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Reciprocity in the Lowland Philippines*

MARY R. HOLLNSTEINER

WHILE the norm of reciprocity is a universal principle of behavior, its manifestations, the emphasis placed upon it, and the power it has to influence social behavior differ from one society to the next. In the Philippines, where people are so concerned about getting along with others, reciprocity is a constant consideration, and some knowledge of its operation is essential for an understanding of Philippine society.

It seems worthwhile, therefore, to give special attention to this social principle, in order to explore its importance and its more typical manifestations. To this end I will present an analysis of pertinent data gathered in the lowland Philippines, particularly in Tulayan, Bulacan, a fishing village some 21 kilometers from Manila.¹ This analysis will be followed by a discussion placing Philippine reciprocity in the wider context of Philippine culture and of reciprocity elsewhere.

* This is the revised version of a paper read at the Fourth Annual Baguio Religious Acculturation Conference, held at Baguio City, December 29-31, 1960.

¹ The author is indebted to the Asia Foundation for a grant which enabled her to conduct field research on reciprocity in a municipality of Bulacan (here called Tulayan), 1959-60.

CONTRACTUAL RECIPROCITY

A study of reciprocity in Tulayan and similar Philippine lowland communities yields a threefold classification; namely, contractual reciprocity, quasi-contractual reciprocity, and *utang na loob* (debt of gratitude) reciprocity. Contractual reciprocity supposes a voluntary agreement between two or more people to behave toward one another in a specified way for a specified time in the future.² An example of this is found in the case of a group of farmers who agree to take turns plowing one another's fields. This arrangement, known as *bolhon* in Cebuano Bisayan, has been described by Hart³ and given the status of a type by Udy.⁴ According to the usual terms, the farmers work jointly on one field at a time, the proprietor of the particular field acting as boss of the group. The amount of time and effort spent in each case is approximately equal. When the complete rotation of fields and corresponding work leaders has been made, the obligation of each member to all the others has been settled.

The strictly contractual nature of this system of mutual assistance is apparent, since the reciprocity arrangements are clearly established beforehand. Each participant knows exactly what is expected of him, and what he may expect of the others. He does not feel compelled to do more than any other member since it is not expected of him. In this sense, his participation is not at the level of a general institutionalized expectation, accompanied by a diffuse sense of *noblesse oblige*. The felt obligation is narrow in scope and devoid of strong emotion. Nonetheless the weakness of affect does not mean that a shirker goes unpunished, for failure to comply with the *bolhon* contract will certainly bring censure and an unwillingness on the part of the others to help the shirker in the future. Analogous situations occur constantly in Tulayan and more

² Stanley H. Udy, Jr., *Organization of Work* (New Haven: HRAF Press, 1959), p. 57.

³ Donn V. Hart, "Barrio Caticugan: A Visayan Filipino Community" (Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Syracuse University, 1954), pp. 431-33.

⁴ Udy, *op. cit.*, p. 77.

urban settings, where workmen fulfill a contract and are paid in return. Upon satisfactory completion of the work, they are paid the prearranged sum and the reciprocal relationship is terminated. The term used to designate this type of debt relationship is *utang*, meaning a contractual-type debt.

To summarize: in contractual reciprocity, the reciprocal acts are equivalent, their amount and form having been explicitly agreed upon beforehand. The obligation that is felt to return a service is relatively colorless, with a minimum of affective sentiment. Fulfillment of the contract is such that there is no doubt in the mind of either party that payment has been made; repayment is unmistakable. The reciprocation terminates that particular relationship, leaving the participants in a state of equilibrium.

QUASI-CONTRACTUAL RECIPROCITY

The second type of reciprocity, the quasi-contractual, regulates balanced exchanges where the terms of repayment are not explicitly stated before the contract is made; rather, the terms are implicit in situations which the culture recognizes and defines as calling for these terms. Reciprocity comes into play automatically without any specific prior arrangement, and repayment is made in a mechanical, almost non-affective manner. But failure to reciprocate brings censure.

The *abuloy* as found in Tulayan is an example of a quasi-contractual obligation based on money exchange. When someone in the community dies, it is customary for some members of the community, related or not, and who are not feuding with the family of the deceased, to contribute a sum of money, or *abuloy*, to the bereaved family.⁵ The family receiving the *abuloy* carefully records in a notebook kept especially for that purpose the name of the donor and the amount contributed. The reciprocal *abuloy* repayment must necessarily be deferred until someone in the donor's family dies. Then the debt engendered

⁵ This is in addition to the *ambagan*, a community-wide collection taken up for the bereaved family where every contributor gives an identical sum of money—in Tulayan, twenty centavos.

may be settled by the original recipient's consulting the notebook to see how much money the original donor's family contributed, giving in turn exactly the same amount. As in the case of contractual reciprocity, no interest is paid; there is no attempt to improve on the sum given by the first donor. To do so would violate the code of equivalence ascribed to the custom of *abuloy*.

Nor may this type of reciprocity, when among social equals, be paid in a manner other than by an equal contribution upon the death of someone in the original donor's family. The duration of time involved in repayment is of little importance; what is essential is that reciprocation be made when the opportunity to do so arises. In the case of the *abuloy*, the repayment situation is, of course, inevitable, provided that the first donor's family does not move out of the barrio before a member dies.

A distinction must be made here between the situation where *abuloy* is given to one's social equal and the one where it is given by a family of distinctly higher status to a lower-status family. In the latter case the higher-status family, in accordance with community expectations, will normally give an amount which the lower-status family could not easily match. For the social system requires that those who have more should share their bounty with those who have less. Rather than make repayment with an embarrassingly smaller amount of money, the lower-status recipient can settle the debt by giving his family's services to the donor. Helpers are always needed to prepare the inevitable *handa*, or repast, which accompanies the wake on the first, third, and ninth nights following the death. Attendance at the prayers for the dead and at the funeral itself is always appreciated and noted by the bereaved family. Although the *abuloy* repayment by the lower status family is not made in cash, the principle of equivalence is enforced, nevertheless. The services or public prayers rendered are acceptable substitutes, and neither party is expected to feel particularly grateful for the amount contributed in money or services since the *abuloy* is a balanced ex-

change relatively free of emotional charge. The *abuloy* is a quasi-contractual form of reciprocity.

Borrowing of certain household articles also involves quasi-contractual relationship. For example, a housewife runs short of rice. Perhaps a few relatives or friends have dropped in unexpectedly and she is caught without money to replenish her supply. She may buy on credit at the sari-sari store, or quickly send her daughter to a neighbor's house to borrow a ganta of rice. The neighbor readily provides it without any specifications as to when it should be repaid. Both lender and borrower know, however, that the rice must be repaid soon and in the same quantity and quality. Only in the event that repayment is delayed beyond a reasonable interval is there any compulsion to increase the amount returned. Again, this interest payment is not explicitly specified but both parties know it must be added. Not to do so would amount to an abuse of a favor done, bringing about strained relationships so undesirable in Philippine culture and particularly appalling when one's neighbors, who usually occupy a special place in one's affections, are involved.

This pattern of borrowing applies to numerous other articles: *ulam* (the main dish or dishes of the meal which go with rice — often called viands), extra plates, silverware, chairs, a bolo, a ladder, a banca for a holiday excursion, and other household goods. In each case the item borrowed should be returned when the borrower is through using it or should at least be handy if the lender sends someone to retrieve it some time afterward. If the item has been consumed, its substitutes should be returned in the same quantity within the next few days. The same sort of items can be lent in turn by the original borrower should the lender eventually also need extra chairs, silverware, etc. Money is usually unacceptable as a form of repayment here since the item was being lent, not sold. Even though the replacement value of the item might be provided by a money payment, the donor would be forced to the inconvenience of buying that item all over again. It is the recipient who should incur this inconvenience. Moreover, they would find it difficult to set a price since the item has

already changed hands on a friendly rather than contractual basis.

Still another kind of quasi-contractual obligation is that engendered by cooperative labor projects. Pedro, a *salambao*, or fishing-raft, owner wants to build a new *salambao*. He tells his close friends and relatives that he would like to have a *lusong* or *bayanihan* (cooperative work bee) the following Sunday. His friends and relatives in turn ask their friends and relatives to attend Pedro's *lusong*. When Sunday comes, the helpers arrive at the approximate time designated and begin the heavy, unskilled labor which needs to be done. They take a break for cigarettes, coffee, beer, *ginatan*, or whatever refreshments the *lusong*-giver, Pedro, has provided. When the work is done, Pedro thanks his helpers, who now depart. Those of the helpers who are also *salambao* fishermen can rest assured that when they build their own *salambao*, Pedro will honor the debt they have just placed him in and will help them in turn. For that matter, they can expect his help in any kind of *lusong*, whether it be house-moving or building a fish trap.

Here again, no clear statement of obligation has been made by either party, yet the necessity to repay in kind when the opportunity to do so arises, is mandatory. For those who do not own a *salambao* or fishtrap or who do not expect to move their houses within a reasonable amount of time, the third type of reciprocity involving *utang na loob* is created. This will be discussed shortly.

To summarize the characteristics of quasi-contractual reciprocity, this manifestation of the norm utilizes both forms of the principle of equivalence in the return payment. In one instance, the things exchanged may be concretely different but should be equal in value, as defined by the actors in the situation. In the second, exchanges should be concretely alike, or identical in form, either with respect to the things exchanged, or to the circumstances under which they are exchanged.⁶ The

⁶ Alvin W. Gouldner, "The Norm of Reciprocity: A Preliminary Statement," *American Sociological Review*, 25 (April, 1960): 172.

payment of interest does not apply here unless the borrower has failed to return a consumption item after a reasonable amount of time. In the latter case it would appear that an *utang na loob* relationship is created because the lender has, in effect, provided an extra service at a sacrifice to himself—that of doing without the item for a long time when he might have been using it.

The terms of quasi-contractual reciprocation are agreed on implicitly, not explicitly. Nonetheless, the situation and the cultural norms bring a clear understanding of expected behavior with a minimum of affective sentiment. Accordingly, the form of the reciprocation when it occurs, is recognized as payment in full, but the obligation remains to initiate another similar exchange when the same kind of situation, culturally defined as such, arises in the future. During this interim period the status of the relationship may be described as dormant. This is in contrast to the contractual type of reciprocity, where the completion of the *bolhon*, for instance, terminates the reciprocal relationship. There remains no obligation to enter into a new contract, though the desire to do this may be a shared sentiment.

UTANG NA LOOB RECIPROCITY

The third type of reciprocity, *utang na loob* reciprocity, is most consciously generated when a transfer of goods or services takes place between individuals belonging to two different groups. Since one does not ordinarily expect favors of anyone not of his own group, a service of this kind throws the norm into bold relief. Furthermore, it compels the recipient to show his gratitude properly by returning the favor *with interest* to be sure that he does not remain in the other's debt. It is a true gift in this sense. It is also a kind of one-upmanship. The kind of debt created in the recipient is called *utang na loob* (literally, a debt inside oneself) or sense of gratitude.

Utang na loob reciprocity is an ancient Filipino operating principle. Colin, writing in 1663, about the social obligations binding a barangay chief and his people makes this statement:

There was another kind of service which was not of servitude, though it appeared to be such. It was generally seen among certain persons called *cabalangay*. Whenever such persons wanted any small trifle they begged the head chief of their barangay for it, and he gave it to them. In return whenever he summoned them they were obliged to go to him to work in his fields or to row in his boats. Whenever a feast or banquet was given they all came together and helped furnish the tuba, wine or quilan, such being their method of services.⁷

The modern counterpart of this diffuse mutual service may be seen in the following description of interaction in a Visayan community:

The share tenant likes a landlord who treats him paternally. Consequently, a paternal landlord is the recipient of many extra services from his tenant. The landlord in turn acts as the patron of the tenant . . . In many instances, a tenant's family is tied to a landlord's farm because of gratitude and debts to the landlord . . . The fact that a landlord always grants a tenant's request for credit and the fact that the credit is granted at a crisis period in the tenant's life binds him in endless gratitude to his benefactor.⁸

Every Filipino is expected to possess *utang na loob*; that is, he should be aware of his obligations to those from whom he receives favors and should repay them in any acceptable manner. Since *utang na loob* invariably stems from a service rendered, even though a material gift may be involved, quantification is impossible. One cannot actually measure the repayment but can attempt to make it, nevertheless, either believing that it supersedes the original service in quality or acknowledging that the reciprocal payment is partial and requires further payment. Some services can never be repaid. Saving a person's life would be one of these; getting a steady job, especially for an unskilled laborer at a time when employment is scarce and unskilled laborers abound, might be another.

⁷ Francisco Colin, *Labor evangelica* (1663), in Blair and Robertson, *Philippine Islands* (Cleveland: Arthur H. Clark Company, 1909) vol. 40, p. 96.

⁸ Robert A. Polson and Agaton P. Pal, *The Status of Rural Life in the Dumaguete City Trade Area, Philippines* 1952 (Ithaca: Cornell University Southeast Asia Program, 1956), pp. 90-91.

There are, furthermore, definitely one-sided *utang na loob* relationships where a power status differential precludes the likelihood of equivalent repayment on the part of the subordinate party. In the landlord-tenant relationship, which parallels the *dato-cabalangay* relationship, cited above, the tenant knows he cannot approach anywhere near an equivalent return. As long as he fulfills his expected duties toward his landlord and shows by bringing a few dozen eggs and helping out at festive occasions that he recognizes a debt of gratitude, he may continue to expect benefits from his landlord. The tenant receives uninterrupted preferential treatment despite the fact that he never reciprocates with interest and never reverses the debt relationship.

The rice which a landlord gives a tenant during the course of their relationship serves to bind one to the other. But whereas the landlord may want to consider such rice as being loaned, the tenant will consider it as "owed" him as part of the reciprocal social relationship and wear the debt lightly.⁹

The *utang na loob* repayment, where it is made or attempted, is undefined in the sense that it can encompass any acceptable form within the reach of the one reciprocating. In a see-sawing coordinate relationship there is an uneasiness about being on the indebted side, temporary though the position may be. This reluctance to be indebted encourages full payment with interest as soon as the opportunity presents itself. The permanent superordinate-subordinate relationship, on the other hand, is characterized by acceptance of the relative positions and a corresponding lack of uneasiness on the part of the subordinate element about reciprocation with interest. In the former case, failure to discharge one's *utang na loob* by repaying with interest brings *hiya*, or shame, on the side of the guilty party; in the latter case, failure to recognize and admit that one has a debt is cause for *hiya*.

A word on *hiya* is called for. *Hiya* is the universal social sanction that regulates the give and take of reciprocity and, in

⁹ *Area Handbook on the Philippines* (Chicago: University of Chicago for the Human Relations Area Files, Inc., 1956), p. 1400.

general, all social behavior. *Hiya* may be translated as "a sense of social propriety"; as a preventive, it makes for conformity to community norms. When one violates such a norm he ordinarily feels a deep sense of shame, a realization of having failed to live up to the standards of the society. To call a Filipino *walang hiya*, or "shameless" is to wound him seriously.

Pal reports that the non-payer of a debt of gratitude on southwestern Leyte is called *way ibalus* ("one who has nothing to pay"), a derogatory term placing him in a status below that of a beggar or a dog. "A beggar prays for the good health of whoever gives him alms, and a dog barks for his master, but a *way ibalus* does not even have a prayer or a bark for his benefactor."¹⁰

By not settling an obligation when the opportunity arises, the Filipino violates a highly valued operating principle and experiences a consequent *hiya*. To avoid this painful experience, he makes every effort to repay his obligations in the manner prescribed by his culture.

INTRA-FAMILY UTANG NA LOOB

Although this paper is primarily concerned with *utang na loob* reciprocity outside the nuclear family context, mention must be made of the feeling of gratitude inherent in the Filipino family. The term *utang na loob* is also used with reference to parent-child and sibling relationships; but the emotion attached to it goes far deeper than the non-familial *utang na loob*. Children are expected to be everlastingly grateful to their parents not only for all that the latter have done for them in the process of raising them but more fundamentally for giving them life itself. The children should recognize, in particular, that their mother risked her life to enable each child to exist. Thus, a child's *utang na loob* to its parents is immeasurable and eternal. Nothing he can do during his lifetime

¹⁰ Agaton P. Pal, "A Philippine Barrio," *University of Manila Journal of East Asiatic Studies* 5 (1956): 431

can make up for what they have done for him. The same is true of the sibling relationship. The younger sibling owes *utang na loob* to all his elder siblings for the care which they have lavished on him and, in the local view, even for letting the younger ones be born by being born first.

That the concept of *utang na loob* in relation to family obligations differs from *utang na loob* as used in non-familial relationships is reflected in the disagreement regarding the use of the term when talking about the child's gratitude toward his parents; some argue that the Tagalog term is inapplicable here. A possible explanation for this disparity in views may be that the felt obligation remains on a non-verbal level. Verbalization is necessary only on the rare and critical occasion when the obligation has been flouted; at other times, mention of it would be superfluous.

The parent-child *utang na loob* relationship is complementary rather than reciprocal. For parents never develop *utang na loob* toward their children. They have a duty to rear them which is complemented by the children's obligation to respect and obey their parents and show their gratitude by taking care of them in old age. The children's obligation to the parents continues even when the parent's duties have been largely fulfilled.

This complementarity breeds a special closeness among family members, imposing on them a deep-seated obligation to cling to one another. They have no choice but to help their closest relatives when the situation demands. Furthermore, whereas the parties to a non-familial *utang na loob* relationship may calculate whether or not the return payment has indeed been made with interest, this kind of thinking is foreign to the family. One does one's duties and performs one's obligations as need arises; failure to do so arouses deep bitterness and the feeling that a sacred unifying bond has been torn asunder and a family betrayed. In a situation of this kind, the accusations of "walang utang na loob" and "walang hiya" take on a meaning far more serious than they would were only non-family relations involved. The family member who has betrayed his trust in this manner is told that he does

not know how to love and honor his parents or elder siblings (*hindi marunong magmahal sa mga magulang/kapatid*). Obligations to grandparents and duties toward grandchildren are extensions of one's parents' and children's roles toward their parents and children, respectively.

The complementary relationship can also be extended beyond the nuclear family to other relatives, but here selection is involved. Some reflection will remind us that the enormous network of relatives any one individual acquires through bilateral kinship virtually forces him to single out certain relatives who will be closer to him than others. This is usually determined by simple geographical proximity, traditional family preferences, or the particular attraction between two personalities. The rest of one's relatives lie outside the pale of the actual, functional segment but are always there, ready to be admitted to the inner circle should the occasion, need, or opportunity arise. The first cousin who lives in another province and is rarely visited frequently rates as an outsider, while the fourth cousin next door or in one's own household is usually a member of one's segment.

The ingroup of which the nuclear family is the core, is characterized by familiarity and ease in one another's presence. In effect, one's guard is down in the knowledge that he can be himself and not bother to adopt the oversolicitous attitude and euphemistic language characterising relationships with outgroup members. The term, *tayo-tayo lamang* ("just us"), is used to refer to this primary group. This difference in feeling and behavior toward those who are close and those who are not, illustrates a more general social valuation in the Philippines: the keen consciousness of the near, and the diffuse awareness and disregard of the far. Some friendly non-relatives may mean more to a man than the long-lost kinsman. Contrary to a popular notion, Filipinos do not indiscriminately support relatives above all others; the near-far, ingroup-outgroup dichotomies introduce limiting factors.

UTANG NA LOOB IN PRACTICE

To show the principle of *utang na loob* reciprocity in operation, I shall now discuss the occasions in which *utang na loob*

is incurred and then present a description of situations through which these obligations may be wholly or partially repaid. In going through the analysis, one should keep in mind the distinction made above between *utang na loob* reciprocity and complementarity.

Utang na loob reciprocity is created when a person sends a relative or friend's child through school, paying all or part of the expenses involved. In a period when education is so highly valued as the path to a prestigious white-collar or professional future, the sponsor of these studies creates a lifetime obligation in the child and his family by making possible such a prospect.

Supporting an initially outgroup relative or non-family member in one's own home creates *utang na loob* on the part of the supported and his immediate relatives. The supported may work, in which case he will give much of his earnings to the supporting family. Or, he may perform services about the house which partially pay his debt. The situations so prevalent, particularly in city and town homes, of poorer relatives living in the household and acting in the capacity of servants need not dismay the non-Filipino. True, they do heavy housework, but with a difference—they sit with the family at meals, meaning that they are treated as members of the family. Helping the mistress of the house with the work is part payment on their *utang na loob*. Once they gain the status of ingroup member in that household, they continue to perform these duties in accordance with the group's expectations that a member of the family must do his share in the functioning of the household. *Utang na loob* becomes a relatively unconscious consideration for one so adopted as long as he remains in the household, but it becomes consciously significant in his own family's relationship to those supporting him.

Professional services rendered free of charge or for a token fee also engender *utang na loob*. When a Filipino consults a doctor or a lawyer, he may choose him on a kinship basis, as a casual acquaintance, or merely because he has heard good reports about him. If a token fee or no fee at all is charged, particularly if the doctor has paid a home visit or if the lawyer

has devoted a great deal of time to one's legal case, the patient/client gratitude is high. If he has paid the regular consultation fee, no *utang na loob* is felt by the patient/client—unless the doctor or lawyer is done far more than the regular fee calls for, for example, coming in the middle of a stormy night to sit by a patient's bedside for many hours. Pal reports that approximately 90 per cent of the people in a Leyte barrio acknowledge a debt of gratitude to the midwife, *hilot* (masseur) and *herbolario* (traditional doctor or herbalist).¹¹ For there is a modality of generosity and pleasantness which cannot be repaid in coin.

Giving credit is another area for the creation of *utang na loob*. Even though many instances of borrowing are ostensibly of a contractual or quasi-contractual nature, the borrower still feels a strong debt of gratitude to the lender *for making available the money at the time he needed it*. In cases where this is so, the borrower will acknowledge an inner debt, even if he has already paid off the principal and high interest rates, because a special service was rendered beyond a strictly contractual arrangement. (The sense of gratitude is even greater when little or no interest is charged.) This tallies with Gouldner's observation that the value of the benefit and the debt developed in proportion to it vary with the intensity of need at the time.¹² As a Leyte proverb puts it, "A debt of money can be paid and once paid, it is paid; but a debt of gratitude may be paid, but the debtor is still indebted."¹³

In accordance with the operation of *utang na loob* reciprocity, therefore, giving gifts to bank officials or persons in high positions in money-lending institutions is not viewed by many Filipinos as immoral since these gifts are merely tokens of their gratitude. When the gifts are presented at Christmas, by definition a gift-giving time, even the most moral official finds it hard to refuse without insulting the giver, provided the gift does not go beyond proper proportions. As Marcel

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 432.

¹² Gouldner, p. 171.

¹³ Pal, *op. cit.*, p. 431.

Mauss has written, the gift involves not only the obligation to make a return but also the obligation to receive.¹⁴ The Philippine bureaucracy has not generally accepted the concept of impersonal service; gift-giving and receiving for service rendered is common.

Extending further the workings of *utang na loob*, when a government official in Manila gives a person special treatment, facilitating his papers ahead of others, it becomes virtually mandatory to show one's gratitude for this service with a few pesos, or by sending special food to his house, or by taking him to dinner and perhaps a nightclub. Obviously, the line between bribery and reciprocal giving is a thin one, and it is easy for an official to rationalize bribery in terms of *utang na loob* payment.

However, the gift is usually presented *after* the initial service is rendered, sometimes long afterwards and at an appropriate festive occasion. To give before the service is rendered would smack of bribery, while to give shortly after the service would be crass and crude. But a decent interval assuages the conscience of most highly moral individuals because the boundary between bribery and *utang na loob* reciprocity has been rather clearly marked by the lapse in time. Indeed when an outright bribe is in the offing, the usual procedure is for the parties involved to have a meaningful conversation beforehand, each sounding out the other in euphemistic language to see what the conditions will be. If this is the case, then the source of obligation is now a quasi-contract or contract and no longer *utang na loob*.

The repugnance of many non-Filipinos and many westernized Filipinos at this "hand-out" situation is not matched by the rest of Filipino society, simply because Filipinos rarely interpret post-service gift-giving as bad. To them it is not bribery. How can the fulfillment of one's social obligations, brought about through *utang na loob*, be anything but good,

¹⁴ Marcel Mauss, *The Gift* (Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1954), pp. 10-11.

reasons the average Filipino. It is the system he has learned as a member of his society; it is part of his culture.

Another occasion for the development of *utang na loob* arises when a person in a strategic position acts as an intermediary between two people or groups. In Tulayan, the individual who has connections in Manila hospitals and uses them to facilitate the admission of a Tulayan resident as a patient creates almost eternal gratitude in the family he helps. It is not easy to gain entry into crowded government hospitals or private charity wards in Manila. Even after the patient is admitted, it takes some skill to get the medicines, x-rays, blood plasma, and various tests free or at a very low rate. The poor people of Tulayan cannot afford to pay much, if anything, and so an intermediary is of tremendous help. The patient and his family will spend the rest of their lifetime repaying their *utang na loob* to their friend, the intermediary. Since hospitalization is being resorted to by Tuluyan folk at a rate faster than free or low cost facilities are being made available, these opportunities for *utang na loob* creation will undoubtedly increase in frequency.

Getting a job is another operation that involves an intermediary and *utang na loob*. In a community where the great majority has not gone beyond fourth grade in school, jobs outside the area are hard to come by and highly coveted, particularly where a steady income is guaranteed. The natural increase in population, aided by the lowered infant mortality rate of the past sixty years, has put growing pressure on the limited resources of the Tulayan area. Some of the men turn elsewhere for their livelihood, flooding the already swollen ranks of unskilled laborers who hope to find work in Manila. The person through whose intercession a job is acquired becomes one's *utang na loob* creditor for life.

There are other instances in Tulayan where *utang na loob* may be developed, but they are not major occasions like those already discussed. Worthy of re-mention, however is the *lusong*, or cooperative work bee, where Pedro's inability to repay in equivalent terms those helpers who do not own a *salam-*

bao and are not moving their house means a creation of *utang na loob*. The *utang na loob* developed in the loan of a jeep or banca or other items which cannot be repaid in kind belongs in the same category.

Although we have discussed these occasions insofar as they create *utang na loob*, one must bear in mind that they may also, in relation to different sets of persons, be occasions for reciprocation. Thus, the doctor who gives free service and medicine may be repaying a favor once done for him by the patient, someone in the patient's family, or by the person who recommended the doctor to the patient. The job-getting intermediary may be reciprocating an act performed by someone in the job seeker's ingroup.

Festive occasions provide the best opportunities for whole or partial payment of one's *utang na loob* to a maximum number of people at one time. Any family will have at least one of these a year in the form of the fiesta celebration, and probably an additional one in a baptism, birthday (a relatively recent occasion for festivity), marriage, or wake-funeral. Elections provide especially propitious opportunities.

All these festive occasions involve a large supply of food on the part of the celebrant, and each celebration of this kind provides an opportunity for *utang na loob* debtors of the host to reciprocate, at least in part, by sending food, much of it already cooked, to his house on the day of the festivities. One tries to send meat dishes and the specialties of the area—in Tuluyan prawns, large crabs, stuffed bangus (milkfish), pickled green vegetables, and other high prestige foods defined as fiesta fare and certain to find particular favor with the guests from other municipalities.

If one does not have much to give on these occasions, women in the debtor family will often go to the house of the creditor and help with the tremendous amount of food preparation which must be accomplished. As people sit around the table after the baptism, wedding, or final funeral prayers, equal and lower-status relatives, friends in the ingroup as well as *utang na loob* debtors help serve and run back and forth to the pre-

paration area to refill the fast-emptying dishes. At weddings, the groom's family provides everything. Again, ingroup members and *utang na loob* debtors come to help and occasionally give presents, too. Others, particularly outgroup relatives, restrict themselves to money gifts, while non-relatives tend to give presents. At funerals these same people help with the arrangements and the food, and attend the nine-day period of prayer for the dead. This may go on year after year, until the debt is considered settled with interest. Or, in the superordinate-subordinate relationship, the partially paid-up debtor who is in good standing feels secure in asking another favor of his creditor, in effect renewing his loan. In this disparate relationship, the subordinate party maintains his good credit rating by making practical admission of the debt that he owes: through his promptness to do service and give small gifts, he pronounces himself the other man's perpetual debtor.

A particularly fruitful occasion for reciprocation is an election. Political leaders, cognizant of the social system, exploit it by deliberately cultivating *utang na loob* debts toward themselves so that when voting time comes, they can reclaim these by requesting the debtors to vote for them or for their candidate. In general, the debtor's sense of honor and propriety forces him to comply regardless of the quality of the candidate involved or his party. This is also true of elections in private groups—clubs, for example. The man who might perform the job better by efficiency standards may lose the election simply because of his opponent has a larger group of followers, among them many *utang na loob* debtors. A vote in Tulayan is considered a substantial repayment and is the object of a great deal of competition. Voting in accordance with an *utang na loob* creditor's request can wipe out one's debt to him, unless of course, this is ruled out by the original circumstances which created that debt. (That some debts can never be fully repaid has already been mentioned.)

The functions of festive occasions, therefore, include not only the fulfillment of religious obligations, meeting family and friends, distribution of wealth, and opportunities for status climbing or reaffirming one's high status; they are also ma-

for means of repaying one's social obligations, mandatory in Philippine culture, or at least of indicating to the invited that one recognizes an existing debt relationship.

UTANG NA LOOB: SUMMARY

Summarizing the nature of *utang na loob* reciprocity, one notes that it is characterized by unequal repayment with no prior agreement, explicit or implicit, on the form or quantity of the return. The only definite requirement is, in the coordinate case, the obligation to repay with interest, while in the superordinate-subordinate case, it is the recognition and admission of the debt.

When the coordinate debtor reciprocates out of *utang na loob*, he is frequently not sure just how much of the debt he has paid back. And even when he believes that he has repaid with interest, he cannot be sure the other party thinks so, too. This element of insecurity regarding the fulfilment of the debt can maintain the relationship indefinitely, or at least as long as the parties remain geographically close enough to each other to continue interacting. Because an *utang na loob* relationship is rarely terminated, the statuses of the two parties are, ideally, never equal: if they began as individuals of approximately the same socioeconomic status, the services they exchange place now one, and now the other, in the creditor's position; if they began as individuals of clearly unequal status, their service exchanges will only rarely disturb this relationship. In the former instance, where near-equals have exchanged services, they may not be sure who has emerged the creditor. In such a case, the fear of being termed "walang utang na loob" and "walang hiya" by the other party often prevents complacency about debt fulfilment and forces continued reciprocation.

Affective sentiment is at a maximum in *utang na loob* reciprocity, particularly when the debt of gratitude is so great that a lifetime is insufficient for repayment. The element of self-presentation is also extremely important, for the spirit in which a service is rendered, the giving of self that is involved, lends an emotional content to the relationship that is lacking in contractual and quasi-contractual reciprocity.

OVERALL SUMMARY

Three kinds of reciprocity have been distinguished: contractual, quasi-contractual, and *utang na loob*. The characteristics of each are summarized in the accompanying chart and, in all but one feature, need not be further elaborated. Calling for some additional explanation are the functioning of *hiya*, or shame, and the way in which this feeling differs from *utang na loob* itself.

Chart

CHARACTERISTICS OF CONTRACTUAL, QUASI-CONTRACTUAL
AND *UTANG NA LOOB* RECIPROCITY

| FEATURES | TYPES OF RECIPROCITY | | | |
|--|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|---|--|
| | Contractual | Quasi-contractual | <i>Utang na loob</i> | |
| | | | Coordinate | Super-ordinate-subordinate |
| Expected Payment | Equivalent | | With interest | Partial, incomplete |
| Agreement on terms | Explicit as to amount and form | Implicit as to amount and form | No agreement as to amount and form | |
| Repayment in full | Unmistakable when made | | Uncertain even when made | Not expected |
| Status of obligation after reciprocation | Balanced and dead | Balanced but dormant | Not balanced, alive, but shifted to other party | Not balanced, alive, and still with same party |
| Emotions involved | Insignificant | | Very significant | Significant |
| Source of <i>hiya</i> | Non-reciprocation | | Non-recognition of debt | |

Whether the reciprocity be contractual, quasi-contractual, or *utang na loob*, *hiya* is the sanction of which ensures pay-

ment. The person who fails to fulfill a contract experiences a sense of shame because he has not kept his word. Thus, the man who does not pay his *utang*, or contractual debt, to the sari-sari store owner at the end of the month, as per agreement, is *hiya*. No deeper sentiment of gratitude is involved, however. *Hiya* also dictates repayment of *utang na loob*, but here an intervening factor emerges because *hiya* in this case is more the product of a failure to recognize one's debt of gratitude than shame at simple non-payment of it as in exchanges of a contractual or quasi-contractual nature. The family which does not cast even one of its votes for a candidate toward whom family members recognize strong *utang na loob* will be *hiya* less from its failure to vote for him than from the realization that the members have not lived up to their obligation to reciprocate in the manner and at the time expected, indeed demanded, by their creditor. Reneging on a contractual or quasi-contractual debt causes shame because the debtor has delayed or failed to make payment; in *utang na loob* reciprocity, the charge of "*walang hiya*" is leveled when the debtor has not recognized the need to repay.

Hiya, is thus distinguishable from *utang na loob*, the latter being an operating principle in Philippine society and the former the universal sanction reinforcing the desirability of feeling and honoring *utang na loob*. *Hiya* is not necessarily accompanied by *utang na loob*, but *utang na loob* is always reinforced by *hiya*. The man who is shamed because he has been scolded publicly does not recognize *utang na loob* as being involved in this situation; it simply does not apply. But when a man was hired through the personal kindness of the company president, and finds himself nonetheless joining his fellow workers in a strike, he cannot help feeling *hiya*, despite the reassurances of his co-strikers: in turning against his benefactor in this manner, he knows he has failed to recognize a primal debt of gratitude to him.

DISCUSSION

Although some manifestations of reciprocity are peculiar to the Philippines, the principle at work is common to all socie-

ties. This norm has been the subject of considerable study and several classic treatises, among them those of Marcel Mauss, Bronislaw Malinowski,¹⁵ and Claude Lévi-Strauss.¹⁶ A short review of their contributions will recall to mind the universality of reciprocity and its place in the social order.

All three writers insist that gift exchange is not so much a purely economic transaction as it is social reciprocation. Mauss makes clear that in primitive society, reciprocity plays an extremely important role which is not primarily of an economic nature but "a total social fact," that is, connected simultaneously with social, religious, economic, legal, and other aspects of the culture.

Malinowski's famous analysis of the Melanesian *kula* ring system of exchange also emphasizes the social nature of reciprocation. Long necklaces of red shell move in a clockwise direction in the area and are exchanged with bracelets of white shell moving counter-clockwise. A member of the *kula* has definite trading partners, one set living in the region north and east of him, who give him the white shell bracelets and who, in turn, receive the red necklaces. The bracelets are then exchanged with another set of trading partners to the south and east, who reciprocate with necklaces. One gift is repaid after some time by another gift, with no bartering or haggling involved.

This ritualized gift exchange serves to bind its members in a series of alliances. The items themselves have little economic value; nor are they worn as adornment. Their worth lies in the prestige they give the temporary owner, not by their mere possession, but by the consequence of their legitimate possession. For the man who owns them takes pride in recounting their history, in boasting from whom he acquired them,

¹⁵ Bronislaw Malinowski, "Reciprocity and Obligation," in Manis and Clark (eds.) *Man and Society* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1960), pp. 223-28.

¹⁶ Claude Lévi-Strauss, "The Principle of Reciprocity," in Coser and Rosenberg, *Sociological Theory: A Book of Readings* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1957), pp. 84-94.

and in proclaiming with whom he will exchange them next. What ownership really establishes is the identity of his trading partners. The more prestigious they are, the higher is the owner's status. Bracelets and necklaces are valued, therefore, not for their substance, but for their source and destination.

To Lévi-Strauss, reciprocity is a means for the transmission of goods, particularly in more primitive societies. He discusses the Kwakiutl potlatch, showing that the characteristic destruction of goods is a response to another party's having done the same. By throwing more blankets into the flames than his rival, the Kwakiutl Indian enhances his claim to the super-ordinate position, crushing his challenger. A western counterpart of this ceremony, remarks Lévi-Strauss, is the Christmas gift exchange, which he terms a gigantic potlatch.

He also cites the reciprocal pouring of wine by fellow guests at small inns in southern France. Here the initially hostile situation of strangers at a table is made friendly by one man's pouring his wine into the other's glass, inducing the other to do the same for him. Obviously, neither has gained in an economic sense; what has been accomplished instead by the exchange is the breaking down of barriers and the substituting of sociability for strained silence.

Mauss, Malinowski, and Lévi-Strauss, therefore, attest to the universality of the principle of reciprocity and agree that it creates, continues, and motivates social bonds. The data presented in this paper indicate that the norm has similar functions in the Philippines.

In a more recent statement, Alvin Gouldner has reiterated the role of reciprocity in stabilizing the social system. But, in addition, he stresses that it is normally improper to break off reciprocal relations, that is, to stop the see-saw process at *any* point in the cycle. Furthermore, a man lays himself open to similar blame by trying to discharge his debt too soon after it is incurred.¹⁷ People tend, rather to search for mechanisms to induce others to remain socially their debtors. Non-recipro-

¹⁷ Gouldner, *op. cit.*, p. 175.

cation and too-hasty reciprocation are equally reprehensible; either of these responses, if they became common behavior, would drain the social system of one potent source of its life, reciprocity.

Consider the Philippines in the light of Gouldner's observation. Two features of the *utang na loob* coordinate relationship function to perpetuate the existence of a debt. One is payment with interest, and the other, ambiguity. Practically speaking, it makes little difference whether a person, on the one hand, wants to be clear of the debt, and so returns service received with a definite addition over and above the principal or, on the other, not certain whether he has discharged his debt, keeps adding further services in hopes of turning the tables on his creditor. In either case, the social bond continues and is even strengthened.

In a society such as the Philippines, where the gap between social classes is marked, *utang na loob* reciprocity stabilizes the social system in a special manner by acting as a bridge between the separated sets. It particularizes the functional interrelationship of the upper and lower classes; that is, the rights and obligations of the upper class toward the lower class and vice versa are translated by it into a functional relationship between *this* upper-class person and *this* lower-class person. Thus, the general expectancy that the upper class will share its surplus with the lower class now becomes a particular expectancy between *this landlord*, for instance, and *this tenant*.

When the tenant takes the landlord a dozen eggs or performs services, the tenant's relatively meager gifts ensure abundant return. For in keeping with his status, the landlord reciprocates in the manner befitting a man of means. This disparity in actual worth of the gifts exchanged in this reciprocal relationship is sanctioned by the Philippine cultural value of sharing one's surplus with others. *Utang na loob* reciprocity is the operating principle which enables a person to lodge a claim on the rich man's wealth.

Worthy of further study are the ways in which reciprocity operates in a predominantly redistributive, traditional eco-

mony, and the place it assumes in a cash economy. Certainly, the long-range trend in the Philippines has been from a redistribution-dominated to a market-dominated economy, and one might speculate that as the redistributive pattern gives ground to the cash and market economy, *utang na loob* reciprocity will decline correspondingly. For both redistribution of surplus and *utang na loob* reciprocity are designed to achieve security through interdependence. Hence the cash economy and contractual reciprocity may belong together, in a functional sense, just as much as redistribution and *utang na loob* reciprocity. The testing of this hypothesis and others like it should result in explanations for the ambivalent attitude many modern Filipinos have toward *utang na loob*.

For there is an increasing resistance to the pattern of *utang na loob* reciprocity. Barefaced refusal to comply with the traditional claims of the system is not very common, but it does occur. More common are less drastic means of evasion. As cash becomes more readily available in various parts of the country, certainly in Tulayan, people who would have used the *lusong*, or *bayanihan*, method for getting a job done often prefer to hire laborers on a contract basis, pay them as agreed, and end the ties there. Not only may the work be done more efficiently, but no *utang na loob* is developed. To the man with interests outside his barrio community, repayment of an *utang na loob* debt may prove more burdensome than the original help given was worth. He tries, therefore, to avoid these relationships as far as he is able to in a small community. His urban counterpart is even more anxious to escape from this drain on his already heavily taxed resources. The person who does free himself from these binding relationships may do so at the expense of many friendships, but at the same time enhance his upward mobility.

Although avoidance of the original debt is the safest way to free oneself from *utang na loob* claims, channeling the payment into an alternate response also prevents a creditor from depleting the surplus one has built up and would prefer to use for himself. Should an *utang na loob* creditor, for example, come to borrow money, one can explain that he has invested

all his surplus in a sewing machine which he is still paying for in installments, or in tuition fees for his children, or in an insurance policy. Where, as in this case, the debt is not so great, the creditor cannot really expect the debtor to go to extraordinary lengths to repay. It is true that the creditor may level the charges of "*walang utang na loob*" and "*walang hiya*" at the debtor; but since there is also a possibility that he may not, under the circumstances, the debtor is often willing to run that risk. If the debt of gratitude is extremely great, however, the debtor is expected to do everything possible to grant the favor, even to the extent of putting a second mortgage on his sewing machine or claiming the cash surrender value on his life insurance policy.

The avoidance and channeling patterns just described are evidences that Filipinos are developing effective ways of adapting to a changing way of life. Traditional relationships of interdependence are being modified and alternative responses are being found more congruent with the new situation. Education, for example, is so highly valued that the parent who is struggling to put his children through college is not really expected to repay his debts of gratitude in the form of cash loans. The society condones payment in other equally acceptable ways. Since the amount and form of repayment of *utang na loob* are undetermined, and since one's debt may last a lifetime, a great deal of leeway is given to persons involved in the *utang na loob* relationship before the charge of "*walang hiya*" can be truthfully and effectively applied.¹⁸

In some instances, the Filipino working in a factory finds himself in a new sub-culture characterized by values derived

¹⁸ The non-Filipino living in the Philippines may wonder what his commitment to the norm of reciprocity should be. A partial answer evolves from the fact that Filipinos do not really expect a non-Filipino to act exactly like themselves. Nevertheless, the allowances made for the non-Filipino should not prevent him from making some adaptations to the local social system. Perhaps even more important is that he try to understand the values of Philippine society and the pressures which motivate Filipino behavior. With this knowledge and the consequent empathy, his dealings with Filipinos should be more satisfactory on both sides.

from the Western industrial world. Management rewards efficiency and places less value on personal ties. The workman who wants to succeed tries to adapt himself to the new impersonal ways, repelling the advances of relatives who seek to exploit his favorable position in the company. To excuse his action—to himself and his offended relatives and friends—he appeals fatalistically to the impossibility of fighting the system. In reality, he may be delighted that the company has provided him with a convenient way of avoiding traditional relationships like *utang na loob* reciprocity. He can now devote his efforts to his promotion, secure in the knowledge that the company backs his new set of values. This kind of behavior, however, is still the exception rather than the rule. With increasing industrialization, it should become more and more common.