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Barrio Houses in Negros Oriental: The Cebuan Filipino Dwelling in Caticugan

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BARRIO HOUSES IN NEGROS ORIENTAL

THE CEBUAN FILIPINO DWELLING IN CATICUGAN: ITS CONSTRUCTION AND CULTURAL ASPECTS. By Donn V. Hart. Cultural Report Series, Southeast Asia Studies, Yale University. 1959. Pp. viii-148. (Multilithed)

One is impressed and delighted to find the same precise and careful scholarship exhibited in this fine anthropological study as in Professor Hart's previous work, *The Philippine Plaza Complex* (Cultural Report Series, Southeast Asia Studies, Yale University, 1955). Professor Hart, formerly at Yale, now belongs to the faculty of the department of sociology and anthropology of Syracuse University, New York.

Caticugan is a barrio of Siaton municipality which is located on the extreme southeastern tip of the island of Negros, west and slightly south of Siquijor Island. In 1951 (December) 597 persons, distributed into 113 households, lived in Caticugan. The author lived for a year (1951) in Siaton, and later revisited Caticugan for short periods in 1955 and 1957. These visits were made possible by Fulbright research fellowships.

Hart's purpose is to describe the materials and methods presently used to construct residences in Caticugan. This naturally leads him into the related discussions of settlement patterns in Caticugan, ways of selecting house sites, typical floor plans, ordinary household furnishings and equipment, and magical beliefs and practices connected with activities classified under these topics, with documentation by photographs and sketches. On the basis of observations in other municipalities and barrios, Professor Hart believes that house construction in Caticugan is typical of that in other barrios of southern Negros which are not isolated from a national road.

The reviewer fully agrees with Hart that anthropological research upon the houses of rural Christian Filipinos is extremely worth while. The house is a highly important artifact in a culture and its design and construction (or lack of construction) directly affect a great many behavioral patterns of members of the culture. The house also furnishes valuable clues to the cultural orientations of a people.

Only by such sharply defined studies of particular cultural items, made in numerous different areas of the Philippines, will social scientists eventually be able to generalize to the culture of the Christian Filipino as such. In the meantime it is devoutly to be hoped that other sociologists and anthropologists will imitate Hart's

restraint and refrain from over-facile and hasty generalizations about this same Christian Filipino culture, particularly where only their personal impressions and no research underlie such generalizations.

Hart finds four main types of family buildings in the Siaton municipality. There are: (1) wooden buildings of four to five rooms, sometimes painted, with galvanized iron roofing, ceilings, and room partitions. These are found chiefly in the Siaton Población. (2) Buildings mounted upon wooden piles with bamboo-nipa walls, a bamboo slat floor, a roof of nipa shingles, window shutters made of nipa or buri, partitions between the rooms, and no ceiling under the roof. Hart states that this type of house is commonest in Caticugan, although many such houses are also found in the Población. (3) An alternative version of number two above is found further north than Caticugan in the Siaton River Valley. Here where it is difficult to get nipa, sa-sa (pounded bamboo stripping) replaces nipa for the walls and cogon grass replaces nipa for roofing material. (4) The fourth type of house also represents a variation of type number two. In it bark walls are substituted for the bamboo-nipa variety. This type of house occurs north of Dulong, one of the northernmost barrios of Siaton.

According to Hart, these variations are based upon cost and availability of materials. In Misamis Oriental and Bukidnon, the reviewer has found that availability of materials locally becomes more and more important the further one departs from a highway in regard to the choice of materials used. Relative coldness at night also plays an important choice in the selection in these two provinces. For instance, in Mirayon, Bukidnon, which is approximately 4500 feet above sea level and more than 40 kilometers over difficult trails from the nearest road, wood is used almost exclusively as the material for the outer walls (cold) and cogon grass is used almost exclusively as roofing material (availability). The writer has also noticed the preference for these two materials in native barrios at high altitudes near Atok in the Mountain Province. In Talakag and Del Monte, Bukidnon, where the altitudes are more than 1100 feet and the nights cool, one also finds wood used more extensively than in the coastal lowlands of Misamis Oriental.

The finding of Hart that in Caticugan magical rites and beliefs enter with great importance into the selection of a house site and into almost every aspect of the building of the structure, is of considerable interest. The reviewer has evidence that this is also true in at least several barrios of Misamis Oriental and Bukidnon, though the particular ceremonies and ceremonial objects are not the same as those described by Hart, although they are of a similar nature. One cannot but be impressed with the breadth of the areas of life in rural Misamis Oriental and Bukidnon into which magical

practises enter, and by the depth of belief and security in these practises. Hart's findings suggest that magical practises are of equal importance in rural southern Negros.

Professor Hart's book, of interest to cultural anthropologists and sociologists, will recommend itself also to the economist and the social psychologist. The book should provide many fruitful hypotheses for research in other areas of the Philippines.

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