

PHILIPPINE SOCIAL SCIENCES: Capacities, Directions, and Challenges

EDITED BY
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Philippine Social Science Report

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Table of Contents

Preface	vii
PART I	
Philippine Political Science: A cursory Review of the State of the Discipline <i>Ronald D. Holmes</i>	1
Philippine Psychological Sciences: Opportunities and Challenges for Development <i>Allan B.I. Bernardo</i>	10
Economic Research in the Philippines: A Brief Survey <i>Emmanuel S. de Dios</i>	26
Taking Stock of Philippine Sociology: Arresting Declines and Mapping New Directions <i>Virginia A. Miralao and Manuel P. Diaz</i>	45
The Statistical Science: Local and Global Directions <i>Erniel B. Barrios, Zita V. Albacea, and Jacqueline M. Guarte</i>	66
Public Administration in the Philippines: Meeting the Challenges of Government and Governance <i>Danilo de la Rosa Reyes</i>	74
Philippine Geography: Riding the Cycles of Growth and Decline <i>Meliton B. Juanico</i>	96
Linguistic Research in the Philippines: Trends, Prospects and Challenges <i>Danilo T. Dayag and Shirley N. Dita</i>	110
Communication as a Field of Study in the Philippines <i>Jose Reuben Q. Alagaran II, Lourdes M. Portus, and Ramon R. Tuazon</i>	127
Philippine Historiography – Looking Back and Looking Forward: The History of Historical Studies <i>Bernardita Reyes Churchill</i>	141
PART II	
Rethinking the Brain Drain in the Philippine Diaspora: With Special Reference to the Philippine Social Sciences <i>Virginia A. Miralao</i>	165
Consulting Opportunities and PhD Graduation in the UP School of Economics <i>Geoffrey M. Ducanes</i>	184
International Publications of Filipino Social Scientists in Universities: Responding to Global Changes in Knowledge Production <i>Allan B.I. Bernardo</i>	196
E-Publishing Initiatives in the Philippine Social Sciences <i>Joanne B. Agbisit</i>	206
The Long Road to Transdisciplinarity <i>Meliton B. Juanico</i>	216

List of Tables

	Page
Philippine Political Sciences: A Cursory Review of the State of the Discipline	
Table 1 Number of Faculty Members based on degree attained	4
Table 2 List of PPSA Conferences, 1996-2011	6
Philippine Psychological Sciences: Opportunities and Challenges for Development	
Table 1 Enrolment in Master's and Doctoral Programs in Psychology	11
Table 2 Graduates in Master's and Doctoral Programs in Psychology	11
Table 3 Type of Authorship for Articles Published in the <i>Philippine Journal of Psychology</i>	12
Table 4 Institutional Affiliation of Authors who Published in the <i>Philippine Journal of Psychology</i>	13
Table 5 Geographic Location of Authors who Published in the <i>Philippine Journal of Psychology</i>	14
Table 6 Areas of Study of Articles Published in the <i>Philippine Journal of Psychology</i>	14
Table 7 Research Approaches of Articles Published in the <i>Philippine Journal of Psychology</i>	15
Table 8 Research Approaches Used in the Five Major Areas of Study in Papers Published in the <i>Philippine Journal of Psychology</i>	16
Table 9 Type of Authority for International Refereed Publications of Filipino Psychologist	16
Table 10 Institutional Affiliation of Authors of International Refereed Publications	17
Table 11 Geographic Location of Authors of International Refereed Publications	17
Table 12 Areas of Study of International Refereed Publications	18
Table 13 Type Authorship for International Publications in the Four Top Areas of Study	18
Table 14 Research Approaches of International Refereed Publications	19
Table 15 Research Approaches used in the Four Major Areas of Study of International Refereed Publications	19
Economic Research in the Philippines: A Brief Survey	
Table 1 Economics Staff at Selected Major Institutions, 2009	27
Table 2 Sources of PhDs of Staff in Selected Philippine Universities and Research Institutions (in percent)	28
Table 3 Journal Article Count and Productivity in Selected Institutions (2000-2009)	30
Taking Stock of Philippine Sociology: Arresting Declines and Mapping New Directions	
Table 1 Number of Enrolees and Graduates of Sociology Undergraduate Programs by Reporting Universities and Region, Academic Years 2004/05 to 2008/09	48
Table 2 Number of Enrolees and Graduates of Sociology Graduate Programs by Reporting Universities and Region, Academic Years 2004/05 to 2008/09	50
Table 3 PSS Members by Highest Degrees and Major Discipline	52
Table 4 PSS Members who Majored in Sociology by Highest Degree Attained, University Attended, and Current Institutional Affiliation	52
Table 5 Non-sociology Majors who are Members of PSS by Highest Degree Attained, University Attended, and Current Institutional Affiliation	54
Table 6 Type of Authorship of Articles Published in the <i>Philippine Sociological Review</i> , 1991-2008	55
Table 7 Number of Articles Contributed by Authors to the <i>Philippine Sociological Review</i> , 1991-2008	56
Table 8 Location of Contributors to the <i>Philippine Sociological Review</i> , 1991-2008	56
Table 9 Regional Location of Local Contributors to the <i>Philippine Sociological Review</i> , 1991-2008	56
Table 10 Type of Institutional Affiliation of <i>Philippine Sociological Review</i> Contributors, 1991-2008	57
Table 11 Academic Affiliation of Local Authors 1991-2008	58
Table 12 Type of Authorship by Contributors from UP Diliman, ADMU, UPLB, 1991-2008	58
Table 13 Social Science Themes Discussed in the <i>Philippine Sociological Review</i> Issues by Year	59
Table 14 Topics of Articles Published in the <i>Philippine Sociological Review</i> , 1991-2008	60

The Statistical Science: Local and Global Directions

Table 1	Enrolment and Graduation Data of the UP Diliman School of Statistics, 2005-2010	71
Table 2	Enrolment and Graduation Data of the UP Los Baños Institute of Statistics, 2005-2010	71

Philippine Geography: Riding the Cycles of Growth and Decline

Table 1	Visiting Professors/Lecturers of Geography in the Philippines	101
Table 2	Foreign Researchers not Affiliated with any Local Institutions in the Philippines	102
Table 3	Visiting Research Fellows at the UP Diliman Department of Geography	103
Table 4	Faculty Members at the UP Diliman Department of Geography	104
Table 5	Other Filipino Geographers not Affiliated with UP Diliman Department of Geography	

Linguistics Research in the Philippines: Trends, Prospects, and Challenges

Table 1	Number of Articles Published in <i>PJL</i> (2000-2009)	111
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Communication as a Field of Study in the Philippines

Table 1	Top Ten Oldest Communication Schools in the Philippines	129
Table 2	Top Five Oldest Graduate Programs in Communication in the Philippines	129
Table 3	Yearly Enrolment in Undergraduate Communication Programs (All Regions)	130
Table 4	Yearly Enrolment in Graduate Communication Programs (All Regions)	130
Table 5	Summary of BA Enrolment and Graduates Per Program (SYs 2000-2001 to 2006-2007)	130
Table 6	Summary of MA and PhD Enrolment and Graduates (SYs: 2000-2001 to 2006-2007)	131
Table 7	Number of Schools Offering Undergraduate Communication Programs (2000-2008)	131
Table 8	Number of Schools Offering Graduate Communication Programs (2000-2008)	131
Table 9	Top Five Titles of Undergraduate Communication Programs Offered by Schools (2007-2008)	131
Table 10	Titles of Graduate Communication Programs Offered by Schools (2007-2008)	132
Table 11	Area of AIJC Consultancy Work (1995-2010)	139

Rethinking the Brain Drain in the Philippine Diaspora: With Special Reference to the Philippine Social Sciences

Table 1	PSSC Member-Associations by Year of Establishment, Journal Title, and Year of First Publication of Discipline Journals	171
Table 2	Status of Fulbright-Philippine Agriculture Scholarship Program Grantees (2001-2006)	174
Table 3	UP Diliman Faculty Members Availing of Study Leaves to Pursue Graduate Studies Abroad, 1999/2000 – 2008/2009, by College and Current Status	175
Table 4	Summary of BA Enrolment and Graduates Per Program (SYs: 2000-2001 to 2006-2007)	179
Table 5	Summary of MA and PhD Enrolment and Graduates (SYs: 2000-2001 to 2006-2007)	180

Consulting Opportunities and PhD Graduation in the UP School of Economics

Table 1	Economics Students in the Philippines, School Year 2008-2009	185
Table 2	Economics Graduates in the Philippines, School Year 2008-2009	186
Table 3	Number of Higher Education Institutions Offering Economics, SY 2008-2009	187
Table 4	Master's and PhD Graduates of the UP School of Economics	188
Table 5	Average Number of Years taken to Finish PhD	188
Table 6	Mean Grade Average in Economics 201, 202, and 206 by Year of Entry in UPSE Graduate School	189
Table 7	Comparison of Mean Grade Average (Econ 201, 202, and 206) of those Captured and not Captured in Survey	189
Table 8	Reasons for Taking up Graduate Studies in UPSE	190
Table 9	Source of Financing for Graduate Studies	190
Table 10	Student Status Upon First Employment in ADB	191
Table 11	Starting Salary in ADB	192
Table 12	Major Reason for Attending School	193
Table 13	Additional Years Expected by Students Before They Get Their PhDs	193

International Publications of Filipino Social Scientists in Universities: Responding to Global Changes in Knowledge Production

Table 1	International Refereed Publications by Institution	200
Table 2	Number of Institutions that Produced International Refereed Publications	201
Table 3	International Research Collaborations	202

E-Publishing Initiatives in the Philippine Social Sciences

Table 1	Journals of Philippine Social Science Societies	207
Table 2	Open Access Social Science Journals	211
Table 3	PhilJOL Social Science Journal Views and Registered Users as of 5 October 2010	212
Table 4	UPDJOL Social Science Journal Views as of October 2010	212

List of Figures

Philippine Political Sciences: A Cursory Review of the State of the Discipline

Figure 1	Enrolment in Bachelor's Degree in Political Science, AY 2005-2006 to AY 2009-2010	3
Figure 2	Enrolment in Graduate Programs, Political Science, AY 2005-2006 to AY 2009-2010	4
Figure 3	Number of Graduates, MA and PhD Political Science, AY 2004-2005 to AY 2008-2009	5

International Publications of Filipino Social Scientists in Universities: Responding to Global Changes in Knowledge Production

Figure 1	International Refereed Publications of University-based Philippine Social Scientists	200
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E-Publishing Initiatives in the Philippine Social Sciences

Figure 1	Screenshot of Philjol Online	210
Figure 2	Screenshot of UP Diliman Journals Online	210
Figure 3	Screenshot of Philippine E-journals	210
Figure 4	Screenshot of the Electronic <i>Journal of Communication</i>	210

List of Annexes

Public Administration in the Philippines: Meeting the Challenges of Government and Governance

Annex A	Schools Offering Public Administration Programs 1971-1972	87
Annex B	List of Schools, Colleges and Universities Currently Offering Public Administration Programs in the Philippines	88

Preface

Represented by a seven-member delegation, the Philippine Social Science Council (PSSC) attended the World Social Science Forum convened by the International Social Science Council (ISSC) in Bergen, Norway in May 2009. The Forum gathered a good number of social scientists, policy makers, students, and leading personalities from all regions of the world to share their work and experiences, exchange ideas and evolving perspectives in their disciplines and in their own countries, and suggest ways that would enhance the value of the social sciences in understanding and addressing global challenges. It was at the Bergen Forum that the preparation of the 2010 *World Social Science Report* was announced and launched, with ISSC enjoining the Forum's international participants to submit contributions to the planned volume envisioned to assess how the ever-changing contexts of national, regional and international affairs impinge on the social sciences, and how, in turn, expertise in the social sciences bears on societal challenges and problems.

Inspired by the 2010 *World Social Science Report*, PSSC endeavored to produce the *Philippine Social Science Report* that builds on previous efforts of the PSSC to assess the state of social sciences in the country. Earlier initiatives included a three-volume *Philippine encyclopedia of social sciences* (1993) which documents the institutionalization of the social science disciplines in Philippine higher education, and the two-volume *Philippine social sciences in the life of the nation* (1999, 2001) which examines the role played by the social sciences in advancing the national development agenda as discussed in the National Social Science Congress held in 1998.

This *Report*, entitled *Philippine social sciences: Capacities, directions, and challenges* focuses on the progress made by the social science sector in building a pool of Filipino social scientists and enhancing its capacity to produce and propagate knowledge and handle twenty-first century challenges. The *Report* includes discipline-specific papers contributed by social scientists from PSSC's member-disciplines in communication, economics, geography, history, linguistics, political science, psychology, public administration, sociology, and statistics. A few other papers covering broader or cross-disciplinary social science concerns comprise the latter part of the *Report*.

The *Report* reveals some important findings. Institutional support for social science disciplines has been strengthened in the decades following their integration into tertiary education. The past 30 years witnessed a surge in the number of schools offering undergraduate programs especially in political science, communication, public administration, sociology, and psychology. This expansion has been fueled by the country's significant population growth of earlier years which has also led to steady increases in student enrolment in the social sciences, despite the popularity of more market-driven degree programs such as nursing and computer science. At the graduate level, a similar increase has been registered in the number of schools offering master's and doctoral degree programs in the social sciences and in the volume of graduate enrollees, albeit to a much lesser degree. The growth in the number of social science graduates/professionals has led to the expansion of membership and activities of the disciplinary organizations associated with PSSC. This has boosted the professional environment of scholars and practitioners in the social sciences, and has advanced as well, scholarly research and intellectual exchanges.

These achievements, however, are not without accompanying disparities and contradictions. While there are now more universities and colleges granting degrees in the social sciences, they are disproportionately spread across the country. Higher educational institutions (HEIs) offering degrees especially in the fields of political science, psychology, public administration, and psychology at both graduate and undergraduate levels are concentrated in Metro Manila or the National Capital Region. At the same time, the quality of academic programs across these institutions is uneven. The quality deficit in

many HEIs stems from the shortage of qualified teaching staff. Ideally, faculty members must be equipped with at least a master's degree to be able to handle college-level social science courses. Many HEIs, however, have resorted to hiring personnel with only a bachelor's degree training or even non-social science majors. The sluggish production of master's and PhD graduates by Philippine colleges and universities partly accounts for this situation. The supply of master's or PhD holders—even counting those who have obtained their degrees abroad—has been outpaced by the rapid proliferation of academic programs and rise in student enrolment. The employment of some master's and PhD degree holders in non-academic careers has further exacerbated the shortage of qualified social science faculty in most of the country's institutions of higher learning.

The quantity and quality of post-graduate degree holders, to a large extent, have also affected the research capacity of social science disciplines. Economics appears to have been the most successful discipline in terms of developing research-oriented master's and PhD degree holders. They publish in their own professional journal as well as in the journals, monographs, and anthologies of other academic, government, and nongovernment institutions. The relatively large population of master's and PhD graduates in political science and psychology also ensures that there are enough sources of research articles to sustain their respective national disciplinary journals. In contrast, the small pool of productive researchers in sociology, geography, history, and other disciplines has been a major stumbling block to the regular production of disciplinary journals. This concern is particularly acute for geography where the share of articles written by foreign and foreign-based scholars in the discipline's national journal is becoming much higher than local authorship. The inadequate pool of researchers in some disciplines also means that research efforts are fragmentary and dispersed. In linguistics and history, for example, many important research areas remain unexplored or understudied.

The human resource pool, research capacity, and direction of the Philippine social sciences are also being shaped by contemporary global forces. First is the increasing concern for the internationalization of academic publications and publications standards. With major universities offering faculty members incentives (i.e., monetary, career advancement) to publish in internationally-refereed journals to raise their global ranking, more academe-based social scientists are publishing internationally, lending visibility to the Philippine social sciences outside of the country. Professional social science associations have also put in more effort to improve their journals in accordance with international standards. The listing of the Philippines' political science journal in the Social Sciences Citation Index, for example, is a direct result of this effort. Initiatives to digitize and electronically publish social science journals are also partly driven by the social science sector's desire to enhance the international presence of local scholarship. The only downside to internationalization is that there is less inducement for Filipino social scientists in the various disciplines to publish in the local journals of their professional associations. Thus, given the increased demand worldwide for social science writing, Filipino social scientists are not able to produce enough articles of sufficient quality to meet both local and international publishing needs.

A second development in and outside the country is the growing demand for social science expertise in other sectors or industries or beyond the traditional halls of academe. This has had a negative effect in terms of the production of teaching and research professionals, and the volume of published research outputs. In economics, for instance, potential PhDs have been lured into consulting work in international development agencies instead of completing or more seriously pursuing their graduate degrees. In communication, public administration, statistics, and in the other disciplines generally, consulting work competes with the time devoted by faculty members to teaching and research. In sociology, researches commissioned by public and private sector agencies end up as unpublished reports that may impact on the specialized programs and policies of donors but not necessarily on the production and accumulation of knowledge in the discipline. The increased demand for social science expertise outside of academe and the

rise of consulting work as a career path among social scientists have placed a premium on the applied or practical uses of the disciplines to the neglect of basic synthesizing and reflective research to develop concepts and theories in the Philippine social sciences.

A third global development is the international migration of social science scholars. Contrary to concerns of brain drain, the movement of scholars to study or train abroad has generally brought positive impact to the social science sector. The large majority of scholars who benefitted from training abroad have returned to the country and are the ones who established social science programs in academic institutions, initiated international collaboration, and formed the professional social science associations that now comprise PSSC. Too, developments in internet technology/connectivity in the last few decades have mitigated possible brain losses popularly attributed to the brain drain. The internet allows Filipino scholars in other countries to remain linked with colleagues back home, share their research work and publications, and engage in richer cross-border academic exchange.

Other than the foregoing impact, rapid technological developments have also had far-reaching effects on Philippine social sciences. Digital technologies have opened alternative avenues for disseminating Filipino scholars' research outputs. For professional social science associations that are struggling with the production of their disciplinary journals, digital technologies offer a more affordable way of releasing journals to a much bigger audience. Pending constraints such as fear of economic losses (on the part of professional associations) and lack of electronic readiness (on the part of local consumers), however, are preventing Filipino social scientists from fully realizing the potential of these technologies. Meanwhile, spatial technologies as GPS, GIS and remote sensing appear to be enlivening Philippine geography which has witnessed a decline in its resource base/pool over the years. These new technologies have created opportunities for conducting new research and studies in the discipline and broadened the applications of geography to other fields of endeavor such as climate change research and environmental and land use studies. In turn, these can raise employment demand for geographers and increase the number of students enrolling in geography programs.

Finally, the need to unravel persistent and complex societal problems—which has intensified the demand for social science professionals outside the academe—is steering Philippine social sciences in another direction. Social scientists have been compelled to cross disciplinary boundaries and “borrow” concepts and frameworks from other disciplines, or engage in collaborative and holistic studies with other professionals towards a comprehensive analysis of and viable solution to these problems. These efforts have variously have been referred to as “interdisciplinary,” “multidisciplinary” or “transdisciplinary.” The move towards interdisciplinarity is occurring in some disciplines. History, for instance, has been employing methodologies, perspectives, and data from anthropology and the humanities in an effort to weave a coherent historical account. Social scientists are also beginning to participate in projects that are transdisciplinary in nature—believed to be the more integrative and thus more ideal form of engagement—to address public concerns such as health and the environment. However, disciplinary loyalties, conflicting goals and values, and project management issues need to be hurdled to advance transdisciplinary collaboration.

The *Report* has shown that the capacity to produce and disseminate knowledge remains uneven across social science disciplines and is fraught with challenges at both local and global levels. The insights and recommendations surfaced by the articles offer the social science community and end-users of social science knowledge—government sector, development agencies, general public—some guidance on addressing these challenges and enhancing capacities in the Philippine social sciences.

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