

Democracy in the Philippines and on Ponape: A Comparison of Two Political Systems Structured on the U. S. Model¹

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The purpose of the present report is to illustrate the way in which democracy, just as any other political system, can be modified by the traditional values of a particular society. We shall attempt to do this by comparing the effect of traditional values in two different societies upon the democratic structure which each has borrowed from the U. S. In this comparison we shall focus on one aspect of democracy, the obligation of political leaders and government officials to place the interests of the community of the nation ahead of personal gain and personal obligations and on the way that traditional values influence the fulfillment of this obligation.

One society we shall examine is the Republic of the Philippines and the other is the society of Ponape, a small island in the Eastern Carolines. Even though there is a vast difference in the size and in the stage of political development of these two societies, it will still be profitable to compare the effects of traditional and existing values on the democratic structure that these societies have adopted from the U. S. Both these societies have explicitly taken the structure of their contemporary political system from the democratic system found in the U. S., and in both cases sufficient time has elapsed since the beginning of the contemporary political system for traditional social values to have clearly affected the functioning of the democracy.

In American democracy there are few formal sanctions on political leaders to work for the good of their constituents. Short of extremely rare cases in which an American president does something serious enough for impeachment to be considered, he is called to account for his actions only once every four years by the electorate. With the national legislators this accounting is given only once every 2-6 years. A system of checks and balances within the government keeps the legislators, the president and the judiciary from assuming too much power, but in itself it does not assure their working for the common good. Nevertheless, over the years informal sanctions based on the general social and ethical values of honesty and fairness have pressured enough political leaders into a sufficient degree of dedication to their constituents' welfare to keep the system viable.

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PHILIPPINE DEMOCRACY

The structure of democracy in the Philippines is fashioned directly on that of the U. S. Also as in the U. S., the formal sanctions on elected officials to work for the common good are slight. However, the informal sanctions stemming from traditional social and ethical values do not pressure the political leaders to work for the common good to the same extent in the Philippines as in the U. S. In fact some important social and ethical values seem to militate quite strongly against the political leaders working for the common good, and Filipinos generally assume that a public official will enrich himself and his friends while in public office and will use the authority of his office to help individuals and groups to whom he has social and political obligations. To a great extent the Filipino political leader equates the common good with the good of the group to which he is bound by ties of kinship and other social and political obligations. Two of the social factors that help to account for this public expectation are: (1) the omnipresence and the importance of obligations arising from kinship and other dyadic, patron-dependent relationships in Philippine society (Lande, 1965:3); and (2) the consequent de-emphasis on universalistic interests among large groups or social classes in the Philippines (Grossholtz, 1964:171). To understand the significance of these factors in Philippine society we must first review some highlights in the development of the Philippine political system.

Almost all other present-day nations of Southeast Asia had a long history of national unity long before the arrival of the Westerners. Not so the Philippines. Though the Muslims in the Southern Philippines were united in some larger groupings under their rajahs or sultans, throughout most of the Philippines people lived in small, scattered and isolated communities (Corpuz, 1965:21). When the Malays first migrated to the Philippines they did so in individual boats called *barangays*. Each boat brought an extended family and its leader or *datu* was the head of the extended family. Once landed, the group established a new village or farmstead also called a *barangay* over which the *datu* and his immediate family assumed a hereditary leadership status (Reed, 1967:22).

The *barangays* faced a constant threat of attack by pirates from the China Sea, by Muslims advancing from the South and by neighboring *barangays*. The only possible security in such a situation was derived from a united group within the *barangay* itself. Thus, a strong loyalty to the *barangay* community and a deep suspicion toward outsiders characterized the *barangay* social system. Since the *barangay* was basically an extended kinship group with a government based on kinship relations and obligations rather than on any legal code, loyalty to the community was identical with loyalty to one's family (Corpuz, 1965:21-24).

When the Spanish took over the Philippines they considered the scattered pattern of the *barangay* communities a hindrance to effective administration and Christianization of the people. So they moved the people from the *barangays* into larger towns. They kept the *barangay* communities intact in the towns and appoint-

ed the *datus* as *cabezas*, administrative functionaries in charge of collecting taxes from the people of their *barangays*. The *cabezas* themselves were exempted from the taxes and were allowed to elect the town leader called the *gobernadorcillo* from among themselves. The *cabezas*, the *gobernadorcillo* and their families lived together in the center of the town and formed a privileged class called the *principalia*. Though the *gobernadorcillo* and the *cabezas* received little respect from the Spanish administrators and were largely subordinated to the local friar, nevertheless the *principalia* were greatly admired by the rest of the Filipinos and they did play an important role as middlemen in the relation of the people and the Spanish administration (Corpuz, 1965:27). The main source of enhancing the power of many of the *principalia* was their acquiring large tracts of land as their personal property. In pre-Spanish times land had been considered communal, owned by the group that worked it. When Spain introduced the notion of individual land ownership the *datus* were often allowed to claim as their personal property all the land worked by their followers.

By the middle of the 19th century a new wealthy aristocracy known as *ilustrados* appeared among the Filipinos. It was composed of those who had become successful farmers or landowners as well as those who had become successful merchants. When Spain relaxed its strict administration of the colony in the late 1800s the wealth of the *ilustrados* enabled them to take most advantage of the opportunities. Many sent their children to school in Manila and some sent them abroad preparing them for the greater commercial and political opportunities that were to come later.

Spanish rule had brought the first political unification to the Philippines but this was a mixed blessing. Filipinos who expected the Spanish administration to work for their benefit were quickly and thoroughly disillusioned. In the Spanish view the colony was the property of the King of Spain. In fact individual offices in the colonial administration such as notaries-public, constables, sheriffs, etc. were looked upon as property to be bought and sold for fee (Corpuz, 1965:79). The Spanish king did not intend that the Filipinos suffer from the system and he even tried to correct abuses, but the inherent opportunities for abusing power in such an administration were too many and too great for the efforts of the king to be of much avail. Very quickly the government became for the Filipinos a burden and a threat. The people withdrew their expectations and their trust from the government and turned instead to the family as their main source of security (Corpuz, 1965:82). Thus during the Spanish regime the wealthy Filipino aristocratic class of *ilustrados* came to power and the Filipinos generally came to rely on kinship relationships and personal relationships to the *ilustrados* for security rather than upon the colonial government in general.

The U. S. administration opened the office of Provincial Governor to Filipinos but at first continued the literacy and land ownership requirements for voting, restrictions which obviously favored the *principalia*. The Americans soon appointed Filipinos to important administrative positions on the national level, but

they invariably chose members of the Filipino aristocracy for these positions. Also, because of their greater wealth and education the ilustrados and their children benefited most from the opportunities in commerce and industry that developed in the American period. One result of these developments is that to a large extent the ruling families of the Philippines have stayed in power but their power presently spans politics, land ownership and industry. The introduction of some new members into the ranks of the elite and even the recent, gradual build-up of a middle class resulting from the broad scope of public education and financial opportunities begun under the American administration, have not significantly reduced the importance of the ties of kinship and of obligations arising from the patron-subordinate relationships.

The first elections for public office under the Americans were town and barrio elections held in 1899 in the first towns taken by the Americans. The first national elections were not held until 1907 and this delay proved most important in the character of the national political system which developed. The elections in the towns and barrios were naturally controlled by the leading families of those areas. The issues and the techniques in these campaigns were local. But more important, the leading families in the local areas took control of the political machinery as it emerged into its contemporary form (Corpuz, 1965:97). When the national parties formed for the 1907 national elections they were subject to the factions within the provinces and these in turn were subject to the factions and pressures within the towns. Thus the national parties were from the beginning loose coalitions or ad hoc alliances of provincial leaders whose support from local leaders enabled them to secure a portion of the province votes for the national leaders. While the need for national leaders to satisfy the demands of local leaders is part of all political systems, in the Philippines it is essential for the survival of any national leader (Corpuz, 1965:16). This historical perspective is necessary if we are to understand important elements of contemporary Philippine politics and how these are influenced by the general social and ethical values of the society.

Personalistic considerations from family relationships and from patron-subordinate relationships pervade all levels of Filipino politics as they pervade every other aspect of Philippine society. At the barrio level political and social leadership are found to be synonymous and both revolve around the leader families and extend through ties of kinship and social obligations (Nydegger and Nydegger, 1966:59). On the municipal level appointments to government service and promotions in this service are based more often on personalistic ties than on merit or capability (Villanueva *et al.*, 1966:23). Municipal officials are caught between official expectations, which pressure them to enact their roles universalistically giving the same service and attention to everyone, and popular expectations, which pressure them constantly to enact their roles personalistically giving preference in many matters to those to whom they have kinship or other social ties (Villanueva *et al.*, 1966:116). To gain and retain political power the municipal officials must frequently give in to personalistic demands of their constituents and the campaigns

are based not on programs or on ideological concerns but on personalities and the promise to reward supporters (Villanueva *et al.*, 1966:199). This same situation has been found to prevail on the provincial level of politics (Agpalo, 1963:447).

Even on the national level the Filipino political leaders are pressured into acting in a personalistic manner to fulfill debts of gratitude and kinship obligations. However, in a study of national political administrators Abueva (1966:52) warns that we must beware of too sweeping generalizations about political administrators acting from personalistic motives. He found personalistic behavior in areas such as assigning semiskilled and unskilled labor in public works projects, and issuing business licenses, permits, etc. But there were also areas in which the official duties of the administrator clearly outweigh personal considerations and where they render services in an objective and universalistic manner. Such areas include public education, public health services, postal services, etc. We can conclude from Abueva's findings that though personalistic considerations are part of all levels of Philippine politics, the higher the level the elected official or administrator is operating on the more that personalistic behavior will be balanced by universal considerations.

One reason why such universalistic behavior has not been more common on the national level of government is that in the Philippines even a national organization like a political party is structured on dyadic, patron-subordinate relationships (Abueva, 1966:37; Lande, 1965:3). The local political elite are those who are wealthy enough to be patrons and win the allegiance of a group of dependents. Local politics is generally a struggle for power between two groups of such leaders, though the composition of the groups can change. The two political parties of each province are composed largely of dyadic, patron-subordinate relationships all the way from the wealthiest and most powerful provincial leaders down to the poorest tenant (Lande, 1965:2). The same is true of national political parties. So both parties contain leaders and followers from all provinces, all social groups and all occupations. The similarity of composition leads to a similarity of policy and programs which make the parties almost identical and help to explain why switching parties is so frequent among Filipino politicians. In other countries political parties are pressured into proposing wide-ranging programs to solve problems. This has been far less so in the Philippines since the voters have allowed and even pressured political leaders to satisfy their needs in a particularistic manner, i.e., as individuals or as members of small groups (Lande, 1965:43).

While this article is being prepared for publication (March, 1970), almost daily reports from the Philippines indicate that demonstrations and riots by university students, taxi drivers, slum-dwellers and other groups are indeed pressuring the Marcos regime to respond to their needs in a universalistic manner. The present article makes no attempt at an instant analysis of these recent events on the Philippine political scene, but it does offer an important background against which these events can be viewed more clearly and understood more fully. It seems safe to suggest that the university students and others are reacting to the inadequacies

and abuses which have abounded and proliferated in the political system as described here.

Briefly then relationships based on family ties and on debts of gratitude (patron-subordinate relationships) are among the strongest in Filipino society. Obligations arising from these relationships must be fulfilled in an individual, personalistic manner. The effect of such relationships on the political system has been that both the political leaders and the voters expect the leaders on all levels of government to use their power frequently for the benefit of individuals or small groups rather than for the common good.

PONAPEAN DEMOCRACY

The second democracy we shall examine is found on the island of Ponape in the Eastern Caroline Islands of the U. S. Trust Territory of the Pacific. Ponape is a fertile, mountainous island of 111 square miles with a population of about 13,000 people. The traditional socio-political system, which still functions on the island of Ponape, is centered in the five kingdoms of Madolenihmw, Uh, Kiti, Net and Sokehs (Riesenberg, 1968). Each of these five kingdoms has traditionally been governed by two rulers called the Nanmwarki and Nahnken. The Nanmwarki is the primary ruler of the kingdom and the Nahnken is his chief advisor and administrator. Below each of the two rulers in each of the five kingdoms there is a line of title-holders. The first twelve title-holders in both lines (including the titles of Nanmwarki and Nahnken themselves) constitute a privileged noble class. Those with lesser kingdom titles or with no kingdom titles constitute the commoner class.

The kingdoms are divided into a number of geographical areas known as sections (*kousapw*), which are ruled by section chiefs (*kaun*) appointed by the Nanmwarki. The section chief holds the first in a series of section titles and in this he resembles the Nanmwarki. The section itself is subdivided into farmsteads which are generally clusters of two or three houses whose inhabitants work the surrounding landholdings.

In the democratic political system introduced by the American administration there are six municipalities on Ponape, five of which are coextensive with the five traditional kingdoms. The sixth municipality was established a few years ago when the town of Kolonia, the base for the foreign administrations since early Spanish times, separated from the kingdom and municipality of Net. Each of the six municipalities has an elected Chief Magistrate as the highest executive official and an elected Council as the legislative body for the municipality. In addition to the Municipal Councils there are two other legislative bodies in the democratic system. The elected District Legislature has legislative authority over the entire Ponape District, which includes Ponape, Pingelap, Kusaie, Ngatik, Mokil, Nukuoro and Kapingamarangi. Finally, there is the Congress of Micronesia which meets annually in Saipan with members elected from all six districts of the Trust Territory.

The Chief executive official of the district is the District Administrator appointed by the High Commissioner of the Trust Territory. The High Commissioner in turn is appointed by the President of the U. S.

The following outline lists the executive and legislative positions on the various levels of the Ponapean democratic political system. The four asterisked positions are elected and the other two are appointed.

	<i>Executive Position</i>	<i>Legislative Position</i>
<i>Territorial level</i>	High Commissioner	*Micronesian Congressman
<i>District level</i>	District Administrator	*District Legislator
<i>Municipal level</i>	*Chief Magistrate	*Municipal Councilman

The traditional Ponapean political system extends only to the municipal or kingdom level. On this level the Chief Magistrate parallels the traditional Nanmwarki (Hughes, 1969b) and the Councilman parallels the section chief (Hughes, 1969c). There are no traditional Ponapean counterparts for the District Administrator, District Legislator, High Commissioner or Micronesian Congressman.

At present both the traditional and the elected leaders have significant power on Ponape (Hughes, 1970). The traditional leaders control the titles which are still essential to the prestige of a Ponapean, and they receive tribute at feasts and first fruit offerings. The people still seek their guidance and are strongly influenced by them. The elected leaders have authority over all affairs relating to the American administration such as taxes, roads, schools, hospitals, etc.

The structure of democracy on Ponape, just as that of the Philippines, is modeled directly on the democracy of the U. S. Here too the formal sanctions on the elected leaders are weak and the informal sanctions from the general social and ethical values play an important role. However, the result of such influence on Ponape is quite different than in the Philippines because the traditional social and ethical values are so different.

In some ways the patron-client relationship existed as strongly in the Ponapean traditional system as in the Philippines. People of the section were all linked with their section kaun, who was appointed by the Nanmwarki and Nahnken and given control of the land and the titles of the section. The people sought the favor of the section kaun by giving him gifts and by following his orders and he rewarded them with section titles. Both as individuals and in groups they were also bound to the Nanmwarki. They vied with each other for his favor mostly by gifts of tribute. The Nanmwarki responded by rewarding them with kingdom titles and grants of land. However, in the Ponapean system there was another element in the relationship of leaders and followers both on the section and the kingdom levels. That was the element of service for the common good on the part of the leaders and the followers. Special devotion and loyalty to the Nanmwarki were rewarded with prestigious titles, but so was service to the common good of the kingdom. While the Nanmwarki, Nahnken and section kauns were expected to give special rewards to those who were linked to them by positions of privilege or by special gifts of tribute, these leaders were also expected to treat all their followers equally in essential

matters and to be constantly concerned with the general welfare of the kingdom. Every person and every family in the section had a right to expect help from the section kaun in time of need. Traditionally the Nanmwarki was so sacred that he was isolated from the common people by a complex series of taboos. But everyone in the kingdom had a right to seek the aid of the Nahnken and through him that of the Nanmwarki. The Nanmwarki himself was supposed to love all the people as his own children and to work for the good of the kingdom as a whole.

The Ponapeans have transferred to the new elected leaders the expectations of working for the common good and of treating everyone equally but they have not transferred the counter expectation that the leaders should show favoritism in some ways. The result is that in contrast to Philippine society, Ponapean society offers strong informal sanctions on the elected leaders to work for the common good and to treat all citizens equally. Ponapeans make a far clearer distinction than do Filipinos between the various roles their leaders must play. Political obligations are kept more distinct from social obligations on Ponape than in the Philippines.

One reason why it has been possible to separate the political and the social roles of the elected leaders on Ponape and to drop the patron-client relationship between the people and the elected leaders is that commoners have replaced nobles to such a great extent in the elected offices (Hughes, 1969a: 41). A major factor in this development has been the ability of the commoners to attain an educational status equal to that of the nobles. In the Philippines from the time that formal education was first available in Spanish times, the principalia had a decided advantage. They were able to send their children to the very best schools at home and abroad. This has continued to be an advantage of the wealthy class and it has resulted in their being far more qualified for public office than the children of the poor. On Ponape during the Japanese administration a few traditional leaders were sent to Japan for higher education than the Ponapeans were generally afforded and this gave them an advantage even with the later American administration. However, the educational system established by the American administration was open to commoners and nobles alike. The quantity and the extent of this education was so much greater than that offered by the Japanese administration that the traditional leaders soon lost whatever advantage they had in this matter. At present a far greater number of commoners than nobles have received high school and college education simply because there are far more commoners. Since the Ponapeans put such a high premium on education as a requisite for public office, they are electing more commoners than nobles to public office and with so many commoners holding political positions they do not find it difficult to distinguish their political and their social roles.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The democratic political structure in the United States provides few formal sanctions on political leaders and government officials to work for the common

good. Nevertheless, by and large, the American system has been successful in producing political leaders and officials who do work for the common good. The question of how the American system produces such leaders despite the comparative lack of formal sanctions on their behavior is answered partially at least by the general social and ethical values operative in the society. These values stress the need for political leaders and government officials to put the common interest of the nation or the community above personal interests and to work for the common good with honesty, integrity and fairness.

The Republic of the Philippines has taken the structure of its democratic political system from the U. S., and like the U. S. has included few formal sanctions on its political leaders and officials to work for the common good. In this society, however, traditional and contemporary social and ethical values have not exerted the same pressure as in the American society for the political leaders to work for the common good. Rather there have been strong social pressures on these leaders to enact their roles largely on an individualistic, personalized basis favoring relatives and others with whom they have some personal ties. A long history stretching back to the pre-Spanish days of the barangay has entrenched such values in the contemporary social system. Wide-spread educational and economic opportunities have wrought changes in the fabric of Philippine society, but they have neither altered these basic values nor brought to power enough leaders from outside the social aristocracy to change the system. Consequently, the democratic structure of the Philippines has been absorbed into a larger social system stressing family ties and individual, dyadic relationships over the common good. It is little wonder then that in playing out their roles in the political drama Filipino political leaders and government officials have tended to place their own interests and the interests of those to whom they are obligated ahead of the common good.

The democratic structure of the contemporary political system on the island of Ponape is also based explicitly on the U. S. model, and here again there are few formal sanctions on political leaders to work for the common good. On Ponape, however, informal sanctions arising from the traditional social and ethical values are such that political leaders do in fact place the common good of the community before their personal interests and obligations. Two factors are offered to explain such an influence. First, the traditional Ponapean social system stressed a leader's (and follower's) obligation to work for common interests as well as for individual, personal interests. Second, a very rapid expansion of educational opportunities has resulted in more commoners than nobles being qualified for and elected to positions of political leadership. With commoners rather than nobles in most of the elected leadership positions the Ponapeans have had little difficulty in distinguishing between obligations arising from political and social roles.

In summary then, both the Ponapean and Philippine democratic systems have been structured on the U. S. model. This structure has fitted more easily into Ponapean society than into Philippine society because (1) the traditional Ponapean

society, which stresses the value of a leader's dedication to the common good as well as his fulfilling obligations arising from dyadic, patron-client relationships, lends more support to the democratic structure than does traditional Philippine society; and (2) the extent and the quality of educational opportunities have made it possible for Ponapeans to choose many democratic leaders who are not identified with the leadership of the traditional society. No matter what system is taken as a model, when a democratic structure is introduced into a society, that structure will have to be changed to fit the social system it is entering. While the U. S. structure has been adapted to Ponapean society with remarkably few alterations, it would seem that this structure will still have to undergo major revisions before it will fit as well in the Philippine setting.

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