

Dr. Amado Castro

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I first met Dr. Amado Castro in 1958, when he sat on the Fulbright panel organized by the US Embassy. At the time, he was already an associate professor in the College of Arts and Sciences of the University of the Philippines as well as head of the economics department. I was being interviewed for a possible scholarship to go to Harvard to take up the doctoral program in economics. I had just passed the CPA board exam, having majored in accounting during my undergraduate years. Since accounting was not in the priority list for the Fulbright scholarship, I decided to opt for the closest allied specialization, economics. During the interview, I had the first good impression of Amado as a gentle but firm person. I knew that I did not impress him with my scarce background in economic analysis since the economics subjects I took within the accounting specialization were taught with an emphasis on economic history and economic institutions and with very little economic theory. He immediately realized this handicap when I could hardly distinguish between the upward movement of the demand curve and the movement along the same curve. He was quite frank about my lack of preparation for the Harvard course. Nevertheless, he still encouraged me to pursue my application, just in case my other qualifications could make up for this gap in my knowledge of economic theory. Thanks to his positive attitude, I did get the scholarship, and the rest is history.

While preparing to go to Harvard, he was generous with his advice, not only about academic matters, but also about the general living environment in Cambridge, Massachusetts. I got to know him as a highly cultured person and as a Catholic who took his faith seriously. While already in the Cambridge campus, I learned about how he was well known in the parish as an active member of the choir. His interest in music was part of his well-rounded personality, which included a keen interest in literature, the arts, and the humanities in general. As I plunged deeper into the study of economic theory, economic history, and quantitative methods, I started comparing him to the great minds in the Harvard faculty who also looked at economics not as an exclusively quantitative study of economic phenomena, but as a multidisciplinary social science more along the line of the founders of economic science in England such as Adam Smith, David Ricardo, and Thomas Malthus who combined philosophy, politics, and economics—the philosophy, politics, and economics degree that is still the main fare in Oxford and

Cambridge. It is not a coincidence that the great Joseph Alois Schumpeter, who taught at Harvard in the late forties, must have influenced the thinking of Amado. Upon my return to the Philippines, as dean of the newly established School of Economics of the UP, he encouraged me to teach part time the Economics 11, or introductory course in economics, for students of the College of Arts and Sciences. I continued to be influenced by his multidisciplinary approach to the study of economic phenomena as a counterbalance to the increasing quantification of the science of economics. Today, when it is increasingly obvious that the so-called quantitative economists have failed miserably to give the right advice about how to solve such problems as massive poverty and inequality of incomes, not to mention how to avoid recessions, especially in the developed world, I look back at those conversations I had with Amado about how important it is to learn the lessons of history. His stint as director of the Institute of Economic Development and Research at the UP convinced him even more about relating economics to the other sciences. It helped that his wide interest in culture and arts was reinforced by his stay in the Harvard environment where professors and students are encouraged to be “renaissance men and women”.

I must admit that we did not always completely agree on how to explain the backwardness of the Philippine economy in relation to our East Asian neighbors. I would see him wince whenever I referred to the Latin American “formula for economic disaster”, the inward-looking, import-substitution, and ultra-nationalist policy of industrialization based on the dependency theory of Raul Prebisch, a Latin American economist. He would always come to the defense of the import-substitution policy that the Philippine government adopted after the period of rehabilitation was over. I would always listen to his arguments since he was well known as the leading Filipino specialist on international economics. He would always point out that the period of import substitution lasted only for a short while from 1954 to 1961 and that decontrol started during the administration of President Diosdado Macapagal, under whom he served as governor and acting chairman of the Development Bank of the Philippines. I would argue, however, that the decontrol in the 1960s was very limited and that we continued to have very high tariff walls against imports, a very unrealistic exchange rate that kept the Philippine peso artificially strong, and an interest rate regime that subsidized highly capital-intensive industries, while completely discouraging the growth of the export-oriented, labor-intensive industries that propelled our neighbors to become the tiger economies of the last century. Despite this difference of opinion, we continued our friendly conversations so that when he retired from the University of the Philippines, I invited him to teach economic history in our fledgling School of Economics, first at the Centre for Research and Communication and later at the University of Asia and the Pacific (UA&P) that was launched in 1995. Until his death, he was the main professor who made sure that the economists we were producing were steeped in economic history, both

of the world and of the Philippines. I was gratified to learn that he was using the always relevant reading lists on economic history that we used at Harvard.

As attested to by both the students and his colleagues in the faculty, Amado took his teaching very seriously. He fitted in to a T in our personal mentoring system, in which the professors personally guided the students not only on academic matters but in their whole-person development. It helped that he had a wide interest in different fields so that he could really assist in shaping the minds and hearts of the students according to the ideals of Christianity, especially as regards the social doctrine of the church. He gave a very good example from his personal life and behavior of how one's faith should influence one's daily life and work. Even as his health was failing, especially during the time that he suffered a serious accident when his foot was run over by a car, he did not hesitate to receive his teaching assignments since he realized we were really short of economic historians. As recounted below by those who were his students and other faculty members, he was the teacher par excellence, both demanding and understanding of the limitations of his students. He always made time for them after class when they needed personal advice and encouragement.

A young member of the faculty of our School of Economics, Mr. Gregorio A. Mabbagu, was one of his students in economic history. Mr. Mabbagu remembers that Amado used to start his classes on a light vein, telling Erap jokes, cheering up the environment very early in the morning. He would always start his classes on time. He was prepared with copious notes and his thoughts were well organized. He had a vivid memory of things and events that occurred during World War II. This especially impressed the students because his memory was still very sharp despite his already being in his 90s. His dedication to teaching, despite his advanced age, was a real inspiration to his students. He expected much of them, making everyone participate in the class discussions. His approach to history was far from just memorizing names and events. He encouraged the students to think more analytically and extract lessons that can be useful for future policy making.

Dr. Peter Lee U, former dean of the School of Economics of UA&P, had dealings with Amado for practically all the 21 years he taught in our institution. Let me quote directly from a testimonial of Dr. Lee U: "I had the opportunity to sit in on many of his lectures and the passion he had for teaching about Philippine economic history was evident. He often asked for more sessions, and we would arrange additional meetings so he could cover material that he felt the students must know. We often worried whether he might be tiring himself out in the process. He was a witness and participant in many of the events and issues he talked about so that the students greatly benefited from his firsthand point of view.

"He was meticulous in grading. I often saw him going over students' papers and marking them in red ink. This was no small effort for him as he had to use a magnifying glass to read the handwriting, since his sight was no longer as sharp as in his younger days. And he would take pains to correct students not

just in economics, but also in their English grammar and style... Despite the age difference, he was able to relate and establish a rapport with the students who easily connected with him because they found out that he had interests in such mundane things as cameras and cars, among others. On the occasions that he was hospitalized, the students would organize visits to the hospital. He enjoyed these visits very much. On at least one Christmas season, he invited the students to his house to do some caroling. As was his custom, he would take pictures of every batch that he taught. He made it a point to attend the graduation rites, which he rarely missed. Students/graduates would seek him out after the commencement exercises were over and take pictures with him. Whenever students would run into him at the Philippine Economic Society conferences, they would rush up to him and take selfies.”

His very human approach to dealing with his students must have been reinforced by his exposure to the Oxford-Cambridge mentoring system he experienced at Harvard, in which students and professors lived together in the so-called “houses” around which student life revolved. As Mr. Mabbaggu narrates: “Our batch went to his house one Christmas time to do some caroling. As we passed through the gate of his house, I noticed that there were many cars parked inside. He told us later about his passion for cars. After welcoming us warmly and joyfully, he toured us around his house. We were impressed with all the antiques that were displayed in the various rooms. We also learned about his love for cats. There were many of them wandering around, including in the garage. Dr. Castro had a name for each of the cats. There were pictures of him and family members framed in elegant old frames.

“When we finished dinner, he showed us to a room where there was a special chair. He said it was from Harvard. Then he told stories about his years at that prestigious university. That is when we learned about his love for music and his having sung in the parish choir and his having been an active member of the Harvard Catholic Club. That night, those of us who were fortunate to have been invited to his home experienced his warmth and friendship. Even in his old age, he was still investing a lot of his time in preparing the next generation of professional people. We will always remember him for his humor and his cordial yet very professional relationship with us.”

Dr. Cid Terosa, the current dean of the School of Economics, had even closer contact with Amado because the former was the professor in charge of the economic history course of the industrial economics program in which Amado taught the module on Philippine economic history. At the end of every semester, Amado would render a very detailed account to Dr. Terosa about his impressions of the students, explaining some low or failing grades he had given to some of them. Dr. Terosa noticed how Amado was a stickler for the rules of English grammar and composition. He would show Dr. Terosa some of the graded test papers that bore short reminders about the proper use of the English language.

Although he was annoyed by simple grammatical mistakes made by the students, he always had a good word about their diligence, discipline, and determination. He was especially pleased with students who wrote well and clearly. He would easily recall the names of those who were able to combine mastery of the subject matter with almost impeccable writing skills.

Dr. Terosa also observed that Amado was a camera hobbyist. He would always take a class picture at the end of each semester. On graduation day, as already mentioned above, he would take pictures of his former students with his trusty camera. As his former students giggled and roared with delight to celebrate the end of their college life, Dr. Castro would brandish his state-of-the-art camera and take pictures of them. The students were more than happy to have a picture with the fabled Filipino economist. A good number of them have kept these photos taken with Amado as souvenirs, reminding them of a very spiritual but very down-to-earth person. They would remember that he never failed to start class with a short prayer. Although he always shared a joke to jumpstart his class, the short prayer always had to be first. More than by talking about his religious beliefs, he showed by his deeds that he believed in the primacy of the divine over the secular.

To summarize the lasting impressions Amado made on him, Dr. Terosa ends his reminiscences: “My once-a-semester conversations with Dr. Castro were lengthy. None ended in less than sixty minutes. Aside from discussing grades and class performance, our conversations pulsated with Dr. Castro’s vibrant and joyful memories of his days in Harvard, his exciting years in the University of the Philippines School of Economics, and his unflagging passion for teaching economics. I listened most of the time, and I always felt that I was being mentored. I drew insights on commitment, loyalty, patience, perseverance, preparation, dedication, and service to country and fellowmen from our conversations. I was never Dr. Castro’s student, but, indeed, I learned a lot from him.”