

Bilateral cultural diplomacy: 50 years of Philippine experience (1959-2009)

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ABSTRACT

This article focuses its inquiry on bilateral cultural diplomacy by examining the bilateral cultural agreements of the Philippines. Using a descriptive-analytical approach, the examination reveals how culture became a domestic consideration in the formulation of Philippine foreign policy as well as a resource for achieving foreign policy objectives. Additionally, this article underscores the need for developing an assessment mechanism to measure the impact of bilateral cultural diplomacy.

Keywords:

Cultural exchange
Cultural interrelationships
Foreign policy
Intercultural programs
Cultural activities

Introduction

The usage of the term of “cultural diplomacy” has become increasingly complicated. The complication stems from the fact that cultural diplomacy is a distinct diplomatic endeavor. This led one author to profess that “cultural diplomacy is hard to define, but you’d know it when you see it” (Schneider, 2006). Nonetheless, there are distinguishable characteristics that help us define cultural diplomacy. For one, it is closely associated with public diplomacy since both concepts are directed towards audiences beyond official diplomatic circles (Bound et al, 2007; Berger, 2008; Cull, 2009). Their common function to convey ideas and attract these audiences brings them to the soft power side of the hard power-soft power spectrum (Nye, 2004). The variety and range of activities which include exchange programs, the use of technology like the internet and broadcasting to engage with foreign publics, cultural and artistic expressions, educational and scientific programs, among others lead many to consider cultural diplomacy as a component of public diplomacy, or in more specific terms, as “the linchpin of public diplomacy” (US Department of State, 2005). This leads us to the second characteristic of cultural diplomacy where there is a pronounced use of culture in diplomacy for purposes such as building or strengthening relations with other nations, promoting national interests, and enhancing mutual understanding (Institute for Cultural Diplomacy, 1999).

While cultural diplomacy can take place among organizations and individuals, governments are often viewed as being the primary actors of cultural diplomacy (Aguilar, 1996). Since governments are guided by their foreign policy, there is a variation in the conduct of cultural diplomacy between countries. The most visible is the model of the national cultural institute with an associated network of cultural centers. Examples of this are Spain’s Instituto Cervantes, France’s Alliance Francaise, and China’s Confucius Institute, among many others. Another is through the participation in multilateral organizations. But while unilateral and multilateral engagements in cultural diplomacy have received adequate scholarly attention (Aoki-Okabe, Kawamura & Makita, 2010), bilateral cultural diplomacy has yet to be explored. It is this scholarly niche which this article seeks to fill in.

For the purpose of this article, bilateral cultural diplomacy is defined as cultural cooperation between

two countries. Cultural cooperation covers all aspects of intellectual and creative activities relating to education, science, and culture (UNESCO, 1966). Countries formalize cooperation in culture through cultural agreements. Although cultural cooperation and exchanges may take place in the absence of cultural agreements, bilateral cultural agreements are regarded as the most visible formal form of such cooperation serving as the cornerstone of international cultural exchange, cooperation, and diplomacy (Staines, 2010). These agreements prescribe the scope and of cultural cooperation, the responsibilities of the contracting parties, its duration, and financing. Cultural agreements usually cover the areas of education, sciences, and arts which usually stipulate the exchange of professors, students, artists and scholars, the reciprocal provision of scholarships, exchange of materials such as books, films and recordings, and the protection of intellectual and artistic property.

In international relations, the proliferation of cultural agreements indicates an increasing desire for mutual understanding. Since cultural agreements facilitate people-to-people interactions, the increasing role of culture in fostering a peaceful, mutually-dependent global community is highlighted. At the bilateral level, the signing of a cultural agreement is heralded as a milestone in diplomatic relations. However, a cultural agreement only achieves its significance once it is implemented. Cultural agreements express broad principles of cooperation and the specific details of activities are formalized through biennial or triennial executive programs. Despite the widespread conclusion of bilateral cultural agreements by various countries, as far as to the knowledge of the author, no study is known to have dealt with a country’s experience in implementing them.

This paper is an attempt to address a research gap on bilateral cultural diplomacy by determining the inherent features of Philippine cultural diplomacy as illustrated by its bilateral cultural agreements. Since the signing of its first cultural agreement in 1959 until the enactment of the National Cultural Heritage Act in 2009, marking a reorientation in policy on cultural diplomacy, the Philippines has entered into 34 bilateral cultural agreements with countries from Europe, the Americas, Middle East and Africa, and Asia Pacific. The scope and number of bilateral cultural agreements concluded provide a substantial amount of data for studying the nature of Philippine bilateral cultural diplomacy.

“ALTHOUGH CULTURAL COOPERATION AND EXCHANGES MAY TAKE PLACE IN THE ABSENCE OF CULTURAL AGREEMENTS, BILATERAL CULTURAL AGREEMENTS ARE REGARDED AS THE MOST VISIBLE FORMAL FORM OF SUCH COOPERATION”.

The paper will begin with a discussion on the factors which were critical for the inclusion of culture in the formulation of Philippine foreign policy. This will be followed by an overview of the roles of various institutions in the implementation of Philippine bilateral cultural diplomacy. The succeeding sections will dwell on how bilateral cultural diplomacy contributed to the realization of foreign policy objectives of the Philippine government. At the end of the paper, future directions for research on bilateral cultural diplomacy are provided.

Factors highlighting the role of culture in the formulation of Philippine foreign policy

Philippine foreign policy is influenced by both internal and external factors. These factors are not only instrumental in the formulation of foreign policy objectives but these also affect the behavior, choices, and actions of the Philippines in the global stage. In this section, the internal factors such as geography, cultural history, and political and economic conditions and the external factors namely relations with the United States of America and relations with Asian countries will be discussed.

Internal factors

There were three crucial internal factors which highlight the role of culture in the formulation of Philippine foreign policy that this article will analyze. These are geography, cultural history, and political and economic conditions.

The first factor is the geography of the Philippines. This tropical climate archipelago of around 7,100 islands has abundant marine, mineral, and natural resources. However, these appealing attributes have corresponding detriments. The seas as well as extreme variations in topography make governance, communication, transportation, and territorial security a major challenge. Around 20 typhoons visit the country on an annual basis. Its location in the Pacific Ring of Fire gives it a propensity to volcanic eruptions and earthquakes. Nonetheless, the Philippines location in the Asia Pacific is considered a natural gateway to the economies of the region (Banlaoi, 2007). As an island state, it is well positioned to engage in international trade because of its proximity to important shipping lanes and its possession of fine ports and harbors (Cohen, 2003). With this, the country is at times made into an arena of contesting regional and world powers. As an independent nation, the Philippines was greatly handicapped by its geographical isolation, which was further aggravated by its relationship with the United States. Culture became a necessary foreign policy tool to overcome the geographical isolation and to link it to the countries of Asia and to the rest of the world.

We go now to the second factor which is cultural history. While the Philippines is located in Asia, its cultural historical experience has brought it into greater rapport with Europe and North America. This experience changed the landscape of Philippine society. Pre-colonial Philippines (900-1521) was inhabited by a people with maritime traditions manifested in their economic activities and cultural practices, enjoy trade relations with the Chinese, Arabs, and neighboring peoples of Southeast Asia, and bear important elements of civilization. Spanish colonization (1521-1898) gave birth to a different cultural landscape in the islands. Riverine, coastal, and lowland communities succumbed to Spanish power and they came to be known as *indios* who were baptized and lived as Christians, adopted Hispanic names, learned how to write using the Latin alphabet, and adopted Spanish words, cuisines, clothing, and art. Nevertheless, while these were taking place, the *Moro* people of Mindanao and the upland communities remained outside Spanish control. Through resistance and aversion, they were able to exercise their culture freely and, as such, the cultural patterns of these groups remain unchanged (Tan, 2008). The Spaniards were then followed by the Americans. From 1898-1941, the Americans embarked on recreating Philippine society in American image, local elite cooptation, and cultural Americanization of the population. The result was a Philippine society shaped in the American image and a colonial mentality, the belief that American lifeways and products are better than one's own, instilled in most Filipinos (Constantino & Constantino, 1978). As for the non-Christian populations of the Cordillera, the Americans were able to convert them to Christianity and subject them under the colonial public school system. The different *Moro* communities managed to remain relatively free of foreign interference after signing agreements that placed them under American protection.

The colonial experience of the Philippines divided its population who had different histories resulting in different cultures. The majority of Filipinos had a history of subjugation by and resistance to colonial powers which gave them a culture with foreign influences. On the other hand, the indigenous communities and the *Moro* people lived undisturbed affording them the opportunity to preserve their traditional cultures. This cultural differentiation among Filipinos is an important factor in culture's role in foreign policymaking. The Philippines cannot pursue an effective foreign policy on account of division and lack of co-operation among various groups. On the other hand, differences in culture gave ample leverage to deal with multi-cultural countries as well as with countries with strong homogenous societies (e.g. Islamic countries).

Lastly, political and economic conditions were also a determining factor for international cultural engagement. The devastation brought by the Second World War placed the Philippines in a challenging situation to rebuild itself. Thus, the first three postwar administrations (1946-1957) concentrated on building the economic and political foundations necessary

for a newly independent nation. Liberation, however, did not only entail the establishment of a democratic government that is responsive to the needs of its people and capable of defending the integrity of its territory. While political reorganization and economic recovery became the immediate concern of the postwar Philippine Republic, it would later realize that such concerns should be directed at the purpose of building a nation. Educational and cultural opportunities, from both domestic and external settings, were necessary to be made publicly and widely available to its citizens.

The above mentioned internal factors were crucial in bringing culture in the purview of Philippine foreign policy formulation. The geographic attributes and position of the Philippines make it vulnerable to both environmental and security threats. Colonial rule resulted in a diversified population with the indigenous culture at the margins of a mainstream culture with foreign influences. The unstable and still developing political and economic conditions of the country limited the institutional and financial resources it can wield to embark on an effective engagement with other states. All of these challenges inhibit the country from pursuing an aggressive foreign policy and in making a substantial contribution in the international arena. Against this context, culture became a necessary consideration in the formulation of foreign policy. It was utilized as power resource that will complement, if not offset, the limitations posed by geography, cultural history, and political and economic conditions.

External factors

Having discussed the internal factors that highlight the role of culture in Philippine foreign policy, I will now analyze the external factors. Among these, highlight is given to the relations with the United States of America and relations with the Asian neighbors.

American power remained influential in economic and security affairs even after Philippine independence in 1946. Parity rights were given to Americans in the disposition, exploitation, development, and utilization of all agricultural, timber and mineral lands of the Philippines (Constantino & Constantino, 1978: 198-199). Nine years after, tariff preferences for Philippine articles entering the U.S. were increased while tariff preferences for U.S. articles entering the Philippines were decreased (Kim, 1968). In terms of security, the Philippines and U.S. signed the Military Assistance Agreement which granted exemptions and privileges to U.S. military personnel and their dependents, to the American civilian component of the bases and their dependents, and to American contractors under contract with the bases. They were exempted from custom duties, internal revenue taxes, license and taxes, immigration requirements, and arrest and service of process. Criminal jurisdiction, while neatly classified in the agreement according to the location where the crime was committed, tended to favor American base

personnel (Romualdez, 1980). The issue of criminal jurisdiction about U.S. base guards shooting Filipinos who had strayed unto base territory revealed that such exemptions and privileges were prone to abuses (Cooley, 2013). By 1956, stirred by such abuses, the halls of Congress were filled by calls for a review and realignment of relations between the Philippines and the United States. The reconfiguration of Philippine-American relations encouraged the Philippines to explore on other aspects of foreign relations to which it will hinge on its bilateral relations with other countries. Moreover, the first attempts of the Philippines to establish and strengthen bilateral relations were with countries that were also aligned with the U.S. such as Japan and South Korea.

Another external factor is the need to foster closer relations with Asian neighbors. While it was a priority, it was left unrealized due to the primary attention rendered to Philippine-American relations (Recto, 1990). A testament to this fact is the attempt to establish and the participation of the Philippines in establishing an Asian Union. In 1949, the Philippines participated in the New Delhi Conference. The conference was unsuccessful because Asian countries, particularly India, were suspicious of the pro-American stance of the Philippines (Lopez, 1990). President Elpidio Quirino attempted to establish a Pacific Union of Asian countries by organizing a conference in Baguio in 1950 but this failed to yield concrete results. During the administration of President Ramon Magsaysay (1953-1957), attempts were made to accommodate the demands for closer relations with Asia while stressing the importance of maintaining and strengthening economic and security relations with the U.S. He instructed Vice President and Foreign Affairs Secretary Carlos P. Garcia to arrange visits to neighboring countries (Regala, 1954). Carlos Romulo, who formerly served as President of the United Nations General Assembly, was asked to represent the Philippines in the Afro-Asian Conference in Bandung, Indonesia, in 1955. Romulo will also take part in the establishment of the Southeast Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO) which was earlier proposed by President Quirino.

The renewed emphasis on fostering closer relations with Asian countries created new opportunities for the Philippines by expanding its bilateral relations with countries of other regions and blocs in terms of economy (Third World economies and European countries), ideology (Socialist countries), and culture (Islamic countries). The Philippines utilized its pre-colonial history in establishing relations with Asian countries. Its Muslim population served as a leverage to establish relations with Islamic countries. Its colonial history served as a basis for establishing relations with Europe and the Americas. These economic, ideological, cultural, and historical connections with other countries would partly determine the nature and scope of cultural agreements. But before we discuss these cultural agreements, the next section will analyze the institutional setup of Philippine cultural diplomacy.

The role of institutions in Philippine cultural diplomacy

The institutional framework of the Philippine government responsible for the management and implementation of foreign and cultural policies is given significant attention in this section. This is on the premise that their capabilities and limitations affected the practice of cultural diplomacy. The foreign policy power of the government falls heavily within the domain of the executive branch and is particularly exercised through the Department of Foreign Affairs. Meanwhile, the government cultural policy is defined by and largely effected through its national cultural agencies.

The Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA)

The DFA is headed by the Secretary of Foreign Affairs, who is responsible for the formulation and implementation of foreign policy; negotiation of treaties, conventions, and other agreements; and the sending abroad of ambassadors, ministers and other diplomatic officers and consuls among others¹. Within the department, cultural diplomacy was the responsibility of the Division of Cultural Exchanges and Activities. Since it was one of the earliest units in the department, its nature and functions have undergone several changes as the department and the Foreign Service were being strengthened. These changes also showed the increasing importance of cultural diplomacy as the unit started from a small division to a full-pledged office of equal footing to both political and economic affairs.

In 1947, the division was transferred to the Office of Political and Economic Affairs and was renamed the Division of International and Cultural Activities. Following the Foreign Service legislations in 1952 and 1953, it became part of the Office of Political and Cultural Affairs and was renamed Division of Cultural Affairs (Galang, 1953). In 1963, the division of the Office of Political and Cultural Affairs led to the creation of a separate Office of Cultural Affairs entrusted with the responsibility "for the Government's cultural and information program abroad and shall undertake studies and submit recommendations as will enable the Government and the Department to formulate policies in connection therewith"².

In 1982, the functional offices were replaced by the geographic offices which remained as the defining structure of the DFA until today. Each geographic office was responsible for the supervision, monitoring and reporting of the activities and operations of Philippine diplomatic missions and posts within its geographical coverage. This responsibility includes

the provision of a more aggregative perspective of policy issues, including its economic, political and cultural aspects, involving their respective geographic group or region³.

DFA plays a crucial role in cultural agreements. It determines the viability and appropriateness of concluding a cultural agreement with another country in consideration of the state of bilateral relations and the national interests of the Philippines. Its embassies provide recommendations for the conclusion of a cultural agreement owing to their knowledge of the affairs of the country of their responsibility. It is also mandated to facilitate the process from the initiation, negotiation, signing, ratification, and even the termination of a cultural agreement by virtue of Executive Order 459.

The national cultural agencies

Although the DFA plays a crucial role in cultural agreements, it also has partners in its implementation. The national cultural agencies were there to provide substance to the provisions of the different cultural agreements.

The postwar Philippine government conceived culture and the arts as the preservation of cultural heritage. The National Archives and the National Library served as important repositories of documents and written materials; the National Museum and the National Historical Commission conducted archaeological, anthropological and historical researches and preserved material evidences to reconstruct the past; and the *Commission on the Filipino Language* preserved the intangible heritage of languages through the conduct of researches and publication of dictionaries. Moreover, the tasks of cultural heritage preservation were also seen as "adjuncts to the country's educational system" (Quiason, 1971). As such, the cultural institutions were placed under the administrative supervision of the Department of Education and their goals and projects were aligned along the institutional goals of the department. The Commission on the Filipino Language assisted the Department in the use of Filipino as the medium of instruction. With education as one of its tri-focal mandate along with science and culture, the National Museum worked with schools in the establishment of school museums and in the preparation of teaching materials in natural sciences. School officials worked closely with the National Historical Commission in arranging field trips to historical sites. The National Library worked towards improving reader services to both students and researchers.

With this kind of setup, the cultural machinery of the Philippine government was inadequate

¹ Executive Order no. 18, September 16, 1946.

² Department Order no. 66-63, November 29, 1963.

³ Executive Order no. 850, December 1, 1982.

to respond to the demands of cultural diplomacy. Cultural administration was highly limited to heritage preservation thereby neglecting the needs of artists and performing groups primarily on international artistic exchanges. Moreover, each cultural agency caters only to their respective specialized, if not, narrow domain, with no single institution looking at the overall landscape of culture and arts administration in the country.

Upon the assumption to the presidency of Ferdinand Marcos in 1965, the Philippine government adopted a more holistic approach towards culture and the arts. In 1966, the Cultural Center of the Philippines (CCP) was established which had the responsibility to bring into the country foreign artists whenever in its opinion performance by such artists would enhance the country's cultural development. After the successful overthrow of the Marcos dictatorship in 1986, the Presidential Commission for Culture and the Arts was established placing the CCP under its administrative supervision. It became the National Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCCA) in 1992 after the passage of the Republic Act 7356. The law mandated the NCCA to create and support a sustained program of international cultural exchange, scholarships, travel grants and other forms of assistance. In 1993, NCCA established an International Desk (later renamed International Affairs Office) which was "charged with coordinating with foreign and local government institutions and private organizations in disseminating information on different cultural events occurring both locally and abroad" (National Commission for Culture and the Arts, 1996).

The establishment of the NCCA secured its position among the cultural agencies as the primary cultural agency that works with the DFA in relation to cultural agreements. It relies on the NCCA to lead in the development of inputs on the provisions of cultural agreements. In turn, the NCCA consults the cultural agencies for their inputs in relation to their respective expertise and reviews them against the national cultural policy. These are then submitted to DFA who reviews against the foreign policy of the Philippine government.

From the above, we see the overall institutional setup of Philippine cultural diplomacy as composed of two organizational players: the foreign affairs department and the national cultural agencies. The first being responsible for initiating and facilitating the conclusion of cultural agreements and the other as the ones who implement programs in accordance with the stipulations of the cultural agreements. After describing the institutional setup, we now proceed to the implementation of cultural agreements.

Cultural diplomacy for mutual understanding (1959-1969)

This section seeks to establish the groundwork for the historical development of Philippine cultural

diplomacy. Covering the years 1959-1969, this section will document the first decade of Philippine cultural diplomacy characterized by initial attempts to conclude the first set of cultural agreements.

In 1955, 29 Asian and African countries gathered in Bandung, Indonesia, to discuss problems affecting national sovereignty and of colonialism and racialism. The parties to the conference recognized the significance of being in Asia and Africa that have been "the cradle of great religions and civilisations which have enriched other cultures and civilisations while themselves being enriched in the process" (Asian-African conference of Bandung, 1955). They condemned "racialism as a means of cultural suppression". They argued that colonialism, "in whatever form, not only prevents cultural co-operation but also suppresses the national cultures of the people" (Asian-African conference of Bandung, 1955). Apart from calling an end to cultural domination, they went further by promoting understanding among nations with cultural cooperation through the pursuit of bilateral arrangements.

Driven by the call for cultural cooperation, the Philippines concluded bilateral cultural agreements with the participant-countries of the said conference: Indonesia (1959), Pakistan (1961), Egypt (1962), and India (1969). Though it was not among the participants, the Philippines also concluded a cultural agreement with Mexico. The proposal for the conclusion of such agreement was first raised in 1963 by Philippine Ambassador to Mexico Librado Cayco as a response to the upcoming 400th anniversary of the Expedition of Miguel Lopez de Legazpi from Mexico to the Philippines in 1964. Though this recommendation was initially turned down, it was later rectified when the agreement was signed during the official visit of Foreign Affairs Secretary Carlos P. Romulo to Mexico in 1969 (Embassy of the Philippines in Mexico, 1963).

While the conclusion of five cultural agreements can be regarded as a remarkable feat, its record of implementation is a source of disappointment. In the case of the Indonesian cultural agreement, it is surprising that the strong political and economic relations between these governments and the cultural commonalities that exist between their peoples did not result in an active cultural cooperation. During the 1960, the Philippine Embassy in Jakarta had recommended the immediate implementation of the cultural agreement as a non-political bolster and a means to preserve the friendly relations between the two countries (Embassy of the Philippines in Djakarta, 1964). When Indonesian Foreign Affairs Minister Adam Malik and Philippine Foreign Affairs Secretary Narciso Ramos met in 1967, they agreed for the formation of a joint panel which will review existing bilateral agreements for possible updating and/or accelerating their implementation. The same matter was agreed upon by Presidents Marcos and Soeharto during the former's state visit to Indonesia in 1968. The Philippine Embassy in Jakarta reiterated its recommendation for the immediate convening of the panel in 1970 (Embassy of the Philippines

in Djakarta, 1970). From 1971 onwards, there was no indication that the panel convened, nor was the recommendation for its immediate convening reiterated in the succeeding annual reports of the Philippine Embassy.

When the Pakistani cultural agreement entered into force in 1964, the establishment of a joint social and cultural society, through the Pakistan-Philippine Cultural Association based in Pakistan, was the only provision that was implemented. The limited implementation of the agreement could have been addressed by the presence of the Philippine Embassy in Karachi. But that, in itself, did not help. The embassy suffered from the absence of a full-time cultural attaché and from a perennial shortage of informational materials. Despite its annual requests for updated publications, documentary films, and radio recordings, these remained unheeded. As such, the embassy had to improvise by printing brochures and newsletters culled from available sources in Pakistan using funds meant for sundry expenses and representation (Embassy of the Philippines in Karachi, 1967). Meanwhile, the Egyptian cultural agreement entered into force in 1963 with no record of activity. These scenarios led Filipino diplomat Pacifico Castro to quip:

The Philippines has concluded a series of Cultural Agreements but due to the tremendous amount of money involved in financing the exchange of publications, books, scholars and professors with other countries, they are to all intents and purposes dead agreements (Castro, 1967).

Financial constraints can be ascribed as the major impediment that prevented the implementation of these agreements. But more than this, it was difficult to rely on the assistance from Philippine cultural agencies since they were also daunted with numerous obstacles that constrained them in fulfilling their respective mandates:

(...) state supported cultural institutions are still facing a host of problems old or new which are complex in scale and are brought about by a multiplicity of cause. The factors that so long retarded their development are not difficult to identify, to wit: set-backs caused by World War II, inadequate financial aid, dearth of highly qualified and trained personnel, bureaucratization of the cultural agencies, lack of modern facilities, and the absence of an imaginatively planned development program (Quiason, 1971: 9).

Given these conditions, a commitment to engage in international cultural exchanges was quite difficult. In the very few instances that these institutions engaged in such exchanges, these were done on an institutional arrangement and outside the purview of cultural agreements. The National Museum, for example, developed international linkages in the museum profession through sister museum relations, collaborative cultural and scientific projects, and hosting international conferences.

Cultural diplomacy as an instrument of foreign policy (1970-2009)

From 1970 to 2009, the conduct of cultural diplomacy gained a clearer direction through its strategic use to pursue national interests. In Eastern Europe and Asia, cultural agreements were concluded to facilitate the establishment of diplomatic relations with Socialist countries. Among Islamic countries, it became an essential tool in the campaign for a lasting solution to the peace problem in Mindanao, Southern Philippines. In Western Europe, the cultural agreements served as a channel for human resource development assistance towards the Philippines. In a similar manner, the Philippines tried to provide human development assistance through its cultural agreements with the member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). However, in most cases, there were also occasions when the Philippines failed to tap the potential of cultural diplomacy in its relations with certain countries.

At this point, I shall now explain the five instances in which the use of cultural diplomacy in the pursuit of specific national interests was undertaken. Firstly, I analyze the use of cultural diplomacy in the *rapprochement with Socialist countries*. In general, the foreign policy of the Philippines during the early years of the Cold War was anti-Communist. As a result, relations with Socialist countries were basically non-existent. By 1972, however, believing that national pragmatic considerations should outweigh ideological considerations, President Marcos established policy guidelines of the conduct of trade with Socialist countries⁴. Soon after, diplomatic relations were established with Romania, Yugoslavia, East Germany, Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and Bulgaria. Apart from trade, the decision to establish diplomatic relations with Socialist countries was also motivated by the following external reasons: awareness of the influence of Soviet and other Eastern European states in international economic and trading system; recognition of the growth of Soviet political and military power and influence in Southeast Asia; and acknowledgment of the Soviet Union's superpower status (Department of Foreign Affairs, 1977). But

⁴ Executive Order no. 384, March 11, 1972.

during this period, cultural agreements were not part of foreign relations.

By 1976, the pursuit of more vigorous economic and trade relations became a priority and it provided the context for cultural diplomacy with Socialist countries. While cultural diplomacy was not explicitly identified, it became a strategic tool towards overcoming socio-political differences and creating the necessary atmosphere for economic and trade relations. In fact, the cultural agreements with Czechoslovakia (1974), Romania (1975), Hungary (1976), Yugoslavia (1977), and Bulgaria (1978) were either the first or among the first agreements to be signed. Similarly, because there had been cultural activities initiated prior to the opening of bilateral relations, the signing of cultural agreements were among the first agreements to be signed with the U.S.S.R. (1978) and China (1979).

In terms of content, cooperation between the Philippines and Eastern European Socialist countries were focused on education and culture. For Czechoslovakia and Romania, educational cooperation was limited to the mutual offering of scholarships in scientific studies and the exchange of materials in English about education and protection of cultural monuments. In the field of culture, the Philippine-Czech executive programs reflected a pronounced interest of the Philippines to send observers to the International Festival of Music Prague Spring and the Bratislava Music Festival (Domingo, 1983). On the other hand, the cultural agreements with the U.S.S.R. and China were more extensive covering the fields of education, language, performing arts, journalism, mass media, and book publishing, with the exchange of persons as the preferred mode of cooperation. As such, there had been mutual visits of students, language teachers, performing groups, and art teachers between the Philippines and the said countries.

Another difference between the two sets of Socialist countries is the regularity of implementation. On one hand, cultural agreements with the Eastern European Socialist countries are characterized by an inconsistent record of implementation. In the cases of Czechoslovakia and Romania, there was a marked interest in enforcing the provisions of these agreements through the conclusion of triennial and biennial executive programs respectively. However, as the years progressed, most of these programs were not renewed. Those of Hungary, Yugoslavia, and Bulgaria were never implemented. Meanwhile, the U.S.S.R. and China had a more consistent record of implementation. In fact, China and the Philippines implemented 14 executive programs within 30 years.

A common reason for the inconsistency of implementation was the political changes that took place in these countries. Their democratic transition

in the latter part of the 1980 led to a decline in cultural cooperation. Apart from this, Philippine diplomatic relations with most Eastern European countries were handled by non-resident embassies based in Western Europe which presented logistical and financial constraints. The absence of agreements on visa, air services, and equivalency of academic degrees also presented technical constraints affecting the exchange of persons.

After economic and political stabilization were achieved, attempts were eventually made to reinvigorate cultural cooperation. Russia and the Philippines signed a new cultural agreement in 1997, followed by agreements between their respective cultural institutions. The Federal Agency for Culture and Cinematography of Russia and the Philippine National Commission for Culture and the Arts concluded a Protocol of Cultural Cooperation for 2006-2008 in 2006. Negotiations for a similar agreement were started between the Russian Federal Agency for Physical Culture and Sports and the Philippine Sports Commission. The University of the Philippines College of Arts and Letters and Moscow State University's Institute of Asian and African Studies concluded a student and faculty exchange program in January 2006 (Embassy of the Philippines in Moscow, 2006). The 30th anniversary of Russia-Philippines bilateral relations in 2006 saw the return of Filipino artists in Russia and their Russian counterparts in the Philippines. In 1999, the Philippines proposed a new cultural and educational agreement to replace the Bulgarian cultural agreement but it remains unsigned and under review⁵. A new cultural agreement was signed with Romania in 2006 while a proposed draft executive program is being reviewed for Hungary⁶.

Although the outcome of Philippine cultural diplomacy with Eastern European Socialist countries was not remarkable, it proved to be useful in dealing with the bigger Socialist countries like the U.S.S.R. and China as the former served as a springboard to gain access to the latter. As a result, a more robust and consistent record of implementation can be observed in the cultural agreements with the two countries.

Secondly, Philippine cultural diplomacy with Islamic countries was utilized for the *preservation of territorial integrity and national security* of the Philippines. One of reasons cited for the declaration of the Martial Law in 1972 was the secessionist movement led by the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF). It pursued an armed struggle towards the goal of an independent Muslim homeland which resulted in countless deaths, displaced numerous families, drained the national economy, and threatened the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the Philippines. With the escalation of violence, the protracted conflict in Mindanao soon developed into an international

⁵ Lourdes Morales to Jaime Laya, May 10, 2001, Bulgaria Country Folder, NCCA.

⁶ Executive Program of the Cultural Agreement between the Republic of the Philippines and the Republic of Hungary for 2005-2008 [Philippine Draft], March 27, 2007, Hungary Country Folder, NCCA.

issue. The Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) raised its concern regarding the welfare and condition of the Muslims. Malaysia and Indonesia have extended moral and humanitarian assistance to the group. Some Arab countries such as Libya, Iran, and Pakistan staunchly supported the MNLF cause in the OIC and were alleged to have extended financial and material support as well. The involvement of OIC member states was crucial in exerting pressure to both the Philippine government and the MNLF to engage in peaceful negotiations. On one hand, the Philippine government recognized the repercussions of a prolonged conflict not only to its domestic political and economic stability but also in its diplomatic relations with Arab and Islamic countries. In particular, the Philippines was cognizant of the fact that they comprised the world's largest oil suppliers and a substantial market for Philippine labor. Meanwhile, because of the substantial leverage extended to the MNLF by these countries, it was able to press the MNLF to accept autonomy as a compromise to secession.

In its quest for a solution to the Mindanao problem, the Philippines embarked on an extensive diplomatic offensive towards various Islamic countries through the establishment of diplomatic relations with Arab and African states. Legations were established and were manned by Muslim Filipino diplomats. Special high-level missions were sent such as those of First Lady Imelda Marcos in Egypt and Libya. Likewise, foreign ministry delegations were invited to visit the country and observe the plight of Muslim Filipinos. In the process, cultural diplomacy was also employed on a bilateral level. The Egyptian cultural agreement of 1962 was renewed in 1975 and 1984 to improve educational opportunities for Muslim students. Muslim Filipinos were sent to Egyptian universities as scholars. Egypt also sent teachers of Islamic studies and the Arabic language to Mindanao. Art exhibits were also held in Cairo and Manila. The Philippine Embassy in Cairo organized an exhibition of 50 paintings by Filipino artists and 120 books of Filipino novels and government publications. In Manila, President and Mrs. Marcos graced the opening of the 1976 exhibition entitled "Egyptian Art through the Ages", which featured 100 pieces of high artistic and cultural value which chronicled the different periods of Egyptian civilization (Cruz, 1976). Cultural agreements were also concluded with Libya (1976), Bangladesh (1980), Gabon (1981), Iraq (1982), and Iran (1995) as the Philippines was trying to convince these countries of the improved living conditions of Muslim Filipinos. However, only the Libyan and Iranian cultural agreements were

implemented. Through the Libyan cultural agreement, there had been 186 Muslim Filipino students enrolled in Libyan universities for the period 1991-1996 (Embassy of the Philippines in Tripoli, 1996). Meanwhile, the Iranian cultural agreement led to the signing of institutional agreements between Philippine and Iranian national libraries and to the visit of Iranian artists to the Philippines.

When the Philippines decided to embark on a bid for observer status in the OIC, it signed a cultural agreement with Kuwait (1997), it supported the cultural initiatives of Iran, and signed a cultural agreement with Syria (2009). With the rise of terrorism as a threat to global security in 2001, the Philippines renewed its relations with Pakistan to enhance security cooperation. It was in this context that the cultural agreement was implemented.

Thirdly, we look into the use of cultural diplomacy for the *promotion of economic security*. In the 1970, the Philippines developed a strategy to pursue all means to improve its market for trade, investment, and aid. Europe was presented as a viable source for such needs. The European common market has become a distinguishing feature of the continent following the integration of peripheral economies and the economic restructuring of France and Italy (Eichengreen, 2007). The Philippines seized this opportunity through the extensive pursuit of bilateral trade agreements. Loan agreements and scientific and technical cooperation agreements were also concluded to finance development and infrastructure in projects and to enhance institutional and manpower capabilities respectively.

Against this context, Philippine cultural diplomacy with Western European countries became an auxiliary to development diplomacy. The Philippines utilized the cultural agreements to access human development assistance in the field of culture and the arts such as language courses, scholarships, and trainings available in institutions of higher education. For this reason, the direction of bilateral cultural cooperation was unidirectional with the flow of assistance greatly favoring the Philippines. As the case may be, the countries of Western Europe welcomed this since cultural cooperation was an integral part of their foreign policy.

France (1978) and Germany (1983) incorporated these assistances in their executive programs. France and the Philippines executed four protocols to implement the agreement. The third protocol was used by the Philippines to project a positive image to the French media through the

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holding of a major exhibition in France accompanied by Filipino artists in conjunction with the Philippine President's state visit to France in 1994. Soon, in the fourth protocol, institutional collaboration between the French Embassy in Manila and the NCCA became a convenient mode to implement the agreement since specific projects and responsibilities for each project were outlined⁷. Meanwhile, the German cultural agreement was implemented through a protocol signed in 1987 but was never renewed thereafter. The Philippines had to reorient then its initiatives by sending performing groups to Germany and participating in its film festivals. On the other hand, the Italian cultural agreement of 1988 failed to reach an executive program. It took six years for the Philippines to complete the internal procedures for its ratification and a few more years were spent for the exchange of comments on the drafts of the executive program. Despite this, Italy continuously provided assistance in the teaching of the Italian language through the grant of scholarships in Italian universities and the provision of language teachers in Philippine universities.

Language promotion was paramount in all three cultural agreements. The provision of scholarships and the sending of teachers to the Philippines were among the schemes used to promote French, German, and Italian languages. Despite failed attempts to sustain the implementation of the German cultural agreement and to implement the Italian cultural agreement, both countries strived to ensure that cultural cooperation remains a dynamic aspect of their bilateral relations with the Philippines. It is easy to comprehend why the Philippines and the Western European countries found it favorable to cooperate on this area. All these countries stand to gain in limiting collaboration to language promotion. The diffusion of their respective languages is an essential component of their respective foreign policies for promoting their cultures abroad. For the Philippines, the languages of Western Europe are key to penetrate Western European business and labor market and to avail educational opportunities in those countries' universities.

Fourthly, the Philippines also utilized cultural diplomacy as a means of *posturing in the ASEAN*. When ASEAN began in 1967, the acceleration of economic growth and active collaboration and mutual assistance in the economic field were among its aims. Over the years, ASEAN and its member states have instituted several economic arrangements to bring these aims into reality. However, with the admission of Vietnam, Laos, Myanmar, and Cambodia, economic disparities among member states became apparent and presented some difficulties in achieving the goal of regional economic integration. The entry of the said countries at a time when ASEAN was responding to the changing global economic landscape made the disparity even more glaring. On such account, ASEAN

was committed to assist these countries to achieve their economic potential with the view of securing the path towards effective economic integration.

As one of the founding members, the Philippines tried to project a brotherly image among the mentioned countries. It extended both financial and technical assistance prior to and until their admission to the association. In the said process, cultural agreements with Vietnam (1994), Laos (1997), and Myanmar (1998) became an extension of such assistance. Apart from the goal of regional economic integration, extending such kinds of assistance was made with the view of securing support from these countries. Among them, it was Vietnam which harnessed its cultural agreement with the Philippines. Printed materials were donated to Vietnam and a delegation was hosted by the Philippines for a study tour. In 2007, Vietnam sought ways to expand cooperation in this field by signing a protocol of cultural cooperation. On the other hand, while the Philippines was willing to subsume the requests of Laos and Myanmar for cultural assistance under the respective cultural agreements, these countries failed to tap the potential benefits of such agreements.

Lastly, there were also cases of cultural agreements which can be characterized by *mixed interests and missed opportunities*. More often than not, the practice of bilateral cultural diplomacy was shaped by the specific conditions of bilateral relations rather than dictated by national interests. With Mexico (1972), the traditional historical and cultural ties became the foundation of cultural cooperation and were further promoted and strengthened through the cultural agreement. With the Holy See (2006), the mutual desire to protect the cultural heritage of the Catholic Church in the Philippines was the *raison d'être* for a cultural agreement. With North Korea (2006), the cultural agreement surmounted the difficulties of political and economic differences and provided the impetus for the growth of bilateral relations. There were also some cases in which cultural diplomacy played a crucial role in strengthening, enhancing, and in renewing bilateral relations, such as those of India (1969), Thailand (1975), South Korea (1970) and Australia (1977). Although the Philippines enjoys cultural commonalities with India and Thailand, cultural cooperation with them was less dynamic and was made useful either to commemorate milestones in bilateral relations or through activities outside the cultural agreement. Meanwhile, the membership of South Korea and Australia to the Asian and Pacific Council provided the groundwork for the conclusion of cultural agreements with the Philippines. However, none of the two agreements were implemented due to the already favorable conditions of the bilateral relations, which did not necessitate the implementation of the agreements. On the other hand, many also failed to lead to

⁷ Executive Program of the Cultural Agreement between the Government of the Republic of the Philippines and the Republic of France for 2005-2007, April 2005, France Country Folder, NCCA.

meaningful gains leaving the cultural agreements dormant for most of their existence. That is the case for Sri Lanka (1976), Chile (1987), Colombia (1987), and Peru (1996). The cultural agreements signed by the Philippines with these countries were never implemented. The ambiguous foreign policy of the Philippines towards these countries fails to explain why the cultural agreements were even signed in the first place.

In sum, it can be said that where political and economic interests lay, cultural diplomacy followed. Political and economic considerations placed a greater weight in the conclusion and implementation of cultural agreements more than the traditional cultural and historical links. The threat of territorial dismemberment prompted the Philippines to adopt a soft approach towards Islamic countries which played influential roles and had significant voices in the Organization of Islamic Conference, the primary source of international support of the MNLF. An expanded trade market was expected to be realized when diplomatic relations were established with Socialist countries and so cultural diplomacy became a necessary tool to prepare the way for smooth trade relations despite differences in political and economic systems. In the same way, increased trade relations with Western European countries were pursued by cultural agreements as conduits for human development assistance. Cultural agreements with ASEAN countries, on the other hand, became auxiliaries to human resources development assistance. Conversely, effete cultural agreements were evident among those countries in which the Philippines have undefined political and economic interests or where favorable bilateral conditions did not necessitate the use of cultural diplomacy to achieve certain ends.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have determined the inherent features of Philippine cultural diplomacy as illustrated by its cultural agreements. From the discussion above, we have examined how culture was included in the formulation of Philippine foreign policy. Firstly, we have shown that culture is a domestic consideration in the formulation of Philippine foreign policy. Like other factors, it comprises the totality of foreign policy determinants which affects and shapes its formulation as well as provides a framework by which the Philippines views itself vis-à-vis other states. Although politics, security, and economics are understandably paramount in foreign policy, culture can help support, refute or explain the peculiarities of Philippine foreign policy but it cannot ultimately account for everything. For example, the course of cultural history enables one to understand why the Philippines was naturally predisposed to favor relations with the United States. The pervasive American colonial legacies in politics, economy, and society resulted in a government with

shared American values and perception. Likewise, this also explains why the Asian policy of the Philippines took time to develop and materialize.

Secondly, similar to political and economic assets, culture is also a foreign policy resource which the Philippines was able to utilize in its diplomatic relations. The enunciation of culture as one of the principles of the Bandung Conference of 1955 compelled the Philippines to adopt culture as a foreign policy resource. Through this gathering, nations recognized the power of culture in addressing certain challenges faced by newly independent states in a post-colonial world. Such outlook gave credence to cultural diplomacy and to the initiation of cultural agreements.

Despite these affirmations, the significance of bilateral cultural diplomacy remains in question. There is still discontent in the inability to measure the impact of bilateral cultural diplomacy as a practice and in the attainment of foreign policy objectives. In the case of Philippine bilateral cultural diplomacy, it is difficult to find any indication that a comprehensive review has been made to assess the impact of cultural agreements or any similar initiative towards such direction. The joint commission meetings between the Philippines and other countries provide a promising occasion to look into the progress of a cultural agreement, yet it never happened that a systematic approach for their review was undertaken. At the very least, the measure of a cultural agreement's success lies in the volume of activities implemented under its purview. Conversely, a cultural agreement without any executive program formulated or activity implemented is described as being inactive. The minutes of the joint commission meetings were silent on any discussion on the content and circumstances of implementation. New activities are proposed without an evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of past activities. The idea of expanding of an activity is limited to the idea of increasing the number of participants and not on institutionalizing it or bringing it outside the nations' respective capitals. In assessing its significance to a particular bilateral relation, the mere fact that there is an existing cultural agreement is enough to be considered as an achievement or milestone.

Measuring the impact of bilateral cultural diplomacy in the overall foreign policy undertaking of a government remains a theoretical and policy challenge. Without responding to this question, bilateral cultural diplomacy naysayers will continue to undermine its effectiveness as a foreign policy instrument. As this article revealed, bilateral cultural diplomacy served its purpose in the pursuit of national interests and regional integration. It is however difficult to state that it was an effective tool without submitting it to a credible and verifiable litmus test. What is clear, nonetheless, is that the continuous practice of bilateral cultural diplomacy points to some inadequacies in the political and economic strategies and tools available to a state, forcing it to use cultural diplomacy as a recourse when most options have already been exhausted.

Although it is not the professed aim of this study to assess the impact of bilateral cultural agreements, the absence of such method had crucial implications on the discussion on their implementation. The lack of an assessment mechanism may serve to explain why there had been a proliferation of cases of cultural agreements that were not implemented. More so, a great deal of difficulty was observed in trying to understand why such cultural agreements were signed given the logistical and financial constraints they pose. Considering that the limited financial resources of the Philippine government are a perennial problem, the practice of bilateral cultural diplomacy should entail a careful analysis of costs and benefits and an expressed hesitation towards entering into agreements that will not yield substantial gains. Whatever the case may be, it is certain that the use of an assessment mechanism might alter the outcome of Philippine bilateral cultural diplomacy.

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