

QUEZON'S PHILOSOPHY OF PHILIPPINE EDUCATION*

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INTRODUCTION

Quezon's philosophy of education is basically a reflection of the need of a colonial people to upgrade themselves intellectually, morally, and economically through education. In this context it may be limited in its application but perhaps meaningful to third world countries. Nonetheless, it is one of the important Filipino educational philosophies during the American colonial period.

A few salient features of the educational milieu during Quezon's time may be mentioned here: first, the earliest group of teachers of Filipino children were the American soldiers who were later supplemented by the Thomasites; second, prior to the Commonwealth the head of the educational system was an American; third, the English language was the medium of instruction; fourth, education was essentially democratic in that the poor but gifted students were given access to education; fifth, the democratization process was relatively fast in that schools were established in many provinces; and finally, a number of Filipino *pensionados* were sent abroad to study in American universities.

Quezon worked for the establishment of the Philippine Commonwealth because in such a set-up a Filipino would replace the American Governor-General and the Philippine Congress could legislate measures more attuned to Filipino, rather than American, educational preferences. For example, it might be difficult for a legislation on a national language to pass the veto power of the Governor-General while it would be much easier under the Commonwealth.

Although some of Quezon's educational views began to develop during the formative years of his political career, his educational philosophy ripened only during the Commonwealth era.

Objectives of Philippine Education

According to Quezon, there are two objectives in Philippine education: (1) for better citizenship, and (2) as a means of livelihood. Quezon emphasized that the primary objective of the government in training or educating the Filipinos is not so much "that they must have a means of livelihood," but so that they "may better serve the nation."¹

Education as Preparation For Better Citizenship

The good of the state, Quezon said, is paramount to the good of the individual. The state is therefore duty-bound to mold the spirit of the youth in patriotism and self sacrifice, which can be done through education. Schools, colleges, and universities—both public and private— "must constantly instill in the minds and hearts of their students their duty to defend the nation in time of war and to be useful and law-abiding citizens in time of peace."²

Quezon envisioned a complete and adequate system of public instruction. He believed in compulsory education, in a free public primary education, and in citizenship training for adults. He likewise believed in government scholarships in all

branches of learning and in vocational and agricultural training in intermediate and high schools. According to Quezon, poor but mentally gifted young men and women should be encouraged to develop their talents since the government could create for them a large number of scholarships.³

For higher education, however, Quezon emphasized that only those intellectually gifted should have the ambition to pursue a college or university education. The government could provide them with scholarships. It would be difficult for a person with an ordinary ability to succeed in his academic profession. He may be disillusioned and despair could be his reward after years of struggle to obtain a college or university diploma. Quezon contended that the average student, especially the poor, should be satisfied with a vocational education. He need not feel ashamed of it because "the true worth of a man is measured not only by a diploma but by his proficiency in his chosen line of work."⁴

Academic education in itself, Quezon maintained, has no value unless the recipient is "capable of making a practical and socially beneficial use of it." Quezon strongly endorsed the employment of foreign professors for the time being until such time that Filipinos themselves could have developed their own experts. The diploma to Quezon was simply a stepping stone toward various paths of progress.⁵

Regarding soldiery, Quezon stressed that Philippine military training should not concentrate merely on the effective use of arms but also for the inculcation of civic virtues, "which makes for better soldiers in time of war and for better citizens in time of peace." Filipino soldiers, Quezon believed, should also be given vocational training to make them economically self-sufficient.⁶

Duties of Citizenship

Quezon declared that a person "can only call himself a worthy citizen if he learns his duties before he demands his rights." The first and foremost duty of a citizen in time of war is "the defense of the State against foreign aggression, internal rebellion or domestic lawlessness." But a citizen must not only defend the nation, he must also be "useful and law-abiding . . . in time of peace." The spirit of heroic patriotism, as against ordinary patriotism, must be instilled in the minds of the citizens. Heroic patriotism, which involves the virtues of devotion, loyalty, and courage, and which "rises to heights of self-sacrifice," can be felt only by those "whose love of country is not based on the natural attachment to the land of their birth, but on the fact that their country gives them freedom, contentment and economic security." Heroic patriotism to Quezon is another name for national discipline—"The spirit of sacrifice of every citizen in the interest of all."⁷

The first duty of a man in time of peace, after securing the basic necessities of life, like food and raiment, is to pay his taxes to the government, which in a certain sense is an expression of his patriotism during peacetime. "Any man," Quezon maintained, "who says that he is a patriot, that he loves his people and is ready to die for the country, but does not pay his taxes is a liar and not a patriot." If he is not willing to pay his taxes how can he be willing to die for the country? Taxes after all, Quezon said, are used for the public interest, i.e. "to keep peace and maintain order, to repel invasion, to improve the living conditions of the people, to educate them, and to promote agriculture, industry and trade."⁸

Quezon asserted that the "maintenance of peace and order is the joint obligation of the government and the citizen" because without peace and order there can be no progress, i.e., "it will be impossible to promote education, improve the condition of the masses, protect the poor and ignorant against exploitation, and otherwise insure the enjoyment of life, liberty, and property." Quezon also said that the "best foundation of peace is not that which is built on fear," but "that which is the result of justice and contentment." Still on another occasion, Quezon remarked, "Peace is the basic foundation of democracy. Without peace life is only a burden and men can do nothing either for their country or for themselves."⁹

If women as citizens are not to be treated as slaves, Quezon said, they must be granted the right to vote. Since the state regulates every kind of relationship, women should therefore have a say on "how their lives are going to be regulated." It is unfair to presume, Quezon opined, that men can always speak for women in vital political issues.¹⁰

Although an ecclesiastic as a citizen, Quezon argued, can exercise his right and express his opinion on any public issue, he is not permitted by law as an authority of a religious organization, church, or faith "to try to influence the Government or any of its branches, in the determination of its policies."¹¹

Quezon enumerated the other duties of citizenship as obeying laws and respecting the government and the constitution, protecting the purity of suffrage and abiding by the decisions of the majority, living up to the noble traditions of the people, doing one's work well, promoting social justice, patronizing local products and developing and conserving wisely the natural resources.¹²

A National Soul

Quezon believed that quality citizenship entails the development of a common language. According to him, a "national soul cannot exist where there is not a common language." Genuine national pride is anchored on one's native language. Until we have a national language, Quezon emphasized, we shall not be a people; we shall always have the sign of inferiority. It did not matter to Quezon whether the national language would be Tagalog, Ilokano, Visayan, or "any other vernacular tongue so long as we shall have a language that can be spoken by all." Quezon was willing to adopt the Mangyan tongue should language experts propose it to be the best for Filipinos. Eventually he supported the adoption of Tagalog as the basis for the Philippine national language since it was the most developed of all the existing languages in the country and the most widely spoken language during his time. In the 1940 banquet of the Philippine Writers' League, Quezon divulged his plan to substitute English with Tagalog as the medium of instruction at the elementary level after independence.¹⁴

Building The Filipino Character

A nation, Quezon said, is nothing more nor less than its citizenry. As such, it is like a family, multiplied a thousandfold. What gives a nation strength is not wealth, but the happiness or welfare of the common man. As Quezon contended, "It is not wealth, but the happiness of the common man that makes a nation strong." that is, "when every citizen recognizes the rights of his fellowmen, and in turn makes his fellowmen recognize his own rights."¹⁵

The happiness of the common man, which gives strength to the nation, can only be built on character. Quezon maintained that self-dependence and self-sufficiency in every respect are a nation's goal and this can be brought about if the leaders—in an heroic effort—awaken the people to become what by right, they should be "morally strong, virile, hardworking, refined, enterprising, persevering, [and] public-spirited."¹⁶

If we imagine a building with magnificent architectural design, this building will not topple down when a strong quake or typhoon hits it for as long as it is built on solid foundation. Likewise, the Philippine national structure, according to Quezon, if it is to endure and be capable of resisting political disorders and grave social upheavals, must rest upon the rock-bottom of the character, the toil, and the physical prowess of the people."¹⁷

Quezon bewailed the shortcomings of the Philippine society of his time. The Filipino character, Quezon observed, had weaknesses that required critical attention, viz., easy-going parasitism and social inefficiency. These are barriers to the education or development of the Filipinos for better citizenship.

Easy-Going Parasitism

Quezon noticed that the Filipinos lacked earnestness; were inclined to sustain hard effort, were frivolous and inconstant, lacked perseverance, had only skin-deep patriotism, valued face-saving very much, were desirous of personal gain which dulled their sense of righteousness, valued expediency in their norm of conduct rather than principle, showed a "failing in that superb courage which impels action because it is right, even at the cost of self-sacrifice," had as their greatest fear not the act to do wrong, but of "being caught doing wrong," took religion lightly, easily accepted defeat and were apt to compromise with ethical principles and to regard truth as compatible with misrepresentation or self-deceit.¹⁸

Even social decorum, Quezon lamented, is "fast becoming prostituted by a mistaken conception of so-called modernity." Foreign customs wrongly adopted created, especially in the young, the feeling that "politeness is commonplace and that smartness and insolence are the equivalent of good breeding." Filipinos, according to Quezon, failed to realize that "civility is the consummate flower of culture and civilization" because "it embraces all the virtues." They also did not utilize the power of self-restraint in attaining desirable objectives, and they hated discipline—moral and physical—"forgetting that self-discipline is the most effective process to build fortitude of body and spirit."¹⁹

Social Inefficiency

In Quezon's view, Filipinos were loathed to accept social responsibilities. They worked slowly and scantily; took pride in a life of ease, not knowing that "there is dignity in work" and looked upon the government as the "fountain of living," to which they were "reluctant to give anything," but from which they expected "every bounty and help." Quezon criticized the middle class, especially the numerous groups of small landowners, as having "no compunction in living on the labor of others." As he said:

[This] group of small landowners . . . are content with the meager income from the rest of their land, instead of working it themselves and from their own sweat gain greater profits. These are the people who constitute our middle class and should be the backbone of the body politic. Yet they are a liability in our social structure. Their idleness is a drag upon the economic and social advancement of our country, too heavy for any people to carry. They form a stagnant pool which breeds anemia into the blood streams (sic) of the body politic and will cause its certain death unless they awake to their responsibilities and realize their ignoble existence.²⁰

National Spiritual Reconstruction

To meet these societal weaknesses and remedy the deterioration of the race, Quezon felt the need for a national spiritual reconstruction. A social code, i.e., a code of ethics and personal conduct should be formulated and adopted. The code, according to Quezon, must be some kind of a written *Bushido* that "can be explained in the schools, preached from the pulpits, and taught in the streets and plazas, and in the remotest corners of our land." Every man, woman, and child shall be indoctrinated in its precepts. Quezon launched this regeneration of the Filipinos as a crusade and called upon all teachers, church ministers, and political and social leaders to be its vanguard.²¹

Incorporated in Executive Order No. 217 dated 19 August 1939, the code of ethics consisted of sixteen civic and ethical principles which, in Quezon's mind, would strengthen the moral character, personal discipline, civic conscience, and citizenship awareness of the Filipino. They are . (1) Have faith in God who guides the destinies of men and nations; (2) Love, defend, and be ready to sacrifice yourself for your country, (3) Respect the constitution and the government which is established for your safety and welfare, and obey its laws, (4) Pay your taxes willingly and promptly, (5) Safeguard the sanctity of the ballot and abide by the rule of the majority, (6) Love and respect your parents, (7) Value your honor as you value your life, (8) Be truthful, honest, just, charitable, and courteous, and dignified in thought and action; (9) Lead a clean and frugal life, without frivolity and pretense; (10) Live up to the noble traditions of our heroes; (11) Be industrious and value the dignity of labor; (12) Be self-reliant and persevere in pursuing your legitimate ambitions; (13) Love your work and do not do for tomorrow what you can do today, (14) Promote social justice; (25) Patronize Philippine-made products; and (26) Use and develop wisely our natural resources and do not allow your citizenship to be exploited by others.

Conclusion

Quezon envisaged a people with a strong moral character as a major component of better citizenship. It is therefore easily perceivable that Quezon's educational philosophy is closely associated with ethical and social philosophy. The social code of ethics would be taught formally in the schools and informally in the pulpits and elsewhere. That the primary aim of education is to train the student for better citizenship only shows to us that Quezon did not have a systematic view of human nature. He believed in Social Darwinism, or the doctrine that governments and societies come about in various stages of development as manifestations of man's desire to survive in the struggle for survival.²² In order for the Filipino nation to survive,

Quezon envisioned a nation with superior qualities that could possibly be obtained through education.

The idea of national survival, particularly the survival of the Filipino democratic nation, is closely linked with Quezon's idea of academic freedom. Although colleges and universities shall enjoy academic freedom, Quezon averred, this does not mean the license to advocate anti-social and subversive doctrines. Academic freedom carries with it the imposition of self-restraint: no man is allowed to preach theories or philosophies destructive of Filipino patriotism. "Should anyone," Quezon insisted, "attempt . . . to establish a school for the preaching of communism in the Philippines," the government should immediately stop it.²³

Some educational programs which Quezon put into effect as Commonwealth President may be mentioned here: (1) Adult education was started in 1973 and 5,053 schools of the Office of Adult Education were established; (2) Compulsory education in the primary grades was implemented in 1937; (3) A national language was adopted; (4) A double-single session whereby one set of pupils attended classes in the morning and another set in the afternoon was instituted; (5) The seven-year elementary schooling was reduced by one year to save on costs and to accommodate more pupils; and (6) Some 4,429 elementary public school buildings were built from 1936 to 1941.²⁴

Some contemporary views on the aims of education simply assume better citizenship as one of their logical consequences. But for a fledgling Philippine Commonwealth—one that was preparing itself for independence—it can be readily understood, I think, why better citizenship was considered the paramount aim of education. After all, Quezon wanted the Filipinos to have a place in the sun. As he said:

We shall be a flowing stream, a rippling brook, a deep and roaring torrent, full of life, of hope, of faith and of strength. Through self-discipline harness all our energies, so that our power, spreading over the length and breadth of the land, will develop its resources, advance its culture, secure social justice, give pulsance to the Nation, and insure happiness and contentment for all the people, under the aegis of liberty and peace.

Other peoples of the world are straining to attain higher levels of progress and national security. We shall not, we must not lag behind.

The Filipino people are on the march, towards their destiny, to occupy their place in the sun.²⁵

NOTES

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1

Manuel L. Quezon, "Social Justice, National Defense Related" in Eulogio Rodriguez, ed., *President Quezon: His Biographical Sketch, Messages and Speeches* (Manila, Publishers Incorporated, 1940, p. 233.

Unless otherwise specified, all citations in this paper are taken from Rodriguez.

2

Ibid.

3

Manuel L. Quezon, "Honest and Efficient Judiciary," pp. 46-49.

4

Quezon, "Social Justice, National Defense Related," p. 230.

5

Ibid. See Manuel L. Quezon, "Address to Commerce Students of De La Salle College," 27 August 1925, Quezon Papers, National Library.

6

Manuel L. Quezon, "Philippine National Defense," p. 70.

7

Manuel L. Quezon, "Good and Efficient Government," p. 43; "Philippine National Defense," p. 69. "University of the Philippines Commencement Address," p. 238; "Social Justice, National Defense Related," p. 266, and "Complications of Independence," p. 105.

8

Manuel L. Quezon, "Social Justice and Taxation," p. 159 and "Good and Efficient Government," p. 42.

9

Manuel L. Quezon, "Peace Based on Social Justice: Rice Festival Speech," p. 247. "Inaugural Address," p. 12; and "Higher Wages for Filipino Laborers," pp. 56-57.

10

Manuel L. Quezon, "Woman Suffrage," p. 61.

11

Manuel L. Quezon, "Amendment of the Election Law Recommended," p. 182 and "On the Separation of Church and State," p. 178.

12

See Executive Order No. 217, 19 August 1939.

14

Manuel L. Quezon, "Filipino National Language," p. 159. See Andrew B. Gonzales, *Language and Nationalism: The Philippine Experience Thus Far* (Quezon City, Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1980), p. 7.

15

Manuel L. Quezon, "New Nationalism," p. 195.

16

Ibid., p. 196.

17
ibid., pp. 192-93.

18
ibid., p. 194.

19
ibid.,

20
ibid., pp. 194-95.

21
ibid., p. 195.

22
See The **Encyclopedia of Philosophy**, 1967 ed, S.V.: "Darwinism," by Morton O. Beckner.

23
Manuel L. Quezon, "Changes in Government," p. 46.

24
Executive Order No. 73, 3 December 1936 and Executive Order No. 306, 21 October 1941

25
Quezon, "New Nationalism," p. 219.