

Introduction

The Philippines: pieces of a jigsaw state

In March 1521 three ships under Ferdinand Magellan (Magalhaes/Magallanes), a Portuguese navigator in the service of the king of Spain, landed in the Visayan islands. One ship later completed the first circumnavigation of the globe, an event for the history record books but more importantly it changed that history of the islands, now home to 110 million people. A few decades later, Spain assumed ownership of the archipelago stretching from the Luzon Strait to the Sulu Sea and named it *Islas Filipinas*. The Spanish left a religion, a few genes and some aspects of culture, but the people were and remain predominantly of Malay/Austronesian race, language and culture, albeit with other influences from America and China.

The Philippines is unique in many ways; its geology, its fauna, in its history of rule by two successive Western powers, Spain and the United States. It has been a political identity with a singular name for nearly 500 years, much longer than many of its neighbours. It is the only predominantly Christian nation in Asia south of the Caucasus and is fervently Catholic. In the nineteenth century it spawned the first modern nationalists fighting Western imperialism.

However, this singularity does not make for an identity which is readily understood even by its own citizens, let alone by foreigners. It is part of the vast Malay Archipelago and shares a basic language and some culture with its Indonesian and Malaysian neighbours but it is separated from them by 500 years of history and itself divided by fragmented geography and regional loyalties. That history explains its current problems as reflected in its weak post-1945 economic and social performance compared with most of its neighbours, and its continuing high levels of violence. Democracy flourishes, elections are regular, noisy and competitive yet little progress is

made towards changing a system dominated by dynasties as seen in the contests in the 2022 election. After the grip of two distant empires, Spanish and American, it now lives under the shadow of another, closer one, China.

Geology divides it into more than 2,000 inhabited islands. Regional rivalries and the widespread but not universal use of English have thwarted the acceptance of Filipino (essentially the Tagalog of Central Luzon) as the national language. Regional languages and loyalties remain strong so that imported languages and the Church seem at times the main unifiers. It is also an administrative jigsaw in that power locally lies not with its geographically coherent seventeen regions but with eighty numerous provinces and cities with province-level powers, some very small.

A basic Malay culture has been so influenced by Spain, the Catholic Church and then by America that its identity is sometimes seen as Latin as much as Asian. Indeed, many Filipinos in California, where they are the second largest Asian community, often self-identify as Latino or Pacific islander not Asian.¹ The Catholic Church, as adapted locally, provides some common bond, other than for the Muslims, but faces its own challenge from evangelicals and populist preachers. Religious division is an underlying historical reality exacerbated by the concentration of Muslims in western Mindanao and Sulu and more recently by extremist Islamism from abroad. Yet the cultural roots and language, even aspects of its politics, remain essentially Malay from Ilocos in the north to Sulu in the south. However, fragmented by religion, local languages and quasi-tribal identities, the Philippines is at once identifiable yet hard to define or describe.

The very notion 'Filipino' began with local born Spaniards, known as *creoles*, and only very gradually spread to Spanish *mestizos*, Chinese *mestizos* and urbanized indigenous people accepted into the dominant *principalia* class.² The nationalism of the *ilustrados* (the reformist educated elite) in the late nineteenth century raised national consciousness and the struggles against America and Japan saw mass participation. Independence brought the masses into the Filipino embrace but despite shared urbanization and education, the sense of national identity developed fitfully. Added to the centrifugal forces of geography were the strength of elite links to the US and of many leading businessmen to China. Suggestions to change the colonial name to a Malay one have failed – many late nineteenth revolutionaries preferred 'Katagalugan', which became the name of a short-lived Tagalog republic. More recently 'Maharlika', a word denoting a Tagalog noble warrior class, has been suggested but attracted little support.

Five hundred years on from the arrival of Spain and Catholicism fissures remain. Muslim Mindanao's on and off warfare has been about local rivalries as well as opposition to Manila and Christianity. Meanwhile, non-Muslim parts of the island also continue to see conflicts, mainly over land rights between local ethnic groups, particularly in Mindanao and the broader population whose composition has been changed by decades of migration from the Visayas. That internal colonization continues. Visayan

languages now predominate in Mindanao. Generally, regional loyalties and in political terms local patron-client relationships remain important. They remain crucial even if weakened by urbanization and the shared identity of the millions of Filipinos now working overseas or brought together via social media such as Facebook or by international beauty pageants. National politics is still partly driven by the regional appeal of particular candidates. Local identity is mostly stronger than national identity, perhaps a reflection of the lack of esteem of the national government.

After years under a backward Spain and the aegis of friars, American imperialism brought education and new legal and administrative systems. Seventy years ago, the then recently independent Philippines boasted higher literacy levels than most of Asia and the highest income levels of populous Asian countries apart from Japan. It had an admired – at least from a distance – US-inspired legal and democratic system. Today, despite two decades of reasonable economic performance, it is widely seen as having failed to match most of its neighbours in income growth and progress in education. It remains better known for natural disasters, flamboyant leaders, political violence and sporadic insurgencies, and for its major export – its own citizens finding work abroad which they could not find at home.

Its social structure has changed only modestly over time, with huge gaps in income and wealth, the dominance of certain families, particularly in the provinces, the preference for the fairer skins of *mestizos* (European or Chinese) and even place names celebrating colonialists, for example the posh enclaves of Makati – Magallanes, Forbes, Legazpi, Urdaneta and Dasmarinas. Violence is an all too constant ingredient in politics. President Duterte's so-called War on Drugs killed particularly large numbers. Killings of political rivals, critical journalists and of farmer and worker activists had long been common but accelerated dramatically under Duterte. Lawyers abound but the state of law and order varies widely, ever subject to political and pecuniary influences. The state structure is weak for historical and geographical reasons which partly explain the persistence of insurgencies and of dynastic politics at both national and local levels. Senses of nationalism and civic duty appear weak compared to the demands of kinship and client relationships, blurring lines between public and private spheres. These features have especially flourished under the de-centralized political system and weak central bureaucracy bequeathed by America. Trading and sailing have always been essential elements of economic life and smuggling a natural outcome of attempts to tax it.

However, the nation has strengths too. Filipinos may be divided among themselves at home but in the outside world they have an identity and solidarity that is strong and recognized as such. Gender equality is ahead of most of Asia; Filipino workers are valued overseas for their skills and commitment, and command of English carries global benefits. Its Catholicism is sometimes more about ritual than ideology and society has relatively few hang-ups about racial mixing born of centuries of practice and the more

recent impact of migration. It is welcoming of foreigners and renowned for its love of music and fiestas. There is a tradition of free speech – and sometimes gaudy rhetoric – and a media which is often too lively for those in power. In the much longer run, a generation or two away, its high fertility rate, which has long been a burden, will in a generation prove a bonus as most of its neighbours face ageing and falling populations. One day the nation may even acquire a name which reflects its Malay core identity.

As a nation, the Philippines needs to be taken more seriously by itself as well as by outsiders. Already it has 110 million people, or ten times as many as a century ago, and still growing by about 1.3 million a year. Its island chain separating the Pacific Ocean from the South China Sea, and hence the Indian Ocean, is strategically vital to bigger powers. Its own West Philippine Sea (the eastern part of the South China Sea) is now largely claimed by China, while the US, Japan and others demand freedom of navigation. Despite its close ties to the US, and its stunning 2014 victory over China's sea claims at the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague, its attitude to China has been equivocal. Now, as in the past, money sometimes trumps patriotism. Its own ethnic Chinese are also sometimes an issue given their prominence in big business, and in the preference (also partly colonial) for fair over the browner skins which are the Filipino norm.

Philippine fortunes have often reflected global power shifts – Spain at the height of its sixteenth century power, the US as it moved on to the imperial world stage in 1898, Japan briefly between 1941 and 1945 until the US became the regional hegemon. Now the question is whether China, with economic as well as military power, will be next, or can this fundamentally Malay people find common cause with their Malay cousins in Indonesia and Malaysia, and their ever-proud Vietnamese neighbours and, helped by outside powers such as the US, Japan and India, keep China in its mainland box?

For the Philippines itself, much may depend on its own social and economic development, in particular broadening the base of power and prosperity in a country where government, local as well as national, has been the domain of dynasties and rent-seeking politicians and where those of *mestizo* origin (Western or Chinese) and appearance are often favoured. Ethnic Chinese dominance of much big business adds to the gap between elites and the rest. Foreign investment has been held back by vested interests cloaking themselves in nationalism. The islands have had numerous changes of rule, foreign and local, but no revolution and only half-hearted efforts at land reform. Communist insurgency still troubles some rural areas but not enough to be a sufficient threat to generate change. Meanwhile, the shared values and identity that the Catholic Church, or at least its saints and symbols, has provided to the majority have made reconciliation of the Muslim minority more difficult.

Filipinos have a reputation for being hard-working and quick to learn new skills but these attributes have mainly benefited the foreign countries to which millions have migrated. Their remittances support the domestic

economy but are no substitute for the investment and good governance which would keep them at home. In recent years a surge in Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) has provided a way to use some of these talents but the nation has largely failed to develop a competitive manufacturing sector like its neighbours. Strong and broad family ties and obligations provide a measure of social security but also contribute to the dynastic politics and nepotism which undermine good government.

The past is littered with fake history including a mythical fifteenth century law giving legitimacy to President Marcos' wartime medals. Nationalism is more often rhetorically invoked than put into practice. False dawns have been many and false prophets are a constant threat. Ferdinand Marcos promised martial law would bring order and progress but his regime ended in debt and disillusion. When the famous dynasts failed to deliver prosperity, the people turned to celebrity figures from movies and sports, and then back to a dynast and then an action man with a real gun. President Rodrigo Duterte's vulgar populism promised change by targeting privileged groups, drug users and, supposedly, corruption but little changed other than that his personal rule undermined already weak institutional checks and balances. He also helped the possibility of Marcos' son becoming president.

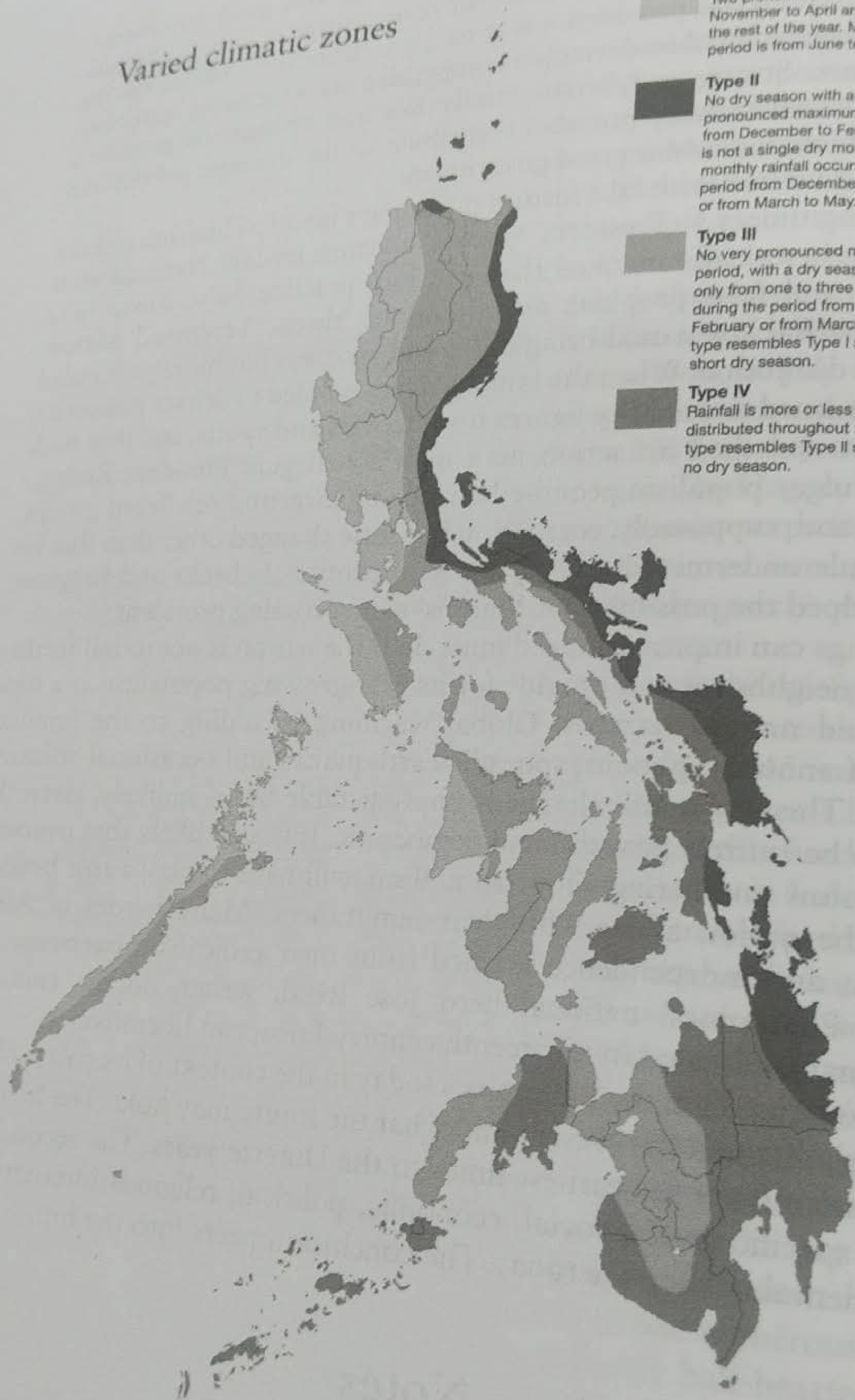
But things can improve, indeed must do if the nation is not to fall further behind its neighbours and provide for its ever-growing population at a time of increased natural hazards. Global warming is adding to the familiar hazards of annual typhoons, sporadic earthquakes and occasional volcanic eruptions. The way it will change is unpredictable but is unlikely, given the history, to be entirely peaceful and democratic. It is also likely that overseas Filipinos, now numbering about 13 million, will have to play a role beyond keeping the nation afloat with their remittances. Many heroes of Asian revolution and independence learned from their radicalism overseas, not least the Philippines' national hero Jose Rizal, writer, doctor, cautious revolutionary schooled in nineteenth century European liberalism.

This book looks at the Philippines today in the context of its past, at how history has dictated the present and what the future may hold. The first half is a narrative from the earliest times to the Duterte years. The second half looks at specific issues, social, economic, political, religious international, environmental as they are today. The conclusion peers into the future.

Notes

- 1 Anthony Christian Ocampo, *The Latinos of Asia: How Filipino Americans Break the Rules on Race*, Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2016, pp. 166–9.
- 2 Renato Constantino, *The Philippines: A Past Revisited*, Vol. 1, Quezon City: Tala Publishing Services, 1975, p. 151.

Varied climatic zones



Type I

Two pronounced season, dry from November to April and wet during the rest of the year. Maximum rain period is from June to September.

Type II

No dry season with a very pronounced maximum rain period from December to February. There is not a single dry month. Minimum monthly rainfall occurs during the period from December to February or from March to May.

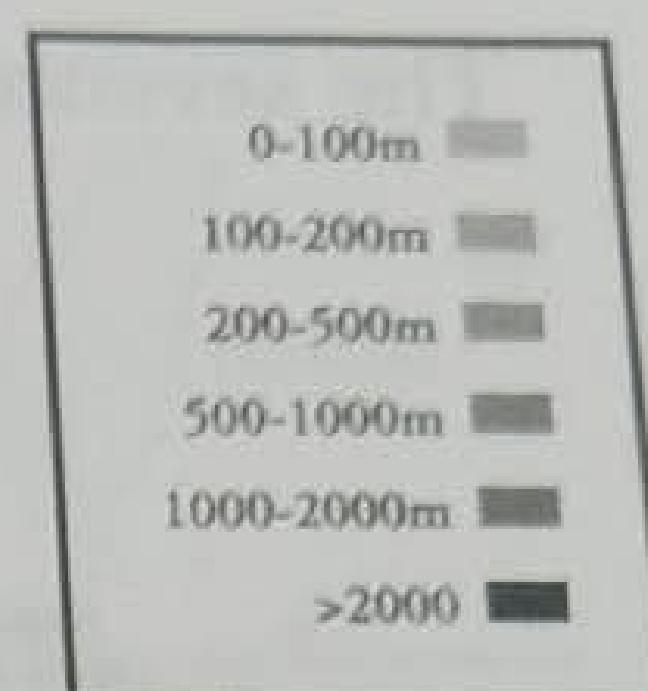
Type III

No very pronounced maximum rain period, with a dry season lasting only from one to three months, either during the period from December to February or from March to May. This type resembles Type I since it has a short dry season.

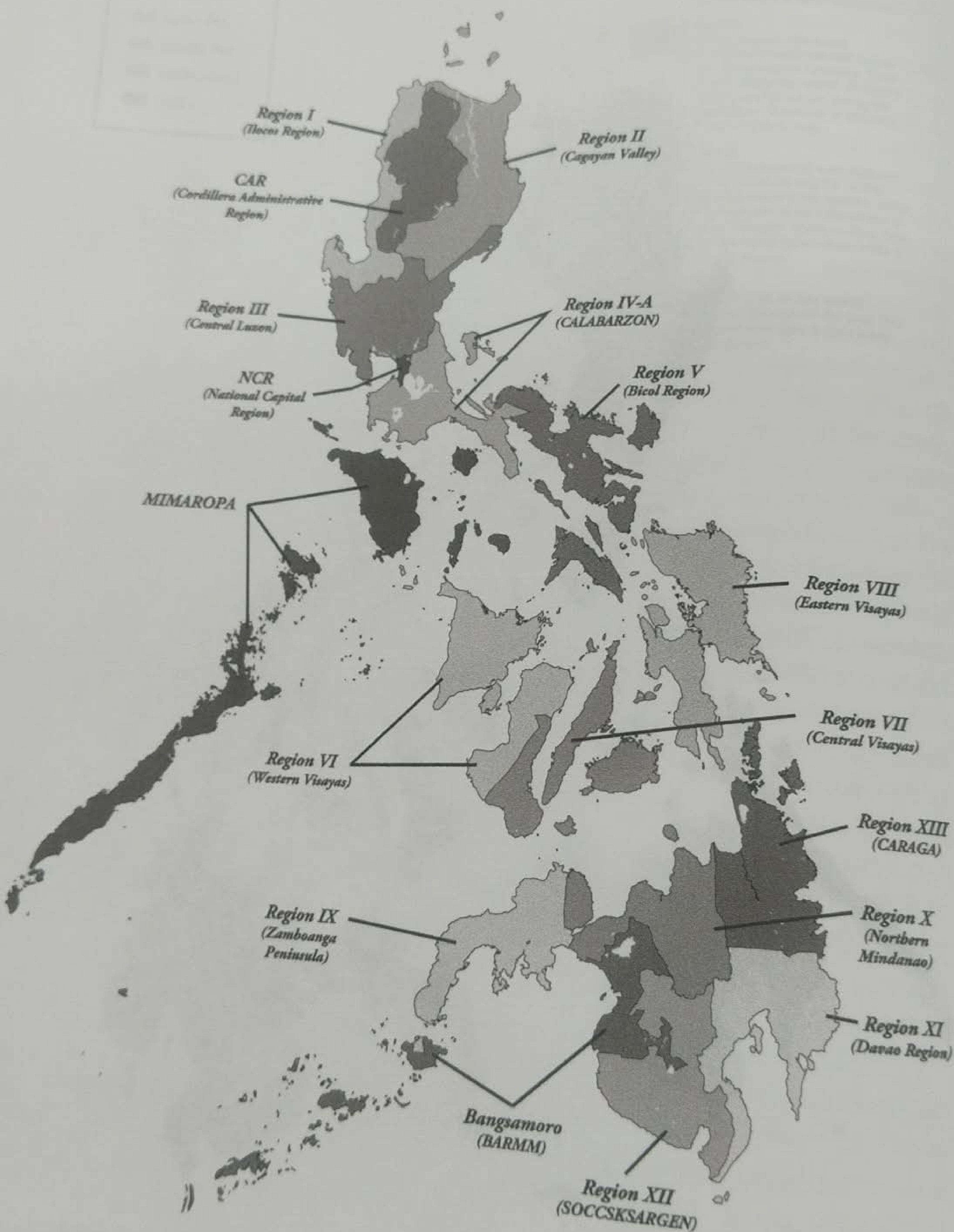
Type IV

Rainfall is more or less evenly distributed throughout the year. This type resembles Type II since it has no dry season.

A complex topography

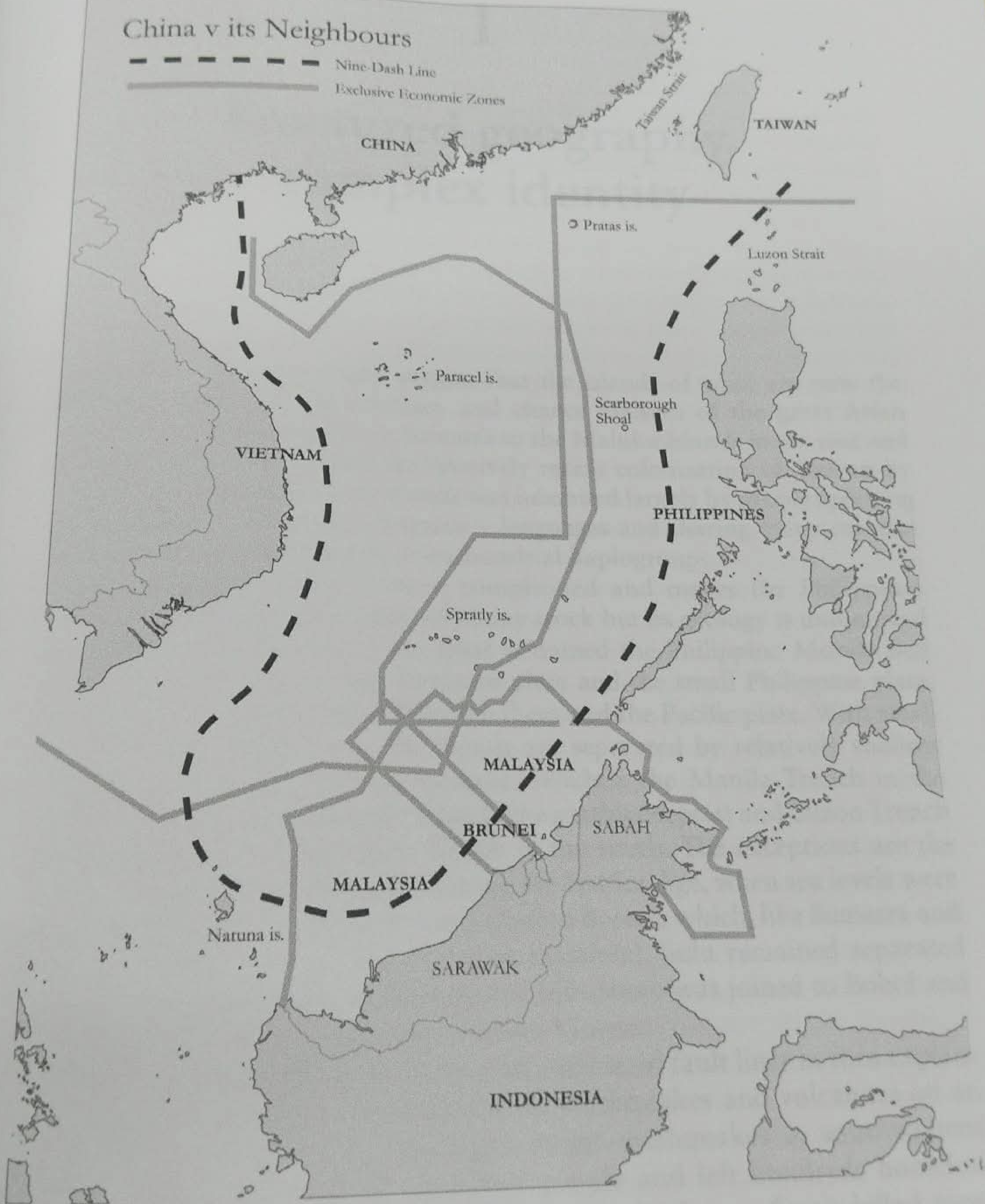


The seventeen regions



China v its Neighbours

----- Nine-Dash Line
—— Exclusive Economic Zones



1

Fractured geography, complex identity

A glance at the map might suggest that the islands of what are now the Philippines are just an arbitrary and chance division of the great Asian archipelago which runs from Sumatra to the Maluku Islands in the east and Taiwan in the north. Until the relatively recent colonization of Taiwan by the Chinese this great arc of islands was inhabited largely by people speaking Austronesian – Malayo-Polynesian – languages and sharing many cultural characteristics and linked by mitochondrial haplogroups.

However, the reality is more complicated and makes the Philippines different. Its people are largely of Malay stock but its geology is unique and convoluted. The islands lie on what is named the Philippine Mobile Belt which lies between the vast Eurasian plate and the small Philippine plate, which lies east of the islands between them and the Pacific plate. With small but significant exceptions, the islands are separated by relatively shallow seas but surrounded by deep oceanic trenches: the Manila Trench in the west and north, the Philippine Trench (the earth's deepest) and Luzon Trench in the west and the Cotabato Trench in the south. The exceptions are the Sulu archipelago and Palawan. During the last Ice Age, when sea levels were tens of metres lower, Palawan was joined to Borneo which, like Sumatra and Java, were both part of the Eurasian mainland. Sulu remained separated from Borneo by the Sibutu Passage but Mindanao was joined to Bohol and the eastern Visayas, Cebu to the western Visayas.

The plate intersections, trenches and associated fault lines in turn explain why the whole country is susceptible to earthquakes and volcanoes on an annual basis. In 2019, for example, major earthquakes in southwestern Mindanao killed a total of forty-four people and left hundreds homeless while one off Batanes in the far north near the Luzon Strait killed nine. Tsunamis are another earthquake hazard, killing more than 3,000 in Mindanao in 1976.

Volcanoes such as Taal, fifty kilometres south of Manila, and Mayon in southern Luzon, are intermittently active. The 1991 eruption of Mount Pinatubo, ninety kilometres from Manila, was the second most powerful of

the twentieth century, caused massive destruction of property and loss of a large area of fertile land which was inundated by volcanic ash washed down to the plains by summer rains.

The complex geology not only shows in the number of islands and twisting coastline but in the prevalence of hill country over plain. There are no big river basins such as those of Thailand or Vietnam and only Central Luzon has a very extensive area of flat land. The Cagayan Valley of northern Luzon, parts of Negros and Panay, the valleys of southern Mindanao and coastal strips on many islands are also suitable for paddy. The area has been a rice importer since the early twentieth century, particularly as rice has replaced corn and root crops as staples for many. The land is mostly more suited to corn and tree crops with coconuts almost everywhere. Sugar, coffee and tobacco are mostly grown in Luzon and Western Visayas, and bananas, pineapples, oil palm and rubber are mostly grown on plantations in Mindanao. Much land is too steep or now eroded for cultivation – in some cases because of wholesale free-clearing of forests. In 1946, 55 per cent of the land was virgin forest, now only about 3 per cent is forest.

Geography has another effect. The nation runs north-south from 20 degrees to 5 degrees north of the equator, a direct distance of some 1,600 kilometres or, in another context, from Edinburgh to Barcelona or Philadelphia to Miami. In other words, it goes from sub-tropical with its pronounced hot and wet, cool and dry, seasons to an equatorial climate, often with all-year-round rain and cloud cover. Monsoon patterns also make the eastern regions significantly wetter than western ones. Pronounced seasonality, with cooler but sunny months is best for grain crops such as rice. All-year rainfall also tends to leach soils. In the days before motorized vessels, seasonal winds were an important contribution to mobility and trade. Most important was the shift from northeast monsoon in the winter and southwest in the summer. Equatorial regions had less wind but some seasonal east-west shift. Add these factors together and they largely account for the fact that Luzon has 50 per cent of the nation's population but only one third of the land area.

Like most of the islands of eastern Indonesia east of Bali, all but Palawan are in a unique situation, cut off by deep water from the animal life both of the Sunda Shelf to the west, which was long part of the Eurasian landmass, and from the Sahul Shelf on which New Guinea and Australia sit. Thus, it had none of the native big mammals of Eurasia – horses, buffaloes, tigers, etc. – but also no marsupials or monotremes (egg-laying mammals).

As for humans, the earliest known were dark skinned people related to those of Melanesia and Australia. They appear to have been the ancestors of still-surviving small groups known as Aeta, or Negritos, traditionally small-statured, forest-dwelling hunter-gatherers. How they arrived is not clear but most likely, during the last Ice Age, they came across the narrow channel separating Palawan, then joined to the Asian mainland. The earliest evidence of human settlement is from about 30,000 years ago in the Tabon caves on

Palawan. Now on a cliff above the sea, it would then have been well inland. Quite possibly the early inhabitants moved further north to Luzon as a warming climate made the Luzon hill country more habitable than the equatorial forests.

The vast majority of Filipinos today, however, are southern Mongoloid by physical type. Languages – Tagalog, Cebuano, Ilocano and a dozen or so others – are all of the same Austronesian or Malayo-Polynesian family which extends from the eastern Pacific to Madagascar and includes Malay and Javanese. When and how settlement by southern Mongoloids, and when and how they acquired their Austronesian language and culture remains a matter for debate. The most generally accepted theory is that the Austronesian-speaking people originated from the eastern Asia mainland, and the language spread from Taiwan to Luzon about 5,000 years ago and then gradually through the Philippine/Indonesian archipelago, to the Malay peninsula and coastal Vietnam in one direction and the Pacific islands in the other. However, not all agree, some suggesting that migration from south to north was caused by the rise of sea levels which inundated Sundaland, now the southern part of the South China Sea. Linguistic experts, archaeologists, geneticists – human and plant – all have contributed to a debate which involves cultural affinities such as tattoos, pottery designs, burial systems and rice and millet agriculture. Pig genetics, for instance, suggests that the animal spread from southern mainland Asia to Sumatra then Java and ultimately to Polynesia.

Whatever the route, the language could only be carried by seafaring peoples who took it from island to island, one small coastal settlement to the next. That sailing prowess could itself have been the result of the rise in sea level after the Ice Age, forcing people on to boats and to search for land above the waters. The eminent archaeologist, Philippine based Wilhelm G. Solheim II suggested that the outrigger-equipped boats still familiar in Philippine waters, and capable of long inter-island passages, date back 7,000 or more years.¹

The Tabon caves remained in use by seagoing people who about 3,000 years ago left behind a beautifully decorated burial jar topped by two figures on a boat – they would need boats in the afterlife too. This jar and other objects were identified as part of the Sa Huynh culture which developed across the sea in what is now coastal southern Vietnam and touched on the Spratly (Kalayaan) Islands.

Little is known about the extent of maritime trade in the pre-historic era but enough common objects have been found from Thailand to Taiwan to know it existed. Solheim saw a maritime trading community stretching from Sumatra northeast via the Ryukyu Islands to Japan and Korea, and southeast to the Bismarck Archipelago of New Guinea and beyond. He named its people, mostly but not all Austronesian, the Nusantao – island people. This derives from *Nusa*, the Sanskrit/Bahasa Indonesia word for island and *Tao*, the word for people in several Austronesian languages.

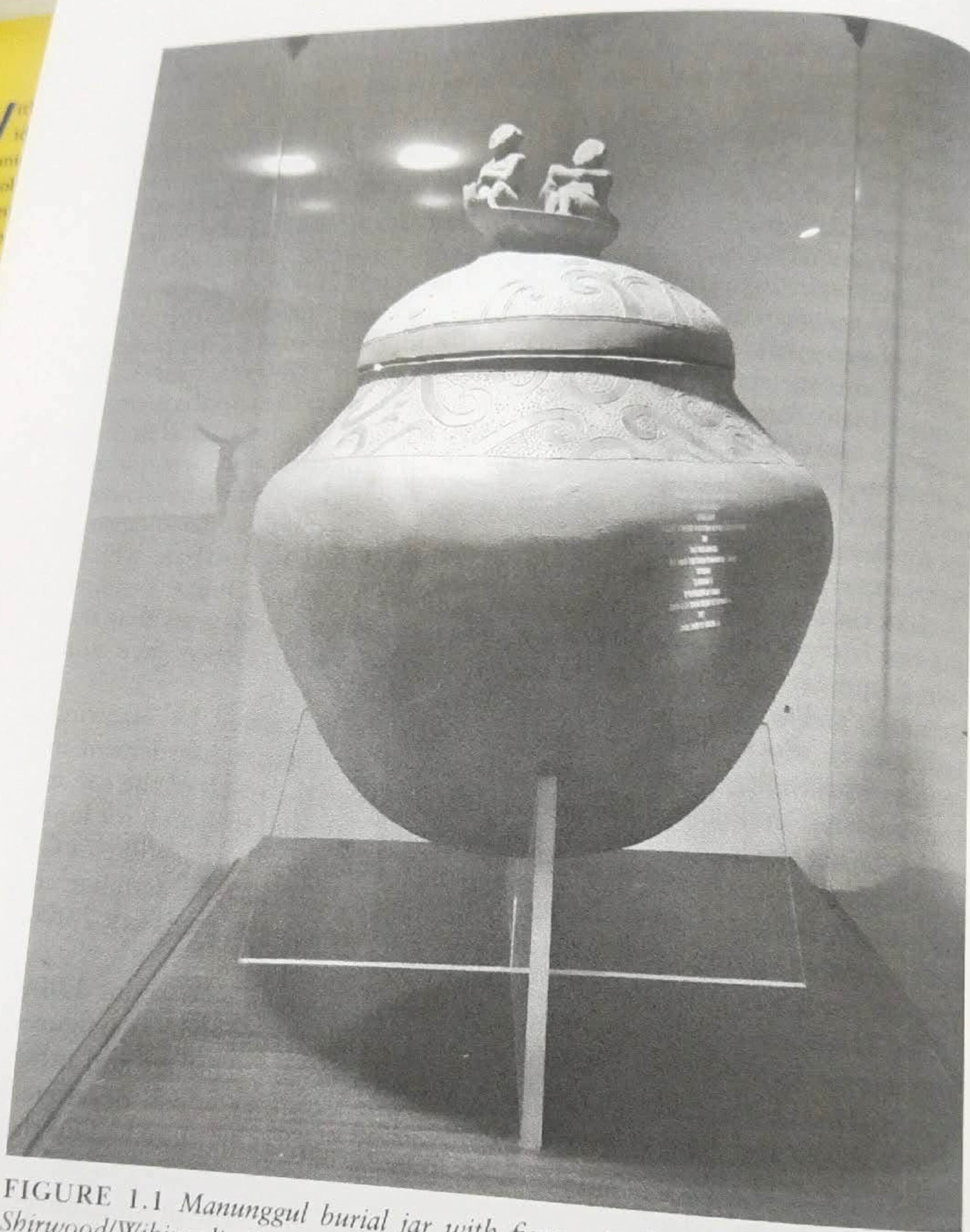


FIGURE 1.1 *Manunggul burial jar with figures in boat, c. 900 BCE.* © Julian Shirwood/Wikimedia Commons.

It goes without saying that an archipelago, particularly one with few areas of flat coastal land, could only be populated by people arriving on boats and living in large part from the sea. The most common coastal boat was the *balanghail*, normally a twelve- to fifteen-metre vessel with outriggers. A new settlement could begin with two or three families arriving on such

a boat. It is the origin of *barangay*, now the word for an administrative division.

For the Philippines, history, in the sense of written records and accurately dateable objects, is little over 1,000 years old but clearly the islands had been linked by trade for very much longer. They were on the fringe of the Sumatra-based Srivijayan trading empire and then the Mataram kingdom of Java, at its ninth century height when the great temples of Borobudur and Prambanan were built. The oldest surviving written evidence is a copper plate found in Laguna, near Manila, written in old Javanese and recording a settlement of a large debt which had resulted in the enslavement of an important family. It is precisely dated by Sanskrit – 21 April 900 in the modern calendar. Clearly it was a settlement of some sophistication but Mindanao was probably more important for trade at that time, being closer to Java and south of the typhoon belt.

Remains of a thirteen-metre boat dated to the early fourth century have been found at Butuan, the city at the mouth of the Agusan River in northeast Mindanao and a Buddha image of similar age. Nearby Surigao, in particular, has yielded a wealth of exquisite gold ornaments dating from the tenth to the thirteenth centuries, locally made but with themes indicating links to Hindu/Buddhist Java; some have also been found in the Visayas. Butuan was a Hindu kingdom and excavations have yielded artefacts from Persia as well as India. Hindu influence was sufficiently extensive that the Maranao people of north-western Mindanao had a pre-Islamic oral epic, *Darangen*, which has similarities to the Hindu *Ramayana* epic. Hindu influence also lived on in titles such as *raja* and *maharlika* alongside Malay ones such as *datu* and *lakan*, and some place names possibly including the Visayas. There are other Sanskrit-origin words which have survived in common use such as *guro* (teacher) and *diwata* (divine being).

By the tenth century, Butuan was sufficiently active to be sending at least three trade missions to Guangzhou, according to Song dynasty annals. Chinese ceramics from around that time as well as later have been found in Butuan and also near Manila so there was clearly trade to China from Luzon as well as Mindanao.

China received raiders as well as traders from the islands with attacks by 'tattooed ones' and people with skins said to be so dark that the tattoos were barely visible. The first reference to Chinese traders visiting the islands was not until 1225, exchanging ceramics, silks and metal manufactures for cotton, wax, pearls, tortoiseshell and banana-fibre cloth. The Quanzhou-based trade official Chau Ju-kua referred to locations including Mo Yi, on the north coast of Mindoro, and described an established trade in which Chinese paid 'tribute' to local rulers just as traders paid 'tribute' in China. He wrote: 'When trading ships enter the harbour they stop in front of the official plaza, the place for barter and trade, and register their ship'.² After providing gifts, including white umbrellas, for the ruler in return for protection they could then trade freely.

By the time Europeans arrived in the sixteenth century, Butuan's importance appears to have declined, overshadowed by the sultanates of western Mindanao and Sulu. According to local annals, Islam first arrived in Sulu in 1380 with a missionary, probably from Melaka, named Makhdum Karim. Ten years later it acquired a Minangkabau ruler from Sumatra, Raja Baguinda. More Muslim merchants and preachers arrived in the early fifteenth century and Sulu became a sultanate in 1457, headed by Sayyid Abubakar who was from Johor. Islam's spread was partly a result of the impact of the Melaka sultanate and the impetus given by its support from China's Ming dynasty at the time of the voyages around southeast Asia and the Indian Ocean by the fleets of Zheng He. Although Zheng He does not seem to have visited any of the Philippines, some of his ships would have. One result was that in 1417 the ruler of Sulu and family members journeyed to Beijing via Quanzhou to be enfeoffed as subjects of the emperor. One died in Shandong and is commemorated there.

Islam also developed a foothold at Maynila on the south bank of the Pasig River, apparently replacing Tondo on the north bank as the main trade centre. The ruler was a sultan with family links to Brunei. However, this may have been a very late development as the Melaka-based Portuguese chronicler Tome Pires wrote of the traders from Luzon: 'They are nearly all heathen [i.e. neither Christian nor Muslim]. They are robust people little thought of in Melaka. They have two or three junks at the most. They take merchandise to Borneo and from there they come to Melaka'.³

Political divisions were small, often island-based with activity summed up by one modern author as 'Raiding, Trading and Feasting' to describe the activities of the rajas (a word, Sanskrit in origin, meaning king) and datus (a Malay/Austronesian word meaning local ruler)⁴. These were also hierarchical societies with luxury goods indicating status and leadership by bravery in battle. Debt bondage was common.

However, the lack, except for the brief Chinese references, of pre-European written accounts of the islands and their people has made them fair game for fake history and frauds. Perhaps the most successful of these was the Code of Kalantiaw, a text of six laws dated to 1433 ascribed to a Datu Kalantiaw of the Visayas – Panay or Negros depending on the version. An early Spanish translation of this was 'discovered' in 1913 and quickly became an established fact and source of national pride, featuring in many history book but was subsequently revealed to be a hoax. The truth took a while to be officially admitted and to this day the myth of Kalantiaw is perpetuated in some books and movies and a shrine to him still exists in Panay.

More credible is the Maragtas, written in 1907 and based on oral history and folklore from Panay and includes descriptions of customs and clothes, and tell stories about the arrival of datus from Borneo and their subsequent adventures. So, for most descriptions of the people of the pre-Hispanic Philippines it is necessary, if inadequate, to rely mainly on the works of early

European visitors and residents writing mostly about the Tagalogs and Visayans. Accounts were necessarily biased by European norms but some religious norms.

The very first account was by Antonio Pigafetta, an adventurous Italian scholar who accompanied Magellan on the first attempted global circumnavigation. He kept a detailed account of the voyage and was one of only nineteen out of 270 to survive it. Leaving Spain in September 1519, the expedition, depleted by the loss of one ship and a mutiny, landed in the Philippines in March 1521 at the small island of Limasawa, south of Leyte and made a compact with its Raja Kolambu. The first Mass was celebrated there on 31 March. From there they went to Butuan, where Kolambu's brother was raja, and then to Cebu whose Raja Humabon and most of his *datus* became Christian, but Magellan got involved in a dispute between Humabon and the *datu* of neighbouring Mactan known, according to Pigafetta, as Lapu-Lapu.

Magellan and several of his comrades were killed in a battle with Lapu-Lapu's forces. Nothing much is known of Lapu-Lapu or if he was even present at the battle. Lapu-Lapu is a national hero but at the same time, the 1521 landing and celebration of the Catholic Mass on 31 March of that year has been celebrated as the birth of Christianity in the nation.

The Mactan battle also saw the departure from the scene of the man who may have been the first to sail around the world. Having taken part in the 1511 Portuguese conquest of Melaka, Magellan acquired a young slave there, given the name Enrique, who accompanied him back to Europe and on the circumnavigation became his interpreter. Enrique could originally have been from Sumatra, the Malukus or Visayas where port residents would have spoken Malay as well as local languages. He parted company with the Spanish in Cebu after Magellan's death, apparently having been refused release from service. What happened to him thereafter is not known but it is possible that by the time he reached Cebu with Magellan his circumnavigation was complete. One will never know for sure.

After Magellan's death, the expedition visited Bohol, Mindanao and Palawan. Everywhere Pigafetta noted an abundance of foods, the ubiquity of habits ranging from betel chewing to tattooing (which was especially pronounced in Cebu), cockfighting and the male practice of inserting a spike through the glans of the penis. He also noted among other things the Cebu raja's literacy in the local script, the quality of the palm wine and the frequency of parties with music and dancing girls and also drinking bouts. The raja advised that it was the practice of all ships entering his harbour to pay tribute. Only four days earlier, he said, one with slaves and gold on board, indicating that it must have been a Portuguese vessel. With that ship had come a Muslim merchant who, wrote Pigafetta, advised the raja that 'these are the people who conquered Melaka and Calicut'.

Politically, the country was divided into small entities ruled by *rajas* (a Sanskrit word meaning king) and *datus* (an Austronesian word for a noble).

Under them, at least in the Tagalog region, was a free but dependent class and serfs known as Alipin. In addition to inherited slavery, debt slavery, which could be the result of a crime or capture in battle, was common but debts could be settled. There was also some mobility between other classes via marriage or service to a superior. The most important socio-political unit was the barrio (or barangay), presided over by a datu who might be subject to a raja or other overlord but would have his own elite retinue who joined in feasting and fighting. They were known as Maharlika in Tagalog and the Timawa in the Visayas – freemen but owing service.

A Spanish official, Antonio de Morga, writing about 1600 noted: 'In each island or province many chiefs were recognized, some more than others, each with his own followers constituting barrios and families who gave them obedience . . . and service in their wars, sailing expeditions, farming, fishing . . .'⁵

Rizal was later to write: 'Thanks to their social condition and number at that time the Spanish domination met very little resistance while Philippine chiefs easily lost their independence and liberty. The people, accustomed to the yoke, did not defend the chiefs from the invader or attempt to struggle for liberties they never possessed'.⁶ Both the political fragmentation and the social divides remain familiar.

Likewise, though the people had spiritual beliefs related both to natural phenomena and a supreme being, there was no organized religion. The impact of the Hindus had been superficial and that of the Muslims too recent to take root. Thus, the Spanish religious orders who flooded in behind Spanish conqueror Legazpi, easily found converts. The new religion might not run deep or overwhelm social practices, but its ceremonies and music had immediate appeal.

The early Spanish saw an economy which was simple but thriving. People were well fed with fish, fowl, root crops and bananas. Wet rice was grown in some lowland places but more often rice was an inland dry crop exchanged for sea and other products. A wide variety of crafts were practiced with metal working and boat building especially noted. In sum, the accounts show that the islands were very similar in customs with little difference between highland and lowland peoples.

The people were probably healthier than contemporary Europeans, had varied diets thanks to product exchanges between coastal and inland peoples and they were skilled at a variety of handicrafts. Gold and other jewellery was ubiquitous.

Three things in particular stood out as far as the Spanish were concerned. One was excellence in boat building and navigation, the subject of extensive descriptions by Francisco Alcina, a Jesuit based in the Visayas for thirty-four years and steeped in local languages and customs. In his monumental *History of the Bisayas and its People* published in 1668. Alcina also noted the changes that had taken place in some customs as a result of Spanish influence.

The second was widespread literacy, particularly among women, in local scripts derived from *kawi*, the old Javanese script, itself of Indian origin. The best known was the Tagalog Baybayin but other regions had their own. In their zeal to convert, the priests translated some Christian texts into local scripts. A small book of prayers, sacraments and practices, *Doctrina Christiana*, published by the Dominican missionaries in 1593 was written in Spanish, Baybayin and Romanized Tagalog. Among the populace, writing was used for day-to-day purposes including love letters and poetry rather than law or history. There were several forms of poetry and song, and great subtlety in the use of words, which, according to Alcina, took Europeans a long time to understand.

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A third much remarked feature was the degree of sexual freedom, at least by the austere standards of Catholic Spain. De Morga noted: 'They are not very chaste. Either single or married women. While their husbands, fathers or brother are not very jealous about it. When the husband finds the wife in adultery he is easily pacified'. Alcina claimed that it was 'always the women who urged them [men] to have more freedom and less hindrance in their sensuality'.⁷ Women were also said to have 'excessive and unbridled relationship with each other . . . more zealous in this regard than men with their concubines'. Divorce was common as was abortion.

Early Spanish accounts were mainly about the lowland settled areas of Luzon and the Visayas. They dealt less with the mountain people of northern Luzon, collectively known as Igorots (mountain people in Tagalog) who included the Ifugao who at Banaue cultivated wet rice on terraces carved out of the lower hillsides, and others such as the Kalinga, Bontoc and Apayo who grew hill rice as well as root crops and hunted. Tribal warfare and headhunting were not uncommon.

The Igorots were Austronesian by language and culture but Luzon's forests and remote parts of the Visayas, Mindanao and Palawan were also home to small groups of earlier peoples, known collectively as Negritos due to their dark skin and wiry hair. Small-statured hunter-gatherers they are the oldest known human inhabitants of the islands, arriving at least 25,000 years ago. The largest group surviving today are the Aeta of Luzon.

Western Mindanao and Sulu were Muslim by the late fifteenth century but before Islam they had much in common with Sulawesi and other islands of eastern Indonesia including Kulintang music, gong instruments sharing many characteristics with those of gamelan ensembles of Java. Both even pre-date Hindu influence which dominated Java and touched Mindanao.

The Islamic region was divided into sultanates based on similar but rival ethnic groups – the Maguindanao of the southwest, the Maranao of the Lake Lanao region, the Tausug of the Sulu Islands and the Yakal and Samal/Baju of other islands of the Sulu archipelago. The latter were sea-based peoples who also inhabited the coast of northeast Borneo, as were the Iranun (Maranao people who had moved to the coast and become formidable sailors). Power often lay with local datus rather than larger sultanates. Islam

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then was also a relatively relaxed affair and still incorporated traditional beliefs. The rest of inland Mindanao was thinly populated by a variety of related but often rival tribal groups, mainly reliant on shifting, slash and burn cultivation, speaking variations of related Austronesian languages.

Five hundred years on, many of these fissures remain. Muslim Mindanao/Sulu's on and off warfare has been about local rivalries as well as opposition to Manila. Meanwhile, non-Muslim parts of the island continue to witness conflicts, mainly over land rights between local ethnic groups, collectively known as *lumads* (indigenous people) and today's broader, immigrant-descended population whose Visayan language now predominates.

These indigenous culture issues in Mindanao/Sulu, and the lesser ones in the Cordillera region of northern Luzon, add to the problems of an already complex geography. Tiny island nations apart, there is no country in the world more splintered by islands than the Philippines. While the sea has always provided links, as now air travel does, geography has hindered its ability to take full advantage of modern road and rail transport links between major cities which in other countries have helped forge national integration and identity. As we shall see, political history has sometimes exacerbated these problems despite 500 years of being considered, at least by its rulers, one country, the Philippines, named after its Spanish conqueror.

Notes

- 1 William G. Solheim II, *Archaeology and Culture in Southeast Asia Unravelling the Nusantara*, Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 2006.
- 2 Chau Ju-kua quoted in Laura Lee Junker, *Raiding, Trading and Feasting: The Political Economy of Philippine Chiefdoms*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1998, p. 244.
- 3 Tome Pires, *Suma Oriental*, Vol. 1, trans. and ed. Armando Cortesao, London: The Hakluyt Society, 1948/New Delhi Asian Educational Services, 2015, pp. 132–3.
- 4 Junker, *Raiding Trading and Feasting*.
- 5 Antonio de Morga, *Sucesos de las islas Filipinas*, trans. Henry E.J. Stanley, London: The Hakluyt Society, 1868, p. 296.
- 6 Jose Rizal, 'Notes on Antonio de Morga', in *Sucesos de las Islas Filipinas*.
- 7 Francisco Alcina, *Historia de las Islas e Indios de Bisaya*, Vol. 3, trans. Cantius Kobak and Lucio Gutierrez, Manila: University of Santo Tomas, 2002, pp. 421–7.