

On the Role of Political Scientists in Developing Countries

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What is the role of the political scientist in the developing countries of today's Asia?

He plays a very important role — more important I should like to suggest than 99.9 per cent of his countrymen realize — and probably more important than even he may realize.

Fifty years ago, when the Department of Political Science of the University of the Philippines was founded, there were practically no political scientists in Asia. This fact may be very closely related to the record of the subsequent half-century: a half-century of war, generally inadequate preparation for independence that came too soon (in some cases), and subsequently much (too much!) failure in public policy formulation and implementation in the so-called "New Nations."

Most of the really major political events of the last 50 years in Asia, I believe, could have been predicted to occur in essentially the form in which they did take place. Some surely might have been modified and the tragedies minimized or avoided and the successes maximized or increased.

It is not easy to explain various of these events or the essential nature of some of these phenomena after their occurrence: a fact which we often forget in an age of unparalleled outflow of studies and commentaries on the politics of the Asian lands. However this is largely because we do not have the relevant data or lack the training to organize and meaningfully interpret such data.

Is it all that more difficult to predict such events before they occur than to explain them *adequately* after they happen? If the facts had been known and understood beforehand, might not *some* of the

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political tragedies of the past half-century have been minimized, or the triumphs of man acting politically been made more complete?

These words are not intended as a post-mortem on a whole half-century. They are uttered, rather, as a prelude to some remarks on the years which lie ahead -- immediately and less immediately so.

There have never been more political scientists in Asia than there are today. Of what use are they to their developing national societies? What are their possible roles in the years which lie ahead? Can they influence the shape and character of these years? How can they do so?

Before attempting to answer these questions, may I define what I mean by a "political scientist" as I shall use the term.

A political scientist can be defined simply as one trained in the methodologies and techniques of the systematic study of political life and, necessarily, in some area or areas of substantive political concerns. The political scientist might also be defined, however, as one who by his behavior does things which employ such methodologies and techniques as well as his particular substantive expertise. Whether such a person holds a Ph.D. in political science seems to me not important. The important thing is what he knows and how he uses his knowledge.

The most apparent probably of the responsibilities of the political scientist in a developing country is in the teaching of the young. But a degree in political science is surely not sufficient for such students. It is the content of that degree, the substance behind it, that counts. The attraction and importance of research and writing cannot, and should not, be denied. Research grants involving travel abroad, moreover, are a vital means of communication among political scientists around the world. At the same time, however, it cannot be forgotten that tomorrow's political scientist has just as much right to solid, if not inspired, teaching as today's practitioner of the discipline. And this cannot be unless some, possibly most, political scientists in the developing countries devote a large portion of their time and energy to teaching responsibilities.

This seems an obvious thing to say. And yet it is necessary to say it. Political science graduates (Ph.D. graduates that is) the world over show a decided preference for research and graduate instruction. This is only natural. But it can be harmful if carried to an extreme. If a country, a whole country, has only, say, a dozen political scientists and eight never do any teaching of undergraduates even though they are associated with institutions of learning that are primarily

undergraduate in character, who then shall teach undergraduate about political man?

Teaching, thus, is one of the main responsibilities of the political scientist in a developing country — but an often forgotten one (though I hasten to add, not in the overburdened Department of Political Science of the University of the Philippines).

My remarks so far could be taken to suggest a de-emphasis of basic research by political scientists of the developing countries about their own countries. Nothing could be further from my intent. Indeed, it seems to me that too large a percentage of the basic studies on the politics of the developing countries come today from the labors of Americans in particular, but also Englishmen and, to a lesser extent, other non-Asians. Mind you, I intend to continue my own studies of Southeast Asian politics, but I do wish that we had studies by Burmese that told us as much about their country as does Lucien Pye's outstanding book (or works by Indians on India like those of Myron Weiner or on Indonesia by Indonesians to compare with Herbert Feith's study).

DeTocqueville, Lord Bryce and others presented long ago ample evidence of the insights to be gained from foreign analyses of a country's political life and ways. But there are advantages possessed by the indigenous scholar that few outsiders can ever attain, advantages born of the process of political socialization that brought him to maturity as a thinking adult member of his society. I am not thinking here in terms of interpreting one's land and its politics to other peoples (though this surely is also an important responsibility). Rather I am thinking in terms of the contribution to the general literature of politics that such studies would make. Surely, the local scholar has many advantages too, in terms of the efficiency with which he does his work. He does not have to learn a foreign (sometimes exotic) language; he already knows (presumably) the historical setting of his country, and he has a first-hand familiarity with its general culture and modes. Nor does he have the pressures and attractions of a professional career to advance in a distant land.

What I am saying, simply, is this: political scientists in the developing lands must produce basic studies dealing with their own countries. They cannot continue to rely on others to tell them what politics in their countries is all about, most especially since they actually may know more about the subject themselves. And yet, how many such indigenous studies have there been? In Southeast Asia, for example, practically none outside the Philippines and fewer than

one might wish which are at par with the quality of the works of Filipino Professors Corpuz, Agpalo and Abueva. All three of these scholars, I might add, also have important instructional duties.

Few persons would probably disagree with these basic teaching and research responsibilities of the political scientist in the developing country, although some will say (and justly) that heavy teaching loads leave little time for research, and others will claim (with less justification) that first class research minds should not be wasted on undergraduate teaching. But in general, there is agreement.

More likely to produce disagreement are some other responsibilities which, I would suggest, confront the political scientist in a developing country. There are three such responsibilities in particular which I would like to discuss here.

The first of these concerns policy studies. These are rightly the primary responsibility of government personnel; but even in countries with developed research staffs within foreign affairs departments, there are many instances of works by scholars influencing public policy. Such a work might be George E. Taylor's *The United States and the Philippines: Problems of Partnership*. Professor Taylor's book has been widely and approvingly cited in the Philippines. But it does, after all, view the problem of Philippine-American relations from the vantage points of an American interest in eliminating contemporary irritants. Although the book may have beneficial consequences for the Philippines, it remains an American book about an American policy problem.

The need for a Filipino look at Philippine-American relations, I submit, remains in spite of Taylor's worthy volume. Nor is this an isolated need. How systematic a look has anyone in the Philippines taken of Philippine-Chinese relations, Philippine-Japanese relations, or Philippine-Malaysian relations? Despite their possible assertions to the contrary, the foreign offices of most developing countries are not usually equipped for such basic and general studies. The questions get considered, of course, but not in the depth and not in the skilled manner in which they should be studied.

One of the most impressive studies by a political scientist dealing with the foreign policy of a developing country is Professor William C. Johnstone's *Burmese Foreign Policy, A Study in Neutralism*, published in 1962. Professor Johnstone deals in his book with the general question of how much freedom a small independent state can have in the shadow of such a big and powerful neighbor as the People's Republic of China. His conclusions, and they are sound and

seemingly substantiated by the drift of Burmese foreign policy in the seventeen years since independence came in 1948, are quite pessimistic ones. Are they applicable to countries other than Burma? Does greater distance from China make a difference, as in the Philippine case, or does greater size, both territorially and in terms of population, matter very much, as in the case of Indonesia?

Probably the first neutral, or would-be neutral, was Thailand in the 1930s. What can be learned from the Thai experience? Does Thailand today follow a different kind of policy only because the other policy failed? Did it fail? Are Thai political scientists studying this question? Are their counterparts elsewhere in Southeast Asia doing so?

One of the great myths of our time in my estimation is the oft-repeated, so-called "domino theory" about South Vietnam. This is the theory, more accurately the thesis, which states that, if Vietnam falls to Communism, it is only a matter of time until Laos and Cambodia and Thailand and Burma and Malaysia and the Philippines (and possibly even also Indonesia) succumb, too (following the fashion of dominos toppling end on end after the fall of the first in a row). But who in Southeast Asia has really systematically studied this question — so vital to each and every nation in this part of the world? Without taking sides one way or the other on the question, permit me to call your attention to a most provocative essay by the American economist Charles Wolf, Jr., in a book on American policy toward Southeast Asia edited by William Henderson. Wolf states that this thesis is not defensible and that it just is not so. The result of the fall of South Vietnam, he states, would not be the more or less inevitable fall of its neighbors but only an immediate increase in the cost of providing the same level of defense against Communism for such other Southeast Asian states, for example, Thailand, Cambodia or the Philippines, as these countries possessed before the collapse of the Saigon government. (I am dealing here, I hope, only in theoretical terms.)

Who is more qualified than the appropriately trained political scientist to seek an answer to this most important or contemporary foreign policy question in Southeast Asia? Can the political scientist avoid the study of such questions? Does he not have a responsibility to use his skills in the service of the survival of his nation and the welfare of his countrymen?

I have cited questions of a foreign policy character only as examples. What I have said about these might also be said about

basically domestic questions. For example, Professors Corpuz and Abueva raised before this conference basic problems respecting the endurance of the present Philippine two-party system or "one-and-a-half party system," or "two-faction one-party system," or call it what you will. Senator Raul S. Manglapus and Manuel Manahan of the Party for Philippine Progress have raised similar questions. What I would like to suggest here is that we ought to be able to predict the point when the present system would no longer satisfy the Filipino people (as Carl Lande has suggested that it now does), as well as the likely consequences for the Philippines when such a point is reached. Surely no more important question could be tackled by Filipino political scientists in the years which lie immediately ahead.

Similarly, the nature, thrust and future of nationalism in its several Asian settings is of major concern to the peoples of those countries as well as others. Visitors to the Philippines frequently ask me questions about Filipino nationalism: What is its likely future or direction of development? How does it affect the partnership with the United States? What is its economic and social content? Why has it evolved into its present particular form? These are important questions, and who can answer them better than the professional political scientist?

It is often argued, however, that others are better qualified to try to answer such contemporary questions. What others? Are there any others who could better answer such questions? Tomorrow possibly — but not surely. Today? None at all in my opinion.

There is someone qualified to fulfill a second responsibility, and his credentials are impressive. The responsibility is the serious investigation of the political life and behavior of neighboring nations — Indonesia possibly in the case of the Philippines, Thailand maybe in the case of Malaysia, China perhaps in the case of Thailand. The fact is that most informed persons in Southeast Asia who have any detailed reading knowledge of neighboring countries have obtained this knowledge from books written by non-Southeast Asians, mostly Americans and Englishmen. Hence, the best books on Indonesia's politics have been written by the American George Kahin and the Australian Herbert Feith. While most of the books on Burma are also by Americans and Englishmen, the Burmese Maung Maung also has contributed three volumes and is writing the fourth. But where is the Southeast Asian who has undertaken serious research on the politics of another Asian country? There are Indians and Japanese who have

studied their neighbors, of course, including Vishal Singh of the Indian School of International Studies in Delhi.

Why should the political scientist of developing countries, for example, those of Southeast Asia, engage in the study of their neighbors? Are not the methodologies and techniques of political science the same, such that Americans and Filipinos for example, or Filipinos and Australians, would probably come up with comparable conclusions? It is possible, of course, that they *might* do so, but by no means sure. The point is that Americans or Australians or Japanese or Indian views – that is, in terms of the values that govern the kinds of questions they ask (let alone how they may seek to answer those questions). There is surely positive benefit in Filipinos seeing Indonesia through Filipino eyes, in Thais seeing China in terms of Thai values. At present, however, there is no Filipino political scientist working on Indonesia, although there is one who has begun his graduate studies in the United States in preparation for doing so. Nor is there any Thai studying contemporary China.

There will be those of you who will reply that there are not enough, say, Malaysian political scientists studying Malaysia at the present time, let alone Malaysians studying neighboring countries. This is of course so. But it is not an adequate refutation of the stated need for Southeast Asian political scientists to rely less on Westerners for their knowledge of their neighbors and more on themselves. Cooperative research is one answer to the problem of a shortage of specialists. This, indeed, might be accomplished, for example, through a journal published in the region dealing with questions relating to Asia as a whole (such as the ones historians have dwelt upon). Such specialists as developed, moreover, might devote more than the usual share of their time reviewing new books on neighboring countries with which they are acquainted; particularly for the more popular media, adding thereby a Filipino, Vietnamese or Thai point of view to the study in question.

This brings me to still a third responsibility of the political scientist in developing countries like those of Southeast Asia. This is the need to interpret the rapidly moving events in his country and neighboring countries to his less informed countrymen. Some of the participants in this conference have done this already. Professors O. D. Corpuz and Remigio Agpalo and three other well-informed Filipinos wrote a column for a while in Manila's evening *Daily Mirror* in which they commented, as trained and informed social scientists, on major national issues and problems as they saw them. Professor

Agpalo also wrote an excellent article questioning the need for hasty constitutional reform early in 1965 at a time when he feared that his nation's legislators might be stampeded into rash action. I have read few pieces of contemporary political commentary in the Philippines during the past twelve months that compare in insight and incisiveness with these articles.

The interpretation of events, of course, requires time, and it takes the political scientist away from the classroom and his research. This is a disadvantage which, on the whole, might not be necessary in future times and future circumstances. But the question is surely, not how many books the political scientist can write or how many students he should teach *per se*, but rather how he might most effectively employ the training and methodologies of his discipline to benefit his fellowmen. If many political scientists, including large numbers in my own country, will not accept this view, this does not lessen the need for the political scientist to fulfill his obligations as a citizen as well as scholar.

The present struggle between opposed forces in Vietnam represents an excellent case in point. There has been some very good commentary on the question of Philippine dispatch of a contingent of two thousand soldiers to struggling South Vietnam — mostly notably that of Maximo Soliven of the *Manila Times*. But there has been an even greater amount of petty political gossip on the topic — glaringly and factually inaccurate commentaries and materials that seem to me to have first seen the light of day in a busy columnist's far from well-lit imagination. The same can be said of radio commentaries and television interviews, excepting one or two programs, including that in which Professor Vuong Van Bac recently participated.

The question of the character and extent of Filipino assistance to the anti-Communist Saigon government in South Vietnam is a major one. It could have repercussions that would be felt for years to come in this country. It is the subject of intense public debate at the present time. But too much of this debate deals with the allegedly nationalist question of whether the Philippines should do the bidding of its big ally, the United States. This misses the point of the question altogether. The point is whether this is an appropriate means of advancing the hopefully fairly specific aims of Filipino foreign policy in Southeast Asia. What action or actions toward South Vietnam would best serve these aims? I have seen very little informed

commentary on this question in the Philippine press, including the weekly magazines and the Sunday supplements.

This is not intended as a criticism of Filipino political scientists, least of all of many of my good friends and colleagues attending this conference. Probably nowhere in the world has an academician written such informed critical commentary through the years on the state of his country's political party system as that of Professor Corpuz. Professor Raul de Guzman has already informed this conference of the efforts of the Graduate School of Public Administration to develop criteria for the determination on the merit of various proposals for the decentralization of governmental authority in the Philippines. Senator Manglapus and Manahan have assumed that decentralization is a good thing; but for what and for whom? Professor de Guzman indicated that he is not yet prepared to answer this question, although he expressed doubts concerning the assumptions of Senators Manglapus and Manahan, but he and his colleagues in the local government project are searching for an answer or answers. The question is an important one and surely worthy of their efforts.

This brings me to the two last questions on which I would like to share some thoughts with you. The first concerns the extent to which a few men shape the course of history; the second inquires whether an avowedly objective political scientist should take part in such efforts specifically as an expert in his field.

I must admit having some doubts on the first question. One of the conclusions of my study of Burma's former Premier U Nu, as some of you may know, was that it probably did not make too much difference who governed Burma among the civilian alternatives during the first decade of independence. But Burma is not the Philippines or Thailand or India. Few countries have suffered quite as unfortunate a legacy for independence as Burma in the years since 1948.

I began this paper with some remarks on the course of Asian history over the last fifty years. It is my contention that there were too few and, indeed, hardly any serious and systematic studies of some of the major events that preceded the Second World War (the emergence of nationalism, the expansion of Japan, the inadequacies of colonial rule, etc.). Not only were there too few such studies: there were practically none by Asian political scientists. It is my personal belief, but surely only an article of faith, that if more men had more information, and this information had been adequately

interpreted, the course of history *might* have been different. Please note that I say "*might*" — and that the difference in question might have been minor.

It is, however, so, I think, and the works of Edward Shils and others would seem to support the point of view that intellectuals have a proportionately greater political role in many of the developing countries than they have had in most of the older states. Large numbers of such intellectuals, of course, are ideologists, and it is open to question whether empiricists can move men to action after the fashion of the dogmatists. Whether they should try to do so is a question to which I should like to turn in just a moment. What I am concerned with here, however, is the role of the political scientist in bringing more and new information to the various policy-making processes and using the prestige of his position to insure that such information replaces frequently dated and inadequate information, or worse, blind prejudice and fear in the formulation of both domestic and foreign policies.

I am impressed, for example, with some of the things that Professor Corpuz has had to say in his writings concerning the politically alienated Filipino: the Filipino who could, but does not, vote. I wonder if even the founders of the new and reformist Party for Philippine Progress fully comprehend some of the things he has said. Or, in a society in which magazine consumers read the crusading *Philippine Free Press* as a kind of entertainment, does such information fail to command the attention of hardly any one, let alone the nation's political leaders? After all it was only 30 years ago that a Dutch Governor-General of the old Netherlands East Indies (today's Indonesia) was quoted as saying, "We have ruled here for 300 years with the whip and the club, and we shall be doing it for another 300 years." How different history might have been if the likelihood of Dutch loss of their colonial empire in Southeast Asia had been seriously studied (which was not) and the insights gained therefrom widely circulated? Likewise, how different tomorrow's Philippines might be if a study were attempted of the durability of various present political practices?

There is another aspect of this problem which I have already treated in a somewhat different context. This is the need for diversified viewpoints stemming from multiple objective studies of common problems. Professor Amara Raksataya of Thailand has suggested that the Thai government has not dispatched combat troops to fight the Communists in South Vietnam, partly because of

Soviet warnings and the related Thai respect for Soviet might. Yet, the Philippines, which follows a set of foreign policies very much like those of Thailand in many respects, does not even have diplomatic relations with the U.S.S.R., and currently seems unlikely to undertake such relations in the foreseeable future. Moreover, the President of the Philippines has asked the Congress of his country to appropriate ₱25,000 to send one thousand Filipino soldier-engineers to Vietnam and another one thousand men as a security contingent to protect the engineers.

On what basis have the Thais and the Filipinos made their quite different strategic decisions, or at least temporary decision or decisions in the process of being made? I submit to you very strongly that all the countries of Southeast Asia would be much the better off and the course of history might be changed if there were general studies publicly available to assist such governments in making decisions of this sort. This is not the place for me to quarrel with any aspect of official American attitudes on this and related subjects. Moreover, there are in fact many private American attitudes on these subjects, and several of these are available in print and are the result of serious scholarship. But most Americans generally start with the same first premises, and there is need for greater diversification of opinions on these questions. This the Asian political scientist can help to provide. The record of the years between the two World Wars in the Far East suggests the need for reliance on the studies of more than a couple of countries, however competent the scholars of both the United States and the United Kingdom are.

The second question I raised relates to the role of the political scientist in developing countries as an advocate. Admittedly, there are dangers in such a posture. One may lose his perspective as he becomes emotionally involved in his subject. (This, however, may come about too even if he is a nonactivist). The political scientist so behaving may also run afoul of today or tomorrow's authorities and become severely restricted in his future activities (if indeed he is allowed any such activities in the future). We must remember that most of the developing states, including most of those in Southeast Asia, are not free societies. On the other hand, these are all societies confronted with countless policy problems, external as well as domestic. And it is surely possible for academicians to seek to influence, even if privately, their country's decision-makers as they seek to cope with these problems.

Possibly, the best argument that I can advance for this position is a negative one. What happens if the political scientist or other social scientists or intellectuals in general do not so engage themselves in policy advocacy? Then, the ill-educated, the public relations expert, the demagogue, and who-knows-who-else take over. The political scientist, in my opinion, has an obligation to other values than scholarship exclusively, and to persons other than himself and the career he cultivates. I am not advocating an educated ruling class. The policy-makers and the various publics do not have to listen to the political scientist if they do not want to do so (and frequently they will not want to do so), but this does not excuse the scientist from the fulfillment of his responsibility.

The other argument that I would advance in support of a politically active role for the political scientist is perhaps even more controversial. It is my belief that our discipline can throw light on future developments as well as offer meaningful historical and contemporary analyses. The fact that it has not done so more than it has in the past is largely a function of the kind of political science pursued by individual practitioners of the discipline. Survey methodology applied over time should be of considerable assistance in gauging the changing attitudes of the populace in general and the extent to which they are satisfied with the prevailing political-social-economic system. Given what we know about prewar Japan and never-colonial Thailand (to cite another application of our discipline to anticipation of future happenings), we ought not to have been as surprised as we were by the emergence of the military as the dominant or as a powerful political group in such countries as Indonesia, Burma, and Pakistan.

Too many political scientists have for too long avoided taking stands on contemporary political issues, frequently assuming "on the one hand" and "on the other hand" postures. The present debate over the American policy toward South Vietnam in the United States is, in my estimation, a welcome change in the situation. Professor Hans Morgenthau of the University of Chicago is one of the leading savants of international relations in my country with Professor Robert Scalapino of the University of California who is a ranking specialist on Far Eastern politics (particularly Japan). Possessed of different points of view, they are among the academic debaters of Vietnamese policy in the United States at the present time. Their remarks are infinitely more enlightened than those of the likes of former Senator Barry Goldwater or, in my estimation, even Secretary

of State Dean Rusk. Interestingly, neither of these two scholars are professional students of Vietnam but rather men who draw on contemporary and historical experiences of other peoples to help support the positions they espouse.

But, it may be asked, are there not too few political scientists in the developing countries, such as those of South and Southeast Asia, and too many issues on which light might be shed and stands taken? The answer, of course, is "yes." But the number of Ph.D.s in political science is increasing in the Philippines, India, Thailand, and elsewhere. Moreover, the impact of our discipline ought not to be limited to the professional activities of the holders of advanced degrees. Professor Amara Raksataya gives some interesting statistics on the number of political science undergraduates in his undelivered paper, "The Study of Political Science in Thailand." Political science, likewise, is a very popular major course at the University of the Philippines as well as in other institutions of higher learning in this country. Although Professor Agpalo will survey the state of political science in the Philippines in a separate paper, may I take note of the emphasis in the department which he heads on the systematic study of politics, that is, on the methodologies and techniques studying political phenomena, as contrasted with merely factual material about things political. The techniques of our discipline are just as applicable to the analytical chores of civil servants and journalists as theirs are to our own work. Some of the better columnists in the Manila newspapers such as Maximo Soliven and Oscar Villadolid, for example, were political science undergraduates. Dr. Bernabe Africa has already paid tribute in his paper to distinguished alumni of the U.P. who have served in the Foreign Service of the Philippines.

Lest I be misunderstood, let me state my position very briefly in conclusion. I am not advancing the political scientist as the savior of mankind in the various developing countries. I am rather suggesting that, in countries in which intellectuals are a major political force and in which various institutions of political activity are slow in forming, the political scientist has a unique opportunity to be of service not only to scholarship and education as such but also to policy-making and national political development. Indeed, it is more than an opportunity; it is a responsibility. The antiseptic attitude of many Western political scientists, now fortunately undergoing significant change, is not applicable to the situation of the developing countries. This is not to suggest an abandonment of the rigorous and systematic data-collecting and analytical techniques of the discipline

in favor of shallow political commentary or pretentious policy recommendations. Rather it is to propose the use of such a national resource as a country's political scientists, however few in number, by the developing countries for the betterment of human existence. If the role is a demanding one, it is because the times are demanding. I have no illusions, moreover, respecting the likely failures and the adverse responses to such failures. But the choice is between the safe retreat of academe and the crucial decisions of the world beyond the university and the college. There is really no choice in my opinion. I hope that you agree.