



東南亞研究中心
Southeast Asia Research Centre

COLLEGE OF
**LIBERAL ARTS AND
SOCIAL SCIENCES**

PENG Hui

**The “Moro Problem” in the Philippines:
Three Perspectives**

Working Paper Series

**No. 132
*December 2012***



香港城市大學
City University
of Hong Kong

The Southeast Asia Research Centre (SEARC) of the City University of Hong Kong publishes SEARC Working Papers Series electronically

© Copyright is held by the author or authors each Working Paper.

SEARC Working Papers cannot be republished, reprinted, or reproduced in any format without the permission of the papers author or authors.

Note: The views expressed in each paper are those of the author or authors of the paper. They do not represent the views of the Southeast Asia Research Centre, its Management Committee, or the City University of Hong Kong.

Southeast Asia Research Centre Management Committee

Professor Mark R. Thompson, Director
Dr Kyaw Yin Hlaing, Associate Director
Dr Chiara Formichi
Dr Nicholas Thomas
Dr Bill Taylor

Editor of the SEARC Working Paper Series

Professor Mark R. Thompson

Southeast Asia Research Centre

The City University of Hong Kong
83 Tat Chee Avenue
Kowloon Tong, Hong Kong SAR
Tel: (852) 3442 6330
Fax: (852) 3442 0103
<http://www.cityu.edu.hk/searc>

The “Moro Problem” in the Philippines: Three Perspectives

Peng Hui

Peng Hui is a visiting fellow in Southeast Asia Research Centre of City University of Hong Kong. She completed her doctoral dissertation at Xiamen University and teaches in Central China Normal University. Her academic interests include ethnic groups and their relationships between government and society in Southeast Asia, especially in the Philippines. She has published several articles about the Moro people (Philippine Muslims) and their separatist movement. Her current research is about Moro self image and their anti-government movement.

Abstract:

The “Moro problem” involves Muslim separatism and violent conflict in the southern Philippines. Philippine Muslims, known as Moros, have been considered “trouble makers” in Mindanao by a succession of Philippine governments. The historical roots of the Moro problem can be traced back to the Spanish colonial period. In Dr. Peng Hui’s paper, she discusses this problem from three perspectives: modernization vs. marginalization, the prototypical Moro image and the link between the clientelist political system and Muslim clan system. She argues that the Moro problem is probably the most important domestic issue facing the Philippine government and that the collision between northern-dominated electoral politics and southern tribal politics will continue for a long time to come.

Key words:

Moro Problem; Marginalization; Moro Image; Clan System

The “Moro Problem” in the Philippines: Three Perspectives

Peng Hui

What is the “Moro problem”?

The “Moro problem” involves a Muslim separatist movement and violent conflict in the southern Philippines. Philippine Muslims, known as Moros, have been considered “trouble makers” by a succession of Philippine governments. Most Moro people settled in Sulu, Mindanao and Palawan islands. They are not an ethnic group; they belong to 13 tribes and clans including the Tausug, Maranao, Maguidanao, and others, with different languages and cultures.¹ Around 1380, they accepted Islam, but still retained some distinctive tribal characteristics (Saleeby 1908). They tended to see themselves quite different from northern Filipinos who converted to Catholicism under Spanish colonial rule and depended on self-reliance to solve problems.

The “problem” with the Moros began in the 16th century when Spain began intruding into the southern Philippines. Until 1898, when the Philippines came under United States colonial rule following Spain’s defeat in the Spanish-American War, Spain

¹ These groups include: the Kalagans in Davao provinces, the Sanguils of South Cotabato and Davao del Sur, the Maguindanaons of the Cotabato provinces, the Iranuns of the coastal areas of Cotabato, Lanao del Sur and Zamboanga del Sur provinces, the Maranaos of the Lanao provinces, the Kolibugans of the Zamboanga provinces, the Yakans of Basilan provinces, the Tausugs, Samas and Badjaos in the Sulu Archipelago, Zamboanga, South Palawan and Davao, the Jama Mapung of Cagayan de Sulu and south Palawan, and the Palawanons and Molbogs of Southern Palawan. See Macapado Abaton Muslim, *The Moro Armed Struggle in the Philippines: the Nonviolent Autonomy Alternative*, a Dissertation submitted to the graduate division of the University of the Hawaii in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Political Science, December 1990, pp.61-62.

and the Moros engaged in nearly continuous warfare. Although it seldom escalated to a full-scale war, the 300-year Moro armed conflict had a profound effect on the development of Muslim areas and the Moros' interaction with northern Filipinos. The long-lasting conflict greatly hindered the economic and social development of the Muslim region. The once flourishing trade in the Sulu Sea was often interrupted by war, while ports on the west coast were turned into military bases. Sultanates of different tribes were busy preparing for wars and economic ties were weakened. A unified market in the region failed to form (Muslim, 1994).

By contrast, Spanish rule brought capitalism to the north and central areas of the Philippines. Transportation, infrastructure and educational facilities were developed and established. When the United States took over the Philippines, the plantation-based commercial capitalism began in north and central areas (Skowronek, 1998).

Unlike the Spanish, the U.S. colonial rulers used a so-called "attraction" policy on the Moro people (Glazer, 1941). Then U.S. President William McKinley said, in order to "attract" Muslim people, their policy should be to develop, educate and train them so that they could achieve self-rule (Gowing, 1977). Specifically, the Americans hoped the progress and prosperity brought about by social, political, economic and cultural "Americanization" in the northern Philippines could have some impact on the southern Moro people too, so that they themselves could take the initiative to integrate with the northern civilization. In order to speed up the process of integration of the south, the Americans took a series of reforms in political, economic, cultural and educational aspects. Politically, many northern Filipinos officers were appointed in the southern government.³ Economically, to exploit southern resources, a lot of northern Catholics were encouraged to move to the south. At the same time, the U.S. issued a number of Land Acts to distribute the land to private companies, while ignoring the common Moro

3

land laws. A lot of land were confiscated and lent to Catholic immigrants (Muslim, 1994).⁶ Culturally, the U.S. implemented Western education systems to cultivate the sense of intimacy of the Muslim youth with Western culture (Glazer, 1941).

However, the Moro people saw America's "attraction" policy as similar to Spain's colonial rule, which would not bring any real benefit to them (Muslim, 1994). So from the start, they struggled against American rule. Between 1903 and 1913, the U.S. military launched pacification campaigns to put down Muslim uprisings (Gowing, 1977). The transformation of the south caused great impact on Moro people psychologically. The elections of government posts, legal systems and judicial operations all operated in accordance with the principles of the northern Catholic areas. The departments of local affairs were almost dominated by Catholic officials. Muslim elites suddenly lost power. They were quite disappointed and thus, actively looked for the opportunity to change the situation (Glazer, 1941). At the same time, Muslims were not easily "Filipinized." Most of them stuck to their original religious beliefs and customs. They generally resisted the government-run schools and hated northern Catholics and Americans for grabbing their lands (Glazer, 1941). Although the Americans occupied southern Muslim areas, their southern policies could hardly be called successful. Except for politically being part of the Philippines, the two areas stuck to their own culture. Northern Catholic people thought Moros were undeveloped barbarians. While Muslim people felt being exploited by the northern people and did not get any benefit from this country.

The situation continued until the United States granted independence in 1946. The Philippine government carried out similar southern policies as the Americans. Eventually,

⁶ According to Macapado Abaton Muslim, there were five capitalist land laws issued by the U.S. from 1902 to 1907 concerning Moro peoples' land. See Macapado Abaton Muslim, *The Moro Armed Struggle in the Philippines: the Nonviolent Autonomy Alternative*, a Dissertation submitted to the graduate division of the University of the Hawaii in the Partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Political Science, December 1990.pp.93-96.

the Moro problem escalated to a separatist movement and became the most important civil problem in the Philippines. The following article would explain this problem from three perspectives.

II. First Perspective: Modernization vs. Marginalization

The First Stage from 1946-1965

In the post-war development of the Philippines, the southern Muslim areas were given great importance by the government. With rich resources and vast lands, coupled with the government arrangement, the southern provinces became an important destination for foreign direct investment. The United States and Japan began to invest in Mindanao during the colonial period. Shortly after the independence of the Philippines, they quickly returned to the area and invested in mining, wood processing, banana plantations and other industries. Other foreign companies quickly followed. In the late 1960s, land used by foreign-funded enterprises in Mindanao reached 2,170,435 hectares (Tan, 1995). Processing industries in the southern provinces became a major source of state tax revenue. However, the biggest beneficiaries of the export-oriented economic development of the southern provinces were foreign companies and the national government in Manila. Except for elites, the Moro people remained poor. More than 80% of the Moro people in Mindanao still lived in the countryside, engaging in traditional industries such as fisheries, farming and other small business (Tan, 1995).

Why did the prosperous export-oriented economy not benefit ordinary Moro people? First, foreigners controlled most large enterprises. These companies focused on overseas markets and not the interest of the local community. Second, foreign companies expropriated a large number of forests, land, and waters owned by the Moro people. The Moro people had no choice but to stick to the original way of life. Due to the loss of resources, their living standards declined. Some were forced to participate in illegal

logging activities and piracy. Third, after independence, a large number of northern Catholics moved to the southern provinces. Most of the multinational corporations preferred to hire these educated people. Muslims only counted a small percentage of employees. A survey by University of the Philippines and Mindanao University in 1972 showed that in a 5,000-employee plant, there were only 200 Muslims, accounting for 4.06% of the total number of workers (Jiang, 1999). In short, the Moro people did not benefit from the modernization and gradually became marginalized economically.

What about the other two aspects of modernization, politics and culture? Politically, in the context of cultural groups opposing each other, post-war Philippine policies in southern provinces were targeted at national integration. Culturally, the government required ideological and religious harmony. To this end, the government of the Philippines followed the colonial policy of “assimilation,” and introduced the “integration policy” in an attempt to weaken and even obliterate the cultural characteristics of the Moro people. In 1954, the Philippine Senate set up a special committee to study the Moro problem and issued an investigation report. According to the report, the key to the Moro problem was that the Muslims have no sense of belonging to the country (Majul, 1985). To resolve it, the government set up the Commission on National Integration, and promulgated Decree No. 1888 in 1957 to “foster, accelerate and accomplish by all means in a systematic, rapid and complete manner the moral, material, economic, social and political advancement of the non-Christian Filipinos, hereinafter called National Cultural Minorities into the body politic”.⁷

The integration policy actually can be divided into two aspects: first, speeding up the immigration of northern Catholics to the south so as to promote the integration of southern parts; second, instilling Western culture and Catholicism over Muslims to win

⁷ Republic Act 1888 full text in Romulo B. Lumaig, *Laws Affecting the National Cultural Minorities of the Philippines*, (Manila:n.p.,1968), pp.6-13.

over upper classes to change their “barbaric” and “backward” condition. In the first aspect of the integration policy, Catholic immigration caused a decline in the proportion of Moro people to the total southern population. By the 1980s, the Muslim population increased to 2,504,232, growing nearly 7 times, but the percentage fell to 23%. In their own native land, Moro people became a “minority.” The proportion of Catholics, on the other hand, increased from 22% to 65% and they became the majority in Mindanao (Tan, 1995).

At the same time, the influx of northern Catholics inevitably led to the redistribution of resources, leading to a struggle for living space between the two groups. Perhaps the intention of the government of the Philippines was the peaceful integration of two groups, but the policy escalated the conflict and hatred between the two groups. As for the second aspect of the integration policy, in the 1953 election, three Muslims were voted to the Philippine Congress: Datu Luminog Mangelen from Catabato, Domocao Alonto of Lanao, and Ombra Amilbansa of Sulu (Coquia, 1955). However, compared to the large number of Catholic officials and politicians, these few Muslims occupied an unimportant place and were just embellishment. Their efforts to protect the interests of the Moro people often ended up fruitless. Real power in the southern area was still held by the Catholics (Hunt, 1964).

The Philippine government concluded that traditional Islamic education could not adapt to modern society. Therefore, they were indifferent to the development of Islamic schools in the south, but vigorously supported formal Western education. The establishment of Mindanao State University in this period was one of such effort (Angeles, 1986). In most public schools, the government did not take into account the particularity of the Muslim religion and culture, but used a unified set of courses and teaching methods, wishing the Moro people to be educated into real “Filipinos.” Except for a few Muslim elites who were willing to cooperate with the government, the number

of Muslim graduates from the colleges was remarkably low and secondary schools inadequate (Angeles, 1986).

On the whole, the implementation of integration policy led to general dissatisfaction among southern Muslims in the first 20 years after the war. In order to protect people of vested interests, the Catholic elite inevitably attempted to control local politics and maintain economic privileges, which clashed with the traditional Muslim Sultanate - Datu power system. Muslim elites, therefore, looked for opportunities to change the situation. In 1961, Congressman Datu Ombra Amilbansa of Sulu proposed to recognize the autonomy of the Sulu province, which caused a tremendous response in Muslim society but failed to arouse enough attention from the Philippine government. Living conditions of ordinary Muslims did not improve but deteriorated. After 20 years of Philippine independence, the Muslims of Mindanao were still backward, their economy stagnated, social traditions declined, and laws and customs on the verge of collapse (George, 1980). Muslims attributed it all to the integration policy which was seen as a deliberate conspiracy to destroy the Muslim community. The conflict between the two religious and cultural groups only deepened post-independence.

Second Stage from 1965- 1986

If the first 20 years after independence (1946-1965) marked the initial stage of modernization of the Philippines, then period under President Ferdinand Marcos (1965-1986) marks an accelerated modernization stage. This period was the golden time of the world economy and also the era when East Asian economies started to take off. During this period, the Marcos government launched a new land reform policy to promote the development of capitalist agriculture. At the same time, Marcos vigorously promoted export-oriented industrialization and actively introduced foreign investment to speed up the pace of integration into the global economy. This series of policies brought rapid

economic development in the Philippines, but also aggravated domestic conflicts. Disadvantaged groups like the Moro people paid a heavy price for this modernization process and eventually turned to violent resistance.

The lack of land had been impeding Philippine economic development. In the northern provinces, especially in crowded Luzon, the issue was particularly serious. During and after the Huk movement, a tense struggle for land between farmers and landowners took place (Kerkvliet, 2002). In view of this, President Marcos implemented land reform policies. In addition, he not only promoted migration of a large number of landless peasants to the south, but also introduced a land exchange policy encouraging landlords in densely populated areas of the north to exchange their lands for lands in Mindanao area (Paderanga, 1995). These measures conflicted with the interests of the Moro people. Marcos policies were actually trying to ease northern class contradictions by immigration. However, conflict between the immigrants and the Moro people escalated. The government also enacted a fishery act to allow foreign investment in the fisheries sector. Land, forests and lakes seen by the Moro people as public resources were occupied. Tensions between the two sides further deepened.

On the other hand, the Moro people's employment situation worsened. They felt displaced by Filipino Catholics and excluded from profitable businesses (Muslim, 1994). Compared with northern migrants who have knowledge and skills, the Moro people went into a helpless predicament. At the same time, like the previous government, Marcos did not take accompanying measures to protect the rights of vulnerable groups in the modernization process. The Moro people were unable to obtain reasonable compensation for their sacrifices for development. The gap between the Moro people and the northern Filipinos widened. In western and central Mindanao area, where most Moro people lived, the level of urbanization were 18.8% and 17.0% in 1980, far below the average level of urbanization (37.3%). Urbanization levels in western and central Mindanao also fell below the level in northern Mindanao and southern Mindanao (26.6% and 33.5%), where

Moro people accounted for a small number of the population (Muslim, 1994). In 1987, the average annual family income, the infant mortality rate, and life expectancy of these two districts, stood far below the national average level (Muslim, 1994). These indicators are closely related to the level of modernization of a society; therefore, it showed the trend of marginalization of the Moro people in the modernization process.

III. Second Perspective: The Moro Image

Moro (Moor) originated from the Mauros of Greece, which means black.⁸ The Spanish and Italians generally spell it as Moro. In the medieval religious wars of Western Europe, the term broadly refers to Arab Berbers, but narrowly meant mixed Muslim descendants of Spanish-Andalusian Berbers in the 11th-17th century.⁹ Historically, the word is associated with war between Muslims and Catholics in Western Europe in the Middle Ages. It is well known that the memory of the Spanish about North African Arab Muslims is closely associated with the formation of its nation and an 800-year war against Muslims, which resulted in a negative image of Muslims in their collective memory. Moreover, the Spaniards tended to extend this prototype to all other Muslims. So Moro generally refers to all Muslims in modern spoken Spanish. When the Spaniards began their colonial activity in Southeast Asia, they also called all Muslims in the region Moro. But later this term gradually narrowed down to refer to Muslims in the southern Philippines. It carried the discrimination of Western culture against Eastern culture.

When the Spaniards began their colonization of the northern parts of the Philippines, they tried to identify two different cultural groups and treated them

⁸ Encyclopedia Britannica Article, 2007- 07- 23, <http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-9053612/Moor>, 2007- 09- 15.

⁹ Encyclopedia Britannica Article, 2007- 07- 23, <http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-9053612/Moor>, 2007- 09- 15.

differently. They began contacting and identifying the Muslims of southern Philippines in 1565 during the expedition led by Miguel Lopez de Legazpi. When they set foot on the island of Luzon, they thought all natives in the Philippine islands were Moros (excluding a small number of Negritos in the coastal areas), based on their observation of local people's Islamic behavior and activities. But soon, some Spaniards with more religious knowledge began to doubt the Islamic faith of the locals. A report in 1572 said that it was sure that the locals of Luzon (by then known as the Moro people) were not (true Muslims), because they simply did not understand the laws of Mohammed, they just learned a little bit of Mohammed's teachings from the Muslim businessmen in Borneo (Majul, 1978). Moreover, these native people quickly abandoned the original primitive religion under Spanish religious aggression and accepted Catholicism. Thus, the Spaniards called these people transfers and all non-Muslims, *indios*. And later this name was narrowed down to specifically refer to the northern Catholics. Mountain people were called *infideles* (infidels). However, the Muslims of the south were quite devout in their Islamic faith. Therefore, the Muslims of Southern Mindanao and Sulu and other areas became known specifically as Moros.

Those two groups originally only represented two trends of cultural development, and even retained a large number of common primitive beliefs and customs. After identification and cultural invasion by Spain, they were judged and valued: the people living in Luzon and Visayan region were peaceful *indios*, while the Moro people were characterized as aggressive slave-hunting pirates (Krieger, 1945).

After 300 years of Moro war, the Spaniards' negative image of the Moros became fixed. But how did the Spaniards instill this prototype on the minds of northern Catholics and made them accept the Moro image? I suggest that religious entertainment and plays represented by the Moro-Moro play were instrumental in this process.

The Moro-Moro drama was first performed in 1637 by Jesuits to celebrate the Spanish defeat of Muslims in a war (Majul, 1985). In 1772, then Governor-General of the Philippines Don Simon de Anda held a formal performance at his home and from thereon the Moro-Moro play began to be officially recognized (Riggs, 1904). The play “Magdapio, or Fidelity Rewarded,” by Pedro A. Paterno (score by Carluen) became a classic from which we can observe how the Moro image became instilled. According to Arthur Stanley Riggs (1904):

Magdapio is a young woman who inhabits a certain mountain of the Itas, which is split apart by the God Lindol (earthquake), thus letting out Magdapio and exhibiting the riches contained within. The prince of the Itas seeks and obtains her hand in marriage, and the people acquire the vast wealth of the cleft mountain. After the marriage has been celebrated with great pomp, a flight of arrows interferes with the proceedings, an army of foreign invaders, the heathen Malays, rush in, the prince is killed, and Magdapio captured. Bay, king of the Malays,¹¹ asks her to marry him. The girl courageously refuses, whereupon he tells her that she must do so, or he will throw the body of her dead lover into the shark-infested ocean. She refuses, and at the first opportunity throws herself also into the sea, and drifts to the throne of the king of the ocean. The latter inquires her purpose, and she explains. The god tells her that since she has been faithful, she shall be rewarded by receiving the name “Pearl of the Orient Sea,” in addition to which, presumably, she recovers her lover by order of the sea king. (p. 283, 282- 283).

There were many plays that featured Muslim pirates and most of the time these plays ended with the Catholic defeat of these outlaw Moros. If we study this drama carefully, the metaphors and enculturation can be explained from three levels. First, Magdapio (representing northern Catholics) lived a stable and happy life, but the

¹¹ Original Malay here meant Muslims living in Malacca and Sumatra. But Moro people were known as Malay too because of their similarities in beliefs and lifestyle. At that time, Malay was used to refer to the Muslims around Sulu waters. See Krieger (1945).

southern militants and heavily armed pirates, e.g. Moro people, destroyed the Catholics normal life. From the outset, the Moro people were described as foreign invaders whose activities will inevitably end in failure. In the face of the threat of the Malays, Magdapio not only refused his request, but also sacrificed her life to the sea. This implies that in the face of the lure and coercion of the Muslims, the Catholics should maintain the purity of their own faith even if it costs their lives. This conveyed the idea that the Catholic faith is above all else and the Islamic faith and Muslims are low and vulgar. Thus, two religions and beliefs have been judged as high vs. low, good vs. evil. After Magdapio sacrificed her life, God rewarded her noble name and even new life for her lover which implies loyal to the Catholic faith would have repay and abandoning the Catholic faith or transferring to Islam would certainly get evil retribution and punishment. The tragic fate of pirates in the play is proof.

As a result, the information conveyed by a short period of drama is rich and complex. The main purpose is to show the positive image of Catholics and negative image of Muslims. And because these plays were performed in major cities and towns in northern festivals, children were taught this idea at a very early age. Therefore, for those northern Catholics who had limited personal contact with Muslims, their Muslim impression could be entirely drawn from the image showed in the drama. The plot arrangement of black and white, good and evil and the final outcome of heroic victory of Catholics (physical and spiritual) and the elimination of Muslims and their faith greatly influenced the Catholics' impression of Muslims. The Moro-Moro play has been described as a very successful Westerner cultural importation into Asia (George, 1981). Encouraged and affected by such plays, northern Catholics would believe that to cherish their faith and culture more, they had to be more hostile to Muslims, which has become important part of the northern culture. Except for dramas, Spain introduced other religious festivals with the anti-Muslim tendencies that were accepted by the locals, such as the Ati-Atihan Festival in Kalibo, Aklan province. Its purpose is to commemorate the

Sto. Nino who helped them defeat the Muslims and led to their conversion to Catholicism.

Therefore, the Moro image instilled by the Spaniards contributed to the hostility between northern Catholics and southern Muslims.

Davao Fieldwork

According to my fieldwork in Davao, the Moro image did have a negative impact on the relationship between Moros and other ethnic groups in the Philippines. The Chinese are a minority group in this city, and they hold such a negative Moro image. Based on my preliminary research, the relationship between the Chinese and Muslims can be probed in two aspects: First, in their close contact and competition in commercial circles. It is the general practice among Chinese merchants to extend credit to Muslim farmers in the form of consumer goods, if not cash. The farmers in turn pay in kind from the produce of their land, such as rice, hemp or copra. The Chinese not only get these products at minimum prices during harvest time, but they also are assured of perpetuating their entrepreneurship of these products due to the loans or advances they extend. At the same time, quite a few Muslim merchants gather here to do business due to the city's stability and commercial advantage. They competed with the Chinese in some businesses such as wholesale. Some wealthy Muslim merchants told me in 2006 that they control some business sectors like jewelry, and Chinese businessmen could gain a foot hold in this commercial area. The second aspect centers on the misunderstanding to and indifference toward their social life. Most Chinese held a negative stereotype about Muslims, which has affected their interaction and communication.

When I interviewed some Chinese about their feelings and impression about Muslims, many of them showed contempt and discrimination. Two jokes about Muslims left a deep impression on me. One is that if a Chinese killed a Muslims' chicken or duck accidentally, then he was in a big trouble because the Muslim owner would not only ask for compensation for the dead poultry, but also the money

for eggs in their belly and hatched poultry by these eggs in the future. So one had to pay a lot in the end. The other one is about a Muslim employee leaving the store early every afternoon. When his Chinese boss asked why, he replied that he could not see money in the checkout counter because he really wanted to steal it. But the boss was really nice to him. So he had to go away early to suppress his desire to steal. In these two cases, the remarks reflected Chinese misunderstanding and discrimination against Muslims even though some of them had no personal contact with Muslims at all. For Muslims, their feelings toward the Chinese were quite indifferent. They showed some jealousy of the wealthy and rich life of the Chinese. In some aspects of social life in matrimony or religion, Muslims intermarried with local Catholic Filipinos and accepted families who changed their religion to Islam. But this did not happen between them and the Chinese as far as I know. So the psychological boundaries are obvious and the Moro image affected the relationship between the two groups in a negative way (Peng, 2008).

IV. Third Perspective: Special Link Between the Clientelist Political System and the Clan System

How did those two groups interact and connect with each other? Politically, I suggest there is a special bond between the northern patron-client system and southern clan system.

Before the Spaniards arrived in the 16th century, Muslim communities in the Philippines established several tribal Islamic states in the south. These tribal states were established on the basis of the original Barangays and implemented the “Sultan (Datu) - free peasants – slaves” patron-client system. They had different languages and geographical differences were also very obvious. In the northern Philippines, the loyalty to local clans like “people of Tagalog,” “people of Cebu” faded gradually with the authoritarian rule of the Spaniards. But due to the long successful resistance against the Spaniards and the Americans, the tribal or clan identity remained strong and obvious.

Thirteen tribes may form in different times, but the local identities and loyalties were the same. The tribes were mostly named after the places where they settled. In the three largest tribes, Tausug means “groups from the river,” and Maranao refers to people of Lanao Lake. Due to the particularity of the southern region as well as long-term anti-government armed movements after the founding of the Philippines, the southern region had not been fully integrated into nation rule. The formation of the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) in 1996 also relied on local tribal chiefs. National control of the region is fragile and weak. Therefore, in the southern areas, it is the clan patron-client system controlling local politics.

Compared with the northern political patron client system, this clan system is characterized by its tribalism and cleavage between them. Firstly, inside the tribal group, local village systems and mutual aid system had been an effective tool for group survival and continuation. The co-dependent relationship between patron and client were obvious. So the mobilization of the group would not be difficult. After long-term observation of the southern tribes, Thomas Kiefer (1970) pointed out that kinship relationship could penetrate into various aspects of life, including political, economic and military mobilization. Therefore, in the post-war Philippines, political families controlled and dominated local politics in the southern areas. According to statistics, there were about 250 political families in the Philippines, most of them in the south.¹²

Second, above the villages, the divisions between the tribal groups are quite obvious. “The nature of the tribal ethnic groups is that it usually is not a political organization, but society - Culture - ethnic groups.” For these tribal people, disintegration and mutual hostility is normal (Tarling, 2003). In the southern Philippines, conflicts and killings caused by competition for resources between families and inter-tribal revenge

¹² Carlos H. Conde, Family Ties Bind Philippine Government, Published: May 13, 2007, <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/05/13/world/asia/13filip.html>

(known as *rido*) are prevalent. According to a recent survey, from 1930 to 2005, there were 1,266 ridos that killed 5,500 people (Torres III, 2007). It should be said that inter-family conflicts and hatred in the north is also not uncommon, but in the southern areas, the family vendetta are often intertwined with the tribal conflicts, which makes the situation more complex.

As a result, the special patron-client system in the south strengthened the unity among the tribes on the one hand, and could easily induce inter-tribal killings on the other hand. This system is quite different from that of the north-central regions of the Philippines and would inevitably cause collision when it interacted with the northern elections patron-client system.

This interaction between the tribal politics and electoral politics of the north-central areas can be divided into two phases. In the first phase, from the early 20th century until the 1970s, two political systems began preliminary contact. Prior to granting independence, the U.S. colonial government spared no effort to integrate the southern region into the national electoral system. Different tribes reacted differently, some Westernized Muslim elites came into contact with the northern elite and tried to emulate the latter. They wanted use the opportunity of democratic election to seek benefits for their families and tribes. In 1920s to 1940s, a number of Muslim elites joined the National Assembly and demanded political and economic equality from the Government. Organizations such as “Sons of Jolo,” “Muslim Youth Association of Cotabato” were founded (Abinales, 2000). However, the southern situation was complex and changeable. Except for this small number of Muslim elites, most of the southern Muslim communities rejected the electoral system and refused to participate in elections. The south was still in the situation of tribal separation and the northern electoral system had limited influence

on local tribal politics.¹³ In the 1960s, a new generation of non-traditional elites appeared in political arenas, including Nur Misuari and Hashim Salamat. They tried to unite different tribes and pushed to change the rule of the northern Catholic government. At the same time, President Marcos also took advantage of the unrest to solve a governance crisis. He declared martial law in 1972, which temporarily interrupted the interaction between the northern and southern political systems. After his overthrow in 1986, the Philippines began to rebuild the electoral system. Those two systems started a new integration process, namely the second phase.

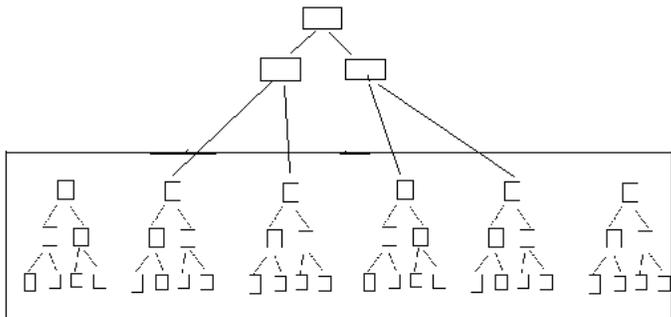
At this stage, the separatist movement led by Misuari failed to unite southern tribes to build so-called “Moro nation.”¹⁴ Different tribal leaders continued to control local politics. Moreover, decades of large-scale separatist movement also strengthened ordinary Muslims dependence on local leaders. In the chaos, various tribal Muslim people have to rely on military protection and economic aid of the local chiefs. Local leaders had more political, economic and military power than before and became the local warlords. Competition for resources between different tribal forces became fierce (Gutierrez, 1999). In this case, the Manila government could not achieve effective control of the southern area without cooperation of southern tribal leaders. The policy of “divide and rule” was its best choice. Therefore, the Manila government would select some tribal leaders as political clients. Moreover, this policy would also induce tribal conflicts and fighting, thus avoiding the mobilization of a unified separatist movement.

¹³ Beginning in early 1920s, Muslim leaders of Sulu and Mindanao began a peaceful movement that asserted their right to establish their own nation-state and form a government of their choice. Leaders petitioned and offered two options for the U.S. Congress to consider: join the federal government of the United States, or be declared a separate sovereign. For a detailed account of the Moro pre-Philippine independence struggle see Samuel K.Tan (1993).

¹⁴The “Tripoli Agreement” in 1976 provided for an autonomous region in Mindanao. Unfortunately, the government and Moro National Liberation Front were unable to settle on an agreement. Moreover, Hashim Salamat challenged Misuari’s leadership.

For local chiefs and leaders of separatist movement in southern area, decades of anti-government movement were to no avail. Therefore, they assessed the situation and tried to integrate into the northern political system in various ways to maximize their own interests. In 1996, the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) was established based on the ideal of decentralization and local self-governance.¹⁵ To seize the power of the ARMM and become a client of Manila became the main political goals of the southern chiefs and forces.

In these places, some of the elites functioned as intermediary brokers. The patron system of elections in the Philippines combined with southern tribal politics in an unusual way. “Election” in those areas became a struggle for power between the large families representing different tribes.



The reciprocal nature of patron and client ties are common for such patron systems. But its prominent features are its instability and variability. The upper patrons

¹⁵ Resource capture in the ARMM takes the form of rent extraction from the central government and from the local constituency in exchange for maintaining national unity, in addition to monetary contributions from oil-rich Islamic nations. See p. 391, Richard Miller Bird, World Bank, *Fiscal Fragmentation in Decentralized Countries: Subsidiarity, Solidarity and Asymmetry*. Edward Elgar Publishing, 2007.

only select a small number of local tribal leaders as clients, which is bound to cause infighting Muslim elites. Changes in the patrons in Manila would bring changes in Muslim clients. The frequent transformation of the system led to local political turmoil. For example, throughout the 1930s to the 1960s, the frequency of the mass killings between families (*rido*) was very low. From 1960s to the 1970s, when the southern political system began to be formally integrated into the northern political system, the frequency of *rido* began to increase (Torres III, 2007).

In the 1990s, in order to win control over ARMM, family battles were more intense and more violent (Gutierrez, 1999). In 1999, Nur Misuari became governor of ARMM. But it did not last long. In 2001, Gloria Arroyo who was running for president was closer to the Ampatuan family. The political position of Misuari was weakened. Desperate, he re-launched a revolt and, when that failed, tried to flee abroad.¹⁶ Thereafter, the Ampatuan family got the upper hand and ensured votes for Arroyo in the ARMM. The family also assisted the government's fight against the separatist movement. The Ampatuan family grabbed most of the office and power of ARMM the Arroyo administration.¹⁷ Other political families tried to change the situation and the conflict between them accumulated. In November 2009, the conflict broke out. In order to win a new round of elections in 2010, the Ampatuans did not hesitate to murder members of the

¹⁶ See Articles about Nur Misuari, <http://www.nytimes.com/keyword/nur-misuari>.

¹⁷ Andal Sr., the family patriarch, had been provincial governor since 1998; he had been elected three times, unopposed. Eighteen of the mayors in Maguindanao belong to the clan. In the 2004 presidential elections, Arroyo won 69% of Maguindanao's vote; three years later, the party-backed coalition scored a 12-0 sweep of the senatorial elections in the province. Unable to run for a third term, he groomed his son, Andal, Jr., to succeed him as governor. See "Maguindanao governor modern-day Godfather". INQUIRER.net.2007-03-14.http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/inquirerheadlines/nation/view/20070314-54689/Maguindanao_governor_modern-day_Godfather. Retrieved 2009-11-27. Also see "21 killed in Maguindanao". INQUIRER.net.2009-11-24. <http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/inquirerheadlines/nation/view/20091124-237982/21-killed-in-Maguindanao>. Retrieved 2009-11-27.

rival Mangudadatu family, which became the bloodiest event in Philippine electoral history. This is the result of the collision between two political systems.

In this case, the so-called Moro problem can hardly be solved easily. The government treated the Muslim region as a hot potato and can really solve the political problems of the southern tribes. Relying on local tribal leaders to govern the southern region can only ensure short-term stability and aggravate the southern conflict and unrest in the long term. In March 9, 2010, the Arroyo government declared complete failure of its goal of peace in the south.¹⁸ Thus, the collision between electoral politics in the Philippines and southern tribal politics will still exist for a long time to come.

¹⁸<http://www.abs-cbnnews.com/nation/03/09/10/philippines-rules-out-muslim-peace-accord-under-arroyo>, Philippines rules out Muslim peace accord under Arroyo, Agence France-Presse, 2010-3-9.

Reference

Alan T. Ortiz, Towards a Theory of Ethnic Separatism: A Case Study of Muslims in the Philippines, A Dissertation in International Relations presented to the Faculties of the University of Pennsylvania in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Degree of Doctor of Philosophy, 1986.

Arthur Stanley Riggs, The Drama of the Filipinos. *The Journal of American Folklore*, Vol. 17, No. 67. 1904.

Benedict J. Kerkvliet, *The Huk Rebellion: A Study of Peasant Revolt in the Philippines*, Rowman & Littlefield, 2002.

Cesar Adib Majul, *Muslims in the Philippines*. Quezon City: Published for the Asian Center by the University of the Philippines Press, 1978.

Cesar Adib Majul, *The Contemporary Muslim Movement in the Philippines*. Berkeley: Mizan Press, 1985.

Cayetano W. Paderanga, *A Review of Land Settlements in the Philippines*, University of the Philippines, 1995.

Chester Hunt, Ethnic Stratification and Interaction in Cotabato, in S. Espiritu and C. Hunt, eds. *Social Foundations of Community Development*, Manila, R.M.Garcia Publishing, 1964.

Eric Gutierrez and Aijaz Ahmad eds., *Rebels, Warlords and Ulama: A Reader on Muslim Separatism and the War in the Southern Philippines*, Quezon City. Institute for Popular Democracy, 1999.

Herbert W. Krieger, Races and Peoples in the Philippines. *The Far Eastern Quarterly*, Vol. 4, No. 2, 1945.

Jorge Coquia, *The Philippine Presidential Elections of 1953*, Manila: Philippine Education Foundation, 1955, Appendix H.

Luis Q. Lacar, Culture Contact and National Identification among Philippine Muslims. *Philippines Studies*. Fourth Quarter, 1994.

Macapado Abaton Muslim, *The Moro Armed Struggle in the Philippines: the Nonviolent Autonomy Alternative*, a Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Division of the University of the Hawaii in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Political Science, December 1990.

Macapado Abaton Muslim, *The Moro Armed Struggle in the Philippines: The Nonviolent Autonomy Alternative*. Published by Office of the President and College of Public Affairs, Mindanao State University, Marawi City, 1994.

Nicholas Tarling, *The Cambridge History of Southeast Asia (Part 1)* (Chinese Edition, Yunnan Social Science Publishing House, 2003.

Peter G. Gowing and Robert D. Mcamis. *The Muslim Filipinos: Their History, Society and Contemporary Problems*. Manila: Solidaridad Publishing House, 1974.

Peter G. Gowing, *Mandate in Moroland: The American Government of Muslim Filipinos (1899-1920)*. Quezon City: Community Publishers, Inc., 1977.

Peter G. Gowing, *Muslim Filipinos-Heritage and Horizon*. Philippines: New Day Publishers, 1985.

Peter G. Gowing, *Understanding Islam and Muslims in the Philippines*. Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1988.

Peng Hui, Field Report on Muslim and Islam in Southern Philippines, *China Ethnic News*, Jan 25th, 2008.

Patricio N. Abinales, *Making Mindanao: Cotabato and Davao in the Formation of the Philippine Nation-State*. Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2000.

Richard Miller Bird, World Bank, *Fiscal Fragmentation in Decentralized Countries: Subsidiarity, Solidarity and Asymmetry*. Edward Elgar Publishing, 2007.

Russell K. Skowronek, The Spanish Philippines: Archaeological Perspectives on Colonial Economics and Society, *International Journal of Historical Archaeology*, Vol. 2, No.1, 1998.

Samuel K. Tan, *The Filipino Armed Struggle 1900-1972*. Filipinas Foundation,

Inc., 1977.

Samuel K. Tan, *Internationalization of the Bangsamoro Struggle*, Quezon City: The Center for Integrative and Development Studies, University of the Philippines, 1993.

Samuel K. Tan, *The Socioeconomic Dimension of Moro Secessionism*. University of the Philippines, 1995.

Sidney Glazer, The Moros as a Political Factor in Philippine Independence, *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (Mar., 1941), pp. 78-90.

Thomas M. McKenna. *Muslim Rulers and Rebels: Everyday Politics and Armed Separatism in the Southern Philippines*. Manila: Anvil Publishing, Inc., 1998.

Thomas M. Kiefer, Modes of Social Action in Armed Combat: Affect, Tradition and Reason in Tausug. *New Series*, Vol. 5, No. 4, 1970.

T.J.S. George, *Revolt in Mindanao: The Rise of Islam in Philippine Politics*. Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1980.

Wilfredo Magno Torres III, *Rido: Clan Feuding and Conflict Management in Mindanao*, Makati City: The Asia Foundation, 2007.

W. K. Che Man, *Muslim Separatism: The Moros of Southern Philippines and the Malays of Southern Thailand*. Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1990.

Vivienne S.M. Angeles, *Islam and Politics: Philippine Government Policies and Muslim Responses, 1946-1976*, A Dissertation Submitted to the Temple University Graduate Board in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy, 1986.