

Studies on Jose Rizal II

Jose Rizal and the Mentality of the People

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(Received November 18 1996)

Abstract

I think here about the culture and identity of the people. One of the notable characteristics of the Filipino's mentality is friendship or hospitality for anyone. This means fellowship to all people as equals.

But if the people have bad intentions, they might get unexpected treatment. The fellowship comes from the sense of cooperation in the society or community but not from "Nationalism." Nationalism has had the effect of people (races) regaining their identities. But it sometimes contains "National Egoism" or strains and conflicts among peoples or nations. Fellowship for all people as the same human beings should be the most important principle for any people in order to overcome nationalism from now on.

1

Jose Rizal wrote about Filipino's character in his paper "The Philippines a hundred years hence" that "Filipinos will recover the old, good character if they regain their freedom." He describes this character as "peaceful, cheerful, with a smiling face, hospitable and brave character."

Teodoro A. Agoncillo pointed out in his book "A short history of the Philippines" that "the basic way Filipinos think is *bahalà na* (we shall consider what to do when the time comes). And the indices of human relations are *pakikisama* (deep friendship) , *utang na loób* (duty for the grace) and hospitality. "

It may be true that "friendship and hospitality" are the notable characteristics of the people.

2

But if the visitors had had bad intentions, the native people might have received unexpected treatment.

Jose Rizal wrote in the same paper that "as soon as the Philippines were brought into the

Spanish Kingdom, they had to help the Spanish conquest wars and the ambitions of the conquerers. The colonial government had changed the government, laws, customs, manners and religion of the Philippines. In this terrible crisis populations had decreased. The people had been reduced to poverty. The culture had regressed. They had been gradually losing old traditions and memories of old times. They had forgotten songs, letters, poems and laws.

They were forced to accept other dogmas and ethics.

But they had felt that these new dogmas and ethics were unsuited to their native culture and the local climate.

They had lost power and they looked upon themselves as useless. They had come to be ashamed of their native products. They admired anything foreign made and that which they could not understand. They were dispirited and struck down."

"And so years and centuries passed. Religious, prosperous ceremonies, visually appealing ceremonies, songs, lights, statues with golden dresses, prayers with mysterious languages, stories, miracles and preachings were charming the hearts of the people. Their mind were originally superstitious.

But they could not be uprooted in spite of their systematic strifes with merciless persis-

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tence.”

Rizal was of mixed blood. And we can suppose that he received a European education and experienced western life styles. He might have been elite in his province.* But while he was staying in Europe some years, he might have found himself to be a Filipino and not a European.

He might have found himself to be different from Europeans and to have a different mentality and way of thinking. The mentality comes from the characteristics of the people and way of thinking comes from the mentality and conceptions that the language carries. Structures and ways of expression are different in every language. Words and conceptions are also different in each language. If the mentality were different, the needed conceptions that the words carry were different. And the ways of expression were also different.

The expressions in European languages are clear and direct, but Japanese expressions are not so direct. Tagalog may also be like Japanese.

Both languages can express thought for other persons.

Japanese can not say “No” clearly in most cases or situations. If one can not grant a request, he tries to explain why not. And he waits for the requester’s understanding.

Japanese always worry about hurting the other person’s feelings when declining invitations, requests, etc.. That is why they are slow to answer. This comes not only from the difficulty of understanding a foreign language but also from consideration of others.

This consideration for others is one of the virtues of a Japanese community. It came from Confucianism* and it serves the community that had been separated from others for a long time.

Ways of thinking come from a sense of values. Native people lived in small villages originally. These villages were communities just

like “*Barangay*”. The members knew and helped each other.* Nobody would offend anyone that he would see again soon. So they valued consideration for others.

3

Culture comes from the climate and the conditions of a land.

Japanese philosopher Tetsuo Watsuji pointed out that the climate greatly affects the characteristics of the culture, mentality, way of thinking, customs and ethics.*

Rizal might have found many kinds of differences between himself and Europeans and he might have considered himself to be a Filipino rather than a European. He might have thought about the good points of the Philippines, which had its own unique climate and culture.

And his thoughts and love for his native islands might have been very deeply felt. We find many expressions of his love for his native islands and the Filipino people in his writings until his “Last Farewell”.*

When Rizal found the difference between his original, native culture and that of Europe, he might have considered the meaning or the merits and demerits of the history of Spanish Colonization.

And then he might have felt deeply sorry to have lost not only political and economic freedom, but also the Filipino cultural traditions.

We can infer this from the former quotations of his.*

His love of the Philippines, the islands and the people implies the desire to revive the native culture for the people.

It means regaining the identity of the people.

* Rizal studied at Atheneo Municipal high school and Santo Thomas University in the Philippines and then Central University of Madrid.

* Confucius’ *Jin* (仁), Mencius’ *Jo* (恕)

* Reger to “Utopia of a few people in a small nation” dreamed by Chinese philosopher Lao-tzu (老子)

* Refer to “*Fudo* (Climate)” Tetsuo Watsuji.

* Refer to “The Philippines a hundred years hence”, “Last Farewell” etc. Jose Rizals.

4

Rizal pointed out "peaceful, cheerful, with smiling face, hospitable and brave character as good character traits of Filipinos". Teodoro A. Agoncillo pointed out "*bahalá na*, *pakikisama*, *utang na loób*, and hospitality". "*Bahalá na*" is a peculiar attitude of southern people. There are always green plants on the lands all year round. The people can harvest rice two or three times a year. It is warm and mild on the sea almost the entire year. The people can fish any time. They do not need to keep fodder for domestic animals for the winter season. Life is not so difficult. "*Bahalá na*" is the original way of thinking of the people in the hot lands. It is natural for us to take a rest and to save energy and power when it is very hot or cold.

But everything is different in cold lands. There are four seasons in a year. All plants grow from spring to summer. Autumn is the one and only harvest season in a year. The people must plant the seeds in spring and take care of the crops for many months.

In autumn all the green leaves fall down on the ground. Only conifer trees keep their green leaves. No green grass remains in the fields. So the farmers must keep the grass to feed the domestic animals in shelters for half a year.

It is very cold in winter. It begins to snow in October and freezes everywhere, even inside the house. The sea is also cold and wild. The fishermen can hardly ever go fishing during winter.

So people must work hard and store enough food during the warm seasons. They must also keep seeds in good condition and prepare the tools or machines for the next season in winter.

So the basic way of thinking of the people in the lands with four distinct seasons encourages "working hard to prepare for the future". It is so much different from "*bahalá na*".

The peaceful, cheerful, smiling and hospitable character that Rizal pointed out is also characteristic of southern people in areas with mild and hot climates.

But the character of the people living in areas with severe climates is conversely wild, serious, expressionless and not so hospitable to strangers.

The people in very cold lands are of few words. Their blood circulates slowly and their cheeks look as if they were frozen.

"*Pakikisama* (deep friendship) and *utang na loób* (duty for the grace)" are Eastern concepts, not Western.

Europe is not such a big land. But there are many people and races. There are not so many high mountains. It is easy for the people to move from place to place. The migrations of the people have been frequent. The world has been cosmopolitan since ancient times.

So the relationships are somewhat different in Europe. The people are friendly superficially, but they maintain neither deep friendships nor duty for the grace. They have contracts with others only within the contexts of "give and take relationships" or legal contracts.

Eastern legal systems came from the West in modern times.*

But we feel ourselves have the sense of like "*pakikisama* and *utang na loób*." These are notable characteristics of Eastern people.

Eastern countries have kept their own identity for a comparatively long time. The people have lived in their communities.

The community cultivates a sense of fellowship and friendship. And these relationships develop deep friendship and duty for the grace.

The Filipino's former character traits, peaceful, cheerful, smiling and hospitable behavior makes our feeling safe and happy. It is valuable in life. It has an ethical value in our life. Hospitality and welcome are very happy thoughts for visitors as Teodoro A. Agoncillo pointed out.

5

Every people or race keeps its community.

* The Meiji Constitution of Japan established in 1889 followed German Constitution of Prussen.

The annual rings of cooperative life of the people develop the culture in each climate. Culture consists of life style, shelter, buildings, foods, cooking style, music, language, letters, poems, conceptions and feelings that are carried with them, customs, ethics, religions, history, traditions, education, political and economic systems, ways of thinking, mentality and interpersonal relationships. I make here issues of the ways of thinking, mentality and relationships. The original character of the people can be found in the community but not on the level of the nation or nationalism.

On this level people change a great deal. They lose their good character and personality. They interact with others only by give and take relationships or contracts. The people change from members of the community to members of the "objective society".*

The people in a community live naturally. They behave naturally, displaying their own character. But the people at the nation level or in the objective society interact with others legally. Their good character and personality almost completely disappear. And moreover, nations sometimes impose upon other people or nations with colonization and government. Nations increase tensions among people with the ceaseless expansion of armaments.* Moreover, nations exercise power and plunder goods, resources, land and entire races.

It is good to buy or to exchange some convenient goods or indispensable things with each other. But it should be done autonomously with free will of the parties concerned. This case is normal trade. It should be done often for better life among peoples and nations.

If it is so, people do not feel unhappy or alienated in their life.

They do not lose their identity.

The words "identity, autonomy, *subjektiv* in German and independence" have almost the same meaning or conception.

* Refer to "*Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft*" Ferdinand Julius Tönnies.

* Refer to "*Zum ewigen Frieden*" Immanuel Kants.

German philosopher Immanuel Kant has already explained the conception of "Autonomy or Subjektivität" in the process of establishing the principle of the moral law.*

He asserted that the worth of a person consisted of obeying the law that the autonomous reason had deduced by itself.

Subjectivity or identity consists of the autonomy or independence of not only a person or people but also a race or nation.

A nation consists of people. It is the people's will that determines the action of the nation. So from an ethical perspective a nation is not an abstract entity but rather a massive person. It has a personality and character, just as people do.

It is a fallacy that people do not bear the responsibility of the nation. On this point French philosopher J. P. Sartre said that "a person has responsibility to himself. This means that he has responsibility not to himself as an individual in a strict sense but to all mankind."*

It is regrettable that the people on the level of the nation change so much. No one has the right to impose their will upon and damage other people. All people are the same human beings. The positions may be reversed some day.

We have to understand the culture and feelings of other people and we should respect their identity.

We should visit each other often to achieve it. And border fences must be low and gates should be always widely opened. The world will become like a community and fellowship for all people should be the principle for not only personal relations, but also international relations.

* Refer to "*Kritik der praktischen Vernunft*" Immanuel Kants.

* Refer to "*L'existentialisme est un humanisme.*" Jean Paul Sartre.