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POLITICS, PROPERTY AND LAW IN THE PHILIPPINE UPLANDS

Melanie G. Wiber

The Ibaloi village of Kabayan Poblacion combines a subsistence agricultural economy with a market economy that has grown up as a result of subsequent waves of colonization. The Spanish arrived in the sixteenth century, following the trail of gold and slave-bearing Chinese trade junks, and were followed in 1898 by the Americans. The Ibaloi, known as gold miners and traders, cattle barons and vegetable producers, have generally been regarded as an Hispanicized uplands people, acculturated to Western ways and struggling to come to grips with new economic realities.

This book examines the Ibaloi property system and demonstrates that the changes which have taken place since the Spanish arrival were complex and had numerous directions and relationships, many of them steered by the nature of Ibaloi society itself, others by the Spanish, and still others by the resources of Benguet Province. What began as a study of the Ibaloi property system rapidly became an exercise in understanding developments over time in social stratification, ritual and law.

Wiber's research has led her to challenge the dependency theory of legal pluralism, whereby peripheral zones are forced into economic dependency by having to exist within two legal structures, their own and another imposed by a central power zone, in favour of the social science view of legal pluralism. Thus all heterogeneous societies experience legal pluralism, but in different and individual ways, as people have a tendency to manipulate the law to their own advantage. She also takes issue with the narrowness of current anthropological terms relating to property systems and whether they are applicable to non-Western societies and argues for a reorientation of anthropology to end the tendency to generate simplistic models of property, kinship and law.

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