Editor's Introduction

Filomeno V. Aguilar Jr.

Copyright © Ateneo de Manila University

http://www.philippinestudies.net

Editor's Introduction

Fantasies need not be utopias, but can come close to them, depending on who dreams and the historical conditions of dreaming. As illumined by Caroline Hau and Takashi Shiraishi, fantasizing about "Asianism" emerged in the late nineteenth century, as European imperialism intensified and globalization deepened. Meiji Japan was a fertile ground for fantasies that would challenge Europe's hegemony in Asia. In this context Hau and Shiraishi situate the meeting of José Rizal and Suehiro Tetchō, who in 1888 became fellow travelers to the United States and Britain. They explain how and why Suehiro—but not Rizal—fictionalized this encounter with dreams of Asianist solidarity.

In the 1920s the *komiks* (comics) emerged as a new form, appropriated apparently from the Western comics that, albeit in existence since the 1820s, began to feature the balloon and panelized continuity only in 1897. Relatively new in the U.S. when it was introduced in the Philippines, the modern comic strip soon became a mainstay of Filipino popular culture as mass literacy grew. Soledad Reyes argues that komiks characters harkened back to the heroes of traditional folklore, even as they offered commentaries on contemporary social life. As the komiks flourished from the 1950s to the 1970s, they became highly popular expressions of the poor majority's utopian dream of a savior rising from among ordinary people to champion the cause of the oppressed.

Riding on the globalized dream of labor, recent films made by women directors, as Rolando Tolentino avers, have eroded the gains of earlier feminist filmmaking. These postfeminist fantasies have come at a time when the feminization of overseas migration has become an established pattern, the state's policy of labor export fully institutionalized, migrant networks in many localities long set in motion, and stories of abuse seemingly taken for granted by the public. The absence of a critical cinematic edge correlates with the setback of the Leftist agenda to which the earlier feminist films had strong affinities.

The articles suggest that changing historical circumstances result in the fantasies themselves changing or having to contend with competing visions. Hau and Shiraishi show that Suehiro's daydream of Asian solidarity—based on personal friendships and an alliance with China—was sidelined by Japan's

subsequent aggression and military victories, embodied in fantasies of Asianism dominated by Japan-as-leader. By the 1930s Japanese expansionism had become a dangerous utopia. But Suehiro's dream did not simply vanish. After Japan's defeat and the rise of the U.S. as the chief power in Asia, the fantasy of the Suehiro-Rizal friendship, in turn, fueled fantasies of a "special friendship" between Japan and the Philippines. Similar rhetorical devices were employed in Japan's reentry into other parts of Southeast Asia. At present, the dream of Japan-as-leader refuses to die, abetted by the decentering of U.S. financial power and competition with a resurgent China, but it is, in the view of Hau and Shiraishi, disagreeable and a liability.

In the heyday of the komiks in the 1920s and 1930s, as Reyes narrates, two types of characters jostled for the readers' devotion: the trickster and the epic hero, epitomized by Kenkoy and Kulafu, respectively. The war's aftermath and grosss social inequalities, rather than allowing the funnyman to thrive as a way of dreaming away reality, whetted the public's appetite for the superhero. Emblematic in the 1970s was Carlo Caparas's *Ang Panday* (The Blacksmith). In a society absorbed with victimhood, the romance mode won the day—enabling the komiks to compete with serialized novels and magazines.

Obviously fantasies have empirical implications. As Hau and Shiraishi put forward, Asianist thinking and practice are best understood in terms of networks formed by individuals who, like Rizal and Suehiro, crossed borders, met fortuitously, talked to each other through language barriers, ate and laughed together, shared their passions, identified with the other, and eventually linked others to their web of contacts—as in the way Mariano Ponce, with dreams of Japanese arms for the Revolution, was plugged into the Rizal-Suehiro network.

Networks, of course, form the backbone of overseas labor migrations. But whether the basic emplotment of tragedy in movies like *Anak* (Offspring) and *Milan* will alter the dreams of actual and prospective migrant workers is an open question. What is certain is that the popularity of these films has guaranteed material advantages to both filmmakers and actors. The outworking of the profit motive also explains the persistent repackaging of komiks characters and stories, which recently have enjoyed a resurgence in film and television.

Eduardo Jose Calasanz pays tribute to his teacher, Fr. Miguel A. Bernad, S.J., the second editor-in-chief of this journal and a prolific contributor starting from the very first issue. Fr. Bernad passed away on 15 March 2009, after a long and highly productive career as a scholar and service as a Jesuit. The erudition of his writings await rediscovery by the younger generation. However, the solid work he put into *Kinaadman* and this journal, we believe, will not be lost.