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## Let Us Put Our Books Away: Review Article

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## Review Article

### LET US PUT OUR BOOKS AWAY

Roque J. Ferriols, S.J.

The familiar first line from an old children's song is the theme of this review article. I have just finished editing my last issue of *Philippine Studies*. I turn to four still unreviewed books on my desk.

The first is so old (date 1968) it would be more discreet to leave it in the closet with the other skeletons. Yet there is a virtue to looking at books years after their first appearance. One is saved from the hurry to be on time, the urge to invent instant opinion on matters that need time and quiet for mere understanding. *The Status of the Individual in East and West* (ed. Charles A. Moore, U of Hawaii Press, Honolulu) is 606 pages fat, the bouncing child of an east-west philosophers' conference. Although the title promises an east-west survey, the book itself is mostly a collection of attempts by some orientals to explain themselves in English to some westerners, with here and there an attempt by some occidentals to extol themselves in English to some easterners. The scholarship throughout is western: an obsessive concern for detail and minutiae, sometimes leading to intuition, sometimes causing intuition to vanish. If one were to apply Dr. Johnson's criterion — to be exact without minuteness, and lofty without exaggeration — one might say that this book often achieves minuteness.

This book appeared at a time when our knowledge of countries only a few drops of water away came almost exclusively from a country many drops of water away. This book came with an air of authority from that far country. If one read it at that time, he would have been overwhelmed, in moment one, with web on web of transcendental abstraction. In moment two, he would have wondered that the book tells him so little that can reveal his neighbor across the small water as a human being whom one can touch. But times have changed. The air of authority has blown away; some of the mist has lifted from the water. At last the book can be seen as a mere source of points of departure for the patient and stubborn.

The closet door creaks; another skeleton. This one is less old: date 1970. It is Stuart A. Schlegel's now famous book on *Tiruray Justice* (U of California Press). A slender book (183 pages) it is a painstaking collection

of facts concerning "traditional Tiruray law and morality". By facts I mean 1) words 2) conjectured attitudes of word speakers 3) incidents 4) patterns conjectured as being revealed by incidents. By conjectured I mean: intelligently guessed.

There is no pure fact. Words, happenings are made or observed within the horizon of one's perception, and the horizon enters into the making or observing. And yet it makes sense to talk of facts. First: one can achieve consciousness of this horizon, then one can use the horizon critically, so that one can say after an observation: this is not a *pure* fact but it is a real *bite* into the true and real. Second: the perceived often have hard cores which cannot be denied without putting one's self out of this world. Thus I might claim that Mr. Schlegel's interpretation of *fedew* is inaccurate, but if I deny the existence of the word I shall be putting myself out of this world. Here one can play games of disappearance. Take the hard core, analyze it, prove the vagueness of its outlines, prove its non-existence, it vanishes. But these games are successful only in abstract surroundings. In real life the hard core falls on your head like a block of concrete the very moment you think you have made it vanish. These remarks are by way of background to my attempt to evaluate this book.

I shall try to guess the author's horizon of perception in this book. First: an ancient Greek awareness of justice as an order immanent in every world happening, in every movement within the inwardness of human beings. Second: an awareness of how this immanent order tends to surface in man-made structures wherever human beings live together. Third: an awareness of order and structure as both *is* and *ought*. I have just tried to present in three parts a horizon which is one living-, perceiving-, being-perceived-in-motion whole. It is this horizon which saves the book from becoming a mere catalogue of facts and gives it a tendency towards humaneness. I say tendency because the horizon does not come into full play, the heart of the matter is missing. Reading this book is like seeing a movie a second time. There seems to be suspense but all is already predetermined and finished.

Take these sentences from pages 25—6.

A once viable mountain tribe — now caught up in the waves and currents of what we speak of as *history* and judge to be *progress* — is rapidly becoming fragmented into an array of individuated peasant families. Gone with the forest are the rich rewards of hunting and gathering, as well as the swidden mode of agriculture. The legal system which, with juristic elegance, knit together these forest farmers, and a religious system which projected their legal and moral concepts to a superhuman plane of social relations, are vanishing entirely, and with them, the influential legal and religious leaders so crucial to the fabric of the old Tiruray culture. The people are becoming, in short, ever less Tiruray and ever more Filipino.

Here we see an appreciation of the richness and creativity of Tiruray culture together with a conviction that it belongs to the past, that it is merely as a *dying*, that in reality it *was*. No suspicion that still it *will be*, that its power to create and be created is not exhausted, that it will self-construct in hitherto unimagined ways. I wonder how the author defined Filipino when he used the word in the above quotation. Is he aware that the Tiruray held-together-in-*fedew* world is familiar to the Tagalog whose world is animate with *kalooban*, to the Ilocano whose world throbs in and

around naquem? I suppose the author reached Tiruray country by passing through other parts of the Philippines, but reading his book one might wonder if some djinn had not transported him from California straight to Cotabato and straight back again. There is no awareness that the Filipinos, of which the Tiruray are one group, are an ancient unity in differences an ancient rootedness, and — like all things truly ancient — always new.

Scholarship needs head to discern the order present in disarray. Scholarship needs heart lest fossils be substituted for the living. This work has head, but heart falls short.

With the third book we enter the world of the recent. It is *Adventure in Vietnam* (Operation Brotherhood International; Manila, 1974) by Miguel A. Bernad, S.J. The subtitle tells us it is the story of Operation Brotherhood, 1954–1957. The narrative moves from organizational to personal, in continuous to and fro, lucidly, and with sustained interest. It takes the reader from seminal idea, to enthusiasm, to call for volunteers, to more enthusiasm, to the deed of danger, courage, death, compassion, a working together that keeps faith when all the world is falling apart.

The book is long, 562 pages, carefully documented and indexed, copiously illustrated and, all the time, human. Taking the risks of oversimplification, one might say that the spirit of the book can be found in two incidents. The first concerns Reynaldo Maglaya and his interpreter; their jeep broke down in wild country. To quote from pages 241–42: There was nothing left to do but wait until they were found by the military patrol that came to these highlands once a week. They had sufficient food to last them several days; there was therefore no danger of starvation. The danger came from another quarter: these lonely mountain trails were occasionally visited by wild beasts, including tigers.

Maglaya had never seen a tiger, but he had seen or had heard of the lacerated faces of those who had come too close to a tiger's paw. When therefore night fell and in the darkness they heard the growl and saw the luminous eyes of a large animal, they knew that they were in serious trouble. The Vietnamese interpreter took refuge underneath the jeep. There he was safe. Maglaya could not join him there, for there was not room for two. There was nowhere else to hide.

Maglaya had come from what Catholics call a "mixed" marriage. His Ilocano father was a Protestant who read the Bible assiduously. His Visayan mother (from Romblon) was a Catholic who went to Mass and prayed the Rosary with equal assiduity. He himself had been brought up a Catholic, but had also learned from his father to carry a Bible around and to turn to certain passages in time of stress. It was to this book that he now turned in what seemed to him his last moments on earth.

With his pencil torch he looked for the familiar passage and began to read . . . "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not starve. He leads me to green pastures where there is plenty of grass to eat. He guides me to the waters, where I can drink my fill." Trying to overcome his panic, he paused at the well-known words: "Though I should walk in the valley of death, I shall fear no evil for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff are there to give me courage."

Eventually, he fell asleep. Later that night his Vietnamese companion woke him up. The tiger had gone. A day or two later the military patrol stumbled upon them and towed them back to the lowlands.

But the Vietnamese interpreter had apparently spread the word that their "miraculous" deliverance had been effected by the use of a "magic black book" which the Filipino carried about with him. The story reached Saigon and inquiries were made as to the nature of this magic book. It was explained that it was only the Bible.

The second incident (pages 326–28) is the often told story of how un-

palatable powdered milk was converted into that candy called pastillas de leche; so that the soap-tasting beverage became delicious food; no need to drink milk when it can be eaten.

Two incidents exemplifying two attitudes: a complete and quiet resting in God's hands and a self-confident flair for improvisation. These two attitudes come together and interpenetrate to form the stance of Bahala na. A stance usually misrepresented in western writings. A stance which other orientals also find puzzling. Consider, for instance, this paragraph from Doroy Valencia's "Another Cup", *Philippines Daily Express*, June 14, 1975:

The Filipinos and the Chinese radio-TV personnel were studies in contrast, the Chinese methodical to a fault, the Filipinos, the geniuses of improvisations — as usual. The Chinese had scripts of everything they did — they seldom improvised, and only at the prodding of our boys. The Filipinos, on the other hand, were still correcting, transposing cameras and scripts minutes before an international satellite broadcast. The Chinese watched with awe how our radio-TV people improvised even under the most difficult situations. They always planned, we never.

Fr. Bernad's book is not explicitly about Bahala na, but I daresay that a perceptive reading of his book will give one a more authentic experience of Bahala na than many an ingenious theory improvised by social scientists.

We now come to the fourth book. It is the newest — date 1975. It is also the most ancient. It gives us the text of a song from the Manuvu Tuwaang epic cycle. Professor E. Arsenio Manuel made several trips into Manuvuland which is the area where Bukidnon, Davao, and Cotabato impinge on each other. Sometimes he carried only notebook and pencil, sometimes also a tape recorder. Between the lines one can discern the most important part of his equipment: an open and humble heart, a talent for friendship. I understand that Professor Manuel has some fifty Manuvu epic songs on tape. He published one about the maiden of the buhong sky in 1958. He calls this latest one *Tuwaang Attends a Wedding* (Ateneo de Manila University Press). A slender volume; 109 pages. The frontispiece: a Manuvu betelnut bag in living color.

From page 18:

Women pounded rice in the yard. When it rained the mortars were brought in the house. The wooden mortars were rather small and the pestles light enough for the slender women. Singly, or by twos or threes, the women stood before the mortar with their feet stuck to the ground, equidistant to the base of the mortar. They held the pestle with both hands and when pounding swayed their buttocks in an unusually rhythmic movement.

The Manuvu' women sometimes placed the mortar on a wide and long thick board while pounding, producing crystal clear beats that reverberated on the opposite mountainside. The Manuvu' women enjoyed these ringing echoes accompanying them in their work. Could this have been one of the motivations for Manuvu' instrumental music?

While reading this quotation, one almost hears Manuvu music springing into existence from the sounds of everyday. In some way this short passage is a shadow picture of the entire book. The author visits the Manuvus, makes friends, shares their workaday, enters as deeply as he can into their pulses, then shows us the epic singers springing into existence from these depths.

The author's account of his visits to the Davao-Cotabato area awoke

recollections in this reviewer. Some eight years ago I briefly flitted through the Bukidnon area, around Kiokong-Kiburiao. Here are some things I can recall. Through the mist and wet of a dim morning, a mother's voice exclaiming over her son. Three talking boys, plucking lanzones and completely at home on a twelve meter high treetop. A kilometer of knee deep mud, then a sudden sight of a tree house, looking exactly like a remembered picture in a long ago geography. Clouds, wet plain, woods on all horizons, people walking in opposite directions, no sound but the chill gentle rain, the squish of feet on mud, and the standard Filipino greeting, softly spoken in Manuvu: Where are you going? And, with finger pointed at appropriate horizon: There.

In this short frivolous encounter, the question I asked myself was: How is their feel of being alive? No book can answer this question. But a book can make the question more real by rooting it in soil and conveying a hopeful beginning of knowledge. Professor Manuel's book accomplishes this for me. In his hands, scientific methodology becomes a living tool because used with simplicity and shrewdness.

And so, by the time the reader has crossed the 47 pages of introduction to find himself at the doorstep of the song (Manuvu text printed side by side with literal English translation), he is able to picture the Manuvu singer, his face covered, now sitting, now lying, now prancing, gesturing as he invokes and evokes the presence of Tuwaang through his epic incantation. And as Tuwaang puts on his battle gear, rides the lightning, talks to the gungutan bird, fights cosmic battles to win a bride, we know we are not listening to mere winds shaking tall grasses in the land of tales, but to the sound of blood pulsing through arteries of living people.