

# **philippine studies: historical and ethnographic viewpoints**

Ateneo de Manila University · Loyola Heights, Quezon City · 1108 Philippines

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**Roberto Blanco Andrés**

**San Francisco de San Miguel: Fraile,  
Embajador y Mártir en Japón**

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*Philippine Studies: Historical and Ethnographic Viewpoints*  
vol. 65 no. 1 (2017): 97–102

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# Book Reviews

ROBERTO BLANCO ANDRÉS

## **San Francisco de San Miguel: Fraile, Embajador y Mártir en Japón**

Valladolid: Editorial Galland Books, 2016. 190 pp.

Roberto Blanco is one of the few Spanish historians who specialize on the Philippines, his research being part of a new wave of Spanish historiography on the Spanish empire. His works, generally on nineteenth-century church–state relations, include *Entre Frailes y Clérigos: Las Claves de la Cuestión Clerical en Filipinas (1776–1872)* (CSIC, 2012) and *El Estado en Filipinas: Marco Político y Relaciones Internacionales (1986–2010)* (Edicions Bellaterra, 2012). He collaborates with the Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas (CSIC) on various research projects, but he is a full-time secondary school teacher in Valladolid.

In *San Francisco de San Miguel* Blanco ventures into the early Spanish period in the Pacific, focusing on the life story of San Francisco de San Miguel, a simple man from a small Spanish town whose biography exhibits events that determined the course of Spain’s imperial expansion and the Catholic Church’s mission in Asia. Fray Francisco never occupied any high position in the Franciscan order. Never ordained into the priesthood, he served as porter, cook, and nurse. He was not an intellectual. Yet by focusing on an ordinary Franciscan brother whose life unfolded in an extraordinary context, Blanco draws attention to the significance of biography in history. Biography gives the interplay of political, economic, and religious interests a human touch, even as these factors affected the course of an individual’s life.

Francisco was one of the twenty-six Christians (including six Franciscans, three Jesuits, and seventeen Japanese Christians who were associated with the Franciscans) who were executed on 5 February 1597 in Nagasaki upon Toyotomi Hideyoshi's orders. Despite the enduring significance of this martyrdom, scholarly material on Francisco is scarce, leading Blanco to contribute a "detailed, rigorous and critical study of the character" (14) and help readers understand Francisco's life in the context of the counterreformation and Spain and the Philippines in the sixteenth century. Blanco's book thus fills a lacuna in a literature dominated by hagiographies.

The complexity of Francisco's life owes to overlapping dimensions that Blanco discusses throughout the book's nine chapters: (a) the spirit of reform among religious orders during the counterreformation, (b) the beginning of missionary work in the Philippines, and (c) the responsibility given to Franciscan friars as ambassadors to Japan (15). The stages of Francisco's life in the Franciscan order (first in the reformed observant branch, subsequently in the recently approved and more rigorous discalced branch), his years as a missionary in the Philippines, and his final mission as a member of the Spanish embassy in Japan all bear witness to these dimensions.

The book can be divided into two parts. The first part consists of the first three chapters about Francisco's youth and early years as a Franciscan. The last six comprise the second part, which is about his missionary life in three territories: Mexico, the Philippines, and Japan. Chapter 1 traces the origin of Francisco de la Parilla, as Francisco de San Miguel was popularly known. Blanco gives details on the missionary's birthplace and upbringing by examining Franciscan chronicles. Chapter 2 narrates Francisco's life as a lay brother in Valladolid and Abrojo. He was admitted to the Franciscan order on 9 January 1567 in the convent of Valladolid, which followed the observant branch of the Franciscans (34). Blanco clarifies the series of reforms within the Franciscan order that gave rise to the observant Franciscans, who practiced the spirit of St. Francis rigorously, especially concerning poverty and austerity.

Chapter 3 relates Francisco's move to the Franciscan province of San Jose, whose jurisdiction included Valladolid, Segovia, Madrid, and a part of Castilla-La Mancha in Spain. This province advocated the strictest observance of poverty, represented by the friars going discalced. It also focused on the Christianization of America and Asia. Francisco's entry into the province

of San Jose marked a turning point as he met Fray Pedro Jerez, the ascetic Franciscan provincial whom he regarded as his model. The author thinks that Jerez, who died on his way to the Philippines, influenced Francisco's decision to enlist as a missionary in Spain's farthest colony.

Chapter 4 is about Francisco's journey to the Philippines, with a two-year stopover in Mexico. The mission, which consisted of sixteen friars including San Pedro Bautista, one of the first martyrs of Nagasaki, sailed from Sanlúcar in Cádiz in 1580 and arrived at Veracruz in the same year. While in Mexico, Francisco lived and worked in the monastery of San Cosme. He likewise worked in the mission to the Chichimecas, who occupied northern Mexico and were known for their ferocity against the Spaniards.

From Mexico Francisco and his companions arrived in the Philippines in September 1583, becoming the fourth group of Franciscans to work in the Philippines since the first mission in 1578. In discussing Francisco's life in the Philippines in chapter 5, Blanco includes a section on the beginnings of the Province of San Gregorio Magno, the Franciscan jurisdiction that took charge of the Philippine mission. Blanco recounts Francisco's life and work in Naga, where he learned the Bicolano language and evangelized in a way that locals could understand, earning him the label Padre Enseñador (Father Teacher) (63). The locals also called him Padre Santo (Saintly Father) because of the miracles he allegedly worked among the sick (65). Later he was assigned to the Franciscan-run San Lazaro Hospital in Manila, where he attended to lepers and learned Tagalog.

Chapters 6 to 9 narrate Francisco's journey to Japan in the context of Spain's attempt to forge ties with Hideyoshi and the church's efforts to evangelize Japan. At the end of the sixteenth century Spain was struggling to establish a Pacific foothold, made precarious by the Japanese. On 4 November 1591 Hideyoshi wrote to the Spanish government in Manila demanding submission of the Philippines to Japan. He explained that he had invaded Okinawa and Korea and was about to conquer China. The Spaniards had grown suspicious of the Japanese even before this episode because of Japan's piratic activities and the involvement of some Japanese in the 1587 Tondo Conspiracy. In order to placate Hideyoshi, Spanish governor-general Gómez Pérez Dasmariñas sent an embassy led by Dominican friar Juan Cobo, who unfortunately died on his way back to the Philippines. Dasmariñas then assigned a group of Franciscans to act as ambassadors to Japan. Why he chose Franciscans over other religious orders is still being debated, but Blanco

thinks that the Franciscans' friendly ties with the Japanese colony in Manila was an important factor. Francisco's inclusion in the embassy to Japan owed to his experience in treating Japanese patients in Manila and his knowledge of the Japanese language. The tenuous relations between Hideyoshi and the Jesuits could also have contributed to the selection of Franciscans as emissaries. Hideyoshi and his advisers felt threatened by the Jesuits because of the latter's success in gaining many converts from the upper class, resulting in a decree on the banishment of the Jesuits in 1587 and the destruction of their churches. The decree was not executed fully, and the Jesuits remained in Japan and continued their apostolic work discreetly.

The presence of Franciscans in Japan raised a jurisdictional issue. Pope Gregory XIII, in the bull *Ex Pastoralis Officio* issued on 28 January 1585, had previously assigned the evangelization of Japan to the Jesuits, who reached the territory in 1549 under the auspices of the Portuguese. The Franciscans argued, however, that Pope Sixtus V's bull *Dum Uberes* on 15 November 1585 opened Japan to other religious orders. I would have wanted the author to explain in depth the seeming nullification by Sixtus V of his predecessor's earlier mandate.

The missionaries juggled different political, economic, and religious interests as ambassadors of the Spanish governor-general. They had to win Japan's friendship and forge trade relations, while communicating that the Spanish colony would not be Japan's vassal. The Franciscans also sought to establish their missionary work in Japan to which Hideyoshi gave his conditional permission, clearly a compromise the Japanese leader made as he tried to establish trade relations with Manila.

Chapter 7 relates the inroads that the Franciscans made in Miyako, where they first established their mission, and Francisco's missionary activity in the hospital of San Jose, which the Franciscans set up in the said town. Meanwhile, the friars also began their work in Osaka and Nagasaki.

Blanco explains the Jesuit–Franciscan conflict in chapter 8. Because the Franciscans worked in areas where the Jesuits were also working, tensions arose over differences in missionary and pastoral methods. The Jesuits took pains to teach Christianity by adapting it to Japanese culture, with their style of preaching more circumspect and directed at the upper echelons of society. In contrast, the Franciscans appeared to ignore Japanese culture, and their work focused on social pariahs. The Franciscans went around discalced, wore sackcloth, and relied on alms, practices of poverty that Blanco thinks

called the attention of Japanese Christians because of their radical difference from the Jesuit way. It is important to note, however, that Blanco does not generalize, pointing out in fact that some Jesuits welcomed the Franciscans despite disagreements between their two orders.

In chapter 9 Blanco discusses the convergence of Hideyoshi's anti-Christian sentiments and his imperialist ambitions, resulting in the arrest and sentencing of the twenty-six martyrs of Nagasaki in 1596–1597. Needing money to finance his war against Korea, Hideyoshi expropriated the goods carried by the galleon *San Felipe*, which was on its way to Acapulco but had been severely damaged by a storm before it could cross the Pacific. Japanese authorities found it docked in Shikoku. The missionaries were then falsely accused of being the advance party of an invasion that the Spaniards had been planning all along. Their arrest and execution served to legitimize the confiscation of the galleon's load.

The book ends with an epilogue that recounts the impact of the martyrdom of the twenty-six and how the reception of their death was translated into religious art and popular piety both in Latin America and in Spain. I would have wanted to see a brief discussion on Filipino religious devotion to the martyrs. Although the epilogue mentions commemorative acts that took place in the Philippines in the seventeenth century, Blanco does not provide an analysis of present-day devotion.

This work is a product of meticulous archival research combined with a critical reading of sources ranging from Franciscan chronicles and published works on the martyrs of Nagasaki. Throughout the book Blanco presents a scholarly yet readable biography of Francisco's life. Some sections, especially those that examine the sources on Francisco's early life in detail, might be too ponderous for the general public. However, these parts transport the reader to the sixteenth century, in Spain, Mexico, the Philippines, or Japan, as would a period movie or a historical novel. They shed light on the circumstances that Francisco and his companions faced, the travails of missionary work, and the arduous task of empire building. The manner of narration helps readers attain historical empathy, a skill not so easily acquired.

Another merit of the work is Blanco's effort to trace the development of Francisco's spiritual biography, a challenging task because the protagonist did not bare his soul in his own writings. Blanco had to rely on Franciscan chronicles, which are usually hagiographic in nature. Despite this limitation,

he has skillfully presented a saint who had his pitfalls but persevered in his commitment to God and his mission.

Overall Blanco's *San Francisco de San Miguel* is a significant addition not only to the literature on the Spanish empire in the Pacific but also to the history of the Catholic Church in Asia. By showing how both endeavors—imperial expansion and evangelization—were connected and entangled, the book highlights the complexity of this historical era. The work affirms the importance of biography as an avenue to understand history, with Francisco's bringing into focus an important consequence of imperial expansion: the movements of people and ideas. His zeal to evangelize in distant lands bolstered by the counterreformation ethos and his experiences in Mexico and the Philippines led him to Japan at a time when Spain wanted to strengthen its presence in the Pacific. The life of this “transcontinental” missionary, who became an agent of church expansion and imperial extension, is as multilayered as this era.

This book is also a welcome addition to the bibliography on Philippine history because it presents the Spanish-era Philippines in a broader and more global context. Its approach considers how intersecting interests, such as the imperialistic and economic agenda of Spain and Japan and the church's concern with evangelization, contributed to positioning the Philippines at a critical junction. The book throws light on the role of the Philippines in the history of the Pacific region.

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MA. CERES P. DOYO

## **Macli-ing Dulag: Kalinga Chief, Defender of the Cordillera**

Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 2015. 92 pages.

In 1980 Maria Ceres P. Doyo figured in a highly mediatized military hearing because of an article she wrote on Macli-ing Dulag. Macli-ing, a *pangat* (peace pact holder) from the Butbut ethnolinguistic group residing in the