

Cultural Diversity and ASEAN Regional Integration: Challenges for Filipino and Asian Educators

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SEAMEO Congress

21-22 October 2014

Amari Watergate Hotel, Bangkok, Thailand

Why Cultural Diversity?

- References to ASEAN or regional integration are often economically driven. Free movement of goods, of people, require some kind of unifying force.
- Alternative paradigm: aim for ASEAN integration by emphasizing diversity and for reasons other than economic.

Cultural Diversity in the Philippines

- ▣ Population of about 100 million, with 170 languages and many more dialects.
- ▣ Language is often the basis for identity, although other factors come into play: residence (childhood and current), urbanization, religion, even class.
- ▣ Divisions can be sharp, with many tensions. . .



And yet. . .

- We were Asia's first democracy and continue to have one of Asia's most stable democracies, except for the dictatorship (1972-1986) and the coups that followed the restoration of democracy.

“Solution”: Isang Bansa, Isang Diwa (One Country, One Spirit)

- Naming of national “costume”, national bird, national tree, with a strong tendency to privilege Christian colonized cultures and marginalizing or exoticizing smaller ethnic groups, especially if they are “non-Christian” or Muslim. Using Tagalog as the basis for a national language, with required teaching throughout the country.

From monoculture to multiculturalism

- Mother Tongue Based Education K-3.
- At UP Diliman, challenging monolithic interpretations of “Filipino”:
 - Emphasizing participation of groups other than the Tagalogs in the Philippine Revolution, in the crafting of Filipino and other national endeavors.
 - Introducing “indigenization” into the social sciences that recognizes local cultures (emphasis on the plural) generating concepts for governance and citizenship. Teaching local history and heritage.



...and ASEAN?

- Philippines has tended to keep apart from ASEAN. Many different reasons including an economic superiority complex in the 1950s, the Maphilindo tensions in the 1960s and a strong American imprint. This amid contradictions like the reified concept of a “Malay race” (Rizal as the Pride of the Malay Race), disconnected from historical realities.

Regional schizophrenia

- Desire to be part of Asia, and yet ambivalence. Wanting to be “Malay” but not sure what “Malay” is. Wanting to cash in on the Chinese markets (China and Hongkong, Taiwan, Singapore) and yet grappling with anti-Chinese sentiments, aggravated by maritime dispute. In relation to ASEAN, “what ASEAN?” (during recent academic calendar debate).



Rediscovering ASEAN

- Pragmatic reasons: the Filipino diaspora includes several hundred thousands in the region, from refugees in Sabah to overseas workers in Hongkong, Singapore, Malaysia. Business opportunities especially with Malaysia and Indonesia.

UP's ASEAN initiatives

- Until 2001, we had a required Asian History General Education (GE) course, with strong emphasis on India and China. This was removed when we went into a no-prescribed-courses GE curriculum.
- UP's Open University has an MA in ASEAN Studies. UP Diliman is exploring possibilities to offer ASEAN-oriented courses and degree programs. An Asian Studies Center has existed for many years.

UP's ASEAN Initiatives

- Curricular changes in content:
 - History and archaeology to explain our Austronesian (rather than “Malay”) origins. Also extensive pre-colonial and colonial contacts in Southeast and East Asia.
 - Linguistics to offer more languages from the region. (Currently limited to Bahasa Indonesia and Thai.)
 - UP Diliman's College of Music offers Asian Music major.

Challenges and unexplored vistas - 1

- Culture is not just history and archaeology. ASEAN perspectives can be developed in other social sciences, in sports (Asian martial arts). . .

Challenges and unexplored vistas 2

- In the natural sciences and technology. Shared flora, fauna, ecological contexts, public health and medicine, and food and nutrition sciences, can generate shared insights on disaster responses, environmental management.

Challenges and unexplored vistas 2

- Cultural frameworks important. American Academy of Science asks what would a stem be without a flower? What would food and nutrition sciences be without the camaraderie of eating? Teaching cultural diversity imparts creativity and innovative thinking.



Challenges and unexplored vistas 3

- Need to relate to larger real-world contexts in the region: migration, tourism, digital revolution, and their impact on cultural circuits. Two examples:
- Southeast Asian Consortium on Gender, Sexuality and Health worked on many cross-border issues, including a last project on digital ICT and its impact on gender and sexuality norms among young people in Thailand, the Philippines, Indonesia, Vietnam and Laos.



Challenges and unexplored vistas 3

- An ongoing project involving the University of the Philippines and the University of Amsterdam looks into “chemicals” used by young people in Indonesia and the Philippines, and found trans-border overlaps in media, entertainment and advertising for skin whiteners.



Challenges and unexplored vistas 4

- Relating southeast Asia to South Asia and East Asia, and to the world, even as we recognize the power imbalances. Gamelan vs Gangnam. Learning Bahasa Indonesia versus Italian. Importance of starting early to inculcate an appreciation of ASEAN: body language for example, words.

Challenges and unexplored vistas 5

- Need to recognize, even celebrate differences. Contrasts are important in the sharing of cultural experiences, eg the Philippines' problem is education of boys, rather than of girls.

Challenges and unexplored vistas 5

- Rather than talk of a regional identity, why not civic education for regional citizenship, emphasizing understanding and collaboration. Return to SEAMEO's (1965) and ASEAN's (1967) origins, addressing poverty, conflicts. Education and SEAMEO should continue to be forward-looking, to function as a learning commons for ASEAN.

