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## Reflections on the Filipino Woman's Past

LOURDES RAUSA-GOMEZ AND HELEN R. TUBANGUI

When Rizal urged the Filipina in his "Letter to the Young Women of Malolos"<sup>1</sup> to be bold, aggressive, and industrious, was she in reality wanting or was she in fact in possession of these qualities? There are varied perceptions of the Filipina. Several historical accounts refer to her character, her virtues, and other winning qualities. Others mention her vices and vulnerabilities. Whichever way these descriptions pointed, what is clear is that she as a person, as a help-mate in the family, a worker in the field or industry, and an active contributor to business enterprise, played not only diverse but crucial roles.

The accounts that refer to the early Filipina are largely written by foreigners. To them she presented a multifaceted personality, sometimes beautiful, sometimes ugly; sometimes chaste, sometimes wanton; sometimes indolent, sometimes industrious; at times the epitome of cleanliness or of slovenliness; sometimes discreet, sometimes vulgar; sometimes docile, sometimes bold to the point of brazenness. To a certain degree there is an element of truth to each of these kaleidoscopic glimpses and therefore the seeming inconsistencies revealed in the Filipina's nature.

What we know of the Filipino woman is largely viewed through the lens of man's observations and judged through values which consider man the measure. It is only in recent years that historical writing has taken note of the female role and point of view. In the Philippines, this takes on greater meaning because the Filipina has on occasion been referred to as "the best man in the country."<sup>2</sup>

1. Jose Rizal, "Letter to the Young Women of Malolos," in Teodoro M. Kalaw, ed. *Epistolario Rizalino*, II, 1887-1890 (Manila: Bureau of Printing, 1931), p. 122. See also pp. 94, 102, 174.

2. George A. Malcolm, *First Malayan Republic* (Boston: The Christopher Publishing House, 1951), p. 43.

Bearing in mind the dual nature of mankind, which comprises the male and female aspects, it seems that historical accounts have depicted Filipino woman as assuming a subordinate role when in reality she has displayed a more assertive nature. Her development has always been made dependent on and sublimated to the interests of others, thus denying her both the opportunity and the recognition she rightfully deserves. Therefore, a total picture of Philippine history would not be complete unless a proper account of the Filipina's experience is explored and recorded. This account would necessarily take note of the evolution of her changing experiences and include the development of her consciousness as an essential aspect of the Philippine historic past.

In this attempt to reconstruct the early beginnings of the Filipino woman in Philippine history, only Spanish and foreign writers who visited the Philippines for reasons of official and private interests were consulted. While this may not present a complete picture of the subject, it may be viewed as an initial effort to record in historical perspective the part and role assumed by the early Filipina in the forging of the Philippine nation.

In referring to the "Filipina," the foreigners record their impressions of three distinct categories of womanhood: the peninsular, the half-caste Spanish or Chinese, and the native Indio. Of these, we are singling out the role played by the native Indio, henceforth referred to as the Filipina, and to a lesser extent the half-caste Spanish or Chinese mestiza. To be sure, any judgment made of the Filipina has to be made within the context of her particular setting, that is, the part of the country from which she hailed. This may explain why she struck some observers as an enigma, possessing negative traits in some instances and positive traits at other times. Yet on other occasions, the same traits would be regarded differently by other writers.

The first insights into the Filipina take note of her physical attributes. What was she like? The following descriptions of her are taken from different authors:

... well built and good-looking... [her] complexion is yellowish brown, like a boiled quince. . . .<sup>3</sup>

3. Francisco Colín, "Native Races and their Customs," in F. Landa Jocano, ed., *The Philippines at the Spanish Contact: Some Major Accounts of Early Filipino Society and Culture* (Manila: MCS Enterprises, Inc., 1975), p. 160.

. . . the women are exceedingly ugly and most indecent. . . .<sup>4</sup>

The Indian women are very beautifully formed, they have luxuriant black hair, and large dark eyes.<sup>5</sup>

[Of the women in the cigar factories of Binondo]. . . It is a strange sight to witness the ingress and egress of these hordes of females; and probably the world cannot elsewhere exhibit so large a number of ugly women. Their ages vary from 15 to 45.<sup>6</sup>

The Tagal women are much better than the men; their faces are more normal and their glances more lively. They are coquettish. . . How well a swarthy colour goes with lively passionate eyes and thick black tresses piled up in a tight knot on a small head. . . The shapeliness of their women strikes you; they are not tall, but are very well built and all the more so because none but nature has laboured over their figures.<sup>7</sup>

. . . the people of this province [Tagals] are the best of all the Islands. . . they are light-coloured people of very good figures and faces, and like to put on many ornaments of gold, which they have in great abundance. . . .<sup>8</sup>

. . . that which distinguished the female half-breed (Spanish mestiza or Chinese mestiza) is a singularly intelligent and expressive physiognomy. Their hair drawn back from the face, and sustained by long golden pins, is of marvelous luxuriance. . . .<sup>9</sup>

Many of the mestizas are extremely pretty, but their gait drags a little, from their habit of wearing slippers.<sup>10</sup>

The Spanish mestizos are possessed by the urge to pass whenever they can as Spaniards, but it is impossible. Their faces, which are too swarthy, and their hair, which is too black, reveals at every step that their

4. The Editorial Board, Filipiniana Book Guild, comp., *The Colonization and Conquest of the Philippines by Spain* (Manila: Filipiniana Book Guild, 1965), p. 204.

5. Feodor Jagor, *Travels in the Philippines* (Manila: Filipiniana Book Guild, 1965), p. 19.

6. Charles Wilkes, "Narrative of the U.S. Exploring Expedition," in *Travel Accounts of the Islands (1832-1858)* (Manila: Filipiniana Book Guild, 1974), p. 38.

7. Ivan Goncharov, "Voyage of the Frigate 'Pallada'," in *Travel Accounts of the Islands (1832-1858)* (Manila: Filipiniana Book Guild, 1974), p. 170.

8. Antonio de Morga, "Sucesos de Philipinas," in Frederick H. Sawyer, *The Inhabitants of the Philippines* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1900), p. 208.

9. Paul P. de la Gironière, *Twenty Years in the Philippines* (New York: Harper & Bros. Publishers, 1854), p. 35.

10. Jagor, *Travels*, p. 23.

blood is not Spanish. They themselves understand this and are resigned to it.<sup>11</sup>

The varied descriptions indicate that the physical attractiveness of the Filipina caught the attention of the foreigners, who were careful to distinguish the women of the Tagalog region from those of other regions. Whatever their differences were, there was one quality which they had in common, a fondness for ornaments, particularly gold.

Since the foreigners who visited the country came as civil servants, soldiers, missionaries, scientists, or tourists, they had the opportunity to observe the day-to-day activities of the people and to travel extensively throughout the Islands. Hence, they were able to observe at close range the Filipina's character, status, qualities, traits, and abilities.

Generally, the Filipina confined herself to the task of running the home. She prepared and rationed the food for the various members, taking care not to quickly consume such vital staples as rice.

The quantity [of rice in Bikol] for each single meal is rubbed in a mortar by the women. This is in accordance with an ancient custom; but it is also due to the fear lest, otherwise, the store should be too quickly consumed.<sup>12</sup>

She not only managed the household but she also controlled the income of the family, to which she oftentimes contributed as a result of her skills in sewing, weaving, embroidering, and even commerce and trade.

One trait which particularly stood out in the mind of the foreigners was her sense of hospitality to strangers. This was true for all classes — whether the Filipina was a domestic employed by the missionaries or whether she was a hostess receiving guests in her own home. This was a departure from the customs observed in other Asian countries, where women were seldom allowed to welcome visitors alongside the male members of the household. This perhaps explains the privileged status which the Filipina enjoyed in her home and in society. In this way, she was often characterized as less shy. Zúñiga comments:

He who sees Manila ladies will take them as less shy, which is what they

11. Goncharov, "Voyage," in *Travel Accounts (1832-1858)*, p. 163.

12. Jagor, *Travels*, p. 115. See also Florence Horn, *Orphans of the Pacific: The Philippines* (New York: Reynal & Hitchcock, 1941), p. 47.

are because they talk more freely than women of other lands. . . And a woman who shows more boldness in certain things than what the established customs allow is not a bad woman.<sup>13</sup>

The home was only a part of the Filipina's daily existence. In certain instances she worked alongside the men in the fields, though performing only the lighter tasks. It is interesting to note in this regard, that other writings refer to the practice of employing women as beasts of burden, citing as examples the Basques, Wallachians, and Portuguese. Fortunately such is not nor has been the practice in the Philippines.<sup>14</sup>

The work of the women is to gather all the grains they could cut as the grains fall from the stalks very easily.<sup>15</sup>

Apart from toiling in the fields, the Filipina employed her skills in cottage industries to augment the family's income. That she could perform all these varied tasks indicated her flexibility in undertaking additional work and pointed to her enduring and unending patience to submit herself to all kinds of situations.

Certainly the Filipina's ability to be wife, mother, provider explains her physical stamina and in general her seemingly good health. It is said that:

. . . the healthy life led by the women enables them to recover very rapidly after child-birth. In fact, they return to their usual avocations directly after the ceremony of purification [of the new-born child and mother]. . . .<sup>16</sup>

The weaknesses of the Filipina did not escape the scrutiny of the foreign observers. While she was both industrious and enterprising, she was also otherwise described as being indolent. Other accounts mention:

Las mujeres se ocupan en cuidar la casa, en hilar y tejer el algodón y el abaca que se saca en otras provincias de un plátano silvestre. Son tan holgazanes como los hombres.<sup>17</sup>

Like the Indians they [Mestizas and Peninsulares] sleep half the day and are scarcely alive till sundown, when they dress for the Alameda or esplanade.<sup>18</sup>

13. Joaquín Martínez de Zúñiga, *Status of the Philippines in 1800* (Manila: Filipiniana Book Guild, 1973), p. 223.

14. Jagor, *Travels*, p. 156.

15. Zúñiga, *Status*, p. 141.

16. Sawyer, *Inhabitants*, p. 227.

17. Joaquín Martínez de Zúñiga, *Estadismo de las Islas Filipinas: o mis Viajes por este país*, ed. W.E. Retaña (Madrid, 1893), 1:161.

18. Frank S. Marryat, "Borneo and the Archipelago," in *Travel Accounts of the*

It is [the women's]. . . laziness, that makes them appear less ingenious; and they are so entirely addicted to it, that if in walking they find a thorn run into their foot, they will not stoop to put it out of the way, that another may not tread on it.<sup>19</sup>

The Filipina also took to smoking. According to Le Gentil:

Everybody smokes, the women as much as the men. Tobacco is rolled for this purpose into lengths of four, or five or six inches, more or less, about as thick as the thumb or slightly less. It is lighted at one end and smoke is drawn through the other while held by the teeth or between the lips, as one would do with a pipe. One rarely sees a woman in the streets, especially a half-caste, without a cigar in her mouth.<sup>20</sup>

Halstead adds:

Tobacco is raised in all the islands. . . smoking being universal among the women as well as the men.<sup>21</sup>

The Filipina was also addicted to one of her favorite pastimes, gambling. She would spend days and nights at the card table.

Tan aficionada al juego, que pasa días y hasta noches enteras, con los intervalos imprescindibles, con la baraja en la mano; en esta pasión no la deja atrás el indio.<sup>22</sup>

Gambling is their chief vice, affecting both sexes, the women indulging chiefly in card-games (which in the past furnished almost their only outlet for social relaxation. . . and of which there are a number of curious and interesting sorts played in the archipelago).<sup>23</sup>

The Filipina's curiosity to look at strangers was on occasion interpreted as part of her flirtatious or immodest nature. Goncharov, on his tour of the Pasig countryside noted that:

the quick-eyed Tagal women, being in their huts or round about men, suddenly raise their eloquent eyes to gaze at passers-by with either a question or a taunt or whatever it may be.<sup>24</sup>

The following describes the young maiden's ways with her young suitors or gallants of the town:

*Islands (1832-1858)* (Manila: Filipiniana Book Guild, 1974), p. 131.

19. Giovanni Francesco Gemelli Careri, *A Voyage to the Philippines* (Manila: Filipiniana Book Guild, 1963), p. 71.

20. Guillaume Joseph Hyacinthe Jean Baptiste Le Gentil de la Galaisière, *A Voyage to the Indian Seas* (Manila: Filipiniana Book Guild, 1964), p. 88.

21. Murat Halstead, *The Story of the Philippines* (Chicago: Our Possessions Publishing Company, 1898), p. 121.

22. R. González y Martín, *Filipinas y sus habitantes, lo que son y lo que deben ser* (Bejar: Establecimiento tipográfico de la viuda de Aguilar, 1898), p. 224.

23. James A. Le Roy, *Philippine Life in Town and Country* (Manila: Limited Editions, 1968), p. 31.

24. Goncharov, "Voyage," in *Travel Accounts (1832-1858)*, p. 74.

... it is not surprising if some of the young women, impelled by the desire of obtaining his good graces, make a dead set at him.<sup>25</sup>

As to the non-Christian peoples, it was observed:

... whilst unmarried, the girls enjoy great freedom. In that tolerant land a little anti-nuptial incontinence is not an unpardonable crime in a girl any more than a youth, nor does it bar the way to marriage. . . .<sup>26</sup>

Both missionaries and travellers alike comment on either the extreme chastity or the brazenness of both the young virgins and wives, the flirtatiousness of the young maidens, or the boldness of the half-caste mestizas.

The women are chaste in the extreme, and never will you see any of them display lasciviousness or disloyalty to their husbands; before marriage, they are ordinarily virgins, and those who are married know only one husband.<sup>27</sup>

The women are beautiful but unchaste. They do not hesitate to commit adultery, because they receive no punishment for it.<sup>28</sup>

Even the missionaries in the provinces were the object of their captivating ways. The fact that some of the missionaries or secular priests were known to have on occasion forgotten their vows of celibacy, attests to the strong attraction that the women held. As a consequence they had to provide for the care of the families that resulted from such liaisons. Foreigners who were given permission by the colonial government to travel into the interior of the islands note:

... the monks are not perhaps fireproof. . . . The younger priests pass their existence like the lords of the soil of old; the young girls consider it an honor to be allowed to associate with them; and the padres in their turn find many convenient opportunities. They have no jealous wives to pry into their secrets, and their position as confessors and spiritual advisers affords them plenty of pretexts for being alone with the women.<sup>29</sup>

... Indian priests, as a rule, do little credit to their profession. Generally ignorant, often dissipated, and only superficially acquainted with their duties. . . little do they care to preserve a properly decorous behavior. . . . The convents are often full of girls and children all of

25. Sawyer, *Inhabitants*, p. 66.

26. *Ibid.*

27. Pedro Ordóñez de Cevallos, "Historia y viage del mundo. . ." in *Travel Accounts of the Islands, [1513-1787]* (Manila: Filipiniana Book Guild, 1971), p. 4.

28. Miguel López de Loarca, "Relation of the Filipinas Islands" in Jocano, *The Philippines*, p. 82.

29. Jagor, *Travels*, pp. 91-92.



whom help themselves with their fingers out of a common dish. The worthy priest. . . introduced a couple of pretty girls to me as his two poor sisters, whom inspite of his poverty, he supported; but the servants about the place openly spoke of these young ladies' babies as being the children of the priest. . . .<sup>30</sup>

It should be noted however, that immorality was not condoned. In fact, the more notorious women of Manila were often deported by the proper authorities to far-flung regions like Puerto Princesa, Palawan.

[In the capital of Palawan, more than half the male populace were soldiers and sailors, convicts and civilians who were to make liaisons with the fallen women]. . . Most of the women had been deported from Manila as undesirable characters in that decorous city. Notwithstanding their unsavoury antecedents, they found new husbands or protectors in Puerto Princesa the moment they landed. Such was the competition for these very soiled doves, that most of them had made their new arrangements before leaving the jetty alongside which the steamer they arrived in lay.<sup>31</sup>

Another aspect which invariably drew the attention of the foreigner was the image which the Filipina projected in her dress and overall deportment. In tours of the outlying countryside or provinces, the women went about their daily activities, seemingly unmindful of the impressions their actions would convey to the observers or strangers passing by.

They clothe themselves with a piece of cloth hanging from the belt, and a very small doublet, so that their bellies are left exposed. They can only be compared to mares gluttoned with hay.<sup>32</sup>

The women wear a waist-long dress (with long, tight-fitting sleeves, the breast covered for decency) over a skirt similar to the Spanish skirt. Over the skirt they wear an apron (locally called *tapis*) made of fine cotton cloth which covers the skirt, leaving only the skirt ends visible. They cover their heads with a bandana worn like a turban. . . As a whole the Filipino woman's dress is ugly until it is given a minute scrutiny. With the passage of time, one sees in the dress a very special grace. It becomes a palliative to the darkness of the native woman's skin and to expose the beauty of the figure which all of them generally possess, a beauty that can be perceived only when they wear the native dress.<sup>33</sup>

30. Ibid., p. 98.

31. Sawyer, *Inhabitants*, p. 315.

32. *Colonization and Conquest*, p. 204.

33. Zúñiga, *Status*, p. 138.

The Filipino working woman out in the provinces, whose wardrobe is too simple to include stockings, will tuck up her skirts to her knees on a wet day, with no troubling notion of false modesty.<sup>34</sup>

The girls while young possess exceedingly statuesque figures, and what charms they have are nature's own, for they owe nothing to art. Their dress is modest, yet as they do not wear a superfluity of garments, at times, as when bathing, their figures are revealed to view.<sup>35</sup>

In the evening, Spaniards, English and French go to the promenades [along the boulevard] to ogle the beautiful and facile half-breed women whose transparent robes reveal their splendid figures. . . . Nothing can be more charming, coquettish, and fascinating than this costume, which excites in the highest degree the admiration of strangers. The half-breed [Spanish] and Chinese Tagals know so well the effect it produces on the Europeans, that nothing would induce them to alter it.<sup>36</sup>

If the privileged position of a woman in the community is an indication of the degree of civilization it has attained, then it can be said that a Filipina's education equipped her to assume such an exalted position. In the Orient this position was not typical.

In no part of the Orient have women relatively so much freedom or do they play so large a part in the control of the family or in social or even industrial affairs. It is a common remark that Filipino women, both the privileged and of the lower classes, are possessed of more character and often, too, of more enterprise, than the men. There seems every reason for ascribing this relative improvement. . . . to the influence of the Christian religion and the position which they have assumed under the teaching of the Church and the directorship of the friars.<sup>37</sup>

The Filipina's intellectual development was conscientiously pursued.

En la civilización tagala la mujer era objeto de la mayor veneración. Su vida estaba rodeada de todo género de consideraciones, llegando su influencia á los mas altos poderes del estado, y su voluntad, manifestada en caprichos y pasiones. . . . En el tagalismo la educación de la mujer es atendida con esquisito y superior cuidado.<sup>38</sup>

As a result of the Filipina's training, she was said to be intellectually superior to the Filipino male.

34. Le Roy, *Philippine Life*, p. 31.

35. Sawyer, *Inhabitants*, p.66.

36. Gironière, *Twenty Years*, p. 35.

37. Le Roy, *Philippine Life*, pp. 27-28.

38. Even a local writer refers to a Filipina's exalted position in society and takes note of

Todos reconocen mayor superioridad intelectual en la india que en el indio, sean cuales fueren su clase y condición sociales.<sup>39</sup>

This again calls to mind the remark quoted earlier that the Filipina was in effect "... the best man in the country." The schools and the homes were not the only avenues by which the Filipina obtained her education. The opportunity for speaking Spanish was sometimes acquired as a result of her employment in the service of Europeans.<sup>40</sup>

On the other hand, despite her undergoing the above training, foreigners mention that the women failed to imbibe the necessary social graces.

Their education, however, seems to be responsible for a lack of vivacity, at least in their conversation with young men. They have evidently been taught to appear as cold and distant as possible in such society. . . .<sup>41</sup>

Whether education enhanced the Filipina's innate qualities or not is hard to say. Nevertheless, a combination of the two could have equipped her for the varied roles she assumed. She excelled in commercial and business transactions. She was recognized as being shrewd and enterprising as she was delegated this task very often by her menfolk.

Esta importante y ventajosa circunstancia [intellectual ability], unida á la de ser al mismo tiempo mas seria ú formal para la contratación, hace y da por resultado, el que raro sea el convenio ó contrato verbal que tenga el debido cumplimiento si en él no ha intervenido la mujer. Bien es verdad que contado es el indio que á ello se atreva sin la venia ó conocimiento de su consorte. Por motivos tales, y convencido el europeo de lo mismo, exige la presencia de la mujer antes de convenir, y en caso de urgencia, dificultad ó imposibilidad, contrata exclusivamente con ella, en la seguridad que convenido se llevará á cabo en todas sus partes.<sup>42</sup>

The lord and master was good at after-dinner speeches, could display all the features of the estate to good advantage, and conduct all the preliminaries of its bargains, was a first-class entertainer in fact; but not a purchase was made, not a sale negotiated, not a labor question sol-

the fact that her education was carefully supervised. See Pedro A. Paterno, *La antigua civilización tagálog (Apuntes)* (Manila: Tip. del Colegio de Sto. Tomás, 1915), pp. 165, 173.

39. González y Martín, *Filipinas*, p. 222.

40. Jagor, *Travels*, p. 118.

41. Leonard R. Sargent, "The Backwoods Filipino," *The Outlook* 63 (2 September 1897), p. 26.

42. González y Martín, *Filipinas*, pp. 222-23.

ved, without the final and effective intervention of the quiet mistress of the place. She was "the man of the house."<sup>43</sup>

Of the Tagalog women it was said that:

[They] are generally charged with the management of all business affairs for which they are much better fitted than the men. As a consequence, there are usually more women seen in the streets. . . .<sup>44</sup>

Their trading activities took them out into the provinces.

In Mambulao. . . the Tagalog element being introduced amongst the population by women, who with their families come here, from Lucban and Mauban, in the pursuit of trade, they buy up gold and import stuffs and other wares in exchange.<sup>45</sup>

Shrewd bargainers were found especially among the women of Pampanga:

The women also are shrewd in trading, especially of their weaving, needlework, and embroideries, which they made very neatly.<sup>46</sup>

The women in Pampanga are smart in appearance, clever in business, and good at a bargain, whether buying or selling. The men are well aware of this and when selling their produce or buying a sugar-mill, they like to have the assistance of their wives, who are always the hardest customers to deal with.<sup>47</sup>

Sugar on the other hand, was traded by the women of Laguna:

. . . where coarse brown sugar from sugar cane is prepared, the women carry it for leagues to the market, or expose it for sale on the country roads, in small loaves (panochas). . . In the evening the woman returns to her home with her wares, and the next day repeats the same process. . . .<sup>48</sup>

The trade therefore, was not restricted to a particular locality. There was interprovincial trade involving rice, sugar, buyo, gold, a wide range of fabrics, tobacco, poultry, fruits and vegetables. Trading within the locality was often pursued in the public market. When the Filipina could not avail of the stalls in the public market, she took to selling her wares elsewhere.

43. Le Roy, *Philippine Life*, p. 45.

44. Jagor, *Travels*, p. 63.

45. *Ibid.*, p. 138.

46. Colin's "Labor Evangélica," pp. 82-98, quoted in Nicolas Zafra, *Readings in Philippine History* (Manila: University of the Philippines, 1947), p. 144. Mimeographed.

47. Sawyer, *Inhabitants*, p. 244.

48. Jagor, *Travels*, p. 196.

In the Philippine markets nearly all the stalls are kept by women. . . they have booths for shoes, clothes, and all kinds of merchandise.<sup>49</sup>

[In the provinces, market days were confined to particular days of the week.]. . . Monday and Friday evenings were the Daraga [Albay] market nights, and in fine weather afforded a pretty sight. The women, neatly and cleanly close, sat in long rows and offered their provisions for sale by the light of hundreds of torches, and, when the business was over, the slopes of the mountains were studded all over with flickering little points of brightness proceeding from the torches carried by the homeward-bound market women. . . These goods they carried on their heads; and I noticed that all the younger women were accompanied by their sweethearts, who relieved them of their burdens.<sup>50</sup>

Sometimes the wife of the landed proprietor may supervise a small store and keep at work a weaver or two and maybe two or three embroidery women, whose output she will send to Manila for sale.<sup>51</sup>

The Filipina exploited her enterpreneurial skills to include, besides the trading of goods, the sale of linens, handwoven or embroidered articles, and hats which she herself manufactured or produced through the people she employed. The variety of materials and their varied strengths and textures depended upon the raw materials found in their particular locale.

At least two of the important industries of the Islands are largely dependent upon the Filipina's nimble fingers. These are embroidery and hat-weaving. The embroidery business draws from all classes of women, from the lady in the stone house, glad to make a little extra money and while away idle hours doing work she loves, to the woman in the cane hut, who thus helps to fatten the family's purse. . . The embroidery is always done by the women, but the designs are made by men.<sup>52</sup>

The women are expert weavers and make from the abaca fiber some very fine fabrics which they locally call *nipis*. The Manila matrons and native ladies of the suburbs who buy them to be made into *camisas* complain that they are not as durable as the *nipis* of Camarines.<sup>53</sup>

[Green plantain called (Mish-Law) ]. . . as the fruit of this tree is of great use for food, so is the body no less serviceable to make clothes. . . The women whose employment it is to make the cloth, take hold of

49. Frank G. Carpenter, *Through the Philippines and Hawaii* (New York: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1925), p. 38.

50. Jagor, *Travels*, p. 81.

51. *Ibid.*, p. 36.

52. *Ibid.*, pp. 37-38.

53. Zúñiga, *Status*, p. 146.

those threads one by one, which rend away easily from one end of the trunk to the other.<sup>54</sup>

They [women of Pampanga] are excellent seamstresses and good at embroidery. In some villages they make very durable silk handkerchiefs with coloured borders of blue, red, or purple. Straw hats, mats, salacots. . . . are made by them.<sup>55</sup>

In Ilocos and Union, very excellent coverlets, sheets, serviettes, handkerchiefs and towels are woven from cotton, as well as the fabrics called abaca, jusi or rengue, nipis, saguran, sinamay and guingon. This last is very suitable for military or naval uniforms; it is a blue cotton cloth similar to what sailors call dungaree.<sup>56</sup>

The Moro women employ their slaves in spinning and weaving. They make excellent stuffs of cotton and of abaca, dyeing them various colours with extracts of the woods grown in the country.<sup>57</sup>

I found the women in almost all the houses [Baliwag, Bulacan] occupied in weaving *tapis*, which have a great reputation.<sup>58</sup>

Jagor found the process of preparing the fiber of the pineapple fascinating:

. . . the fruit of the plants selected for this purpose is generally removed early; a process which causes the leaves to increase considerably both in length and breadth. A woman places a board on the ground, and upon it a pineapple leaf with the hollow side upwards. Sitting at one end of the board, she holds the leaf firmly with her toes, and scrapes its outer surface with a potsherd; not with the sharp fractured edge but with the blunt side. . . . In this manner a stratum of coarse longitudinal fiber is disclosed, and the operator, placing her thumbnail beneath it, lifts it up, and draws it away in a compact strip; after which she scrapes again until a second fine layer of fiber is laid bare. Then, turning the leaf around, she scrapes it back. . . . drawing [it] to its full length. . . . When the fiber has been washed, it is dried in the sun. It is afterwards combed, with a suitable comb, like women's hair, sorted into four classes, tied together, and treated like the fiber of the *lupi*. In this crude manner are obtained the threads for the celebrated web *nipis de piña*, which is considered by experts the finest in the world. . . .<sup>59</sup>

54. William Dampier, "A New Voyage Around the World," in *Travel Accounts (1513-1787)*, p. 39.

55. Sawyer, *Inhabitants*, p. 244.

56. *Ibid.*, p. 159.

57. *Ibid.*, p. 373.

58. Jagor, *Travels*, p. 46.

59. *Ibid.*, pp. 103-104.

After the article [piña] is brought to Manila, it is then embroidered by girls; this last operation adds greatly to its value. . . We visited one of the houses where this was in progress, and where the most skillful workwomen are employed.<sup>60</sup>

Lace-making was attempted, but it never surpassed the quality of imported lace.

Las mujeres [Tondo] se dedican á hacer encajes, a hilar algodón, á tejer y á bordar. Los encajes que ellas hacen son bastante buenos, aunque nunca llegan á los de Europa; lo que bordan lo hacen con tanta perfección como en China; pero como tardan mucho en concluir la obra por su natural pereza, sudan mucho y son naturalmente sucias; cuando salen de sus manos algunas piezas que se les han dado á bordar, parecen ya usadas, y nunca aciertan á dar á sus bordados la brillantez y hermosura que dan los chinos.<sup>61</sup>

One other activity employed the skills of the Filipina. She provided the bulk of the labor force in the cigar factory, which was a lucrative source of income for Spain. The cigar factories were located in Binondo; while the paper covered cigarettes (*cigarillos*) were found in Arroceros. When visitors came to Manila, they never failed to visit the cigar factories. They remarked on the interesting aspects of the industry:

Many of the fourteen thousand employees in the cigar and cigarette factories of Manila are girls or women, for they do their work more rapidly and skillfully than men.<sup>62</sup>

In making cheroots women only are employed, the number of those so engaged in the factory at Manila being generally about 4000. Besides these, a large body of men are employed at another place in the composition of *cigarillos*, or small cigars.<sup>63</sup>

The work in the cigar factory was described in the following manner:

. . . About 3,000 women are daily employed in making and packing up the cigars. One party selects, cleans, and moistens the leaf; a second cuts; a third rolls; another packs them; and thus they were passed through a variety of hands before they are completed.<sup>64</sup>

60. Charles Wilkes, "Life in Manila," in *Travel Accounts (1832-1858)*, p. 38.

61. Zúñiga, *Estadismo*, pp. 294-95.

62. Carpenter, *Through the Philippines*, p. 38.

63. Robert MacMicking, *Recollections of Manila and the Philippines During 1848, 1849, and 1850*. Edited and annotated by Morton J. Netzorg (Manila: Filipiniana Book Guild, 1967), p. 182.

64. Marryat, "Borneo," in *Travel Accounts (1832-1858)*, p. 141.

... Some are busy moistening the leaves and cutting off the requisite lengths, or are sorting the fragments and smaller pieces, of which inferior cigars will be made.<sup>65</sup>

The concentration of such a large number of workers in the confined area of the factory resulted in what many considered to be unpleasant and stifling work conditions.

Others hold in their right hand a flat smooth stone, with which they keep continually pounding each single leaf, in order to make these more susceptible of being rolled up. This drumming noise and the cries of several hundreds of workwomen, who, on the appearance of foreign visitors, handle their implements of stone with yet more energy, apparently out of sheer wantonness, the strong odour of the tobacco, and the disagreeable exhalations from the bodies of so many human beings shut up together in one close apartment, in a tropical temperature, have such an unpleasant, uncomfortable effect that one has to exchange the damp sultry vapours of the workshops for the fresh air without.<sup>66</sup>

Gold was found in different parts of the country. Here again, the labor of women was availed of but was largely confined to the panning of the sand beds of the rivers and streams in the hope of extracting gold.

I have seen women washing the sands of the river San Jose del Puray in the province of Manila, and noted what small specks [of gold] they collected.<sup>67</sup>

Near Gapan in Nueva Ecija more profitable washings are situated, and at times large numbers of men and women are to be seen at work, especially after a sudden flood has come down.<sup>68</sup>

The sands of the river Agno also yield gold, and the washing for it is quite an industry amongst the Pangasinan women about Rosales, but the return is said to be small. But after a northwesterly gale has heaped up the black sand at the mouth of this river in the Bay of Lingayen, the people turn out in numbers to wash it, and sometimes have better luck.<sup>69</sup> There are indications that the gold was sometimes fashioned into jewelry.

Articles of beautiful workmanship in gold, and a species of metal named *tombac*, which is esteemed one-third more precious, are man-

65. Karl Von Scherzer, "Narrative of the Circumnavigation of the Globe by the Austrian Frigate 'Novara' [1858]," in *Travel Accounts (1832-1858)*, p. 242.

66. *Ibid.*

67. Tomás de Comyn, quoted in Sawyer, *Inhabitants*, p. 146.

68. *Ibid.*, p. 147.

69. *Ibid.*



ufactured by the artists of Manila; and the gold chains made by their women vie in beauty with the most elegant I have ever seen in any other part of the world.<sup>70</sup>

Added to the presence of the precious metal mentioned was the marine life which abounded in the Islands. The women gathered or fished for these in order to provide for their daily diet.

[Island of Talim in the great lake of Bay]. . . At each tide the takes of fish are more or less plentiful, and at low water the women and children may be seen picking up shellfish with their toes, for practice has enabled them to use their toes as deftly as their fingers, or gathering in the sand crabs and eatable seaweed.<sup>71</sup>

These latter women [those who live along the shores] are engaged in fishing in the sea waters and in rivers and creeks. At times, they are out for many days, getting sea food, and this is why they are darker than their farm-working counterparts.<sup>72</sup>

When the fishing vessels set out to the open sea or sailed upstream to Laguna de Bay, women together with the men navigated the vessels.

It is for the most part the Tagalese women who manipulate the fishing instruments.<sup>73</sup>

All the activities in which the Filipina involved herself transformed her ordinarily dull life into a challenging and meaningful one, so that an assessment of the Filipina in the light of the accounts made by the foreigners places her in a position that recognizes her uniqueness among Oriental women. Not only was she at ease and in control of the household, but her activities saw her branching into various lines of economic endeavor. An evaluation of her character indicates her strength, sense of responsibility, industry and enterprise. At the same time, the attractiveness of her bearing, figure and dress never failed to draw the attention of the men.

What she was and what she had become was partly brought about by Spanish influence. However, much of what she actually was resulted from qualities inherent in her nature and complemented by the privileged position which society and her men-folk bestowed upon her. She certainly exhibited admirable qual-

70. Pierre Vicomte de Pages, "Travels Round the World in the Years 1767, 1768, 1769, 1770, 1771," in *Travel Accounts (1513-1787)*, p. 167.

71. Jagor, *Travels*, p. 29.

72. Zúñiga, *Status*, p. 232.

73. Von Scherzer, "Narrative," in *Travel Accounts (1832-1858)*, p. 248.

ities which in the long-run compensated for her weaknesses. Of these many virtues, her inclination towards economic activities stood out. As Legarda pointedly writes:

The Philippine entrepreneurial scene would not be complete — would, indeed, not be Filipino — if it did not include that ancient Philippine institution, the woman of business.<sup>74</sup>

74. Benito Legarda y Fernandez, "Our Growing Entrepreneurial Class," in Horacio de la Costa, *Readings in Philippine History* (Manila: Bookmark, 1965), p. 289.