

Foreword

Philippine Political Culture: View from Inside the Halls of Power engages us in the discourse on Philippine political culture. The narratives are from the (and reflections of politicians and their supporters. These voices are rare studies of Philippine political culture. In this pioneering work, we hear them speak, bringing with him/her through first-hand account the complexity of the Philippine grassroots political culture. Alongside the politician's narrative is a study of political culture grounded on research, incisive analysis and intuition. The result is an insightful work that offers a fresh understanding of Philippine culture.

The collection comprises three chapters. In the first chapter, political pundit Cristina Jayme Montiel presents theoretical and practical aspects of Philippine politics and governance at the turn of this millennium. She introduces political culture as a template that defines the Filipino's collective understanding and interpretation of political reality. Dr. Montiel also elaborates on the plurality of political culture as the outcome of the Philippines' social and power structures, interest-based movements, and colonial past. The chapter also includes a set of broad questions that may be pursued in future Philippine political culture studies.

Montiel goes on to discuss her own findings in a research on Philippine politics. Using in-depth interviews and focused group discussions as data-gathering tools, she examines the existing Filipino political culture of elections and governance. She describes the politician as embroiled in a campaign to power that does not end on election day, but goes on to govern one's life in the next three years. The politician is the master of language and culture, using social expectations such as *utang na loob*, *pakikisama* and *machismo* for one's own political gain. The public official likens the ordinary masses as participants in this political culture, as the social expectations are utilized to exact benefit and protection from the patron-politician. At the same time that the politician is portrayed as a cunning strategist, the study also portrays the politician as vulnerable to pressure that comes from all fronts. The politician feels tense, burdened, frustrated and disappointed. Montiel shows us the politician that is all too human. Finally, she discusses new progressive political culture as an alternative to the prevalent political culture.

The second chapter is written by Lutgardo B. Barbo, three-term Governor of Samar, and Secretary of the Senate during the impeachment proceedings against Former President Joseph Estrada. Barbo draws on his rich political experience to portray his observations on the extent and deep-rootedness of corruption in national and local governments. One cannot help but be amazed by the individuals engaged in anomaly: the establishment of a network within government institutions, the inventiveness of the contractor in bagging projects, the audacity of low-level bureaucrats. However, the problem of corruption does not lie on individuals, but stems from the institutionalization and cultural acceptance of corrupt practice in government itself. Thus when we speak of corruption, we speak of corruption that has invaded institutions like the Department of Public

Highways (DPWH) and the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR). Systemic corruption is also the reason why it is so hard for the well-meaning politician to institute reforms, as exemplified by the author losing his bid for a congressional seat in the 1998 elections.

In the third chapter, Nereus Acosta, House Representative from Bukidnon (as of this writing), discusses Philippine political culture from the point of view of an alternative politician who has experienced the rough-and-tumble of politics. Written in a light hand and with mild irony, Acosta dispenses important advice on how to survive Philippine politics, but also on how to transform and reform it. A key, Acosta argues, is to have decorum, good taste, keen judgment, and knowledge of self. The significance of this narrative lies in bringing to light the complexity of Philippine political culture. To be an alternative politician does not mean withdrawing from the reality that is political culture, but rather it means immersing oneself willingly in this reality so that change may be wrought from within. The politician uses political culture as a backdrop to the path to be charted toward reform. Instead of offering a clear and distinct array of choices, politics entails balancing a manifold, and oftentimes contending, views and interests of different stakeholders.

My own reflection on Philippine political institutions and culture is that the underlying deep problem is in the lack of fit between political institutions and dynamics that are from the West, mainly the United States, and the underlying Philippine culture, which comes from a very personalistic and clan-oriented culture. The essays in this volume are a tremendous help in understanding, on the one hand, the dysfunctional areas in the lives and practice of politicians and public officials and, on the other hand, the efforts of individual politicians to bring about renewal and reform. But the path to transformation may not only be through the efforts of individual politicians to create a new politics. It may lie in creating institutions and reforming those that will create a better fit between the overt political institutions and the underlying culture. An example I have often cited is our judicial and legal system. I believe that a lot of its dysfunctions lie not only in the personal values of lawyers and judges but in the lack of fit between a judicial and legal system that follows the adversarial system of the United States, and our underlying management culture which is uncomfortable with confrontation. A major reform is under way through what was initially an experiment called "Alternative Dispute Resolution." This experiment sought to settle disputes through mediated compromise agreements, rather than through adversarial court proceedings. The results have been very encouraging. So much so that the Philippine Judicial Branch is now in the process of accrediting the "Philippine Mediation Foundation" to institutionalize mediation as a major alternative available to the judiciary to settle disputes in the country.

It is clear from Congressman Nereus Acosta's essay that, in a country with a population concerned with basic survival, it may be a mistake to see the basic necessities as dole-outs and thus to be eschewed by alternative politics. The question may then be whether we can create institutional reform that will allow a Congressman or Governor to respond to their basic needs without this being seen as a pork barrel, or worse having to depend on jueteng proceeds. As I read this, I found myself asking many questions like this.

It is clear that change in our political culture will only come slowly. It will require gradual re-education of Filipinos across classes and practical support for political practitioners. It will also require transforming our political institutions so they fit better the realities of our culture and our people's needs. *Filipino Culture: View from Inside the Halls of Power* shows us the tensions between officials' values and ideals and the realities on the ground, between mandates of our political institutions and realpolitik. It thus provides analysis, reflection and experience to help us take important steps towards reform and renewal for which we all aspire. For helping us take these first steps, we are deeply grateful to our authors.

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