

# GEOGRAPHY — THE CORE IN THE UNITY OF KNOWLEDGE<sup>1</sup>

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The study of the earth and its inhabitants is one of the most fascinating studies known to man. The term geography is derived from the Greek word "geographia" which may be translated as "earth description." Today, as in the past, Geography is a broad division of human knowledge which is concerned with the study of the earth and its relation to the social, economic, and political activities of man. Man is born on the earth's surface where he makes his living and eventually dies therein. His knowledge of his environment, physical, biological, and cultural becomes more and more significant if only he has to live a fuller and a better life.

The historic concept that geography is a description of the earth is no longer adequate to meet the modern concept of geographical science. It is not a mere enumeration of rivers, mountains, lakes, cities, and capital towns. Webster defines geography as the science of the earth and its life especially the description of land, sea, air, and the distribution of plants and animals including man and his industries with reference to the mutual relations of these diverse elements.

What then are some of the big concepts and viewpoints of Geography? In the development of geographic thoughts five great traditional ideas are herein presented in their chronological order.

Firstly, the man-land relationship concept. It is fundamental that any scientific endeavor depends first and foremost in careful observation. Here the Greeks led the way. They described the topography of the land and correlate it with the character and customs of the inhabitants. Thus Herodotus who is recognized as the father of both geography and history explained the cause of the fertility of the soil of the delta of the Nile and its influence which made it a cradle of ancient civilization.

In the Philippines the man-land relationship can be observed in many parts of the country. In the Ilocos coastal plain for instance where the arable land is limited the inhabitants have developed the habit of industry and frugality. The nearness of the place to the shores of the China Sea as well as its limited resources have given the inhabitants the vision to migrate to other lands and to seek for new and better opportunities.

The Ifugaos of the Mountain Province who built the rice terraces at Banawe, as the 8th wonder of the world, show a clear adjustment

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of man's use on the land. The land provides the possibilities but it is up for man to use and modify it according to his needs. A place may have rich natural resources but it is up for the industry and character of man to make it viable and progressive. Japan is a country with rugged relief and poor natural resources but it is more economically advanced than the Philippines.

Secondly, the space and location concept. This aspect of geographic thought studied the shape of the earth and devised a system of locating the continents and the oceans and their features. This brought about the development of the grid system of longitude and latitude on the globe and their projections on plane surface to form the real maps.

The zones of latitudes which divide the earth into heat belts arose the concept of torrid, temperate and frigid zones. The temperature of a place therefore is greatly dependent upon its latitudinal location. Thus the location of the Philippines between  $4^{\circ}23'$  to  $21^{\circ}25'N$  latitude, which is within the zone of low latitude is mainly responsible for the moist warm climate that we enjoy. The longitudinal location of our country between  $116^{\circ}$  to  $127^{\circ}$  East, placed the Philippines some eight hours ahead of the time of Greenwich, London.

The development of map making has encouraged man to travel far and wide which brought about the discovery of new lands and the unknown world. Thus the discovery of the Americas and the Philippines by the Europeans was partly due to the development of map making. Today, maps find their usefulness not only as guide to tourists and travelers but also as tools to portray information about the features of any particular place. Thus we have the physical and political map of the Philippines that depict the landforms and political boundaries of the different cities and provinces.

Thirdly, the dual nature of geography provides the connecting link between the natural and the social science disciplines. The study of the earth, its composition and processes which include the lithosphere, hydrosphere, and atmosphere are physical in nature. All the processes and resulting features can be studied through the methods used in physics and mathematics. But the field of geography is not limited to understanding the physical phenomena but also interprets the influence of the natural features and processes to the varied activities of man. Thus the distribution of human settlements and industries are affected by the configuration of the land and the available resources.

Geography concerns itself with the study of two inter-connected streams of inquiry. One aspect is known as physical geography and consists of the systematic study of the origin, distribution, and significance of the major physical features of the earth such as landforms, climates, the oceans, and the natural resources. The other division is called human or cultural geography and gives emphasis on the study of man's imprints upon the earth. Such subjects as the distribution of population, various settlement patterns, and the features resulting from man's productive activities in earning a living fall within this province.

This unique position of geography and the richness of its contents provide a common territory for the sciences and the humanities to meet. It integrates and unifies the various disciplines that has something to do with the earth's surface. As a natural science, it finds com-

mon ground with geology, biology, astronomy, meteorology, and oceanography; while in the social science and humanities aspects, it is linked with history, economics, political science, anthropology, sociology, and demography. Because of this, Sir Patrick Geddes called geography the "synthesis and mother of all sciences." It is the common core in the unity of knowledge.

Fourthly, the concept that Geography is the study of places or spaces. First of all, "place" means a specific or unit area which is identified by its given name, such as the Greater Manila Area, the Philippines or Southeast Asia. The questions that are usually asked about the place are: Where is it located? What are its products and resources? How big is the land area and its population? These and several others will make the place unique and distinct from any other place on the globe.

In the study of the Geography of the Philippines for instance, we take up its location, size, shape, landforms, climate, and natural resources as well as the human and cultural elements. The maritime location of the Philippines led us to adopt the archipelagic doctrine so that the bodies of water separating the more than 7,100 islands shall be looked upon as part of the total land mass. This is significant for our own national interest. The size of our country should not be compared with the size of the former mother countries where we will be dwarfed as a small territory. Instead, we should be reckoned with the average size of the states of the world and in this context the Philippines will not emerge not as a small territory but a medium-large state. The fragmentary character of the Archipelago will make us understand the Filipino attitude of regionalism and why the solidification of our country into a coherent nation profession one common ideal and aspiration is taking place slowly. Our climate provides us splendid opportunities for adjustment. Thus our periods for vacation are made to coincide with the hot summer months where man's climatic energy is at its lowest. It may interest you to know that in the tropics a mean temperature of about 73°F (23°C) is conducive to the greatest efficiency of man. Our mean annual temperature is 80°F and during the summer months the mean monthly temperature goes up to 84°F. The planting of our crops should be timed so that they will be harvested before the approach of the typhoon season. The nature of our landforms and rich natural resources provide the potential for national wealth. But these resources like the forest, the minerals, the soils, the waters, and fishery resources are not inexhaustible. They belong not to the present generation alone but also to the future generation yet unborn. It becomes our duty to spread the gospel of conservation, to use our resources wisely and economically. The goals of conservation should be taught in all levels of education so that life in this part of the world shall remain vibrant and progressive.

The approach to the study of any area or place is both systematic and chronological. The focus is upon distribution and associations and with area inter-relationship. This enable man to realize of his dependence with other countries. Thus, the oil crisis in the Middle East has affected our national economy. Viewed from world perspective the study of geography may enhance the promotion of international peace and understanding as nations are interdependent with one another.

Fifthly and lastly, the modern concept of Geography is the study of the earth as the home of man. The earth includes the totality of man's environment, the physical, biological, social, and human environment. It is not the natural environment alone that affects man but the cultural environment as well.

As population grows, the demand for space and the basic requirements for food, shelter, and clothing becomes more and more acute. To meet these needs man has endeavored to transform an agricultural into an industrial economy. In the process, however, the quality of the environment may be impaired which will in turn affect the quality of life. Thus in putting up a plywood and lumber factory, a chain of events takes place. The cutting of the forest if proper safeguards are not observed may bring about rapid soil erosion and the consequence of floods. These are now being observed in our country which in the past were unknown. The factory may discharge gases which may pollute the atmosphere. The liquid effluents may be discharged through rivers and lakes which may in turn destroy the fishes and other biotic life in these bodies of water. This may deprive the fisherman of his source of livelihood. Proper regulations should be made so as to meet the rising expectations of our people and at the same time maintain the quality of our environment. The study of geography which is environmental oriented has become more relevant to our daily and national life. Thus the President of our Republic has decreed that no hazardous factory shall be constructed within a 50-kilometer radius from the City Hall of Manila. This is geography in action.

These five great traditional concepts of Geography are by no means distinct and exclusive from each other. Each emphasizes a certain aspect of geographic study. The geographer must learn the five major spheres of the earth: (1) lithosphere, the solid portion, (2) hydrosphere, the water portion, (3) the atmosphere, the gaseous portion, (4) the biosphere, the plant and animal life, and (5) the homosphere, man and his culture. All of these are part of the whole and together they serve the purpose of geography: to understand the earth as the habitat of man.

The natural and cultural environment influence man's ways of living. It provides the stage but it is the human mind, character, and industry that determine the ways in which life is lived in this planet. Man can modify his environment and with improved knowledge in science and technology he can harness and develop the earth's resources to enable him to live a richer and a more abundant life.