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Abstract:

This paper would talk about Emerita Quito’s thoughts and ideas about the state of the Philosophy in the Philippines. It would enumerate the problems that prevents it from totally flourishing here in our country and would try to provide viable solutions that can help develop it further. Moreover, it will also highlight why our language is an essential key factor in understanding philosophy. She would discuss here how we can never Filipino Philosophy can never flourish until we settle the dilemma in our own language. This paper will also talk about the importance of philosophy and thinking not just to an individual but also to the country. It will also pose the dangers of critical thinking and how to handle it.

Keywords:

*Emerita Quito, Filipino Philosophy, Critical thinking, language*

Emerita Quito is a female professor of philosophy and became the leading figure in the development of Filipino philosophy. She is a former dean of De La Salle University and an author with more than 20 books. After attaining her masteral in the University of Santo Tomas (UST), she left the country to pursue her studies in Europe. There she studied different philosophies, allowing her to break free from the strict influence of Thomism and Scholasticism in philosophy at UST.[[1]](#footnote-1) After achieving her doctorate degree in the *Universite de Fribourg, Switzerland*, she came back to the Philippines to be a philosophy professor. She just passed away recently last September 17, 2017. Though she might have been physically gone, the ideas, contributions and lessons that she imparts to Filipino philosophy will always stay forever.

As one of the pioneers of Filipino philosophy, half of her books and writings was dedicated to developing Filipino Philosophy. She talked about the status, problems, reflective thoughts and lack of importance of it through the country. I want to start with the problems of Filipino Philosophy. Personally, I think the first problem in Filipino Philosophy is the disassociation of two terms in its own context. Quito states that “the term philosophy in the Philippines should be discussed on two different levels: the *academic*, and the *popular or grassroots* level.”[[2]](#footnote-2) The problem here is that since the “grassroots level” has been imbedded to the minds of the Filipino people, philosophy has been taken lightly here in our country. One of the examples would be the typical response of most elders such as “Pilosopo[[3]](#footnote-3) ka pala” or “Anong ginagawa doon?” upon hearing that you’re a scholar of Philosophy. Shallow as it may seem, it has a damaging effect into the academic consciousness to this field.

Emerita Quito believes that one of the hurdles that prevent Filipino Philosophy from reaching its success is the problem in language particularly, its own native language. In philosophy it is inevitable to encounter highfaluting words or jargons in reading theories and works of the thinkers, this then gives an image that philosophy is unfathomable and hard to decipher. Quito argued that if only we can express the ideas of philosophies through a language that can be understand by many of us, we can excel and be our own masters in this field. This is because it would diminish the perplexing façade of philosophy making it understandable for everyone not just for scholars, since it is now translated to our mother-tongue. To be able to reach this state, the solution is not just to create a pure Filipino philosophy untainted by foreign influence but to have philosophy translated and expressed into our own words. But of course, challenges always arise and one of most common mistake that Filipino translators possess is giving up quite too soon. Many scholars retreat to English when they experience the complexity of translating to Filipino. Quito calls out their laziness and doubtfulness and argued that nothing will happen if they don’t give Filipino language a chance. Some said that “there are just thoughts that can never be translated and has no equivalence to Filipino words” but Quito never quitted as she is truly passionate about contributing something to Filipino Philosophy. She mentioned that “Ang isinalin naming ay hindi ang mga salita kundi ang diwa”[[4]](#footnote-4). This was the technique she used that led her to success. I agreed with her that the thought or sense comes first before the words and other technicalities. She argued that “until the Filipino people recover the native tongue, it will not develop an indigenous philosophy, for the soul of a people is better expressed in a native language.”[[5]](#footnote-5)

Another problem that Filipino Philosophy encounters concern the scholars of this field per se. Since philosophy belongs to the humanities, it lacks the practical aspect that a science course typically offers: a steady job. Here in the Philippines, humanities doesn’t promise a lucrative job after graduation. The career path of philosophy doesn’t really offer a wide variation of profession. Its either you become a professor and help preserve reason and knowledge as we know it; or you can deviate from it and opt to use it as a pre-law course or priest vocation. Whatever one choses, these all require additional years of studying and research and most of the scholars isn’t ready to commit to this life style. Another problem is that, since a professor is one of the lowest paying profession in the country, many people opt for a different career path. The Philippines is more focused on rising back up in the economy that is why courses like philosophy is not prioritize. And I think that if these conditions are changed, many would commit their life to philosophy.

Furthermore, Emerita Quito talked about the importance of philosophy to one’s self and to the country but mentioned how “thinking” is now rare nowadays. She talks about how thinking had already died in a fast-paced society, perhaps because of how people desires for things that are instant. She also said that the media somehow contributes to this phenomenon. She argued that people now fails to think for themselves since they always conform to what society dictates us, comparing people into robots who does nothing but follow orders. In this contemporary time, many ideas and inventions have already been formulated to make living much easier and convenient to people. I agree that development and innovation is good, but its side effect makes man incompetent and ignorant. I think people do not think for themselves anymore since everything has been laid out for them, with an instant click everything you need to know will already be made available not even questioning its legitimacy. Moreover, People avoid ideas that are abstract and somewhat colorless. That is why the proportion of the people who prefer movies than books are greater because most of them don’t want to think anymore. They prefer things that is already done. What I think is that people conform for the reason that they are afraid to be viewed and labeled as a deviant. Having different thoughts or sharing strong opinions isn’t really entertained here that’s why some people suspend their reasoning. People who deviate from the norms is hated and that is why the term “smart shaming” is coined in our country. These are the people who think and are not afraid to question authority when they know that something is wrong.

Similar to philosophers, since critical thinking and logical reasoning is our foundation. The mass doesn’t really favor us. Their perception of us connotes a negative notion since we are viewed as eccentric and unpractical just because we don’t enjoy the same cup of tea as them. The question of “can the country or perhaps an individual survive without philosophy?” comes then into mind. Quito argues that every individual has their own philosophy. I quote that

Ang bawat tao ay mayroon ding pilosopiya ng buhay. Datapwat ang isang tao ay nararapat mag-isip upang makapagtayo ng isang matibay na sandigan ng buhay. Kapag hindi na tayo nag-iisip, mawawalan tayo ng pagkakataong umangat sa kinalalagyan. Tayo ay mahahalintulad na lamang na isang halamang kumukiling sa araw o sa isang hayop na sumusunod na lamang sa hilig ng kalikasan.[[6]](#footnote-6)

She emphasized the importance of thinking to one’s self. Critical thinking doesn’t only construct principles that one should live by, but it also helps us elevate our present conditions. It is essential because without a person’s capability to think he wouldn’t last in life that is because first, he is incompetent of making good choices and decisions that would affect his life. and Second, he is incapable of producing something productive, may it be in the field of arts or science. Nonetheless, Quito compared a person devoid of thinking to an animal or a plant that goes with the natural flow of things unable to make an own stand.

But Quito also poses the dangers of thinking. She mentioned that thinking doesn’t only produce good outcomes, it may also induce bad results and phenomenon as well. There are ideas that led to the destruction of man that is caused by thinking per se. One example would be the Holocaust led by Adolf Hitler. His hostility to the Jews led him to think of ways on how to annihilate their race. Nevertheless, thinking shouldn’t be discouraged. The individual will lose his own humanity if his capability to think would perish since it is in his nature to think. This is what distinguishes us from animals and machines, our rationality. Our mental traits, cognitive abilities as well as our abstract ideas all adds up to our “humanness”. This is why man lives according to his own philosophy in life.

She also argued that philosophy is essential not only in an individual’s life but also to one’s country. But if that’s the case then why doesn’t the society favor us? Why do we get a stern look or a grimace when we mention that we are scholars of philosophy? Perhaps because of misunderstanding. Society has the notion that all we do is contemplate that results to uselessness. First, because they think that all the theories stays in our head or in the four corners of the room. Second, perhaps they think that we can’t apply all of these to practical terms. And Lastly, since they are complacent and satisfied with the current state of things in life, they loathe people who challenge the present norms by thinking and questioning. One good example of this is Socrates, his discourses contain the truth that can help for the betterment of Athens, yet he was sentenced to death by giving him hemlock; just because he didn’t follow the orders of the authority. The leaders and rulers will always view the people who think and question as a threat to their supremacy. They would always prefer townsfolk who blindly agrees with what everything they say with no questions asked. This is because they can freely exploit and deceit the people with no consequences.

But despite of all of these, we can’t really prevent people from thinking. We just have to inspire them and continue with what we are fighting for. Besides all it takes is one idea to abolish an establishment. One example would be the revolution of the Philippines. Another is Karl Marx who pioneered communism against the bourgeoisie. With passion and enough perseverance, our ideas could transform not just ourselves but the whole world.

References:

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1. Cf: Leslie Liwanag, “Ang Pilosopiya ni Emerita S. Quito”. (Kritike, 2016), pp. 54-82 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Emerita Quito, “The State of Philosophy in the Philippines”. ( Philippines: De La Salle University Research Center, 1983), pp. 9 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. “Pejorative term for a person who argues lengthily, whether rightly or wrongly.” Definition by Emerita Quito. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Emerita Quito, “A life of Philosophy”. (Philippines: De La Salle University Press, 1990), pp. 200 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Emerita Quito, “The State of Philosophy in the Philippines”. ( Philippines: De La Salle University Research Center, 1983), pp. 55 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Emerita Quito, “Ang Pilosopiya: Batayan ng Pambansang Kultura” [↑](#footnote-ref-6)