

Sociology and the Social Sciences in the Philippines: Developments and Prospects

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This paper discusses the future of sociology in the context of the development of the social sciences in the Philippines, specifically of anthropology, economics, political science and psychology.¹ Reflections on the commonalities and divergences of the social sciences in the country will enhance our awareness of our own discipline and of its prospects at the threshold of the 21st century.

The discussion is divided into three parts. The first part is a brief account of the institutionalization and professional development of the five disciplines from the American period to the 1960s. The second section focuses on some of the developments in Philippine sociology and the other social sciences in the 1970s and 1980s. The third part looks at trends in the 1990s, concluding with a discussion of prospects for sociology at the turn of the century.²

Sociology and the institution- alization of the social sciences

The beginnings of the social science disciplines covered in this paper date back to the early American period although the establishment of academic departments corresponding to

each of these disciplines occurred at different times. Most of the disciplines were instituted as academic departments at the University of the Philippines (UP), the flagship unit of the American colonial government, between 1915 and 1926. However, sociology and anthropology were merged in one department, the Department of Anthropology and Sociology. Later, the latter combined with social welfare to constitute the Department of Sociology and Social Welfare. Sociology became a distinct department in UP only in the early 1960s or at about the same period when the Department of Economics separated from the UP College of Business Administration.

The return of a substantial core of Filipino social scientists with graduate degrees from foreign universities in the 1950s served as the impetus to the establishment of distinct sociology and anthropology departments. This was also the case in the establishment of a separate School of Economics at the U.P. Upon the return of professional social scientists, the social science curricula gained prominence in Philippine higher education institutions. Moreover, the perspectives and content of the disciplines shifted.³

Sociology and psychology moved away from a philosophical and normative orientation toward a more empirical science, with the latter developing an experimental psychology. Legalistic studies of government as the principal organ of the state gave way in political science to the study of political systems and processes. Economics became more quantitative, shifting out of qualitative descriptions of economic phenomena. Unlike the four other disciplines, the broadening of anthropology's thrust beyond the study of ethnic communities did not occur in the 1950s and early 1960s but a decade later.

The presence of a critical mass of trained social scientists in the aftermath of World War II also led to the establishment of professional associations in economics, sociology, political science and psychology.⁴ The Philippine Sociological Society was the first to be founded. It pioneered in the publication of academic social science journals, publishing the first issue of the *Philippine Sociological Review (PSR)* in 1952. *PSR* came out a decade before the publication of the *Philippine Economic Journal*, fifteen years before the *Philippine Journal of Psychology*, nineteen years before the *Philippine Political Science Journal* and 23 years before *Anthropology* published *Agham-Tao*.

The conduct of systematic research and cumulative work in the disciplines distinguished the professional social sciences of the post-war years.

Sociologists played an important role in setting up three of the more notable research institutions in the 1960s. These were the Institute of Philippine Culture at the Ateneo de Manila University, the Community Development Research Center at the University of the Philippines and the Research Institute for Mindanao Culture (RIMCU) at Xavier University.

Sociologists also played a critical role in organizing the Philippine Social Science Council (PSSC). PSSC emerged in 1968 as a result of the fortuitous confluence of charismatic academic leaders and the collegiality among representatives of the newly established professional associations.⁵ Since PSSC's establishment, sociologists in PSSC have been instrumental in building the research capability of young social scientists throughout the country.

Redefining relevance in the 1970s and 1980s

Although the social sciences in the Philippines were colonial implants, the issue of relevance to Philippine conditions was not lost to the post-war professionals who laid the foundations for the disciplines today. Sociologists in the 1950s and 1960s, for instance, addressed the issue of relevance by training and building research capabilities that would eventually focus on Philippine social institutions and issues. They generated data on topics ranging from ethnic relations to social institutions,

community studies and Filipino culture and values.

Psychologists, political scientists, economists and anthropologists also concerned themselves with applying their analytical skills to Philippine problems. Because of their concrete professional practice, psychologists in the immediate post-war years and the early 1960s inevitably grappled with the need to develop appropriate and relevant psychological tests.⁶ Political scientists, on the other hand, pre-occupied themselves with the study of political institutions and processes⁷ while economists focused on efficiency-oriented research that was concerned with the allocation of resources to various sectors.⁸ Finally, Filipino anthropologists in the early post-war decades sought their relevance in the conduct of ethnographic research, applying the discipline's methodology for understanding minority groups and cultures.

Relevance took different meanings in the late 1960s and the 1970s. Prior to this period, social science in the Philippines avoided areas of intense ideological debate. The thematic foci of sociologists and political scientists, for instance, eschewed agrarian unrest and the Huk rebellion. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s scholars began to question and challenge the ideological assumptions of earlier research.

Inspired by Marxism, a significant segment of the social science community began to define relevance in the

1970s and 1980s as unmasking the structural roots of social ills and linking the social and cultural aspects of Philippine life to wider economic and political structures. Marxist discourses in the West from the mid-1960s onwards and the declaration of Martial Law in 1972 contributed to the attraction of Marxism as well as the influence of the revolutionary movement in the social sciences. But Marxism in its structuralist or humanist neo-Marxist formulation affected the social sciences in different degrees. Political science and sociology were the disciplines most affected in the Philippines. The former could not remain oblivious to the century's most influential political theory, as some of the leading Filipino political scientists became its adherents. Moreover, new schools of thought in sociology by the 1970s had eroded the dominance of mainstream functionalist and positivist paradigms. Sociologists became more open to the intellectual influences of the times.

In contrast, Marxism did not have a perceptible influence on mainstream economics in the Philippines although younger economists participated in shaping nationalist discourses and the discussions of the Philippine left.⁹ Even at the height of Marxist influence in the 1970s, the discipline maintained its methodological unity. A consensus among its practitioners on its explicit and implicit assumptions prevailed, based on a common model of reality. The acceptance by Filipino economists of the framework and analytical tools

of their discipline discouraged the pursuit of research on structural and political determinants of economic policy or in the general area of political economy. Instead, sociologists and political scientists filled in gaps in political economic studies. They explored, among others, the organization and impact of transnational corporations, the operations of joint ventures and the political economy of agriculture.

Marxism's influence on anthropology in the 1970s and 1980s seems to be more apparent in the practices of anthropologists and their consideration of marginal classes as part of the discipline's scope. Marxist-inspired ecological anthropology did not hold as much sway in the discipline as Marxist development theories did in sociology. For psychology, the essentially atheoretical stance of behaviorist thought in the 1970s made it impervious to Marxist influence, despite historicist strains in psychological theory.

Anthropology and psychology, while less affected by Marxism, were at the forefront of the indigenization movement of the 1970s and the 1980s. The critique of Western anthropology's epistemological and ethical formulations toward the end of the 1960s encouraged efforts to shed the discipline's colonial legacy. Filipino anthropologists reflected on their discipline's identity and re-examined the constructs they used for understanding Philippine communities in an

effort to decolonize the discipline. Apart from interpreting Philippine cultural and social problems from the perspective of national minority groups and marginalized sectors, a significant group within the discipline explored culture using Filipino in order to derive indigenous concepts for delineating local and national realities.¹⁰

Efforts to identify and rediscover indigenous concepts and the appropriate medium for articulating reality were even more vigorous in psychology. In the 1970s and the 1980s, the discipline was polarized between the proponents of *Sikolohiyang Pilipino* and psychology as conceived in the tradition of Western science.¹¹ The former group advocated a theoretical indigenization. They advocated the construction of conceptual frameworks and metatheories reflecting Filipino world views, as well as social and cultural experiences. In addition, they explored more appropriate field methods for these phenomenon in a Philippine setting.

The movement toward theoretical indigenization did not affect economics. Neither did it gain much foothold in sociology and political science. Although a number of sociologists focused on specific Filipino values and consciousness, an eminent political scientist proposed a more indigenous concept of government.¹² Nevertheless, most social scientists were aware and supportive of indigenization. The prevailing view of the process, how-

ever, is that local paradigms will emerge not by a conscious search for them but by doing competent social science research or engaging in an analysis of concrete Philippine conditions.

Moving toward multidisciplinary and pluralism in the 1990s

With the exception of economics, Philippine social sciences in the 1970s and the 1980s offered a range of competing theories and methodologies. Marxist or Marxist-inspired theories challenged dominant perspectives which drew from structural functionalism or systems theory in sociology, political science and to a lesser extent, in anthropology. In sociology, symbolic interactionist and phenomenological schools of thought further eroded the prevailing frameworks. The debates during this period were quite intense although much of it did not see print in academic journals.

By the 1990s, however, attempts to integrate opposing perspectives and levels of analysis theoretically have blunted the most polemic of exchanges. This is illustrated most clearly in sociology where debates in the West spurred the development among others, of Giddens' theory of structuration that combines a political economic focus on structures with the symbolic interactionist and Weberian emphasis on human agency; of a Marx-Weber model of society; and of a macro-micro nexus that combines

micro theories emphasizing the contingency of the social order and centrality of individual negotiations with a focus on structures. Sociologists in the Philippines are open to these developments and have been quick to incorporate them in the teaching of theory.

Efforts to reach convergence at the level of theoretical frameworks are not as apparent in the other social science disciplines. Nevertheless, there are indications of dialogue, cross-fertilization and peaceful coexistence among proponents of divergent schools of thought. In psychology, for instance, insights from research within the framework of *Sikolohiyang Pilipino* have been incorporated into the growing body of knowledge in the broader discipline.

Criticisms of positivist social science by scholars in the interpretive and phenomenological traditions that stressed the significance of language in the social construction of reality rather than the search for generalizations, eventually contributed to greater methodological tolerance. In the most positivistic of the behavioral sciences—sociology and psychology, several methods are now combined to validate initial propositions. A triangulation approach is now accepted, if not tolerated, by the staunchest positivists in the two disciplines.

It is important to note that sociology and to some extent, anthropology, have been more open than the other social

sciences discussed in this paper to new methodological and theoretical approaches. Sociology, in particular, readily accepted participatory development paradigms as well as the methods developed in the course of doing participatory research. By the 1990s, researchers have reaped the benefits of methodological convergence and the development of participatory approaches. The discipline in the Philippines has also been most open to feminist methodologies which draw from postmodern discourses and participatory techniques.

Collaboration among social scientists from different disciplines in problem-oriented multidisciplinary research facilitated the convergence of methods and perspectives. Greater involvement of social scientists in multidisciplinary research in the 1980s and 1990s resulted from a confluence of factors. These include the need to understand and address concrete issues and problems at the macro or micro levels; the thrust of funding agencies toward research that require linkages with various actors in the field and a new openness to the empirical substantiation of theoretical claims.

Among social scientists, sociologists demonstrate a propensity for multidisciplinary work. The sociological imagination, that quality of mind most sociologists are expected to possess, seeks to discern the intersection of biography, history and society. It is not surprising, therefore, that sociologists venture into the study of the

most diverse phenomena, focusing on various aspects including the economic, political and social psychological. They also make use of historical, anthropological and survey data and constantly engage in philosophical debates about the theoretical and methodological foundations of the discipline.

Prospects for sociology in the 21st century

The loose boundaries and increasing pluralism of Philippine sociology have made sociologists transgress the turf of the other social sciences more often than their colleagues. The lack of a distinct substantive or methodological focus at this stage in the development of sociology has led to speculations on the demise of the discipline in the next century.

I would argue, however, that sociology will thrive in the 21st century, albeit in a form that is difficult to predict at this juncture. The future requires a generation of social scientists open to new ideas and capable of synthetic and critical thinking. Since habits of analytical and critical thought are important tools for the 21st century, when facts become obsolete faster than ever before, the sociological imagination is invaluable. In a world without borders, it promises to help students spread their wings and take flight while remaining firmly rooted in the nation's cultural and humanistic traditions.

What would be the scenario for sociology in the first decade of the 21st century? To my mind, the discipline will continue to reflect the plurality of concerns, perspectives and methods of its adherents. Continuities in the ideas and practices of sociologists in the last decade are likely to be found. For instance, sociologists will remain at the forefront of development debates in an era of globalization. Since neo-classical thought is likely to prevail in economics, sociologists and political scientists are more likely to pursue research on political economy and human development. Professor Walden Bello's advocacy for a department of critical economics that is less deferential toward the market, less methodologically obsessed, and more attuned to the dirty complexity of reality that is slipping through the filters of economists attests to the continuing work in the interstices of economics, sociology and political science.¹³

Sociologists will also continue to explore new perspectives and methods. For instance, we foresee more young sociologists, inspired by postmodern thought, engaging in multidisciplinary discourse analysis along the tradition of Reynaldo Ileto's *Pasyon at Rebolusyon*¹⁴ or Filomeno Aguilar's recently published work, *Clash of Spirits*.¹⁵ Academic research on culture is also likely to flourish given the current interest and resolve of young sociologists to examine Filipino values, thought and consciousness. Such future work that will reflect the discipline's

academic thrust is essential to its intellectual stimulation and growth.

But because the Philippines by the beginning of the 21st century will still be caught in the problems of the 20th century, it is highly probable that problem-oriented and field-based multidisciplinary research in various areas will continue to absorb many in the field. Some sociologists will be moving into policy-oriented research and even into advocacy work. Hopefully, some of these sociologists will process, codify, analyze and transform experiences and empirical findings into raw materials for theoretical production.

In summary, given the way sociology has developed vis-a-vis other social science disciplines in the last four decades, sociologists will be at the forefront of research on critical political economic issues in a rapidly globalizing environment. They will pursue studies in areas ranging from ergonomics, health, the environment, women, deviance and literature. They will be engaged in rethinking social arrangements and institutions in a new age, in exploring cultural issues including questions of local or national heritage and roots and in critiquing theoretical discourses and implicit frameworks. They will be exposing the new generation to debates on identity, memory and the invention of self in a world where familiar conventions will no longer hold and the routines of daily living will have changed dramatically.

Sociologists will continue to trespass on disciplinary boundaries, encroaching on the turf of other social scientists, spearheading multidisciplinary work and labeling such work as sociological. Given the capacity of the discipline to incorporate divergent perspectives and revise its analysis and views of

societies in flux, it will continue to have problems in delineating its disciplinary focus. Thus, the first decades of the 21st century will find sociologists speculating on the possible demise of their discipline while simultaneously reinventing themselves.

Endnotes

¹The discussion in this paper draws from "The Social Sciences in the Philippines: Reflections on Developments and Prospects," a paper originally presented at the National Centennial Congress on Higher Education, May 28-29, 1998. The paper has since been expanded and revised for publication in Miralao (ed.). *The Social Sciences in the Life of the Nation* vol. 1. Philippine Social Science Council and the National Academy of Science and Technology (forthcoming 1999). It also draws from "Reflections on Philippine Sociology in the 1990s." *Journal of Philippine Development* 38(21) Nos. 1-2, First and Second Semesters 1994.

²My assessment of the state of the social sciences in the Philippines and of the discipline of sociology is an ongoing project. Therefore, the broad trends discussed in this paper do not yet reflect nuances emanating from the disciplinary and multidisciplinary practices of social scientists in private universities, research centers and institutions like the Asian Social Institute.

³See Abaya, Eufrazio. "Highpoints of Anthropology in the Philippines." Paper presented at the National Social Science Congress IV's Pre-Congress on The History and Development of the Social Science Disciplines in the Philippines, January 29-30, 1998, Philippine Social Science Center; Agpalo, Remigio "Political Science in the Philippines: A Postscript." Paper presented at the National Social Science Congress IV's Pre-Congress on The History and Development of the Social Science Disciplines in the Philippines, January 29-30, 1998, Philippine Social Science Center; Agpalo, Remigio. *Adventures in Political Science*. Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 1996; Bennagen, Ponciano. "The Indigenization and Asianization of Anthropology" in Enriquez, Virgilio. *Indigenous Psychology*. Quezon City: Akademiya ng Sikolohiyang Pilipino, 1990; Panopio, Isabel. "The History of the Philippine Sociological Society." typescript, 1996; Sicat, Gerardo. "The Early Years of the Philippine Economic Society." *Philippine Economic Journal* No. 51 21(5), 1982; Tan, Allen.

"Philippine Psychology: Growth and Becoming." Paper presented at the National Social Science Congress IV's Pre-Congress on The History and Development of the Social Science Disciplines in the Philippines, January 29-30, 1998, Philippine Social Science Center.

⁴The professional organization of anthropologists, the Ugnayang Pang-Agham Tao, was established in 1977. Prior to this date, anthropologists joined sociologists in the Philippine Sociological Society.

⁵Gonzales, Andrew. The Future of the Social Sciences in the Philippines. *PSSC Social Science Information*, July-December 1996.

⁶Enriquez, Virgilio. The Development of Psychological Thought in the Philippines. *Sikolohiyang Pilipino: Isyu, Pananaw at Kaalaman*. Manila: National Bookstore, 1985. p. 155.

⁷Machado, Kit. Philippine Politics Research 1960-1980: Areas for Future Exploration. In Hart, Donn (ed.) *Philippine Studies, Political Science, Economics and Linguistics*. Occasional Paper No. 8 (Dekalb, Illinois: Northern Illinois University Center for Southeast Asian Studies, 1981) as cited in Caoili, Olivia, "The Social Sciences in the Philippines: A Retrospective View," In Samson, Laura and Carmen Jimenez (eds.). *First National Social Science Congress: Toward Excellence in Social Science in the Philippines*.

Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 1983.

⁸Mangahas, Mahar. "Perspectives in Contemporary Philippine Social Science Research: Economics, Demography, Social Work and Statistics." In *PSSC Social Science Information*. October-December 1982.

⁹Ricardo Ferrer stands out among Filipino economists for his effort to articulate a political economic alternative to contemporary economics. While his book *An Introduction to Economics as a Social Science* influenced students, it did not make as much dent on mainstream thinking.

¹⁰See Covar, Prospero. *Larangan: Seminal Essay on Philippine Culture*. National Commission for Culture and the Arts. Sampaguita Press Incorporated, 1998.

¹¹See Enriquez, Virgilio (ed). *Indigenous Psychology*. Quezon City: Akademiya ng Sikolohiyang Pilipino, 1990; *Sikolohiyang Pilipino: Isyu, Pananaw at Kaalaman*. Manila: National Bookstore, 1985.

¹²Although sociologists like Dr. Manuel Bonifacio have worked with students on Filipino indigenous concepts, these studies have largely been unpublished. See Agpalo, Remigio discussion of the "Pangulo Regime" in *Adventures in Political Science*. Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press.

¹³Bello, Walden. "Thoughts on the Response of Philippine Education to Globalization." In *Globalisasyon, Nasyonalismo at Edukasyon*. Proceedings of the 1997 Faculty Conference. College of Social Sciences and Philosophy, University of the Philippines. Puerto Azul, Cavite, November 14-15, 1997.

¹⁴Ileto, Reynaldo C. *Pasyon at Rebolusyon*. Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1979.

¹⁵Aguilar, Filomeno V., Jr. *Clash of Spirits: The History of Power and Sugar Planter Hegemony on a Visayan Island*. Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1998.