

CULTURE, ARTS AND NATION

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This paper is divided into three parts: 1) the concept of the Philippines as nation; 2) the importance of the Filipino culture; and 3) the physiognomy of a national culture.

There are three terms that we are talking about here: culture, arts and nation. Perhaps we have to begin with the basic working definition of each of these.

Culture is the totality of a people's way of life produced by their struggle with nature and their interaction with one another and with outsiders. I believe this anthropological definition is the best definition we can get. Culture includes the performing arts (music, dance, theater), the literary arts (poetry, prose), visual arts (metal craft, pottery, painting, sculpture, graphic arts), architecture, the broadcast arts (radio, TV, print media) and film.

Culture is shaped by man's surroundings, specifically by the struggle with nature. An example is the very interesting art form that has developed because of the kind of geography that we have: the church structure. One foreign scholar called this form of church architecture earthquake baroque. Where European churches would be long and high, most Philippine churches would be long and squat. Why? Because we have earthquakes. And churches were built long before we had reinforced concrete and steel. These churches were built using coral rocks, sometimes adobe, built one on top of another.

Churches had to be built in such a way that their staying power was insured during earthquakes. They had walls that were thicker than usual -- about one-and-a-half to two meters, sometimes three to four meters thick. They were also not very high and they had buttresses also made of stone. Lastly, these churches had very small and very few windows. Why is this so? Because a window is a breach in the wall. The more windows you have, the more chances of the walls collapsing. Filipinos have, over the centuries, devised a system of decoration that fools the eye. Through paintings all around the walls, for example, a low and squat church could look deep and wide.

So our churches, although some people call them Spanish churches, are not Spanish churches. They are Philippine churches. The concept of the church has been adapted to Filipino conditions first, because of the earthquake phenomenon and second, because of our motif and our own decoration.

What about interaction with outsiders? When you have groups or tribes who need to protect themselves, they develop cultural forms that strengthen the tribes. One good example would be the epic. The epic, in times past, functioned as a way of rallying the people around one epic hero, like Lam-ang who represented a particular tribe. The epic's social function therefore was to set up a hero for a tribe who would be the epitome of all the important values that those tribe people should have. And it is a rallying point for them, their identity. What does this culture therefore include? It includes all the systems -- economic, political, religious, social and artistic -- which propagate the beliefs and values which may reaffirm, modify or change this very system.

The second concept is the arts. Arts include the works which express the best thoughts and emotions of a people and which are marked by integrity and intelligence. Art could be music, dance, theater, beautiful textiles, carvings, architecture, film, radio, television, comics like Kenkoy. Art form should include all forms, whether in the ethnic, in the Hispanic or in the American tradition that the Filipinos now use to express their own ideas and emotions. Good art is characterized by excellence and integrity.

Nation is composed of the people of a territory, united under a single government. It is a state, a stable, historically developed community of people, with a territory, economic life, distinctive culture and language in common. The Philippines is a nation because of the Filipinos' commonality of experience in history and in contemporary society. We all know Ferdinand and Imelda, Ninoy and Cory; we all know EDSA, the AFP, the NPA, *coup d'etat*, the vigilantes.

SYMPOSIUM IV

Symposium Title : Culture, Arts and Nation
Moderator : Academician Jose R. Velasco
Rapporteur : Academician Magdalena C. Cantoria
Speaker : Dr. Nicanor G. Tiongson

SUMMARY/HIGHLIGHTS OF DISCUSSION

1. The terms culture, arts and nation were defined.
2. The Philippines is a state, but because it has no distinctive culture, it has not yet attained the status of a nation as defined. The country has to develop a national identity in politics, economy, education and media.
3. There is a need for a Filipino national culture which is the soul and strength of a nation. This has to be consciously developed. The identified problems are: 1) cultural fragmentation; 2) impairment of racial memory; 3) culture still inchoate; and 4) the perception that "the Filipino is negotiable."

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Cultural engineering can be done by: 1) identifying and emphasizing those aspects of the Filipino way of life which should be saved and strengthened; and 2) supporting and encouraging patronage of the arts. Filipino artists should shape and express the national soul by their art.
2. Some suggestions to develop a national culture are: 1) create a national awareness of this vision; 2) disseminate information about the various ethnic groups to promote knowledge and understanding of these communities; 3) recognize the important artists and the character of the works of each; and 4) offer incentives to artists in the form of awards and grants.
3. Efforts to develop a national culture should be divided among persons in different fields in government and in the private sector. All these should start at the same time.

