

Rockefeller Philanthropy and the Filipino Diaspora

By Sharon Orig

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My research on the "Texts and Contexts of the Filipino Diaspora" analyzes a wide range of issues concerning Filipino migration history. For instance, it scrutinizes the effects of migration on the family and investigates the subaltern position of Filipino women. It traces the political and economic origins of the body trade and probes the anonymity of the Filipino intelligentsia abroad. It critiques the death of the native as far as Filipino identity is concerned. It also shows the role of individual philanthropists, non-government organizations, church organizations, and supranational institutions in advancing the human rights of Filipinos in foreign lands.

Thus, when I began to look into the role of individual philanthropists and non-government organizations in the Filipino diaspora, I was drawn into investigating the effect of Rockefeller philanthropy on the Philippines's migration phenomenon in the 20th century. Through the years, the Rockefeller Foundation awarded several fellowships that led Filipinos to study in and travel to America and other countries. It was pertinent to my research to discover if the fellowship awards somehow contributed to Filipino migration to the United States. In any case, the idea of transporting Filipinos to study in America or any other part of the world was in itself an aspect of the Filipino diaspora.

Early Filipino migration can be traced to the Galleon Trade of the Spanish era, when Filipino seamen escaped from their abusive employers during some Acapulco expeditions and eventually settled down and worked in the shrimp-drying industries of Louisiana. Later, diasporic journeys to the United

States increased under the American colonial regime since Filipinos were hired as laborers in the Hawaiian plantations and have been sent to America as *pensionado* scholars of the American government. Somehow American foreign policy and migration rules vis-à-vis economic opportunities in the United States and American philanthropy have actually attracted Filipinos to America. Filipinos have mainly settled in Hawaii, California, New York, New Jersey, and Illinois. Today, their numbers are increasing with such rapid speed that leading demographers now predict that they will soon comprise the biggest Asian-American population.

My visit to the Rockefeller Archive Center was, by the very nature of visiting a library in New York, germane to my research. By visiting New York, I had the opportunity to meet Filipinos who were living and working there. I managed to listen to their difficulties, adjustments, and reasons for going to the United States. I also had the opportunity to interview non-Filipino professionals from the health sector concerning their opinions of Filipinos in America. Johanna Valiquette, a registered nurse at Lenox Hill Hospital in New York, explained why Filipino nurses succeed in the nursing profession in the United States. “They are hard-working, well-prepared, easy to get along with ... friendly and caring,” she said. She added that such qualities “are highly valued in the U.S.” Talking to Filipinos and non-Filipino professionals led me to discover how Filipinos managed to immerse themselves into America’s professional culture.

At the Rockefeller Archive Center I examined the fellowship record files to learn about the experiences of the Filipino fellows who trained in the United States. My primary sources of information were the Fellowship Recorder Cards. Each of the cards contained summaries of the fellow’s work and quotations from correspondence between Rockefeller Foundation officials, the fellows, the professors who trained them, and other individuals who formed part of the Rockefeller web of communications. They were important documents that shed light on the experiences of the initial group of Filipino *pensionados* who went to America. Filipino *pensionados* were precisely the Filipino intellectuals who

were sent to the United States via study and research grants from the United States government and private American institutions. The scholarship system was in keeping with the general strategy of America's foreign policy of benevolent assimilation at the turn of the twentieth century.

In addition, my research delved into how the Rockefellers were all-American philanthropists who incarnated and transmitted American ideals. In this respect, the book that helped me most in my research at the Rockefeller Archive Center was *The Rockefeller Century* by John Ensor Harr and Peter J. Johnson. It gave me a general overview of the Rockefellers involvement in both politics and philanthropy. It was common observation that the Rockefellers supported American policies that blended with their principles. If there was any policy that blended with the Rockefeller's family culture, however, it was American civic responsibility.

As a people, the Americans incarnated a socio-civic ethos that inspired them to enmesh themselves with the lives of other people. However, American "involvement" has always been viewed ambivalently. In the postcolonial era, there were nations that resented such involvement and interpreted it as an attempt by America to continue its power of influence in its colonized nations. On the other hand, there were also governments that welcomed the interference as a benevolent act of the American people. The advantage that the United States government reaped from involving private American philanthropists like the Rockefellers in national philanthropy was the camouflaging of American political agenda in government-funded social aid. Thus, the suspicion that arose in relation to development-related projects of the United States Government was mitigated by the involvement of private initiatives in development-related projects. Private initiatives were more readily understood as altruistic while government funded aid was often suspected of power manipulation.

The Rockefeller Foundation's spirit of philanthropy then suited the American government's political agenda. Concretely, it promoted the American credo of democracy among the Filipino people without making the American government appear as a propaganda agent. For instance, John D.

Rockefeller 3rd was impressed by President Ramon Magsaysay's stalwart efforts to curb communist insurgency in the Philippines via diplomacy and economic strategies for disgruntled communities. When Magsaysay met a sudden death in a plane crash, John D. Rockefeller 3rd initiated the Ramon Magsaysay Award as an award to recognize leading personalities of the Asian region who have spread the ideals of democracy in their respective countries. Needless to say, initiatives like the Magsaysay Award fostered the Americanization of the Asian region as it promoted the ethos of democracy. However, through its fellowship awards, the Americanization of Asians was carried out even more effectively. The Rockefeller Foundation intended its scholars to return to their home countries after a fellowship period. It is true, however, that such an intention was not expressly stated in the fellowship rules inasmuch as it was expressly stated in the informal communications. For instance, an inter-office correspondence of the Rockefeller Foundation dated October 20, 1930 made an implicit reference to fellows who did not return to their mother country as "outright runaways." Such fellows were described as scholars "who broke the spirit if not the letter of their agreement to turn the benefit of their fellowship to the advantage of their own country."

In fact, most of the fellows did return to their home country immediately after the scholarship period. However, when they did, they transmitted American viewpoints, American techniques, and American approaches. They became harbingers of the American *weltanschauung*. Oftentimes, the fellows held a considerable amount of professional influence upon their return to the Philippines. They became well-respected authorities in their respective fields and whatever they espoused was accepted as legitimate and true. Hence, their assimilation and transmission of American techniques successfully led to the Americanization of the Filipino people as they communicated the American way of life.

The process of knowledge transmission following a fellowship spent in the United States established the notion of America as some kind of model society. America was deemed a country that had the authority to transmit ideas because it was assumed to be a vessel of sound ideas. This idea

gradually made Filipinos look at America as a haven of social, economic, and political order. Eventually, this led to Filipinos desiring to work, study, and live in America as the “promised land” of milk and honey. Hence, regardless of whether or not the Rockefeller Foundation fellows returned to live and work in America after the fellowship period, they became propagandists of the American nation. Many of them were professors who communicated their American perspectives to young student generations who could have realized the dream of going to America. Since they were influential Filipinos who “marketed” the American viewpoint, they were credible and effective propagandists. Once the authority of America was established in the arenas of knowledge like academia, America became a nation of power with whom other countries wanted to have economic and political relationships.

During my research at the Rockefeller Archive Center, the article “Fellowships and Field Stations: The Globalization of Public Health Knowledge, 1920-1950” by Darwin Stapleton was another source of useful information. It analyzed how fellowships triggered cultural change through the metamorphosis of both the professional and personal views of the fellows. The “Americanization” of fellows and national societies at large was achieved through the cultural transformation that transpired in a fellowship period. Stapleton’s article was noteworthy in its analysis of how Rockefeller fellowships became tools of globalization. Although Stapleton’s paper focused on the effect of public health fellowships, I found his analysis to be applicable to the fellowships of other disciplines as well.

Stapleton’s idea of linking Rockefeller fellowships with globalization was interesting because there is indeed a perceived nexus between globalization and colonization. With the dissolution of structural colonization came the upsurge of structural globalization. Just like other colonizers of the 19th and 20th centuries, America relinquished its colonizing power but redirected its efforts towards globalization, which was sometimes perceived as a postcolonial imposition of former colonizers.

At the Archive Center, I also managed to examine files on both colonial and postcolonial

Philippines. The documents that formed part of the Philippine series 242 were beneficial to my analysis. In addition, the other bibliographical sources that helped my research were the Rockefeller annual reports since they included information on the programs of the Rockefeller Foundation through the years, especially as far as fellowship funding was concerned.

Finally, I would like to extend my immense gratitude to Darwin Stapleton, Thomas Rosenbaum, Camilla Harris, and Patrick Shea for their guidance and support during my research at the Rockefeller Archive Center. Without their help and support, my research at the Rockefeller Archive Center would not have been as fruitful and enriching.