

THE CONTACT HISTORY OF MINDANAO AND SULU

The state of scholarship on Mindanao and Sulu is eloquently described in the modest volume put out by Professor Alfredo T. Tiamson in 1970, which is an annotated bibliography of the works written on the said region. However, the book has not remained static in the sense that two subsequent parts of it are now in preparation by the author, the first of which I had the privilege to read and prepare a brief introduction.

A cursory examination of these volumes would reveal that the pre- and proto-historic periods of Mindanao and Sulu have not been given enough attention by scholars. Certainly, the work done by archaeologists from San Carlos, Xavier, Silliman, as well as Pittsburgh and Hawaii universities do indicate a growing interest in this particular period. However, much of the written materials so far produced, as they appear in Prof. Tiamson's list, are concentrated on the Islamic, Spanish and American periods. The pre-Muslim period, more specifically the period of "Indianization," is limited to the work of only one author. The "Chinese period" — which is not really a particular period, since it rami-fies into all the other periods, from the Muslim period through the present — has had very important students in the persons of Dr. Antonio Tan and Dr. Samuel K. Tan.

But the biggest body of works in Mindanao and Sulu is on the field of ethnography, and these works range from the pure dilettante to the professionally anthropological. These could also be seen in the listings made by Professor Tiamson.

The scope of my present notes, however, shall be limited to the pre-Muslim period. I shall confine myself to the Chinese, on the basis of existing works and studies, and to the Indian on the basis of my work

in the past and subsequent studies.

Contact as seen through Archaeology

Perhaps the most exciting evidence of Indian contact seen through archaeology is the Golden Image of Agusan. The late Professor H. Otley Beyer, in 1921 identified it as the statue of a Sivaite goddess belonging to the Majapahit Javanese period : He wrote that "the image . . . fits well with the name Butuan" (signifying 'phallus'), because the image represents an aspect of Siva which is the *linga* and which denotes 'phallus' (see Beyer, 1947a:301). I have challenged this identification (Francisco, 1971) with the suggestion that the image represents the female bodhisattva, which belongs to the Buddhist cult during the Majapahit period.

Professor Beyer (1947a:302) further referred to a number of bronze Sivaite and Buddhist images, found by the early Jesuit Fathers among the Mandayas in eastern Mindanao, as evidences of an Indian contact, certainly through the Javanese or Malay. However, no actual artifacts have been seen, and therefore we may leave this problem in the realm of speculation, except, of course, for the golden image of Agusan, which is now in the Gold Room of the Chicago Museum of Natural History.

The most well-known evidences of Chinese contact with the Philippines, in general (and in particular with Mindanao and Sulu), is porcelain ware. In discussing the trade between southern Philippines and China, Dr. Hubert Reynolds (1967:473-479) referred to the very extensive volume of porcelain ware that may have come with the trade China brought to the southern islands. Professor Beyer (*loc. cit.*) referred to great numbers of porcelain finds throughout Mindanao and Sulu, ranging from the earliest Chinese ware, i.e., Tang, to the Ming ware. However, these were primarily trade wares rather than the more important types, namely the imperial ware (Fox, 1959:364).

The most recent systematic archaeological study of Mindanao and Sulu was conducted by Professor Alexander Spoehr in 1967 and 1969 (1973:95-101). Of his excavations of Fort Pilar in Zamboanga, Professor Spoehr wrote that "the amount of Chinese trade pottery found . . . indicates a greater external trade than documentary sources suggest . . . ,

and by the middle of the nineteenth century a small Chinese community had become established in the town" (1973:96).

The interior of the Zamboanga peninsula is settled by the Subanon, an ethnic group that has remained apart from the Muslim as well as from the Christian majorities in the area. In excavating part of this settlement, Spoehr recovered a collection of Chinese (Siamese and Annamese) trade ceramics, "of fourteenth or early fifteenth century date . . . The earliest evidence for Subanon involvement in Asiatic trade is no older than the fourteenth century. However, there is no evidence that the Subanon of this region directly engaged in trade with Chinese . . . traders" (1973:97). It is evident, though, that the Subanon engaged in trade with the Zamboanga and Sulu peoples through the intermediary of the Samals, who have a tradition of pottery making. In spite of this tradition, however, the Samals still engaged in trading other types of merchandise, Chinese porcelain ware not excluded.

Of the Tausog contact beyond Jolo or the Sulu Archipelago, Spoehr wrote of his excavations in five *kutah*'s in Parang: "the artifact content of the five cottas reflects through time an increasing measure of external trade. At the earliest cotta, trade ceramics are of Chinese manufacture" (1973:93). He further writes:

Bud Datu is a volcanic hill two kilometers south of the town of Jolo. The hill has very steep sides and traditionally was a place of refuge during hostilities . . . A surface survey of Bud Datu was undertaken to gain knowledge of the duration of its occupancy through the collection of trade ceramics. The earlier of these are Southern Sun(g) celadons of the late twelfth century to early thirteenth century. These extend the archaeological record on Sulu external trade, although it no doubt began several centuries earlier (1973:98).

It is most interesting to note with Spoehr that "the artifact inventory is a measure of the sophisticated taste of the Tausog . . . and their participation as consumers in the external trade of Jolo" (Ibid).

Contact as seen through Language and Literature

As I am not familiar with Chinese and Arabic, two of the major languages that have provided the most important contact with Mindanao and Sulu, I use Sanskrit for the main paradigm of contact in this paper. My works on this subject are sufficiently well known to be cited here in extenso. But for the purpose of these essay, it may be worthwhile to summarize them.

A number of Sanskrit terminology had penetrated into the languages of Mindanao and Sulu, notably in Maguindanao, the Maranao and the Tausog. Most of these terms are socio-religious, some political. The linguistic contact, historical in all its ramifications, provided a great occasion for the people to enrich their concepts and thoughts. The Tausog, Maguindanao and Maranao, the three main ethnic groups in the Mindanao-Sulu regions, use terms for heaven and hell which are recognizably Sanskrit in origin. It is quite possible that these two are not the only terms from the Sanskrit, but at the moment the others are not immediately citable.

The contact provided through literature — secular or religious — is equally important in discussing this contact with the Indian tradition. However, most aspects of literary contact are not discernible, because they seem primarily to be echoes of Indian literary greatness, remembered from a distant and mystical past. Somehow, it is easy to argue that these elements may be fortuitous parallel developments, considering that peoples, living in various regions of the world with masses of water and land between them, tend to develop independently concepts that are significantly similar.

Most spectacular of the literature contact is the existence in the Philippines of a version of the most important epic of India. This version is the *Maharadia Lawana*, a miniature of the Indian *Ramayana* found among the Maranao. I have discussed this very extensively in the *Maharadia Lawana* (1969), in which I presented a history of the piece. One thing that needs to be emphasized, however, is that the piece has been orally transmitted, and that, in the process, it has suffered miniaturization, interpolation and perhaps even mutilation, as indicated in its present form. However, despite its transformation, we have in this piece a very important evidence arguing that there was indeed contact, if an

indirect one, between Mindanao and Sulu and India.

It is difficult at this stage of the work done on the Indian overlay in Philippine culture to pinpoint specifically ethnographic evidences of contact. The difficulty lies in the capacity of Philippine societies to absorb, leaving no traces of its origins, any foreign element that enters into the milieu. To cite two instances: In the *Tuwaang*, the folk epic of the Bagobos in Central Mindanao (E. Arsenio Manuel, 1985), the following lines occur:

Immediately, the maiden spoke
 And this is what she said,
 "Aru, where shall I sit?
 For custom sayeth that the place
 Is the right side of a gallant
 And that the left side of a hero
 Will cause misery to anyone
 Ill luck to whoever sits there." (Lines 248-277)

Tuwaang spoke:

"Even if there were thousands
 And hundreds more
 Supposed to be my sisters
 I never would like to receive them
 On my left side
 But always on the side at my right."
 Immediately she sat down
 On the right side
 Looking like
 A sitting white heron. (Lines 269-277)

Regarding these lines, Dr. Arsenio Manuel has made the following significant footnote (No. 34):

This is an indication of love or high regard for a relation or a visitor. In Bagobo society whenever the host allows the guests to sit on the left side, the esteem is considered less.

At this point, let me proceed with this discussion by quoting extensively from my own work (*The Philippines and India*, 1971:113-114):

This reference to the left and right positions of persons in terms of their relations with people of high station seems to echo an Indian concept: the right side is associated with holiness, exaltation, and good omen. The right hand extended to bless, particularly by a holy man, is taken to impart holiness. At worship the Hindu walks around the deity's images, with his right-hand side next to the object of worship, the hand extended to touch the image as a sign of reverence and respect for the deity. Similarly, the newly-weds circumambulate the image with their right side next to it as part of the ceremony. The elders are also circumambulated by the young to show their reverence to them. To do so with the left side next to them would be the height of irreverence and disrespect.

The right side of a *maharaja* or a *rajendra* is an exalted place to stand or sit on when he is around. That is why in India, during occasional audiences given by a monarch, the minister's rank is immediately seen from the side he sits on and his distance from the monarch.

A good omen among orthodox Indians occurs on the right side of the body: the twitching of the right eye, the right arm, or the right leg . . . [However the twitching of] the left eye, the left arm, or the left leg [is considered] a bad omen. Correct breathing, particularly during an important ceremony, is effected through the right nostril.

In South India, according to the literature which found its way into Old Funan (now Cambodian) society, there is a vestige of the so-called left and right castes. K.A. Nili kantha Sastri discusses this kind of caste system . . . He writes in part about the "distinction between what are known as right and left hand castes, one of the most permanent divisions of South Indian Society which was well known among the officials of Funan.

However, to return to the Tuwaang:

The maiden heard this
 And she said to herself,
 "I believe it so
 That he comes from Kuaman
 Because as you look at him [Line 930]
 He is possessed with the power from *Anitu*
 Imbued with virtue from the *diwata*
 For one cannot gaze at
 The middle of his forehead.

In a footnote (No. 96) to the the line cited, Manuel wrote: "This is due to the radiating light emanating from the forehead of Tuwaang . . ." Compare this radiating light with the eye of Siva in Hindu mythology. According to the myth, this third eye is difficult to gaze at because it shatters one to smithereens when one is subjected to its power, i.e., the rendering of Kama, the Hindu Cupid, bodiless for disturbing the penance of the god in answer to the pleadings to Parvati to help her implore the god to refrain from his penance, but instead perform his duties as lover.

In interpreting the lines quoted, as I did in the work cited above, I proceeded in a very speculative manner. With the same cautious tread, therefore, I would argue that there certainly had been contact between the Philippines and India.

Mindanao and Sulu Contact History in the Perspective of National Life

Perhaps the Philippines' richest experience in her long history of national development can be examined in the context of Mindanao and Sulu's contact with cultures beyond the seas. While the northern part of the country has had intermittent culture contact with traditions of equal importance, Mindanao and Sulu had experienced cultural encounters in a more or less continuous downpour, to use the analogy of the rainfall, the most important aspect of the Philippines' climatological situation. The most significant of that contact, after the Indian and Chi-

nese traditions, is with the Arab, which persisted to this century, and is certain to last for many more centuries. This contact has provided one of the most stable socio-cultural foundations of Philippine society. While India and China certainly played an equally important role in the building of this foundation, their lasting effects is not quite clear in the Philippine cultural matrix.

While Islam could not be divorced from the general Arab context as the most important evidence of contact, it did reach the Philippines solely under conditions which were certainly ripe for its implantation in Philippine soil. There are many theories regarding the coming of Islam in the Philippines, but what is important, particularly to the process of contact is that it did come and become a major factor in our national life, culture and history.

When we talk of Philippine history and culture, it is inevitable to mention that our pre-hispanic past should constitute the most important segment of that history and culture. Inevitably also, our contact history played a singularly important role in shaping the whole cultural and social perspective of the contemporary Filipino. It is furthermore inevitable that our heritage acquired through these contacts had contributed to the present Filipino's style and mode of life.

I do not intend to write a conclusion to this brief essay, for they are just few of my thoughts about the subject. However, in place of a concluding remark, I would like to indulge in some flight of fancy, if I may be permitted.

From the notes above, I would like to draw at least two implications which to mind have very significant relevance to our cultural experience as a nation. The first implication of these ancient contact with the great traditions is that they have further enriched the already rich cultural life of our people. For example, the Philippine languages, which were already rich as they were, felt the full impact of contact with other languages of the region as well as the languages of the great traditions. New concepts and new meanings did not just add to the existing ones, but the borrowings from these languages even expanded to conceptual horizons of the Filipino mind. To cite just two examples, the concept of heaven and hell in Islam, as it developed in Mindanao and Sulu, has certainly its early beginnings in Insular and Peninsula Southeast Asia, and goes further back in time to its Indian

developments. These two terms are the Maguindanao, Maranao and Tausog *sorga* (Sanskrit *svarga*, "heaven," also Malay and Javanese *sorga*) and the Maguindanao, Maranao and Tausog *naraka* (Sanskrit, also Malay and Javanese), meaning "hell." These two terms, while they may be Sanskrit in origin, certainly have Islamic meanings, yet have Javanese (Indonesian) and Malay orientations.

Side by side with the language contact, the literary was an inevitable phenomenon. This manifested in many dimensions like motif index, translations, re-narrations, etc. In examining the whole picture of Philippine oral traditions, one would note a very important relation with those of Southeast Asia. But perhaps it is not foolhardy to argue that in the *kunst literature* of Mindanao and Sulu, we find the *Ramayana*, the Indian epic, in its extremely condensed form. The work being done on the Maranao *Darangen* as well as on the Maguindanao *Radia Indarapatra* may yet reveal evidences of contacts with the literatures of India through Malaya and Indonesia. It may not be superfluous to speculate that the epic of the Subanons also would show such contact. On examination of the oral folk traditions of the Tausog, as they are made available in *Sulu Studies*, we are shown that there are indeed motif indices which bring us to regions in Java and Malaya, whose oral and written literatures reveal such motif indices as the swan maiden and life index motifs, to name a few but most popular motifs in Indian and Southeast Asian literary traditions.

In art, perhaps the most extensive design that certainly makes the contact inevitable to note is the *naga* design. It is one design in art that cuts through socio-religious and cultural barriers. In a paper "The Naga Design in Southeast Asian Art," I described in detail its origin, relations and symbolic meaning in the cultures that have it. With particular relevance to the Philippines, I wrote of it in part, as follows:

In the Philippines, the *sari-manok* has often been equated with the *naga* motif. This may be due to the relatively very close resemblance between the two designs. It is interesting to note that the *sari-manok* approved by the Heraldry Commission of the Philippines certainly does not have the resemblance of the *sari-manok* as known by the Maranaos . . . It is indeed a highly stylized *naga*-motif . . . One of the main

reasons for the identification of one with the other . . . is that oftentimes the stylization of the *sari-manok* beak, comb and tail resembles very closely the *naga* form, either in the simple or stylized design.

To the Maranao, the *sari-manok*, as a mythological bird symbolizes wealth, power and prestige. The primary colors used in painting the object reveals the Maranao's volcanic temper; elaborate *naga*-like lines exhibit his tendency to ostentatious display, and the abstract lines bring him closer to his God. As a national art object, it is valued both for its aesthetic qualities and its cultural significance.

In a review of Galo Ocampo's "Three Periods of Philippine Art," I had the occasion to give some extensive comments on the color plate he included in his paper. This is captioned, "Sari-Manok - A Lanao Design." I wrote in part:

This decorative design has characteristics which manifest similarity with or perhaps are reminiscent of the *kalamakara* ornament in temple architecture of ancient Java . . . Perhaps the design is an abstract representation of the ornament, as it had tended to become in the Javanese Art. Dr. Stutterheim wrote of this ornament: "It should not be forgotten that the *kalamakara* was no longer a symbol but had become an ornamental motif which, so long as there was no other motive to take its place, it retained a permanent place in architecture owing to the fact that it was eminently suited to surround niches and gateways." . . . Only a further research on the history and evolution of this Lanao decorative design will show us the real purpose of the ornament. It may not be hazardous to postulate that we might even be able to connect it with the *kalamakara* (*kirtti mukha*) motifs of India, via the Javanese designs and that the purpose of such design, before it became abstracted from the objective representations of the mythical animals, may have followed the same lines of development as the Javanese.

Over the past years, the *sari-manok* has some-

how been understood in the context of its own cultural milieu rather than its impressionistic manifestations. The role that the present Filipino Muslims are now playing have brought them into the front of studies thereby bringing out the best of their culture, one of which is the *sari-manok*, stylized on *naga*-like designs and lines forming the basic factor of understanding the Maranao, (Francisco, 1974).

The second implication that I wish to suggest in this essay is the meaning of contact in inter-ethnic relations and its ramifications vis-a-vis cultural experience. This is exemplified by Spoehr's interpretation (1973) of ethnic diversity in Zamboanga and Sulu. He wrote:

. . . the utilization of complementary resource zones and a modest development of craft specialization by the ethnic groups of southern Zamboanga and Sulu formed a basis for internal trade and ethnic group interaction. Included is the exchange of protein from the sea for the agricultural products from the land . . .

. . . Th external trade has been of equal if not greater significance in establishing the character of ethnic group relations in this region. Historically, the status of one ethnic group vis-a-vis another seems to be clearly linked to relative access to external trade. Tausog political authority in Sulu was certainly related to their control through the Sultanate of foreign trade with other parts of Southeast Asia, China . . . [India?] In the Zamboanga Peninsula, the Samal, as middlemen between the source of external trade and the Subanun, were the dominant partner in Samal-Subanon relations . . . (Spoehr, 1973:100).

Trade indeed played a very important role in those contacts, which ramified in many cultural dimensions. It is probable that the presence of other evidences of contact may be explained in terms of the trade that existed between peoples from time immemorial. And trade further explains so much of what we wish to understand in terms of culture and history. It is therefore not ill-considered to advance the

theory that initially cultural contacts between peoples had their early beginnings in the trade and traffic that they engaged in to effect a stable economy.

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