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## **Philippine Ancestral Houses (1810-1930)**

Review Author: Felino L. Lorente

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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.

As is often the case, one finds what one seeks. And Castañeda discovered much hard evidence to prove his point; and in fact he suggested by sheer numbers that public buildings both religious and secular seem to suffice to indicate the main development trends in the history of Philippine architecture. The book was written for the reader from the academe whose education in history taught him that the history of a nation is nearly equivalent to the collective biographies of those who take turns by the ebb and flow of political currents to hold sovereignty in their hands.

*Philippine Ancestral Houses* is the product of a somewhat different perspective. Recent trends in Philippine historiography have stressed the role of the *indigenous* and the *mass* base of historical and cultural events. This nativist and proletarian tendency has led to the reevaluation of traditional artifacts of local culture. The product has generally been the highlighting of the (1) native roots and (2) proletarian contribution to Filipino culture. *Philippine Ancestral Houses* builds upon the first, but is relatively silent about the second. The Philippine ancestral house, Zialcita and Tinio say, is the *bahay na bato* whose general design and justification for its parts trace back their origin or at least their inspiration from the *bahay kubo* (p. 19), the native cube-like house made of light materials and resting on posts. There is danger in overstressing the native roots and the authors wisely suggest the influence of the *casas tribunales* (p. 189), and other nonindigenous ideas.

An important phenomenon in the nineteenth century Philippines was a sudden spurt of economic opportunity which gave added wealth to a considerable number of city and country dwellers. This new wealth created new needs and inspired new vanities in the upper economic class. There grew the need for comforts far more sophisticated than was possible in the smaller houses. And once the wealth was there, there arose the need to court power and to show that wealth and power by means of elegant and large houses where "sat a hundred guests at a table and served . . . food on beaten silver plates and with gold cutlery to boot!" (p. 128). And Tinio comments, "such were the feats expected of the pretender to the throne." For certain parts of the *bahay na bato* were indeed designed to suggest "thrones" which, in Tinio's playful, sometimes cynical, but always charming style, were "overlaid with gold leaf beaten thinner than a whisper" (*ibid.*).

The reader of the Zialcita-Tinio book certainly must have wider interests than the one of Castañeda's. For here in this charming book — published by Gilda Cordero-Fernando, excellent fictionist and recent master of expensive books — are not only vivid and charmingly written essays on the history and shapes of the *bahay na bato*, the "Philippine Ancestral House" of the title, but several bits and pieces meant to appeal to the widest number of readers of popular writing. There are documents for researchers. There are lots of tales for folklorists — folk beliefs, haunted houses, and all (pp. 122-23). Here, too, is a gallery of antiques, making the book a must for

historians of Philippine architecture. Academicians will love the bibliography but will miss an index. The photography, layout, and printing are superior.

But the book is surely not about the "ancestral house" of most Filipinos neither of today nor of the past. The "ancestral house" exquisitely written about by Zialcita and Tinio and superbly photographed by Oshima is the ancestral house of Filipinos whose traditional title to wealth and/or power originated from the years between 1810 and 1930. And these have been always a minority group in Philippine society, and they were also certainly not always all Filipinos at heart. Even the price of this handsome volume (over ₱300) is above the reach of those who today cannot live in modern versions of the "ancestral house."

*Felino L. Lorente*

TRADITIONAL HANDICRAFT ART OF THE PHILIPPINES. By Roberto A. de los Reyes. Manila: Casalinda, 1979. xi + 96 pages. ₱35.00

NATIDO BINWAG WEAVES THE BANGO. By Mary Ng. Quezon City: The Council for Living Traditions, Inc., 1978. 87 pages. ₱39.00

T'BOLI ART IN ITS SOCIO-CULTURAL CONTEXT. By Gabriel S. Casal, O.S.B. Makati: Ayala Museum, 1978. 228 pages. ₱250.00

In the past, a great amount of descriptive and graphic documentation was devoted to the material culture of colonized peoples. In recent times, there has been a marked interest in a part of the material culture — handicrafts. And by handicraft, it would seem from the literature, is meant a large family of useful ornamental handmade objects from toys to tools to textiles, designed to cope with the demands of survival, comfort, and pleasure, and religion. The latest demand seems to be tourism. While rural folk are striving hard to procure the benefits and products of modern technology, moneyed tourists are searching for "ethnic artifacts" and other such curiosities to bring or send back home.

With the increasing demand, a new business has been created: the manufacture of "traditional" and "ethnic" handicrafts by non-traditional and non-ethnic methods. This has led to the birth of another need: the ability to make "traditional" and "ethnic" handicrafts. Thus the demand for books that document and describe the techniques of making these crafts. All these appear to have inspired Thelma R. Newman's *Contemporary Southeast Asian Arts and Crafts*, subtitled *Ethnic Craftsmen at Work with How to Instructions for Adapting Their Crafts* (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1977).

In the Philippines, interest in traditional arts and crafts, particularly the ethnic kind, has attracted a variety of persons from educationists to artists to Christian liturgists.