

The Social Role of the Filipino Ritual Kinship System

—Through Theoretical Issues of Cognatic Kinship Form—

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I. Introduction

In this paper, I maintain that the kinship system in Filipino society can actually support community development, even though it is often argued that the Filipino cognatic (bilateral) kinship system prevents people from forming corporate groups. According to recent researches however, the form of bilateral or cognatic descent group based on the bilateral principle has emerged. And these studies have also examined how the system of ritual kinship relations among nonkinsmen can act effectively to recruit the people whom they can trust and establish the socio-economical reciprocity.

In his work, "The growth of 'Ie' in Cognatic Society" (1967), Seichi Muratake argued that there were signs of emergence of unilineality or mono-lineality after he completed field work in mainland Japan and Ryukyu society. This idea was actually derived from "Unilateral Filiations and Its Periphery" (1964), by J. D. Freeman, and also his research of "The Family System of the Iban of Borneo (1971)". According to Freeman's research, an axial line of eternal lineality is sought, the similar phenomenon as that which is the basis of the Japanese "ie", in societies that have a bilateral kinship structure. Thus far, a number of American anthropologists have studied these themes, but have not yet developed a clear theory on the emergence of unilineality in cognatic forms. However in 1973, Murry, Jr. tried to prove the presence of the <descent principle of isantyan (one blood)> and the <angkan (like a descent group)> theory which clearly presented the tendency toward or emergence of mono-lineality in central Luzon.

II. Theoretical issues on Filipino cognatic form

It seemed logical for Muratake, to apply the Japanese eternal lineality and the so-called "ie" concept, apply it to Filipino bilateral society, and support the correlation with Barton's (1938) study of Ifugao families, because he seemed to misunderstand the Ifugao inheritance system. That is to say, according to Muratake's interpretation of Barton, "'ie', including land and other commodities, is maintained through eldest child inheritance". However, in Ifugao society, inheritance is actually devised to the eldest and the second child without sexual distinction. According to the study of Barton and Kyoko Kikuchi (1974), in Ifugao society, inheritance is not conferred to individuals. Rather, the heir is considered to be a caretaker of the kinship inheritance. In addition to

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their studies, Burton himself uses the word “primogeniture”, which merely means the eldest child, and does not assume sexual distinctions in inheritance (1969: 44). Thus, the eldest and the second child would divide among them and inherit and take care of parents’ pre-marriage property (wealth) and from the third child, he/she inherits and manages property that is held after her/his parents got married. Inheritance for the children following the third child becomes kinship inheritance for the next generation. That is to say, except for an individual’s goods and currency, the inheritors cannot deal freely with properties and all members of the kinship group have rights to demand all properties but acquired after its owner’s marriage. Therefore the existence of children is essential for caretakers of the inheritance for the next generation. As it shows that heritage is inherited over the first, the second, and the third children and that they leave their parents when they marry, inheritance is never held in the form of mono-lineality like a male or female line that was observed in the traditional Japan before 1945. In such a society, it is possible for each member to become a center and axial family, which is the central position of the personal kindred. Therefore, unless inheritance tends to be mono-linear and to be sexually distinguished, or heritage is given entirely to the one child, the supra-generational <eternal lineal “ie” line> or <specific descendant line> can never be expected to emerge.

However, even though the depth of generation is still shallow, the existence of bilateral decent group (including Isantyan and Angkan) was proved from the studies of Muratake, Yasushi Kikuchi and Kyoko Kikuchi. In this sense, the notion that found out mono-lineality from bilateral system achieved theoretical progress. Kyoko Kikuchi, who was influenced by Muratake’s theory presenting signs of mono-lineality in a bilateral system, further developed the theoretical analysis of the Ifugao in Kiangnan. It is her theoretical development theory in particular, that suggests the existence of kinship organization defined by a <multitudinous ancestor based group>, the core of which is the extract of the hin-tutulan (all their descendants) and the hin-puun (origin or root) principle. The hin-puun principle emphasizes the lineal continuation between ancestors and descents, which shares the same function introduced by Dozier in his study of the Kalinga (1967), in which the prominent ancestor being chosen by her/his descent.

In agreement with Muratake’s theory, I have also developed a theory which introduced the concept of <mono-lineality> in the environment of the <ego oriented kin concept>, taken from his surveys in Mindoro and Palawan, though recognizing a lack of sufficient resources. This mono-lineality is apparent in the household-line of the caretaker in the Batangan, and the tayalian principle that argues the <lineality> of the Alangan. From the evidence of mono-lineality presented above, it is possible to construct the concept of <multitudinous ancestors oriented group>, which is derived from Kyoko Kikuchi’s study of Ifugao. In addition, both my survey of the Bontok and Kyoko Kikuchi’s research on the Kiangnan-Ifugao give examples of <multi-filiation> recognition towards dead kinsmen. Both of these studies ascertain that each ethno-linguistic group designates a common ancestor selected from dead kinsmen who shared the same origin and could be respected for having made achievements for their own groups, fought bravely, and having had considerable wealth. If individuals can claim to be related lineally with a common ancestor, they can expect to have the social status and honor

from their neighbors.

Most ethnic groups in the Philippines refer to their lineal dead kinsmen in a plural form of terms that translate as "multi-ancestors". This implies that they have a tendency to plural ancestor worship, the recognition of which influences people to choose one outstanding and prominent ancestor from their dead kinsmen. Such observation clearly shows how earnestly people recognize multi-filiation with their dead kinsmen, choosing a dead kinsman to become the "representative" of the group of dead kinsmen. According to Toichi Mabuchi, the selection is made from all dead kinsmen who are "bilateral-multilineal" (1976: 110), rather than from those who are <agnatic>.

Given that such is the case, how do individuals form a sense of belonging (identity) to their group in such cognatic society?

The application of E. Leach's taboo theory to their worldview facilitates a wider understanding of their irrational forms of behavior in daily life. Thus, in order to explore identity in cultural linguistic groups in cognatic Filipino society, careful research of mythology and ritual rites is useful for understanding their sense of ethnic identity.

In addition to this question of identity in cognatic society, as Leach points out: ...for example, it has been argued very cogently that in societies with lineage structure, the continuity of the society as a whole rests in the continuity of the system of lineages, each of which is a "corporation". The life span of which is independent on the individual lives of its individual members. But in societies which do not have unilineal descent groups, what kind of "corporation" takes the place of the lineage in providing the nexus of community between one generation and the next? ...It will be found that in the Sinhalese village of Pul Eliya it is locality rather than descent which forms the bias of corporate grouping (1971: 6-7).

In this regard, Muratake and I have attempted to take into account of the emergence of <corporate group>, taken from the study of the <group oriented kin concept>, based on the case of the Batangan. Upon which they provide an explanation for the emergence and maintenance of the corporate group in the Alangan society since the society had a caretaker.

Through these studies, I have formed a hypothesis of "Filipino community", which was based upon three principles: (1) Cognatic social structure and the principle of behavioral forms. (2) The principle of the group solidarity derived from the ritual kinship system. (3) The caretaker oriented-centered principle in small ethnic groups. Under the hypothesis, a beneficiary group is being formed and the group appoints one outstanding person from the bilateral extended kin group. On the other hand, those who have kin relations with the chosen prominent person and his family members form interest groups. The relation between the central or axial person of the community and the people around him is not of a reciprocal nature, but is unequal and can be described as a top-down relationship. As this sort of relationship is based upon a bilateral kinship structure or personal kindred-oriented concept, there is no possibility to form the certain supra-generational family line if there is no centralized inheritance system by one offspring with sexual distinction. Thus, the axial person of the group and his family cannot retain their special status from generation to generation. However, when considering only one generation, an autonomous community is established which

designates one central person, and personal patron-client relations that remain for only an ego-generation is revealed. In addition, the principles of ritual kinship help to consolidate this personal relation. This ritual kinship system is based upon the mixed religious values of predominantly Catholicism, which holds faith in super-natural sacred being, and the Filipino local religion that is based upon the principle of communal unity supported by local value systems. From the argument thus far, an individual's sense of belonging to a group in one generation is similar to that in a unilineal kinship group. In order to distill the concept of "Filipino community", one of the most efficient methods is through the analysis of their social behavior in terms of their value systems and ritual kinship relations that can stitch nonkismen under the super natural existence, that is God.

III. Compadrazgo system (co-parenthood)

The compadrazgo system (co-parenthood) was introduced to the Philippines by the Spanish through Mexico in the sixteenth century. Using Tagalog society as an example, I discuss how the compadrazgo system functions to extend and inter-stitch cognatic kindred (and other social groups) in the Philippines. Most Filipinos, like people in some other cognatic societies, try to increase the number of their ritual kinsmen as a social investment and as security for the future. Indigenous ritual kinship systems such as blood brotherhood and food feeding system are still observed among Filipino cultural minorities like Tagbanuwa and Palawano in Palawan island.

Such indigenous ritual kinship system has predisposed Filipinos to easily accept the compadrazgo system; its form and social function fit the pre-existing template well. At present, big land owners, politicians, and high-ranking military officers usually have several dozens godchildren. In many cases, these elite who are asked to be sponsors or godparents seem almost obsessed to fulfill the economic and other obligations entailed. Compadrazgo's emphasis seems to have shifted from original religious functions to economic and social reciprocities, as it has become the most important social mechanism in Filipino daily life. To many, it no longer matters whether a sponsor (godparent) is Catholic or not.

Before analyzing the Filipino ritual kinship system, their indigenous kinship system must be introduced.

As noted above, the Filipino kinship system is generally regarded as bilateral in form and ego-centered in orientation. In the Philippines, which is a society without unilineal principles in general, a formal political leader or head is not defined. Moreover, strict marriage rules, except for incest, are not prescribed. Filipino definition of Family is best exemplified by the Tagalog term *mag-anak*. *Mag* means to link or combine, while *anak* refers to a child. The Filipino concept of Family obviously stresses the sibling link. The Filipino social structure and kinship system bilaterally gives a premium to family solidarity and reciprocal relationship. Present Filipino society may be defined, at the very least, as a cult group or cultural linguistic group based on blood relationships. The Philippine society, which has no political solidarity like that of a unilineal society, functions well within extended families but not at the community level. The basic structure of Philippine society on a folk level is characterized by the primacy over public and official matters of private, person-to-person relationships reinforced by a

principle of personal gain or loss (Kikuchi: 1991: 42). Loyalty is paid to one's personal boss and not to the institution or organization. This attitude is caused by the ego-oriented concept that is based upon personal attachment through a blood relationship or a ritual one.

IV. Ritual Kinship System as Social Mechanism

What is the difference between the Filipino compadrazgo system and the Spanish? At the time of baptism, a person needs religious parents. Therefore, the real parents look for suitable people among their friends, superiors, rich people, or people of high status like medical doctors and politicians to be the godparents. The godparents must give religious guidance to the godchild in the future. Such relationship and roles are the original religious function of ritual co-parenthood.

Using Tagalog society in Metro Manila as an example, I have observed how the compadrazgo system functions to solidify bilateral extended family groups and social groups in real Filipino society. Godparents are selected not only for baptism (*binyag*), but also for confirmation (*kumpil*), and marriage (*kasal*). In a rural community near an urban area, two sponsors are chosen for each occasion, i.e., birth, confirmation, and marriage. Thus a spiritual relationship is established between godparents and a godchild. In this manner, parents who have a lot of children will naturally develop relationships with many ritual kinsmen. Moreover, those who live in urban areas generally have several co-sponsors in addition to the formal ritual parents recognized by the church. The co-sponsors have the same function as the formal sponsors to the godchild and his parents. In this way, most Filipinos try to increase the number of their ritual kinsmen as an investment in the future. Such behavior (ritual kinship system) will generally result in all villagers being related with one another through consanguinity, affinity or ritual kinship in the small village.

Theoretically, an individual would be supported by the sponsorship of baptism, confirmation and marriage as noted earlier. In fact, the relationship between godparents and a godchild is the only formal and permanent relationship that carries obligations, and even if this relationship is not so strong, the formal and religious obligation will continue to be fulfilled. Generally, godparents must discharge their obligation at the ritual party performed at home after baptism. It is expected that their godchild will grow to become a religious person, and the godparents are expected to support the godchild financially if his real parents die. If the godparents have no children and have some property, they will usually take care of the godchild's education; in fact, people will expect them to do so. Sometimes godparents who live in the city will also accept and take care of godchildren in their home when they come from the province for education. In the same manner, these godchildren tend to look to their godparents who live in Manila for help in finding their second home in a great city and for acquiring education and occupation.

As explained above, if they fail to fulfill their obligations in providing accommodation or assisting the job-hunt, they will be stigmatized as *walang hiya* (no shame). Such behavior is emphasized in Filipino nepotism. The continual relationship between godparents and godchildren is reconfirmed and strengthened with occasional gifts by ritual parents and the love and respect from ritual children. Such gifts are normally

given at Christmas and on birthdays. A godfather is called *Ninong* by his godchild, his *inaanak*. The godmother is *Ninang*. Godparents are expected to fulfill their obligations by the ritual kinsmen like godchildren and their parents, but these financial claims are shared among many ritual kinsmen. For this reason, godparents may not be able to perform their duties completely as sponsors because such rich and high status people may have a lot of ritual kinsmen. In short, their resources will be dispersed. In general, big land owners, politicians, higher officials, and high-ranking military officers will have several dozens of god-children (*inaanak*). However, the difference in social level or status between godparents and real parents is extreme, the corporate relationship among ritual parents does not function well. Nowadays, there is a general tendency for Filipinos to try to find sponsors/godparents of higher social status or class for the sake of the social mobility of their children. This phenomenon is more prevalent in urban areas than in rural areas. What kind of benefit can those who agree to the requests to be sponsors expect in return? In many cases, these elite people who are asked to be sponsors or godparents seem to have a kind of obsession to fulfill the obligations and economic duties entailed in the acceptance or ritual sponsorship.

Ideally, before lower class people ask higher class people to be godparents, they must try to think through whether the elite are likely to accept their request or not. For this purpose, those seeking favor will seek to learn the intention or inclination of the elite family. They never ask the elite to be godparents directly or curtly; because they are frightened that their self-esteem might be hurt and they might be embarrassed (*hiya*) if the elite refuse their request. In other words, they will try to get the elite to accept their proposal through the indirect expression of their prospects. In actual cases, they will often express their prospects not seriously but indirectly or in a joking manner, and the elite must guess what they are requesting—that they become godparents of the requester's child. Until the two parties come to understand each other and reach a tacit agreement, they will not talk about it openly. As a result, requests to be godparents are seldom refused. If the elite does refuse, those who are repudiated, and their whole family will receive sympathy from the community and the elite will be criticized and blamed for their behavior. In short, the elites who refuses will be subjected to social condemnation. At the same time, they will lose the respect of other elite. In many cases, elite people who are requested to be sponsors think of the prestige and other positive non-pecuniary benefits much more than the expenses involved. Here, we can classify elite people into two types:

- (1) Those with no political ambition, and
- (2) Those with burning political aspirations.

The former is not interested in establishing a relationship with low class people, but the latter will make a positive effort to extend his kinship group in his community and for this reason, desires to become a godparent to acquire the abstract property which is the so-called political power in the community to which he belongs. When both the requester and the acceptor are of the same socio-economical status, the case of refusal seldom arises. Also the relationship of *bata* system will not result in refusal.

As mentioned above, today the function of *compadrazgo* system is focused on the social and economic reciprocal relationship rather than the original religious function. Such a relationship is the most important social mechanism in Filipino daily life, which

cannot be ignored. In this sense, it can be said that there is no problem whether a sponsor (godparent) is Catholic or not. It means that this social mechanism (compadrazgo system) can embrace and accept adherents of any religion. Through this mechanism, Filipinos find social and economic security with each other and they know that they cannot live safely without this social mechanism. In a bilateral kinship group based on the principle of consanguinity (ego-oriented kinship group), they try to expand their human relationship within their generation horizontally including ritual kinsmen to strengthen their socio-economic security. In this way, a group based on human relatedness that transcends blood relationship will emerge. The size and composition of this group will be distinct from other groups, and will be a reciprocal group. Will a pivotal person with socio-political power and authority emerge within such group? Such person in power can be observed among national minorities as a caretaker.

Several factors of Filipino social behaviors promote the development of solidarity in the bilateral extended kinship system that has strong blood consciousness. The compadrazgo system is the stronger impetus underlying the solidarity within the bilateral extended family. Filipinos skillfully exploit the compadrazgo system as a coagulating agent for its loosely structured society. It is used to overcome the weak social unity caused by the lack of socio-economic protection from generation to generation. In this context, the structural stability of Philippine society is based on the compadrazgo system and special element in its social value system and social behavior.

Ritual kinship is influenced by the difference in the social class or status of the real and ritual parents. If both are of the same socio-economic status, ritual kinship is easily established, and refusal from prospective ritual parents is seldom. If the godparents and natural parents belong to extremely different social strata, the corporative relationship through ritual kinship does not function well. Nevertheless, there is a present tendency among Filipinos, particularly in urban areas, to choose godparents from the upper class for the better social mobility of their children.

As gleaned from the foregoing, the compadrazgo system functionally emphasizes the reciprocal social and economic relationships rather than its original religious objectives. It is an important social mechanism recognized by Filipinos as indispensable to an individual's social and economic security. Given the departure from its original religious aim and its significance in society, the compadrazgo system is equally practiced or applies to Filipinos irrespective of religious affiliation. In a bilateral kinship group founded on the principle of consanguinity, people expand their personal relationships horizontally within their generation and among ritual kinsmen towards better socio-economic security. It is for this reason that a group based on personal relationships, which transcend consanguineal bounds, will eventually develop.

V. Conclusion and Summary

None of Filipinists has studied the relationship between the indigenous kinship system and compadrazgo system. The question is why Filipino ethnic societies have accepted Compadrazgo system. Among Asian countries, the Philippines except the southern part of Mindanao is the only Catholic practicing country. In the Philippines, all ethnic groups have practiced the indigenous fictive kinship system as mentioned. As such, the role of indigenous fictive systems is quite similar to the role of Compadrazgo

system. As it is known, the Filipino society is typically based on cognatic or bilateral kinship system that is ego centered-oriented form. I call the Filipino cognatic kinship system as an “Uncrystallized form” rather than “Loosely structured”. I perceive that such bilateral kinship society mostly lacks the corporate organization in general. In other words, Filipinos find it hard to form social organizations with non-kinsmen, On the other hand, cognatic kinship system such as the Filipino society and the most Latin societies can hardly establish a trust relationship with non-kinsmen, because the personal relationship is based on the strong blood consciousness. In this situation, it is very difficult for them to form the corporate organization with non-kinsmen. Only those who are related through consanguinity can trust each other. On the contrary, it means that they cannot trust non-kinsmen without ritual or fictive kinship relation. I call such a society as “**distrust society**” in the context of social anthropological analysis.

We cannot live alone because we are social beings. This is the reason why the people of ego-oriented society try to recruit intimate friends whom they are able to trust and protect each other for the social security.

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