

THE PHILIPPINES: AMBIGUITY AND MISPERCEPTION*

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Introduction

An outsider with no source of information about the Republic of the Philippines other than the newspapers of Manila is likely to get an extremely gloomy view of this country. To compound this view are the "two-week experts," committed to writing an authoritative article or composing a "documentary" film for TV, who come to Manila for 10 days to find out what is "really happening." Ten days are spent reading the newspapers and talking with a few professional intellectuals. Unfortunately there is here, as elsewhere, the "intellectual" whose stock in trade is the sophistication of being contemptuous of his own nation. Thus, the Philippine Republic has a rather poor public image in many parts of the world.

When I arrived here in mid-1968 as part of a three-man research team, there was an impression of competence, dynamism, and hope which appeared to be strongly at variance with the public image cited above. People were not fearful, nor lethargic, nor were they oppressed into silence. Most whom we met in the government and private sector were young, well educated, and highly knowledgeable. And most importantly they were persons sincerely interested in

doing what they could for the improvement of the Philippines. How does one resolve the apparent contradiction between these initial subjective impressions and the widely held "tarnished image?"

We took on the rather immodest task of trying to answer "what really is happening in the Philippines?" In approaching this problem, each of us was concerned with trying to provide an answer to this question from sources other than subjective, personal opinion. We were each interested in finding out, as much as possible, the truth; and each believed that personal opinions were too much subject to personal biases to be reliable indices of reality. The ideal goal was to find reliable, objective data which would help in answering the questions.

This ideal goal is, at best, only partially achievable. Nonetheless, we gathered as much quantifiable data as we could from a variety of sources—the Bureau of the Census and Statistics, the Police Commission, the Commission on Elections, opinion surveys, and so forth. With this data we attempted to "measure-the-pulse" of the nation. The published report (Averch, Denton, and Koehler 1970) is too extensive to cover in the time available this evening. I would like rather to spend the available time discussing the nationwide survey of attitudes which was done in January-February, 1969 for RAND by the Asia Research Organization of Manila.¹

The Pegasus Survey

In this survey, called the "Pegasus survey," we attempted to obtain information on how

*Text of a paper given as part of the Philippine Sociological Society's public lecture series entitled "The Philippines Today: Second Thoughts for Citizens Concerned." It was presented September 24, 1970 at the San Miguel Auditorium, Makati, Rizal. Dr. Denton is co-author of the 1970 Rand Report on the Philippines (Averch, Denton, and Koehler 1970).

people viewed their own life, what problems they felt were important for the nation, how they viewed the government, what their views were on crime, on dissidence, and so on. In other words, did the people accept the multiple-crisis views which would be gleaned from reading the press? Was the social volcano percolating?

First, it is important to emphasize that it is always possible for different persons to look at the same bit of information and to reach different conclusions as to the broader meanings of that information. I will be giving some interpretations with which some may disagree. With the other members of the RAND team, I have made available the data collected in the hope that others will question our interpretation, and perhaps in cases offer alternative views more persuasive than ours.

Findings

By far, the most important finding from the survey is that there appears to be no homogeneous "Philippine View" of the state-of-society. Attitudes vary widely from one region of the country to another. If one wished to aggregate attitudes at the highest level which seems permissible, considering the pattern in these data, it is possible to speak of Manila and the Non-Manila Philippine Republic.

Typically, the Manilan expresses quite negative views about the state of the polity, about crime, about government servants. That is essentially all non-economic aspects of life were viewed negatively. In fact, the Manilan sounded rather like the press in these regards.

Beyond the environs of Greater Manila the government obtains a higher rating, crime is frequently viewed as practically non-existent; there is considerable pride in Philippine democracy.

On the economic side the view is reversed. The Manilan sees his present life as rather higher on the ladder and is quite optimistic about his future. In the rural areas the material aspects of present life are viewed as more meager and

there is less expressed optimism about the future. Thus, there is the paradoxical case of the Manilan being economically optimistic and at the same time expressing concern about the non-economic aspects of life. While in the rural areas the pattern is strongly reversed. It is almost like two countries. While the Non-Manila areas tend to be somewhat more homogeneous in attitudes, there were some differences of note. The Pampangan tends to respond rather more like the Manilan than like the other rural respondents, particularly with regard to economic well being. The Ilocanos (we interviewed in Ilocos Norte, Ilocos Sur, and La Union) stick out as having views of government institution and officials noticeably more favorable than those of any other group. Bicolanos and Ilocanos took especially dim views of their material well being.

Simply stated, the Non-Manila areas of the country took more than a little pride in the institutions of Philippine social and political life, while at the same time indicating their material life to be a hard one. But they did express an astute awareness of certain "anomalies" in the system which I will discuss below.

First, let us look into this issue of Philippine pride in things Philippine. Several years back there was a study conducted on attitudes toward government in a number of nations. These nations were the United States, England, Germany, Italy, and Mexico. We attempted to duplicate some aspects of this cross-national study in an effort to determine how the Republic of the Philippines compared with these nations.

This is over-simplifying, but for the sake of brevity, responses in the Philippines indicated political attitudes rather like those found in Mexico and Italy. Filipinos were somewhat more prone to view their political system with pride than were the Italians. The Filipino expects as good treatment by government officials as does the Mexican. In the Republic of the Philippines, respondents are relatively prone to say that the government has an impact on their daily life and to indicate that the impact is positive. Thus, from this limited international comparison the

Philippines compared well in these political-development indicators with Mexico and Italy.

How about the issue of graft and corruption? Questions were asked about the extent to which the respondents believed certain categories of government or public officials to be honest. Politicians, followed by civil servants, drew the least favorable response—though again there are wide differences between Manila and Non-Manila. The local police and the constabulary drew slightly higher, rather middling, rankings, while lawyers and judges tended to draw quite favorable responses. Again everyone looked better to the Ilocano respondents. The view of the government is rather selective.

An effort was made to determine if the Pamangan area stood out as particularly negative in attitudes toward government representatives. Actually the reverse was true: economically they responded with optimism, and had much the same view of the government as was held elsewhere.

Perhaps somewhat surprisingly, the younger people (21 to 25) surveyed in this project held views which could not be easily differentiated from those of their elders. Also, tenants and the unemployed did not respond in any considerable measure differently from persons in other categories. Class differences did not appear to be pronounced.

After that of economic development, peace and order was viewed as the most important problem facing the nation. But again regional variation was considerable. Of the eight problems asked about, crime rated number one in Manila; it was number six in the Bikol and Waray areas, and five in Ilocos. Questions were asked about "fear of getting killed or robbed in your neighborhood." Chances were considered to be between "low" and "high" in Manila. Outside of Manila, except in the Muslim regions, the indicated fear was between "very low" and "low," usually tending toward "very low." An interesting finding was that people in areas of reported low robbery/theft rates tended to respond much more favorably about their local

police than did persons from high-crime regions. Thus, it would appear that the public is sensitive to police performance.

Briefly on the Huks. There were slightly-to-strongly-negative attitudes about the Hukbong Magpapalaya ng Bayan, or People's Liberation Army, as an organization, in all parts of the country. Respondents from areas of alleged HMB strength, viewed this organization rather negatively.

Conclusions

What does it all mean? In attempting to answer this question, it is necessary to go beyond the relatively factual data to interpretations and inferences. It is here that "science" is in part discarded and we must add in some experience and opinion.

The impressions obtained from these and the other data we examined can be summarized as follows:

1. The Philippine political system appears rather stable and functional, especially in the rural areas. In Greater Manila there is less satisfaction with the state-of-society. However, Greater Manila residents feel they are relatively well off economically and are quite optimistic about the future. It does not appear that much evidence can be generated to support the thesis that the volcano is doing more than simmering.
2. The Philippines compares favorably with Mexico and Italy and behind the United States, and United Kingdom in the political development of its people, if one is content with the Almond and Verba definition of political development.
3. The typical citizen is concerned with the graft and corruption of the politician, but, at the same time, he is also concerned with bringing government resources to his area or even to himself. That is, he is dissatisfied with part of the political system which tends to be something of a consequence of his parochial view of the role

of government. To some extent there appears to a realization of this conflict of interests.

4. Finally, specific attitudes and conditions do appear to vary quite significantly among respondents from the different language areas of the country. If their responses, given here, are accurate, it follows that the political system in the Ilocos region is quite different from that in other regions. Violence is something of a problem in many areas, but in the Bikol region there is indicated a strong abhorrence for the use of violence and there is little reported. Waray and Magindanao regions express little concern with graft and similar problems.

Perhaps the most important message from these data is that for many issues it can be highly inaccurate to speak of the "attitude of the people." Attitude patterns are concentrated by region.

Note

¹Details of this survey are found in Averch, Denton, and Koehler (1970:225-47 and *passim*).

References

- Averch, H.A., F.H. Denton, and J.E. Koehler
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COMMENT ON THE DE JESUS-BENITEZ AND DENTON PAPERS

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My comment on the two papers presented this evening, and the two studies on which they are based (de Jesus and Benitez 1970 and Averch, Denton, and Koehler 1970) will be somewhat biased by the profession in which I am engaged. While going through the studies and listening to the speakers, I naturally tended to view both in the context of economics.

This viewpoint, however, appears to have strong justification. The de Jesus-Benitez study (1970:vi) stated in its summary that "all the problems that the people consider most important are generally economic in nature; all of them, including peace and order, are directly connected with the business of physical survival." The Rand study, on the other hand, devotes its longest chapter to analyze what it called the country's "lurching economy" (Averch, Denton,

and Koehler 1970:119-77). Congressmen interviewed for the study felt that "various 'economic problems' held first place" (*ibid.*, 171).

It is evident, therefore, that among the many societal insights and inferences reached by the studies, there is one which places on the professional economist a major responsibility for the advancement of national welfare. That burden, incidentally, is present under any form of economic system.

Technically, or perhaps better, theoretically, the further developmental responsibility of economics in the Philippines can be carried out successfully. Japan, for instance, in the postwar period has been doubling its gross national product every six years. But in terms of Real-*ekonomik*, the task is probably of heroic proportions. What renders it problematical is a host of factors both economic and non-economic. An example of the first is the rapidity of our population growth, given the inability to completely harness

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labor productively. An example of the second is the time imperative. It would seem from the studies that the postulate of a time imperative is questionable. Filipinos do want improved economic levels, they have rising expectations, but not all of them are clamoring or are ready to clamor at the gate. Personally, I would presume a time imperative in the sense that we should not rely on secular trends. I mean, we cannot depend on that growth which is merely a function of the passage of time.

This note of urgency brings me to the heart of my comment. It is not an interrogative critique. Rather, it is basically in the nature of a subjects-for-further-study proposal. It may even be considered as an empirical application of the systems-model approach outlined by Mr. de Jesus.

I think that a logical and vital area for future investigation suggested by the de Jesus-Benitez and Rand reports is an attempt to specify the economic aspirations of people. This specification can involve the expression of subjective desires and objective ideas.

On one level, it would render economic thinking of a personal character very concrete. For instance, in the framework of a questionnaire dealing with transport, we can perchance discover that the near-term dream economic world of the Greater Manila resident is not the possession of a bantam car but the existence of a dependable high-speed cross-city mass transit system. On the other hand, the rural sector may reveal that the primary economic expectation of the farmer is not a Torrens title, but a P500-monthly pay envelope for his oldest son when he joins the labor force, whether this income is the result of work in agriculture or in industry.

The Rand report had something of this type of inquiry when it sought to establish an answer to the following query: "Do the unemployed value government development activities more highly than the employed?" (Averch, Denton, and Koehler 1970:131-32)

The de Jesus-Benitez report (1970:133, 139)

also followed this direction of inquiry in two questions it posed to its respondents. One question was this: "When you think of the best way of life for you, what are the *things* that come to your mind?" The second question: "What are the most important problems that are facing our country today?" To this latter question answers were suggested which included items such as population, unemployment, high prices, inadequate roads, and foreign exchange.

These more generalized responses indicate the other level which conceivably can be probed by the suggested economic study. We ascend from the individual to the collective. If you like the analogy, drawn from a cartoon joke of yesteryear, we move from the decision area of the biblical wife (budget-planning, education of the children) to that of the armchair-sitting husband (Do we ban nuclear weapons? Do we admit China into the United Nations?) There would be, then, a systematic exploration of Filipino attitudes toward more macroeconomic issues. The number of desired children, the disparity of income classes, the level of minimum wages — these, for illustration, would be fit subjects for identification.

Even politico-economic perceptions can be searched into. To what extent does the Filipino want the production of goods and services to be owned by the public sector, or determined by it, and not by market demand? Is there a preference for wider socialized medicine? Is there a wish for the assignment of a non-role to foreign investment in the country's economic activity? Is an Asian investor more welcome than a Western investor?

A time dimension can also be introduced into the research. How soon does the Filipino want to realize these economic aspirations or to see his economic thinking implemented? Does the Filipino grant a reasonably extended period — a decade, say, or two?

The preceding specification of anticipated positions in the economic ladder, to adopt the de Jesus-Benitez report terminology, and of the acceptable means for ascent on this ladder,

will not just satisfy curiosity. The removal of ambiguity here would serve both theoretical and pragmatic knowledge. In the first case, it would contribute to the fixing of popular economic conceptions prevailing at certain key periods of a country's development history. In the second, it would provide certain normative factors for economic planning and policy of government and business.

In this latter aspect, at least we allow the poor economist—confronted with a task that appears to be nothing less than shaping a West-German or Japanese miracle within 2,000 days in the framework of a developing country—a chance to know beforehand more sharply what really is expected of him today, in the near

future, and in the distant future, quantitatively and qualitatively, and under what conditions such a task is to be accomplished.

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