

# philippine studies

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## **Land and People in the Philippines** by Joseph E. Spencer

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*Philippine Studies* vol. 1, no. 3 (1953): 277–278

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## BOOK REVIEWS

LAND AND PEOPLE IN THE PHILIPPINES. Geographic Problems in Rural Economy. By Joseph E. Spencer. University of California Press, Berkeley. 1952. Pp. xviii-282. \$4.50

*Land and People in the Philippines* is the first serious attempt—long overdue—to provide a broad survey of the relationship of the Philippine population to its geographical environment. While Professor Spencer provides us with many interesting and valuable observations, the book has serious shortcomings. A major weakness—strongly suggested by the limited bibliography appended—is the lack of an ample factual basis for many of the topics discussed. In part, this weakness can be attributed to the scarcity of reliable facts and figures on all but a few phases of Philippine social and economic life. No scholar working on contemporary Philippine problems can escape this handicap. Yet, Professor Spencer has failed to use primary source material that is available and has relied heavily on secondary sources which he fails to evaluate critically. His extensive use of Castillo's *Philippine Economics*, a high school textbook of severely limited value, is a case in point. Secondary sources of this calibre can hardly qualify as an adequate point of departure for a scholarly work.

There are several parts of the book which deserve specific comment. On page forty-seven, for instance, there is a disconcerting failure to differentiate between "standard of living" and "actual level of living" in the Philippines. Such a failure completely ignores one of the most crucial factors in the contemporary scene: the increasing gap between that which is the standard of expectation in the way of economic goods, services and other intangibles and the reality of life as far as such factors are concerned.

On page one hundred and thirteen, Mr. Spencer falls into the common error of identifying Spanish *encomiendas* as land grants, an error that is also made in most of his secondary sources. In historical fact, however, *encomiendas* were grants which gave the *encomendero* the right to collect tribute from a specified number of *indios* in certain areas. In return for this the *encomendero* was legally required to provide protection and religious instruction for

the *indios*. Legally speaking, an *encomienda* was never a land grant (it bore a closer resemblance to the farming out of taxes), and laws were actually passed forbidding *encomenderos* from living within their *encomiendas*.

The general treatment of the sugar industry in the Philippines by the author is, at best, inadequate. Little consideration is given to the fact that the existing sugar industry of the Islands has been built up almost entirely upon the artificial basis of tariff protection in the American market. And this tariff protection for sugar has been gained only at the expense of free entry for American goods, a questionable horse trade in the long run. The author also fails to discuss the unique problems involved in the organization (or disorganization) of the Philippine sugar industry around two historically competitive loci, the planters and the centralists.

In the discussion of corporate activities in the Philippines, Professor Spencer fails to recognize the tremendous importance of the culture pattern of the Filipino family system. This reviewer, however, feels that it is within the organization and traditions of the Filipino family that the key to success or failure in corporate activities can be found.

The strongest criticism of this reviewer is directed against Professor Spencer's summary chapters. It is here that Professor Spencer fails to see the implications of explosive population growth, expanding demands for goods and services that accompany an increased standard of living and such a factor as mechanization of agriculture. It is here that the inherent limitations of the present colonial type economy based on agricultural exports are ignored and the fact that the Philippines has had a structurally unsound economy, at least since the war, is forgotten. The solution to the economic problem in the Philippines which Professor Spencer seeks in the land is not there.

Despite the general and specific criticisms of *Land and People in the Philippines*, Professor Spencer has written a welcome addition to Philippine studies and it will undoubtedly remain an important reference for some time to come.

THOMAS R. McHALE

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PHILIPPINE WRITING: AN ANTHOLOGY. Edited by T. D. Agcaoili. With an introduction by Edith L. and Edilberto K. Tiempo. Archipelago Publishing House, Manila. 1953. Pp. xxxi-351. P10.00

"Philippine writing" is a much anthologized thing, as anyone can see from the number of anthologies of Philippine prose and verse in English that have appeared in the last quarter of a century.