

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

KINSHIP SYSTEM AND SOCIAL ORGANIZATION OF THE
SULOD OF CENTRAL PANAY, PHILIPPINES

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BY

F. LANDA JOCANO

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INTRODUCTION

The Sulod are a relatively small group of non-Christians inhabiting the banks of Panay River between Mt. Siya and Mt. Baloy in Central Panay, Philippines. Unless otherwise indicated, this essay deals with the social organization of those living in the settlements of Maranat, Siya, Taganghin, Buri, and Takayan. These people number from 800 to 1000. The basis of the economic subsistence is shifting, dry agriculture, called by them ka?ingin,¹ supplemented with hunting, fishing, and gathering. Despite sporadic contacts with Christian lowlanders, no dramatic social and cultural changes have occurred in Sulod lifeways in recent times. Social life is still characterized by a primary concern with socio-religious activities and a correlative superordination of kinship.

Prior to this study, the Sulod were relatively unknown to students of Filipino society; no similar investigation was attempted in the past. The earliest mention of the Sulod that I have found is in a ten-page typescript term paper submitted by Juan Celeste to Prof. H. O. Beyer, University of the Philip-

¹Harold C. Conklin calls this type of farming "swidden agriculture." Hanunóo Agriculture in the Philippines (Rome: Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations, 1957), p. 1. Henceforth, ka?ingin will be used as a common term for shifting agriculture and will not be italicized.

pinos, in 1912.¹ It appears, however, that Beyer did not take this report seriously for he did not cite it in his book, Population of the Philippine Islands in 1916.² He continued to use such broad terms as bukidnən, mundu, and montesses to describe the mountain people of Panay. The latter designation was used by Eugenio Ealdama to describe a group living in Daan Sur and Daan Norte in the municipality of Tapaz, Capiz province, in a series of popular articles published in the Philippine Magazine in 1937 and 1938. Ealdama's work offered many valuable leads into the culture of Panay's mountain people. However, no similar studies have been made since 1937.

Lack of information makes the position of the Sulod significant not only in understanding the culture history of the central Philippines, but also in providing a starting point for future studies in the Western Bisayas. Moreover, the relative isolation of these people from the rest of the inhabitants of Panay island, due largely to the geographical ruggedness of their territory which discourages frequent low-land contacts, offers an excellent opportunity for a more rigorous and scientific control over observation and analysis

¹Although he indicated that his "study" referred to the Sulod inhabiting the interior hills of the municipality of Calinog, Iloilo province, Celeste did not specify the area he visited. Moreover, his paper dealt largely with the description of the material culture and "superstitious beliefs of these mountain people." See Beyer Collection, Manila, Philippines.

²H. O. Beyer, Population of the Philippine Islands in 1916 (Manila: Philippine Education Company, Inc., 1917). See also H. O. Beyer, "Christian Population of the Philippines in 1942," in Marcelo Tangco, Christian Population of the Philippines (Quezon City: University of the Philippines, 1951), pp.26-28.

of cultural phenomena important in determining the choice of principles of social behavior and the consequent formulation of possible generalizations.

Problems and Methods

The primary aim of the present study is to examine the nature and function of the social organization of the Sulod. These people possess a complex bilateral social structure. A great deal of anthropological attention has, for many years, been devoted to the study of societies having unilinear social structures while those with bilateral structures have received less attention from ethnographers¹ or "have been allowed . . . to remain an unstudied residual category to everything that is not unilinear."² Aware of this problem, Alexander Spoehr, Robert Pehrson, Ward H. Goodenough, William Davenport, Fred Eggan, and J. D. Freeman have stressed the need for closer study of bilateral social structures.³ Pehrson argued that "bilateral social organization has more structure than has

¹George P. Murdock, Social Structure (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1949), p. 57.

²William Davenport, "Nonunilinear Descent and Descent Groups," American Anthropologist, LXI (1959), 557.

³Alexander Spoehr, "Observations on the Study of Kinship," American Anthropologist, LII (1950), 1-15; Robert Pehrson, "Bilateral Kin Grouping as a Structural Type," Journal of East Asiatic Studies, III (1954), 199-202; Davenport, op. cit., p. 557; William Goodenough, "A Problem in Malayo-Polynesian Social Organization," American Anthropologist, LVII (1955), 71-83; Fred Eggan, "The Sagada Igorots of Northern Luzon" and J. D. Freeman, "The Iban of Western Borneo," in George P. Murdock (ed.), Social Structure in Southeast Asia (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1960), pp. 24-50; and 65-87, respectively.

been allowed and that this structure must be studied in its own terms."¹ Davenport has likewise emphasized, in an article, that "even the most cursory glance at the now voluminous literature on societies with bilateral structure reveals the great variations among them and suggests the need, not only for a better understanding of what these variations are, but also of what structural principles are being varied."² Moreover, a bilateral system, as Eggan pointed out, "faces the same problems that unilineal systems do, and must solve them if the society is to persist."³ Expressing impatience over this lack of interest in the problem of bilateral kinship systems, Freeman called attention to the danger of too much emphasis on studies of unilinear structure.

Preoccupation with unilineal descent systems can lead to dangerously lopsided views of social structure in general, as for example, in the assertion by Radcliffe-Brown (1952, p.8) that "unilineal institutions in some form are almost if not entirely, a necessity in any ordered social system." Although thorough studies may still be sparse, we do know enough about some hundreds of bilateral societies still in existence to be able to demonstrate that there are a number of solutions alternative to unilineal descent all of which result in ordered social systems.⁴

It is hoped that the data presented herein may contribute to elucidating some of the important points which have been brought to bear upon this problem by these writers. However, it must be made clear, at the same time, that the major concern of this present study is not to demonstrate any kind

¹Pehrson, op. cit., p. 202.

²Davenport, op. cit., p. 557. ³Eggan, op. cit., p.24

⁴Freeman, op. cit., p. 85

of solution alternative to unilineal descent but to seek to understand the nature of Sulod social organization "in its own terms," through description and analysis of the manner in which the individual members of the society are structurally related and socially integrated into a "set of relationships within which they can interact and cooperation without too many serious conflicts."¹

A complete understanding of the significance of this problem calls for an analysis of the socio-cultural matrix in which rules governing activities associated with social relations, ceremonial practices, economic activities, and other aspects of Sulod social life are best exemplified. The following questions, therefore, become relevant. How are the various units of Sulod social organization defined? How does their social structure function, and through which unit or units of social life are its functions realized?

The most useful index in understanding social structure, according to Professor Fred Eggan, is the kinship system.

In many societies the kinship system represents practically the entire social structure, and, even when there are elaborate developments of segmentary and associational structures, these are frequently closely associated with the kinship system.²

¹A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, "Introduction," in A. R. Radcliffe-Brown and Daryll Forde (eds.), African Systems of Kinship and Marriage (London: Oxford University Press, 1950), p. 83.

²Fred Eggan, Social Organization of the Western Pueblos (Chicago: The University of Chicago, 1950), p. 10.

From this standpoint, how does kinship limit or reinforce social behavior and contribute to the maintenance of personal and social equilibrium among the Sulod? In the socio-ceremonial life of these people how does kinship specify relationships of the living with the dead? Which unit or units of kinship are closely related to the rituals connected with the cult of the ancestors?

This essay will try to answer these and other questions by examining in detail the structural ramifications of the Sulod kinship system and social organization in relation to ecological adjustment and community structure, economic activities, family and marriage, and basic magico-religious beliefs and practices. Certain conclusions of a general nature concerning the type of integration inherent in Sulod social organization will be offered in the latter part of this study.