

## FORUM KRITIKA

### SHORT NOTATIONS AND REFLECTIONS ON PANTAYONG PANANAW

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#### Abstract

This paper answers the question “What is Pantayong Pananaw?” through the subject of its study, its methods, its mode of communicating knowledge, and how it has served as a conscious effort of counteracting Western historiographic discourse. It also discusses the limitations and pitfalls of Pantayong Pananaw as well as its possible directions and trajectories.

#### Keywords

historiography, Filipinization

#### About the author

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I was not a student of Zeus Salazar or any of the leading names of *Pantayong Pananaw* (PP). I first heard of Salazar’s name from my mother’s stories about her UP [University of the Philippines] days, which provided me my earliest idea of Salazar’s influence in the field of history. But unlike my mother, I never made it to UP, and my exposure to PP actually began in doing required readings in my junior year as an undergraduate in Ateneo. When I went on to take graduate studies in the same school, my appreciation of PP deepened—a course called Philippine Social History introduced me to three works of historians initially known as luminaries of the PP movement. These were *Katutubo, Muslim, Kristiyano: Palawan, 1621-1901* authored by Nilo S. Ocampo (1985), *Kasaysayan ng Bulakan* by Jaime B. Veneracion (1986), and the basis of PP’s methodological prescription, Salazar’s *Ang Pantayong Pananaw Bilang Diskursong Pangkabihasnan* (1997).

One major requirement of that course was to write a journal entry containing my reflection on every discussion, a compilation of which was to be submitted at the end of the semester. Some of the early versions of these entries were registered in my weblog, and as an electronic repository that provided access to netizens, it made available my journal entries for access not only to my peers but also to PP’s disciples. An entry on PP even found

its way in one conference paper, much to my surprise.

Indeed, my thoughts on PP have changed since then. This essay is partly an attempt to work on my opinions that have developed in my graduate school days. Still, I am compelled to provide a caveat: I have not engaged in a sustained critique of historiography, and what I will mention in this essay will most likely sound stale to those familiar with debates on PP.

What is Pantayong Pananaw (PP)? Filipino historians who subscribe to PP call for an indigenous perspective with which historical and other intellectual enquiries should be conducted. "*Pantayo*" simply means *from-us-to-us*, and connotes that the speaker communicates with an audience that is also part of the speaker's community. PP necessitates a "*talastasang bayan*," which Ramon Guillermo (1) describes as a "subsistent dialogical circle" consisting of subjects within a community with a homogenous socio-politico-cultural code. This "code" becomes the referent of analysis in historiography and other academic fields under the social sciences and the humanities.

In historiography, PP maintains that no indigenous view can be attained unless one utilizes the inherent characteristics (*katangian*), values (*halagahin*), knowledge (*kaalaman*), wisdom (*karunungan*), goals (*hangarin*), customs (*kaugalian*), proclivities (*pag-aasal*), and experiences (*karanasan*) understood genuinely by the members of the community themselves (Salazar "Isang Paliwanang" 55-6). The use of the community's language is crucial in achieving this vista, because it is assumed that only through the use of the local language that the community's meanings, concepts, and values are effectively invoked. Guillermo is again instructive when he describes the community that performs a *talastasan* as a "social collectivity (possessing) a relatively unified and internally articulated linguistic-cultural structure of communication and interaction and/ or a sense of oneness of purpose and existence" (2).

Needless to say, the call for a PP is a conscious effort to counteract the perceived western orientation of Philippine historiography. Since the early efforts to reconstruct Philippine history were attributed to colonial authorities (i.e., friars, colonial bureaucrats), there has been a notion that the moving forces in Philippine history are external influences and that Philippine history is merely a delayed repetition of Western history (e.g., Gabriela Silang is the Philippine's Joan of Arc). Such tendencies are strongly interrogated by intellectual enquiries that subscribe to PP. There is insistence in the use of Filipino language because the most palpable manifestation of the Western orientation is the historian's use of English.

More importantly, PP views that Philippine historiography is replete with

*“pangkaming pananaw.”* *“Pangkami”* connotes a speaker talking to an audience outside of the speaker’s community. PP carries with it a perception that the writing of the Philippine past has been carried out within the parameters of the colonial, and that those who engage in history writing innately converse with the outsiders (i.e., West). PP regards extant studies of Philippine history as inherently flawed due to the ubiquity of *“pangkaming pananaw”* in intellectual enquiries. Hence, the promise of PP is its resounding call to challenge the asymmetric relationship between those outside and those inside the *“Philippine community.”* To subscribe to *“pantayong pananaw”* then is to take the task of making sense of the Philippine experience according to the terms not of the westerners, but of the Filipinos. And if the western oriented Philippine academia has conditioned its members to use the English language, PP insists in using Filipino not only because by doing so could one attain an authentic and indigenous (i.e., *taal*) view, but because it challenges the intellectual milieu created by those who converse with the outside.

This critical gesture is not entirely novel with PP. In Ateneo, there has been a similar fervor which asserted the Filipino language as scholarly and erudite as English. Starting in the 1960s, a *“Filipinization”* movement has been launched to respond to the need of indigenizing western-oriented courses and of bridging the gap between the American Jesuits and their students. Horacio Dela Costa, S. J. led a committee that introduced Filipino as medium of instruction in selected courses and soon after, Roque Ferriols, S. J. offered the first philosophy class taught in Filipino. Following a positive reception from the students, Filipino was adopted in Theology, Economics, Sociology, Anthropology, and History (Brillantes 8-9). At present, there are a significant number of courses in Loyola Schools taught in Filipino. The Department of Philosophy teaches half of its classes per semester in Filipino. The progressively-themed publication *Matanglawin* is also a product of the Filipinization movement. Even outside the formal institutions within the university, Filipinization has affected the learning atmosphere of the undergraduate student population. During my college days, informal study circles were effortlessly organized, serving as venues for *Atenistas*—although a small number compared to the general *Inglesero* population, but a significant number nonetheless—to discuss the philosophical issues in Filipino: the Marxian analysis of the Tagalog trope *“paghahanapbuhay”* as ironically insufficient to sustain decent life, Gabriel Marcel’s formulation of *“tao bilang sumasakatawang diwa”* and its potential in paving the way for a more humane Filipino society, and Jurgen Habermas’s *“kilos komunikatibo”* in the attaining peaceful and just coexistence within the context of globalization.

The potential I find in PP is similar to the liberating power of these debates and discussions. The assertion of the indigenous and the use of national language are empowering

tools against the onslaught of corporate-driven globalization, whose effects are very much felt even in the Philippine academe. The surge in the number of nursing schools is a disconcerting indication of this and it appears that even research agendas and course offerings are being dominated by the forces of the free market. Multinational capitalists and neoliberal doctrinaires are bent on describing the world as becoming “borderless,” that the nation is increasingly turning obsolete with its geo-political boundaries becoming porous, paving the way for the free flow of capital. One way to offset the disconcerting effects of fresh graduates of Filipino schools being turned by global capital into docile transnational bodies is to assert that amid the displacement of Filipino bodies, the national community would not be dissolved. Nationalism and the assertion of Filipino as a language of erudition could create an environment in which the production and dissemination of knowledge would consciously include the members of the whole national community. This aspiration is promising in the field of history—the historical past becomes reconstructed such that the intention is to make the national community learn more about the plurality of the groups which constitute it, and how it should aspire to interrogate (and reverse) its marginal position in the global capitalist system.

But the promise of PP somehow ceases at its affirmation of the Filipino community and its insistence of the use of the national language. Most of PP’s tenets are actually sources of discomfort. I doubt that our passionate debates in Filipino about Marx, Marcel, and Habermas during my undergraduate days would have been approved by proponents of PP. Mere mention of these names could have resulted in accusations that we have a “pangkaming pananaw” because we used appropriated concepts, values, and meanings introduced from the outside in order to make sense of our experiences as members of the community.

This leads me to ask: what are the pitfalls of PP?

There is limited space for dialogue with PP. PP sets the stringent parameters that must be first attained in order for a dialogue to be possible. The strict use of “Filipino” is one parameter with which dialogue could be accomplished. In the field of history, the adoption of PP’s own brand of periodization in Philippine history is imperative. Failure to comply with PP’s own set of parameters would elicit accusations of having a “pangkaming pananaw” which PP immediately dismisses as the wrong way of doing Philippine history.

We may ask, is it acceptable to say that when Filipino academics engage in discourse using a foreign language, they dialogue with a foreign audience and they utilize a “wrong” view? There is also a notion that no indigenous view can be had among foreign scholars and foreign-trained Filipino scholars. Then it seems that the entitlement of history writing

the “right” way is only exclusive to those who subscribe to PP. Only in a few instances, a consolation “proto-pantayo” is used to refer to a few works, such as Reynaldo Ileto’s exemplary subaltern study *Pasyon and Revolution* (1979).

Caroline Hau has argued how Salazar’s critical assessment of the politics of the use of English does not extend to the politics of the use of Philippine language (56-7). Writing in the language called “Filipino” may not guarantee that more people will read the works of PP historians, thus the inclusion of the multitudes may not become part of the *talastasan bayan* that PP wants to achieve. Even modes of communication within the national polity are embedded in contexts of politics, history and economics, and cannot be considered as a “free-floating abstraction.” Hau argues, “linguistic analysis cannot be thorough without a socio-historical analysis of the contexts not just of linguistic performance, but of the production and reception of texts” (57). Distinction between “foreign” and “national”/“indigenous” are categories too simplistic to become basis of what could or could not be suitable for discourse.

The politics attendant to the use of Filipino language is most palpable in charges that this language is merely a guise for Tagalog. This has been the basis of members of non-Tagalog ethno-linguistic groups to refuse “Filipino” as the national language. Without any kind of closure in the Filipino/Tagalog debate, PP cannot be able to find a high ground from which it could insist that only by using “Filipino” could one do Philippine history the “right way.” At most, the use of “Filipino” language could serve as a statement of aspiration, with an attendant acknowledgment that it is a by-product of a Tagalocentric nationalism. It could help if we appreciate Filipino as an on-going national project still being shaped by the contribution of all Philippine languages spoken by Filipinos. It may be an impossible project to achieve, but as it is now, the use of Filipino still proves to be instrumental in facilitating a venue which challenges the academic milieu created by English.

What is important is that those who take this critical stance must not hesitate to communicate and enter into dialogue with those who remain complacent with the English-speaking milieu of the university. Rather than regarding English academic journals as artifacts for the propagation of a “wrong” view, should we not pay homage to their potentiality in facilitating transmission and production of knowledge within the confines of the university instead? The questions that Diokno posed are very instructive: “Is expanding the arena of discourse through the use of the Filipino language the sole consideration in the construction of an indigenous history? Does not *content* figure at all?” (12).

Many schools of thought have asserted their stake in truth-claiming, but only those

able to attain theoretical hegemony were able to do so by allowing other contending schools-of-thought to pit and polish its arguments. Obviously, PP aspires to become the theoretical guidepost with which all thoughts in social sciences and humanities must be crafted; yet, what passes off as the “wrong” view of doing history and what passes off as “right” view of doing history are not attained by PP’s being able to exceed the theoretical challenges posed to it by other schools-of-thought. An *a priori* statement is firstly made by those who subscribe to PP, and that is, PP is the right view of doing history. Other “*pananaws*” are dismissed and simplistically delegitimized as the wrong way to do history. The venture of reifying PP as the “right” way to do history, as well as that of delegitimizing other pananaws, is not conducted within extant venues for academic dialogue and debate (i.e., English academic journals), but within its own exclusive venues for discussion (indoctrination?): a journal, a website, and a flagship historical association which holds conferences regularly. This clearly indicates how spaces for dialogue and debate are consciously made to be limited by PP.

It is distressing how hasty it is for PP’s proponents and followers to deploy the blanket term “*pangkaming pananaw*” even to historical works critical of latent structures of power (i.e., colonialism). The failure to use Filipino language is one criterion, but it is more than an issue of language. As long as a historical work is non-compliant to PP’s prescriptions, it is instantly dismissed as a wrong way to do history. For instance, PP would immediately accuse as utilizing a “*pangkaming pananaw*” an account that reads Philippine history through the lens of state-society relations (e.g., Abinales and Amoroso). Such appreciation of Philippine history may not be totally different from the manner by which twenty-first century Philippine history has been studied before, but the idea is to put emphasis on the formation of the Philippine state and the changes that had occurred with it, the changes in the reaction of groups within the Philippine society vis-à-vis the policies and actions of the state, and the result of these dynamics. Through PP’s analytical lens, there is an inherent flaw in such an intellectual endeavor due to its utilization of colonial constructs such as “state,” “civil society,” and even the western concept of the “nation.” Still, as much as a history of the bayan/banua/ili would elucidate a latent basis for social cohesion of an impoverished Filipino community, how else can one make sense of Philippine socio-politico-economic realities? It is only by grappling with these “foreign constructs” can one be able to understand the community—the shortcomings of the post-colonial state (some even say it is less post- than neo-) resulted in the marginalization of the majority of Filipino population due to the state’s failure to uphold the interest of the community it purports to represent. If looking at Philippine history through the lens of

state-society relations is that of having a “*pangkaming pananaw*,” perhaps adopting such a *pananaw* is even more enlightening than adopting a PP because it enables us to deeply understand who we really are, the juncture in history we could locate ourselves in, and the trajectories that we want to take as a people.

This is not to say that PP’s aspirations should be rejected altogether. The philosophical underpinnings of PP may be needed to be threshed out more. Indeed, PP possesses its own potentialities, but the conduct with which PP attempts to hegemonize in the academe renders PP a source of discomfort to its audience. It may help if we are all reminded that the use of “*tayo*” is also a rhetorical tool in politics. If “*tayo*” has been invoked in order to assert that only a certain pananaw is correct while others are not, do we not mimic what our colonial masters and this predatory regime tell the Filipino people that only they know what is right for everyone, while arrogantly discrediting other points of view in spite of their actions and policies inimical to the welfare of the people? Without displaying any gesture to dialogue and debate, is it not remote to equate PP to a dogma? Would not subscription to PP become detrimental to knowledge production since once people think in one and the same way, no debate and dialogue could then be had? Would everyone not be afraid, then, of being accused of having a wrong *pananaw*?

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