

Editor's Introduction

Explaining social change is a complex task, but determining whether change has occurred in the first place can be equally difficult. This question is most pointed in this issue's lead article that deals with headhunting. William Henry Scott reminded us that in the preconquest epoch the various ethnic groups that would encounter Spanish colonialism starting in the late sixteenth century practiced headhunting. It was true of the Tagalog as it was of the Isneg. Under Spanish rule, murders continued but the meanings specific to headhunting as a cultural practice ceased among those that settled within the grasp of the colonial state. However, it persisted among groups such as the Ilongot, who call themselves the Bugkalot, well into the twentieth century.

The New Tribes Mission's influence since the 1950s was a major factor in the cessation of headhunting among the Bugkalot. However, Shu-Yuan Yang, who first visited the group in 2004, found that some Bugkalot men had taken heads even after they had become Christians. Yang discusses the context of the reemergence of headhunting as due to localized conflicts with the New People's Army (NPA), which resulted in the killing of seven Bugkalot men in 1988. Grief and anger tormented the Bugkalot, some of whom could not find release until they could take a head. Yang suggests that the reversion to the old practice raises questions about inner agency and the adequacy of conversion. Have they in fact changed, or has Christianity been a mere veneer? Yang's answer asserts a complex relationship between headhunting and Christianity; at the same time, the Bugkalot do "engage with Christianity as a domain of conscious deliberation that provides grounds for meaningful human lives" (178). Analogously, despite being on the same side as the state vis-à-vis the NPA, the Bugkalot have not been reduced to cooptation, and have even used the threat of headhunting to resist the state.

In the late nineteenth century, Western medicine underwent a paradigm shift that favored germ theory to explain disease causation, in lieu of

environment-centered etiologies. Did this alter the view of Americans in the Philippines in the early twentieth century? Examining the residential pattern of Americans, Michael D. Pante points to the continuing salience of the “geography of disease” perspective that saw the tropical environment as hazardous to the white man’s health. Pante argues that American belief in the salubrity of elevated places resulted in the development of Santa Mesa and San Juan, with their hilly topography, as elite suburbia where Americans, along with elite Filipinos, established their residences starting in the 1910s and the 1920s. The move to the suburbs underscored the avoidance of inner Manila’s unhealthful environment, with its flat topography, poor sanitation, congestion, and warmer climate. Along with developments in transportation and lifestyle choices, the apparent persistence of old beliefs on health and geography helped transform the urban landscape.

In a critique of the work of Luis Alonso Álvarez, Bruce Cruikshank raises the question: Was the method of making tribute lists really changed in the eighteenth century, resulting in greater revenue collection, as Alonso has claimed? Cruikshank doubts Alonso’s contention concerning the changed role of the priest in compiling the tribute lists; accepts the rise in tribute collections but contends that the increase occurred even in provinces where the tribute system was not changed; and suggests a misreading of evidence on Alonso’s part. In his response, Alonso marshals evidence that parish priests were wont to increase the number of exemptions from tribute as this enlarged the pool of church workers, but it diminished state revenue. Transferring control over the tribute lists to the civil authorities should result in a significant increase in tribute collection, but Alonso concedes no dramatic increase occurred. The enigma of what actually changed in the tribute system in the eighteenth century remains.

In an extended research note, Elmer I. Nocheseda inventories the terms related to palm leaf art found in Spanish dictionaries compiled from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries. He then surveys the contemporary practice of this indigenous art. Despite the admitted difficulty in matching earlier terms with present-day names, forms, and shapes of palm leaf art, Nocheseda conjectures that complex forms of which today’s artisans have no knowledge might have disappeared already. This art form may indeed have declined, and consigned to the exotic. Studying the cultural significance of palm leaf art and the context that allows it to endure even on the margins may also advance research in this field.