

THE GEOGRAPHIC BASE IN THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF THE PHILIPPINES¹

by

DOMINGO C. SALITA²

It has been correctly stated that with the restoration of the independence of the Philippines on July 4, 1946, the problems of the country have shifted from political to economic. From Spanish times up to the present the national economy has been and is still basically agricultural. As of 1965 about 60 percent of the working population is engaged directly in farming and only 12 percent is engaged in manufacturing. About 70 percent of the entire population is dependent on agricultural for their livelihood. With this statistics, the Philippine economy is classified as underdeveloped and to distinguish it from the much more undeveloped regions of Africa, Latin America, and Asia, ours is often called a developing economy.

Underdeveloped countries are overwhelmingly rural. Generally, they also have a high rate of population growth and a low per capita income. The population of the Philippines is presently increasing at the rate of 3.2 percent annually. With this rate of growth our population is estimated to reach the 100 million mark by the year 2000. Since the size of our land area has remained the same but the population keeps on increasing the pressure on the land becomes more and more acute.

To meet the rising expectation of our rapidly growing population it is the consensus that our country should accelerate its program of agro-industrial development. The term "agro" does not mean agriculture alone but it includes all the primary or basic industries such as mining, forestry, fishery, and livestock industry in addition to crop agriculture. The products of the farms, the forests, the mines, and the seas shall however be processed into finished products so as to meet not only the basic requirements of man — food, shelter, clothing, medicine, and education but also a certain amount of comfort for decent living. The processing of the raw materials with the use of modern technology into economic goods that will satisfy human wants is industrialization.

Industrialization is one aspect of economic development. With the development of the processing or secondary industries more opportunities for employment will be created. But the manufacturing industries must be supported by a scientific development of the primary industries to maximize production at minimum cost. And the manufactured goods must be marketed under a more efficient service or tertiary industry. Hence an agro-industrial economy requires a coordinated program of developing the primary, secondary, and tertiary industries. Secondary industry refers to manufacturing or processing while tertiary industry includes marketing, transportation, warehousing, and financing. This

¹ This article is first of a series.

² Dr. Salita is presently Associate Professor of Geology and Geography, University of the Philippines. He is a registered civil and mining engineer, lawyer, geographer, and holder of a doctorate in economics.

includes marketing, transportation, warehousing, and financing. This will eventually result in increase per capita income of the inhabitants. This is a manifestation of economic development. Economic development is a process whereby the people of a country are able to increase their per capita income through the proper utilization of resources such as land, labor, capital, and technology which will result in a corresponding rise in their standard of living.

FACTORS OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

In a broader sense, the factors of production and economic development can be reduced into three categories, namely: (a) human resources, (b) natural resources, and (c) capital. Human resources include all the works of man, such as human labor, entrepreneurial ability, technology, and the institutions such as government, that are the outcome of his own creation. Capital as used in the economic sense comprises the total stock of produced means of production. This includes machinery, tools, equipment, and building that are used for production. These producer goods as they are often called are in effect derived from both the human and the natural resources. Money is included as part of capital when used for productive purposes.

The natural processes as used by economists is synonymous to land. As used in this sense, land is not just a single factor, but a collection of several items. Land is space equipped with other resources such as weather and climate, surface and underground waters, topography, mineral and rocks, biotic resources in the form of plants, animals, and fisheries, the coastlines, the location, size, and shape of the area. Ginsburg defines natural resources in its broadest sense to include all the freely given material phenomena of nature within the zone of man's activities, at present a zone extending about 12 miles above the surface of the earth and about four miles below it, plus the additional non-material quality of location. The association of these elements of land, air, sea, and situation in a single area is identified as the resource endowment.

The resource endowment which is a part of the earth is the main subject matter in the study of geography. In other words the natural resources of any place or territory in its broadest concept is synonymous to its geographic base. Geography as a discipline is of Greek origin which means a study of the earth and its relation to the activities of man. These activities may be economic, political, or social in nature. They are however affected or influenced by his physical and cultural environment.

The geographic base in the economic development of the Philippines which will be discussed in this article includes the location, size, shape, landforms, climate, and the natural resources of our country. The natural resources in its limited meaning includes the waters, soils, forests, fishery, minerals, and the agricultural resources. The natural resources are indeed the precious heritage of the Filipino people. These resources however do not belong only to the present generation but also to the generations yet unborn. They form the basis upon which the economic well-being and prosperity of the nation depends. But the degree of prosperity that can be attained will depend in a great measure upon the foresight of and the wise use of conservation measures by the present generation. Con-

ervation is the utilization of the natural resources so as to derive the maximum benefit or the maximum number of people and for the maximum length of time.

THE PHYSICAL SETTING

The physical setting which forms part of the geographic base includes the location, size, and shape of the Philippines. The location of a place is one of the most important factors that determines its economic, social, and political well-being. This location fixes the permanent position of the place on the surface of the earth. It can be expressed in terms of latitude and longitude or in relation to its vicinity and nearness to land and water bodies.

LOCATION

Geographically, the Philippines is a part of southeast Asia. It lies between the equator and the Tropic of Cancer. Specifically, it lies between $4^{\circ} 23'$ and $21^{\circ} 25'$ north latitude and between $116^{\circ} 00'$ and $127^{\circ} 00'$ east longitude. The country is bounded on the north by the Bashi Channel, on the east by the Pacific Ocean, on the south by the Celebes Sea, and on the west by the China Sea. We have therefore a maritime or insular location.

The vicinal location of the Philippines places the country some 600 miles from the southeast coast of the mainland of Asia. The neighboring countries in the north are Taiwan, China, and Japan. In the west, the Philippines is bordered by the states of North and South Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, and Malaysia. In the south, the Philippines is only a few miles from Borneo and Indonesia. The geographical location of the Philippines is shown in Fig. 1.

The insular or maritime location of the Philippines is similar to that of Japan or Great Britain. Insular location has an advantage over continental location in the sense that the insular state does not have a common land boundary with its neighbor. The common land boundary is a sensitive spot where conflicts of interest usually originate. It is partly because of this insular location that the Philippines is enjoying a comparatively peaceful relations with her neighbors. Our physical separation by sea from the Asiatic mainland is an advantage for our security.

Commercially, the Philippines lies on the major oceanic trade route and air lane plying between the United States and Asia. The air routes follow closely the oceanic trade routes. The Philippines is one of the terminals of air lanes that starts from the west coast of the United States through Hawaii and the island chain dotting the Pacific Ocean. Manila lies also on another air route starting from North America through Alaska, the Aleutian Islands, Japan, and Taiwan. In addition to this, Manila is also an important port of call for ships that are enroute to other south-eastern Asian countries.

The geographical location of the Philippines in the tropics is greatly responsible for the climatic conditions prevailing in the country. The uniformly high temperature and abundant amount of rainfall that prevails in the Archipelago have a direct bearing on the soils, waters, agricultural crops, and forest resources of the country. This matter will however be

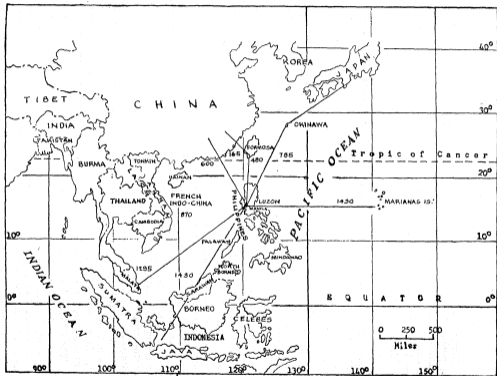


Fig. 1. The Geographical Location of the Philippines.

treated more extensively under the topic dealing on the climate of the Philippines.

SIZE

Next to location, size is an important factor in evaluating the economic potentials of a political unit. Small countries are always handicapped by their limited land resources. The need for adequate space is not only necessary to support a large population but also to provide room for expansion and development.

The present boundaries and limits of the Philippines are defined by three treaties, namely: (a) the Treaty of Paris between the United States and Spain on December 10, 1898, (b) the Treaty between the United States and Spain on November 7, 1900, and (c) the treaty between the United States and Great Britain on July 2, 1930. The present claim of the Philippines over North Borneo or Sabah is not included in evaluating the size of the Philippines.

By following the above treaty limits the territorial waters of the Philippines extend very much more than the three-mile limit in all the four cardinal directions. This is especially pronounced in the eastern and western part of the country. On the eastern coast of Mindanao, the narrowest portion along the shores of Davao is about 30 miles while in Luzon along the coast of the Cagayan Valley, the historic waters extend to about 300 miles to the international treaty limits. On the western portion, the most extensive territorial waters cover a distance of 170 miles from the Ilocos Coastal Plain.

The combined land and water areas of the Philippines is about, within the treaty limits, 700,000 square miles of which the water areas comprise about five times the land areas. The absence of a definite provision that Japan will respect the historic waters of the Philippines is one of the objections in the ratification of the proposed treaty of amity, commerce, and navigation with Japan.

The total land area of the Philippines is 115,830 square miles or 30,000,000 hectares. It is about the size of Italy, slightly larger than the size of the United Kingdom but slightly smaller than Japan. It is composed of 7,100 islands and islets of which about two-thirds are still nameless. Luzon and Mindanao are the two biggest islands; their combined areas comprise about 70 percent of the total area of the Philippines.

The combined area of the twenty largest islands comprise about 96 percent of the total land area of the country. Arranged in the order of decreasing size these twenty islands are: Luzon, Mindanao, Samar, Negros, Palawan, Panay, Mindoro, Leyte, Cebu, Bohol, Masbate, Catanduanes, Basilan, Busuanga, Jolo, Dinagat, Tablas, Polilio, and Guimaras.

In Political Geography, states with a land area of from 100,000 to 500,000 square miles are classified medium large. It is in this group where the Philippines belongs. Other countries that are in the same bracket are: Pakistan, France, Japan, New Zealand, Italy, Spain, Iraq, Finland, Norway, and Sweden. From the above classification, the Philippines is not truly a small state. We are however accustomed in comparing it with that of the United States whose size is gigantic and consequently the Philippines will appear to be a small country.

Among the highly developed countries whose per capita income ranges from \$500 to \$1,000 and are of the same class size or smaller than the Philippines includes New Zealand, Switzerland, Sweden, France, Norway, United Kingdom, Belgium, West Germany, Denmark, Israel, and Venezuela. The per capita income of the Philippines is only between \$100 to \$150 which is roughly 20 percent of the above-mentioned countries. From the foregoing, the physical size of the Philippines is not a deterrent factor for its economic growth and development for many small countries have achieved a high per capita income.

SHAPE

The shape of a country is another important physical element that should be considered in analyzing the geographic base. The Philippines has an elongated and fragmented shape. It is far from being compact as its parts consisting of 7,100 islands are disconnected. Its elongated shape is discernible from its longitudinal extent of 1,150 miles from north to south while its broadest extent from east to west is only about 600 miles. The length of its coast line is 10,850 miles which is almost as long as that of the United States.

From the economic, social, and political aspects, the elongated and fragmentary character of the Philippines is a distinct disadvantage. The construction of a continuous network of roads and railroads throughout the length and breadth of the country is a physical impossibility. The economic development of the Archipelago cannot be accelerated in the absence of good means of transportation and communication. The problems of administration and supervision as well as the implementation of economic plans and policies can not be easily carried out because of the physical division of the country. The insular location and fragmentary character of the Archipelago should give impetus to the ship-building industry and the development of a good merchant marine.

The apprehension of smugglers who are economic saboteurs as well as the prevention of the illegal entry of aliens have become a major problem of the government. This is due to the presence of many islands and landing beaches in many parts of the country. The plan of the national government to construct the Pan Philippine Highway which will connect Luzon with the Visayas and the Visayas with Mindanao is a laudable project. It will help to unify the country and regionalism may be minimized. Although this project will require a big capital outlay its completion is a milestone in the socio-economic development of the country. It should, however, be undertaken gradually so as not to affect adversely the national economy.

(To be continued)