

Filipino Concept of “Loob”

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ABSTRAK: Tulisan ini membahas pemikiran masyarakat adat Filipina dalam mengapresiasi budayanya. Konsep “loob” yang dibahas di sini mencakup dimensi kemanusiaan, kepribadian, perspektif teologis, dan pengalaman sehari-hari orang Filipina. Konsep ini menegaskan bagaimana masyarakat adat Filipina menjalani hidup dalam keharmonisan baik dengan orang lain maupun dengan alam dan Tuhan. Karakteristik interpersonalistik dari “loob” menjelaskan dualisme dalam tubuh-jiwa dan emosional-rasional orang Filipina. Tulisan ini terutama difokuskan pada dua dimensi “loob”, yakni interior dan holistik. “Lubang” interior menegaskan kebaikan bawaan. Konsep “loob” direkonstruksi tidak hanya mengenai dunia tetapi juga dirinya sendiri. Konsep holistik mengacu pada kesatuan dunia dan pandangan dunia non-ganda. Lebih lanjut, penulis juga menunjukkan adanya interaksi kontras yang muncul antara pandangan Ayn Rand dan konsep Filipina tentang “loob”. Berbeda dengan filsafat Barat yang sangat menekankan sains dan teknologi modern, pemikiran Timur di mana konsep “loob” menemukan akarnya, lebih mementingkan sifat batin dan diri. Ketika pemikiran Barat menjadi terpusat dan terpisah, pemikiran Timur justru memandang dunia indra sebagai sesuatu yang fana dan ilusi. Alih-alih mengambil jarak, para pemikir Timur mengenal dunia melalui pengalaman pribadi dan pemahaman intuitif tentang realitas yang bernilai lebih tinggi daripada spekulasi analitis.

KATA KUNCI: Loob, loob as holistic, loob as interior, personalism

ABSTRACT: The paper discussed Filipino indigenous thoughts to appreciate its culture. “Loob” encompassed Filipinos’ humanity, personality, theological perspective and daily experiences. It aspired harmony with others and nature to be in union with God. The interpersonalistic characteristic of “loob” explained the dualism in body-soul and emotional-rational of the Filipinos. The paper focused on the two dimensions of “loob”: as interior and holistic. The interior

“*loob*” affirmed the innate goodness. “*Loob*” is reconstructed not only the world but itself as well. The holistic concept referred to the unified entity of the world, the non-dual outlook of the world. More, the author took note of the interplay of emerging contrasts between the views of Ayn Rand and the Filipino concept of “*loob*”. While the Western philosophy emphasizes modern science and technology, the Eastern thinking, however, is more concerned on the inner and personal nature of the self. The Western thinking is departmentalized and detached. On the other hand, the Eastern thinking views the world of senses as ephemeral and illusory. Likewise, the Eastern thinker is acquainted through one’s personal experience and intuitive grasp of reality which is of higher value than analytical speculation.

KEYWORDS: *Loob*, *loob* as holistic, *loob* as interior, personalism

1. INTRODUCTION

Church (1986: 95) opines that many Western concepts and process such as objectivity do not readily fit in to Filipino experience. In relation to this, I found myself in a dilemma over this paper. I found Ayn Rand’s philosophy fascinating and challenging however, I perceived her views too loose, aggressive and very idealistic. Hence, I found myself alienated to the ideas she espoused. Individualism has Western roots which, as a Filipino, I could not readily connect with my Eastern identity. Somehow, I have to fit in the pieces of the idealism of Rand’s individualism with my Filipino identity—it seemed better and more effective this way. In this light, I could not think of anything better which would best represent the *Volksgeist*, or “*diwa ng mga Filipino*”, but “*loob*”. Mercado (1974: 6) had identified the Filipinos’ concept of “*loob*” in two-fold. First, “*loob*” is holistic, secondly, “*loob*” is interior. The holistic concept centered on the unified entity of the world. The Filipino’s view of the world is non-compartmentalized and holistic. The Filipinos’ “*loob*” is connected to the intellectual, volitional, emotional and ethical aspects of life. Emotions and thoughts were integrated and not dualistic in approach. Thoughts, actions and words were all related with each other.

2. HOLISTIC “LOOB”

According to Quito (1975: 3-5), philosophy is religion and religion is philosophy in the Orient. The Oriental does not segregate philosophy which includes process of thinking, from religion, which is application of life. Quito stressed, “Life for oriental thinkers is a translation of thought; it is philosophy in action.” The fruit and application of life must be an extension of thought. The experience of the individual can be considered as phenomenological. Reflections are linked to personal experiences; a particular event is related to the total experience of a person.

Questions such as, “What am I living for?” and “What do I live by?” guide the reflective process (Dy, 1989: 70). Experience vis-a-vis reflection focus on the growth of the “I” in the community—the “we”. Without “we”, the “I” ceases to develop. That “I” exist with a reference group emphasizes that “*loob*” in essence, is not individualist nor a private perspective on morality.

For instance, if I answer back my parents, I would later reflect on my actions. It occurred to me that the result of talking back to them is not just personally painful, but that my pain becomes a part of the others—my family. Thus, in my reflection, I discover myself in others. Talking back to my parents is embodied to my total experience. It dawns on me that I may have my own life to live, but I am not alone.

Along with my reflection are the feelings of shame, guilt and anguish. The holistic concept of “*loob*” brings me into a face-to-face encounter with God, sort of elevating my experience in the realm of spirituality such as asking forgiveness to God and my family. At this point, I am not invited to look up in the heaven to experience God because my self-reflection already reaches celestial being. Therefore, I am not to forsake my humanity but to be most truly human. As Quito (1975: 50) said, man has to step out of the Totality of which he is a part or reflect upon himself and therein arrive at an identification of self with Reality.

The interior dimension of “*loob*” focuses on human-heartedness such as compassion, kindness and harmonious relationship with people.

Further, as the innate goodness of human beings, “*loob*” embodies moral conscience and ethical dimension. “*Loob*” as interior, encompassed harmony, deepens the reality of human beings and gives order to their lives which are connected to the Creator (Alejo, 1990:29). Rand’s concept of the self, on the one hand dichotomizes people into rational and emotional entities. She further defends her philosophy on selfishness as based on rationality (Rand, 1946:34). To quote Rand (1946: 447): A man’s self is his mind—the faculty that perceives reality, forms judgments and chooses values.

“*Loob*”, however, encourages one to share one’s self to a wider reality; thus promotes harmony. In either specific or broad sense, “*loob*” is God’s will. The concept of interrelation of “*loob*” is rooted from the Christian concept of unity. The story of Adam and Eve (Genesis 2: 24), for instance, came from a realization that we have a need for others and for God. We are called to be united or in communion with one another and with God.

“*Loob*” as the seat of Filipino religiosity can be the best summarized in the following verses from Psalms 40: 8: How I love to do your will, my God! I keep your teaching in my heart [*loob*]!

Hence, the definition of self of the Filipinos vis-a-vis the self of Rand, eclipses the Filipinos’ “*loob*” as such, “*loob*” is religious, spontaneous and emotional in character. In his discussion of “*loob*”, Alejo (1990: 1-9) alludes to many objects. For instance, “*loob*” was compared to picking of fruits. We should be cautious of choosing a fresh-looking and lush fruit, which when opened, could be rotten inside. In the same manner, our bodies which might be strong and healthy houses “*loob*”. So that our “*loob*” will not rot, we should contemplate life not according to its relevance but in the light of truth. The death of “*loob*” is a death which should be understood in its magnitude.

Understanding of “*loob*” is a never-ending process. Like an artist who dedicates time and whole person in perfecting his craft, so too, we should not stop in contemplating within our “*loob*” so it will be perfect, we

can further delineate the essence of “*loob*” in I-thou relationship and We-relationship. The I-thou relationship and sustains the community; there is no antagonism between different groups. Andres (1986: 37) calls the communion with self, others and God vis- a-vis harmony of the mind, emotion and will as the Christian view of “tripartite Being”. In contrast, Rand’s view of the world or any aspect of it as divided into two-fold, between related by but separate or antagonistic elements (e.g. mind versus body).

“*Loob*” touches the daily human aspect of the Filipinos. For instance, “*utang na loob*” (debt of gratitude) can be experienced in almost all relationships. “*Utang na loob*” means shifting of obligation to the other party upon repayment (Church, 1986: 39). As such, if a personal lends money to his friend in times of dire needs, the receiver will have “*utang na loob*” to the benefactor. If the friend will not honor his debts to his friend, he is considered “*walang utang na loob*”. Thus, “*loob*” in this case is the measurement of one’s morality and personhood in Philippine culture.

Moreover, the universal principle of reciprocity reinforces family solidarity which is an appendage of smooth interpersonal relationship (SIR). Upon receiving the favor, the beneficiary has an “*utang na loob*” to the giver and in exchange, the beneficiary has an everlasting obligation which further knits the family together. “*Utang na loob*” also includes non-kinsmen (Mercado, 1974: 97). Such fraternization even with non-relatives was guided by Christian tenet of extending love for all for the Kingdom of God included all creation. The following verses describe the type of help members of the People of God give to one another.

To quote St. James (5: 13-20):

If anyone of you is in trouble, he should pray; if anyone is feeling happy, he should sing a psalm. If anyone of you is ill, he should send for the elders of the church. And they must anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord and pray over him. The prayer of faith

will save the sick man and the Lord will raise him up again. And if he has committed any sins, he will be forgiven. So confess your sins to one another, and this will cure you; the heartfelt prayer of a good man works very powerfully. My brothers, if one of you strays away from the truth and another one brings him back again, remember this; whoever turns a sinner back from his wrong way will save that sinner's soul from death and bring about forgiveness of many sins.

“*Loob*” sought to avoid fragmentation or “*hindi kabuuan*”. “*Loob*” embraced reference groups, family and political parties. However, Rand's concept of the self, eliminated moral evaluation (Rand, 1946: 25) which totally eclipsed “*loob*” consciousness on principles of affection, responsibility, feelings and attitudes. “*Loob*” does not only fulfill reasons of the mind but reasons of the heart and personal involvement as well. Alejo (1990: 57) affirmed “*hindi magkakahiwalay ang isip, salita at pagkilos*”.

There are two basic classifications of “*loob*”. First, “*loob*” as an analytical concept and secondly, “*loob*” as synthetic. The analytical concept, dealt on morality; while the synthetic, on the wholeness or process of integration. Similar with other Oriental outlook, Filipinos’ “*loob*” is non-dualistic. There is emotional-rational and body-soul harmony which aspired unity with God.

For instance, the Indian belief, of *Anatta*, which is denying of the inner self or the Atman, meant to be in union with the Absolute (Mercado 1974: 3). Conversely speaking, harmony between humanity, nature and God is the essence of “*loob*”. The soul, in Greek thinking, has nothing to do with unity. For the Greeks, they consider the soul as separate from the inner vision of oneself; an external which swallows the self (Agapay, 1991: 140). Rand's selfishness, however, is the independent mind that recognized no activity higher than its own and there is no value higher than its judgment of truth.

But, Fromm (1957: 100) thought otherwise. He opined that most people live under the illusion they follow their own ideas and inclinations. That they are individualists, they have arrived at their own opinion as the result of their own thinking—and that it just happened that their ideas are the same as those of the majority. As it happens, Fromm (1957: 137) views the self somewhat similar to the Filipino’s concept of “*loob*”. For him, care, responsibility, respect and knowledge are elements of self. On the one hand, Fromm shares his view with Rand that the self should not just be a conglomeration of strong feelings but should also be based on a decision; henceforth, on judgment.

Rand (1946: 447) maintained that there can be no compromise on any party (e.g. government) because according to her, compromise is tantamount to surrendering individual rights and thus, will lead to gradual enslavement. To quote Rand (1946): To be free, a man must be free of his brothers. That is freedom. That and nothing else. Rand upheld the individual, whereas “*loob*” is essentially a relational and social concept before it is a privately personal concept. Further, Filipinos look at themselves as holistic from interior dimension under the principle of harmony (Mercado, 1974:40).

3. INTERIOR “LOOB”

“*Loob*” is rich in meanings. It is unique, spontaneous and similar to faith (Mercado, 1974: 36-37). Being the seat of Christian morality, “*loob*” reacts not only in a logical but also in an emotional way. Further, “*loob*” is viewed in terms of reference-groups, whereas the self of Rand, is primarily an individual affair (Rand, 1946: 447). For Rand, values are required for human survival while “*loob*” emphasize values as moral qualities by which the “goodness or badness of a person is measured”.

Though there are different emphasis in the two philosophies concerned, both Rand and the Filipino coincide in their efforts to improve the status of humanity and society. “*Loob*” encompasses Filipinos’

humanity, personality and theological perspective and daily experiences (Church, 1986: 33-39). It aspires harmony with others and nature, to be in union with God. Thus, the interpersonalistic characteristics of “*loob*” explains the non-dualism in body-soul and emotional-rational of the Filipinos (Mercado, 1974: 5).

Rand, as an advocate of Aristotle, exemplified the dualistic approach of the Western thought (Mercado, 1977:2). Hylomorphism polarizes matter and form which conversely posits the dichotomy between mind and heart (Rand, 1946: 447). Further, the Western philosophy has the mastery-over-nature orientation.

“*Loob*” stresses a being-with-others and sensitivity to the needs of others which inhibits one’s own personal and individual fulfillment (Mercado, 1974: 29, 107). Rand (1961: 56) on the one hand, philosophizes individualism. To quote Rand (1961: 65):

The word “we” is a lime poured over men, which sets and hardens to stone, and crushes all beneath it, and that which is white and that which is black are lost equally in the gray of it. It is the word by which the weak steal the wisdom of the sages...

I am alone with the monster of “we” the word of serfdom, of plunder, of misery, falsehood and shame. And now I see the face of god, and I raise this God over the earth, this God whom men have sought since men came into beings; this god who will grant them joy and peace and pride.

This god, this one word: “I”.

“*Loob*” is totally connected to the emotions (Mercado, 1974: 66). Rand, on the one hand, condemns all forms of mystics, dark emotions and instincts which are not in accordance with reason (Quito, 1986: 45-40). The entire philosophy of Rand can be summarized in her book entitled *With Charity towards None*. “*Loob*”, on the one hand, is the basis of charity which is a manifestation of gratitude (Gorospe, 1988: 31).

“*Loob*” had been inseparable from religious concerns. For the practice of religion is not only second nature to Filipinos, it is the spiritual psychic of the Filipinos to be religious. Oriental thinkers emphasize personal transformation which basically focused on the question, “Who am I?” “*Loob*” is distinctive in a way that the action it espoused are those which will benefit society. Contrary to self, “*loob*” is not inferred to or reasoned to but as a reality which we experience in our lives. The intuitive grasp of reality is valued more than analytic speculation. In the first place, true thinking never reaches a state of completion any more than man in his movement toward death he achieves completion.

In material need, the Filipino seeks the support of relatives (Church, 1986: 42). According to Timbreza (1989: 23), the need to immerse the individual in the group may be due to authoritarian tradition which prevails to our strong family system. The individual is told what he is to do, follow the advice of the elders. In short, the Filipino is group-oriented, which could be rooted from the non-aggressiveness of the Orientals (Quito, 1986: 13).

In my case, I have felt the strong influence of my parents in my decisions in life. For instance, when I was younger, I was applying for a teaching position in a certain university, my mother advised me to try at another university where the distance is nearer. I followed her advice.

There is certain apprehension toward the group-oriented approach of the Filipinos which might regress the individual’s initiative and responsibility. In one view, the individual should be disciplined from within rather than fear from authority figures. Discipline and responsibility should be inculcated especially to the youth through education. There ought to be a balance between values and culture, money and society. Similarly, Hinduism and Buddhism value discipline (e.g. yoga) which is the way towards a happy, contented life (Dy, 1989: 187).

As an educator, it is my task to encourage students to think, to let them speak out their own view. I allow the students to decide for

themselves so that they will be responsible for their own lives and must bear the consequences of their choices. But Church (1986: 129) thinks that the Filipino's nature of trying to get along with others spring from recognizing the dignity and feelings of others. Further, Church opines that Filipino image is stereotype in lieu of personality and culture.

Personalism and high regard of Smooth Interpersonal Relationship (SIR) are some of these stereotype images of a Filipino. Personalism features the Filipino's emphasis on personalities and personal factor. During election campaigns, for instance, politicians invite movie personalities to support their candidacy. Meanings are not in words but in people. Most Filipino voters consider the political pageantry and pomp associated with the candidate rather on their political platform.

The SIR is further manifested in reciprocity and "*pakikisama*" (Timbreza, 1989: 167). When a Filipino is in need, he seeks the support of relatives. Out of "*pakikisama*", the more well-off members of the family share their gains with relatives and neighbors. But the giver is likely to predetermine what form which should be of greater value than the original debt, should be repaid (Church, 1986: 38).

In the state of philosophy in the Philippines, Quito (1986: 10) identified two levels. The first level is confined in the academic atmosphere of university classrooms. The second is the popular or grassroots level, a philosophy which is not only mass-based but is in the process of formalization.

There is a room for optimism. Most Filipino values have richly developed which were crystallized during the EDSA revolution. The willingness to confront the authority did not coincide with the SIR value system. Instead of personalism, the Filipinos fought for freedom and justice which are abstract ideals. The Filipino, more importantly, saw the national picture and chose not to be subservient anymore.

In this respect, the God whom the Filipinos are aware of, seems to me, the God whom Carl Jaspers thought of when we encounter the so-called

“boundary situations”. These boundary situations are death, suffering, guilt and struggle. In my view, Filipinos normally encounter God during conflicts and struggles. For instance, during the Edsa Revolution, people who do not even know how to pray, did pray in the hope that through faith in God and Virgin Mary, reconciliation with leftist and armed forces will be achieved bloodlessly.

All religions believe in mysticism. Mysticism seeks the power beyond us and to unite with this power. From the Greek “*mustes*”, which means close the eyes and mouth, mysticism is a secret. Mysticism is a mystery in which the soul craves to understand God (Smith, 1978: 9). Indeed, the East used intuition and mysticism only as a last resort, when human logic has reached its limits. There are some truths beyond ordinary human logic, where ordinary words of expression are not enough, requiring a superior form of reasoning. Mysticism in the East is a conjunction of reason.

“*Loob*” is mystical. The religious aspiration of “*loob*” cannot be separated from spiritual enlightenment (Van Over, 1977: 9). The transpersonal world view of the Filipinos underlies the belief that the individual can go beyond human limitations such as geography, space and time. The transpersonal world view encompasses the world as run by “spirit” or “spirits” such as God, mind, providence and others. To achieve direct communion with God is a universal yearning of the human spirit.

In this junction, the soul is like a lover who longs to return to God. Love is the union with God. The soul then enjoys, “happiness of those that are immortal and in spite of the body, the soul is endowed with the alacrity of the mind”. In ecstasy, the mystic has no longer consciousness of the body, the power of the soul is brought together and united to God in him. The soul and God are entirely bound (Pourrat, 1953: 209). After touching God, one is transformed (Johnston 1973: 182).

To be united with God, one should be humble. The self should be lost in the presence of God. The self does not assert its own will, rather the self is sensitive to the spirit guiding him secretly in the depths of his heart

and wait until the spirit himself stirs and beckons him within (Johnston, 1973: 177). Prayers and contemplation provide experiences of God in the depths of the soul and verify God in the realm of their experience. Saint Bernard of Clairvaux and Saint Gertrude are some of the Christian models in their ecstatic union with God.

The Confucian *jen* is equal to Christian love. In Matthew 22: 37-40: Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the greatest and most important commandment. The second most important commandment is like it: Love your neighbors as you love yourself.

Jen deals with relationship with others which can be rooted from love of one's parents, brothers and sisters. *Jen* incorporates the self with right conduct. Similar to Jesus' pedagogy, *jen* instructs us to love others as we love ourselves. As we undergo the process of knowing ourselves, we acknowledge the fundamental goodness of our nature and share it to others as well. Our preoccupation with ourselves must be regulated by temperance.

In Hinduism, the Vedantist observes the three stages to commune with God (Van Over, 1977: 47). Faith, reason and experience, respectively. Faith is the stage wherein the seeker simply accepts the laws of nature as expression of divine existence. Reason, which is the second path, is wherein the seeker attempts to understand these laws by rational and logical processes. Though God is beyond the power of any created intellect to comprehend. Finally, only through experience can the limitation of faith and reason be complete. Through experience, the seeker sees the deceptive veil covering Brahman. The union between the self and Brahman is finding the Real self which is pure. The self overcomes worldly attachments until the self becomes ultimately naked in Brahman. The flesh is a mirage to the self for the spirit if of greater dignity than the flesh. According to Hindu chants: *I sought Him and I found/Brahman sought in vain and on high./Vishnu deduced vainly underground,/ Him in my soul found I.*

The Buddhist practice the four states of sublime condition: love, sorrow of others, joy in the joy of others and equanimity as regards on one's own joy and sorrows which should be practiced. Buddhism, similar to Hinduism and other religions, is a matter of practice (McLean, 1970: 41). The philosophy of Rand on self explicitly describes that each person is plainly responsible for his own individuality. What we are, each of us, is determined by ourselves. But as the existentialists say, “We are responsible for more than what becomes of us; we are also responsible for what becomes of others.”

The Indian's concept of Brahman has similarity with Ludwig Feuerbach who thinks that in the essence of Christianity, a person is God and God is in the person. For Feuerbach, there is no distinction between God and human beings. The Chinese look at the world as dynamic and relational (Copleston, 1980: 145). The outlook which is a matter of integration is called the *yin* and the *yang*: the male principle and the female principle, action and passion, matter and form. In Chinese thought, *yin* and *yang* are concrete, complementary, intertwined in all natural processes. Similarly, the Japanese' view the world as a whole. To him, rather, in him, thoughts and emotions are not separated.

4. CONCLUSION

“*Loob*” is indigenously Filipino, philosophically and culturally speaking. Though “*loob*” was an influence of the Spaniards during their reign in the Philippines (Church, 1986: 54), the core of “*loob*” can be traced to the Filipinos' journey toward oneness with God. “*Loob*” deepens and broadens the meaning of God in the lives of the people (Alejo, 1990: 45). The basis of Christian value of sensitivity to the needs of others and gratitude is traced in “*loob*”. Goodness is embodied in “*loob*”. Thus, if children answer back to their parents or leave them when they were sick and old, they were considered to have bad “*loob*” or “*walang utang na loob*” (ungrateful).

Hence, “*loob*” is the measure of one’s personhood. Further, “*loob*” encompassed a “give-and-take” relationship among Filipinos. As such, Filipinos repay those who have helped them as manifestation of “*utang na loob*” or debt of gratitude (Timbreza, 1989: 36). “*Loob*” does not stress individuality *per se*. Rather, it is connected with the Filipinos’ transpersonal view of the world, that is, the self is governed by personal being and that goods should be for the advancement of many. “*Loob*” is an oasis amidst life’s struggles where peace and love springs.

Alejo’s concept of “*loob*” surmised “*loob*” as a reality which promotes harmony and creativity. “*Loob*” is similar with other Oriental views. Like the concept of *Atman* in Buddhism and Chinese’s *jen*, “*loob*” aspires for harmony (*sakop*) with others, God and nature. “*Loob*” prioritized family, relatives and even non-kinsmen. In fact, it bridged individual differences and is the common factor among human beings. The concept of Rand’s “self” and Filipino “*loob*” had diversities but their differences should be overcome. Their concepts should not oppose each other. Rather, the best of their views should be integrated in the pursuit of a free and responsible individual.

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