

Dr. F. Landa Jocano: A Life in the Academe

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It is perhaps an irony in our field (anthropology) that so few practitioners embody one of anthropology's key areas of study—kinship. This article examines the life and work of one of Philippine anthropology's most prolific members—Dr. Felipe Landa Jocano, more popularly known as F. Landa Jocano. Taking a page from Clifford Geertz (1983), I examine his life and career tacking between the experience-near (as his son) and the experience-distant (as another anthropologist). I trace the trajectory of his thought through his published work and examine the implications for theorizing and theory-building in Philippine anthropology.

Jocano's work is remarkably diverse and reflects a wide range of interests, ranging from childrearing practices, cultural interpretation of archaeological research, urban poverty, indigenous medicine, community studies, folklore, mythology, education, international relations, management theory and practice, and local entrepreneurship. A large part of his early work was focused on building a strong corpus of ethnographic data. As I remember him, "It's necessary to first build up your data before theorizing about culture." This he certainly did and over the years since his return from the University of Chicago, he was very productive. Eventually he would finally come up with his model of Philippine culture in his series *Anthropology of the Filipino People*, first published in 1997. I will return to these works later as they represent a summary of his work that was written for a lay audience.

Dr. Felipe Landa Jocano was born on February 05, 1930, in Cabatuan, Iloilo Province. He had finished elementary education in the local school and was determined to continue his education beyond his graduation. He left for Manila and set out to find work to support himself and to continue his goals. Initially, he was employed as a janitor in a large newspaper company. How he got his job is an interesting narrative and one that reveals much about his character and his drive to excel in his profession. As he narrated to me, he was looking for a job at the company; he had borrowed some clothes from his landlady's son and went looking for a job. By chance, he had managed to meet the president of the company and presented his report card from his school. The president told him to come back the following day, and so he presented himself at the office. The secretary however told him that the president was in a meeting and that he had to secure an appointment first. Just then, the secretary was summoned inside the boardroom and seeing his chance, he quickly followed the secretary inside. The president was surprised to see him but admired his guts and determination. Right then and there he was given a job first as an all-around maintenance man. He slept in the printing room and did various tasks during the daytime. His ability to write was soon noticed and he was soon made a cub reporter. It was here that he learned his journalistic skills, especially the attention to detail and the ability to tell a story that would serve him later when he became an anthropologist. This period in his life was a challenging one for him as he became a working student. He enrolled in Arellano High School's night classes while working as a reporter during the day. It was during his days as a reporter that he began signing his articles *F. Landa Jocano*, a signature that he would carry for the rest of his days.

He was able to complete his secondary education, but due to changes in circumstances, he left his job as a reporter and returned to Iloilo. There he enrolled in the Bachelor of Arts in Literature program at the Central Philippine University. His research into local epic literature and mythology was prompted by a discussion with his professor in literature; during one of the classroom lectures, he asked his professor why local mythology was

not in their course materials. The latter replied that there was no indigenous mythological literature. This he could not accept and this prompted his research into indigenous mythology. He managed to persuade the officials of Central Philippine University (CPU) to loan him their sole reel to reel tape recorder for his fieldwork. From 1956 to 1957 and at various times from 1958-1960, with the necessary supplies and his best friend's company, he began what would soon be an epic journey in itself. With the help of various contacts, he started traveling up and down the mountains of central Panay, collecting indigenous literature in the form of songs, stories, proverbs and riddles. It was during one of his trips to the towns of Maasin, Janiway, Lambunao and Calinog that he was introduced to an old man named Udig, who sang for him portions of the epic called the *Hinilawod*. By the time he had finished, he had gathered several reels' worth of narrative which he began transcribing as soon as he had returned to CPU. Out of this would eventually come the *Epic of Labaw Donggon*, originally published by the University of the Philippines Press (UP Press) in 1965. This work included an analysis of the themes in the epic in terms of the local social structure and kinship relationships, especially among the Sulod, the subject of his dissertation at the University of Chicago.

He graduated from Central Philippine University and afterwards returned to Manila. While in Manila, he was hired by the National Museum initially as a maintenance man. While doing his tasks at the exhibits on prehistory, he became fascinated with the displays and began writing about them. His article was published in *Sunday Times* magazine, the weekend magazine of the *Manila Times*. The article caught the attention of the Secretary of Education, who wanted to include it in a series of textbooks for the Philippine educational system. As a result, Jocano was quickly promoted to the equivalent of a Research Associate, and began working closely alongside colleagues such as Robert Fox and eventually H. Otley Beyer himself. During this time, from 1957 to 1960, he was assigned to the Anthropology Division. One of his more memorable assignments was to do ethnographic research among the Ilongot of Nueva Vizcaya (later to be known as the Bugkalot). The Ilongot had a reputation for ferocity in

dealing with outsiders and for taking the heads of strangers (Rosaldo 1980; Rosaldo 1980) at that time. Despite their reputation, he was warmly welcomed into the community and stayed in the house of the chief.

There is a significant overlap between the time he was initially employed at the Museum, and his return trips to central Panay to do fieldwork among the Sulod (Introduction, *Sulod Society*). Among the many topics of interest was conflict settlement among the members of the community. On one occasion, he was witness to a meeting to settle an issue between two men, when suddenly one of the members on one side speared another on the other. Immediately cooler heads on both sides intervened and no further blood was shed. He was later able to witness how the wounded man was treated using traditional herbal medicines. The wound later healed, without any traces of infection. For Jocano, this was one of the many incidents that would lead him to an interest in folk medicine. For him, sorcery and medicine were closely intertwined, as many sorcerers were healers as well. He sought out training in sorcery as part of his ethnographic work, although he did not complete the entire process. This episode says a great deal about his willingness to fully participate as an observer in his field research.

While working at the National Museum, he was recommended to do his PhD in anthropology at the University of Chicago. At the same time he was also awarded a Fulbright grant in order to do his degree. Because he had already carried with him his field notes and the corpus of two epics, he was able to finish both the masters' and PhD degrees within three years, two years shorter than the norm. He received the Roy D. Albert Award in Anthropology in 1962, while his work on *Labaw Donggon* garnered him the first place in the Chicago Folklore Prize for the year 1963.

His training in anthropology included doing fieldwork among selected Native American communities (also formerly known as American Indians). His host family was part of the Tesuque, originating from Santa Fe, New Mexico. His host family, however, had relocated to Arizona. The

topic for his fieldwork was kinship, a theme that would occur again and again in his later fieldwork back in the Philippines. How he was able to successfully complete his field research is itself very instructive in terms of methodology. In general, most of the Native American communities were reticent about specific aspects of their daily life and culture. When Jocano began his fieldwork with his host family, he did not immediately begin interviewing them about the aspects of Tesuque culture he was interested in. His host family owned a farm, and being from a farming family himself, he began to volunteer for various chores around the farm. This included rising up before dawn to do his tasks before breakfast, and assisting the family members as needed. One day, as they were resting under the shade of a tree, the family patriarch began asking him questions about farming in the Philippines. This soon led to comparisons of farming practices and gradually the family members began to take him into their confidence. Soon he was able to ask questions and take notes with their tacit approval. An indication of how well he had blended in with his hosts was in how they took him along when they went drinking in town. On one memorable occasion, as he sat with them, the conversation was so interesting but he could not bring out his notebook and take notes given their setting. Instead he resorted to excusing himself to go to the toilet, and while there, he would furiously scribble with a pencil on the available toilet paper everything he could recall. Later when he returned to his room, he would transcribe his scribbling and mailed these to the secretary of the anthropology department, with a request to type them up for him. Upon his return to the University, he set about organizing and writing up his final paper. He would later jokingly refer to this as *toilet paper ethnography*.

Part of what shaped his later orientation was his experience of racist attitudes from classmates and strangers alike while in the US. These came in the form of disparaging remarks and snubs that ended only when his work was praised by his professors. One memorable incident he told me was about a time when he and his Tesuque friends watched a movie together. The movie was one of the popular cowboys vs. Indians (the colloquial

name for the Native Americans). While watching, they soon noticed that every time the Indians were shot by the white cowboys, the white members of the audience would cheer and clap. This prompted them to cheer and clap in turn every time a cowboy was shot by an Indian. Shortly after that, the film was paused, the lights went on and they were made to leave the theater. Incidents like these fueled his passion to prove that Filipinos were the equal of any other group.

He defended his dissertation, *Kinship System and Social Organization of the Sulod of Central Panay* at the Department of Anthropology at the University of Chicago, Illinois, in June 1963. That same year, he returned to the Philippines and married Ms. Adria K. Payad in a simple church wedding. Upon his return to the Philippines, he was initially employed by the National Museum as a researcher. Financial constraints led the young couple to find lodgings in an inner-city district known as Sta. Ana. It was during their stay in Sta. Ana that he took an interest in the activity going on around him. He began to sit around at the neighborhood *sari-sari* store and struck up conversations with the locals. Over time, he made friends with many of the vendors, pedicab drivers, the streetwalkers, the hostesses at the nightclubs, taxi drivers and more. He attended their drinking sessions, hearing the stories of their lives and discovering how they coped with their economic and political constraints. From these narratives emerged *Slum As A Way of Life*, the subtitle of which captures its direction: *A Study of Coping Behavior in an Urban Environment*. This was published by the University of the Philippines Press in 1975, eight years after he and his family transferred to Ermita, another district in Manila.

From his return until 1967, he continued working with the National Museum of the Philippines at its Department of Anthropology. In 1967, he joined the Department of Anthropology of the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of the Philippines Diliman. He was given the rank of associate professor and was tenured almost immediately. From 1970 onwards, he was promoted to full professor in anthropology. In 1974,

he transferred to the Asian Center as a full professor in Philippine Studies. He remained with the Asian Center until his retirement in 1995. Thereafter he was professor emeritus until his passing in 2013.

The country experienced a major change in 1972 upon the declaration of martial law throughout the land by then President Ferdinand E. Marcos. As part of his consolidation of his hold upon the country, he began to recruit intellectuals and academics and created a think tank thereafter called Philippine Center for Advanced Studies (PCAS). PCAS was housed within the Asian Center of the University of the Philippines in Diliman, Quezon City. The function of PCAS was to provide research-based policy advice on various issues facing the government at the time. As one of the leading intellectuals of the country, Jocano was part of PCAS until its dissolution a few years later.

Participation in PCAS was a boost to those who accepted the invitations. The government invested significant resources in the Center to enable it to do its tasks. I asked my father why as to why so many academics stayed with the Center until its dissolution. He told me, “Imagine this – all you had to do was to state what kinds of resources you needed and these arrived on your desk two days later.” This plus the challenge of influencing policy matters at the highest levels proved to be irresistible to many. But involvement with PCAS was not without its challenges. Because of the dictatorial nature of the Marcos administration, those who were recruited often faced criticism from their colleagues. Nevertheless, many stayed on until PCAS was dissolved and its resources transferred to the University. In the years that followed, Jocano began to distance himself from further involvement with the Marcos administration. He grew increasingly disenchanted with what he saw was happening within and he began to steadily turn down invitations to join administration projects. Instead, he focused his energies on continuing to publish and to teach within the University. The steady stream of publications is testament to his continued energy and never-ending curiosity about different aspects of Philippine culture. Towards his retirement, he shifted his attention to understanding corporate culture, paying attention to issues of labor and

management in particular. He felt that the role of cultural differences was either misunderstood or downplayed and this resulted in a continuous disjuncture between management styles and cultural realities among workers. He then began to be active as a lecturer and consultant to different corporations until the early 2010s, when a series of microstrokes and cardiac issues forced him to slow down his pace. He set up a small private publishing firm, PUNLAD Research House, in order to make available to the general public his works. It was during this time that he had republished *Folk Medicine* and *Slum As A Way Of Life* and began a five-part series called *Anthropology of the Filipino People*. This series sought to explain Filipino culture to the general reading public; thus, its language overall was in layman's terms. Before he passed away, he had started publishing a series on the Filipino value system and entrepreneurship. Even at his advanced age, he was still a fieldworker at heart; he did his research at a nearby marketplace, engaging the vendors in conversation and storytelling after having breakfast at a fastfood chain.

This summary of the years from his return until his death does not begin to capture the different directions his career took over the years. In the following sections, I identify some of the different themes emerging from a reading of his different works and the possibilities for theorizing about Philippine culture.

The first major consistent theme from his works is an emphasis on kinship and how it impacts other aspects of daily life. In his dissertation, he examined closely the nature of the bilateral system of kinship, until that time a topic little studied by anthropologists. During this time, he had revised his dissertation and had it published by the University of the Philippines Press as *Sulod Society* (1968). This was followed by *Growing Up In A Philippine Barrio* (1969) a study in education in the broadest sense, as socialization and enculturation and not only formal instruction in schools. Education in this sense encompasses both the circles of relationships in which knowledge of the world is imparted as well as value orientations and the realities of the supernatural world. This last mentioned is important, as belief in the supernatural is presented as a means of social

control. *The Traditional World of Malitbog* (1969) is a broader ethnography of Malitbog, one of the communities in his field research. In this work, he presents issues of social change and cultural continuities in a rural setting.

The term *Sulod* deserves some explanation as its use provoked a widespread discussion on names and naming conventions years later. *Sulod* literally means inside or in a room, or a state of being enclosed like in a room. As he stated in the Introduction, the local people didn't have a set name for themselves; some called themselves *Sulodnon*, others *Halawadnon* and still others *Bukidnon*. He finally settled on the term *Sulod* as it also alluded to their geographical location. Years later, this would provoke a discussion among local scholars since it raised the question, was an ethnic identity created or not? My father would always tell me, all that people had to do was to read the Introduction in order to understand the dilemmas he faced and the willingness to change what he wrote once more and better factual information was at hand.

Kinship is also central to his other works, both the ethnographic and the mass market. It is within the immediate family and the kinship network that our early socialization and education into the world takes place. Childrearing practices are contextualized within kin groups – thus at an early age, children learn local norms and behavior. As the child reaches adulthood, these become default practices, often carried out instinctively. Kinship also provides a framework for dealing with other people, as it is within and among kinfolk that one learns who is one of the group and who is not (*loob*, inside; *labas*, outside). Even in his works on prehistory (*Questions and Challenges in Philippine Prehistory; Philippine Prehistory*), Jocano describes how the early *barangay* were actually organized along kinship lines. In a kin-based social organization, personal ties become paramount and relationships are not conceived of in the abstract sense, but with a strong emotional dimension. In *Maternal Child Care among the Tagalogs in Bay, Laguna* (1970), he described the life cycle from birth until death, showing that from birth until death, individuals are not really isolated but are surrounded by kinfolk and integrated into the networks that bind them. A person raised in this manner will soon

deal with others as if they were or were not kin to him, and this theme is raised again and again in his subsequent work. In particular, the socialization and education process described in this article and in *Folk Medicine*, *Slum As a Way of Life*, and other works show similarities in approaches. This appears to be one of the seeds of his subsequent model of Philippine culture—the focus on the behavioral and normative similarities across language groups and cultures all over the archipelago.

Second is the proposition that worldviews have an inherent rationality all their own. Worldview, which is a wide range of cognitive frameworks including religion, magical practices, rituals, local mythology and belief in spirits, serves to meet immediate needs. The rationality of worldview is that it permits an individual to make sense of the world, to be able to impose order through various practices, and in the case of local mythology, to validate one's existence by appealing to a moral order. This is reflected in *Filipino Catholicism: A Case Study in Culture Change* (Asian Studies 5: (1) 1967; in *Folk Christianity* (1982), *Folk Medicine* (1973). The *Epic of Labaw Donggon*, *Sulod Society* and *Malitbog* also highlight the moral nature of a worldview; the stories of folk heroes are meant to instill desired behavioral traits while warning of the consequences of violating local norms. Belief in spirits is perpetuated as a means of social control, which extends even into adulthood. However, it is worth noting that the desired ways of behaving with deities and spirits resonates clearly with the behavioral patterns in dealing with others that one learns through the kinship system. In other words, spirits and deities are like people; they have emotions, they can be hurt; they behave as humans do. The difference lies in the power that they wield over the natural environment. Nevertheless, following the logic of relationships, they can be dealt with as one deals with other humans; it is possible to talk to them or to snub them; they can be appealed to, insulted, flattered and bribed with offerings and gifts. This proposition that worldview has an inherent rationality led to his assertion that indigenous or folk medicine is also parallel to clinical medicine; both are based on fundamental assumptions about the world; both are based on record keeping; both have systems of diagnosis and thus are empirical in nature.

A third theme is the role of language in understanding local culture. Vocabulary and grammar point to local norms and ideologies; it is in mishandling local language that one learns rather abruptly what the actual and correct usages should be. Thus in all of his ethnographies and in his later applied work, vocabulary and the cultural context of each of the words plays a major role in understanding local cultural practices. In his applied works, he stresses the return to the use of local language in refining internationally accepted practices to local standards of behavior.

Fourth and crucially, the works mentioned above have another thread running through them and this is their emphasis on maintaining social harmony. Implicit here is the proposition that maintaining harmony becomes pervasive because the potential for disharmony exists. Thus in the ethnographic works, there are case studies of disagreements and conflicts, both resolved and unresolved. All these point to unstated rules of conduct that are learned through experiential means rather than through didactic classroom pedagogies. This emphasis on harmony carries over into how one relates with the unseen world; thus in his works on folk medicine and on folk Catholicism, harmony with the spirits and with the saints is also paramount in the lives of local folk.

Following the trajectories outlined above, it is clear that he sought to understand what it was that different ethnolinguistic groups had in common with each other. In the above instances, these similarities were to be found in the way social life was organized, with kinship at the core. The pervasiveness of kinship leads to the observation that it is this that shapes worldview and how people deal with the physical world. Thus, the inherent logic of Philippine cultural systems as seen from this point of view is based on kinship, the rules of behavior expressed through value systems (cognitive) as learned through the processes of socialization and enculturation, and the rationality of worldview as a way to live in the world when understood through both historical processes and present material realities.

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