

VALUES AND DEVELOPMENT

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INTRODUCTION

The theme of this year's 15th Annual Scientific Meeting of the National Academy of Science and Technology is very timely. At no point in our history has there been a need to re-examine the issues and processes in the social transformation of the Filipino.

The purpose of this paper is to discuss (or better still, to ventilate) certain issues which, to my mind, have contributed much to the transformation of Filipinos away from their native grounds. This transformation (some call it colonization) has been the subject of long debates – its impact on our society has been scrutinized in detail more than a hundred times over.

I do not intend to repeat the subject of colonization here, although it is very tempting to do so. It is the most visible aspect of our historical experiences which transformed our institutions and, to borrow James Fallow's phrase, "damaged our culture."

But I will not do it here – the subject matter has already been wrung dry of its meaning and significance. Rather, I shall examine certain elements of our society and culture which have remained intact underneath this historic veneer and see whether we can make these elements surface and use them to "prime up" our national development.

I am referring here to our traditional values which we have constantly blamed for our inability to develop. They are barriers to our efforts to nation building. That is why, critics of our society and culture are quick in saying that these values are sources of "ills plaguing our society" and of the "weakness in Filipino character."

I have a different view from these critics. I do not see these values as causes of the "ills plaguing our society"; neither do I accept that these traditional values account for the "weakness of Filipino character."

On the other hand, I believe that our negative views about our values cause the "ills now plaguing our society"; they have held back the momentum of

development everytime we make a good headstart. It is our disdain of these values which dulls our senses and blurs our vision of the future. It is our refusal to harness these values in nation building which accounts for much of our difficulties in making this nation move forward.

As one bureaucrat said in an interview:

"Sa totoo lang, suyang-suya na ako d'yan sa pakikisamang iyan, sa utang na loob na iyan, sa awa na iyan. Magagandang katangiang pambahay ang mga iyan. Ngunit sa opisina – ang mga katangiang iyan ang sanhi ng kalokohan, pagkawalang disiplina, graft and corruption. Sobra na, dapat palitan na ang mga ugaling iyan."

Rough translation: "Truthfully, I am fed-up with those traits – *pakikisama* (getting along with others), *utang na loob* (debt of gratitude), *awa* (pity). These are beautiful traits to use at home. But in the office – these are the sources of mischief, lack of discipline, graft and corruption. It is too much. Those values have to be changed."

Let us change these values. For what? Western ones? But our colonizers tried that before – for 400 years under Spain and 50 years under the United States and apparently they did not succeed. After they left, we continued to use their value-system and look at the results – we have not gotten off in spite of our bold schemes at development. Let us review some of these. For example:

1. A long time ago, we said that political independence could not only set us free but could also stimulate economic growth and development. So we revolted against the Spaniards in 1896-98; fought the Americans in 1898-1905; resisted the Japanese in 1942-45; and in 1991 removed the last bastion of American dominance in the country – the US military base in Subic.
2. We also argued that education was it – and the Americans helped us acquire Western education. Literacy was said to be the key to development. Our educational system, patterned after the American system, became the envy of other Asians. In fact, we became the training center of other Southeast Asians. The College of Agriculture in Los Baños and the International Rice Research Institute are among the finest institutions in the world. That is why, Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia, among others, sent their students here to study agriculture.

Ironically, however, our economy did not grow as expected and we have to import rice from Thailand.

3. When we received political independence from the United States immediately after world War II, we stressed community development as the best stimulator of economic growth. Feeder roads were built to link the villages to towns, artisan wells were constructed to give the rural people potable water, the villagers were taught the skills to become better agents of change and so forth.

After the euphoria, economic growth and development did not take place. We were back to square one: poverty and underdevelopment continued to prevail.

4. Then, we introduced land reform as the harbinger of growth. It was the centerpiece of the administrations of Presidents Macapagal, Marcos and Aquino. However, it did not bring about the growth it promised; it compounded our economic problems.
5. Ferdinand Marcos declared Martial Law and worked for the creation of a New Society. The battlecry was "This Country Can Be Great Again" because we have recast the structure of society which causes our economic sufferings – the elite.

But the outcome of the 20-year experiment of 20-year centralized power did not push the frontier of development to any greatness at all. The outcome is now history.

6. Today, we look at foreign investments as the key to economic growth and modernization. To insure its success this time, we are now engaged in a national moral recovery program – hoping to create a better environment to sustain whatever growth takes place.

But our headstarts seem to be fraught with frustrations: political infighting, brownouts, congested streets, lack of water supply, etc.

ISSUES

What I have just presented is the darker side of our past record in national development. The optimistic side is that we are still here, despite all the natural and socio-political disasters which hit us during the last 30 years. What is the secret? Why can't we make this nation move forward a bit faster than how it is doing today? What holds us back everytime we gain momentum in development?

There is no singular answer. My personal view, based on my long years of active participation in research and academic teaching, as well as consulting in both public and private organizations, is that there is one fundamental flaw in our approaches to social transformation: we have not founded our approaches deep into our native grounds. We have not harnessed our traditional values to serve as inner reinforcements of the edifice of progress we have been attempting to build, such that everytime we add one more story of development, the structures fall apart.

We cannot build castles on sands nor strong walls without reinforcements. Ask the architects and the engineers and they will tell you that the height of the building is proportionate to or is dependent upon the depth of its foundation. The foundations of our past development schemes were not deeply rooted on our native grounds. They were merely laid out on the surface. That is why everytime we add another story of progress, the structures collapse and we are back to square one.

But it is a different phenomenon when it comes to our traditional institutions and values. They have been subjected to all kinds of acculturative pressures and yet they are still with us. They are firmly ingrained in our minds and deeply embedded in our hearts such that even the long years of colonization have not seriously altered them. The visible changes we see are merely at the veneer, propped by fad and fashions of the time. But underneath this veneer, our core values and institutions are intact – waiting for us to surface in our consciousness and to harness for nation building.

THE CHALLENGE

It is the harnessing of these core values and institutions for nation-building which is the real challenge of our times. We find it difficult to accept these values because we have been looking at them from negative points of views. These views do not give us better appreciation of Filipino behavior in its proper framework, context and meaning.

For example, many critics see Filipino conformity to traditional values as passivity, subservience and lack of initiative (i.e, "we are even patient with long hours of brownouts and government inaction"). These critics also consider the high premium we place on reciprocity as "scheming", concern for consensus as "lack of leadership", silence borne out of deference or sensitivity to feelings of others as "concealed dishonesty", firmness and discipline as "authoritarianism", kinship loyalty as "nepotism" and so on.

These critics also hold the view that Filipino norms – like *hiya* (politeness, shame), *pakikisama* (cooperation), *utang na loob* (debt of gratitude), *bahala na* (responsibility) and others – are primary sources of "ills in our society and weakness in our national character."

There are many other examples wherein critics do not seem to see anything positive in Filipino traditional values and institutions, especially those values which highlight the basic and unique Filipino ways of thinking, believing, feeling and acting.

But suffice it to say, at the outset, that these "critical views" about and definitions of Filipino traditional values, have not been helpful in broadening our knowledge of our society and culture. Neither have these views been helpful in nation-building.

Although intended to enlighten us about ourselves, as Filipinos, these views have succeeded only in confusing us, in producing basic incongruences within our social system, in transforming our otherwise positive values into negative psychology that denies us the moral will to realize our full potentials as individuals and as members of the national community.

These incongruences must be resolved. This negative psychology must be corrected. They have confused us for so long now. They have also held us back from harnessing efficiently our value-driven potentials for excellence.

To rectify these errors in social transformation, the following initial steps are suggested:

First, let us demystify the superiority of Western models and restore our lost confidence in our indigenous paradigms. Unless we do this we will never realize our potentials as a people, individually or collectively.

Second, let us look at our traditional values more positively than we do now. There is nothing wrong with them, in spite of what critics say. These values are what hold us together as a people. They are sources of our inner strengths, ethical principles, moral judgments and cultural ideals. It is only our way of looking at these values which is wrong; and, this view shaped by past colonial biases, has influenced us to use them wrongly.

Third, let us examine the functions of our values more in terms of the logic and moral authority of our tradition and less in terms of the logic and legal authority of our borrowed models. Our traditional values still form the bases of our collective sentiments and world view as a people.

Fourth, let us focus our academic and civic endeavors at discovering the inner strength of our culture instead of continuously looking for its weakness. This is not saying that the traditional system has no weakness. Admittedly, it has. But if we persistently load our consciousness with ideas of weakness, we will never realize our real strength. Moreover, self-criticisms in the past have never been helpful.

And **fifth**, let us incorporate the positive features of our values in our textbooks and teaching strategies in schools, in managing our public and private organizations, in advertising our products, in writing stories and in producing programs for radio, television and the cinema.

It is only in proceeding on these steps that we can harness our traditional values and institutions to support our efforts at social transformation. Let us take some examples.

Let us focus our attention on familism. Critics say it is one of the sources of "corruption in society" and of "the weakness in Filipino character." These critics have their reasons for associating familism with these "ills in society."

But if we look at familism in terms of its positive function, such association is wrongly placed. Familism is deeply ingrained in Filipino minds and hearts. It is central to Filipino world view. Thus, if familism has to prevail as a principle of transformation, it has to be used as a tool of teamwork in modern organizations; it must not be used to favor family members. Doing so is a violation of the original meaning of familism which is to protect the honor of the family. Doing so is not the right way to use the concept of familism; it is not only unethical, it is also immoral. It violates the principle of "delicadeza."

Rather, familism must be used, at the personal level, in working hard to bring honor to the family by not engaging in activities (like taking advantage of one's position in the company or bureaucracy) that will embarrass or shame the family. At the organization, it must be used as a principle of mutual protection -- i.e., attending to the welfare of the workers and working for the interest of the company.

In this way, familism serves as a means of social control against nepotism rather than its "originator", "facilitator" and "protector". It is in this way, too, that we can restore to the concept of familism the respectability it deserves.

Other norms may be redefined and harnessed as tools for restoring our confidence in ourselves, thereby strengthening our sense of identity in, pride of and commitment to our national ideals.

Pakikisama can be used as a tool for public relations, teamwork and cooperation. There is no teamwork without *pakikisama*.

Hiya can be harnessed as an instrument of motivation, discipline and quality performance. It is *nakakahiya kapag hindi natin nagampanang mahusay ang ating tungkulin* (It is embarrassing if we do not do quality work.)

Bahala na can be used as moral force of calculated risk and our *amor propio* as the inner strength to win, as demonstrated by our athletes in the 1991 and 1992 Southeast Asian Games. They were disadvantaged in all fronts but they brought home gold and honor to the country. As the Philippine Daily Inquirer wrote in its Dec. 5, 1992 editorial:

We will never know what fires lit in the heart of the Filipino that drove him to run as though the wind lashed at his back. Maybe Rizal was right. Maybe amor propio did wonders to the Filipino. Maybe what drove him to rebel against the most iniquitous rule was the same thing that drove him to rebel against the most inequitable odds. For suddenly, in our glorious moment, the Filipinos were one again, pouring into the game sites and cheering their countrymen on.

Suddenly, in our glorious moment, the Filipinos were proud again, flying their flags, hurdling their hurdles, making their wild dash to victory.

Indeed, we will never know in detail what fires were lit in the hearts of our athletes. But we agree with the editorial writer that *amor proprio*, often brazenly condemned as negative norm, was what "did wonders to the Filipino." The *hiya*, as pointed out, can also be turned into strong motive force which enabled them (i.e., the athletes) to achieve peak performance. *Dapat hindi tayo mapahiya* (We ought not to be embarrassed or shamed.) was among the challenges the coaches gave the athletes before the games began. The athletes understood the exhortation, accepted the challenge, felt the need to excel and performed well.

Even in government offices where our traditional values are notoriously misused and condemned, there are bureaucrats who can use the same so-called "negative values" to their advantage. As one bureaucrat in an interview said:

By invoking the other person's pakikisama and by establishing a feeling of utang ng loob to me and what I stand for. I was able to get my subordinates to cooperate efficiently. These norms can be used to counter the very negative practices which we say they cause. It is a matter of using them to your advantage than condemning and throwing them away.

BACK TO THE BASICS

In other words, if we are to provide proper direction and hasten the positive transformation of the Filipino, we have to go back to the basics. We have to relearn the positive functions of our values and rediscover their inner strength.

Let us be reminded that the lack of appreciation of the positive strength of our cultural values is what holds us back each time we gain momentum in national development. We are afraid we might not sustain our momentum. We do not trust our sentiments and abilities. Thus, each time we make progress, we tend to check ourselves whether or not we are in the right path we set. We indulge in "too much analysis until we suffer from academic and bureaucratic paralysis" – we cannot move. If ever we succeed to move, it is too late – events have already overtaken us.

In the process, we become frustrated. This frustration, in turn, leads us to become cynical about our abilities to perform well. We have become a nation of cynics whose highest delight is to bash our cultural dignity by downgrading our traditional values and by extolling the virtues of the West. We beat our breast with joy each time we spot errors in our values and doubt whether or not there is merit in looking for positive strengths in our values. Many of us believe that there is none. We have concluded that we are not progressing because our culture is "damaged", our "character is flawed and weak" and we "lack the moral will" to do things right.

Let us be reminded further that it is also this cynicism which prevents us from harnessing our traditional values for development. Thus, we cannot marshal societal support for our programs because there are no values -- sentiments and attitudes -- in them which could evoke in many of us a deeper sense of identity, pride and commitment to national development. Without these basic motive forces, no progress can ever be attained.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Let us go back to the basics. Let us remember that, as someone has said before, "The people who do not honor their native tradition can never hope to build a nation." Indeed, nation-building begins from the heart -- in sentiments, attitudes and values of the people desiring to build that nation -- before it is rooted as intellect in the mind or expressed as skills in the hand.

SYMPOSIUM I

Symposium Title : Values and Development
Moderator : Academician Apolinario D. Nazarea
Rapporteur : Academician Salcedo L. Eduardo
Speaker : Dr. Felipe Landa Jocano

SUMMARY

Dr. Jocano's paper dealt with values and development, concentrating on traditional values. These values have been blamed by others as the cause of our inability to develop but he believed otherwise. For Dr. Jocano, there are no negative Filipino values. It is rather our negative views about our values, our unwillingness to view these values positively as well as our continued refusal to harness these values for development which cause the "ills now plaguing" the Filipino society.

There was no singular answer as to why we have not moved forward as we ought to. However, one fundamental flaw in our approaches to social transformation was identified: "We have not founded our approaches deep into our native grounds"; "we have not harnessed our traditional values to serve as inner reinforcements of the edifice of progress we have been attempting to build."

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Demystify the superiority of Western models and restore lost confidence in indigenous paradigms.
2. Look at traditional values more positively.
3. Examine the functions of these values more in terms of the logic and moral authority of Filipino tradition and less in terms of the logic and legal authority of borrowed models.
4. Focus academic and civic endeavors at discovering the inner strength of our culture instead of continuously looking for its weakness.
5. Incorporate the positive features of Filipino values in all aspects of our activities.