

# Filipino Concept of “Loob”

Christine Carmela R. Ramos, Ph.D.

**Abstract**— The paper discussed Filipino indigenous thoughts to appreciate its culture. “Loob” encompassed Filipinos’ humanity, personality, theological perspective and daily experiences. It aspired harmony with others and nature to be in union with God. The interpersonalistic characteristic of “loob” explained the dualism in body-soul and emotional-rational of the Filipinos.

The paper focused on the two dimensions of “loob”: as interior and holistic. The interior “loob” affirmed the innate goodness. “Loob” is reconstructed not only the world but itself as well. The holistic concept referred to the unified entity of the world, the non-dual outlook of the world. More, the author took note of the interplay of emerging contrasts between the views of Ayn Rand and the Filipino concept of “loob”.

While the Western philosophy emphasizes modern science and technology, the Eastern thinking, however, is more concerned on the inner and personal nature of the self. The Western thinking is departmentalized and detached. On the other hand, the Eastern thinking views the world of senses as ephemeral and illusory. Likewise, the Eastern thinker is acquainted through one’s personal experience and intuitive grasp of reality which is of higher value than analytical speculation

**Keywords**— *Loob* as holistic, *Loob* as interior, Objectivism, Personalism

## I. CONCEPT OF “LOOB”

Church (1986: 95) opines that many Western concepts and process such as objectivity do not readily fit in to Filipino experience. In relation to this, this paper analyzed Rand’s view of the individual in light of *Volksgeist*, or “*diwa ng mga Filipino*.” Mercado (1974: 6) had identified the Filipinos’ concept of “loob” in two-fold.

First, “loob” is holistic, secondly, “loob” is interior. The holistic concept centered on the unified entity of the world. The Filipino’s view of the world is non-compartmentalized and holistic. The Filipinos’ “loob” is connected to the intellectual, volitional, emotional and ethical aspects of life. Emotions and thoughts were integrated and not dualistic in approach. Thoughts, actions and words were all related with each other.

### A. HOLISTIC “LOOB”

According to Quito (1975: 3-5), philosophy is religion and religion is philosophy in the Orient. The Oriental does not segregate philosophy which includes process of thinking, from religion, which is application of life. Quito stressed, “Life for oriental thinkers is a translation of thought; it is philosophy in action.” The fruit and application of life must be an extension

of thought. The experience of the individual can be considered as phenomenological. Reflections are linked to personal experiences; a particular event is related to the total experience of a person.

Questions such as, “What am I living for?” and “What do I live by?” guide the reflective process (Dy, 1989: 70). Experience vis-a-vis reflection focus on the growth of the “I” in the community -- the “we”. Without “we”, the “I” ceases to develop. That “I” exist with a reference group emphasizes that “loob” in essence, is not individualist nor a private perspective on morality.

The holistic concept of “loob” brings a person into a face-to-face encounter with God; elevating one’s experience in the realm of spirituality such as asking forgiveness to God and family. At this point, one is invited to look up in the heaven to experience God because one’s self-reflection already reached celestial being. Therefore, a person does not forsake one’s humanity but experiences how to be truly human. As Quito (1975: 50) said, man has to step out of the Totality of which he is a part or reflect upon himself and therein arrive at an identification of self with Reality.

### B. INTERIOR “LOOB”

The interior dimension of “loob” focuses on human-heartedness such as compassion, kindness and harmonious relationship with people. Further, as the innate goodness of human beings, “loob” embodies moral conscience and ethical dimension. “Loob” as interior, encompassed harmony, deepens the reality of human beings and gives order to their lives which are connected to the Creator (Alejo, 1990:29).

Rand’s concept of the self, on the one hand dichotomizes people into rational and emotional entities. She further defends her philosophy on selfishness as based on rationality (Rand, 1946:34). To quote Rand (1946: 447): *A man’s self is his mind – the faculty that perceives reality, forms judgments and chooses values.*

“Loob”, however, encourages one to share one’s self to a wider reality; thus promotes harmony. In either specific or broad sense, “loob” is God’s will. The concept of interrelation of “loob” is rooted from the Christian concept of unity. The story of Adam and Eve (Genesis 2: 24), for instance, came from a realization that we have a need for others and for God. We are called to be united or in communion with one another and with God.

“Loob” as the seat of Filipino religiosity can be the best summarized in the following verses from Psalms 40: 8:

*How I love to do your will, my God!*

*I keep your teaching in my heart!*

Christine Carmela R. Ramos is with the Mapua University, Philippines.

Hence, the definition of self of the Filipinos vis-a-vis the self of Rand, eclipses the Filipinos' "loob" as such, "loob" is religious, spontaneous and emotional in character. In his discussion of "loob", Alejo (1990: 1-9) alludes to many objects. For instance, "loob" was compared to picking of fruits. We should be cautious of choosing a fresh-looking and lush fruit, which when opened, could be rotten inside. In the same manner, our bodies which might be strong and healthy houses "loob".

So that our "loob" will not rot, we should contemplate life not according to its relevance but in the light of truth. "Loob" is a death which should be understood in its magnitude. Understanding of "loob" is a never-ending process. Like an artist who dedicates time and whole person in perfecting his craft, so too, we should not stop in contemplating within our "loob" so it will be perfect, we can further delineate the essence of "loob" in I-thou relationship and We-relationship.

The I-thou relationship and sustains the community; there is no antagonism between different groups. Andres (1986: 37) calls the communion with self, others and God vis- a-vis harmony of the mind, emotion and will as the Christian view of "tripartite Being". In contrast, Rand's view of the world or any aspect of it as divided into two-fold, between related by but separate or antagonistic elements (e.g. mind versus body).

"Loob" touches the daily human aspect of the Filipinos. For instance, "*utang na loob*" (debt of gratitude) can be experienced in almost all relationships. "Utang na loob" means shifting of obligation to the other party upon repayment (Church, 1986: 39). As such, if a personal lends money to his friend in times of dire needs, the receiver will have "*utang na loob*" to the benefactor. If the friend will not honor his debts to his friend, he is considered "*walang utang na loob*". Thus, "loob" in this case is the measurement of one's morality and personhood in Philippine culture.

Moreover, the universal principle of reciprocity reinforces family solidarity which is an appendage of smooth interpersonal relationship (SIR). Upon receiving the favor, the beneficiary has an "*utang na loob*" to the giver and in exchange, the beneficiary has an everlasting obligation which further knits the family together. "Utang na loob" also includes non-kinsmen (Mercado, 1974: 97). Such fraternization even with non-relatives was guided by Christian tenet of extending love for all for the Kingdom of God included all creation. The following verses describe the type of help members of the People of God give to one another.

To quote St. James (5: 13-20):

*If anyone of you is in trouble, he should pray; if anyone is feeling happy, he should sing a psalm. If anyone of you is ill, he should send for the elders of the church. And they must anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord and pray over him. The prayer of faith will save the sick man and the Lord will raise him up again. And if he has committed any sins, he will be forgiven. So confess your sins to one another, and this will cure you;*

*the heartfelt prayer of a good man works very powerfully. My brothers, if one of you strays away from the truth and another one brings him back again, remember this; whoever turns a sinner back from his wrong way will save that sinner's soul from death and bring about forgiveness of many sins.*

"Loob" sought to avoid fragmentation or "*hindi kabuuan*." It embraced reference groups, family and political parties. However, Rand's concept of the self, eliminated moral evaluation (Rand, 1946: 25) which totally eclipsed "loob" consciousness on principles of affection, responsibility, feelings and attitudes. "Loob" does not only fulfill reasons of the mind but reasons of the heart and personal involvement as well. Alejo (1990: 57) affirmed "*hindi magkakahiwalay ang isip, salita at pagkilos*".

## II. "LOOB": ANALYTICAL AND SYNTHETIC CONCEPTS

There are two basic classifications of "loob". First, "*loob*" as an analytical concept and secondly, "*loob*" as synthetic. The analytical concept, dealt on morality; while the synthetic, on the wholeness or process of integration. Similar with other Oriental outlook, Filipinos' "loob" is non-dualistic. There is emotional-rational and body-soul harmony that aspired unity with God.

For instance, the Indian belief, of *Anatta*, which is denying of the inner self or the Atman, meant to be in union with the Absolute (Mercado 1974: 3). Conversely speaking, harmony between humanity, nature and God is the essence of "loob".

The soul, in Greek thinking, has nothing to do with unity. For the Greeks, they consider the soul as separate from the inner vision of oneself; an external which swallows the self (Agapay, 1991: 140). Rand's selfishness, however, is the independent mind that recognized no activity higher than its own and there is no value higher than its judgment of truth.

But, Fromm (1957: 100) thought otherwise. He opined that most people live under the illusion they follow their own ideas and inclinations. That they are individualists, they have arrived at their own opinion as the result of their own thinking - and that it just happened that their ideas are the same as those of the majority. As it happens, Fromm (1957: 137) views the self somewhat similar to the Filipino's concept of "loob". For him, care, responsibility, respect and knowledge are elements of self.

On the one hand, Fromm shares his view with Rand that the self should not just be a conglomeration of strong feelings but should also be based on a decision; henceforth, on judgment.

Rand (1946: 447) maintained that there can be no compromise on any party (e.g. government) because according to her, compromise is tantamount to surrendering individual rights and thus, will lead to gradual enslavement.

To quote Rand (1946):

*To be free, a man must be free of his brothers. That is freedom. That and nothing else.*

Rand upheld the individual, whereas "loob" is essentially a

relational and social concept before it is a privately personal concept. Further, Filipinos look at themselves as holistic from interior dimension under the principle of harmony (Mercado, 1974:40).

### III. THE RELIGIOUS DIMENSIONS OF “LOOB”

“*Loob*” is totally connected to the emotions (Mercado, 1974: 66). Rand, on the one hand, condemns all forms of mystics, dark emotions and instincts which are not in accordance with reason (Quito, 1986: 45-40). The entire philosophy of Rand can be summarized in her book entitled *With Charity towards None*. “*Loob*”, on the one hand, is the basis of charity which is a manifestation of gratitude (Gorospe, 1988: 31).

“*Loob*” had been inseparable from religious concerns. For the practice of religion is not only second nature to Filipinos, it is the spiritual psychic of the Filipinos to be religious. Oriental thinkers emphasize personal transformation which basically focused on the question, “Who am I?” “*Loob*” is distinctive in a way that the action it espoused is what will benefit society. Contrary to self, “*loob*” is not inferred to or reasoned to but as a reality which we experience in our lives. The intuitive grasp of reality is valued more than analytic speculation. In the first place, true thinking never reaches a state of completion any more than man in his movement toward death he achieves completion.

In material need, the Filipino seeks the support of relatives (Church, 1986: 42). According to Timbreza (1989: 23), the need to immerse the individual in the group may be due to authoritarian tradition which prevails to our strong family system. The individual is told what he is to do, follow the advice of the elders. In short, the Filipino is group-oriented, which could be rooted from the non-aggressiveness of the Orientals (Quito, 1986: 13).

For Quito (1986: 10), the state of philosophy in the Philippines is identified in two levels. The first level is confined in the academic atmosphere of university classrooms. The second is the popular or grassroots level, a philosophy which is not only mass-based but is in the process of formalization.

There is a room for optimism. Most Filipino values have richly developed which were crystallized during the EDSA revolution. The willingness to confront the authority did not coincide with the SIR value system. Instead of personalism, the Filipinos fought for freedom and justice which are abstract ideals. The Filipino, more importantly, saw the national picture and chose not to be subservient anymore.

In this respect, the God whom the Filipinos are aware of, seems to me, the God whom Carl Jaspers thought of when we encounter the so-called “boundary situations”. These boundary situations are death, suffering, guilt and struggle. In my view, Filipinos normally encounter God during conflicts and struggles. For instance, during the Edsa Revolution, people did pray in the hope that through faith in God and Virgin Mary, reconciliation with leftist and armed forces will

be achieved bloodlessly.

All religions believe in mysticism. Mysticism seeks the power beyond us and to unite with this power. From the Greek “*mustes*”, which means close the eyes and mouth, mysticism is a secret. Mysticism is a mystery in which the soul craves to understand God (Smith, 1978: 9). Indeed, the East used intuition and mysticism only as a last resort, when human logic has reached its limits.

There are some truths beyond ordinary human logic, where ordinary words of expression are not enough, requiring a superior form of reasoning. Mysticism in the East is a conjunction of reason.

“*Loob*” is mystical. The religious aspiration of “*loob*” cannot be separated from spiritual enlightenment (Van Over, 1977: 9). The transpersonal world view of the Filipinos underlies the belief that the individual can go beyond human limitations such as geography, space and time. The transpersonal world view encompasses the world as run by “spirit” or “spirits” such as God, mind, providence and others. To achieve direct communion with God is a universal yearning of the human spirit.

In this junction, the soul is like a lover who longs to return to God. Love is the union with God. The soul then enjoys, “happiness of those that are immortal and in spite of the body, the soul is endowed with the alacrity of the mind”. In ecstasy, the mystic has no longer consciousness of the body, the power of the soul is brought together and united to God in him. The soul and God are entirely bound (Pourrat, 1953: 209).

The Confucian *jen* is equal to Christian love. In Matthew 22: 37-40:

*Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the greatest and most important commandment. The second most important commandment is like it:*

*Love your neighbors as you love yourself.*

*Jen* deals with relationship with others which can be rooted from love of one’s parents, brothers and sisters. *Jen* incorporates the self with right conduct. Similar to Jesus’ pedagogy, *jen* instructs us to love others as we love ourselves. As we undergo the process of knowing ourselves, we acknowledge the fundamental goodness of our nature and share it to others as well. Our preoccupation with ourselves must be regulated by temperance.

In Hinduism, the Vedantist observes the three stages to commune with God: Faith, reason and experience (Van Over, 1977: 47): Faith is the stage wherein the seeker simply accepts the laws of nature as expression of divine existence. Reason, which is the second path, is wherein the seeker attempts to understand these laws by rational and logical processes. God is beyond the power of any created intellect to comprehend. Only through experience can the limitation of faith and reason be complete.

Through experience, the seeker sees the deceptive veil covering Brahman. The union between the self and Brahman is finding the Real self which is pure. The self overcomes

worldly attachments until the self becomes ultimately naked in Brahman. The flesh is a mirage to the self for the spirit if of greater dignity than the flesh.

According to Hindu chants:

*I sought Him and I found  
Brahman sought in vain and on high.  
Vishnu deduced vainly underground,  
Him in my soul found I.*

The Buddhist practice the four states of sublime condition: love, sorrow of others, joy in the joy of others and equanimity as regards on one's own joy and sorrows which should be practiced. Buddhism, similar to Hinduism and other religions, is a matter of practice (McLean, 1970: 41). The philosophy of Rand on self explicitly describes that each person is plainly responsible for his own individuality. What we are, each of us, is determined by ourselves. But as the existentialists say, "We are responsible for more than what becomes of us; we are also responsible for what becomes of others."

The Indian's concept of Brahman has similarity with Ludwig Feuerbach who thinks that in the essence of Christianity, a person is God and God is in the person. For Feuerbach, there is no distinction between God and human beings. The Chinese look at the world as dynamic and relational (Coppleston, 1980: 145). The outlook which is a matter of integration is called the *yin* and the *yang*: the male principle and the female principle, action and passion, matter and form. In Chinese thought, *yin* and *yang* are concrete, complementary, intertwined in all natural processes. Similarly, the Japanese' view the world as a whole. To him, rather, in him, though.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

"Loob" is indigenously Filipino, philosophically and culturally speaking. Though "loob" was an influence of the Spaniards during their reign in the Philippines (Church, 1986: 54), the core of "loob" can be traced to the Filipinos' journey toward oneness with God. "Loob" deepens and broadens the meaning of God in the lives of the people (Alejo, 1990: 45). The basis of Christian value of sensitivity to the needs of others and gratitude is traced in "loob". Goodness is embodied in "loob". Thus, if children answer back to their parents or leave them when they were sick and old, they were considered to have bad "loob" or "walang utang na loob" (ungrateful).

Hence, "loob" is the measure of one's personhood. Further, "loob" encompassed a "give-and-take" relationship among Filipinos. As such, Filipinos repay those who have helped them as manifestation of "utang na loob" or debt of gratitude (Timbreza, 1989: 36). "Loob" does not stress individuality *per se*. Rather, it is connected with the Filipinos' transpersonal view of the world, that is, the self is governed by personal being and that goods should be for the advancement of many.

"Loob" is an oasis amidst life's struggles where peace and love springs. Alejo's concept of "loob" surmised "loob" as a reality which promotes harmony and creativity. "Loob" is similar with other Oriental views. Like the concept of *Atman*

in Buddhism and Chinese's *jen*, "loob" aspires for harmony (*sakop*) with others, God and nature. "Loob" prioritized family, relatives and even non-kinsmen. In fact, it bridged individual differences and is the common factor among human beings.

The concept of Rand's "self" and Filipino "loob" had diversities but their differences should be overcome. Their concepts should not oppose each other. Rather, the best of their views should be integrated in the pursuit of a free and responsible individual.

There is a certain apprehension toward the group-oriented approach of the Filipinos which regresses the individual's initiative and responsibility. In one view, the individual should be disciplined from within rather than fear from authority figures. Discipline and responsibility should be inculcated especially to the youth through education. There ought to be a balance between values and culture, money and society. Similarly, Hinduism and Buddhism value discipline (e.g. yoga) which is the way towards a happy, contented life (Dy, 1989: 187).

Personalism and high regard of Smooth Interpersonal Relationship (SIR) are some of these stereotype images of a Filipino. Personalism features the Filipino's emphasis on personalities and personal factor. During election campaigns, for instance, politicians invite movie personalities to support their candidacy. Meanings are not in words but in people. Most Filipino voters consider the political pageantry and pomp associated with the candidate rather on their political platform.

The SIR is further manifested in reciprocity and "pakikisama" (Timbreza, 1989: 167). When a Filipino is in need, he seeks the support of relatives. Out of "pakikisama", the more well-off members of the family share their gains with relatives and neighbors. But the giver is likely to predetermine what form which should be of greater value than the original debt, should be repaid (Church, 1986: 38).

It is the author's task to encourage students to think, to let them speak out their own views. The author allows the students to decide for themselves so they will be responsible for their own lives and bear the consequences of their choices. However, Church (1986: 129) thinks that the Filipinos' nature of trying to get along with others spring from recognizing the dignity and feelings of others. Further, Church opines that Filipino image is stereotype in lieu of personality and culture.

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**Dr. Christine Carmela R. Ramos**, author of *Introduction to the Philosophy of the human person, Globalization and Technology* and *Introduction to Philosophy*, obtained her Ph.D. in Philosophy of Philosophy at De La Salle University, Manila graduating with distinction (magna cum laude). She also completed her Master's Degree in Philosophy and AB-BSE at De La Salle University. A former professor of The

Philippine Women's University and the Philosophy Department of De La Salle University, Dr. Ramos is currently teaching at Mapua University. She was also cited for her significant contributions in the fields of humanities and community development. She had given training to women in putting up daycare centers in the outskirts of Manila, as well as facilitated students in their community outreach. In 1995, she received a scholarship from Women's Council of Great Britain, studying in Hertfordshire College, England where she found the inspiration to write her book on globalization. She was a member of the Philippine National Philosophical Research Society (PNPRS), Philosophical Association of the Philippines (PAP), Asian Association of Christian Philosophers, and National Organization of Professional Teachers (NOPT). Born in the sign of Cancer, her other interests include learning to speak foreign languages, traveling in other countries, visiting museums and other historical places, and singing. Her family and friends consider her a dedicated, intelligent and trustworthy