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## Friendship in the Rural Philippines

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## Notes and Comments

### Friendship in the Rural Philippines\*

ROBERT J. MORAIS

Given the importance of personal relationships in the lowland Christian Philippines, it is surprising that there have been no systematic studies of friendship in the country.<sup>1</sup> While the topic has been mentioned briefly by Lynch and Fox, Ashburn, Mendez and Jocano, and Jocano, far more attention has been paid to other structured personal bonds than to friendship per se.<sup>2</sup> The only extensive treatments of friendship in the Philippines are Kiefer's works on the Moslem Tausug of Jolo.<sup>3</sup> Thus, what Hart refers to as "proven friendship," and indeed all forms of friendship in the lowland Christian Philippines, suffer from a paucity of ethnographic data.<sup>4</sup>

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1. See Robert J. Morais, "Dimensions of Interpersonal Relationships in a Lowland Philippine Town" (Ph.D. diss., Department of Anthropology, Univ. of Pittsburgh, 1980).

2. Confer Frank Lynch, and Robert B. Fox, "Philippine Social Organization," in *Human Relations Area Files Handbook of the Philippines*, Vol. 1 (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1956), pp. 413-30; Franklin Ashburn, "Some Recent Inquiries into the Structure-Function of Conflict Gangs in the Manila City Jail," *Asian Studies* 3 (1965): 126-44; Paz P. Mendez and F. Landa Jocano, *The Filipino Family in its Rural and Urban Orientation: Two Case Studies* (Manila: Centro Escolar Univ. Research and Dev't. Center, 1974); and F. Landa Jocano, *Slum as a Way of Life* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 1975).

3. Thomas Kiefer, "Institutionalized Friendship and Warfare Among the Tausug of Jolo," *Ethnology* 12 (1968):225-44 and *The Tausug: Violence and Law in a Philippine Moslem Society* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1972).

4. Donn Hart, "Christian Filipino Society Approaching the Twenty-First Century," *Silliman Journal* 17 (1971):37.

The purpose of this study is to describe patterns of friendship in a lowland Christian town in Central Luzon. Friendship will be viewed as part of a larger system of relationships, i.e., a personal alliance system functioning as an anchor and effective model for other personal bonds.<sup>5</sup>

### THE SETTING AND CONTEXT

This study deals with friendship in the municipality of Tanay, located in Rizal Province, fifty-five km. southeast of Manila. Tanay is an occupationally diverse town of 35,000 persons living in nineteen neighborhoods (*barangays*). The town may be roughly divided into two classes: the upper class includes lawyers, engineers, government employees, business men and women, and other professionals while the lower class includes farmers, fishermen, shop owners, laborers, and drivers of mini-buses, motorcycles with side cars, and other vehicles which they operate within and between municipalities.

There are numerous forms of interpersonal relationships in Tanay. Patron/client bonds between landowners and tenant farmers are common and are frequently coupled with ties of ritual kinship (based on the Spanish introduced *compadrazgo* system) and/or a special debt of gratitude known as *utang na loob* (literally "a debt from inside oneself").<sup>6</sup> Either or both of these latter bonds may be combined with real kinship, market exchange partnerships, and/or friendship. Kinship in Tanay, as elsewhere in the lowland Philippines, is bilateral with a personal kindred including affinal and consanguineal kin. Among close kin, loyalty and solidarity are important but these qualities may vary among distant kin.<sup>7</sup>

5. See Frank Lynch, *Social Class in a Bicol Town*, Research Series no. 1 (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Philippine Studies Program, 1959), and "Perspectives on Filipino Clannishness," *Philippine Sociological Review* 20 (1973):73-77; Stuart Schlegel, "Personal Alliances in Lowland Philippine Structure," *Anthropology Tomorrow* 10 (1964):50-65; William Davis and Mary Hollnsteiner, "Some Recent Trends in Philippine Social Anthropology," *Anthropologica N.S.* 11 (1969): 59-84; and Hart, "Christian Filipino Society."

6. See Lynch and Fox, "Philippine Social Organization," and Donn Hart, *Compadrinazgo: Ritual Kinship in the Philippines* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois Univ. Press, 1977). See also Charles Kaut, "*Utang na loob*: A System of Contractual Obligation Among Tagalogs," *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology* 17 (1961): 256-72; and Mary R. Hollnsteiner, "Reciprocity in Lowland Philippines," in *Four Readings on Philippine Values*, Frank Lynch and Alfonso de Guzman II, eds., IPC Papers No. 2 (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila Univ. Press, 1973).

7. See Lynch, *Social Class in a Bicol Town*, pp. 49-55; and Davis and Hollnsteiner, "Philippine Social Anthropology," p. 66.

Market exchange partnerships (*suki*) involve implicit agreements between suppliers and vendors and between vendors and their customers to engage in regular transactions. Such regularity generates trust and provides a means of establishing a secure linkage which is a basis for loyalty and the extension of credit.<sup>8</sup> Ritual kinship is sometimes an outgrowth of *suki* bonds and functions to strengthen the relationship. This is also true of friendship, a bond we shall now consider in some detail.

#### FRIENDSHIP IN TANAY

The basic defining qualities of friendship (*pagkakaibigan*) in Tanay include mutual aid, sibling-like attachment, trust, companionship, camaraderie, and mutual understanding.<sup>9</sup> These general attributes must, however, be seen relative to specific kinds of friendship in Tanay. Before describing these, we shall take a brief look at the development of friendship during the course of life.

#### FRIENDSHIP AND THE LIFE CYCLE

Pre-school children in Tanay have localized, often kin based, cross-sex play groups. When boys and girls begin school, they segregate sexually and develop friendships with non-kin. As they grow older, children begin to associate with particular groups of age-mates. These groups (*barkadas*) are primary units of interaction for young men and women in Tanay. During adolescence close dyadic friendship evolves.

After marriage, household responsibilities can interfere with the maintenance of close friendship but for men, and to a lesser extent women, casual social friendships prevail. Some form of friendship continues to be an important locus of interaction, solidarity, and information exchange through old age.

8. See James N. Anderson, "Buy and Sell and Economic Personalism: Foundations for Philippine Entrepreneurship," *Asian Survey* 9 (1969):641-68; Marie Christina Blanc Szanton, *A Right to Survive: Subsistence Marketing in a Lowland Philippine Town* (Univ. Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State Univ. Press, 1972); and William Davis, *Social Relations in a Philippine Market* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1973).

9. Details on the questionnaire and other methods used in this study can be found in Morais, "Interpersonal Relations," pp. 15-24 and 234-39.

## KINDS OF FRIENDSHIP

People in Tanay recognize three levels of friendship: close and true friendship, social friendship, and fake or superficial friendship. A fourth category, idealized friendship, while not verbally identified, is nonetheless an important form of friendship conceptually.

*Close and True Friendship:* For most people in Tanay the terms for close, intimate friend (*matalik na kaibigan*) and real, true friend (*tunay na kaibigan*) both denote a dyadic bond entailing a high degree of interaction, mutual aid, trust, loyalty, attachment, and self-disclosure. The former phrase (*matalik na kaibigan*) refers more to self-disclosure than the latter (*tunay na kaibigan*) which connotes proven assistance in a time of need. Yet mutual aid is also important to intimate friendship. When individuals were asked what sentiments they associated with close, intimate friendship both the knowledge that their friend would help them and a sense of intimacy were highly ranked. This response documents the interplay of the emotional and instrumental aspects of friendship in Tanay, for often sentiment is a basis for mutual assistance.<sup>10</sup>

The following description of a close friendship by a thirty-seven year old man illustrates many of the attributes of the relationship:

This childhood friend of mine has been my friend ever since I can remember. We played together as children and have been constant companions ever since. We are like brothers. We are emotionally at ease with each other and confide in one another. We go drinking together and have good times. I have a special debt of gratitude (*utang na loob*) to him because he has helped me many times when no one else would. He gives me money whenever I run out if he has money to spare; he advises me to refrain from vices.

Close friendship tends to be localized with most close friends residing in the same neighborhood. This is more true for women than men because the mobility of women is more restricted by

10. See Ruben Reina, "Two Patterns of Friendship in a Guatemalan Community," *American Anthropologist* 61 (1959):44-50; and Eric R. Wolf, "Kinship, Friendship and Patron-Client Relations in Complex Societies," in *The Social Anthropology of Complex Societies*, Michael Banton, ed. (New York: Praeger, 1966), pp. 1-22. Both have made a dichotomy between emotional and instrumental friendship. In Tanay, and I think elsewhere, both of these qualities can be present in a single relationship. See also Robert Paine, "In Search of Friendship: An Exploratory Analysis in 'Middle-Class' Culture," *Man* 4 (1969): 506.

their child-rearing and household responsibilities. Further, it is expected that men do not spend too much time around the house. For both men and women, however, close friendship tends to be contained within the boundaries of the town. Lastly, the general qualities noted for close friendship do not vary by sex, age, or social class but close friendship normally does not cross-cut social classes.

*Social Friendship:* While both close and social friendship involve many of the same activities and sentiments, social friendship does not entail the dyadic intimacy and intensity of commitment that characterizes close friendship. Social friends identify one another as friends (*kaibigan*) or gangmates (*kabarkada*), the latter referring to the polyadic gangs (*barkada*) which are the context for most social friendships.

The *barkada* is a group of males and/or females for which the adage "all for one and one for all" ("*lahat para sa isa at isa para sa lahat*") exemplifies the group ethos. Members of these informal groups name their *barkadas* and join with them daily (for males and, more rarely, for females, nightly as well) for social activities such as card-playing, athletics, walks, sharing of gossip, and, for males, drinking. Payment for all of these activities is accomplished by pooling whatever money each member has; those with more money pay more, though ultimately the contributions will balance out.

There are few teenagers and young adults without *barkadas*. These groups evolve from play groups and school classes and endure a number of years. If one moves away from a town or becomes interested in different activities (e.g., basketball rather than drinking), he or she will join another gang. Even when a gang is closely knit, all members may not attend all activities for reasons of lack of interest or other obligations. Ranging in size from four to a dozen members, all members will only be present for a major event, such as the birthday of a gangmate, though there is a good deal of variation in this pattern.

*Barkada* leadership is usually informal, contingent on the individual who suggests a particular activity. Occasionally, however, one charismatic youth may be the informal head of the group. *Barkadas* exhibit strong internal solidarity and camaraderie until they are disrupted by marriage, which involves responsibilities that conflict with the demanding social activities of the group. Men, be-

cause of their greater mobility, tend to maintain their barkada affiliations longer than women whose social friendships tend to be based more on convenience (i.e., activities such as card-playing, which allow women to watch their children while they play). In contrast, it is not uncommon to see a group of half a dozen middle-aged men gathered around a table on a warm evening drinking until intoxicated, then taking a walk to the *plaza*.<sup>11</sup> A twenty year old male described his barkada in the following way:

My barkada is called "Durpox." We were seatmates in school and got to know each other. We started talking, helping each other cheat. We started seeing each other a lot and got closer, sharing problems, helping with girls. Now we get together almost every night. We roam around, get drunk, eat snacks, play basketball, sing together, court girls, and go to parties. Sometimes we get into fights and then we always support each other. When we go out we each give our money to one person who pays for everything. One of us is from a wealthy family and he puts in more but it doesn't matter. We share for the sake of friendship. When I get married, I will probably see my gangmates less often but I will still be a part of this barkada.

While the barkada is the major form of social friendship, social friendship may also involve people who join one another to play cards or other gambling games or to sit and chat as the day passes. These people consider themselves friends but are casual, occasional friends. Indeed, many would identify such people as neighbors (*kapitbahay*) with whom they are "friendly".

*Fake or Superficial Friendship:* There are occasions when one who has been considered a close or social friend violates the rules of the relationship by denying assistance, spreading gossip about his/her friend, or otherwise failing to demonstrate the trust, loyalty, and understanding that is central to close and, to a lesser extent, social friendship. On such occasions, a quarrel may result and the feeling is one of hurt and frustration, especially when one's self-esteem (*amor propio*) has been injured. Such conflicts are often resolved with the help of mutual friends; sometimes, however, one discovers a foible that precludes friendship and avoidance is the rule. One forty-five year old man recalled:

I once had a close friend who borrowed a large sum of money from me. After a few months, I realized that he never intended to pay me back. At first, I was angry and frustrated; later I was hurt that he did not value my

11. This practice is recognized as a "rite of intensification" of social friendship and barkada identity by the participants.

friendship enough to pay his debt. He never even expressed a sense of gratitude to me for the loan! I have not seen him in many years and could never be his friend again after what he did. A man who I thought was a close friend turned out to be a false friend. That makes me very sad.

*Idealized Friendship:* There are some relationships in which one or both of the individuals involved may regard the other as a friend but, in fact, the relationship has deteriorated to little more than an acquaintance (*kakilala*). The reason may be a change in residence, the demands of marriage and children, a feeling that frequent interaction would strain the relationship or simply a lack of opportunity for interaction. The stated qualities of the relationship may be identical to close friendship but there is little behavior that actually demonstrates that such a relationship exists. The case of Nene and Patring, two twenty-seven year old women, illustrates an idealized friendship:

Nene and Patring were childhood friends. They grew up in the same neighborhood and went through school together. At twenty-one, Nene married and moved to her husband's home in another neighborhood. Patring continued to live with her parents. Six years later, they see each other only when Patring visits Nene's daughter to whom she is godmother. When asked about their friendship independently, Nene will describe Patring as a close friend and from the tone of her description, one would think the two women saw one another frequently. Patring, on the other hand, recognizes that the friendship the two women had has faded and considers Nene a casual friend.

Idealized friendships such as this one are often perpetuated when one of the friends asks the other to become a ritual kinsman. Over time, however, the relationship will dissolve unless a great effort is made by one or both parties to salvage the friendship.

#### FRIENDSHIP AND OTHER INTERPERSONAL BONDS

The four kinds of friendship that have been described are each based on affective qualities (e.g., trust, loyalty) and rules for behavior (e.g., solidarity, generalized reciprocity). These attributes distinguish friendship from other dyadic and polyadic bonds such as close and distant kinship, ritual kinship, market exchange partnerships, utang na loob reciprocity, and patron/client bonds. These relationships provide, like friendship, linkages between and among individuals. The question we shall now consider is: "What is the

role of friendship relative to these other personal bonds?"

#### FRIENDSHIP AND KINSHIP

Close kin are rarely considered friends. This is due in part to the label – and the role it entails – of “brother” or “sister” which has cognitive priority for individuals when considering close relationships. Thus, close kinship and friendship are mutually exclusive conceptual categories.

There are other reasons, primarily behavioral, for this exclusivity. Because one already has an intimate relationship with siblings, he or she need not couple that relationship with friendship to intensify it. Related to this point, many people claim to prefer “new” interactional partners to siblings with whom they share a long history. An additional factor is that because of the emphasis on respect and obedience based on sibling position, siblings would feel constrained in their behavior if their siblings were also their friends, a relationship based on equality. Some informants contended that the age difference among siblings precluded friendship, but differences of up to five years are common for friends, suggesting that it is the association of age and prescribed roles among siblings, not age itself, that is at issue. Finally, because siblings feel highly protective of one another, they do not want to expose one another to the potentially dangerous or social unacceptable activities in which they and their friends might participate. A woman of eighteen expressed a number of these points when she noted:

I am not friends with my sister because we share the same house; we grew up together. I know her too well. From my friends I learn new things. Also, I feel protective of her (the sister is a few years younger) and I would always be watchful of her if we went out with friends. I would not have much fun.

More distant kin (usually cousins to the third degree) are often friends, especially gangmates. These individuals are given an opportunity for contact through their families but do not have the extensive sibling-like obligations and responsibilities that would prohibit friendship.

#### FRIENDSHIP AND RITUAL KINSHIP

Many informants noted that their friends (close and social) are

also their ritual kinsmen, revealing the importance of friendship as a factor in the selection of ritual kin.<sup>12</sup> Ritual kinship functions to formalize and intensify a bond between friends.<sup>13</sup> The actual degree of intensity varies across individuals, however, and some ritual kinship bonds have little to do with friendship.<sup>14</sup> Instead, they are merely means of extending one's personal alliance group. Yet when ritual kinship is an outgrowth of friendship the result is a bond high in affective content and dynamic in social exchange.

#### FRIENDSHIP AND DEBTS OF GRATITUDE

Utang na loob reciprocity cross-cuts many personal relationships, including friendship. As both an antecedent to and a product of friendship it creates and intensifies bonds of sentiment through personalized exchange. It often transforms social, casual friendships into more intimate relationships. As a college student in Tanay phrased it:

Utang na loob is one of the tests of friendship. When a friend has helped you, you know that he or she is someone you can count on; he or she is a real friend (tunay na kaibigan).<sup>15</sup>

Utang na loob is a central aspect of close friendship because it is a prime demonstration of trust and loyalty. Indeed, it is rare to find close friends who do not claim to have countless utang na loobs to one another. Thus, while close friendship need not be the basis for a favor on the magnitude of an utang na loob, utang na loob reciprocity is a defining attribute of close, and occasionally social friendship.<sup>16</sup>

#### FRIENDSHIP AND MARKET EXCHANGE PARTNERSHIPS

Market exchange partnerships are often combined with friendship. Friendship can be the basis for the selection of a particular suki or a suki bond can lead to friendship. In both instances, there

12. It is possible for friendship to develop as a *consequence* of ritual kinship bonds, but this is empirically rare.

13. See Hart, *Compadrinazgo*, pp. 44-45.

14. See Morais, "Interpersonal Relationships," pp. 104-5.

15. The historical and economic bases for the importance of mutual aid to friendship in Tanay are discussed in Morais, "Interpersonal Relationships," pp. 220-22 and 231-32.

16. For other bases see Kaut, "*Utang na Loob*," and Hollnsteiner, "Reciprocity in the Lowland Philippines."

is an ideology of friendship which pervades market exchange partnerships and functions as a basis for trust, loyalty, regularity and the extension of credit.<sup>17</sup>

#### FRIENDSHIP AND PATRON/CLIENT BONDS

Only a few informants claimed that some of their friends were patrons or clients. This reflects the emphasis on equality among friends and the tendency for friendship to remain within class boundaries.<sup>18</sup>

#### ANALYSIS

There are a number of personal bonds which are often linked with friendship (distant kinship, ritual kinship, utang na loob reciprocity, market exchange partnerships) and two (close kinship and patron/client bonds) which are not. In the latter cases, friendship provides an alternative to close kinship and is not compatible with the structure and content of patron/clientage. With regard to close kinship, friendship provides age-mates for interaction without the demands of siblingship and can function as a second tier of social allies beyond close kin.<sup>19</sup> In this sense, close friendship begins where ties of close kinship end.<sup>20</sup>

For those relationships which are often coupled with friendship there is mutual support. Friendship entails bonds of sentiment and rules for personalized exchange and loyalty while the other bonds involve complementary obligations. Thus, ritual kinship clothes friendship in a sacred ceremony and "makes friends like siblings," to quote one informant. Market exchange partnerships involve economic transactions which, when rewarding, solidify friendship.

17. David Gilmore, "Friendship in Fuenmayor," *Ethnology* 14 (1975):320-21; and Anderson, "Buy and Sell"; Szanton, *A Right to Survive*; and Davis, *Social Relations*.

18. For a related discussion on friendship and patron/clientage, see Wolf, "Relations in Complex Societies."

19. Robert J. Morais, "Kin, Friends and Favors: Some Data on Lowland Philippine Personal Alliances" (Unpub. ms.).

20. For other considerations of the relationship between kinship and friendship, see Erick Schwimmer, "Friendship and Kinship: An Attempt to Relate Two Anthropological Concepts," in *The Compact: Selected Dimensions of Friendship*, Newfoundland Social and Economic Papers No. 3, Elliot Leyton, ed. (Memorial Univ. of Newfoundland: Institute of Social and Economic Research, 1974), pp. 49-70; Sandra Wallman, "Kinship, A-Kinship, Anti-Kinship: Variations in the Logic of Kinship Situations," in *The Compact: Selected Dimension of Friendship*, pp. 105-16; and Mac Marshall, "The Nature of Nurture," *American Ethnologist* 4 (1977):643-62.

Utang na loob reciprocity provides much the same function (in a non-market context) but with greater affective content. The general obligations among distant kin, while less intense than those among close kin, provide a foundation for loyalty and solidarity among friends. The contribution of friendship to all of these bonds is positive regard, trust, attachment and loyalty enhanced by generalized reciprocity.<sup>21</sup>

Friendship functions, therefore, as a basis for the creation, intensification and perpetuation of a number of interpersonal bonds which in turn reinforce friendship. These relationships do sometimes disrupt one another, e.g., the exposure of a fake friend can result in the termination of a market exchange partnership. Generally, however, the relationships are more supportive than disruptive. In either case, friendship is a central component within a larger system of interpersonal bonds (the personal alliance system which contains all of these relationships).<sup>22</sup> It is especially salient as an affective model for non-kin bonds, for it mirrors many of the sentiments associated with close kinship, and is an anchor for market exchange partnerships, ritual kinship bonds, and utang na loob reciprocity.

### CONCLUSIONS

While some anthropologists have suggested that friendship may not have a powerful integrative role in social systems with alternative interpersonal linkages (e.g., ritual kinship), the data from Tanay demonstrate that friendship can be complementary to many other relationships.<sup>23</sup> This is not the sole function of friendship in Tanay; indeed, it provides for a myriad of emotional and practical needs in itself.<sup>24</sup> But when friendship is seen as part of a broader system of social relationships and alliances which are constantly interweaving, it proves to be at the core of this system. Thus, if we are to grasp the complexities of rural Philippine social organization, we must begin to appreciate the role of friendship.

21. On the importance of reciprocity in personal relationships see George M. Foster, "The Dyadic Contract: A Model for the Social Structure of a Mexican Village," *American Anthropologist* 63 (1961):1173-92 and Marshall, "The Nature of Nurture."

22. See Hart, "Christian Filipino Society," p. 37.

23. Gilmore, "Friendship," p. 321.

24. Confer Reina, "Two Patterns of Friendship."