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A Primer of the Negritos of the Philippines

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Book Reviews

A PRIMER ON THE NEGRITOS OF THE PHILIPPINES. By Daisy Y. Noval-Morales and James Monan. Manila: Philippine Business for Social Progress, 1979. v + 208 pages.

Current ethnography in the Philippines appears to divide itself into three types: (1) those that are written to serve the needs of a tourist industry, or to answer the questions of curious tourists; (2) those that are properly scientific, designed to serve the demands of anthropology and ethnology; and (3) those that are intended to provide data for development programs for human groupings whether national, regional, or ethnic. This book belongs to the third category. The authors explicitly say so (p. 4).

The Negritos are widely scattered, and are known by a great variety of names. The authors, using information from John M. Garvan, indicate that they are found in at least fifteen provinces as widely apart as Cagayan and Apayao in the north and Negros Occidental and Agusan in the Visayas and Mindanao in the south, and known by more than twenty-five different names (pp. 13-14).

One learns that in spite of the geographic distances between the places where the Negritos live, there are at present common conditions affecting them, conditions which, in general, threaten life and culture. The forests where they live are getting increasingly smaller due to the advancing lowlanders. As a result, these nomadic hunters and food gatherers, see their sources of livelihood slowly vanish (pp. 2, 138ff). As the lands become less useful for food gathering and hunting, and since the Negritos have not developed great skills for agriculture and the value of the land is not readily apparent to them, they willingly sell what landholdings they have. Even if they were given land titles to protect them, their traditional notion of tribal common ownership makes it difficult for them to understand how one person, by virtue of a piece of paper, could come to own a plot of land all for himself (pp. 93, 132ff). With increasing contact with lowland peoples, they have learned to accommodate themselves to the new culture and have even developed a marked liking for the new, as symbolized by the prevalent wish among young unmarried Negritos to marry lowlanders, or if they cannot, at least they hope

their children would (p. 139). All these changes have led to an increasing move toward a cash economy as against the old subsistence economy whose mode of exchange was barter. Unfortunately, the Negritos have yet to learn much about the intricacies of a cash economy (p. 33). At present they are vulnerable to exploitation and abuse by lowlanders. For this reason, many institutions have come to the fore to establish supportive structures (pp. 3, 201-8). The proposed solution to much of the current woe of the Negritos is a decisive change to "sedentary agriculture" not only for their mere survival but for profit and market-oriented livelihood (pp. 161ff).

Some readers will find the discussions on "negrito intelligence," "religious beliefs," "personality and social values," "aesthetic life," and so forth fascinating. Others will probably be deeply affected, even feel guilty, after reading topics like "landgrabbing and philanthropy," or "lowland abuse towards Negritos" (pp. 132ff).

As a whole, the book serves well its purpose, and Father Rudolf Rahmann speaks well of it in his introduction (p. 1). But perhaps there is a built-in problem in the method of composition of the book itself. This book is a reader, that is, it is a concatenation of a great number of excerpts from an equally great variety of monographs and reports on the varied Negrito communities in the mountains and jungles of the Philippine archipelago. What compounds this problem of numbers is the fact that the sources come from times as remote from each other as 1925 and 1975. Speaking about "gathering," for example, a quote is taken from a 1925 work of Morice Vanoverberg on the Negritos of Northern Luzon, and this is immediately followed by a quote from Marcelino Maceda's 1975 work on the Mamanuas of Mindanao. This would be acceptable if there were no such thing as "change," but the whole chapter nineteen shows the Negritos are changing (pp. 137ff).

Whatever weakness there may be, it remains that this book is the most comprehensive effort to date to document in one volume the Negritos of the Philippines — what they are doing, and what is being done to them and for them.

Renato Fernandez

PHILIPPINE ANCESTRAL HOUSES (1810-1930). By Fernando N. Zialcita and Martin I. Tinio, Jr. Photographs by Neal M. Oshima. Quezon City: GCF Books, 1980. 263 pages.

Dominador Castañeda's *Art in the Philippines* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines, 1964) was written for another reader and another time. He had three chapters on architecture, one for each of the periods into which he divided Philippine art history: Spanish, American, and Modern. The period headings say more than Castañeda might have consciously intended: the influence of the holder of power in the shaping of the spirit and style of art.