The Concept of Time Among the Mangyans

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" CALENDARS " AND TIME

One afternoon I was climbing a steep trail in the mountains of Mindoro, the seventh largest island in the Philippines, returning to my mission station among the Mangyans. About half-way I met a group of Mangyan men going in the opposite direction. They were carrying a Coleman lantern. I asked them by way of greeting: " Where are you going? " They said: " Me go fishing at the seashore with our Coleman light." I then remembered to have noticed on the calendar that today was a new moon, and therefore the ebb-tide would be particularly low. The Mangyans knew about the new moon by looking at the " calendar " of the nightly sky. I asked again: " When are you coming back? " " Oh, tomorrow morning about such a time," was the answer of one of them. And with the open palm of his hand and stretched-out arm directed upwards at an angle of about 45 degrees, he was indicating the position of the rising sun, meaning to say: about nine o'clock.

I continued my way, as they did theirs, and was thinking: how clever these Mangyans are, that they can tell the time from the " clock " and " calendar " of their surrounding nature.

Of course, the Mangyans of Southern Mindoro are not the only ones who still can read the " signs of the times." In general, it is usually the people in the rural areas that are still able to live comfortably without calendar and watch, because they have other means that tell them the progress of time.

Reading the time from natural phenomena goes back to the very start of mankind. Observation of the recurrencies of celestial ap-

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pearances, and its subsequent gauging into a fixed time-schedule that could be predicted with fair accuracy, had reached an amazing level of expertise already some 8000 years ago among the Sumerian astronomers, not to forget the engineers of Stonehenge in Great Britain, who arranged a double circle of massive stones, some weighing as much as forty tons, in such a way that they could observe the rising and setting of stars, which indicate the course of the four seasons.

Through the influence of Christian Holy Scriptures the " calendar of nature " is still used in observing the Holy Week, because this is calculated to take place at the first full moon after the start of spring (March 21).

Nowadays, in 1985, we have no difficulty in telling exactly what time it is. But usually we do not look upwards at the sky to determine the hour of the day. (Sometimes we can't even see the sky at all!) We automatically look down at our wrist where the Casio digital watch will display to us immediately, or at a slight touch, which year, month, day, hour, minute and second we are experiencing at this very moment. We couldn't maintain our efficiency any longer without these electronical time devices, because we need them in our busy schedule to run from place to place, or from one business to the other.

There were the times of the past when there was no great urgency to know the time within the minute. That was when people were in closer contact with nature. We now often consider them the lucky ones who do not have to yield to the tyranny of time-pressure, but who know, on the other hand, very well how to interpret the time signals given by heaven and earth around them.

Mangyan Time Consciousness

The following lines reflect some of my observations among the Mangyans of Southern Mindoro on how they have a keen concept of time that developed in the course of the centuries, and is based on repeated occurrences of certain aspects of nature.

The Mangyans are independent up-land farmers, who grow a variety of food crops for their own use, and are completely self-sufficient in this respect. They are dependent, however, on what nature provides them by way of fertile soil, and a proper measure of rain and sunshine to make their crops grow.

Until today, they are still rather uninfluenced by modern ideas, ways of living, and household needs, and scientific perceptions of certain natural phenomena are unknown to them.

They do not remember their birthday, and cannot tell you how old (or young) they are because these notions are of little importance

in their daily lives. Although, they know very well when they are old enough to get married, and do notice when they are past the climax of their lives.

However, when it comes to things that are essential for their daily existence, they are never at a loss to determine the right moment for doing the work that needs to be done.

Time-indicators employed by the Mangyans, as based on their observations of the surrounding nature, can be distinguished in the following events, occurrences or phenomena:

1. *Celestial:* the stars, sun and moon.
2. *Meteorological and seasonal:* Temperatures, winds and their directions, weather disturbances and/or changes.
3. *Terrestrial:* animal behavior, vegetable appearances.
4. *Human:* bodily changes and perceptions, ritual observations, cultural traditions.
5. *Historical:* natural disasters (earthquakes, typhoons), widespread epidemics, wars and raids (Moros).

These various time-indicators are used singly or together whenever applicable, often supplementing each other at the different time periods that are important in the course of a human life span, like pinpointing key events in Mangyan history, and the recurring yearly, seasonally, monthly, weekly, daily/nightly and hourly time cycles.

If a Mangyan wants to place an important event of the past in its proper time perspective, he will utilize an important historical happening that also affected Mangyan society, as his point of time reference.

He will say e.g.: Banyan was the great judge and leader at the time of the *poko* (small-pox epidemic in 1954 that killed 40% of the Mangyan population). Or, referring to her approximate age, a Mangyan woman might say: during the time of the *Hapon* (Japanese occupation: 1942–1945) I was a *dalaga* (marriageable girl).

Recounting the past does not reach far back in Mangyan memory or perception. Genealogical trees of many past generations, like the amazing Mayawyaw genealogical tree that traces back twenty seven generations of Ifugao ancestors, are not known among the Mangyans (Lambrecht 1953).

Intensive research by Masaru Miyamoto,[1] a Japanese anthropologist working at the Kilapnit Mangyan settlement, could not produce the names of the great-grandparents of the oldest Mangyans still living at the settlement. Only five Mangyan generations could be retraced.[2]

The simple reason for this lack of knowledge about past generations, is the unimportance of knowing this for their cultural and prac-

tical needs, unlike the Ifugao people who needed this intricate geneological knowledge for the rituals where their forebears played an essential role.

SEASONS-MONTHS

Although the Mangyans are lacking in knowledge about historical events in the remote past, their practical observation of the recurring annual, monthly, etc. time-indicators is very extensive.

Southern Mindoro is situated between 12 and 13 degrees latitude from the equator, still well within the tropic region bounded in the North at 23.5 degrees at the Tropic of Cancer. For that reason we do not experience in the Philippines the outspoken differences in climate of the four seasons like in Japan, Europe and North-America, etc. Nevertheless, we do notice also within the Philippine boundaries the differences in temperature and the lengthening/shortening of daylight caused by the seasonal tilting of the earth's axis and subsequent position towards the sun of the earth's surface.

Triggered off by extreme temperature changes on the Asian Mainland (from India to Siberia) our climatical conditions are influenced and further complicated by the so called monsoon wind-system that produces, moreover, the dry and wet seasons, aside from the relative cold and warm periods based on the " four seasons " mentioned above.

The Mangyans are not acquainted with these complicated meteorological and seasonal weather conditions of our atmosphere, but they have observed the different changes in the position of the stars during the night, and the sun during the day, aside from the behavior of the animal kingdom and the appearances of the vegetable world.

In their observation of the nightly sky, the Mangyans noticed the continuous change in position of the Pleiades star cluster and the following Orion constellation in their course along the celestial equator. They were not the first persons who noticed this because many centuries ago these constellations were used by the Greek seafaring merchants and the early discoverers in the Pacific.

The Mangyans called the Pleiades: " Ulod Baboy " (or: maggots of a wild pig) and the Orion: " Balatik Baboy " (or: Pig's spear-trap), because according to their traditional Mythology, the Balatik Baboy had killed a wild pig, but the owner of the trap was late in checking the catch and only found as remnant a collection of worms.

For the Mangyans, the Ulod Baboy and Balatik Baboy became important celestial guides in determining the right moments of their various agricultural activities.

When after sunset in the early evening the Ulod was observed to

be in a position of about 9: 00 a.m. (as the sun would be), it was time for cleaning the future rice field; when it was *udto ulod* or standing in its zenith, it was the time for sowing the rice; when finally Ulod Baboy was touching the mountains and about to disappear, it was considered too late for sowing rice and expecting a bountiful harvest. These three positions of the Pleiades star would coincide with the months of February, May and August respectively.

But the nightly sky was only one of the many indicators available to the Mangyans for knowing the right moment of their agricultural activities around which the whole yearly time-cycle revolved.

Since the amount of water needed for the growth of the Mangyan cultivations, especially the upland-rice, had to come from the yearly monsoon rains, it was of the utmost importance to them to know with a fair degree of approximation when the first rains could be expected. The corresponding position of the Ulod Baboy was one aspect, the change in wind direction from *amihan* (northeasterly) to *abagat* (southwesterly) was another, which was carefully observed during the day. The " tug-of-war " between the two opposite monsoons was noted with much interest, and the final outcome with the *abagat* as victor, was looked forward to with much anticipation. The decisive victory was usually announced by the sky itself with much " drumbeating and fireworks," because the afternoon thunderstorms in the far away mountains meant clearly the end of the dry and hot season. The Mangyans assure you that the *abagat* rains will definitely come after seven evenings without interruption of lightning-cum-thunder.

Then there was the hyper-sensitivity of the insect-world and other animals as an additional indicator of the rains to be forthcoming, and the behavior of lowflying birds trying to catch the flies and other winged insects emerging from the dry earth, did not escape the Mangyan observation as to its significance. In fact, the *ansusubong*-bird (of the family of the fly catchers) could only be seen during the months of April till June, the onset of the rainy season because it was a migratory-bird coming from China.

The budding, flowering and fruiting nature was not lagging behind in contributing its own signals of the impending seasonal changes that were of vital importance for the economy and food supply of the Mangyans.

All these various signals transmitted from the surrounding universe were received as loud and clear by the monitoring Mangyans and would trigger off the start of the appropriate sowing and planting activities.

The important knowledge of the beginning of the wet monsoon

or rainy season represents for the Mangyan farmers their point of time reference from where they calculate back or ahead the other work tasks connected with their agricultural enterprises.

Although the right moment of sowing (rice) and planting is of prime importance for the success of the subsequent harvest, the preparatory stages in this agricultural cycle are not to be neglected because they are all linked together and form the basis for all the following activities of planting, weeding and harvesting.

Therefore, the " Calendar of Nature " is consulted again by the Mangyans to determine the opportune moment for the different work-tasks of selecting the site, cleaning the field, burning the dried cuttings and making the final preparation for the *pamamgas* (rice sowing) in May or June.

Celestial phenomena are consulted as explained above, but the more practical and obvious indications are given by nature itself at the various moments throughout the year. A long list could be composed of the behavior of the plant and animal (insect) world at a certain point of time that corresponds with a particular month of our calendar.

For example: 1. When the *tagablang*, a climbing vine, is bearing fruit (around December or early January), it is the sign for the Mangyan to start preparing the fields by cleaning a portion of land he wants to use for rice cultivation. This time signal is further supported by the winged appearance of a small grub, *laylayo*, that makes a strident noise, small as it is. Together with other indicators it is the accepted evidence that the *turungon* or hot season is near at hand.

2. The month of August is recognized by the fruit bearing *uloy* or *marang* (among others) and by the appearance of the *daldalo*, a winged termite that crawls out of the earth and swarms towards the light of a lamp in the evening. The *daldalo* is a delicacy for the Mangyans who catch them and enjoy them fried!

For calculating the monthly time unit, it is evident that the moon is their natural time-piece, even if the Mangyans are now well aware that the moon-cycle of around twenty-eight days does not correspond with a calendar month (February excepted!).

In the Mangyan language, like in Pilipino as well as in the whole Malayo-Polynesian language family, the word for " moon " and " month " is identical, namely: *bulan* and *buwan* in Mangyan and Pilipino respectively.

The everyday appearance of the moon, whether first quarter, full moon, last quarter or the positions in between, are exactly known by the Mangyans and subconsciously recorded in their memory and automatically adjusted in the course of the lunar month.

Using the moon for time reckoning, the Mangyan refers to its different positions and appearances. When telling you: " I will be back *sa usa ka-bulan*," it means: in a *moon*'s time, when the moon is in the same position as today, and not: in a *month*'s time.

When a Mangyan has to make a trip to a far away place, he will calculate beforehand the hours of moonlight, so he may walk comfortably in the night without being overtaken by the dark.

Any moment of the night the Mangyan can tell the approximate time by looking at the moon and the stars, and he knows how many hours are still left before sunrise. Based on the same experience, he is aware of the right time when the ebb-tide will be at its lowest level during the new or full moon, so that he can gather the crawling seafood left behind by the retreating waters.

Indeed, the moon in its various shapes and sizes is a good and appreciated companion to the Mangyan, and a great number of Ambahan[3] poems are dedicated to this mysterious light whose rays are soft and cool.

Days-Hours

The weekly time-unit of seven days is of less importance to the Mangyans, since it is not part of their tradition. Originally this concept was unknown to them, and only gradually through contact with lowland communities, was the seven day cycle or *Domingo* accepted. The names of the different days of the week are frequently placed in the wrong sequence, but that they number seven altogether is generally known by everyone.

Some Mangyans who had to deal with lowland merchants who were buying their bananas or other products, saw the need for remembering the correct number of days they had agreed upon to bring down their products to the town. For that purpose, they constructed a kind of memory aid, consisting of a piece of wood with seven holes in a row and a short string through each hole. Every morning after waking up, one string was pulled to the other side, starting from the bottom, to indicate the progress of the week. With the help of this homemade " computer," a Mangyan's business deals took place on the exact day agreed upon.

Interestingly, the Sunday is considered by the Mangyans as a day of rest, probably under the influence of contacts with Christians, although the latter are less faithful now in observing the Sunday rest. But on Sundays, the Mangyans usually come down from the mountains and visit the neighboring town to engage in bartering their products or to buy at the stores and on the market the most essential items

they need, like sugar, salt, matches, and the like.

For determining the various time moments in the course of a day, it is clear the sun itself will be their most valuable guide, supplemented only by animal nature where a certain regularity can be observed, e.g. the crowing of a cock in the morning.

I would like to present here the clock of Mangyan tradition to divide the day into different intervals based on the observation of the sun's position. We would call them " hours," but the Mangyan clock works only by approximation.

About 3:00 a.m. is called: *Magpaminto yi ti manok* (first cock's crowing).
One hour or so before sunrise: *Surip madlom* (dark morning).
Around 6:00 a.m.: *Magbutlak ti init* (sunrise).
7:00 a.m.: *Magpamalayan ti init* (the sun shines on a high portion of the house).

10:00 a.m.:	*Pang-itlugon manok*	(egg-laying of the hen).
12:00 a.m.:	*Udto init*	(sun in zenith).
1:00 p.m.:	*Ligdas init*	(sun slipping down).
2:00 p.m.:	*Palis init*	(sun at an angle).
4:00 p.m.:	*Dul-ong ti init*	(sun going downwards).
5:00 p.m.:	*Lawis kawayan*	(one bamboo-length to go).
6:00 p.m.:	*Sangday yi ti init*	(sunset already).

Frequently too, when indicating a certain hour of the day, the relative position of the sun is indicated by the outstretched arm pointing to the approximate angle of the sun's position with the earth. When the open palm of the hand is facing towards the sky, the morning hours are indicated, when facing towards the earth, they are the afternoon hours.

Usually, the Mangyan can tell rather accurately the hour of the day by looking at the sun. When once I had an argument with some Mangyans about it, I discovered afterwards that my watch was half an hour late, and the Mangyans had been right!

Within the hour, the Mangyans can still indicate smaller time intervals when needed, and they usually refer to certain activities for which the duration of time is more or less constant.

Asking for the length of time a certain person had left his house. I got the answer: *usa ka-tamaan ginatong* (one cooking-time of rice, or less than an hour). A shorter time would be: *usa ka-buraan upi* (one cooking-time of vegetables, or about half an hour). A ten minute period is expressed as: *usa ka-imbasan mama* (one chewing of betelnut).

The shortest time period of about two minutes is: *usa ka-lahuban dawon* (the time it takes to heat and soften a banana-leaf in the fire, to be used later for wrapping).

From all this, it is clearly manifested that the Mangyans of Southern Mindoro manage very well without a time-piece that indicates the time of day, month or year, because their activities are such that there is no need to know the time exactly to the last minute. Maybe the expression " Filipino time " is still a reminder of a similar situation among the majority of the Filipinos.

But times are changing also in Mangyan society, and it is not uncommon to see young people with a watch on their wrist, even if it is not working anymore. Radio time, moreover, has added to the mechanical method of determining the current hour of the day.

That certain modern time indicators have always fascinated them, is evident from the Mangyan names of: Enero, Marso, Agusto, or Minggo, Martes, and Huwebes, given to the babies when they were born during that particular month or day.

For the time being, however, the Mangyans are still satisfied with the bright beacons in the sky, during the night or the day, and by the amazing cosmic clock of the restless nature that never misses a beat, and that is a magnificient tribute to its Maker, for whom time does not exist.

Permit me to present a Mangyan Ambahan poem[4] about the mysterious moon, a good friend of theirs.

Anong si kanaw bulan	Look! The moon so full and bright,
Sinmalhag sa rantawan	Shining in front of the house!
Kabiton lugod ginan	How can you explain to me,
Salhag mabalaw diman	That the rays are soft and cool?
No ga tawo di ngaran	If a man like us he were,
Kang way inunyawidan	I would hold him by the hand!
Buhok ngatay tawidan	Seize the hair to keep him back!
Palaylay ngatay huytan	Grasp the clothes to make him stay!
Unhunon sab araw man	But how could I manage that!
Tida ti kanaw bulan	It is the moon in the sky!
Tida kuramo diman	The full moon shining so bright,
May bantod pagpaday-an	Going down beyond the hills,
May ratag pagrun-ugan	Disappearing from the plain,
May ili pag-alikdan	Out of sight behind the rocks.

NOTES

1. Masaru Miyamoto, Research Fellow at the National Museum of Ethnology, Senri Expo Park, Suita, Osaka, conducted frequently fieldwork in Mindoro, since 1973, mainly among the Hanunoo-Mangyan and Buhid.

2. Unpublished Manuscript, and personal communication on Kilapnit Genealogy.

3. The Ambahan is a Mangyan poetic form, consisting of heptasyllabic lines coupled with end-rhyme. It employs an archaic and poetic language, liberally making use of metaphors and similes to express human behavior or situations in human life (see also note 4).

4. Poem 198, taken from Antoon Postma 1981.

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