

## ***Hiyang: A Filipino Approach to Healing***

***Felipe M. de Leon, Jr.***

In Philippine culture, there is an underlying belief in the psychic unity of all of creation. Individual existence is only apparent and relative. For we all exist within a cosmic matrix of being at the deepest center of which is a creative living principle or energetic process. All human beings – and to a lesser degree animals, plants and minerals – share this innermost sacred core. Everything is alive, permeated by a **divine essence** *that seeks fulfillment in imaginative, creative endeavors*. At the same time, the interdependence implied by a **shared matrix of being** *seeks affirmation in a celebration of togetherness*.

A synthesis of these twin motivations produces a culture that is highly creative in interpersonal relations, communication and healing. In this culture, there exists a “symphonic” wealth of techniques for connecting to people, so that loneliness, alienation, ennui, depression, and emotional repression hardly exist. Togetherness is happiness. A sharing, nurturing orientation ensures emotional and mental well-being.

There is no concept of the “other” in the other person. The “other” (**kapwa**) is also yourself. This makes Filipinos a highly relational and essentially nonconfrontational people, as monumentally demonstrated in perhaps the world’s first peaceful removal of a long-reigning dictator, the “EDSA Revolution” of February 1986 (“If there is no ‘other’ there is no war” – Milojevic<sup>1</sup>).

The Filipino cultural genius is in the fullest and deepest exploration of the social possibility, the myriad of ways of connecting

with and achieving harmony with others. Philippine culture is highly inventive of new social structures, experimenting with all kinds of social roles, identities, interactions and relationships with others. Interpersonal intelligence and the capacity for personal services is highly developed.

Since all of levels of existence are permeated with life – a creative living presence, the whole universe is, then, a society of beings: the elements at the mineral level, plants, animals and human beings all pulsate with life energy, consciousness and feeling, albeit in differing degrees of intensity. Thus, at its most profound, Philippine culture is a celebration of the mystical unity of humanity through an intimate union with the one creative living principle at the innermost core of our shared being. This is an affirmation of the essential joy and meaningfulness of existence.

The implications for healing of this philosophy of life are tremendous. Its basic tenet is **hiyang**: creative harmony and integration with all the levels of being – from the elements (nature spirits) to the Infinite Spirit of God. Hiyang also connotes a capacity to sense and identify one's place in the cosmic social order in all levels and to feel which objects, persons and situations one can have complete harmony with.

We can now derive from this tenet the basic features of the healing philosophy of **hiyang**:

1. As social ties increase, the healthier a person becomes. If this integration with others occurs in all levels (physical, sensory, affective, cognitive, psychic, spiritual) in as harmonious a manner as possible, the more conducive to health it is.
2. Since it is not only human beings that possess life and consciousness, then beings in all the other levels must be accorded the same respect and attention that we render to humans. If treated with sensitivity and respect, even the spirits of the natural elements can give us healing energy and other powers that they possess, for example, the salamander of fire can give us immunity to fire, the earth element can give us some kind of invulnerability to physical attack.

We must live in complete harmony with plants and animals and must never destroy the ecological balance in any way.

3. A healing therapy is effective if it addresses and harmonizes with all the human faculties. Thus, hiyang healing has spiritual, psychic, mental, aesthetic (literary, visual, spatial, musical, kinaesthetic, gustatory and olfactory), emotional, sensory and physical components. At the same time, a person must live in complete harmony with his society and environment.
4. To maximize social relationships, one could be a specialist but must be as well-rounded in education and knowledge as possible. The kind of awareness this makes possible can provide us tools and vehicles for optimum social integration.
5. The human being is essentially a creative, living soul, hence one should engage in creative interaction with life as often as possible. He must do creative, inventive or productive work in whatever field he is. Play, the plastic and the performing arts, sports, crafts, story telling, myths and oral literature, scientific exploration, nature trips, lively conversation, humor, and holistic, multileveled social relationships are some of the activities for the realization of our creative possibilities.

*The more expressive and creative one's life is, the freer he is from disease. The more creative and productive we are, the more we are in harmony (hiyang) with our soul.*

6. Being an integral part of the cosmic order means that we have to recognize and realize our creative individuality yet at the same time avoid any kind of selfishness and arrogance that is a sure sign of disharmony with life (loss of hiyang). One must have an attitude of supreme humility, since each of us is only a channel of divine goodness, inspiration and creative energy. Prayer, self-reflection, contemplation, and meditation are some of the ways to achieve this sense of oneness with the whole of existence, and not disrupt it like a cancerous cell that has splintered away from its parent body. Modern maladies like the glorification of the individual ego and obsession with commercial success are a guaranteed recipe for diseases of stress like heart disease and cancer.

7. Another way of achieving humility is through celebrative, sacred rituals where people completely lose their sense of separateness from others and feel as one with the whole of creation, especially if the ritual is built around a highly revered symbol or object of devotion.

But celebration, together with meditation, play, love, and creative expression of all kinds, is more significant as a way of attaining a sense of timelessness. The more we lose our sense of passage of time, the more we become whole and thus, become healed. An acute sense of clock or linear time is total fragmentation of being, a radical separation from the cosmos, and loss of our mystical feeling of oneness with the universe, and therefore a total loss of *hiyang*.

8. *Hiyang* requires that not only the healer be active but also the one being healed, who must be a participant in the healing process. There should be no concept of an inactive, merely passive patient but one who is a co-healer. There should be no dichotomy of expert and others because healing is not the specialist's concern alone. Everybody is expected to be his own healer and partici-pate in creative, expressive activities.
9. Inasmuch as ***everything is alive and sensitive*** it is demanded of us that we approach everything in as gentle, caring and caressing manner as possible. Thus, ***gradualism*** is the method of ***hiyang***. Opposites should not be made to clash but meet each other gradually, **each side modifying itself to become more and more like the other**. The attitude here is one of mutual and reciprocal action. One gets sick or suffers loss of vitality if he comes from a very hot place and immediately enters a very cold place without a gradual transition from one to the other, or vice versa. Washing one's tired eyes or hands immediately after a hard day's work can cause blurring of vision if not blindness, or trembling of the hands (***pasma***).

In contrast to *hiyang*, both allopathic and homeopathic medicine appear to be simpler in their approaches. Allopathy makes opposites simply confront each other while homeopathy makes similar qualities

affirm each other. *Hiyang* attempts to make opposites more like each other.

The technical and economic power of Western allopathic medicine has awed many Filipino medical practitioners and led them to embrace its methods blindly. Creative cooperation and harmony in traditional communities have been replaced by the wasteful competition and anxiety-driven ways of modern living. To revitalize the cultural contexts of the **hiyang** traditional healing in contemporary life is to return to the part of wholeness and wisdom.

## SOURCE

[Gender, Peace and Terrestrial Futures: Alternatives to Terrorism and War](#) by Ivana Milojevic from Future Studies, Metafuture.Org.

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