

THE IVATAN
CULTURAL ADAPTATION TO TROPICAL CYCLONE:
A MATTER OF EDUCATION

A Thesis
Presented to
the Faculty of the Graduate School
University of San Carlos

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts in ANTHROPOLOGY

by

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This thesis entitled "THE IVATAN CULTURAL ADAPTATION TO TROPICAL CYCLONE: A MATTER OF EDUCATION" prepared and submitted by Raymundus Rede Blolong, SVD in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masteral of Arts in ANTHROPOLOGY has been examined and is recommended for acceptance and approval for ORAL EXAMINATION.

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ABSTRACT

The Ivatan of the Batanes are farmers and fishermen who are commonly known as "living in one of the most-storm-battered places in the world," where tropical cyclones often reach the level of typhoon strength.

Anthropological studies on hazardous environments show that to survive in hazardous zones, human beings, through their culture, must make proper adaptive responses to natural hazards, especially tropical cyclones. It has been said that for tropical cyclones, if they are not locally and properly coped with by the people in order to prevent the extent of the disaster, then all a population can do is "to live or to die with them."

From this perspective, the Ivatan are still alive. They have been surviving from one cyclone to another.

The problem, therefore, is how do the Ivatan adapt themselves to a tropical cyclone climatic regime? or what indigenous coping strategies to tropical cyclones do the Ivatan have? Some sub-problems to be examined are:

1. To provide a description of the Ivatan natural environmental context and to show aspects of Ivatan culture in relation to it.

2. To find out Ivatan world view and classification of

tropical cyclones in comparison to Western scientific classification systems, and how often, in fact, tropical cyclones do bear down on the province.

3. To learn how the Ivatan have made cultural adaptations that aid in surviving tropical cyclones in some major areas of life especially agriculture and fishing.

4. To describe the extent the Ivatan provide a model of a self-reliant community from the indigenous development perspective.

The problem is situated in the interdisciplinary corner of ecological anthropology called natural hazards research. The approach taken in the study here is anthropological, using ethnographic methods. These are participant observation, informal talk, key-informant interviewing, the questionnaire, and some other techniques such as diary-keeping, tape recording, and photography.

There are two broad types of responses to natural hazards. They are cultural adaptation and adjustment. It is on the first type of response, cultural adaptation to tropical cyclone in terms of agriculture and fishing, as practiced by the Ivatan that this study concentrates.

The findings of the study are that the Ivatan of the Batanes province have culturally adapted to their tropical cyclone

regime. Ivatan cope using their own indigenous knowledge, and technical skills learned from preceding generations, that enable them to "live with tropical cyclones." Long-term, long-life activities allow the Ivatan to survive tropical cyclones without shock and without much support from outside agencies. Adaptation here refers to approaches and coping strategies that are already embedded in or integral to Ivatan culture.

The following are Ivatan cultural adaptations which this research has found, presented here as a summary.

1. Ivatan Natural Environment. There are natural factors which help to limit the disastrous effects of storms on the Ivatan population. These are: the fertility of soil, plentiful rainfall, a good drainage system, and considerable forest and grassland reserve. Along with them are: the presence of slow-growing, storm-adapted, salt-resistant, hardwood strand trees that have been adapted for use as wind breaks, especially the vutalaw (Calophyllum inophyllum); the presence of abundant coralline limestone, beach sand and gravel which has made possible their use in constructing typhoon-proof homes; and the fact that the majority of cyclone winds affecting Batanes do not reach typhoon strength in Batanes itself.

2. Ivatan Cyclone Prediction. Ivatan have some natural signs that are usually observed in relation to the prediction of the

coming of a cyclone or bad weather. These are the sea sign (its waves and color), the sun and the rainbow, the growing characteristics of plants, the sky and the clouds, and the behavior of animals. Knowing these natural signs by heart enables them to prepare for the worst, and so, decrease the negative impacts of the cyclones, especially the typhoon.

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3. Ivatan Agroforestry. The vutalaw (Calophyllum inophyllum)

in Ivatan ecosystems are a very significant resource in many areas of life especially in agriculture, fishing, firewood needs, and house and furniture construction; all are necessary for adaptation to stormy weather.

4. Ivatan Agriculture. In terms of agricultural activities

the Ivatan have (a) land fragmentation and scattering which is important for survival, for the Ivatan know that if they plant on widely scattered parcels, then if some parcels are storm-damaged, crops in others may survive. Scattering of parcels serves as a safety device. (b) The absence of landlordism allows freedom in decision-making and species diversification. (c) The Ivatan agricultural principle whereby each family every year plants and cultivates all species of crops that it has available, especially root crops, preserve their gene banks from extinction. (d) Livestock are well taken care of in case of an approaching storm. They are tethered on level land, in a valley or depression, and in some places, are taken into a cave where wind direction is

always considered when selecting a site. (e) Agricultural works are scheduled according to an astrological calendar which is not rigid and which provides a chance for reciprocal labor exchanges.

5. Fishing. There are two remarkable evidences, the invention of the yuyus flying fish hook and social harmony, which enable Ivatan cultural adaptation to tropical cyclone in terms of fishing. Yuyus is an indigenous fish hook used by the Ivatan to capture flying fish for use as live bait, and so enable them to have the larger catch, dorado, a source of protein that when preserved was then adequate to last the cyclone months. Social harmony is a concern that has been developed by the Ivatan in fishing (in fact in other areas of life, too) with the principle that an aggressive environment should not be met by aggressive behavior and cultural values which try to dominate the environment, but by values and behavior which direct the Ivatan to achieve harmony with it as the only way to "live with it."

The conclusion, therefore, is that the Ivatan are a self-reliant community in the face of tropical cyclones, from the indigenous development perspective. For the Ivatan, "development" is satisfying enough if it can mean having fields fertile enough to grow some uvi yam; several parcels fit for different crops; enough dried fish (diban and arayu) to last tropical cyclones; a fishing boat; a little home-grown rice; some smaller livestock for festive occasions; a work animal; a storm-sound house; plenty