

## **Role of Social Science Research in the Philippines**

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NRCP's Division VIII has seven sections. Each section is composed of two or three social science disciplines, namely: (1) anthropology and linguistics, (2) sociology, social work and demography, (3) political science and public administration, (4) psychology and philosophy, (5) education and communication, (6) economics and statistics, and (7) geography and history. Each section is headed by a social scientist who represents one of the member disciplines. The entire division, however, is led by a Chairperson.

An essential issue is that the NRCP is viewed as an organization largely committed to basic research. The most important need in the social sciences, however, is "problem-oriented research undertakings geared to finding solutions and/or explanations to social problems." With such competing interests, the Division of Social Sciences has to seriously meet the following concerns: (1) the proportion of basic research in relation to the overall research program of Division VIII; (2) the extent to which the Division VIII should attempt to generate and develop social theories relevant to the Philippine setting; (3) how the social sciences can contribute effectively to the quest for Philippine values and socio-economic development; (4) the position of social scientists regarding government-commissioned policy-research studies; and (5) how social scientists can engage in government-funded research yet maintain independence in disseminating the results, particularly when these findings are contrary to current government programs/priorities/policies.

### **Rationale for Interdisciplinary Social Science Research in the Philippines**

At the outset, I would like to stress that the teaching function in any university must be balanced by research. I believe that teaching without research is stale. A teacher who is at the same time engaged in research becomes more authoritative in his classroom because what he says inside his classroom is backed up by what he finds in his research.

Moreover, a teacher who actively does research is able to extend his influence beyond the four walls of his classroom by reaching not only his students, but also his colleagues and the general public through his writings as well as publications.

I therefore encourage you wholeheartedly to do research, and not just research of the applied variety, but basic research that will contribute toward the advancement of the frontiers of knowledge in the long run. I am furthermore encouraging you to engage in interdisciplinary research, research that enables a group of scholars to cut across their departmental lines and make their respective disciplines bear upon a particular research problem. Interdisciplinary research is very enriching for the scholars concerned, and it will further enhance the process of interaction among us.

Interdisciplinary research makes it increasingly difficult to draw the line between the humanities and the social sciences or for that matter between the social science disciplines themselves. Interdisciplinary research is certainly finding broad acceptance among scholars in the social sciences and in the humanities.

In the Philippines, and at the University of the Philippines and the University of Tsukuba in Japan where I both pursued my academic career for a total of 36 years, the interdisciplinary

mode of analysis in research is always encouraged, and efforts are constantly being undertaken to promote as well as strengthen the capability of the Filipino scholars to engage in interdisciplinary and applied research in the social sciences. For trained historians like me, it is very necessary to equip myself with intellectual tools drawn from the other social science disciplines as well as from the humanities, to enable me to look at things "in the round."

Thus, to know more about the culture, manner of living, and the process of change taking place among the masses living in the countryside, I have to know something about, and draw from, the oral and popular literature of the people.

Oral and popular literature can shed valuable light on the values, attitudes and experiences of the non-literate many or the inarticulate and semi-literate masses of rural society in particular, as well as on the processes of social change affecting them within the context of agrarian tradition in the Philippines.

One cannot be content interpreting past change only from the evidence of official records written by the dominant elites in politics and in the economy. The oral and popular literature of the people will surely give illumination to the lives and activities of what we in the Philippines call the common tao or the ordinary village folk.

From my perspective as a historian, the field of anthropology in particular is most useful in the quest for a better understanding of the oral and popular literature of the rural masses for purposes of illuminating the life and experiences of the humble folk of Philippine villages. That is because the anthropologists do not generally have preconceptions about the societies they seek to study, and because they view the culture of a society as an integral whole. As a historian, I also recognize the value of folklore as a source of social history, because in folklore, we see people as human beings and we see them being both historians as well as the history in which they tell their own story in their own words.

Here we see social history as inextricably bound to folklore. They do not simply have a common ground; they are actually one and the same ground. From this ground, we are able to gain insights into the emotions and consciousness of the people we are studying. Moreover, we also go to the roots and sources of society in which the people are living.

While I have concentrated my remarks thus far on the value of anthropology and the humanities toward the enrichment of a historian's historical analysis, I do not wish to imply in any way that other disciplines, especially in the social sciences, have nothing to contribute in propelling the frontiers of knowledge forward.

In the Philippine context, the social sciences indeed have a vital role to play. Economics is crucial in understanding and raising the material levels of existence; sociology in pinpointing which social factors bear upon programs for implementation; linguistics in understanding the multi-racial and ethnic profile of the country; demography in population control; mass communication in innovation diffusion to the grassroots level; psychology in understanding human behavior; and political science in understanding political process.

Thus applied interdisciplinary social science research has attained recognition in the Philippines because it is useful in policy formulation and needed for ethical development purposes. The main fields of inquiry which an increasing number of social scientists, governmental authorities and the public consider to be of importance for social science input into policy are those that are "development-oriented" but which I insist must be imbued with a moral and ethical content in order to promote the common good and public welfare. These

include agrarian reform, family planning, pollution control or environmental planning, food production, communication and others. These relate directly or indirectly to social and economic changes. Through applied interdisciplinary field research into areas such as those I mentioned, social science contribution to policy formulation is optimized with immediate impact on policymakers and ultimate positive benefits redounding to the general population.

In other words, interdisciplinary social science research enables us to have a rational understanding of the Filipino or any other people as a social being. This understanding can only be reached with the use of social science research because the social sciences together provide us with a good basis for a rational analysis of the socio-economic, cultural, political and historical situation in the Philippines, and other countries as well.

The social sciences promote attention to the sensitive interplay of culture, health and environment, and thereby avoid social instability and environmental degradation while fostering indigenous cultural preservation. For example, if the technologists who planned the Chico River Dam Project in the Cordillera, the Agus River Hydroelectric Project in Lanao del Norte, and the Mt. Apo Geothermal Plant Project in Davao del Sur and North Cotabato only took into consideration the human factor and had they consulted the social scientists and social ethicists fully, the above modernization projects that they have undertaken at considerable financial cost to the Filipino taxpayer would not have been devoid of ethical purpose and therefore would have enjoyed greater popular acceptance.

### **Problems and Constraints of Interdisciplinary and International Field Work in the Philippines**

One problem that I can identify at the outset is the complication of doing interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary research with scholars coming from other nations, where the participants have different perspectives, and even those coming from the same discipline may have different ways of looking at things. This is something to think about as part of the process of formulating and conceptualizing research proposals and assembling scientific teams. While I personally have had a rich experience in interdisciplinary and international field research in the Philippines, in Southeast Asia and in Japan, I honestly must state that the potential contribution of the Filipino social scientists to the process of reconstructing Philippine society is constrained, however, by the state of social science education in the country today.

It is difficult for the social sciences even in the University of the Philippines to be relevant to the fast-changing conditions outside the university and even to the demands of scientific development because of the bifurcation between teaching on the one hand, and research and extension service on the other. Faculty orientation had been based toward teaching as the primary function of the social science department. The bifurcation between teaching on the one hand, and research and extension work on the other, and the primacy of the former in the orientation of the social scientists, partly explain some observations regarding the state of the social sciences in the State University and elsewhere; for example, that social science research capability even in the premier State University of the country is not well-developed, with research not contributing significantly to constructing theories and developing methodological models appropriate for understanding Philippine social conditions, and which in turn accounts for the inability of the social science community to provide analyses and predictions in the context of the current fluid situation confronting the Philippines; that research activities done by some Filipino social scientists are peripheral to the concerns of the general social science community and are therefore ignored because the alternative perspectives to mainstream theoretical and methodological positions they present are perceived to be outside the purview of the social sciences rather than challenges to confront or incorporate into intellectual frameworks

used in the disciplines; and that there is hardly any interaction between those who are familiar with theories and those with practical experience in social science field work.

There are two major constraints faced by the Filipino social scientists to do research, and these are their full-time teaching duties and the lack of funds for field work. To be able to do applied or ethical development-relevant research, they need financial support and time off from their teaching assignments. Field research demands immersion in selected communities and this would interfere with their teaching duties. Planners of interdisciplinary and international field research projects must therefore address this situation. The implementation of interdisciplinary and international field research projects can be severely constrained by a number of factors which should be anticipated early enough by an "identification mission" and by a "formulation mission" from abroad. These factors will determine if you will push through with the proposal and the project or not, and if you will have an institutional-based linkage or a low-intensity collaboration with individual social scientists and scholars belonging to an institution.

Based on my direct personal experiences, the other major constraining factors are the following:

(a) The situation in major universities like the University of the Philippines as regards the attitude towards foreign assistance and research conducted by foreigners, known locally as "academic imperialism."

(b) The involvement of many persons in one project, which could open the door for politics in the university involved to creep in and enter the scene more easily, thereby affecting the decision-making processes.

(c) The negative image of a project perceived to be "contaminated" by "academic imperialism" thereby hampering the complete commitment to the undertaking by the members of the scientific team assembled.

(d) The extra complication, as alluded to earlier, of the proposed project dealing with social scientists with their different disciplinary backgrounds, and political orientations, and personal temperaments.

(e) The vagueness of the organization of the project, the project management, and the project research management, which could lead to the duplication of functions and positions.

(f) The expectations of the local members of the project team as regards the technical and financial backstopping of the foreign counterparts.

(g) The very nature of the project, which could lead to a resentment by local members if it implies a dependent position by the local members to their foreign colleagues.

(h) The unrealistic expectations as regards the output of the proposed project, which means that planners must make sure that the aims, must be realizable within the prescribed period of the research undertaking.

(i) And the last but not the least, the reality of administrators in a given university being turf-conscious and self-centered thereby being obstructive rather than facilitative toward an interdisciplinary and international institution-based project.

There are other constraining factors, and these are the ones which could be encountered right in the field itself, such as a life-threatening situation of being caught in the eye of a powerful typhoon, as I experienced in Okinawa, Japan in 1977; the threat of being ambushed by the henchmen of local government officials engaged in treasure hunting, even as the villagers look at you as a treasure hunter yourself when you go to a locality for field work; being threatened by drunken members of local militias who look at you as a potential trouble agitator or subversive; being threatened as a trespasser by logging concession guards merely because you are a University of the Philippines professor; and being caught in the crossfire not only between the Philippine Army and the New People's Army, but also between feuding clans as in the Manobo areas of Surigao del Sur.

Then there is the problem of "roughing it" and learning how to take a kingfisher's bath to make do with the available pail of water supply; learning how to use five-hectare toilets; walking long distances for lack of transportation; and avoiding getting sick and learning how to drink local toddy where before you avoided drinking toddies like tuba, basi and lambanog.

These constraints that I have enumerated, which I am sure most of you have also experienced or are at least familiar with, will serve as major hindrances to the successful completion of any project. However, if we take them into consideration right at the outset, at the conceptualization and formulation stage of the research proposal, then they can be avoided and successfully dealt with.

These should not deter scholars from doing individual, interdisciplinary, and international field research because the benefits to be obtained will far outweigh these obstacles. Thank you very much for listening and I like to inspire all the NRCP social science division members as well as the authors and contributors of the BANNAG: Journal on Local Knowledge to cultivate their dreams, go after their goals and be all they can be always in their respective research undertakings. May you all have good health constantly.