

WE ARE LIKE THE BAMBOO

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The biggest single advantage we have always had in our relations with other peoples is that we start with the premise that we are wrong and they are right. This is not so much a sense of inadequacy as a sweet reasonableness which makes it possible for us to "see" a foreigner's "point," to conform enough to it to insure our survival and, at last, to extract from that contact some benefit for ourselves.

This thesis is patent in ancient as well contemporary history. We paid tribute cheerfully to the Chinese emperor or the Madjapahit one. When the long-nosed white men came with their muskets and their sacred insignia, we were, with a few exceptions, more than willing to meet them halfway. We listened courteously to their claims about the Spanish king (what, another one?) dressed up in capes and feathers for their religious rituals and we turned our

anitos into saints. When the few angry young men like Lapu-Lapu had had their day, and the encomenderos became fiercely rapacious we retreated into indolence and unproductivity — to this day the last refuge of the oppressed.

After a brief spell of hostility towards the Americans, we were once more ready to be charmed. Indeed, how much more clever to have sanitary wells and to have everyone learn to read and write English and to play baseball and to believe, with the new evangelizer, that heaven is for those who "git up and go." It was much harder to accommodate the Japanese, but we learned how to do it in a thousand ways and who knows, if the fortunes of war and international power politics had been different, whether the Nippongo teachers would have become Thomasites, too. We seem almost glad that the Chinese are so ingenious

and hard-working — that leaves us more time in which to play politics.

Thus, we disarm other people before they can do us much harm. Where they expect a war or an argument, they find acquiescent smiles and nodding heads. And we rob them of the pleasure of conquest or exploitation. What pleasure can there be in victory or imperialism where the natives are so happy to be conquered? The bamboo, rather than the tough, unbending *narra*, should have been our national tree. — *My Humble Opinion*, the *Manila Chronicle*, October 12, 1961.

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"Dreams can be bought and sold, or stolen," says Arthur Waley in a collection of Third Programme broadcasts, and proceeds to tell an ancient oriental story of a bartered dream: "The Japanese Regent, Masatoki, who lived in the 12th century, had two daughters, who were step-sisters. The younger dreamt that the sun and moon fell into her lap. 'I must go and ask Masako what this means,' she thought, Masako was the

name of the elder sister, who was learned in history, mythology and dream-interpretation. 'This would be a strange enough dream for a man to have,' thought the elder sister, 'and it is stranger that it should come to a woman.' For she knew such a dream meant that the person concerned would become ruler of the land. Being herself of a masterful and ambitious character, she determined to get hold of the dream and said deceitfully to the younger sister. 'This is a terribly unlucky dream. You had better get rid of it as quickly as possible.' 'How can one get rid of a dream?' asked the younger sister. 'Sell it!' said Masako. But who is there that would buy a bad dream? 'I will buy it from you,' said Masako. 'But, dear sister, how could I bear to escape from misfortune only to see it descent upon you?' 'That does not happen,' said Masako. 'A dream that is bought brings neither fortune nor misfortune.' The price paid was an ancient Chinese mirror. The young sister went back to her room saying, 'It has happened at last. The mirror that I have

always coveted is mine.' Only long afterwards, when Masako became the virtual ruler of Japan, did the young sister realise what she had lost by selling her dream."

This is one of my favorite stories because it is a stabbingly apt allegory of what happened to the Filipino dream. The generation of Rizal, Bonifacio and Aguinaldo dreamed of freedom and national dignity. But in their innocence, they bartered it for security, protection, material prosperity and the lessons of democracy and

self-government. It was deemed proper to be grateful to an elder nation for having saved us from the vicissitudes of glorious but uncertain dreams. The sun and the moon on our laps, we were assured, would burn us to a cinder. Now we admire ourselves in a pretty looking-glass and daily remind ourselves that this is what we wanted all the time. Ah, but how dazzling and inaccessible are the sun and moon that we lost! — *My Humble Opinion*, the *Manila Chronicle*, July 11, 1958.

THE IFUGAO'S "PUNNOKAN"

The Ifugaos celebrate the end of the harvest season with a river ceremony called "punnokan". On the day of the ceremony, nobody is allowed to go to the fields, where, it is believed, any "intruder" will be killed by the spirits. Instead, the folk assemble beside a river, around a human figure made of hay. This figure is called the "kinaag." It is thrown into the water and the people try to hook as much of it as they can. The group that hooks in the most hay wins the game. The "punnokan" is a welcome relief after the labors of harvest. — *Jose G. Canapin*.