

# MUSYAWARAH

The Asian Center Newsletter



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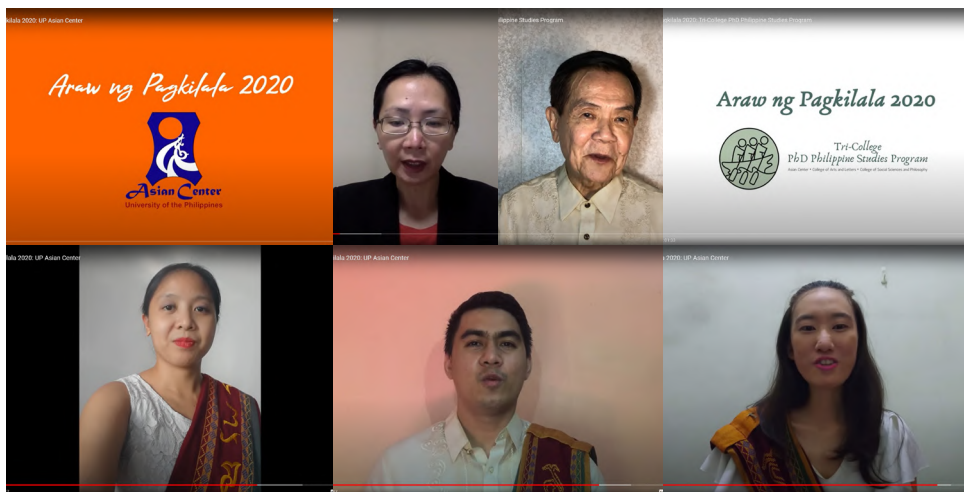
## UP SHIFTS TO REMOTE LEARNING FOR AY 2020-2021

With stay-at-home measures implemented due to the increasing number of COVID-19 cases, the University of the Philippines adopted a complete shift to online platforms for teaching and learning in this academic year. This despite calls from various sectors for a more inclusive alternative.

Courses will be delivered remotely through "the entire spectrum of asynchronous or non-real time communication between teachers and learners—from text-based (basic email, FB messenger, Viber group, etc.) to online discussion boards in different platforms (UP's Learning Management Systems (e.g. UVLE, VLE), Canvas, Google Classroom, Edmodo etc.)—and synchronous or real time communication between teachers and learners (e.g. lectures, webinars and teleconferences using such platforms as Zoom, Google Meet)," as indicated in OVPAA Memorandum No. 2020-68. "CUs are urged to adopt a uniform LMS or at most two LMSs" to avoid confusion among students and teachers.

The memorandum, released by the Office of the Vice President for

**Turn to Page 2**



Clockwise (from top): Dr. Caroline Hau, Dr. Jaime Galvez Tan, Zhandra Tam, Jefferson Mendez, and Marie Bernadine Umali. Photo Credit: Araw ng Pagkilala Online Ceremonies

## 7 MA AND 9 PHD DEGREES CONFERRED IN FIRST VIRTUAL GRADUATION OF ASIAN CENTER AND TRI-COLLEGE PROGRAM

The Asian Center and the Tri-College PhD Philippine Studies Program held the first ever virtual recognition rites to honor 7 MA and 9 PhD graduates last 26 April 2020, amidst the lockdown imposed because of COVID-19.

This year, three were graduates of MA Asian Studies: Sarah Jean Grutas, Abdulwahid Panganting and Marie Bernadine Umali. Another three graduated with the degree of Master in Asian Studies: Jefferson Mendez, Denzel Sarmiento and Zhandra Tam; while the lone graduate of Master in Philippine Studies was May Haydee Serona. The PhD Philippines Studies graduates were: Christoffer Mitch

Cerda, Michael John Fast, Maria-Teresa Galura, Marichu Liwanag, Joanne Manzano, Guillerma Mendoza, Romeo Peña, Minard Reyes and Elyrah Salanga-Torralba.

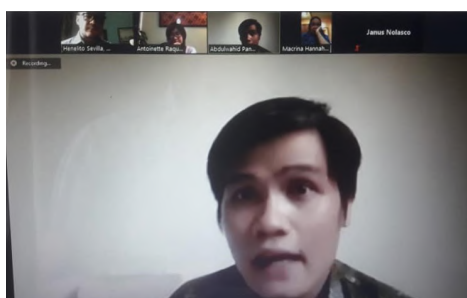
"This afternoon's program is a historic event," noted Dean Joeje Santarita in his opening remarks. "You were able to earn your degree despite the threat of COVID-19... and you were able to witness your graduation through this special online program," he said.

From their homes, all graduates also delivered a short message, a move away from having one class representative to deliver the batch's graduation speech.

**Turn to Page 2**

## GRADUATE CANDIDATES DEFEND THESIS VIA ZOOM

The pandemic may have put a halt on many things, but it certainly did not hinder Asian Center's students from graduating. Three students from the MA Asian Studies program and five from the PhD Philippine Studies Program successfully defended their thesis through Zoom (video calling platform)



Abdulwahid Panganting defends thesis via Zoom. Photo credit: Dr. Sevilla's Facebook

last May, marking the completion of their academic requirements.

Coincidentally, the MA students' theses were all related to Southeast Asian studies. Each thesis looked at Indonesia and touched on themes such as literature, state order, and conflict resolution.

The said MA thesis are:

**Turn to Page 2**

## 7 MA AND 9 PHD

from page 1

"I am thankful to my professors and classmates who have been instrumental to my growth. Medyo malungkot nga lang na hindi ko sila personal na mapapasalamatan at personal na makakapagpaalam," said Sarah Grutas in her graduation message.

The guests of honor were Dr. Caroline Hau, professor at the Center for Southeast Asian Studies in Kyoto University, for the Masters Program ceremonies and former Health Secretary, Dr. Jaime Galvez Tan, for the PhD Philippine Studies Program.

Tracing the developments in Asia that signified its "position as the leading growth center of the world," Hau pointed out in her speech that the "growing regional clout, connectivity and interdependence among nations" belies the "politics of inclusion and exclusion, the unequal processes that underpin the processes of nation as well as region making in Asia." Hau also called on the important role of graduates "as students of Asia."

"It is your task... to make sense [of]

what's happening and to make intervention to the best of [your] abilities...through networks and institution...[and] participation in social and political movements," she said.

Galvez Tan, on the other hand, drew from his experience in working in the grassroots communities to highlight the culture and traditions of the Philippine indigenous peoples, such as traditional medicine and healing practices, and unique writing systems.

Highlighting this year's graduation theme, "Maglingkod, Magmalasakit, Manindigan," he called on PhD graduates to make their research beneficial. "Sana po ito ay maging policy, maging program guidelines, part of communication. Sana magamit ito ng maraming tao," he said.

Deviating from the usual conduct of graduation, two separate ceremonies for the Masters Program and the Tri-College PhD Philippine Studies Program were prerecorded and streamed via YouTube.

## GRADUATE STUDENTS from page 1

- "The Converging Role of Traditional Leaders and Non-Traditional Leaders in Conflict Resolution: The Cases of Mindanao, Philippines and Maluku, Indonesia" by Abdulwahid Panganting;
- "Pramoedya Ananta Toer's Buru Quartet: Literature as a Site of Counterhegemony and Contestation in Indonesia's New Order" by Marie Bernardine Umali; and
- "Lustful Lords, Dead Deities: Female Sexuality in Indonesian Folk Literature" by Sarah Jean Grutas.

The PhD dissertations defended remotely, on the other hand, examined Philippine culture, tradition and values as seen in aspects such as design, kinship,

business and governance, history, and local literature.

The PhD dissertations successfully defended via Zoom are:

- "Diskarte: Understanding Design Culture through the Chairs of the Filipino Design Exemplars" by Guillerma Mendoza;
- "Subli (Ang Pamana): Philippine Culture and Values in the Governance of Filipino-Owned Family Corporations in the Philippines" by Maria-Teresa Galura;
- "Piso, The Image of Filipino Identity: The Concealed Value of Philippine New Generation Currency" by Minard Reyes;

## UP SHIFTS from page 1

Academic Affairs on 19 July, outlines the academic plans and timetable, preparations for, and implementation of remote learning. This was part of the University's early plans and strategies developed even before the COVID-19 in case of class suspensions brought about by natural hazards, disasters, or social and political eventualities. The implementation was now propelled by the current public health crisis because of the pandemic.

The Board of Regents (BOR), UP's highest decision-making body, approved the shift to remote learning during its 1352<sup>nd</sup> meeting on 30 July. In the same meeting, it also adopted the proposed calendar of the UP Administration, opening classes on 10 September and shortening the first semester from the usual 16 to just 14 weeks.

Sectoral regents (Student, Faculty, and Staff Regents) have since called for a more pro-student approach to the "new normal." Based on the university's data, more than 5,600 students may be unable to keep up with and afford the approved mode of learning.

- "Naratibo ng Lubi sa Ating Gunita: Ang Industriya ng Niyog sa Panitikan at Kasaysayang Pilipino, 1940–2018" by Romeo Peña; and
- Katwiran ng Kasaysayan: Ang Alegoryang Pangkasaysayan at ang Diskurso ng Kasaysayan, Nasyunalismo, at Bayan sa mga Nobelang Pangkasaysayan sa Wikang Tagalog, 1905–1927" by Christoffer Cerda.

## THE DEAN'S CORNER

### MILESTONES

by Prof. Joeje B. Santarita, Ph.D.

"Time flows away like the water in the river."

Indeed, this saying from Confucius perfectly fits the bill to describe the development of Musyawarah. Time flew by in the past 14 years since the release of the newsletter's maiden issue. Its inception was geared primarily towards documenting the activities conducted by the Asian Center and the achievements of its students and alumni. As the newsletter's first editor-in-chief (EIC), I remember well that it featured the experience of an alumna studying in South Korea. After a decade and four years, that alumna is now the EIC of the revived newsletter.

Musyawarah, the Bahasa term for "discussion," is a fitting word to carry the newsletter's purpose of promoting and facilitating discussion among stakeholders, and providing space for students to showcase their achievements, passion and skills related to Asia. It is a forum where academic and literary expressions of faculty, staff, students, and alumni are highly welcomed.

I am glad that we have revived this newsletter, despite being at a time when the world is suffering from COVID-19. Regardless of the limitations, we continue the dialogue and record the milestones of the Center and its constituency. The newsletter complements the Asian Center's website and other social media platforms in widely disseminating our activities and advocacies. Furthermore, it gives our students the opportunity to share their travels and travails, flights and plights, as well as inspirations and inhibitions regarding Asia and beyond. By and large, the collective narratives greatly enable the Asian Center to perform its mandate, as envisioned by its founders—to be a "world center" for the study of Asia.

With the help of Dr. Michelle Palumbarit and her team, I hope that this newsletter will encourage Asian Center's students to take part in the discussion, as their time, likewise, flows away like the water in the river.

Padayon!

# NORTHEAST ASIA

## JAPAN'S PM ABE RESIGNS DUE TO HEALTH CONDITION

by Justin Beneraba

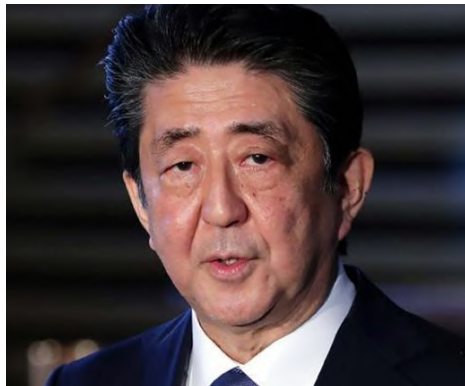
Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe announced his resignation due to his poor health condition on August 28.

"I apologize from the bottom of my heart that despite all of the support from the Japanese people, I am leaving the post with one full year left in my term and in the midst of various policies and coronavirus," he said.

The 65-year-old prime minister has long suffered from an intestinal condition called ulcerative colitis. His recent hospital visits have fueled the rumors about his ability to handle the job before his term, as the leader of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), and hence, premier, expires next year.

It was the second time Abe has resigned due the same health condition. His first tenure as prime minister started in late 2006 but he abruptly stepped down in 2007.

Abe was re-elected in a rare second term in 2012. He launched his multipronged economic program called "Abenomics" which included massive monetary stimulus,



Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. Photo from CNN Philippines

increased government spending, and structural reforms. Abe also pledged to strengthen Japan's military and to revise the pacifist, U.S.-drafted constitution.

Shinzo Abe is Japan's longest-serving prime minister. On August 24, he marked his 2,799<sup>th</sup> consecutive day in office since he retook the prime minister position in late 2012. He surpassed Eisaku Sato, his great uncle, who held the same post for 2,798

consecutive days from November 9, 1964 to July 7, 1972.

"In politics, what matters more is not how many days you were in office, but what you have accomplished," Abe said.

Markets have responded negatively following the announcement of Abe's resignation. Tokyo's benchmark Nikkei index reversed earlier gains and closed down more than 1.4%, while the Japanese yen rose 0.3% against the U.S. dollar. The Nikkei 225 Index fell 1.41%, or 326.21 points, to 22,882.65 after the country's local media reported that Abe was set to step down.

Abe's resignation also raises the question of his replacement. The LDP is set to hold an election which will be followed by a parliamentary vote to elect the new prime minister who will hold the post until the end of Abe's term in September 2021.

*Justin Beneraba is an MA Asian Studies student, specializing in Japanese studies.*

### SOUTH ASIA



Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi holds a rifle during a defence expo in February. Photo by AP

India is set on acquiring \$2 billion worth of arms and weaponry despite making policy announcements that ban the import of military equipment to boost local production. This move comes four months after the confrontation between India and China in the Himalayan borders, which increasingly heightened the tension between the two superpowers. India has failed to make significant headway in strengthening the local weapons industry since it was first proposed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2014.

### SOUTHEAST ASIA



Protests in Thailand. Photo by Adam Dean, New York Times

In the latest wave of pro-democracy protests in Southeast Asia, at least 10,000 demonstrators in Thailand call for a new constitution and demand a change from the repressive militaristic governance in the country. Many sectors have since joined the rallies, openly defying the taboo of challenging the monarchy. In the past, human rights violations have been rampant in Thailand as critics of the crown have disappeared and been killed.

### WEST ASIA



IAEA Dir. Gen. Rafael Grossi with Head of Iran's Atomic Energy Organization Ali-Akbar Salehi in Tehran. Photo by EPA

On 26 August 2020, the Islamic Republic of Iran has voluntarily given the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) access to two locations specified by the agency to facilitate verification of Iran's possible undeclared nuclear material and activities. In a joint statement published by the Director General of the IAEA and the Vice President of Iran, the two have resolved to cooperate facilitating the full implementation of the Comprehensive Safeguards Agreement and the Additional Protocol (AP), to which Iran applied for in 2016.



## THE KEY NOTE

# ADVENTURE, DATA GATHERING, AND BUILDING NETWORK IN INDONESIA

by Abdulwahid Panganting

*A day after my panel members accepted my research proposal on October 2019, I immediately started drafting an itinerary for a fieldwork in Indonesia. Intended to be completed in less than a month, from 16 November until 12 December, the itinerary was dense and consisted of five cities: Surabaya, Malang, Jogjakarta, Ambon, and Manado. While the allocated time was quite short for the cities to be explored thoroughly, I was confident in my decision because I think that one is truly baptized as an Asian Studies student when you travel to historical places in Asia, such as Jogjakarta where famous Hindu and Buddhist temples are housed.*



Photo from Mr. Abdulwahid Panganting (fourth from left) shows the raja of Negeri Hitu Lama, Leihitu, Maluku (fifth from left) with the students from Universitas Pattimura.

The transit from Manila to Indonesia—with a layover in Kuala Lumpur—took almost 24 hours. Hence, I decided to sleep in Surabaya, where I landed, before going to Malang. The next day, I headed to a train station near my bedspace accommodation to catch a train to Malang where one of my respondents lives.

Malang's probinsya-like ambiance welcomed me. Compared to Jakarta's sprawling metropolis, Malang is bounded with refreshing sceneries, with a fair demography and quite comfortable transportation. The Dutch influence on the architectural style of picturesque houses and a church amidst the suburb—distinct from grandiose Mosques outside the exclusive village—revealed the remnants of Dutch colonization that once controlled the city.

In Malang, and across Indonesia, motorcycles were everywhere. While I should not be stunned by this aspect of Indonesian culture, I was still enthralled as everyone—elderly, young, men and women—comfortably used a motorcycle as their mode of transportation. In fact, my teacher fetched and toured me around using her motorcycle.

After staying in Malang for a week, I bade adieu to travel to Jogjakarta.

Jogjakarta is special for being the only province in Indonesia that still practices the Sultanate system. Thus, the sultan also stands as the governor in the city. The province also houses a lot of tourist spots such as the Prambanan and Borobudur Temples. One of Indonesia's topnotch university, the Gadjah Mada University,

where I did research, was also located there. I was unable to visit the said temples, but I was still lucky to have visited the official residence of the Sultan and the presidential palace. Regrettably, my stay in Jogjakarta was cut short since I must proceed to Ambon.

I went back to Surabaya to catch a flight to Ambon via Makassar. For many reasons, I felt uncomfortable going to Ambon, the locale of my research. Ambon, or Central Maluku by large, is frequently jolted by earthquakes. During my entire stay in Indonesia, 145 cases of earthquakes had been recorded in Maluku and nearby areas. In fact, there was an alert that a tsunami may come a day before my flight because of the tremors. Upon arrival, I was welcomed by

*“Surprisingly, Manado closely resembled the Filipino communities back home. Naturally, it gave me a feeling of serenity.”*

an earthquake-damaged airport and cracked buildings.

Ambon is situated in Central Maluku, east of Indonesia. Formerly a Dutch-controlled city, it is an island rich in spices and is a forgotten gem. It is also a melting pot of different ethnolinguistic groups in Maluku province and nearby islands including Makassar, and of different religions such as

Protestantism and Islam. It is inaccessible to tourists because of the limited flights to and from Ambon. Transportation was inefficient: there were no taxis or ride-hailing services. Only motorcycles and a few jeep-like vehicles roamed the city. The only things to be observed are the serenity that envelopes the city and the rhythmic lull of the sea's waves.

The lack of necessities in the place is secondary to its tumultuous past. Two decades back, Ambon had gone through a bloody ethnic cum religious conflict that claimed thousands of lives and destroyed houses, properties and places of worship.

The city's slogan, “Ambon manise” or “pretty Ambon,” might be the opposite of its bitter past. This, however, is redeemed by the truly pretty, congenial and sweet locals. Contrary to my biases, the people of Ambon are in fact the most welcoming and accommodating, compared with other ethnolinguistic groups in Indonesia.

As evidence of their hospitality, I was able to interview all the professors I needed to just by introducing myself as a researcher from the Philippines. One professor invited me to his office and, upon knowing the title of my research, arranged a meeting for me with the dean, Dr. Pariela. The dean was generous to give me a brief yet substantial presentation on the topic I was researching, together with books and a photocopy of his master's thesis that he assumed will be useful to me.

The students were equally helpful. Despite the city's lack of accessible transportation, students occasionally fetched

## EDITOR'S CORNER

## AN INVITATION TO THE DISCUSSION

by Prof. Michelle R. Palumbarit, Ph.D.

I am delighted to introduce to you the first issue of *Musyawah* for this academic year. Since its inception in 2006, the newsletter has featured stories of great significance. It highlighted various events in Asia, featured perspectives from scholars on various issues and showcased achievements of Asian Center's constituents—from students, faculty, staff and even its alumni.

From capturing proud moments of students' achievements to featuring timely conferences and lectures, *Musyawah* invites you to spare a moment and listen to the precious stories of the people from various walks of life that makes the Asian Center an institution. It also enjoins you to take part in the 'musyawarah' (discussion) of the happenings not just in the Asian Center but also within the national and international arena.

Let us continue the discussion. I look forward to receive your contributions to *Musyawah* in the succeeding issues.

Amidst this pandemic, I trust that everything is well with you.

## ADVENTURE from page 4

me from my place. With them, I visited restaurants, beaches, and amusing places. During their free time, we sat near the shore and watched the sunset while talking about Filipino artists. In the evening, they toured me around the city in their motorcycles. They were of great help as I interviewed respondents in and outside the city. The camaraderie I had built with them was the most precious treasure in my travel.

From Ambon, I proceeded to Manado, my last destination. Surprisingly, Manado closely resembled the Filipino communities back home. Naturally, it gave me a feeling of serenity. I was unable to explore much of the city because I spent only a couple of days there, but I was glad to have a peek of its environs by hanging out in a mall for hours to stroll around and look for *batik*.

As I look back on these memories, I thought that this experience would not be realized were it not for the Asian Center and my panel members who pushed me to go beyond my comfort zone. Indeed, studying at the Asian Center opened doors for me to explore the world.

*Adbulwahid Panganting is a graduate of MA Asian Studies of Class 2020. This essay chronicles his fieldwork experience for his thesis, "The Converging Role of Traditional Leaders and Non-Traditional Leaders in Conflict Resolution: The Case of Mindanao, Philippines and Maluku, Indonesia."*

## DR. AILEEN BAVIERA: REMEMBERING THE LEGACY

by Prof. Antoinette Raquiza, Ph.D.

The last time I had a chance to talk to Dr. Aileen San Pablo Baviera was in November. The Asia-Pacific Pathways to Progress Foundation, Inc. or APPFI, of which she was the founding president and moving force, organized in Manila an international workshop, entitled "Southeast Asia Regional Cooperation Amidst Great Power Competition," for the ASEAN-ISIS network.

The APPFI was accepted as the Philippine representative to the ASEAN-Institutes of Strategic and International Studies (ASEAN ISIS) in May 2018, and, served as chair and host of the network in 2019. Needless to say, APPFI's membership in the regional network of elite think tanks was a feat unto itself; to be given the leadership role in such a short time spoke volumes of Aileen's incredible cachet in the community of international relations and security experts in the region and beyond.

I cite this experience to illustrate the kind of leader that Dr. Baviera was.

Dr. Baviera brought this rare combination of expertise, grit, and gravitas during her tenure as dean of the Asian Center from 2003 to 2009.

In 2003, when she took over the helm of the Asian Center, Dr. Baviera already had more than 20 years of experience as a foreign and strategic studies scholar and policy analyst, specializing on China and Philippines-China relations, and also Southeast Asia and ASEAN. By then, she had already assumed different roles that gave her depth as an academic and a public intellectual.

Fresh out of college in 1979, she got involved in the anti-dictatorship movement and, while pursuing higher studies in China, helped with international solidarity work. Since then, she also worked intermittently with the Department of Foreign Affairs' Foreign Service Institute—which eventually culminated with her heading its Center for International Relations and Strategic Studies in 1993. Just before she joined the Asian Center in 1998, she served as executive director of the Philippine-China Development Resource Center that built people-to-people linkages in development and cultural work.

One can argue that it was this accumulated knowledge and diverse experience as well as her exposure to new trends in area studies and regional and global trends that allowed Dr. Baviera to steer the Asian Center toward three fundamental changes:

1. Under her term, the 40-year old Asian Studies curriculum, which



Photo Credit: FES Philippines Podcast in 2019

focused on specific country studies, was overhauled to promote a comparative analytical framework around specific themes. This reorientation allowed for a deeper study of similar and distinct development patterns as a result of historical legacies as well as intensifying globalization and regionalism.

2. In line with this programmatic reform was the strengthening of AC programs on other regions, starting with the aggressive recruitment of faculty members.
3. The forging of the partnership between UP and the Toyota Motors Philippine Corporation for the setting up of the GT-Toyota Hall of Wisdom and the GT-Toyota Asian Center Auditorium. Aileen initiated the P100 million-project in March 2008 as part of the then AC's UP Centennial fund-raising activities.

When I look back at Aileen's life, I see her as always peaking, always growing, always setting new goals for herself and the people she worked with. Whether by force of circumstance or by design, she excelled in whatever role she assumed. She had an indomitable spirit, even in the face of adversity, that it often seemed to me that nothing at all could ever crush her.

Equally important, when she spread her wings, she would take us along with her. All of us—in our professional careers, in our private lives, and in our institutional positioning, benefitted from Aileen's wisdom, decency, and commitment. Many of the students and staff whom she mentored and who followed along the paths she carved for them have gone on to build their own careers. In those lives, in the possibilities she opened for so many of the people around her, we find her true legacy.

*Dr. Antoinette Raquiza is an Associate Professor at the Asian Center.*



## ALL SOLID HAS MELTED INTO AIR:

The COVID-19 pandemic through the accelerationist perspective

by Allen Casey Gumiran

Until recently, the term 'accelerationism' has been referred to as a political heresy. Likewise, right-wing extremists have used accelerationism as a tactic of gaining power, even if accelerationist philosophy has preceded their existence. To begin this trip to a contested terminology, how can we define accelerationism and how does it relate to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic?

According to the British philosopher Nick Land, its original proponent, accelerationism claims that mere resistance to the ruling ideology is not enough. Instead, accelerationists advocate for capitalism to be stretched into its limits and be taken over by radical projects. Some champion social revolution through programs such as universal basic income and green economy to tackle climate change. Others believe that intensive forays to artificial intelligence will resolve the dilemma of unemployment and bureaucratic intervention on citizens. What they have in common is the grim reality that future technologies such as automation will cause massive changes in society, and drastic preparations will be necessary for the rest of humanity.

Accelerationism is becoming relevant due to the travails that various governments are experiencing in this pandemic. Accelerationists claim that neoliberal orthodoxy is not doing well to cope; and this situation is not just an accident. Neoliberalism by design is fragile. It relies on interdependence on trade and open borders to function, principles which have been reversed in recent months with lockdowns and state intervention. Even mainstream publications such as *The Financial Times* note that neoliberalism is in serious doubt as the world enters an uncertain era, tilting between the replacement of the system in its entirety or a total collapse.

The concerns and stances posed by accelerationists have their critics. They accuse the accelerationists of being pessimistic. Accelerationists retort that neoliberalism must be overcome, and their proposals are meant to provide the means to break loose from the cycle. Whether you agree or not with accelerationists, they represent an attempt to look at things beyond the rose-tinted glasses of today.

*Allen Casey Gumiran is a student of MA Philippine Studies, specializing in Society and Culture.*

## STUDENT VOICES

### REMOTE LEARNING AS UP'S EDUCATIONAL STRATEGY: ARE WE REALLY READY?

by Sean Thakur

*Late as it is, the Philippine national government was compelled by the looming threat of COVID-19 to suspend classes in Metro Manila and in nearby Luzon provinces for a week, starting on March 10. Little did we know that this was the beginning of the world's longest community quarantine that would cause the on-going semester, including each bit of normalcy in our lives, to come to a halt.*

Adversely affected by the situation, educational institutions faced the inevitable need to re-assess learning systems and execute changes for the incoming academic year. In UP, as in other schools, the Board of Regents (BOR) resolved to implement remote learning, an education modality in a synchronous (real-time) or asynchronous (flexible) setup which can be accessed anywhere using a device with internet connection. This despite opposition from university sectors.

With the Philippines still battling COVID-19 eight months after the first reported case in the country, an essential question should be asked as we open the new academic year.

various student concerns.

The administration's efforts to deal with gaps in learning for this semester is commendable. There is, however, a need to realize that addressing continuity in education is not devoid of our country's struggle against the pandemic, as its onslaught brought us to re-assess learning in the first place. Student support programs for internet connectivity and gadgets only provide partial relief to those in need. In the face of an economic recession that contracted the Philippines' GDP to 16.5%, coupled with a minuscule economic package to boost the economy, where will our students, faculty, and staff get the money to pay for electricity and internet bills, assuming that everyone will be reached by the support programs? Faculty and staff members are at a greater disadvantage: a one-time device subsidy costing P6,000 for the faculty was proposed; there was no provision for the staff. The proposal also includes a P1,000-1,500 internet subsidy for both staff and faculty, which allows for a monthly data allocation of 70-100 GB for home wi-fi. An hour-long good quality Zoom call typically uses 700 MB to 1.2 GB of data.

Such problems are partly behind the calls from various youth groups to implement an academic freeze and postpone the school opening. These calls also concern our professors, who need to scramble to create course packs for their classes while contending with copyright restrictions for learning materials, and administrative support. Taking into account pedagogical considerations, imagine how difficult it must be for them to compress a semester's worth of learning in a course pack with just a month before school opening.

Everyone is forced to adjust to the so-called "new normal in education," but who would even want to live in a rehash of an already unequal and unjust normal of before? Our right to education has long been compromised by a neoliberal framework that treats such as a commodity, creating a divide that makes education inaccessible to many. This disadvantageous situation should not be amplified by the mere acceptance of remote learning as our sole option. And if it is, for how long must we endure it? This pandemic

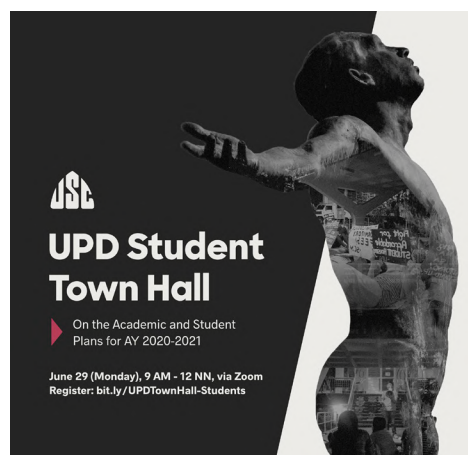


Photo Credit: UPD USC's Facebook

#### Is UP ready to fully implement remote learning for this semester?

Teleconferencing and comprehensive course guides are the main tools expected to make remote learning possible in the first semester, as discussed by UP System officials during the UP Diliman town hall for students. In the same event, support programs for student concerns on connectivity, devices, and mental health were guaranteed to be instituted by the university. Consultations on colleges, including the Asian Center, were also conducted by student councils to collate on-the-ground sentiments regarding the university's plans. Concerns raised were mostly on the preparedness of the university to institute distance learning—adjust classroom and practical courses to the remote setup and develop programs for

## HUMANS OF AC

# SERVING AT THE FRONTLINE: ASIAN CENTER'S SKELETAL WORKFORCE

by Jane Maren Dasal

Even before 6 am, Lito takes his motorcycle out to begin his 20 km travel from Montalban, Rizal to Quezon City. This is his routine for 15 days of every month when he is assigned as the security guard on day shift duty at the Asian Center (AC). At 7 am, his 12-hour shift officially begins until he is relieved from duty by another colleague in the evening.

Lito Abrilla, "Abre," to his colleagues or "Kuya Lito" to the students, is one of our kuyas and ates that serve as the skeletal workforce of the Asian Center. Kuya Lito's nature of work, and that of the other frontliners, does not allow the same liberties as with many university employees who can transition into a work-from-home arrangement.

His usual 40-minute travel to work acquired an additional 30 minutes when the enhanced community quarantine was imposed because of checkpoints. "Ang dinadaan kong checkpoint noong ECQ, minsan apat o lima. Pinakamababa na yung dalawa. Hindi maiiwasan na mahaba ang pila, puro motor lang yun. Wala namang social distancing sa motor," Kuya Lito said regarding the risks he faces when going to work.

Aside from this, he is also constantly exposed to visitors at the Asian Center as he implements standard precautionary measures, such as temperature check, for those transacting or delivering documents in the college.

"Hindi mo alam baka magka-virus ka sa dinadaan mo, o baka may virus yung kausap mo," he said when describing his biggest challenge during the community quarantine.

The same worry occupies Arlene Espinola, who has been part of Asian Center's custodial staff for eight years already. What Ate Arlene fears most is the risk of contracting the virus and infecting her family.

Precautionary measures and guidelines have been imposed at the Asian Center to decrease the risk of possible transmission, changing the dynamics of interaction in the workplace.

"Nagbago yung pakikihalubilo namin sa mga kasama sa work, yung pakikipagkwentuhan. Hindi na [kasi] kami sabay-sabay kumakain. Hindi na kami



The Asian Center staff, custodians, and security guards during the 2019 UP Diliman Lantern Parade. From L (back) Cristian Limban, Jeffrey Mariano, Jonjon Katigbak, Mark Manlicic, Frankie Bogoc. From R (front) Chris Llano, Roderick Castillo, Arlene Espinola. Photo from Arlene Espinola's Facebook page.

magkakasama sa araw. Minsan lang din kami magkita," Ate Arlene described.

Unlike Kuya Lito, Ate Arlene and the other custodial staff come to the office only twice-a-week. For each day, only two to three custodial staff are on duty.

The two-day work schedule has different implications for the other frontliners in the Asian Center.

For Frankie Bogoc, one of the Center's technical assistant, the new schedule and the lack of physical classes mean that his time is now more spent on repairs and gardening. Prior to the quarantine, Kuya Frankie was responsible for setting up the technical equipment used during classes and events.

"Walang mga customer ngayon dahil wala ring mga estudyante at event. Kaya maaga ako nakakauwi kapag pumapasok. Nakafocus ako sa pamilya [at] sa pagtulong sa household," said Kuya Frankie. His shift used to be from 11 am to 8 pm to ensure that all equipment was returned to safety after classes. Now, his shift has been from 8 am to 5 pm.

Similar physical reporting policies implemented in other offices in the university brought a different challenge for Felipe Nario, Jr., who has been with the Asian Center for nearly 40 years already. Kuya Jun, as he is more commonly called, handles and delivers the documents to be submitted to other offices in UP Diliman, such as the HRDO and the Cash Office.

"Minsan, hindi mo kasabay ng pasok ang hahawak ng papeles sa ibang opisina. Kaya kailangang bumalik," he said. On days that he reports for work, he manages to process

and deliver essential documents within half-a-day, after which he heads home.

The limits to movement, even just within the university, was a big adjustment for Kuya Jun. Even before the lockdown, he was one of several AC staff who biked to work. He said that biking ensures that he gets a healthy amount of daily physical activity. But because of a comorbidity, he is now fetched from his home to lessen the risk of possible exposure to the virus.

While the limited activities brought on by the community quarantine resulted in drastic changes that affected work routines, it has another implication on people's way of bonding together. Ate Arlene thinks back on the days before the lockdown, "Dati masaya kaming nakakapasyal kahit saan namin gusto. Nakakakain kami sa labas ng mga anak ko."

With the kind of government response in the Philippines, the battle against COVID-19 has become more than just a health concern. It has seeped into various aspects of our lives and by extension, affected mental wellbeing, livelihood, and family relationships. In this situation, our frontliners bear the brunt. Many in the skeletal workforce of the university are outsourced from agencies and thus are not afforded the same policies that safeguard their protection and benefits. As a university that serves the people, it is only right for UP to ensure and act so that they, the frontliners, are given their due in terms of protection and compensation for serving in our frontlines. While many of UP's employees, faculty and students are protected in their homes, who then will protect our frontliners?



## ACSO CORNER

## SO WHY GO TO GRAD SCHOOL?

by Rebecca Verzola

There's a whole lot more to getting a Master's degree than merely facing academic challenges. Emotional, mental and even financial stress could take their toll on a graduate student trying to accomplish class requirements amidst deadlines and, sometimes, work responsibilities. And now, we also must consider an uncertain future because of these trying times.

So why pursue a Master's degree? Students enter graduate school for various reasons: to start a career; to expand knowledge in their profession and field of specialization; to widen employment opportunities; or perhaps, just to study a field that they love.

Admission to Asian Center's MA program is not an easy task, and what comes next is another matter altogether. Graduate school, for me, was a novel experience because I had to jump from one technical field to an entirely different one. You will have to read and write academic papers—papers, papers, and look, more papers. Will you impress your professor? After finishing coursework, you still have to pass your comprehensive exams. What will be your topic for your research proposal? Will you continue writing your thesis? This is the future—your future—I am talking about. Difficult as it may seem, there is always light at the end of the tunnel as long as you do not lose your motivation.

My advice: DO NOT STOP READING! Learning never and should never stop. Join conferences—expanding your environment will bring you new perspectives. Connect with your classmates—you never know who you are going to meet. Develop good study habits—it will help your professional development, as well. Commitment and determination are keys to surviving graduate school. When you feel or think about giving up, remember what made you decide to take a Master's degree. Remember your drive and your inspiration. These will help you get past this stage of your life. Relax. Breathe. Smile. Know that your professors will always be there to guide you in your academic journey. Anything is possible when you have the right people to support you. We all started from the same point. For you, that is today. Welcome freshies! You got this.

*Rebecca Verzola is the president of the Asian Center Students Organization. She is taking up MA Asian Studies, specializing in West Asia.*

## ALUMNI CORNER: STAYING IN TOUCH

HOME LIES IN THE HEART:  
ASIAN CENTER AS HOME

by Prof. Grace Odal-Devora, Ph.D.

Before enrolling at the Asian Center, I was a graduate of BA English, major in Comparative Literature. I was a lover of literature even in high school.

I took up a Master's degree in Asian Studies focusing on Southeast Asia, with Indonesia as country of specialization. In my literary studies, I wanted to come home.

While studying at the Asian Center, I discovered the wayang puppets. It became a topic for my thesis, "The Hero in the Javanese Wayang Purwa Texts" where I derived three kinds of hero: Arjuna—"alus", Bima—"kasar", and Semar, the trickster. I was coming home to my understanding of heroes.

Through the wayang puppets, I also discovered my inner-dance advocacy, which I called Sayaw-Bathala, Alay-Sayaw, Sayaw-Babaylan, and Alay Sayaw-Mutya for Earth – Healing. By understanding the wayang wong (dancers imitating the movements of puppets by surrendering to the movements of the puppeteer), I got the idea of divine dancing as an unschooled way of tuning into a natural flowing state, or inner rhythm of the body, through breathing, humming and chanting, inner visualization, and hearing inner melodies. I was coming home to my body.

I got to tour Sagada with international students at the Asian Center. As we were entering a cave with an underground waterfall, my foot was caught in-between two rocks. This experience introduced me to the story of Bernardo Carpio; the story of Bathala as a local giant-god imprisoned within a giant rock; and the "mutya" as talismanic gemstone, symbolizing inner power, or local metaphor of the hidden, spark of light and divinity within; the "pearl of immortality" of Lao Tzu; the "Blue Pearl" of Hinduism; the Chintamani (Wishing-Stone Gem of Buddhism); the Pearl of Allah of Islam; and the Pearl of Great Price of Eastern Christianity. I was coming home to my indigenous home.

This discovery of "Mutya" as the local alchemy for the Philosopher Stone, and as the image of the Divine Female as Shakti, Shekinah, and Sophia—made me write about it for my dissertation in the PhD Philippine Studies Tri-College Program. I can say that I have come home to my heart, my spiritual home.

It was the Asian Center that served as my educational home, that provided my interdisciplinary strength to write about the "mutya" in language; in narratives and folklore; in literature and the arts; and in history.

*Prof. Grace Odal-Devora, PhD is the president of the Asian Center Alumni Association.*

## REMOTE LEARNING from page 6

must end but the government in charge of executing plans to make physical classes possible with necessary health measures is incompetent, to say the least.

Neighbors in the region—Taiwan, Brunei and Vietnam, to name a few—are commended for their early and public health-centered measures to fight COVID-19. Some were already able to hold physical classes with proper health measures in place to prevent a resurgence of cases. The Philippine government's response, on the other hand, is still led by a "guns and goons" approach. How will remote learning proceed when families are struggling to keep up with living expenses without enough government intervention during an economic and medical crisis?

Economic concerns on remote learning might seem bigger than the university, but history proves to us that there is no battle big enough for UP to take on. It must realize the need to press for the healing of our nation—one that would start by calling for a better normal through a better pandemic response (salute to our UP COVID Response Team). This is essential if it really wants to prioritize the safety of its constituents, along with the Filipino people, and to stay true to its mandate of service.

At this rate, no one, not even UP, is fully ready to pursue a remote semester. It is a challenge to push for the maximum; or else, the alternative will only end up leaving more people behind.

*Sean Thakur is chairperson of the UP Diliman University Student Council A.Y. 2019-2020. He is currently taking up MA Philippine Studies, specializing on Development Studies.*



# ASIAN CENTER IMPLEMENTS GENERAL HEALTH GUIDELINES TO BATTLE COVID-19

by Miccah Angela Frayna

Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, the UP Asian Center is closely monitoring the health, safety, and well-being of our students, faculty and staff, as well as the UP Community. The Center instituted a Post-Enhanced Community Quarantine (ECQ) Team and Health Committee to ensure the proper implementation of health protocols, and immediately respond to health emergencies and other potential hazards that may affect the health and safety of personnel and clientele.

Currently, work-from-home (WFH) is the default work setup of the AC staff. For essential and priority functions, staff may report physically to work for a maximum of two days a week as prescribed by the Post-ECQ Team and the UPD COVID-19 Task Force. Vulnerable employees such as senior citizens and employees with comorbidities were offered an alternative work arrangement to avoid exposure.

After the ECQ was lifted in Metro Manila, the Asian Center was sanitized and disinfected. Control and public health measures implemented were: the installation of physical barriers in the visitor's area, placement of floor markers and infographic signages, designation of unidirectional walkways and different entrance and exit points, and a holding area with proper ventilation for employees who may contract symptoms, etc. These measures help lower the risk of disease transmission, avoid contact among workers, decrease the duration of infection, and increase the physical and mental resilience of our constituents pursuant to the DOH Memorandum No. 2020-0157 or the "Cleaning and Disinfection in Various Settings as an Infection Prevention and Control Measure against COVID-19" and the UPHS Memorandum on Cleaning and Disinfection of Building and Offices.

Students or visitors who require the physical presence of any AC personnel for a transaction should set up an appointment

through the AC online system at least a day before the desired schedule. All employees and visitors must use the Hall of Wisdom main entrance, wear a facemask, wipe footwear on doormats with disinfectants, fill out a health screening form to facilitate future contact tracing, and undergo temperature screening. Everyone is also advised to strictly follow the University's policies and guidelines, maintain physical distancing, and regular hand washing to help mitigate the spread of COVID-19.

Anyone exhibiting COVID-19-related symptoms will be immediately isolated and brought to the designated holding area while the health liaison officer or any member of the unit's post-ECQ team shall coordinate with the UP Health Service (UHS) for an immediate consultation.

We encourage everyone to continue to work together and support the community as we face these challenging times. As UP shifts to remote learning for the first semester of A.Y. 2020-2021, the Asian Center is committed to providing expanded access to academic resources and support systems, strengthen our linkages, and prioritize health and well-being during the global pandemic. Together, we can win against COVID-19.

You may contact the following for any COVID-19 related information and concerns:

- University Health Service: 0947.427.9281
- UP Diliman COVID-19 Task Force: covid19.taskforce@upd.edu.ph
- Counseling Services via telemedicine: 8981.8500 local 2702
- PsychServ: 8981.8500 local 2496 or mobile number. 0916.757.3157

You may also visit the Online Portal of University of the Philippines COVID-19 News and Information to see the latest information and updates on UP's response during this public health situation.

## AC: TALK OF THE TOWN

### AC'S FIRST WEBINAR TACKLES FILIPINO MIGRANT CHILDREN

The Asian Center in cooperation with UP CIFAL, the Commission on Filipinos Overseas, the Philippine Department of Education, Diaspora 4 Education, and UNICEF organized its first-ever webinar titled, "Inclusive education for Filipino Children on the Move: Making the invisible visible." It was held last 31 July 2020, 2 pm, Manila Time through Zoom, an online teleconferencing platform.

Dr. Maruja Asis of the Scalabrini Migration Center delivered the welcoming remarks followed by an overview on ensuring the right of education to children by Ms. Teresita Felipe of UNICEF.

The main presentation by Dr. Jocelyn Celero, an assistant professor from the UP Asian Center, discussed the present education situation Filipino migrant children as well as issues on the availability of child-migrant related programs of host countries, accessibility, quality and type of educational opportunities and programs provided by the Philippine government for repatriated Filipino migrants.

To address these issues, reactors shared their comments and presented their own insights:

- Ian Simbulan, Executive Producer, The Reporter's Notebook
- Marita del Rosario-Apattad, Director, Project Management Division, Commission on Filipinos Overseas
- Ellene Sana, Executive Director, Center for Migrant Advocacy
- Diosdado San Antonio, Undersecretary for Curriculum and Instruction, Department of Education

A ZOOM WEBINAR 31 JULY 2020 | 2 PM GMT +8

## INCLUSIVE EDUCATION FOR FILIPINO CHILDREN

*on the Move: Making the invisible visible*

**PRESENTER**  
Prof. Jocelyn O. Celero, Ph.D.  
Assistant Professor, UP Asian Center

**OVERVIEW**  
Ms. Teresita Felipe  
Basic Education Specialist  
United Nations Children's Fund

**MODERATOR**  
Dr. Maruja Asis  
Executive Director  
Scalabrini Migration Center

**REACTORS**  
Mr. Ian Simbulan  
Executive Producer, Reporter's Notebook  
Dir. Marita del Rosario-Apattad  
Division Chief, Project Management Division  
Commission on Filipinos Overseas  
Ms. Ellene Sana  
Executive Director, Center for Migrant Advocacy  
Usec. Diosdado San Antonio  
Undersecretary for Curriculum and Instruction,  
Department of Education

Register: [bit.ly/inclusiveeducation731](https://bit.ly/inclusiveeducation731)

[CIFALPhilippines](#) [@CIFALPH](#)

## AC BITS AND BITES

## NEW ACQUISITIONS FROM THE ASIAN CENTER LIBRARY: FEATURED ARTICLES

Established in 1956, the Asian Center Library is UP's primary hub of Asian and Philippine studies related materials. It supports the learning, teaching, and research programs of the Center through acquiring, organizing, and dissemination of information materials to all stakeholders: students, faculty, staff, and scholars. In this list, we feature articles that tackle current issues on health, governance, culture, and development in Asia.

1



**Mobilizing Policy (In)Capacity to Fight COVID-19: Understanding Variations in State Responses**  
*Gilberto Capano, Michael Howlett, Darryl S.L. Jarvis, M. Ramesh & Nihit Goyal (2020)*  
 Policy and Society Volume 39, 2020 - Issue 3

.....  
 This collection of essays seeks to gain insights into the different national-level state responses to COVID-19 around the world and the conditions that shaped them.

2



**Politics and Science: The Case of China and the Coronavirus**  
*Kerry Brown & Ruby Congjiang Wang (2020)*  
 Asian Affairs Volume 51, 2020 - Issue 20

.....  
 This article looks at the spread of the disease across China, and around the globe, as a multi-layered issue affecting both politics and science. It highlights issues on Chinese governance during the public health crisis, and examines the geopolitical atmosphere among states, particularly China and the United States.

3



**Assessing the South Korean Model of Emergency Management during the COVID-19 Pandemic**  
*Min-Hyu Kim, Wonhyuk Cho, Hemin Choi & Joon-Young Hur (2020)*  
 Asian Studies Review

.....  
 This article analyzes South Korea's response to COVID-19 and how it reflects expectations of good governance. It assesses the strengths and challenges to the model, showing that South Korea has been reactive rather than preventive amid outbreaks in key public places.

4



**The Role of Culture in Post-Emergency Reconstruction: Case Studies from Afghanistan, Pakistan and Indonesia**  
*Jonathan Rider, Daniel Skillings & Flore de Taisne (2020)*  
 Asian Affairs

.....  
 This article discusses the role of cultural heritage in post-emergency reconstruction. Through field experiences, it argues that cultural heritage has significant potential to foster economic development, especially in remote communities.

5



**Capitalism, Conflict and Contradiction: Southeast Asia's Development and the Reorganisation of Production**  
*Toby Carroll (2020)*  
 Journal of Contemporary Asia

.....  
 This article locates the political economy of Southeast Asia's highly uneven and constrained development within the context of capitalism and its most recent "world market" stage. It argues that its development must be understood relative to key historical dynamics beyond the nation-state—such as colonialism, superpower relations, and shifting production relations.

## CONFERENCES AND LECTURES

January 31

Conflict in West Asia: Implications for Philippine Migration

February 20

Japanese Society and Culture:  
 A Lecture and Debriefing Seminar

February 21

People's Mobility in the Time of COVID-19

March 2

VFA Termination: New Strategic Moves?

July 31

Inclusive Education for Filipino Children  
 on the Move

August 14

ASEAN Centrality: Up Close and Personal

August 28

Wikang Filipino at iba pang Rehiyunal na  
 Wika at Gamit Nito sa Panahon ng mga  
 Hamon at Krisis

September - November

Living in Guyub:  
 Asian Center Webinar Series

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