

- ◇ Amb. del Mundo asked the three speakers which strategy they would adapt if they were the Philippine Ambassador to China.

Mr. FlorCruz stated that politically, he would build an independent foreign policy, one which is not pro-US. Economically, he would try to identify the complementarities between the Philippine and the Chinese economies. Culturally, he would encourage more Filipinos to learn Chinese, since it is considered the "language of the future." (He added that a number of foreign governments and enterprises are sending their people to China to learn the language.)

Mr. Sta. Romana said that he would identify areas in China where the Philippine investments can profitably enter into. He would also take steps to facilitate travel to the Philippines by the Chinese. (He maintains that the Chinese will not overstay in a country whose culture they are not very familiar with.)

Mr. Baculinao said that he would take steps to bridge greater understanding between the two peoples. He reiterated Mr. FlorCruz's proposal for a more intensive learning of the Chinese language.

CHITO, ERIC, AND JIMI

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*I*n this space I will be essentially quoting excerpts or paraphrasing from my closing remarks at the symposium entitled "China in the Asia-Pacific Century" which featured the three aforementioned guest speakers from China. Those remarks were essentially personal reminiscences about my association with these three friends in China where I served two tours of duty as a diplomat, first, from late 1979 to about mid-1986, then again from 1993 to 1995. Thus, I speak from my vantage point as diplomat and friend.

During my first six years in Beijing I never saw Chito, tall and big as he is, even though he worked almost next door to me in the same diplomatic ghetto where I lived then. One day a Chinese-Australian friend (a wife of a diplomat), who knew Chito since they both worked for the *Washington Post* then, said to me: You know, I asked Chito Sta. Romana, because he comes from the Philippines, if he knows you at the Philippines Embassy, and it was strange that he gave me a very curt and disinterested reply: "I

have nothing to do with *that* embassy!" Those were the days when the official policy of the Philippine Embassy, which I never agreed with, was to keep a distance from the so-called "student defectors" or dangerous creatures like Chito, Eric and Jimi. Well, I not only respected Chito's isolation from the Philippine Embassy, but I also forgave him for his low regard for my work place.

Then came 1986, that historic year. When Cory assumed power, who should turn up at the embassy the very next day but Chito Sta. Romana! Visibly excited, a wide grin on his face, he introduced himself and I welcomed him with wide-open arms. We have become good friends since but think of the six years wasted!

I think I met Eric during my first six months in China at the Beijing Language Institute where he was studying Chinese at the time. A diplomat friend from Guyana, also a student at the institute, invited me to lunch at the school canteen and asked if I would like to meet Eric. My reply was, would *he* like to meet me? Well, we not only met but we had lunch together as well. Eric then seemed more hungry for news about the Philippines than for canteen food—obviously a homesick expat. After lunch, he showed me around the campus and we even had photos taken together. He evidently felt "safe" in my company even though I was from the government sector. All told, Eric was more friendly than Chito.

But the friendliest of all was Jimi. By the time I met him at the early 80's, he had conquered his "fear" of the Philippine Embassy. I would see him come to the Embassy periodically to check on the status of his application for a Philippine passport which had been pending for a very long time. His patience was tried almost to the breaking point, but he never gave up. Any-

way, he eventually got his passport, the first Philippine passport ever granted to a "student defector" in China. Of course, I signed it myself for historical reasons. In those days of the early 80's, Jimi was extraordinary helpful and friendly to our Filipino students who came to Beijing under our cultural exchange program with China. I was then the cultural officer of the Embassy and our exchange students were my wards, so to speak, and through them I got to know Jimi quite well. Jimi would visit me in my flat; sometimes he would knock on my door late at night to ask if I had food. In those days there were few restaurants in Beijing and those few closed early, like 7:00 at night, so after that hour, if you were hungry, you went knocking at a friend's house. Subsequently, a year or two later, Jimi knocked at my place for another reason, not food this time. By then I had invited a niece, who just finished college, to visit me in Beijing. Jimi, who always managed to be around newly arrived Filipinos, especially girls, set eyes on my niece, took a fancy to her, and knocked on my door ever more! Well, to make a long story short, one day when I wasn't looking, Jimi turned around and swiftly married my visiting niece! I am now a grandaunt of two. Thanks, Jimi.

I have more stories in my memory which I am saving for the next symposium, hopefully. Since the People's Republic of China is an inexhaustible topic, we China watchers and interested onlookers as well as prospective tourists to China hope that in the near future our three distinguished guest speakers will come back for another session with us. China is changing incredibly fast, and who can better update us on the changes happening in that country and the impact of these changes on China's neighbors like the Philippines, than Chito, Eric and Jimi