

BOOK NOTES

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JOEL KUIPERS & RAY MCDERMOTT (eds.), *Fine description: Ethnographic and linguistic essays by Harold C. Conklin*. Yale University Southeast Asia Studies, 56. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007. Pp xviii, 511, Pb \$37.00.

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This book gathers a significant sample of decades of anthropological fieldwork in Asia by Harold C. Conklin. It is a “fine description” of distinctions, concepts, and methods used by Conklin to explore how various people thought, talked, worked, and played. The force of this book, edited by Joel Kuipers and Ray McDermott, comes from the attention to fine details in Conklin’s work: Each chapter displays the rigor and the responsibility with which the ethnographer studied many different cultural phenomena, from agricultural and botanical knowledge to verbal play and orientation. Conklin showed a way to a rigorous ethnography of the human mind in action. It is a particular kind of detailed ethnography that is defined as a fine description, meticulous in construction but also grand in design. The force of Conklin’s fine description comes from attention to details and accuracy in fieldwork. The book surveys the fascinating challenges that this ethnographer offered to us over the course of 50 years of research.

Most of the essays have to do with Conklin’s fieldwork with the Hanunóo of Mindoro and the Ifugao of Luzon. In sections I and II, the relation between fieldwork and ethnographic knowledge in all realms of human science is clearly underlined. Conklin’s contribution was to suggest the need for minimal lexical units to categorize a large number of observations and of methods for determining different types of relationships among them. Section III presents Conklin’s lexicographical approach, according to which an adequate ethnographic description of the culture of a particular society requires a detailed analysis of its communication systems. Aspects of folk classification from a lexicographical point of view are presented, with specific attention to linguistic structures, lexical units and contexts, translation, and hierarchic structures. Concerning ethnogenealogical method, there is a presentation of techniques for recording and summarizing fieldnotes on kinship relations.. This method offers a certain number of steps that should be taken in an ethnographic analysis of this segment of social behavior.

From section IV to section VIII a series of applications is described: the link between color categories and cultural aspects of a society; the cultural significance and the use of plants; music, literacy, and linguistic play in context; spatial orientation; and the link between language and agricultural practices. In the last

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part of the volume (section IX) there is a description of Conklin's early linguistic, cultural and environmental views. In this part Conklin's sense of indebtedness to the people who facilitated his ethnological research in the Philippines emerges very clearly. Finally, there is a detailed bibliography of Conklin's work.

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