



Benedict J. Tria Kerkvliet. *Everyday Politics in the Philippines: Class and Status Relations in a Central Luzon Village*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990; and Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1991, 310 p.

The book is about conflicts in a village called San Ricardo in Nueva Ecija, central Luzon. It is not, however, about rural uprisings like Communist insurgency (in fact, the village was a battle ground for Huks in earlier years), but about conflicts which do not explode. According to Kerkvliet, they arise because the rich and the poor have different views on what is just, and manifest themselves in such acts as stealing and sabotage, which obstruct the proper use of property rights. The author discusses in Chapter 6 patron-client ties and kinship, which cut across classes and statuses and reduce conflicts; but the most interesting part of the book to me is Chapters 4 and 5, where he discusses the poor's view of the world and their resistance to the capitalist ideology of the rich.

Kerkvliet may have written this book as a political study, but it contains many things anyone interested in rural development should reflect on. I approached the book with the following question in mind. The poor economic performance of the Philippines, the rural sector in particular, (compared with other ASEAN countries), may have something to do with resistance to capitalism. One thing which comes to mind to support that is Communist insurgency. As Kerkvliet wrote in another important book on this topic (*The Huk Rebellion: A Study of Peasant Revolt in the Philippines*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1977), Philippine Communist insurgency started during the Pacific War, and though it declined for a couple of decades after the early 1950s, it has been plaguing the country again since the early 1970s. It has destroyed property and crops, threatened personal safety, extorted money from the rich

(through revolutionary taxes and kidnaping), and caused the government to allocate a large expenditure to counter-insurgency, which could have been spent more productively on education and other social services.

But this has been an explored field. What is new in this book is that many people in the village do not accept the capitalist ideology, though this has not been translated into uprisings in the past few decades (since the Huk rebellion died down). If so, is this the reason why rural development did not go smoothly in the Philippines? The only way for rural development (measured in terms of the rise of average per capita income, as experienced in rural Thailand) is capitalistic development (I do not want to defend this statement here), and the poor's rejection of the capitalist ideology can be a major roadblock (the poor usually constitute a large majority). But unfortunately, the author is more concerned with proving the existence of conflicting views, and feels that such is a universal phenomenon (to support this, the author briefly discusses 19th century England and contemporary Malaysia).

To me, an interesting question is whether conflicts are more serious in the Philippines. The author discusses in the final chapter Antonio Gramsci's theory of hegemony (p. 260). If I can introduce the notion of hegemony, I can rephrase the question above in terms of whether the degree of the hegemony of the capitalist ideology is weaker in the Philippines (than in other Asean countries which have experienced higher economic growth). Isn't it possible that the Philippines has done poorly in rural development (and economic development as a whole) because of that?

There are several factors supporting it. As Gramsci himself points out (as discussed on p. 261), hegemony is weak "if the economically ... deprived and impoverished compose a significant portion of society." Land distribution in San Ricardo village is very unequal (as in many other villages in the Philippines), which can be considered as a factor which weakens the capitalist ideology (the situation should

be contrasted with Thailand where land distribution is much less unequal and the capitalist ideology is better accepted).

Unequal land distribution (which is discussed in the book) is not the only factor. The institutions which make people accept the existing social order (since this is the order of the elite or superordinate—the latter is the author's term—it includes the capitalist order as a component) are weak. The author says that about two thirds of villagers are Catholic, but that there is no resident priest. Compared with the situation in Thailand, where most villages have a temple and a resident priest, many villages in the Philippines do not have one, which may have made religious moorings weak there (this is partly because of the separation of church and state). And as the government failed to allocate enough funds to education, the quality of public education has declined, and moral education, which teaches children to respect the existing social order, has been poorly conducted.

The author does not discuss religion and education, but he discusses the importance of the concepts of rights and entitlements among villagers. In the last few pages (starting on p. 270), he discusses how they originated in the Philippines; but to me, he seems to be missing one important factor. This can be seen probably more clearly if San Ricardo is contrasted with a village in another country (say, Java) where land distribution is as unequal. He will find that rights and entitlements are weaker concepts there than in the Philippines. The reason will be that such a country is much more insulated from liberal ideas in the West because it has traditional institutions to keep them out. In contrast, the Philippines is too exposed to such ideas.

The author discusses the legacy of the Huk as a factor, but the Huk itself was a Communist organization. It was organized by the Communist Party of the Philippines soon after the Japanese invasion. He and a number of authors on this topic seem to think that it was organized to fight the Japanese Army, but if this was the only reason, peasants in other South-east Asian countries would have done the same, but

they did not. It was only in the Philippines that peasants fought the Japanese. This was because peasant organizations had been infiltrated by Communists, who as part of the international Communist movement against fascism, organized a resistance group.

What obstructs capitalistic development is not only Communism. Although not violent, liberal ideas which impose conditions on the use of private property can be as deadly over the long run as Communism. As two contrasting views, the author discusses Robert Nozick's *Anarchy, State and Utopia* (New York, Basic Books, 1974) and Henry Shue's *Basic Rights: Subsistence, Affluence and U.S. Foreign Policy* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1980). From Nozick's point of view (which is a slightly extreme form of capitalistic ideology in the present world's context), the penetration of Shue's ideas would be harmful. One can ask whether the Philippines has been more subject to such ideas and whether that has weakened the capitalist ideology. My answers to both are affirmative, since if Communism can penetrate the country, liberal ideas can penetrate it much more easily. After all, the country is full of liberal-leftist intellectuals and populist politicians. Remember this is the country where minimum wage legislation started in the early 1950s (compare this with Thailand, where it started in the early 1970s) and minimum wages are higher than in Thailand, despite the fact the latter enjoys twice as high as income today. It is no surprise if liberal ideas (the concepts of rights and entitlements in particular) affected villagers in San Ricardo.

I do not want to sound over-critical. I have a different interpretation of some of the things which went on in the village, but the author's analysis is clear, and the book is well written. When this is combined with the data he collected over several years, the book becomes an impressive work. Recently, it has become rarer to find a book which focuses on a small community but has wider implications. It was a great joy to read this book.

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