

Albert Ravenholt

THE PHILIPPINES

A Young Republic
on the Move



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*A Young Republic
on the Move*

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Introduction

Enjoying, understanding, and creatively working with another people is possible only as we appreciate the perspective from which they view both the little matters of daily life and the affairs of the world. It is our purpose to encourage such an awareness of the Filipinos. We will picture their experience and environment, sketch their heritage and show what use they have made of it, and seek to discover their hopes for the future.

The Philippines is a tropical Island Republic of 28,000,000 citizens, a land of infinite variety and substantial promise that is fast becoming a modern nation. Next door lie the teeming lands of East and South Asia, their emerging new nations plagued by economic and political instability. The Philippines occupies a crucial position in this turbulent area, representing as it does the fullest development of the democratic idea on the western rim of the Pacific. While her neighbors are struggling with seemingly insurmountable problems that cripple healthy progress and inhibit individual freedom, the Philippines, some sixteen years after the achievement of full independence, has evolved a pattern of self-government that is rela-

tively stable, that is responsive to the need for change and yet at the same time safeguards human rights. How is it that the Filipinos have afforded themselves this advantage? Does their experience relate to the problems of their neighbors? And are the Filipinos able to inspire an appreciation of their methods in fellow Asians, whose pride and new-found independence make this a delicate process at best?

Historical development and geographical location have combined to make the Philippine experience unique. During the three centuries of her rule in these Islands, Spain practiced the "most intensive Christian missionary effort in the Orient." As a consequence the Philippines today is the only predominantly Christian nation in Asia. Americans raised the Stars and Stripes over the Archipelago at the turn of the century and lent themselves to a different type of missionary enterprise. With rare energy, determination, and occasionally an overabundant faith in the rightness of their cause, they sought to build democratic institutions through public education, representative political instruments and the concept of freedom which afforded at least the promise of opportunity for all.

Filipinos have digested nearly all importations and withal usually retained their sense of personal dignity. Manila's city council occasionally does rename its streets. But generally the Philippines has been spared that curse of the new nationalisms that seeks

INTRODUCTION

to expunge everything the white man has brought, except his gadgets. Yet, all that has been borrowed from abroad is essentially an overlay upon indigenous institutions. Attitudes and customs that were established long before Ferdinand Magellan found his way to the Islands in 1521 still continue in evidence. So far the unique role of the family as the primary concern of the Filipino has not been erased, even in the face of industrialization, with its emphasis upon individual mobility and specialized skills. One of the riddles of the future is whether this extended familial system now can adapt itself to foster the performance that a more modern economy and state exact.

Geographically the Philippines as part of the Malayan world is situated in one of the three great areas of tropical potential (the other two are in Africa and Latin America). While most temperate lands are being exploited today within the limits of present economic technology, the development of scientific methods for the tropics is only in its infancy, and man's frontiers for feeding his burgeoning numbers lie chiefly in the moist tropics. Here in the latitude "where winter never comes" are some of the greatest of unused resources in land, minerals, fisheries, forests and power. So far the countries of Southeast Asia have progressed farther than most other regions of the moist tropics.

With the elimination of colonial rule a question arises: What is the administrative and technical po-

tential of people never habitually compelled to discipline themselves in preparation for winter and unfamiliar with the competition for survival imposed where population presses relentlessly upon the available land? The Philippines—among the most advanced of these societies—offers both sobering and encouraging examples of what can be accomplished under their own management.

Despite the manifold problems they face in building a new nation amidst the ruins that World War II left them, Filipinos have not lost the capacity to enjoy the daily experience of living. The more intense, faster-paced societies of the West may have something to learn from a people still closer to the rhythm of nature. While politics in the Islands is an immensely consequential matter, for example, it also is a national sport. And individual concern for getting ahead in a career or business has not yet overruled attention to helping one's relatives and friends. The national delight in music and the dance, the repartee of village discussions and concern with cockfighting all demonstrate an inclination not to let mundane affairs become too serious. It is this optimistic temperament that fortifies Filipinos in adversity and helps lend the future an optimistic note amidst the uncertainties of Asia's new and cataclysmic awakening.

Contents

	PAGE
Introduction	vii
1. The Islands and the People	i
2. Early History and Spanish Rule	27
3. The Philippines under the Stars and Stripes	51
4. The Free Philippines	71
5. The Economy	95
6. The Society, Its Religion, Arts, and Pastimes	126
7. Government, Politics, and Education	161
8. The Philippines and the Future	190
Bibliography	198
Index	201



1. *The Islands and the People*

The environment in which Filipinos are evolving their distinctive way of life is possibly as varied as that of any people on earth. This conditions both the national temperament and prospects for the Republic. Their insular landscape has meant that Filipinos had to overcome major hurdles to build a sense of national identity—and the process is not yet complete; inhabitants of isolated islands like the windswept Batanes group north of Luzon feel themselves only remotely linked to the twentieth century mentality that dominates the thinking of citizens in Greater Manila.

Physical remoteness also poses special problems in speeding economic progress. Each Island is compelled to develop its own public services. The Republic cannot be spanned by a single electric power grid nor can commercial distribution systems readily supply the needs of such isolated Filipinos as the residents of the Cuyo Group in the Sulu Sea. Delivering the mail on time and undamaged becomes a real challenge to the ingenuity of the postal service. It is also this fragmented character of the Archipelago, with large and small islands guarding enclosed seas, that creates a particular beauty, as coconut palms lean over the coral formations and white sand beaches and are silhouetted against the lush green slopes farther inland.

The sovereignty of the Republic includes some 7,100 islands; the total figure actually changes as new islands are "born" through volcanic action occasionally pushing up another isle, that later may be washed away by the Pacific. These islands extend for 1,200 miles from 5 degrees north of the equator just east of British Borneo to within sight of the rocks that mark Formosa's southern outposts. They help shield the South China Sea and its necklace of new tropical nations from the Pacific storms, including both the northeast monsoons and the destructive typhoons that originate near Guam. These sweep westward to spend part of their fury over Luzon and the Visayas or are deflected north toward Formosa, Okinawa and the China main-

THE ISLANDS AND THE PEOPLE

land. Warm waters gathered from these shallow seas help form the Japan Current, the Kuroshio, that moderates the climate along its course past the Ryukyus and the Aleutians to the coast of British Columbia and the States of Washington and Oregon.

In total land area the Philippines is approximately equal to Great Britain or the New England states and New York combined. But the actual land surface of 115,600 square miles comprises only about one-sixth of the national domain; the remainder is composed of surrounding waters over which the Republic claims jurisdiction and such near-land-locked bodies of water as the Mindanao Sea, the Sibuyan Sea, the fabled Sulu Sea and numerous straits. Although an exact measurement has never been made, the total coastline of all the Islands combined may exceed that of the United States. Luzon and Mindanao forming the northern and southern anchors of the Archipelago contain roughly two-thirds of the total land and are almost "continental" in character. They hold substantial plains like those of Central Luzon, the northeastern Cagayan Valley and, in the far south, the Agusan basin and the wide rolling landscape of Cotabato that are girded by mountains and drained by large rivers. Of major importance to Filipinos are nine other islands: Cebu, Negros, Bohol, Panay, Leyte and Samar which almost join, Masbate, Mindoro, and Palawan. They range in size from 1,250 to 5,000 square miles, as

contrasted to another 455 islands that each hold from 1 to 500 square miles. The remaining more than 6,500 islands are of little economic consequence and over 4,000 of them have been given no names on published maps, although Filipinos who live on or near these isles use local terms to describe each, sometimes after an incident related to the site or a curious formation that has aroused popular interest.

Scientists are still reconstructing the history of the geological ages when the Philippines was formed. Although the Philippines is perched along the rim of the Western Pacific trench that leads south from near Japan past Formosa to the deepest known spot on earth off eastern Mindanao—the ocean bottom here is more than six miles beneath the surface—the Islands do not appear to be a true extension of the Asiatic shelf. Rather, they have been cast up, broken apart and worn down to be lifted again above the Pacific by the mighty tectonic movements in the earth's crust that have characterized this region. The larger islands were shoved up from the ocean floor as the crests of anticlinal folds and as upthrust blocks caused by faulting; in Northern Luzon there are ancient coral formations that now rest more than a mile above sea level. With the exception of the Sulu Sea which in places is three and one-half miles deep, the water between these islands generally is shallow. Here the numerous coral formations have built up to form many of the small

THE ISLANDS AND THE PEOPLE

isles that are strung like glittering pearls through the central and southern regions of the Archipelago.

To this largely tectonic process has been added intense volcanic activity; most of these volcanos have died down and become eroded but some forty still are more or less active. One chain of volcanos leads north from Borneo through Palawan and Mindoro to Western and Northern Luzon. Another such volcanic line evidently extended from Borneo through the Sulu Archipelago and Western Mindanao into Negros where majestic Mount Canlaon stands as a still active sentinel, having disgorged the debris that formed the rich coastal plains of this sugar growing region. Two other chains of volcanos extended north and south through Central and Eastern Mindanao. One of these is marked today by the enormous crater that holds Lake Lanao some 2,000 feet above sea level and the adjacent Mount Ragang to the south where a cluster of volcanic cones rises to roughly 10,000 feet in occasionally furious activity. The other chain begins with 10,000-foot Mount Apo near Davao, includes the volcano that now periodically rains destruction on Camiguin Island and extends through Leyte and Samar up the Bicol Peninsula into the Sierra Madre Range and the "cradle of volcanos" southeast of Manila Bay. Both to the geologist and to the devotee of beauty in nature this chain offers spectacular attractions. At the very southern tip of Luzon stands

5,115-foot Mount Bulusan, which is still active, overlooking the San Bernardino Strait that opens onto the stormy Pacific. Near Legaspi is steaming Mount Mayon which rises 7,960 feet to form the most perfect volcanic cone in the world. Mount Banahao within sight of Laguna de Bay is nearly as high and is flanked by its nearby smaller neighbor, Mount Makiling. Farther to the west is the favorite tourist attraction of the huge Taal volcanic crater, now holding a lake with its own smaller and still active volcano inside; much of Greater Manila rests upon ashes thrown up long ago by this volcano to form the adobe stone quarried for building and numerous other purposes.

Like most of the lands that ring the Pacific, the Philippines is subject to frequent and sometimes severe earthquakes. This violent movement in the earth's crust over eons of time has opened numerous fault lines; some can be seen, such as one huge crack in the floor of Ragay Gulf off Southern Luzon. It is these fault lines that have facilitated extrusion of the minerals including gold, copper, lead, zinc, chromite and others still being explored. But the process of geologic formation may have so fractured the Islands as to minimize the prospects of major petroleum deposits. The origin and dating of the land bridges that during several geologic periods linked the Philippines to present day Borneo, Sumatra and the Asian mainland still are in dispute. But it is generally agreed that the

THE ISLANDS AND THE PEOPLE

Islands lie at the northern terminus of the Wallace Line, that remarkable demarcation extending from the Lombok Strait east of Bali north through the Makassar Strait into the Philippines. The co-discoverer of the "theory of natural selection," Alfred Russell Wallace, found that this line tended to divide the forms of life associated with the Asian mainland from those that had originated in and around Australia. As the "bridge" over which these forms of flora and fauna were able to intermingle, the Philippines evolved an extraordinary variety of species and became a botanical wonderland.

A traveler through the Islands is impressed with the variety of climates at differing elevations and the great contrasts in types of landscape encountered. This traces in part to the weather; a single island may have two or three distinct rainfall patterns. Northwestern and Central Luzon have a definite dry season extending approximately through the first half of the year, while the rains brought by the northeast monsoons are captured by the mountain slopes facing the Pacific. This pattern is almost equally characteristic of the western portions of Mindoro, Panay, Negros and Palawan. Later, the start of the southwest monsoon brings intense precipitation to these areas, while the eastern regions of the Bicol Peninsula, Samar, Leyte and Mindanao experience their driest months. A central belt extending from Southern Mindanao through

the Visayas to the Cagayan Valley has a more moderated rainfall with local variations influenced by topography. In most settled communities the annual rainfall ranges from 43 inches to about 170 inches. Particularly when a typhoon spills its enormous load of moisture, a concentrated downpour may flood rivers, washing out bridges and dikes; the summer capital of Baguio once experienced a rainfall of 133 inches in a single month.

The vegetation encouraged by this abundance of moisture, by the considerable areas of fertile, volcanically deposited soils often overlaying limestone, and by the differences in temperature has been affected also by man's relentless determination to subdue the jungle. From the cool, pine-clad mountain crests of Northern Luzon to the mangrove swamps along the Moro Gulf, forest can be found cloaking nearly one-half of the land surface. At some of the higher elevations where rainfall is intense and continues throughout most of the year there are fog-shrouded, moss-laden growths almost impenetrable to man. In the forests on the lower slopes dipterocarps usually form the top story of the jungle. The commercial stands of timber include 65 species and cover some 23,000,000 acres that provide the basis for a growing export industry supplying Philippine Mahogany to much of the world. Another 9,500,000 acres are classed as noncommercial forest. In addition to stands of timber the forests

THE ISLANDS AND THE PEOPLE

support a luxuriant growth of numerous shade-loving plants and vines including rattan, sometimes 200 yards long, that finds favor with furniture makers. On the lower slopes are also found palms of several dozen kinds, the distinctive fig tree, numerous species of graceful bamboo, wild cinnamon and hundreds of plants for which medical uses have been discovered, to mention only a few. In all approximately 15,000 flowering plants have been identified and nearly 1,000 native orchids. Some 13,500,000 acres are occupied by the tall, tough cogon grass and brush that often have grown up after the destructive *caingin* farming whereby the forest is burned to afford fertility for two or three crops before the migratory cultivators move on to another site. Of the remaining 28,000,000 acres nearly 2,000,000 are covered by swamps, some of which have been converted into fish ponds and salt beds. It is estimated that some 16,500,000 acres of this area now is cultivated and that introduction of suitable farming methods might permit doubling this arable area.

The fauna of the Philippine Archipelago is almost as varied as its flora, although most of the larger wild animals found on mainland Southeast Asia, including the tiger, seladang, elephant and rhinoceros, no longer inhabit the Islands. Largest among the wild life on land today is the *tamarao*, characteristic particularly of Mindoro, a wild buffalo, not much different from

the domesticated *carabao*. In the jungle the wild pig abounds, to the delight of the sportsman and distress of the farmer whose crops it roots out. In less inhabited regions deer are plentiful, including the mouse deer of Palawan that is reputed to be the smallest in the world. Bird life is extraordinarily abundant and many have brilliant plumage; some 750 species have been identified, including the famed monkey-eating eagle. Some remote regions are favored by huge bats living in caves where they deposit their guano that farmers prize for fertilizer. They emerge at night to feed on jungle fruits in such numbers that they blanket the sky. Monkeys are found throughout the Islands and the Philippines has supplied many chartered plane-loads for research laboratories in the West; while some naturalists deplore the trapping of these agile inhabitants of the jungle, farmers on the frontier are glad to be rid of those that become pests and dig out newly planted coconut trees. Rodents and particularly rats inhabiting the swamps often are a curse on new settlers; they nest in the crowns of coconut trees and destroy the flowers, climb cacao trees to eat the pods and, particularly in Cotabato, move in enormous flocks that destroy a corn field in a single night despite efforts to fight them off with fire and ditches. Elegant butterflies and insects are found in this region in possibly greater profusion than any-