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Julius Caesar in Manila: A Short History of the Filipino People

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Book Reviews

JULIUS CAESAR IN MANILA

A SHORT HISTORY OF THE FILIPINO PEOPLE. By Teodoro A. Agoncillo and Oscar M. Alfonso. Quezon City: University of the Philippines, 1960. iv, 648 pp. Mimeographed

The senior author of this latest history of the Philippines has long been a vocal exponent of a new approach to the narration of local events: he believes that too much emphasis has been placed on the colonial period of the country and too little on the purely Filipino aspects of history that have given rise to the present-day modern Philippines. This history, therefore, is a sharp departure from previous work on the same subject by Conrado Benitez, Eufronio M. Alip and Gregorio F. Zaide, the writers of the sacrosanct textbooks used by our schools on that subject.

"With few exceptions," says Professor Agoncillo, "the documents of the pre-1872 Philippines deal almost exclusively with the history of Spain in the Philippines", and it would be "illogical and irrelevant to discuss lengthily the innumerable events in which the Filipinos have no direct or indirect participation." Again, "it has been customary for foreign and Filipino historians and teachers to say that Magellan discovered the Philippines... this may be true insofar as the Spanish chroniclers are concerned; but why should Filipinos follow the Spaniards even in this matter of interpreting their own history? The Filipinos already had cultural and commercial intercourse with the peoples of Southeast Asia centuries before Magellan was born. From the Filipino viewpoint, how could Magellan have discovered something which has been known to many even before his time?"

In this latest work by Professor Agoncillo, he continues bandying about such terms as "landed aristocracy", "bourgeoisie",

"middle-class", "serf" and "proletarian", which were used in two of his earlier books, *REVOLT OF THE MASSES* and *MALOLOS: THE CRISIS OF THE REPUBLIC*, leading the casual reader to believe what his bitter critics have accused him of: espousing the Marxist interpretation of history. This suspicion is further strengthened by the chapter on the Hukbalahap Movement, wherein the use of certain adjectives indicates where his sympathies lie. "Taruc," he relates, "entered Manila [after the presidential amnesty of June 21, 1948] like Julius Caesar entering Rome after the Gallic wars." This phrase could aptly be used of Manuel L. Quezon on his return to the islands in 1916 after securing the Jones Law, or of Ramon Magsaysay on the day of his inauguration in 1953, but hardly of anybody else. Again, the murder of the millionaire *hacendero* of Pampanga, Jose de Leon Sr., is attributed to the peasant workers' "discontent", when in reality he was killed by a disgruntled sugar planter named Timbol over some personal financial arrangements.

The authors have properly devoted a chapter to the Aglipayan Movement, because it is an important offshoot of the revolutionary struggle, but to place it on the same level as the Reformation in Europe is to magnify it beyond true perspective. It cannot be denied that with the death of the two founders, Gregorio Aglipay and Isabelo de los Reyes, much of the initial momentum has been lost and today that church has a lesser impact than the other religious minorities in this country, say, the *Iglesia ni Kristo*, whose political potential seems to be greater than the Aglipayans ever enjoyed at the height of their popularity.

Every so often, the authors have a tendency to lapse into inappropriate colloquialisms: for example, the term "fishy" for T. H. Pardo de Tavera's theory of direct Indian-Filipino contact, "taking it easy", "busting each other's head" etc. They are critical of President Manuel A. Roxas, whom they accuse of being slavishly pro-American, and question the truth of Ramon Magsaysay being "by nature a man whose heart always bled for the *tao*." In fact, they point out that "all his (Magsaysay's) plans relative to the rural uplift, though impressive to the peasants, were mere improvisations, patchwork, a temporary expedient that meant continued alliance of the masses with him." If the authors have been critical of the Spaniards, Americans and Japanese, they have not, on the other hand, spared the Filipinos themselves for their national shortcomings and idiosyncrasies.

But it is in the section on Filipino literature that the senior author excels. Himself a ranking writer in Tagalog, he gives a candid and witty appraisal of the status of past and present-day

writers in both English and Tagalog. As for a certain exponent of free verse in Tagalog, Professor Agoncillo says this poet "considers himself an inch above Walt Whitman", since, in an introduction to an anthology, he "laid down, in the manner of a man about to give up his ghost, his so-called literary testament." Passages such as this, which abound in the book, prevent it from becoming dull.

CARLOS QUIRINO

NOT ONE BUT TEN

SOUTHEAST ASIA TODAY AND TOMORROW: A Political Analysis. By Richard Butwell. New York: Frederick A. Praeger. 1961. 176 p.

One may as well accept the fact that books will continue to be written about Southeast Asia just as they will be written about other regions, like Latin America and Tropical Africa. What this book makes plain is that such work is in danger of being an exercise in superficiality and is liable to have as little internal coherence as the region itself. Southeast Asia is not one place but ten different places—different, it seems, in all possible ways: racially and ethnically, in climate and endowment of resources, in religion and language, in literacy, in entrepreneurial vigor, in the relative importance of minorities, in internal problems of law and order, in external threats to independence, in historical background and in present world allegiance.

Professor Butwell first visited Southeast Asia in 1953; during 1959-60 he was a Fulbright Professor at the University of Rangoon. He is a member of the Department of Political Science of the University of Illinois. He has set out first of all to assess the record of the lands of Southeast Asia in governing themselves after a decade of independence. His secondary purposes are to offer suggestions about the nature of government in this part of the world and to chart the probable course of future development. Perhaps he judged that a man ought not be too modest in reporting to his sponsors. Imagine a traveller in 1939 charting "the probable course of future development".

It struck me how often the Philippines, to its credit, must be cited as an exception to general statements: for example, the region's decline in enthusiasm for democratic government, the growth in political importance of armies, and the despair which replaced the excitement of early independence years. "We expected so much