT

The Philippine Vaults, otherwise known as the Philippine collection and housed at the Central Anthropology Storage of the Field Museum in Chicago, contain 10,000 objects from various parts of the Philippines that were collected at the turn of the 20th century by colonial administrators, missionaries and anthropologists. These integrally important historical objects - photographs and unpublished field notes have largely lain dormant for years. Lack of institutional resources and the capacity to communicate this aspect of the museum's holdings, meant that these documents have not been accessible to indigenous peoples as well as to scholars working in the Cordillera region, northern Luzon. In 2014, the collections were made accessible to scholars and the Filipino American community through a *co-curation* project mounted across various communication platforms: digital modes of repatriation, extensive field based documentation, exploration of material culture through discussion and research on the objects and their origins. This digitization project is now an online catalog accessible worldwide. As such, I argue that this archive comprises a unique and timely resource of the early visual documentation through which to insightfully learn of the early 20th century life-world of Igorots in northern Luzon. Given the current Philippine focus on "indigenous peoples' culture", analyzing this resource of important physical objects, catalogue information, and photographs can elicit an insightfully informed understanding of how early 20th-century Cordillera material culture has informed the type and use of objects in the present. Upon examining selected objects to establish ethnographic identity, for example, I suggest that although some museum objects are no longer used by the Igorots, through photo-object elicitation in different northern Luzon source communities, by talking about these objects, people connected with their ancestors, enriched their local knowledge, and had a new reference with which to engender their Igorot identity.