

The Role of Protestant Mission and the Modernization among Mangyans in the Philippines¹

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Introduction

Various colonial experiences in Asia have shaped the social, political as well as religious landscape in Asia. The Philippines, long dominated by Western colonial powers—more than three hundred years under Spain and almost fifty under the United States—became the only Christian country in Asia with more than ninety percent of the total Catholic population in Asia. When the U.S. took over the colonial domination after Spain, various U.S. colonial and post-colonial influences were introduced and their political, economical and social systems penetrated into the Philippines (Goda, 1999, 2003; Hunchcroft, 2000; Abinales and Amoroso, 2005; Hidalgo and Patajo-Legasto, 2005; Go and Foster, 2005). And Protestant denominations based on U.S. have been operated their missions into the country through over a century. With the social, political as well as religious influx of foreign and Christian influences within Philippine context, the Philippines seemed to be a good place to examine the modernization process and the interaction with various foreign based Christian groups in the post-colonial era.

In the study, the Mangyans in Mindoro, Philippines was purposefully chosen to examine the protestant intervention in the modernization process in a remote area in the Philippines. Known as the swidden agriculturalists in the island of Mindoro, The name, Mangyan is the generic term for the native people who settled in the island of Mindoro 600- 700 hundred years ago (Postma, 1974). They are geographically closer to Palawan with the group of Malaysia and Borneo during prehistoric times than Luzon and Visayas (Mandia, 1987).

Some studies focused on religion and spirituality from indigenous aspects, which were also deeply related to rituals and social life (Pennoyer, 1975, 1980b; Leykamm, 1979; Mandia, 1987, 2004; Miyamoto, 1988; Gibson, 1983), but none of the studies have paid attention to the effects of evangelical endeavor in the national development of the indigenous people group, such as Mangyans. Therefore, this study seeks to analyze the protestant intervention in the development of modern Mangyan communities in Mindoro Island. Employing ethnographic methods with in-depth observation and interviews to understand the process of modernization

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and the effects of religious works in a particular Mangyan community, the study particularly seeks to describe the three sitios (Sitio Siyapo, Baraas, and Calamias); analyze the current social and religious context of the Iraya and Alangan Mangyan tribes in Northern Occidental Mindoro, and determine the protestant effect on the modern development of the Iraya and Alangan Mangyan tribes in Northern Occidental Mindoro.

Review of Related Literature

Among the leading scholars in Mangyan studies, Japanese scholars are notable. Kikuchi (1973a, 1973b, 1974, 1979, 1982) began his study on the leadership and kinship systems among the southern ethnic groups in Batangan, Oriental Mindoro, which was based on Muradake's theory of a cognatic society. He argued that the Batangan-Mangyan group confirmed the bilateral social organization theory that formal political leaders do not exist. It was a "caretaker" and "megico-religious leader" who took primary leadership among traditional Batangan groups (Kikuchi, 1973a, p. 7). Miyamoto continued to explore ethnographical studies among the Hanunoo Mangyan group on the kinship, leadership, funeral rituals, cosmology, law and other interesting subjects (1975, 1978, 1985, 1988).

The community development work and research of Postma, a Dutch missionary to Hanunoo Mangyan in Oriental Mindoro, need to be stressed. In more than forty years of missionary service to the Hanunoo Mangyan ethnic group, Postma articulated the social problems of where he worked and described what his mission did to improve the lives of the people (1974, 1994), studied mission history of the land (1977, 1981) and translated into English the only written form of communication, called *Ambahan*, of the Hanunoo Mangyans. With other bibliographic accumulation of the written documents regarding Mangyans (1988), the *Ambahan* is valuable data for sociolinguists and anthropologists.

Socio-historical studies were also done by both foreign and Filipino historians. Lopez (1976) provided local perspectives on ethno-historical studies on Iraya and Hanunoo Mangyans. Later, a German historian, Schult (1991) studied the social history of the island of Mindoro. He argued that the various foreign interventions and invasions to the islands caused the "delay in the development of the island in the modern history of the country." With Swedish anthropologist Helbling (2004), they pursued the study of the peaceful nature of the people among Alangan Mangyan in Oriental Mindoro and concluded that the peaceful nature shown throughout the history of Mangyans is the very survival strategy they used in the face of various threats from outsiders including, Spanish colonizers, Moros, American colonizers and lowland Christianized Filipinos.

Pennoyer, a son of a long-term protestant missionary, did extensive anthropological research on plants and the rituals of cosmology among Hanunoo Mangyan (1975, 1977, 1980a, 1980b). Later, ethnobotanical studies were continued by the Filipino scholar Mandia (1987, 2004) on the Alangan group in the Northeastern Mindoro. Both researchers argued that the role and the use of plants in the communities are deeply related with social and spiritual life.

Before and after Mandia, there was a group of Filipino scholars who provided inner

perspective on the study of Mangyans. Maceda (1967) did the first descriptive study among the Mangyans in the northern part of Oriental Mindoro. Yet due to the lack of articulated research areas on the topic, the study was rather descriptive with no focus. Leykamm (1979) studied the diseases and their remedies of Alangan Mangyan in Oriental Mindoro. Similar to the findings of Pennoyer and Mandia, the researcher argued that the Alangan Mangyans believed the work of evil spirits in various illnesses and depended on the intervention of magico-religious leaders in the remedies. A more scientific study on health-related disease was done by Osteria (1985) among Hanunoo Mangyans in Oriental Mindoro. The research found out common diseases among the group and proposed suggestions for the remedies. Navarro (1993), on the other hand, studied on the legal aspects of the land as the ancestral domain of Alangan Mangyans in Oriental Mindoro, while Quiaott (1997) and Feraro-Banta (1985) compared the life and the culture as well as the concept of land between traditional and acculturated groups of Alangan Mangyans. Both confirmed that modernization through the government, foreign missionaries and other factors made significant changes in the life and social structure of the people.

Based on the literatures, Mangyan studies clearly provided cultural diversity of the Mangyan indigenous groups in Philippine studies. They have communicated with the lowland Christians and continued to be influenced by them over four centuries. The previous Mangyan literatures provide cultural identities, worldviews and coping strategies in their lives. Yet, Mangyans are considered as the cultural group that has been least studied in the Philippine studies. Thus, it is also noted that further researches are needed in the area of Northern and Occidental part of Mindoro. Furthermore, religious studies in the Philippine studies are also focused on the indigenous religious practices rather than Christians or Protestant influences which is obvious in the contemporary culture of Mangyans. This study, therefore, is based on the distinctive cultural plurality of Mangyan indigenous groups yet extends their construction of religious meanings in the modern society, which is the influence of religious media.

Research Methodology

Using a qualitative ethnographic approach in the interpretive paradigm has guided this study, which allows the researcher to interact in the process of constructing meanings (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000, p. 4). Interviews were conducted during field research and the selection of interview participants purposefully used snowball methods. Observation was intensively used during three consecutive film showings in the community and during field work.

The research was done in the three sitios of Siyapo, Baraas and Calamias, which are located in the northern part of Occidental Mindoro. The first local contact in this study, Ptr. Santi, proposed six places that he considered most needed. Considering the accessibility, convenience and needs of the film showing, Ptr. Santi decided on sitio Siyapo, Baraas and Dapdap for this showing, while sitios Landing, Dapdap and Ranao were dropped out due to the complexity in the schedule.

Results and Discussion

Alangan and Iraya Mangyans in Three Sitios (Siyapo, Baraas, and Calamias)

Known as the swidden agriculturalists of the island of Mindoro, “Mangyan” is the generic term for the native people who settled on the island 600- 700 hundred years ago (Postma, 1974). The Mangyans have gained the attention of the early Spaniard colonial Catholics since the sixteenth century. It was in the early twentieth century when ethnographers again paid attention to searching for the new ethnic tribes in Mindoro and the origin of the Mangyans (Blumentritt, 1940; Worcester, 1899). Although Mangyan is the name for all proto-Malayan ethnic groups found in northern Oriental Mindoro, there are some differences in the linguistic and cultural diversity among Mangyans (Maceda, 1967).

Classified as northern Mangyans (Conklin, 1969), both Alangan and Iraya Mangyans mostly inhabit the hills and mountains of northern Mindoro. While traditional Mangyans tended to live deeper in mountainous areas due to the colonial and foreign invasions of the Spaniards, Moros, Japanese and the U.S. (Scholts, 1991, see also Leykamm, 1979), acculturated Mangyans have lived close to or near lowlanders that are connected by roads.

Social Context (Sitio Siyapo, Baraas and Calamias)

General Information

Sitio Siyapo is located about 20 kilometers south of the municipality of Sta. Cruz and within tricycle-reach from barangay Pinagtulian along the national road. This settlement was developed and organized by the joint efforts of the local government and the Catholic Mangyan Mission, Pantribong Samahan Sa Kanlurang Pantribong Samahan Sa Kaulurang Mindoro (PASAKAMI). The community has grown to more than 350 members with more than 50 families. Near the entrance of the sitio, an elementary school and a community health clinic were built with concrete and hollow-block walls to accommodate sitio Alangan for education- and health-related matters. The sitio is an example of how modern structures were able to attract the scattered Alangans to reside in an organized acculturated settlement.

Sitio Baraas is located about five to seven kilometers from the municipality of Sta. Cruz. The location of sitio Baraas was similar to that of sitio Siyapo in that the settlement was located on the outskirts of the hill and a vast corn field near the settlement. Most members of the settlement work in the corn field, which is owned by the lowland Tagalogs and Visayans who have moved to the settlement. The member villagers of this settlement were about 300 hundred, including children, similar to that of sitio Siyapo. While no Catholic mission was organized in the sitio Baraas, two Protestant churches were organized by MTCA and ICCP. Most of the members of the settlement attend either MTCA or ICCP churches, yet several families attended Catholic mass and local sects in the nearby lowland communities.

Sitio Calamias is close to the pier of the municipality of Abra De Ilog where shipping ferries going to Batangas port. This settlement is a part of three small Iraya sitios (sitio Lipawin, Burburuan and Calamias) that are spread within five kilometers. This settlement was hard to find from outside without prior knowledge of the location. Organized as a small sitio, Calamias had

only fifteen households, with the total of fifty five members lived in the three sitios where traditional leadership *kuyay* (Iraya leader) and a *chieftain* (political leader in the modern Mangyan settlement) who is often called the “mayor of the settlement.”

The Structure of Settlements

Ethnic Origin and Dress: Ethnic and linguistic differences among Mangyan stimulated the ethnic origins of the Mangyans. Notably, Estel (1952, 1953) argued that Mangyans are certainly not Negrito but a mixture of Veddoid (Indo-Australoid and Dravidian, and the Sakal group) and Borrio ethnic groups. Mandia also argued that the Mangyans were geographically close to Palawan with the group of Malaysia and Borneo in the prehistoric period (Mandia, 1987) rather than Luzon and Visayas. Maceda (1967) also argued that the Mangyans are generally referred to the proto-Malayans in northern Oriental Mindoro, although some disagreements on the linguistic and cultural differences could be found.

The acculturated Mangyans have been transformed with the modern manner of clothes and style of dress. Several ethnographic studies depicted the traditional Alangan and Iraya Mangyan dresses, “*Abayen*” or G strings that were made out of cotton, bark clothes and rattan, although no Mangyans in the field research wore traditional dresses that were shown in previous literature. Acculturated Mangyans gave priority to the purchase of clothes when cash was available.

As the nuclear family is the new shape of family in modern times, it has been similarly shown in the acculturated settlements for both Alangan and Iraya Mangyans. Yet it was again a different attribute that distinguished traditional Mangyans from the acculturated Mangyans. Mangyans in the three sitios have a similar nuclear family structure with parents having three to five children. Parents share ancestral lots upon the marriage of their children and the bridegroom builds a new house in the same settlements.

Residence (House)

As revealed with the nuclear family, the structure of Mangyan housing was smaller than traditional houses. The main material used for Mangyan houses was sliced bamboo. It was made of wooden boards and covered with cogon grass on top. Usually, a Mangyan house is lifted up one foot high and the space below the house is called *silong*. The function of the *silong* is to protect dwellers from the chill and humidity coming from the ground, but it is multi-purpose in that it is often used as a storage space for firewood, root crops and livestock such as pigs, dogs and chickens. Although their construction skills are slowly improving, the Mangyan house is still more mobile than a permanent residence.

Community Development

School: Education was a vital part of the Mangyan modernization process. Acculturation requires adopting a modern political social system and Tagalog as a lingua franca. Most Mangyans in the three sitios have somewhat extended Tagalog language education over the past

years and let their children attend elementary education either in the Mangyan settlements or lowland schools. Currently, sitio Siyapo has an Alangan Mangyan elementary school that has been funded by the local government and run by the PASAKAMI. Two Tagalog teachers were hired to teach the children using a DECS-recognized curriculum but have adopted some Mangyan subjects such as an Alangan language class. Religious institutions and workers have played a pivotal role in Mangyan education by facilitating school administration and providing teachers, support class materials and funds.

Leadership Patterns: Emerging socio-political leadership among Mangyans is also a distinctive feature of acculturation. In the Mangyan studies from the 70's, the presence of socio-political leaders were found as contrasting to the existing magico-religious leaders such as *kuyay* (elder) in Alangan and *datu* (elder) among Iraya Mangyans (Leykamm, 1979; Kikuchi, 1973a; Miyamoto, 1975, 1977, 1978). The emerging leadership was continually observed during field research and quite involved even the local administration in their municipalities. Yet the emerging socio-political leadership was somehow separated and, at the same time, merged into the traditional *kuyay* and *datu* system. His role as an elder of the community has transformed into a more established socio-political one as the settlement acculturated at the same time, as a traditional leader.

Food: Known as swidden agriculturalists (Conklin, 1949, 1958 1969; Pennoyer, 1979), traditional Mangyans implemented slash and burn methods of agriculture, whereas acculturated Mangyans practiced new methods of upland agriculture. Sitio Siyapo is placed at the foot of a rocky hill and faces the large corn field. Lowland Tagalog communities own most of the corn field are within ten minutes walking distance from sitio Siyapo. According to Ptr. Santi, corn harvest has not been widely practiced among Mangyans in Occidental Mindoro. Although it seemed relatively simple cultivation, use of farming equipment such as tractors and carabaos to plough the land as well as the purchase of chemical fertilizer made it impossible for Mangyans to practice the corn field cultivation. The major staple foods, such as cassava, camote and banana remain important to Mangyans, but acculturated Mangyans have been borrowing seeds and methods of cultivation from lowland Tagalogs, aiming to grow crops such as beans and eggplants.

Ancestral Domain and Land Struggles: Ancestral Domain is the recognized ownership of land by the central government in order to secure the land of indigenous people in the Philippines, which include the island of Mindoro, the land of the Mangyans. DAO No. 102, Series of 1993, provided "the recognition and protection of the right of the indigenous people in their ancestral land and domain and to ensure their economic, social and cultural well-being."² In distribution of the land, Alangan Mangyans were awarded 7,200 HA and Iraya Mangyans were awarded 2,500 HA. However, all Mangyans have not benefited from the distribution of the land and the acculturation process. Mangyans who have been experiencing acculturation also experienced the challenges of adjustment in modern economic conditions. Given the land of ancestors, Mangyans began to settle down in a permanent place and planted rice, corn and other

² http://www.davaonorte.gov.ph/profile/sep_2_1_4.htm

more lucrative crops. Yet the new methods of cultivation, such as purchasing fertilizers and seeds, required a certain level of capital. This is a widely occurring phenomenon among all tribes of Mangyans (Pennoyer, 1975).

Religious Context

Christianization and Acculturation

Religious context of the three sitios revealed the process of acculturation. Religious institutions such as PASAKAMI have been deeply involved in the establishment of the elementary school at sitio Siyapo, and native Mangyan priests were directly involved in teaching kids at sitio Calamias, which also happened in the work of missionaries in several settlements of Mangyan tribes (Postma, 1974). In sitio Calamias, an Episcopal priest has been extending his ministry to the people of Iraya, including members in Calamias. He has not only provided religious services but also considerably involved in elementary education in the sitio by providing teachers from his parish. Religious institutions and workers have been actively involved in the acculturation and modernization process of the three settlements in one way or another.

Religious workers made extensive connections with outside communities. Several Mangyan pastors in ICCP have been educated biblically and professionally at Calapan, Oriental Mindoro. They were able to learn Tagalog and English, which helped them learn and apply typical evangelical patterns of worship and teach songs in Mangyan churches. Churches also often served as meeting places for Mangyans to interact with lowland Mangyans. The significant social development was mostly initiated by religious and government projects such as schools, community centers and water pumps, and were mainly negotiated and carried out by the religious institutions in the settlements.

Protestantism

Christianized Mangyans are either Catholic or Protestant. It is hard to find data about the religious profile of Mangyan tribes yet Ptr. Santi roughly figured out that twenty percent (20%) of Alangan tribes are Catholic, ten percent (10 %) are Protestant and the rest are traditional spirit believers. These figures were based on the number of small sitios and settlements of Alangans due to the distinctiveness of community of believers, which has been raised in recent theological dialogues by understanding the spirituality of settlements that are community-based in Africa and Asia (Adewuya, 2001; Hays, 1996). Mangyan religious settlements were similar to community-based religion in that all the community members experienced conversion to another religious belief. Members of sitio Siyapo converted to Catholicism, sitio Baraas converted to Protestantism, such as MTCA that are initiated by OMF, and sitio Calamias converted to Protestantism through the collective work of Western OMF missionaries. Religious conversion did not happen individually but collectively through the community leader's proposal.

Indigenous Christian Churches in the Philippines (ICCP): ICCP was an indigenous

protestant organization established by the visionary Mangyan pastor, Santi. Ptr. Santi, who was once a member of sitio Dapdap, which belonged to MTCA. When he had a personal spiritual experience—in the Protestant term, born again in the Spirit—he wanted to become a minister, so he attended a Bible school in Calapan, Oriental Mindoro in 1998. During his study, he was able to adopt typical Western and Protestant patterns of worship, discipleship and pastoral skills such as preaching and church administration, including church finance. He came back to Dapdap and tried to apply what he had learned from the Bible college. The distinctive features of ICCP are its self-governing, self-propagating and self-supporting characteristics. ICCP as an indigenous religious organization was not initiated by foreign missions but established by the Mangyan Protestant Christians. Although it was not legally organized, the leadership and the administration were quite formalized.

The Mangyan Christians in the three sitios began to experience multiple religious practices and voluntarily chose one religion. Several religious groups such as Catholic Mangyan missions, PASAKAMI and Protestant foreign organization such as OMF, and indigenous group like ICCP and MTCA have been involved in establishing the churches of the Mangyan settlements in the sitios. They have actively constructed church buildings and conducted various worship styles. Conservative protestant groups among indigenous groups were noteworthy, while indigenization of religious practices has been witnessed among Christian religious practices in various religious groups.

Among Mangyans, becoming a Christian connotes becoming acculturated and modernized civilians. In the process of adapting modern Filipino culture among Mangyans, Christian religious institutions both Catholic and Protestant have become the agents of social change. Religious activities and efforts were becoming the venue for experiencing modern technology and media, while religious leaders have played a vital role in social changes. It is, therefore, Christianization that has been integrated into the development of social changes that makes Mangyans acculturated in the three settlements.

Conclusion

The three sitios (Siyapo, Baraas and Calamias) showed relatively modern settlement patterns. Religious institutions have become a major agent of the acculturation and modernization process in addition to the local government. Settlement size was relatively large compared to traditional villages, with the numbers between 200 and 300 individuals. Traditionally, Alangan and Iraya Mangyans do not have a written language, but modern education systems provided changes for Mangyans to speak and write Tagalog as a *lingua franca*. Family and house sizes have become smaller compared to those in the traditional Mangyan society. Contrary to the small size of the households, the sizes of the settlements became large enough to include an elementary school, community center and health clinics within the compound. These indicators have assured that there is a high degree of acculturation among Mangyan settlements.

Notably, leadership in relation to Christianization has been a part of the process of social

change. Traditional magico-religious leadership has merged into the socio-political leadership that intermingled with religious affiliations. In order for the leaders to maintain leadership roles in the community, they were more or less forced to change their religious affiliation to Christianity. The permanent settlement patterns supported by Christian groups and local government required new adaptation. Yet, many Mangyans have exposed themselves to the greater danger of losing their land through immediate cash loans from the lowland lenders.

Religious institutions such as Catholic, protestant and Episcopal Churches have already extended their missions to the three Mangyan sitios since the 1980s. The alliance of the Mangyan mission in Catholic Church, called PASAKAMI, was deeply involved in the establishment of the sitio Siyapo; MTCA, supported by OMF ran a church in sitio Baraas; and ICCP of Ptr. Santi provided typical evangelical services in the three sitios. Besides the three institutions, the Bible League of the Philippines and other independent foreign missionaries somehow interacted with the indigenous Mangyan Christians. The members of ICCP explicitly showed typical evangelical patterns of worship and organization but developed their worship styles in the presence of indigenous practices. Various religious institutions have been active in developing the communities by putting up the water pump, school and construction of community center and others.

This study recommends in-depth studies on Alangan and Iraya Mangyans in Mindoro Occidental. The previous literature and current data clearly showed that Mangyans in the research area (Northern part of Occidental Mindoro) have been greatly neglected in terms of modern technology development and information sharing. cultural and religious influences from both Catholic and Protestant Christian groups have shown a great deal yet not studied fully. The research also found out the urgency of government intervention to preserve Ancestral Land titles from the lowlanders. Besides policy makers, similar challenges face the community development social workers from both government and non-government social organizations. Schools need to re-open to educate the children of Mangyans in preparation for the future. Culturally relevant Mangyan teachers were another concern in the children's education. These were just a few aspects in the list of their social struggles that need to be taken care of immediately.

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