

Filipino “Mam’ya Na, “Pwede Na,” and “Bahala Na”: Detrimental to Philippine Modernization?

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A golden epoch of Philippine economic growth and development, also called modernization, took place during the American regime from 1901 to 1942. However, a little more than sixty years of self-governance since being granted independence in 1946, economists reported in 2006 alarming trends of Philippine economic under-performance from 1950 to 2004. When compared with the economic progress of its ASEAN as well as Asian neighbors, pundits dubbed the country as the productivity “laggard” of Asia. Economists capitulated that this Philippine slip back is “a puzzle to explain.” Why? What happened? What can be done to achieve a sustainable modernization take-off mode for the country through the 21st century and beyond?

In an attempt to establish the possible root-cause of economic slip back or under-performance, I conducted in 2010 five studies which were related to Modernization and socio-economic development: 1) The Rostovian Theory of Modernization; 2) Impact and influence of Spain and Portugal on the religious mind-set, culture, and socio-political and economic development of eighteen countries in Central and South America including Mexico, and the Philippines; 3) Impact of the Age of Enlightenment and Reformation on North European as well as North American countries; 4) In terms of the socio-economic and technological development, comparison between the North-eastern states of the US which were originally occupied by Puritan colonizers, and the South-eastern, the North-western and South-western states which were originally occupied by Spanish colonizers; and, 5) Deming’s model of Quality, Productivity and Reliability which miraculously saved Japan out of its economic crisis as a result of her devastation from World War II.

Cultural paradigms such as those related to the following are interestingly prominent and inherent among countries colonized by Spain and Portugal: “Mam’ya Na”, “P’wede na iyan,” “Kumpadre or kumadre,” “Lagay,” “Torpe,” “Pakiramdaman,” “Utang-na-loob,” “Bahala na,” and “Ningas kugon.” No documented evidences have so far been encountered that show directly measured implications and impacts of these cultural paradigms on quality of work and products, rate of productivity, and level of consistency and reliability in making scheduled

delivery of expected results. Do they cause poor quality, slow productivity, and untrustworthy reliability of organizational outputs? Are they the reasons for an organization's slip-back and under-performance? Are they the reasons why organizational scope of activities seems to be surprisingly limited? Can these harmful paradigms be checked, controlled or managed? No one has so far answered these questions.

In countries where these paradigms predominated and where practices continued to exist, however, evidences of poor quality, slow productivity, and untrustworthy reliability are exhibited and reflected in their economic slip-back and under-performance. Their economic activities are also surprisingly limited to four predominant trades: 1) Farming; 2) Fishing; 3) Forestry; and, 4) Mining – all found in the traditional stage of modernization according to the Rostovian model of Modernization.

On the other hand, countries which have been influenced by the Protestant Ethic which, incidentally became the spirit behind Capitalism, exhibited enormous successes and advancements in education, science and technology, law, medicine, the arts, politics, regard for liberty and freedom, and value for work, savings, investments, wealth creation, and modernization. These advancements are all found in the maturity stage of Rostow's model.

Historical evidences show that there is one "other set of cultural paradigms" which is different from, and relatively opposite to, those harmful cultural paradigms mentioned above. These "other set of paradigms" creates and sustains an environment that is conducive to enhanced consistency in work and product quality, labor productivity, and reliability. This "other set of paradigms" promotes dignity and honor in workplaces and institutions. Participants within this culture possess moral values and virtues, and assume personal responsibility and ownership. This persuasive culture does not compromise truth, integrity, fairness, righteousness, and purity. Unfortunately, this "other set of cultural paradigms" is not predominant in the Philippines and in other countries where the security and welfare of Filipino migrants are threatened or they are unjustly treated; it is, however, found active in countries which respect and highly regard the ideals of liberty, equality, human dignity and justice. This culture is found in organizational environments where continuing improvement efforts are sustained.

Thousands of migrant Filipinos who have been exposed to this "other set of cultural paradigms" have reportedly been cited and praised by foreign employers and colleagues in their host countries for exhibiting enormous successes and advancements in education, science and technology, law, business, medicine, the arts, politics, regard for liberty and freedom, value for work, savings, investments, wealth creation, and various contributions to

modernization. These praise-worthy Filipinos have been able to meet the required and expected quality, rate of productivity, and level of consistency and reliability of their foreign counterparts despite of their struggle against the harmful cultural paradigms mentioned above which they also concurrently possess.

The testimony and proof of success of migrant Filipinos in workplaces and institutions provide the evidence that organizational environments for continuing improvement do exist whereby attitudes and practices of quality, productivity and reliability thrive. This environment has been created, established and employed in places where this “other set of cultural paradigms” is highly regarded, respected and practiced. This environment effectively motivates migrant Filipinos to adapt, participate and succeed while promoting, uplifting and nurturing the precepts of quality, productivity and reliability.

Philippine cultural paradigms must be re-engineered to create a new Filipino attitude and mindset that will promote the return of honor, exercise of moral values and virtues, and assumption of personal responsibility in Filipino homes, communities and institutions. This culture will not compromise truth, dignity, fairness, righteousness, and purity. Otherwise, if no social re-engineering interventions are done to change old cultural paradigms which are harmful to modernization, Philippine quality of work will continue to suffer, production costs will not become competitive through high rates of productivity, and Filipino worker consistency, reliability and trustworthiness will always be doubted and compromised. And consequently, the country will continue to be ridiculed as the productivity “laggard” of Asia.