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The Case For More Geography In Philippine Universities

D. J. DWYER, T. W. LUNA, JR. AND
D. C. SALITA

THERE are very few courses in geography offered in Philippine universities. Geographical studies are perhaps best developed in the state University of the Philippines; but even there only two members of the Discipline of Geology and Geography are geography specialists, though there is occasionally also a Visiting Professor in Geography. During the last five years only eight students in the University of the Philippines selected geography as their major field. Five worked for undergraduate degrees and three for graduate degrees. Students working for a B.S. degree in Foreign Service, together with some A.B. and other B.S. students, constitute the majority of those who take a course or two in geography.

It is the purpose of this paper to present the case for more geography in Philippine universities. The case rests on two arguments: first, that the content alone of geographical studies makes their inclusion in university curricula desirable; and second, that Philippine universities are far behind their counterparts elsewhere in recognizing the importance of geography. These arguments are presented in the two succeeding sections of the paper. The third and final section consists of an examination of the practical aspect of the case.

THE CONTENT OF GEOGRAPHY

Geography does not consist solely of an inventory of rivers, mountains, plains, capital cities and the like, just as the mere listing of plants is not botany. Broadly, geography deals with man in relation to his environment. Within this field there are basically two inter-connected streams of geographical inquiry. One is known as physical geography and consists of the classification and study of the distribution of the major natural features of the earth, such as landforms, climates, the oceans and the earth's resources. The other is called human or cultural geography and concerns itself with man's imprint upon the earth. Such subjects as the distribution of population, the various settlement patterns and the features resulting from man's productive activities in earning a living fall within its province. Because the content of geographical studies includes both the natural and the cultural features of the earth's surface, geography cannot be classified exclusively as either a natural or social science; rather it belongs to both Science and the Humanities.

It is precisely in the inherently dual character of geography that its richness lies. Its possibilities as an integrating subject, that is, as a bridge between Science and the Humanities, give it a particularly timely appeal in an age that has been said by Sir Charles Snow to be splitting into "two cultures".¹ As a social science, geography is linked with history, economics, political science, anthropology and sociology; while in its natural science aspects it finds common ground with geology, physics, astronomy, botany, mathematics and zoology. Of special importance are meteorology and oceanography. In the classification of the various disciplines in the University of the Philippines, geography is listed in both the Natural Science and the Social Science Divisions. It is the only subject which provides common ground for both.

Apart from its unique relationship to Science and the Humanities, geography is a valuable study in itself. It is often claimed that the Philippines is rich in natural resources;

¹ C. P. Snow, *THE TWO CULTURES AND THE SCIENTIFIC REVOLUTION*, New York, 1959.

yet there is still a substantial measure of ignorance as to the precise location and extent of these. In a large measure this is, quite simply, geographical ignorance. Its incidence cannot be expected to decrease until the universities of the Philippines start producing many more specialist geographers. One of the first steps geographers visiting the Philippines usually recommend in the field of resources development is detailed land use survey, both rural and urban. There are not enough trained geographers in the country at present to carry out a survey even in sample areas.

In general education, too, the value of geography has not yet been fully appreciated in the Philippines. No person can be considered fully educated who lacks knowledge of his homeland and of the world around him. Yet even in the University of the Philippines geography is not included among the required subjects of the general education programme.

GEOGRAPHY IN OTHER COUNTRIES

Geography has attained wide recognition both inside and outside academic circles in all the more technologically advanced countries of the world. That the statesmen of these countries now rate highly its contribution to national development can perhaps best be illustrated by the present position of geography in the United States, the United Kingdom and the U.S.S.R.

The term "geographer" is now in official use in the United States, where there are currently more than two hundred geography graduates employed by the Federal Government alone. This is largely a by-product of World War II. The professional geographers, who were engaged in strategic and tactical intelligence, cartography and in area and topical research and analysis, quickly demonstrated to government officials and the many businessmen also in war work in Washington the capabilities of geographers. Prior to 1940 there was no Army Map Service, no Aeronautical Chart and Information Service. Today there are many civil service classifications that cover geography, such as "geographer", "cartographer", "cartographic aid", etc., which exist at several Gov-

ernment Service levels. Business administrators also became receptive to the employment of geographers and today jobs can be obtained in business and industry. The work of these geographers has been summarized as follows by the United States Civil Service Commission:

Geographers will perform or assist in performing professional work in the field of geography; perform related cartographic work including the compilation and analyzing of geographic data; assist in studies and researches relating to industrial and commercial geography, soils, soil erosion and land utilization mapping, climatology, vegetation distribution, and allied fields; prepare reports on geography (physical, economic, social, and political) of specified areas; and assist in the establishment and use of map collections.²

There are old, established and thriving departments of geography in all the leading universities, and those at the University of Chicago, Clark University, the University of California and Yale University in particular have a world-wide reputation. Many new academic institutions are also including geography in their curricula. The recently established U.S. Air Force Academy, for example, gives two prescribed courses and one course for enrichment in geography. The stated reason for this is to enable the cadets to gain "a good working knowledge of the major differences among the different areas of the world ...essential to intelligent operation."³

Geographic research and publication in the United States are undertaken by many agencies both federal and private. However, the most important geographic societies, which have helped greatly in the stimulation of geographic research and the improvement in the application of its results, are the Association of American Geographers founded in 1904 and the American Geographical Society founded in 1888.

In the United Kingdom, where geography is taught in every university, geographers are employed in various branches

² J. K. Rose, "Geography in Practice in the Federal Government, Washington", in Griffith Taylor, *GEOGRAPHY IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY*, New York, 1951, p. 577

³ Association of American Geographers, *STATUS AND TRENDS OF GEOGRAPHY IN THE UNITED STATES, 1957-1960*, Washington, 1961, p. 49.

of the Civil Service, upon essentially the same duties as in the U.S. Government. They are currently also in strong demand to serve on the planning staffs of local authorities. Indeed, a major impetus to the local planning of both urban and rural land use, which now figures prominently in the administrative programmes of all local authorities in Britain, sprang from the success of a detailed nationwide land use survey. This was carried out as an entirely voluntary joint effort by university geographers, geography teachers and geography students during the nineteen thirties.⁴

The Soviet Union is one of the many countries where geography has attained wide recognition and acceptance both in academic circles and in basic and applied research activities. Of the 34 universities in the USSR, 28 have programs in geography, mostly in separate geographical faculties but some in combined faculties of geography and geology.⁵

The Geography Faculty of the University of Moscow is the most important. It occupies six stories in the central skyscraper of the new university buildings on Lenin Hill, has perhaps a hundred rooms for laboratories, offices and workrooms and a staff of 300 professors and assistants. In 1958 there were 1,000 full-time day students in the five-year geography course, 817 evening students and 55 graduate students. The geography faculty is composed of 14 departments: physical geography of the USSR, economic geography of the USSR, polar geography, soil geography, physical geography of foreign countries, economic geography of the capitalist countries, general geography, geomorphology, hydrology of the land, oceanography, climatology and meteorology, biogeography, and geodesy and cartography.

The research program of the Geography Faculty is more highly organized than in an American university in the sense

⁴ L. D. Stamp, *THE LAND OF BRITAIN: ITS USE AND MISUSE*, London, 1950.

⁵ Chauncy D. Harris, "Geography in the Soviet Union", *The Professional Geographer*, Washington, Vol. 10, No. 1, 1958. pp. 8-13.

that many of the staff work on specific problems proposed by the state.

Students who are graduated from the five-year geography course do not want for employment. Of the 193 students who were graduated in 1958, 12% went into teaching; 44% went into practical applied work, mostly in government agencies; 31% went into research positions, particularly in the academies of sciences; and only 13% went into no fixed positions.

Another important geographic institution in the USSR is the Institute of Geography of the Academy of Sciences. A staff of about 300 is engaged in full-time research. Work is organized under ten sections: physical geography, geomorphology, climatology and hydrology, biogeography, economic geography of the USSR, geography of the democratic republics, geography of the capitalist countries, cartography, history of geography and glaciology. Each section has an average of 30 staff members. The Institute is under vigorous and able leadership. Probably nowhere else in the world is there a comparable concentration of resources in a single institution devoted solely to geographic research and publication.

Among the Asian countries there are strong departments of geography in several Indian universities, in the University of Dacca, Pakistan,⁶ in the University of Tokyo, in the University of Malaya (which publishes the highly regarded *Journal of Tropical Geography*)⁷ and in the University of Hong Kong, where the Department of Geography and Geology is one of the largest in the university. In recent years the Fu-Min Geographical Institute of Economic Development, an integral part of the National University, has played an important role in formulating the national development programme of Taiwan.⁸ The universities of Mainland China have since 1949

⁶ See the current half-yearly issues of the *Oriental Geographer*, Dacca, Pakistan.

⁷ R. Ho, "The Department of Geography, University of Malaya", *Oriental Geographer*, Vol. 3, No. 1, January, 1959, pp. 105-108.

⁸ A. O. Lee, "Research Reports of the Fu-Min Geographical Institute of Economic Development", *Geographical Review*, New York, Vol. 49, No. 4, October, 1959, pp. 575-577.

reorganized their departments of geography along Soviet lines; that is, much of their research work consists of specific projects assigned by the State.⁹

THE PRACTICAL ASPECT

Of all the Philippine universities only the University of the Philippines has the beginnings of an independent Discipline of Geography. Its growth has never prospered because there seems to be little demand for the courses it offers. As matters stand at present, it is doubtful whether its further development could be justified on practical grounds alone. There are doubtless several already well-established Disciplines within the university crying out for more staff, more rooms and more books in order to meet increasingly heavy student demand. No matter how desirable in theory it may be to foster geographical studies at the university level in the Philippines, sound expansion can only be achieved on the basis of demand.

There are several reasons why geography is so little known and so little cultivated in this country. The first is the prevalent idea that geography is only an elementary subject. To most people an engineering degree or a business degree seems more practical. Second, although geography is an old subject, in its present conception it is new. Its workers are still to some extent pioneers; the worth of their exploration is not generally appreciated. Third, as has already been mentioned, opportunities for effective specialization in geography in the various universities and colleges are limited. Fourth, the question of remuneration and opportunities for employment and advancement cannot be overlooked. For most people the earning of a comfortable livelihood is a problem that is ever present and young people are duty bound to consider it in selecting their courses. Professional zeal in some specific line may be great but, unless financial returns are in keeping with the preparation necessary and the responsibilities involved, the

⁹ Chiao-Min Hsieh, "The Status of Geography in Communist China", *Geographical Review*, Vol. 49, No. 4, October, 1959, pp. 535-551.

average young man or woman shuns it. Only those who are financially independent can afford to omit consideration of probable compensation.

On the other hand there are certain advantages. First, there are not many geographers. A rapid increase in numbers is not expected but it is hoped that the field will gradually grow and, when its merit is proven as it is in other countries, more people will be needed. Another advantage is the newness and vastness of geography. Extending the boundaries of the field of human knowledge is a very important part of the geographer's work; he therefore holds a dignified position among those engaged in scientific research.

Then again, the field of study to which the geographer must devote himself is one that leads toward broadmindedness. He must be able to work out details of small areas and to see the effective factors in large areas. He must be able to comprehend the fundamental conditions that affect development of regions, and be able to reason from such conditions to their economic and social consequences. Because his problems are varied he is forced to become a student with ability to concentrate on specific problems as well as to make broad generalizations. It is therefore hoped that in the Philippines the trained geographer may find an opportunity to prove his merit in industrial, agricultural and political fields.

It will be appreciated from the preceding section of this paper that geographers in government service are called upon to do research work. This is perhaps even more true of those geography graduates, chiefly at present in the United States, who hold positions in the business world closely related to their geographic training. A recent editorial in the journal, *Economic Geography*, announced that "Marketing Geography Comes of Age," and the issue in which it appeared contained several papers presenting the results of recent research work in this field.¹⁰ These papers are indicative of the usefulness the busi-

¹⁰ *Economic Geography*, Clark University, Worcester, Mass., Vol. 37, No. 1, January, 1961.