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## Philippine Culture and the Filipino Identity

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# Philippine Culture and the Filipino Identity\*

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MIGUEL A. BERNAD

I N 1958 I had the privilege of visiting the island of Borneo. With me, as my companion and assistant, was a man who has since become my boss: Father Francisco Araneta. We were guests of the Sarawak Museum, and our expenses while on the island were paid for by the Sarawak Government. Through the kindness of our hosts, and ably chaperoned by two guides— one a Muslim Malay and the other a Catholic Iban—we travelled about in two of the three northern regions of that great and mysterious island, namely in Sarawak and in Brunei. We travelled by landrover, by motorboat up the rivers into the interior, and also (less extensively) on foot.

Borneo (as is well known) is inhabited by people of many tribes or ethnic groups. There are Land Dyaks and Sea Dyaks or Ibans. There are Dusuns, Belaits, Kelabits, Muruts, Tagals, Bisayans. And of course, there are the Malays, and the ubiquitous Chinese merchants. Whenever we had a chance we asked questions. We were interested in the language, the

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customs, the attitudes of the people, And one of our questions was: What do you consider yourself to be? What is your nationality?

I do not recall a single one who said, "I am a Bornean"; Or "Sabahn"; or "Sarawakan"; or "Bruneian." Instead, they gave the name of their ethnic group: "I am Iban"; "I am Dusun"; "I am Bisayan"; "I am Malay."

That was thirteen years ago. Today of course, things may have already changed. Sabah and Sarawak have become federated with the Republic of Malaysia. And Brunei, which was then a British protectorate, has now become an independent monarchy. If anyone from Sabah or Sarawak were asked today what he considers himself to be, he would presumably answer, "I am a Malaysian." But in 1958, Sarawak, Singapore, the Straits Settlements, Sabah (or as it was then called, British North Borneo) were territorial names, designating geographical and political entities. They did not represent nationalities. They were not one nation. There was as yet no awareness of national identity.

We discovered, incidentally, that the term "Malay" was not used in a racial sense (as we use it in the Philippines); it had a religious connotation. "Malay" was (and is) synonymous with "Muslim." The Malays of Brunei or of Sabah would have been amused, had they read certain Filipino books which claimed that Jose Rizal was "the pride of the Malay race": in their sense, Rizal was not "Malay"; he was Christian.

We also discovered that wherever the Malays predominated, as in Brunei or in Malaya, there seemed to be an invisible line of demarcation between them and the other ethnic groups who were in the minority. The Malays were the lords of the land; the other ethnic groups seemed to feel that they were considered, as it were, second class citizens.

And yet, from a broader perspective, the Malay and the Iban, the Dusun and the Dyak, the Bisayan and the Belait, all belonged basically to the same race. Their skins were equally brown; their cultures were similar. Their languages were indeed

different, but they all belonged to the same basic linguistic family, identified by the Jesuit scholar, Panduro, as "Malayo-Polynesian." Moreover (with the exception of the Malays who were Muslims) they had the same religious practices and beliefs: they were all animists. The Malays themselves must have originally been animists, for Islam was a later importation. Its sacred books and the mottoes displayed on the walls were in an imported language, Arabic.

The point is that in the Borneo of 1958, there was no consciousness of national identity. That great island was inhabited by peoples who were basically of the same race: but they were not conscious that they were one people and one nation. They were keenly aware only of cultural diversity.

What a contrast with modern Singapore! When I first visited Singapore, that city was part of a new struggling republic called Malaya (later Malaysia). There was then great tension between the Malay Peninsula (which was predominantly Malay) and Singapore (which was predominantly Chinese). Last year I revisited Singapore, and I found a great change. By that time, Singapore had broken off its ties with Malaysia. It had existed as an independent republic for only five or six years: but what a change! In the first place, people of every walk of life (shopkeepers, hotel bellboys, porters, taxi drivers) seemed proud of their city and their government. In the second place, the city itself and the entire island had become much cleaner, more attractive, more prosperous. In the third place—and this is the important point—there seemed to have developed a sense of national identity. I asked the Chinese if they considered themselves Chinese. They said no. "We are Singaporeans," they said. They were obviously proud of their citizenship in that city, but proud also of their Chinese origin and their Chinese culture. The same appeared to be true of the Malays. I asked them if there was racial tension between Chinese and Malay. Not in Singapore, they said. "We live together and we work together in peace," they said. "Of course" (they added) "we do not intermarry. And we do not pray together." This was understandable for the Malays are Muslims,

while the Chinese are Christians or Buddhists or (as one of them put it) "freethinkers."

Singapore has some two million inhabitants, of whom about 75 per cent are Chinese. Ten per cent are Malay. About five per cent are Indians. The remaining ten per cent are composed of people of various origins: Europeans, Americans, Africans, Asians. There are four official languages in Singapore, all of them equally official: English, Mandarin, Malay, and Tamil. Tamil, which is spoken by only five per cent of the population, and Malay, which is spoken by only ten percent, are equally official with Mandarin and English. Perhaps this is the reason (or part of the reason) why there are no racial riots in Singapore, while there have been in Kuala Lumpur, where the Chinese minority seem to feel that they have been discriminated against by the Malay majority.

Perhaps this excursion into the affairs of our Asian neighbors might help us to understand the meaning of the term "national identity." But there are European parallels. In the middle ages (and indeed, as late as a hundred years ago) the inhabitants of Italy were not called Italians. They were Genoese or Venetians or Florentines or Milanese or Neapolitans or Sicilians or Romans. Those were their citizenships, their "nationalities." Today, they are all Italians. Fortunately for them, they all speak one language, Italian. But the Swiss consider themselves one nation, although some of them speak French and others German and others Italian.

This is the meaning of national identity.

## II

We have a similar situation in the Philippines. Today, whether you go northeast to the Cagayan Valley, or northwest to the Ilocos, or southeast to the Bicol Peninsula, or farther south to Leyte and Samar, or to Panay and Negros, or to Cebu and Bohol or to Dapitan or Butuan or Agusan or Davao, when you ask people what they are (what they consider themselves to be, what is their nationality) they will all give the same answer: "I am a Filipino."

*A Fragmented Society.* It was not always thus. Four centuries ago, we had a situation here very much like that in Borneo. There were no "Filipinos" then in the sense in which we understand the word today. There were Visayans and Tagalogs and Pampangos and Ilocanos and Bicolanos and Ibanags and Gaddangs and Pangasinans. There were Tirurays and Manobos and Maguindanaos and Maranaos, and Tausugs and Samals. Even these were not united among themselves. There was no such thing as the "Tagalog Kingdom" or the "Visayan Empire." Even the people of one island were not united. There were no Leyteños: they were from Cabalian or from Baybay. There were no Samareños: they were from Ibabao or from Tandaya or from Basey. What we know today as the Philippine Islands was indeed an archipelago, but it was not one country, and its people, though racially one, were not one nation.

The Spaniards who came with Legazpi learned this fact quite early. They would make friends with one village, drinking the blood-compact with its chief—thinking that thereby they would become friends with all the natives of the entire island: only to find that the blood-compact bound only the members of that one village. In the next village they had to do the same thing all over again. Where they did not do so, their men were killed.

In Bohol, Legazpi had drunk the blood-compact with a chief called Katuna (or Katunao) mistakenly called by the Spaniards "Sikatuna." But Legazpi soon found out that Katuna did not rule all of Bohol: he had only a village or two under him. It was necessary to drink the blood-compact again with another chief, Gala ( named by the Spaniards "Sigala").

In Cebu, Legazpi found out that peace and friendship with Tupas of Sugbu did not include the people of the nearby village of Mandawe; or of Liloan; or of Carcar. Forty-four years earlier, Magellan had discovered that same fact, and in his case it was tragic: friendship with the Rajah of Cebu did not include the people in the nearby island of Mactan.

Each village was separate, independent. Philippine society was fragmented. It was not structured into a large kingdom

with extensive territories, like Majapahit or Angkor or the Chinese Empire. Philippine society was a conglomeration of little units called barangay. Each unit was independent, and each unit was small, ranging from 15 or 30 to 100 families. Cebu, with 300 houses and 2,000 warriors was the largest metropolis in the Visayas; Manila and Tondo were the largest in Luzon. In Mindoro and in the Bicol Peninsula, there were a few large towns of several hundred families: these were the exception.

Legazpi called attention to this fragmented nature of Philippine society. In a report on the Philippines and the Character of its People, he argued against using force to subdue the natives:

I believe that the natives could be easily subdued by good treatment and the display of kindness; for they have no leaders, and are so divided among themselves and have so little dealing with one another—never assembling to gain strength, or rendering obedience one to another. If some of them refuse at first to make peace with us, afterward, on seeing how well we treat those who have already accepted our friendship, they are induced to do the same. But if we undertake to subdue them by force of arms, and make war on them, they will perish, and we shall lose both friends and foes; for they readily abandon their houses and towns for other places, or precipitately disperse among the mountains and uplands, and neglect to plant their fields. Consequently, they die from hunger and other misfortunes.

Legazpi's observation was corroborated by many others. The Augustinian friar who wrote the day-to-day chronicle of their first two years in the Visayas (from 1565 to 1567) deplored the fact that the natives did not want to pay tribute to the Spaniards (a fact, by the way, which was not at all deplorable); the reason he gave was the fact that they belonged to a fragmented society, whose largest unit was the barangay:

[The natives] do not know what it is to pay the tribute, because they have never done it before, nor have they ever seen it done. They are subject to nobody. Each one makes himself the head of his own group. Thus, the majority of villages are small, with only 15 or 20 or 30 houses. For the most part [each village is composed of] the chief, his sons, his relatives, and his slaves. They live apart, without bothering about others. They are bad neighbors. The neighboring villages rob each other, and take whatever they can whenever occasion offers. They even rob their own father.

One example of this fragmentation was what happened in Mandawe on the island of Cebu in the year 1565. In that year, the village of Mandawe (not far from the town of Cebu) was raided by people from the town of Baybay of the western coast of Leyte. Several people were killed; at least twenty natives of Mandawe were brought away captive to Baybay. The rest had fled to the hills. When they returned, they found that their houses had been looted, all their foodstuffs gone, and even their large bamboo fishtraps in the sea had been stolen. Who had stolen them? Their neighbors from the town of Cebu.

This fragmented structure of society did not exist only in the central Visayas. It was true elsewhere. It was true, for instance, in the Tagalog provinces, as has been described for us by the Franciscan missionary, fray Juan de Plasencia.

Because of this fragmentation, the people of one region could be pitted against those of another. When Goiti (in 1570) and Legazpi (in 1571) entered Manila Bay to establish the Spanish capital on the left bank of the Pasig, it was with the aid of Visayan warriors that they conquered the Tagalogs of Maynila. Later in Philippine history, insurrections in the Tagalog or Visayan or other provinces were put down with the aid of Pampango troops.

The fact is that we were not yet a nation. We became a nation in the course of three hundred years, because the Spaniards, by putting the entire archipelago under one government, provided the external structure which made unity possible.

*A Nation Evolves.* But that external structure was not enough. Witness the experience of Sarawak. That territory was given an external unity, both under the White Rajahs and later under the British Colonial Government; yet despite this external structure, the inhabitants of Sarawak did not evolve into one people with a common national identity. Other elements, besides the external structure of government, were needed to forge the Filipino people into nationhood. Among these elements were: a common history, a common official language (Spanish), and (more important) a common religion, Christianity. Without these elements, there would have been little



difference between the people of these islands and the ethnic groups in Borneo and elsewhere who belong to the same racial group as the ancestors of the modern Filipinos. There are Tagals in Borneo as there are Tagalogs in Luzon; there are Bisayans in Borneo as there are Visayans in the Visayas and Mindanao. Yet the peoples of the different regions of the Philippines are conscious of belonging to one nationality, where the peoples of Borneo were not.

*The Non-Christian Minorities.* It is a fact of history that Christianity has been an important element in the development of this nation. It is also a fact that today, about ninety percent of the population are Christians. This does not mean that only Christians can be Filipinos. I come from a province which is more than ninety per cent Christian. But there are people in the hills, called Subanons. I have stayed among them. They are good people. They are not Christians. They are Filipinos. They are not aliens. They belong. The same would be true of the people called "cultural minorities" in other regions of the Philippines.

*Not an Artificial Unity.* This unity which was given to us by the Spaniards was not a purely artificial unity. There was a natural basis for it. Although they lived in a fragmented society, the people of these Islands belonged to the same race. They spoke different languages, but they belonged to the same linguistic family: the Malayo-Polynesian. And with the exception of the people of Mindoro and certain parts of Luzon and of southern Mindanao who had been converted to Islam, all the others had similar religious practices and beliefs, namely the religion which is called Animism. There was therefore a potential unity arising from racial and cultural similarity. It was the achievement and the contribution of the Spaniards that they allowed this potential unity to evolve into an actual union. Thus, although the Spaniards never intended it, and although they were determined to keep us as their colony and possession, it was they who allowed the people to evolve to such a state as to demand, eventually, an independent existence.

*Not Exclusively Malayan.* This new Filipino nation that emerged after three centuries of Spanish rule was no longer a

pure-blooded people of exclusively Malayan origins. The Filipino nation did not grow up as a hothouse plant, immune from outside influences. Tagalog and Visayan and Ilocano blood was mixed with Chinese and Indian and European. The Oriental mentality was influenced by Occidental thinking and Occidental technology.

Under the Spanish regime, Philippine society had been stratified along racial lines. Highest in the social scale were the *peninsulares*, the Spaniards from the Iberian Peninsula. Next were the *criollos*, the Spaniards born outside Spain—in Latin America or in the Philippines. Next came the *mestizos*, who were of mixed origin, partly European and partly native; and even among these mestizos there was a distinction (*cuarterones*, etc.) depending on the amount of European blood in a person's veins—the assumption being that the more European a person was, the better. Then came the *sangleys* or Chinese, and the *mestizo sangleys*, of mixed Chinese and native origin. And finally, lowest in the scale, were the full-blooded natives, called "*Indios*" (under the impression that the Philippines were part of "the Indies").

Naturally, among these various groups, there were differences not only of racial origin but also of education, economic status, social manners and customs, and so forth.

The Filipino nation that has evolved is not composed exclusively of "Indios." It includes people of every social class. It is significant that our national heroes and leaders included men like Father José Burgos, José Rizal, Antonio Luna, and many others—who were true Filipinos, but whose ancestors belonged to different races: Chinese, Spanish, Malayan.

*To Sum Up.* That is my first point: that in the course of the past four hundred years (over three hundred under Spain, a half century under America, and three decades under our own independent government) a national unity has emerged in which people of different regions and of different linguistic groups do not consider themselves merely Tagalogs, Visayans, Pampangos, Ilocanos, Bicolans, and so on, but first and foremost Filipinos.

This unification of the country into one nation and one people has not been completed. There are still minority groups within the country who do not yet feel at home within this union. When every member of a minority group feels that he is, first, a Filipino, and only secondarily a member of his ethnic group, the task of unification will have been completed.

### III

One of the drawbacks to the task of unification is the fear felt by some of the cultural minorities that, by being integrated into the Filipino nation, they might lose their cultural identity. This is a very real fear, and it poses a problem which must be faced squarely.

The Spaniards have shown us the way to solve this problem. They solved it by respecting the language and culture of every region and every linguistic group. They did not try to level down or erase all differences. The Ilocanos became Filipinos, but without ceasing to be Ilocanos. The same is true of Tagalogs and Pampangos, and of all regional and linguistic groups.

The Maranaos of Lanao, the Maguindanaos of Cotabato, the Tausugs and Samals of Sulu, and all other cultural minorities should be given every assurance and every guarantee, that they can remain what they are and retain their religion, their culture, and their traditions, and still be genuinely Filipino.

*A Multi-lingual Society.* Note, for instance, how the Spanish Catholic missionaries went about the difficult task of Christianizing the Islands. They learned the language of whatever region they were assigned to. Some of them learned it so well that the standard and classic works on the grammar and vocabulary of the various Philippine languages were compiled by the patient labour of Catholic missionaries and printed under their patronage. In doing so, they helped not only to preserve the language, but also to call attention to the high degree of development that these languages had attained.

The Spaniards did not do (they had not the means of doing) what the Americans later did. Spanish, although the

official language, was never as widely disseminated among the Philippine population as English was later to be. Had the Spaniards been more assiduous or more successful in spreading their language among us, we should today be a Spanish-speaking nation—as the Puerto Ricans, although an American possession, continue to be Spanish-speaking.

There were elements of Philippine culture which the Spaniards destroyed. Some of these were evil and deserved to be abolished—like slavery and the common practice of killing slaves and burying them together with their dead masters. But other elements were not at all evil and should have been preserved—like the native alphabet, or the basic structure of Philippine society.

But the languages they preserved. That is why today, although we are all Filipinos, we have different ways of saying it. In Bulacan or in Batangas, one might perhaps say: "*Filipino ako: Tagalog ang wika natin.*" But in the Ilocos, they might say: "*Maysa ak a Filipino: makasarita ak ti Ilocano.*" In Alaminos or in Malasiqui: "*Pilipino ak: mansasalita ak nan Pangasinan.*" In Apalit or in Lubao they might say: "*Pilipino ku: byasa kung Kapangpangan.*" In the Cagayan Valley, they would say: "*Filipino nga. Ngyem maguobobug nga to Ibanag.*" And in the Ifugao district of the Mountain Province: "*Ha 'oy ya Pilipino ak. Hoy kalit ya Ipugao.*"

In Cebu they would say: "*Filipino ako. Binisaya ang akong pinulungan.*" In Catanduanes they say: "*Pilipino ako: Tatao ako magtaram ning Bicol.*" In the Sulu Archipelago, the Tausugs could say: "*Tan Bangsa Philippines aku. Maingat aku magbichara Tausug*"; while the Samals would say: "*Pilipino aku. Ambal aku magsiamal.*"

There are even some (by no means unpatriotic) who prefer to say: "*Yo soy Filipino: hablamos Español en casa.*" While there are others who say: "I am a Filipino: at home we speak English."

The languages are different: the nationality is one. All are Filipinos. Unity, not uniformity, should be the goal.

*A Pluralistic Society.* We are not a monolithic society. It would be fatal to act as if we were. Politics, as Aristotle reminds us, is the science of the possible. Is it really possible to close our eyes to the fact of regional and linguistic diversity? Statesmanship must be based on facts. No wishful thinking can dream away the fact of regional differences.

The regional differences must not only be accepted: they must be respected. Everyone is entitled to feel that his own regional culture will be respected by his fellow Filipinos. No one should be made to feel that he is a second class citizen because he was born on the banks of the Pulangi, instead of on the banks of the Pasig; or that he was brought up in the language of Batanes instead of in that of Central or Southern Luzon.

You can not suppress a language which is spoken in the home and in the fields and in the market place. You suppress it at your peril. The experience of certain countries which have tried to do so, should warn us against the attempt.

On the other hand, unless certain common languages are taught in the schools, we shall disintegrate into a heterogeneous group of regions incapable of understanding each other, and incapable of dealing with the outside world.

*Practical Consequences.* The fact that we are not a monolithic society has enormous practical consequences which merit careful attention.

One consequence is pedagogical. We are a multilingual society: why should not our education be multilingual? Every Filipino should be brought up, first, in the language of his own region. But every educated Filipino should also be able to communicate with others, in the Philippines and elsewhere. Hence the need for a common national language, and for common cultural languages by which we can be at home anywhere in the Philippines and anywhere in the world. But the national language should be allowed to develop. It should not be imposed. Imposition will not solve problems, but merely create new ones. A national language should be allowed to spread quietly, gently, irresistibly.

Another consequence is political. We are an archipelago composed of distinct, and in some cases well-defined, regions. Why should not our governmental organization be so structured as to foster national unity on the one hand, and regional autonomy on the other?

There has been much talk about decentralization. Decentralization is essential. We are demanding too much of our central government in Manila. But decentralization should not be carried too far. Disintegration into municipalities and provinces (each of which is becoming smaller and smaller) will eventually defeat the purpose of government. We need larger entities, intermediate between the municipality and province, and the national government. Why not regional governments?

The Mountain Province has now been divided into four independent provinces. This has its advantages. It has also obvious disadvantages. Yet the four provinces and various subprovinces have many things in common. Why not restructure them into one distinct region? This region has a different geography, a different culture from other regions. It must be allowed to grow and develop in a different way and at a different pace from, say, the Bicol Peninsula, which has a different regional culture and different economic and social needs.

*Two Dangers.* In all this, we must avoid two extremes. Too much regionalism will lead to disintegration. If unchecked, we may have independent and warring states.

On the other hand, to strive for unification without regard for regional needs and regional diversity, may also be dangerous. It may lead to a new kind of colonialism, by which the people of one region would impose their language and culture on those of another. Instead of being freed from foreign rulers—the Spaniards, the Americans, the Japanese—we might end up by becoming colonies of one or other of our own regional groups.

That is my second point: we must aim at national unity, without destroying our cultural diversity. To repeat, unity, not uniformity, should be the goal.

## IV

In reading over the first-hand, eyewitness accounts concerning the customs and characteristics of the early Filipinos, one gets the clear impression that at the coming of the Spaniards, the natives of these Islands, despite the fragmented nature of their society, had reached a respectable degree of culture. It is true that certain Augustinian friars (fray Diego de Herrera in 1570 and fray Gaspar de San Agustin two centuries later) had called the natives "barbarians." But their unfavorable testimony is countered by the favorable testimony of far more perceptive observers. (A perceptive observer, of course, is one whose observations agree with yours.) Such for instance as that of the Jesuit Father Ignacio Alzina, who lived for forty years among the Visayans of Samar and Leyte. Or that of another Jesuit Pedro Chirino, who first worked in Batangas and Taytay where he learned the Tagalog language, and then worked in Tigbauan in Panay, where he learned Ilongo, and afterwards went to Leyte and Cebu. There was also Dr. Antonio Morga, who came as a civil servant and rose to become Justice of the Royal Audiencia and Governor of the Islands. There was also the Franciscan, fray Juan de Plasencia, who worked among the Tagalogs of Laguna and Tayabas and eventually died in Lilio. There was the earliest observer of all, the Italian Antonio Pigafetta, who came with Magellan and survived to complete the circumnavigation of the world. There were others.

*The Early Native Culture.* From the testimony of such men as these, it is clear that the natives of these Islands had attained a cultural development which was fairly advanced. There are several indications of this culture.

*Literacy.* One indication was the amazing degree of literacy. "All these Islanders," says Chirino, "are much given to reading and writing, and there is hardly a man and much less a woman, who does not read and write. . . ." They did not use the European alphabet. They used the syllabic abakada of three vowels and thirteen consonants. "By means of these characters," continues Father Chirino, "they make themselves

understood and convey their ideas marvelously, he who reads supplying with much skill the consonants which are missing.”

Their drawback was the fact that they did not possess paper or adequate writing materials. They did not use brush or pen. They had to cut their characters with a knife or sharp pointed stylus upon bamboo tubes or the barks of trees. Under such circumstances, writing would have to be reduced to the minimum: short pieces, not long epics. Such long epics had to be handed down orally—with the danger of eventual loss.

*Languages.* Another indication of culture was the high state of development that the native languages had attained. The Jesuits were men who were trained in language, and who could recognize a highly developed language when they came across one. It is therefore interesting to hear Father Chirino make the following statement about the Tagalog language. “Of all the languages in these Islands, it was the Tagal that pleased me most and which I most admired. I found in this language four qualities of the four greatest languages of the world: Hebrew, Greek, Latin, and Spanish. It has the abstruseness and the obscurity of the Hebrew, the articles and distinctions . . . of the Greek, the fullness and elegance of Latin, and the refinement, polish and courtesy of the Spanish.”

But Father Alzina, also a Jesuit and also well trained in linguistic and literary studies, preferred the Visayan: “*Es abundantisima de palabras y modos de hablar.*” The Visayan language (and he was talking of the Visayan as spoken not only in Samar but also in Leyte and in Bohol) “The Visayan Language has a copious vocabulary and has many ways of expressing thought, both in a literal and in a metaphorical sense. The metaphorical way of speaking,” he continues, “is so ingrained in the language that people spontaneously express themselves in metaphors.” In this regard (concludes Alzina) “hardly any language, including the classical languages of Greece and Rome, can surpass the Visayan.”

It is probable that, had they been questioned on the matter, similar praise would have been given to the Ilocano and the Pampango languages by the Augustinian friars; to the



Pangasinan language by the Dominicans; and to the Bicolano by the Franciscans. In more recent times, the Jesuits wrote the books that were first published in the language of the Maguindanao Muslim of Cotabato, and of the Tiruray animists. And Belgian missionaries in northern Luzon have been transcribing the epics and other folklore of the Ifugao and the Kalinga of the Mountain Province and of the Ibanag and Gaddang of the Cagayan Valley.

*Literary Forms.* A third indication of culture were the various literary forms by which the natives entertained themselves at their festivals. They did not have a written literature, but they had a literary art that was handed down by oral tradition. Father Alzina tells us that among the Visayans, there were at least six literary forms which he himself studied. One was the *ambalan*, a kind of ballad consisting of unrhymed couplets. Another was the *bical*, sung by two persons replying to each other. It was a kind of impromptu dialogue in music. "They reply to each other" (he says) "in strict musical time and without hesitation for as long as one or two hours, saying anything they wish in satirical fashion."

A third form was the *balak*, in which the language used was highly metaphorical. The subject was almost always love, and the two singers were usually a man and a woman singing to the accompaniment of a *cudyapi*, or similar instrument. A fourth literary form was the *siday*, an epic narrative about legendary heroes. A fifth was the *parahaya*, consisting of dirges sung at funerals. And a sixth was the *awit*, consisting of songs sung by boatmen when they were out at sea.

A people with at least six literary forms of popular art could not be said to be uncivilized.

There are other indications of the early Philippine culture, which we have no time to go into: such as the dance, the carvings, the gold ornaments, and other things.

*Disappearance of Early Native Culture.* The question is: what happened to all this native culture? Why was it that after three hundred years of colonial rule a Spanish Academi-

cian like Vicente Barrantes could state that there was no native culture whatsoever? "*Pierden el tiempo los que buscan en la historia datos que demuestren la potencia intelectual de la raza tagala.*" ("It is a waste of time to look in history for proofs of any kind of intellectual ability among the Tagalog race.")

Rizal had part of the answer. "Scarcely were the Islands annexed to the Spanish Crown than the Filipinos had to sustain with their blood and toil the wars of conquest which the Spanish people waged in obedience to their ambitions. At a terribly critical period when the Filipino people were undergoing a change of government, of laws, of customs of religion and belief, the Philippine Islands were depopulated by these wars."

"Thus," Rizal continued, "a new era began for the Filipinos. Little by little they lost their ancient traditions and their culture. They forgot their native alphabet, their songs, their poetry, their laws. . . . The race became thus cheapened in its own eyes. The people became ashamed of their own traditional customs in order to imitate whatever was foreign and incomprehensible."

*Filipino-Hispanic Culture.* We can only bewail with Rizal the loss of this ancient culture. And yet, all was not lost. Rizal himself belonged to a generation of Filipinos, whose culture, whose thinking, whose writing, and whose ideals commanded the respect, not only of their countrymen, but of all the world. In the late nineteenth century, a cultural renaissance rejuvenated the country. It expressed itself in music, in painting, in sculpture, in poetry, and in polemical writing. The writing was mostly in Spanish—a Spanish that even Spaniards envied.

Alas, the days of that culture were numbered. No sooner had it flowered than a change of government brought about a change of language. The writers continued for a time: but fewer and fewer people could read them. Apostol and Guerrero, Balmori and Bernabe, Barcelon and Recto—how many now could read their writings? Yet they were part of the flowering

of Philippine culture that had taken three centuries to develop. They belonged to a generation whose fathers fought our great wars of independence, first against the Spaniards, and then against the Americans.

*A New Language.* Like the bamboo, however, Philippine culture has shown its resiliency. Within the relatively short time of four decades, a new generation of Filipinos had arisen whose reading, thinking and writing was in English. That was the generation that fought once more against the invaders at Bataan and Capaz and Fort Santiago. It was the generation that saw the country take its first steps as an independent nation. There are members of that generation in this hall.

#### V

*Can We Go Back?* There are some who, in the name of Filipinization, want us to forget the past four hundred years; forget the half century under the Americans; forget the three centuries under Spain. Get rid of what they call our colonial mentality. Get rid of anything we learned from the West. Let us go back (they say) to the culture of Lapulapu.

But we can not turn back the clock. We can not, by wishful thinking, erase our history, or cancel the past four centuries and go back to the original Malayo-Polynesian culture of these Islands. We are no longer purely Malayo-Polynesians. We have been subjected to influences from Europe and Asia and America. We have experienced many things. We are what we are.

Let us not be ashamed of ourselves. Let us not be ashamed of our history. We are Asians; but we have been greatly influenced by the West. We belong to both. In this we are unique.

Tennyson, in a well known poem, has put into the mouth of the great Ulysses a very interesting human statement: "I am a part of all that I have met." That is true of nations, as it is true of individuals.

What would you think of a seventy-year old man or woman, who tries to forget the knowledge and the experience

of the past sixty years and goes back only to what he or she knew at the age of ten? We call that second childhood. Let us not, as a nation plunge ourselves into a second childhood. Let us bravely march forward into the future as adults, knowing what we are, and preserving every worthwhile element of our culture.

*What is The Essential Culture?* There is a final point, and I shall be very brief. Let me tell you a story.

Some years ago, I went out walking with one of my students. He was a seminarian, and he was intensely nationalistic. During that walk he told me that he was amazed that there were Filipinos who slept in beds. Filipinos (he said) should not use beds; they should sleep on mats on the floor like their ancestors. That is the way a true Filipino sleeps.

Well, I know many who do. I have myself slept on the floor. I have gone mountain-climbing; and when you are out on a mountain, you have to sleep on the ground. But when at home, why must I sleep on the floor? To do so as an act of mortification or penance would be commendable: but not because it is the only "Filipino" way of sleeping.

What about the man in Malacañang? He has a bed—reportedly, a rather expensive one. Isn't he a Filipino?

The point is, that we must not mistake accidentals for essentials. I told my young friend. "Look, by your logic, Filipinos should not ride in automobiles. They should use carabao carts. When they go from island to island, they should not go by steamer or by plane: they should paddle a banca. Because the ancient Filipinos had no automobiles or motor-boats or airplanes."

But why should a Filipino not ride a car or an airplane? Why should he not partake of the benefits of modern technology? Why should he be discriminated against? Has not a Filipino as much right as anyone to use a computer, a walkie-talkie, a tape-recorder or a camera?

Is a person less a Filipino because he wears a suit and not a gee-string?

Accidentals can change; essentials should remain.

“What then are the essentials?” asked my young friend.

I told him: If you observe the well-bred Filipino, rich or poor, you will find certain elements which he values.

He is polite: the forms of etiquette vary, but the underlying politeness is the same.

He is hospitable: to him the rules of hospitality are sacred. The forms of hospitality will vary with the rich and the poor, but the principle remains the same.

He is respectful: he shows respect for elders; for sacred persons and things; respect for women; respect for authority.

He is grateful. Ingratitude is to him something heinous.

And he is brave. He avoids a fight if he can. But when he must, he does not run away. That is why he respects a man like Rizal, who could have run away; who could have lived an easy and secure life, but was willing to work and to fight, and when necessary, to die.