

# (Re)theorizing the Nation: Jocano's Structural-Functionalism in the Neo-Colonial Order

David Gowey  
*Arizona State University*

Before proceeding with my reflections on Dr. F. Landa Jocano, I would be remiss not to mention two ironies central to my writing them. First, my main argument is that Dr. Jocano's experience of rural Panayanon life prepared him for his work in ways that his American anthropological training never could. Writing as one of those American anthropologists, this is quite a thing to admit. Second, these reflections are of necessity much more imagined than I would have liked them to be. In November 2013, the PagBayaw Conference held in Iloilo City—the first to focus specifically on Panay Bukidnon *sugidanon* chanting, the field in which Dr. Jocano made his initial contributions—seemed to be the ideal opportunity for me to meet the person whose work had sparked my interest in *sugidanon* in the first place. As it happened, Dr. Jocano passed away only two weeks prior. I write with all of this in mind.

It is tempting to conclude that Dr. Jocano's work began in a particularly auspicious time for Philippine anthropology and folklore studies; “auspicious” because I wonder if it would have had quite the impact it did had it been done at any other time. Certainly, folklore traditions of the Philippine Islands attracted the attentions of many others before him, from the Spanish authors of *relaciones* to *babaylan* rebels to *ilustrados*. The latter sought to make a new nation out of nearly two

hundred distinct ethnolinguistic groups, all with varying religions, worldviews, and literatures. After all, what would a nation be without its national 'somethings: national anthem, national language(s), national bird, national story? While Rizal, de Tavera, de los Reyes, and others did admirable work in trying to use these cultural repertoires as means of recovering what they felt was lost to colonization and ultimately to construct a national identity, it should not be surprising that the results are largely Tagalog in their orientation. What I mean by this is that this identity looks not just outward from Manila but inland—*pa-ilaya*—to the mountains for that cultural material which they believed had remained pure and undefiled, desperate to fill the gaps left by centuries of colonial extirpation campaigns in the lowlands.

The period in which Jocano conducted his initial fieldwork in Lambunao (1956 to 1958) was also one in which the Philippine nation was still taking shape only ten years after independence from the United States and eleven years after the end of Japanese occupation. Where Jocano differed from the *ilustrados* was in his training. Inspired and mentored by prominent American anthropologists like Fay-Cooper Cole, Robert Fox, and Fred Eggan, Jocano sought throughout his career to understand Filipino societies: not just surface-level description, but a deep understanding of how the parts—stories, rituals, beliefs, etc—give coherent form to the whole. This was to have practical benefits in development projects like sanitation and family planning; in ethnographic analysis of then-understudied bilateral kinship systems; and in promoting aesthetic and cultural value as well. Through all these efforts runs the common thread of structural-functionalism gleaned from his American mentors, his upbringing as a farmboy transplanted into academia, and the intellectual curiosity that took him up into the mountains of Lambunao for research.

The curiosity, I hope, is something I can relate to. After all, it was his work on what he named the Hinilawod epic (now referred to more generally as part of a genre of Panay Bukidnon epics called *sugidanon*) that pushed me toward Panay folklore as a research focus when I first read

about it nearly ten years ago. More than that, Jocano's writings have proven inspirational for generations of Filipino anthropologists, writers, and others who came in contact with his work and then turned their gaze to their own local communities. On an even more local level, specifically in his home province of Iloilo, the publication process still continues for Panay Bukidnon epics that have been taught in the IP-run School of Living Tradition or GAMABA Training Center for nearly twenty years now. Even then, the work of collection remains unfinished: a research project led by Jocano's student and fellow Panayanon Dr. Alicia P. Magos in the 1990s who met dozens of upland chanters throughout Panay, presumably with their own versions of the *sugidanon* narratives. How many of these versions still persist is a question that cannot be answered here but certainly, Jocano's work deserves significant credit for bringing this vast collection of oral literature to the attention of non-IP scholars, some of whom have then gone on to support IP chanters in their efforts to maintain their intangible heritage.

This last aspect touches one of the main critiques of structural-functionalism itself, which is that constructs as large as societies—from the national level to Jocano's much-studied village of Bay, Laguna—tend to be far too messy for such a totalizing paradigm. Rather than being wholly cohesive machines with consistently predictable inputs and outputs, they consist just as much of describable practices, articulated systems, and recognizable institutions as they do of contradictions, impurities, paradoxes, ironies, exaggerations, secrets, impositions, and lies. It is a caution especially important to bear in mind as we collectively write and research in a post-Andersonian paradigm, where anthropologists (indigenous and otherwise) have written profusely on the loaded nature of "authenticity" as it applies specifically to art forms, and generally to ethnic identity: who decides what is authentic, who does this designation benefit or harm, what is excluded and why, etc.

Such criticisms of ethnographic overgeneralization have been raised in the past about Jocano's research methodology in writing *Sulod Society* as primarily a kinship ethnography, notably by Talledo. Still, the question

remains of how to account for anthropological subjects without resorting to a “world of abstraction” as Talledo advises against in conducting ethnographic work. With his critique in mind and this commemoration of Dr. Jocano's work at hand, I still find it an admittedly difficult task to eulogize from my position as a cultural outsider. Perhaps it is fitting in the sense of coming full circle, that an American would write about a Filipino trained by Americans to write about Filipinos.

In a larger sense, though, I wonder again about auspiciousness and timing. As the *ilustrados* sought to make a nation out of its selected stories and traditions, so Dr. Jocano wrote at a time when that nation was struggling again to define itself in the first decades after the end of the prewar colonial order. Over 60 years later, a new (or at least a differently centered) colonial order advances from China as that from United States increasingly withdraws. How will the Philippines and Filipinos define themselves against this one as they have done for what is soon to be five centuries since Magellan?

One way could be a continual ordering of collective time and memory such that those of the colonists do not assume a position of primacy over those of Filipinos themselves. Where popular history tends to use colonial interventions to periodize the emergence of the nation, local (particularly indigenous) histories have their own conceptions of chronology, causation, and significance that are equally valid. However, even this returns our line of inquiry back to Dr. Jocano's: what makes Filipino society/ies distinct in terms of their various forms and functions? What documentable culture shifts exist and how do they compare or contrast with what came before? With care not to repeat the sort of totalizing generalizations that can emerge from structural-functionalism's extremes, these investigations remain crucial to ongoing processes of Filipino self-identification.

May Dr. Jocano's enthusiasm and curiosity continue to inspire future generations of researchers, thinkers, and anyone who seeks to better understand their world.