

INDIGENOUS CONCEPTUALIZATION OF FILIPINO PERSONHOOD

Prospero R. Covar

Introduction

The goal of the discipline of anthropology is to study the nature of man, including the conceptualization of Filipino personhood (*pagkatao*). Unlike science that claims universal measurements, the parameters I will use are indigenous conceptualizations. Thus, I will attempt to describe Filipino personhood according to the context of Filipino culture. In this exercise, the benefit is the interconnection of events that overlap within a field. Filipino personhood and its factors.

Personhood and Personality

There is a Filipino saying: "It is easy to be born a man; it is difficult to be a human being." Being human (*pagiging tao*) is a biological process. Acting as a human being (*pagpapakatao*) is a cultural process. In this paper, the cultural process will be emphasized.

The word "*tao*" (person/human) is a noun. It receives various affixes to express different meanings. For example: *maka-tao* (humane), *t-um-ao* (to inhabit), *tau-han* (character/subordinate). According to Ramos, "The suffix *ka-han* when attached to a root word expresses an abstract concept." Therefore, *ka-tau-han* (personality/humanity) means the "essence of the spirit carried by the root word," i.e., *tao*. In English, my translation for *katauhan* is "humanity." According to Miranda, "humanhood." Because of this, the word "*pagkatao*" is more appropriate for the concept of "personhood" or being a Filipino person. According to Santiago and Tiangco, the prefix *pagka-* "refers to the nature of a person, animal, or thing." This is how *pagka-* is used in the phrase "*pagkataong Pilipino*," i.e., the Filipino person.

Metaphor of the Body and the Jar

In Biblical belief, man came from a mold of clay, breathed upon by the Creator, and became Adam. This is common in Christian faith. In literature, man is like clay that can be made into various shapes and forms. There is a custom regarding burial where those attending take a handful of earth and throw it over the coffin of the deceased as a recognition of the view that "from dust you came and to dust you shall return." The practice of placing flowers on the coffin while it is being lowered into the grave has also become a custom. The flowers eventually become earth as well.

In literal terms, the jar came from clay; in metaphorical terms, man also came from clay. The body of a person is like a jar. The jar has an exterior (*labas*), interior (*loob*), and bottom (*ilalim*). Likewise, the soul (*kaluluwa*) of a person. It is the vessel of the jar. Its content is the soul. Within the depths resides the soul, accompanied by the conscience (*budhi*).

Structure of Filipino Personhood

Figure 1.0 is just one way of illustration. The connection of various concepts is an attempt to build a system or theory regarding Filipino personhood.

Exterior, Interior, and Depth

A dualistic approach is the method for conceptualizing Filipino personhood: if there is an exterior, there is an interior; if there is a soul, there is a conscience. Perhaps, the important parts of our body manifest the exterior, interior, and depth, such as the following pairs found in Figure 2.0.

Exterior (Labas)	Interior (Loob)
face (<i>mukha</i>)	mind (<i>isipan</i>)
chest (<i>dibdib</i>)	heart (<i>puso</i>)
stomach (<i>tiyan</i>)	intestines (<i>bituka</i>)
abdomen (<i>sikmura</i>)	liver (<i>atay</i>)
Depth (Lalim)	
soul (<i>kaluluwa</i>)	conscience (<i>budhi</i>)

The Pairing of Exterior, Interior, and Depth

The dualistic approach prompted me to research the concept of external personhood. I wrote a poetic essay titled “*Mukha*” (Face). This is one of three essays commissioned by the Cultural Center of the Philippines for their exhibit titled “*Pansariling Likha* (Art in Private Spaces).”

In short, the face reflects various experiences. The face is a mirror of the feelings and the interior of a person carved by cultural experience.

The interior (*loob*) has been the focus of several studies. First among these is Kaut, who focused on the concept of *utang-na-loob* (debt of gratitude) in a town in Bulacan. This was

followed by the study of Lynch and Hollnsteiner, which made *utang-na-loob* one of the three main values for Filipinos.

Ileto, in his book *Pasyon and Revolution*, looked at *lakas ng loob* (inner strength/courage) in the context of history. De Mesa studied the theology of the *loob* of God in man and the *loob* of man in God. Salazar researched the concept of the *loob* in the exterior, and Enriquez explored the richness of the *kalooban*. Alejo stated that the *loob* has content, depth, and breadth.

The concept of *loob* has deep and wide roots. From the root word “*loob*,” we can create various words: *kalooban ng Diyos* (God's will), *saloobin* (attitude/sentiment), *kaloob* (gift), *looban* (compound/inner area), *magandang loob* (kindness), etc. In Alejo's thesis, he included a list from Sofronio Calderon's *Diccionario* consisting of four pages regarding the use of *loob* that he himself freely gathered, numbering one hundred and thirty-eight. Mercado, on the other hand, classified concepts related to *loob* into five categories: intellectual, emotional, volitional, ethical, and miscellaneous.

In my view, the concept of *loob* becomes clear when described in the context of a vessel. The vessel may have an exterior *loob*. The *loob* is filled with content. Thousands and tens of thousands can be contained in the *loob*. Likewise with our *loob* and *kalooban*.

Determination of the Parts of the Body

Four pairs of body parts determine Filipino personhood. The pairs were formed based on the dual concept of exterior and interior. Notice that each part of the body has its own unique characteristics. These require a more in-depth study. I will only mention a few examples.

Face (*Mukha*) and Mind (*Isipan*)

Each part of the face has its own capabilities: forehead, eyebrows, eyelashes, eyes, nose, mouth, lips, tongue, teeth, snout, chin, and cheeks. Let's look at some metaphorical capabilities of each:

- Broad forehead — intelligent
- Meeting eyebrows — brave, angry, hot-headed

The look of the eyes has various meanings such as:

Sticky stare (<i>Malagkit ang tingin</i>)	conveying love

Melting stare (<i>Nakatutunaw na tingin</i>)	a stare with an ulterior motive
High nose (<i>Matangos ang ilong</i>)	grand, dignified, Spanish-nosed
Dirty mouth (<i>Maduming bibig</i>)	speaks ill
Gnashing teeth (<i>Ngiping nagngangalit</i>)	suppressed rage

The snout (*nguso*) is often used for pointing. Doing something half-heartedly is not sincere (*hindi taos sa puso*).

A kiss is pressed against the cheek; a marital slap is delivered to the cheek.

In total, the face has its own unique qualities; for example, a bright face that hides nothing or a face that cannot be shown—shame (*kahiya-hiya*). We can say that the face speaks of one's personhood according to the expression of the various parts of the face.

The mind (*isipan*), which is the partner of the face, is what I am focusing on now. The brain is connected to the mind. The mind is the source of spirit (*diwa*), consciousness (*kamalayan*), awareness (*ulirat*), talent/intelligence (*talino*), and virtue (*bait*). Understanding also depends on thinking. We have phrases such as the following: high-thinking (*mataas mag-isip*), unconscious (*walang malay*), senseless (*walang bait*), unaware (*walang ulirat*), intelligent (*matalino*), open consciousness (*bukas ang kamalayan*), etc. A person's thinking is not only expressed in their intentions but especially in their actions or deeds. A person's actions can be described as refined, coarse, vulgar, elegant, decent, godly, or patriotic. These are also expressions of personhood.

Chest (*Dibdib*) and Heart (*Puso*)

Marriage among Filipinos is referred to as "the union of one chest" (*pag-iisang dibdib*) and not "the union of one heart." Perhaps marriage should be taken seriously (*dibdiban*) and is not a joke. Aside from *dibdiban*, we also use terms like relaxed chest (*maluwag ang dibdib*), tight chest (*masikip ang dibdib*), or low chest (*mababang dibdib*). A low chest has nothing to do with a large expectation. The chest is related to the word "*damdam*" (feeling) or "*dama*" (felt). The chest is the organ for feeling.

Stomach (*Tiyan*) and Intestines (*Bituka*)

Very few metaphors are related to the stomach and intestines. The phrase “big stomach” (*malaki ang tiyan*) may mean: full, greedy, has worms in the stomach, or covetous. Its partner, “small or no stomach” (*maliit o walang tiyan*), may mean: hungry, poor, or lacking food.

“Twisted intestines” (*bitukang sala-salabid*), on the other hand, means a life full of obstacles. This describes a state of personhood.

Abdomen (*Sikmura*) and Liver (*Atay*)

Phrases related to the abdomen are: bad, powerful, stinging, or sour. A bad abdomen (*sikmurang masama*) means a bad feeling. A stinging or burning abdomen means something unacceptable. One's abdomen is powerful if they can accept everything, especially those repulsive things or events.

The phrase “I can't take it” (*hindi ko ma-take*) is an expression of the youth that means it's unacceptable, but the meaning is shallower than “*hindi ko masikmura*.” In summary, the abdomen has something to do with the swallowing or non-acceptance of what is ingested. The abdomen is a part of the body used for estimating feelings, thoughts, weight, and deeds of other people.

In indigenous communities, the liver is used as a view for diviners to achieve the fate of a decision, such as whether to proceed with a *pishit* or a celebration. It is in the color of the liver. A yellow liver is a sign of good luck. A red liver means success in the planned endeavor; a black liver is a disaster to be faced. Likewise, a person with a black liver has no regard for what they do.

In my opinion, the description of Filipino personhood as a jar with an exterior and interior began in the Neolithic Period. Featured here is the carving of burial jars. According to the prevailing culture, the human body is compared to a vessel. The body as a vessel is filled with soul and conscience. This is what I consider in the following discussion.

Soul (*Kaluluwa*) and Conscience (*Budhi*)

According to Panganiban's *Tesouro*, the word “*kaluluwa*,” “*ikaruruwa*,” or “*kararua*” is common in various native languages in the Philippines—Tag. *kaluluwa*; Bk. Hlg. Sl. *kalag*; Kpm. *kaladua*; Ibg. *ikarwa*, *karurua*; Ilk. *kararua*; Mar. *aroak*; Png. *kamarerwa*; Ng. *kaelwa*; Al. Png. *kadua*.

In Manuel's study, the word “*kaluluwa*,” “*ikaruruwa*,” or “*inikaduwa*” comes from the word “*duwa*.” “Two,” because of its dual states; the first is the pairing of the soul and the body, and the second is the soul's own state.

In Salazar's study, the soul is the source of life and vitality (*ginhawa*). The Cebuano word “*ginhawa*” is “breath,” the translation in Tagalog. Filipinos believe that the death of a person is caused by the snapping of their breath.

When a person dies, their soul departs (*yumayao* or *pumapanaw*). The soul detaches (*kalag* - Bk. Hlg. Sl.) from the human body. In the cemetery, we often see the epitaph “*Sumalangit Nawa*” (May they rest in heaven). “*Nawa*” in Malayo-Polynesian is “*nawa*” in ancient Tagalog which refers to spirit or soul. Therefore, the direct meaning of SLN is “may the soul, spirit, ancestor, etc., go to heaven.” The word “*yawa*” in Cebuano is a bad type of soul.

The soul of a person, when it departs, becomes an *anito*. There are two types of *anito*: (1) the *anito* of our ancestors and (2) *anito* that guard our environment. In Benguet, they have what they call “*puun ti balay*” (ancestral house). This is where the belongings of the deceased are kept. This is also where the *anito* of our ancestors reside.

The *puun ti balay* also has cherished “*chilos*.” This is a ritual that must be performed periodically by the relatives of the deceased. To implement this, there is inherited land, the income of which is spent on the preparations every year.

The departure of the soul from the human body can be temporary only; it is what causes illness or the loss of consciousness or sense.

The soul can also wander while the person is sleeping through dreams or if it is “in a state of trance” during the chanting of epics.

During the temporary loss of the soul from the body, a body can be entered by another soul. This phenomenon is called *langkap*, *lapi*, *sanib*. The soul that enters or possesses is what moves the person. The body of the person becomes an instrument of the soul that possesses or enters. See the following readings: Abrera, Lieban, Tan, and Terada.

From ancient times until now, the *babaylan*, *baglan*, *katalonan*, *mambunong*, and *talaytayan* are able to remove the *langkap* or *sapi* through rituals like *tawas*, pouring boiling water on the body of the possessed which is not felt, or pinching the wing of a chicken between the fingers of the possessed, causing them to cry out or be “leaped over” (*inalangkapan*). They return the original soul to the body.

Filipino personhood in the context of the soul has several dual categories: (1) beautiful/ugly soul, (2) straight/crooked soul, and (3) pure/black soul.

The conscience (*budhi*) is the partner of the soul. If the soul is what moves life, the conscience is what judges the life that has occurred. The conscience is the one that prosecutes and also carves the person. Repentance and asking for forgiveness, as well as paying for whatever wrong was done, can stop the conscience from prosecuting and nagging. Perhaps this is the state of stray souls, troubled or wandering because they are not at peace until they can make themselves felt and be prayed for.

In my deduction, the conscience is not like the conscience [in English], I have a hunch that this is a new word in our consciousness. In my opinion, the location of the conscience is close to the mind. This is what pushes one to do good or evil and prosecutes if evil was done. The location

of the conscience, like the soul, is pervasive throughout the personhood, in the depths or innermost core. Like the *loob*, we cannot grasp or position these in the anatomy of our body.

Three Persons

The conclusion of my study regarding Filipino personhood, i.e., the interaction of the interior and exterior, of the conscience and the soul, was validated by my study on the Altars of belief. In the doctrine of the Christian Church, the Three Persons (*Tres Persona*) consist of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Often this is not understood by many people. Several have determined that this is difficult to understand. One of these is the view of the *Santicima Trinidad* as a consistory of three persons. The three persons became God the Father, God the Mother, and God the Child. The origin of the *Santicima Trinidad* became biological. Because they are persons, each person among them has a body and a soul.

Indigenous Theology

The *Santicima Trinidad*, according to belief or myth, is a consistory. The consistory decides on important tasks like the creation of the world or the creation of man in the world. The consistory also decides why God the Father, God the Son, and God the Mother rule the world according to their respective eras. The first era is the recognized rule in the world of God the Father through the Holy Voice. Followed by God the Son who saved humanity through his incarnation as man and being hung on the cross. Because it is now the era of women's liberation, it is only right that God the Mother should rule. The era of God the Mother is the final incarnation to bring humanity back to God from Abraham. But in the Philippines, the three deities of the *Santicima Trinidad* arrive through the Holy Spirit. The method they use now is "spirit possession." Thus, many blessed men and women are possessed by God the Father, Mother, and Child.

Psychology of Filipino Personhood

I have realized that a Filipino's personhood changes if they are possessed, entered, or inhabited. Bulatao's explanation for the change in personhood is "altered state of consciousness." But this remains only a deduction because we do not yet know what physical process changes. If so, we remain tied to signs only. The signs suggest changes in feelings, thoughts, actions, and even language. These changes are perhaps determined by different parts of the body and the soul. In short, there are two types of personhood classes: (1) natural personhood and (2) possessed personhood. Perhaps there are many more categories of personhood that we will understand through broad and deep research.

Summary

Salazar and Enriquez wrote some foundations for a Filipino Psychology. The goal of this professorial lecture of mine is to contribute to clearing the overgrown field of Filipino personhood. This lecture establishes the human body as a jar: having an exterior, interior, and depth; moved by the pairing of conscience and soul. Indigenous conceptualization is what prevails in identifying the factors of Filipino Personhood.

