

# Philippine Studies: Historical and Ethnographic Viewpoints

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## Editor's Introduction

Michael D. Pante

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# Editor's Introduction

**M**uch can be learned from absences and gaps, phenomena that barely register in our perception. Paying attention to what is unrealized, what has disappeared, and what is concealed allows us to deepen our understanding of ourselves and society and not settle for the obvious.

Dissecting an unimplemented proposal approved and then scrapped during Ferdinand Marcos's presidency, the lead article offers an alternative historical view of the regime, made infamous by its plethora of dubious projects. In "Dodged Bullet or Missed Opportunity? A History of Planned Monorails for Manila, 1961–1985," Judith Camille E. Rosette and Miguel Paolo P. Reyes focus on the relations between the Philippine government and the Philippine Monorail Transit Systems, Inc. (PMTS), the firm that was awarded a legislated franchise to construct and operate a monorail in Manila and its environs in 1966. The project's significance lies in the perception at that time that this form of technology was still "experimental" (13) in contrast to other supposedly "tried and tested" (7) transit modes. The authors position the article within the literature of mass transit technology adoption. Rather than explain how a particular innovation came to be embraced, they elucidate how conflicting interests can cause feasible proposals to falter. They show how the PMTS project was disparaged ostensibly due to technical considerations, even if political motivations were the main factors that derailed it. The article concludes that Marcos's decision to scrap the project did not save Filipino taxpayers from a costly but unproductive investment: "evidence shows that he was not particularly concerned about the type of technology to be adopted. Rather . . . among his main considerations was whether the project could be claimed as an initiative of his administration" (33). In 1979 Marcos gave the green light to construct the expensive and corruption-ridden Light Rail Transit line in Manila, a decision that belies whatever cost-benefit analysis he did to justify the junking of the monorail project a few years earlier.

The impact of a facility's closure and its absence in a community are key elements in Karl Gerrard Tiu See's ethnographic work on people living near Subic Base. The residents of Olongapo, a city that had long been economically dependent on the US naval base in Subic, have dealt with drastic changes since the Philippine Senate decided to expel American bases in the country in 1991. See provides a composite picture of how these residents, especially at the grassroots level, look back to this chapter in the city's history after almost thirty years. Based on the results of interviews and a survey conducted in 2016, he notes how the residents wax nostalgic about Subic Base and are amenable to a hypothetical return of the US base, positive sentiments that are, however, rooted in the sense of insecurity that developed after its closure. He argues that the government's decision in 1991 "made people more vulnerable to nonphysical threats like economic difficulty (freedom from want)" (48). Because Subic Base generated a lot of livelihood and social mobility opportunities for Olongapo residents during its time, its current absence engenders their feeling of socioeconomic loss.

Peeling away the layers of pomp and pageantry, Frances Anthea R. Redison uncovers the grim behind-the-scenes details of a seemingly innocuous instance of elite display during the Second World War, a beauty contest. In 1944 the Iloilo chapter of Kapisanan sa Paglilingkod sa Bagong Pilipinas (Kalibapi), the only Filipino political party sanctioned by the occupation forces, organized the Miss Lakambini beauty contest in the province as part of its task of disseminating pro-Japanese propaganda. Similar to prewar beauty contests, the pageant winner was determined by the highest number of votes cast using ballots printed by local newspapers. However, the Japanese-sponsored event created a space for the candidates to challenge the ideal image of a domesticated woman, which the colonizers wanted to promote. Moreover, while at first glance it appeared to showcase collaboration between the colonizers and the elite who comprised Kalibapi's Iloilo chapter, the contest was actually consonant with the "lie low policy" of the local anti-Japanese guerrilla movement. Projected to be an overt sign of civilian normalcy under Japanese rule, it became a convenient ruse to lull the colonizers into complacency prior to the guerrillas' attack that prefigured the end of the occupation.

Michael D. Pante  
Ateneo de Manila University