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Revolution in the Philippines, 1983-86: Forces, Sources and Perspectives

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Notes and Comments

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THEODORE FRIEND

MARTYRS AND MADONNAS IN PHILIPPINE POLITICS

Corazon Aquino, the new president of the Philippines, has the support of the church, has herself a quasi-religious aspect in the eyes of many followers, and may draw upon the traditions of two national martyrs, including her own husband. Jose Rizal was executed before a Spanish firing squad in 1896. Benigno Aquino, Jr. was assassinated in 1983 by military personnel of the Marcos government on the orders of a person or persons not yet known.¹ Now Corazon Aquino, Benigno's widow, must try to represent the best that connects him to Rizal, while using church sympathies and maintaining her own integrity. Even all of that will not be enough. Leading the Philippines through and beyond crisis will take abundant political skill, and more than a little luck.

By their martyrs one may begin to understand a nation. Particularly so if that nation has a strong Catholic tradition by which the passion of Christ has become a positive political metaphor, in addition to being a sacred image for the religious lives of individuals.² Rizal died opposing an outdated imperialism, ecclesiastical

1. Although a subsequent Marcos court decision acquitted the military escorts and their commanders, I follow the opinion rendered by the majority in *Reports of the Fact Finding Board on the Assassination of Senator Benigno S. Aquino, Jr.* (Manila: Mr. and Ms. Publishing Co., 1984), pp. 353-84. The case is presently being retried in Manila.

2. Reynaldo Ileto, *Pasyon and Revolution: Popular Movements in the Philippines, 1840-1910* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1979).

and inquisitorial. Aquino died as a critic of a modish authoritarianism which relied on police surveillance and manipulation of public relations. Both the late Spanish empire and the Marcos regime had grown economically stagnant and corrupt and both were swept away, the Spanish less than two years after executing Rizal, and the Marcos regime within two and a half years of killing Aquino. Filipinos remember courage in facing repression with their almost cultic devotion to Rizal, and their recent emotional arousals on behalf of Aquino. Rizal has a crude equivalence to Christ in the minds of many followers (including the expectation that he will come again). And, at a high moment of the non-violent triumph of Aquino followers over Marcos in February 1986, a statue of the Blessed Virgin was passed hand over hand through the crowd that had defended General Ramos. When it reached the General, a pivotal defector to the Aquino side, he embraced and kissed the statue.

The religious component behind Mrs. Aquino is strong. It is not merely the express support of Cardinal Sin and the great bulk of the Philippine church and clergy. In the eyes of many, her role is the exalted one of *Mater Dolorosa*, and symbol of redemptive hope.

The Philippines, needless to say, must be governed more than symbolically. What practical traditions bear here? Understanding basic political lineages is a precondition for comprehending events yet to come.

HERITAGES: AUTOCRATIC, AUTHORITARIAN, LIBERTARIAN

Shortly after Marcos' exile and Aquino's accession, a leading Filipino businessman renowned for his intelligence and integrity was surprised by a question in Southeast Asian capitals: "Why can't the Philippines make authoritarianism work?"³ Lee Kuan Yew, Suharto, even Ne Win, succeed in their different ways. Why couldn't Marcos succeed? The question may be more revealing for other parts of Southeast Asia than for the Philippines. But

3. Discussion at "The Philippines and the United States," a conference sponsored by the Asia Society, The Center for Research and Communication (Manila), and the Johnson Foundation, Wisconsin, 6-8 June 1986.

it nonetheless helps initiate review of the "yellow revolution" of 1983-86, and the conflicted legacy behind it.

With the death of Ninoy Aquino in August 1983, the color yellow sprang into evidence everywhere — headbands, armbands, shirts, scarves, banners — after an American popular song about a prisoner returning home. From the time of Ninoy's assassination to Cory's political ascendancy, yellow was the symbol of the forces — business, professional, church, and ordinary people — united against Marcos. One color symbolized the singleness of their purpose. But if that dye were bleached out, one could focus better on several different kinds of historical cloth beneath.

As early as the Philippine-American War of 1898-1901, three fundamental strains of Filipino political thinking could be identified. All were more concrete than the emancipationism of Rizal, because determined in power struggles. One was the autocratic. General Emilio Aguinaldo announced a "dictatorial government," which revealed his true instincts but alienated many potential followers. A second was the authoritarian, as represented by Apolinario Mabini, a romantic nationalist who favored strong executive power for the sake of national discipline and social regeneration. A third was the libertarian, favored by cosmopolitan *ilustrados*, who mistrusted both Aguinaldo and Mabini, and wished a strong legislature instead. The third element prevailed politically at Malolos, eventually managed a series of compromises with the United States, 1899-1901, and dominated in spirit the constitutional nationalism and cultural assimilations of the colonial era.

The three elements have continued to express themselves throughout the twentieth century. The American presence helped insure libertarian dominance. But authoritarian elements appeared as an undercurrent of Quezon's presidency of the Commonwealth, 1935-41. Military-executive fiat prevailed under the Japanese, 1942-45. And native dictatorship, with subthemes of dynastic fantasy, prevailed after Marcos announced Martial Law. Other elements could be identified, especially folk charismatic and millennial ones, but these basic three provide sufficient vocabulary to discuss mainstream and main-chance Filipino politics for the Marcos period, its overthrow, and the open future.

The NAMFREL volunteers at the polling places, the entrepreneurs crying for a free marketplace, and the hundreds of thousands

of citizens responding to Cardinal Sin's call to station themselves in protection of General Ramos and Minister Enrile – what do they signify? What indeed, if not the resurgence of libertarian currents against Marcos, and against his autocracy, his cronies, his concocted statist orthodoxies, his “caponized” legislature.

Finally, Marcos fled. Nonviolence, as practised by courageous citizens, overcame threatening arms. But history has no happy endings. Present travail throws up elements and images of the past. They must be newly comprehended. They will be misunderstood, however, if seen through external lenses.

Many Americans will continue buoyantly to believe that their values have been restored in the Philippines. But the midcentury phrase, “showcase for democracy,” is no longer apt. The glass of the Fil-American display has been shattered, and its contents ransacked.⁴

Some Japanese may be misled by the facts that President Aquino's father-in-law was one of the most enthusiastic of Filipino leaders working with the Japanese during the occupation of 1942-45, and that the father of Vice President Salvador Laurel was the president of the Republic declared under Japanese occupation in 1943. But these family facts will be forgiven by Filipinos, rather than endorsed as positive.

Southeast Asian neighbors of the Philippines may believe that now is the time to try regional models of governance in Manila. But both traditions and conditions there are different. A mystico-magical dictator like Sukarno could draw on Javanese traditions and successfully substitute incantation for action across a significant period of time. In the Philippines, however, the proportion of the literate and the high percentage of college-educated would not have tolerated porous theatrical kingship for so long.

A meritocratic authoritarian like Lee Kuan Yew may be seen to have achieved extraordinary results. Managerial rationality and dexterity, however, can be felt with far greater force in a small island nation with a high degree of effective literacy, than in a

4. A summary review of the years 1898-1986 is in Theodore Friend, “Freedom, Dependence, and Development: Philippine-American Tensions in History,” in John Bresnan, ed., *Crisis in the Philippines: The Marcos Era and Beyond* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, October 1986).

large archipelago with much superficial education and deeply grained superstition.

The Philippines is not without its own elements of both magic verbalism and obedient passivity. But leaders employing either obscurantism or hyperrational discipline eventually find themselves confronting a core amalgam in Philippine public life — something made of Hispano-Catholic sense of conscience and Anglo-American due process of law. Their peculiar blend posed limits which the Japanese encountered during the Great Pacific War, and which eventually stopped Ferdinand Marcos forty years later.

JAPAN'S EXPERIMENT WITH PHILIPPINE GOVERNANCE ⁵

Prior to Marcos and Martial Law, the last major attempt to revise the Philippine polity and revamp its values was that of the Japanese. Whatever theoretical value the concept of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere may have had,⁶ and however logical may appear its evolution in historical retrospect,⁷ it struck Filipinos in concept as absurd and in practice as oppressive.

Japanese military administration had been cooperatively received in Malaysia and warmly welcomed in Indonesia. The Philippines, however, was generally unresponsive to the "Holy War to liberate a billion Asians." The Japanese emitted a stream of criticism of Westernized ways, and particularly of American manners and tastes — loose, unhierarchical, too consumer-oriented, individualistic.⁸ Examine yourselves, the Japanese told the Filipinos, and emulate *us*. Even the Harvard-educated businessman who became a key advisor and interpreter to Jose P. Laurel, Hamamoto

5. Ideas in this section are further developed in my article to appear in Japanese in the September 1987 issue of *Chūō Koron*. The translator is Professor Miwa Kimitada, Director, Institute of International Relations for Advanced Studies on Peace and Development in Asia, Sophia University, Tokyo.

6. Rōyama Masamichi and Takeuchi Tatsuji, *The Philippine Polity: a Japanese View* (vol. 2 of the report of the *Hito Chosa-I-Inkai*, 1943), Takeuchi Tatsuji, trans., Theodore Friend, ed. (New Haven: Yale University Southeast Asian Studies, 1967).

7. Miwa Kimitada, "Japanese Policies and Concepts of a Regional Order in Asia, 1938-1940" (Tokyo: Sophia University Institute for International Relations, Research Report No. 46, 1983).

8. *Official Journal of the Japanese Military Administration* 4 (April 1942): v-xii, and *Official Gazette*. 1942-43, *passim*; author's interviews with Gen. Hayashi Yoshihide, 2 October 1957; Gen. Wachi Takagi, 25 September 1958.

Masakatsu, thought that was right. His model was the development of Formosa under Japanese rule.⁹

The Japanese also criticized the Filipinos governmentally and constitutionally. A study commission led by the distinguished Rōyama Masamichi found the Philippine civil service suffering from American "mechanistic rationalism." It should have instead the spirit of public moral principle and the sentiment of family loyalty which were demonstrated by the Japanese bureaucracy.¹⁰ When adverse fortunes of war moved the Japanese toward granting the Philippines "independence" in 1943, Japanese advisors hovered at the shoulders of the Filipino draftsmen of a new constitution. The 1935 version was too American in its accent on popular representation, too inefficient in its limitations on the power of the chief executive. The Japanese made sure that there was plenty of presidential power. They intended not only to stand behind Jose P. Laurel, whom they chose as president, but to manage through him.

Laurel keenly felt the split nature of Japanese advice. Murata Shōzō, Ambassador to Laurel's occupied republic, once observed that Filipinos should use the "younger brother's right" to ask for help. But Laurel knew that most Filipinos felt "older brother" was treating them with contempt and milking their resources.¹¹

When Premier Tōjō made a trip to the Southern region in 1943, he was obediently greeted with praise of Japan's "radiant spirit of brotherly love."¹² But there were other styles of collaboration. Benigno Aquino, Sr. took on an uncompromising *banzai* spirit which fitted his own formula for Philippine progress — leadership and discipline. Here Aquino as *anti-Saxon* blended

9. Author's interview with Hamamoto Masakatsu, 1 October 1958.

10. Rōyama and Takeuchi, pp. 114-15.

11. Theodore Friend, *Revolution and Restoration: Java, Luzon and Japanese Impact, 1942-45* (in preparation, *passim*). For Murata's thoughts, Fukushima Shintaro, ed., Murata Shozo: *Iko hito-nikki* (Shinjuku: Hara-shobo, 1969), 21 July 1944. This translation from Japanese was done for me by Oshima Kazuko; subsequently noted translations are by Barbara Shimer and Guy Hobbs.

12. Jorge Vargas, 6 May 1943, quoted in Armando J. Malay, *Occupied Philippines: The Role of Jorge B. Vargas During the Japanese Occupation* (Manila: Filipiniana Book Guild, 1967), p. 206. A recent book dedicated to Vargas and defensive of him is Teodoro A. Agoncillo, *The Burden of Proof* (Manila: University of the Philippines Press, 1984).

with Aquino as *pro-Nippon*.¹³ Some key Japanese favored him for the presidency, but the military administration persuaded him to yield to Laurel, and to "wait," on the face-saving rationalization that Laurel was the older man.¹⁴

In fact, the wiser Japanese knew that Jose P. Laurel, Sr. was at the time more popular than Benigno Aquino, Sr., and was a safer choice because he was less apparently pro-Japanese.¹⁵ To guide a restless Philippines, one in which guerrillas were increasingly making forays against the Japanese, the best bet was a lawyer trained at Yale, rather than an *hidalgo* and *haciendero*.

The Rôyama Commission, in its report on the Philippines, said there were too many lawyer-politicians and not enough engineers and agrarian experts. American policies of "education for citizenship" had indeed overshot, and produced a surplus of lawyers educated for politics. For many Filipinos, however, legal precedent and procedure was a good way of coping with Americans, and the legal profession was a channel of upward professional and social mobility. At the summit of the profession was Jose P. Laurel. Whatever his flaws, he was one of the few Filipinos who could quote with authority Tertullian, William Howard Taft, and Fukuzawa Yukichi. He displayed an understanding of the Catholic theological basis of Philippine private conscience, and the American legal basis of the Philippine public conscience. And still he could provide a dignified rationale for the Philippines following Japan's lead in modernization.¹⁶

Among those Japanese officials who hoped to bring enlightenment and welfare to the Philippines, and who might have justified Laurel's faith, was Utsunomiya Naotaka. His recent memoirs testify to a civilized mind, capable of making rational in retrospect the security context in which the Japanese military worked,

13. Nick Joaquin, *The Aquinos of Tarlac: An Essay on History as Three Generations* (Manila: Cacho Hermanos, 1983), pp. 153-69.

14. Theodore Friend, *Between Two Empires: The Ordeal of the Philippines, 1929-1946* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965), pp. 234-35.

15. Their sons, Benigno Aquino, Jr. and Salvador Laurel, became close friends and political allies. Laurel led the deputation at the airport waiting to greet Aquino on his return home in August 1983. He later ran against Marcos, joined his forces to those of Aquino's widow, and is now vice president, prime minister, and foreign minister of the Philippines.

16. Conversations of the author with Jose P. Laurel, Sr., 1957-58. For the range of Laurel's reading, notes, and correspondence, see Laurel Library, Lyceum of the Philippines, Manila.

without justifying the excesses of the Kenpeitai.¹⁷ The memoirs of Kenpeitai officers, however, contain little evidence of objectivity, and less of remorse, for their deeds of summary justice, torture and murder. Those recalling service in the Philippines and elsewhere write to glorify individual deeds or to excuse them, to enhance the historical reputation of themselves as warriors in Japanese minds.¹⁸ Such tendencies, moreover, are not confined to the nostalgic memoirs of majors and sergeants. In what used to be called the Dai Tōa Kyo-eiken, there are understandable shudders at influential Japanese high in the Education Ministry polishing with a soft cloth the record of overseas occupations during the Pacific War.¹⁹

It is not easy for non-Japanese to try to comprehend the underlying ethos and sensibilities of Japan.²⁰ Along with neo-militant "diabolism," there also exists an "angelicism," an authentic craving for universalism, revealed in the desire that Article IX of the Constitution become a supra-sovereign model for other states' self-restraint.²¹

Present and past good impulses acknowledged, however, the memory of the Japanese period for Filipinos remains strongly negative. The American return in 1944-45 is still called "The Liberation." The term may appear anomalous to Burmese, Indonesians, and Vietnamese. But for Filipinos, a Fil-American victory signified not only an imminent and promised independence, but a return to their core cultural values.

17. Author's interview with Utsunomiya, 29 September 1958; Major General Utsunomiya Naotaka, *Minami Jūjisei O Nozomitsutsu* (Looking at the Southern Cross) (Tokyo, 1982; extracts in Bōeichō Bōeikenkyūjo Senshūbu (War History Division, Defense Research Institute, Japan Defense Agency), *Nampō no Gunsei* (War in the South Seas) (Tokyo: Chōun Shimbunsha, 1985).

18. Zenkoku Kenyūkai Rengōkai Hensan Iinkai (Editorial Committee of the National Federation of Kenpeitai Veterans' Associations), *Nihon Kenpei Seishi* (The Authentic History of the Kenpeitai, and *Nihon Kenpai Gaishi* (The General History of the Kenpeitai) (Tokyo: Zenkoku Kenyūkai Rengōkai Honbu, 1976 and 1983).

19. Most recent among stories that have been unfolding for several years are those in the *Japan Times*, 26, 28 May 1986, and the *New York Times*, 10 July 1986.

20. Kyogoku Jun-ichi, "Modernization and National Ethos: Japan in the Twentieth Century," *The Japan Foundation Newsletter*, XIII, 3 (October 1985), pp. 1-8, especially 7-8.

21. Comment of Maruyama Masao on essay by Hagihara Nobutoshi in Hagihara, et. al., *Experiencing the Twentieth Century* (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1985), pp. 61-63.

THE AMERICAN LEGACY AND ITS CRITICS²²

Even scathing things said about the Americans may rely on using the Japanese period as a springboard. For instance, the remark of Carmen Guerrero-Nakpil: "Those who survived Japanese hate did not survive American love. Both were equally deadly; the latter more so because sought and longed for."²³ Mrs. Nakpil is talking about culture as she sees it, including the whole web of trade, investment and military ties that were rewound about the sovereign Philippines in the immediate postwar years. There is no question that the Filipinos "sought" that re-embrace. In a referendum on a constitutional amendment required to give American investors parity rights with Philippine citizens, Filipino voters approved by a four-to-one ratio.

Then the United States turned about and befriended Japan. It gave quantities of resources, financial and human, far beyond what was going to the Philippines. Filipinos felt a sharp emotional distress. Were we not your ally? Have we not modeled our constitution, our education after yours? Do we not design our professions, our entertainments, our Christmases, our blue jeans, our everything after yours?²⁴ Did we not fight and die *with* you, *against* them? Then why do you befriend Japan and ignore us?

Now, perhaps, those jiltings and disappointments are giving a special tone to years of simply growing apart. A Philippine referendum today would probably still come out positive on retention of American bases. But the signs against the so-called "U.S.-Marcos Dictatorship" show that there are powerful contrary forces. Will the signs change to read "U.S.-Aquino Dictatorship"? Perhaps. There are more immediate questions, however: How will the Philippines manage itself; how will the insurgent be contained, the intransigent be allayed, the indigent be comforted? And how

22. I treat further the questions implied here in "The Yellow Revolution: Its Conflicted Historical Legacy," an article among numerous others forthcoming soon, edited by Carl Landé and published by the Washington Institute for Values in Public Policy. That essay focuses particularly upon comparative distinctions between Quezon of the Commonwealth period and Marcos in his later years of rule.

23. Quoted by Cristina Pantoja Hidalgo in *The Manila Review* 1, 1a, January 1975, p. 109.

24. Among the leading critics of the Philippine-American cultural amalgam are Renato Constantino (neo-Marxist), Nick Joaquin (nostalgic Hispanicist), and Doreen Fernandez (cosmopolitan nationalist).

will the Aquino government summon Philippine political traditions to address those problems?

LATENCY, 1986: TRADITIONS AND OPTIONS

The several months since the forces of the yellow revolution prevailed over Marcos have been a period of latency. Among the deeper sources of Philippine political tradition, those made manifest after 1896, it is not yet clear which will prevail. Such lack of clarity is natural at this point. That the eventual answer might be mixed is also natural. But a few things are already evident.

In the long run, even though there are some early signs of renewed American investment, American influence will continue to wane. Americans do not wish to exert a great effort in the Philippines. And they cannot afford to do so. The late Ninoy Aquino once said, "The United States really kills you with love They kill you with Hershey bars."²⁵ He was right, but that was another era. The United States is running out of candy. Now, Aquino's widow has to put the Philippines back together again.

Corazon Aquino's administration in the Philippines clearly is trying to keep its pact with those who empowered it, by restoring civil rights, a free press, and free universities. But at the same time the new government has had to cope with Marcos loyalists who have tried to turn "people power" against it in numerous demonstrations. While contending with such urban adversaries, the Aquino administration faces renewed attacks of Marxist guerrillas in the hills and rural areas. To address massive Philippine economic problems and social dislocations, authoritative action will be required.

These circumstances, however, still do not justify the question from Southeast Asian capitals — "Why can't the Filipinos make authoritarianism work?" The query does not admit of complexity. Historical experience requires a flexible lexicon for the mixed system the Philippine government is trying to realize and revitalize. Filipinos fought against Spanish authoritarianism and fashioned the first revolutionary constitution in Asia. They then grafted their constitutional energies successfully onto American models. The Japanese discredited external "Asian" models of

25. Author's interview with Benigno Aquino, Jr., 19 January 1968.

authority for the Filipinos by exploitation and excesses of harshness. And now Marcos has discredited a conceivable internal authoritarian model by palace gluttony, erosion of treasured institutions, and short-sighted management.

Filipinos still accept authoritarian values in church, school, and home, but less than they did twenty-five years ago.²⁶ Meanwhile they tend to accept initiatives by the state more than they did in a previous generation. Rhetorical fervor for democracy in the society at large coexists with tolerance of severe failures of democracy in action.

The mix of options available from the Philippine past cannot readily be suggested by any simple dichotomy between "authority" and "democracy." The range of possibilities is wide. It begins at one end with military dictatorship, either of a personalistic sort as exemplified by Aguinaldo, who briefly and unsuccessfully declared a "dictatorial government" during the revolution against Spain, or of a bureaucratic sort such as Marcos was evolving. The Philippines, however, has no *dwifungsi* theory like Indonesia's, nor any elaborate rationale of *kekaryaan* functions for the military in civil, social, and business affairs.²⁷ The prevailing creed in the Aquino regime is the civil-military distinction learned from the United States, with the civilian as supreme. General Ramos represents this in its purer West Point form, and former Minister of Defense Enrile in its more pragmatic and unpredictable form. Enrile, a Harvard-trained lawyer in part of his makeup, also stands in some minds for the bureaucracy of the Marcos period, and for latent praetorianism.

At a far end of the range counter to military dictatorship are the civil rights lawyers, the cause-oriented groups, the liberation theologians, and the libertarian businessmen who helped produce the four days that tumbled Marcos from power. But it is difficult to imagine that they will hold together and prevail with the impact of the *ilustrado* legislators in 1899, or the assimilationist lawyer-politicians in the American colonial period. Too much has happened since sovereignty devolved in the Philippines. Regional patterns

26. My measuring point is Rex Drilon, et. al., "Philippine Democracy Reexamined," pamphlet based on *Philippine Historical Bulletin* 6 (December 1962).

27. Of various authorities that might be cited here, I find David Jenkins particularly insightful: *Suharto and His Generals: Indonesian Military Politics, 1975-1983* (Ithaca, N. Y.: Cornell Modern Indonesia Project, Monograph No. 64, 1984).

are in part taking hold. Economic entropy and political jeopardy produce their own local logic.

Dissatisfactions among some of the cause-oriented groups and ultraliberarians move them toward still another band of belief and potential action. Either through radical chic that might wear off, or dogmatic conviction that will hold fast, they are related to the National Democratic Front. Ties of sympathy, association, or active affiliation may or may not lead from there to the New People's Army (NPA). Whatever may be novel and effective about the archipelagic strategy of the communist NPA, armed communist insurgencies in Southeast Asia are not new. And where they have triumphed thus far, populist romance has given way to terror and totalitarianism.

Neither military dictatorship nor pseudo-populist totalitarianism is appetizing to most Filipinos. At the same time, many might find acceptable a strain of executive authoritarianism which respects central parts of the Philippine political heritage and its most revered cultural and religious symbols. Such a government could legitimately trace its lineage back through Quezon of the Commonwealth to Mabini of the Revolution. But at the same time, if it practised a more open entrepreneurial economy, it would still have to prove it could keep people fed. And insofar as its national disciplines might go beyond those of the neo-American period, 1945-72, it would have to keep them civilized and retrained by a churchly humanitarianism.

Practical success in a great many dimensions will be required to produce a Philippine nation consonant with the hopes of both its martyrs, Jose Rizal and Ninoy Aquino. Symbols of governance, even a president seen as Mater Dolorosa, can do a great deal to keep a people together during a period of latency. But that period itself may not last much longer.