

# Indigenous Wisdom, Local Knowledge, and Social Development

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A popular Filipino adage warns that “Those who do not look back at their origins will not arrive at their destinations.” This admonition speaks louder in a globalized world of distracting possibilities. It reminds us to keep our bearings by acknowledging those who have contributed to our personal and social development. We are profoundly indebted to our generous forebears and kindred who enabled us to flourish and mature as responsible human beings.

Our life-communities, however, intersect with unfamiliar worldviews that question our received traditions and ways of being. Philosophical reflection is evoked by these intersections and leads us to evaluate our shared humanity and compare our differences. The similarities ennoble our local values and the differences broaden our horizons of

meaning and even yield insights that can be adjusted and become useful to our own circumstances.

The first article in this issue, Gail Presbey's "Harmonious Relations with others and the Insights of Indigenous Philosophy: Bukusu and Amazonian Perspectives," describes the highly developed philosophy of intersubjectivity among the indigenous populations of Africa and Latin America. By practicing "unrestricted generosity," the Amuesa community of Peru was able to distinguish leaders who merely take advantage of their constituencies from those who can be relied upon to care for their people. When their colonizers gave them tools and textiles, for example, the Amuesa reciprocated by trading with their perceived enemies until they became friends. Likewise, the Bukusu sages of Kenya discriminated outsiders who were merely motivated "by the stomach," or self-gain, in contrast with those who share their resources judiciously. According to them, rifts between people are due to deception and misinformation and these can be overcome by listening and seeking the truth. One of their sages counseled that the key to a harmonious society is to "level the tongue."

Once the tongues are leveled, they live in harmony and peace with each other as they are now amenable to listen to peace and counseling.

The second article, Daniel Chen Ratilla's "A Tale of Two Walls: A Comparison of the Green Wall Project in Inner Mongolia and the Sahelo-Saharan Region," shows the efficacy

of decentralized and community-centered management systems even in handling large-scale projects, such as their intercontinental attempt to fight desertification. The participation of local communities allowed them to attend to the needs of the terrain and to cultivate endemic plants that provide short and medium term incomes while they tend to the majestic trees that will take a while to yield benefits. Ratilla compares the success of African community-based forest management to the difficulties encountered by the Chinese government in controlling desertification in Inner Mongolia in spite of the latter's tremendous resources and large-scale government support. The problem lies in their top-down management style, in contrast to the bottom-up approaches applied in the African Sahelo-Saharan region.

The third article, Aurelio Agcaoili's "*Sanut, Wayamaya, and Naimbag a Biag* in Ilokano Philosophy," exposes the social problems in the Ilokos region, where sophisticated philosophical resources are evident in spite of feudal social systems that breed anomie among the poor and marginalized sectors of Ilokano society. Agcaoili challenges Ilokanos to actively pursue their aspirations for the good life, freedom, and the formation of their own character by overcoming their passivity, parochial concerns, and dynastic politics. This coupling of profound philosophical insights with abysmal social contexts is prevalent in the global south and deserves further investigation.

Our book reviewers suggest that we emancipate ourselves from our traumatic colonial and imperial experiences. Michael Charleston “Xiao” Chua’s review of Caroline Hau’s *Interpreting Rizal* reminds us that the questions we pose are more significant in exposing our own concerns than the answers generated by our queries. That the flipside of the book about Friar Damaso is on Rizal’s dialogue with his Japanese colleague is indicative of our shifting identification from our hispanic heritage towards our fascination with the Japanese hegemon.

John Paul Manzanilla, our second reviewer, reminds us of the American imperial project of encasing our cultural life to their museums. But awareness of such objectification awakens the imperial subject of the depth of her psyche “and redirects us towards an alternative form of community and nation-building.” Manzanilla concludes that Sarita Echavez See, author of *The Filipino Primitive: Accumulation and Resistance in the American Museum*, “shows how creative acts of responding to continuing imperial violence are generative of redemptive kinds of knowledge . . .”

Our Research Notes, a speech delivered by Felice P. Sta. Maria for the *Bulacan Indigenous Festival* on November 15, 2018 and Zenaida Hamada-Pawid’s Report on the current status of Indigenous Philippine Communities, offer two ways of enhancing our indigenous wisdom towards social development: the first is to identify and cultivate the indigenous person in each one of us and the second is to

support institutional mechanisms that include, promote, and develop our indigenous identities. These personal and collective aspirations can be achieved, according to Professor Agcaoili, by finding their meaning in “engaged human action.” That there are political and economic obstacles to these efforts should all the more inspire us to vigorously strive towards our own emancipation.