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**The Tenth IAHA Conference, Singapore,
27-31 October 1986**

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The Tenth IAHA Conference, Singapore, 27-31 October 1986

JOSE S. ARCILLA, S. J. ,

The tenth conference of the International Association of Historians of Asia (IAHA) was held in Singapore in the last week of October 1986. Held every two or three years, it was the first time the conference was held in that city-state.

More than 250 historians came together to discuss new findings and ongoing projects of historical research. There were more than fifty discussion panels grouped according to homogeneity of topics covering a wide range of subjects on all aspects of Asian history. Twenty-five papers and three workshop discussions were set aside for Philippine history.

A session that provoked lively interest was the one on the February 1986 revolution in Manila. Unfortunately, of three speakers scheduled to present their views, only one came, Theodore Friend, whose paper, "The Yellow Revolution in the Philippines 1983-1986: Forces, Sources and Perspectives," was ably balanced by an impromptu lecture on the Aquino government and Enrile by Belinda Aquino, currently a Visiting Research Fellow at the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (Singapore). As it turned out, however, the absence of the other two was a blessing in disguise, since with only two speakers, more time was left for questions from the audience.

Friend identified "three fundamental strains" in contemporary Filipino political thought: the *autocratic*, exemplified by Aguinaldo's dictatorial government of 23 May 1898; the *authoritarian*, in Mabini's strong executive for "national discipline and social regeneration"; and the *libertarian* thinking of the Filipino elite supported by American rule early in the twentieth century. One, however, cannot separate these three, he pointed out. They have been part of the relatively brief political experience of the Philip-

pines. Quezon's presidency had an undercurrent of authoritarianism; military dictatorship was imposed by the Japanese during the Pacific war; and twenty years under Marcos saw the Philippines reeling under a thinly disguised autocratic rule "with the sub-themes of dynastic fantasy."

With the downfall of Marcos, Friend asked, what is in store for the Philippines? The February 1986 revolution was unique, an event whose meaning Friend described as "the resurgence of libertarian currents against Marcos, and against his autocracy, his cronies, his concocted statist orthodoxies, his 'caponized' legislature." Seen through "external lenses," one is liable to miss the significance of these developments, however.

This remark occasioned a rather spirited discussion. After the Philippine experience, someone pointed out, the word 'revolution' will have to broaden its meaning. First, nowhere has it ever occurred that sophisticated war machinery could be neutralized by people kneeling in prayer on the streets. Second, after the dust had settled, very little seems to have changed in the Philippine political scene. And to the opinion that one must not overlook the moral and religious values that energized the people against Marcos' tanks and tear gas, the answer was one cannot "document or quantify" religion or morality!

No less interesting and provocative were Belinda Aquino's observations on Enrile. Against rising fears, President Aquino remains in control of the Philippine government, she explained. Considering the magnitude of the problems she has inherited and her total lack of political experience before assuming public office, the President "has done not reasonably but exceedingly well." Some believe Enrile seems not to want the Aquino government to succeed in order to be able to project himself as the "alternative" to the people. But, in doing so, he is "hitting at the worst fears of the Filipinos" even if he cloaks his pronouncements "in the lofty rhetoric of nationalism revolving around the need to preserve the integrity and security of the state."

What is behind Enrile's words? For all his public statements, Aquino observed, the Filipinos still prefer the democratic electoral processes as the route to presidential power should Enrile "decide to run in the next election." Certain factors are working, however, against him. Though still imperfect, the democratic life has taken firm root among the Filipinos who will certainly fight to make

sure they have a voice in their government. Even the military by and large, despite their experience of almost unrestrained power under Marcos, have not been politicized and seem unlikely to supplant civilian authority. Besides, Enrile is perceived as too close with the hated Marcos bureaucracy and has admitted fixing some three hundred fifty thousand votes in favor of the deposed president in the last election. Furthermore, he had earlier confessed having been one of the planners in the declaration of martial law in 1972.

Interestingly, a Filipino delegate shopping in downtown Singapore was surprised by a few pointed questions from a sports goods dealer about communist insurgency in the Philippines. The questions themselves are perhaps not too important, but the fact that an ordinary store-owner should possess minute knowledge and show interest in the current Philippine situation is rather significant.

As is normal in multi-paneled conventions, one cannot attend all of the discussions and a choice has to be made. A glance at the list of papers on the Philippines is perhaps a gauge of the current research among the Filipino scholars at the moment: Chinben See, "The Publications on the Ethnic Chinese in the Philippines"; Zeus A. Salazar, "Towards a History of Filipino Out-Migration in the 20th Century . . ."; Oscar Evangelista, "The Filipino Community in Seattle, Washington: Continuity and Change in an Ethnic Minority"; Susan Evangelista, "Filipinos in America: Literature as History"; Maria Luisa T. Camagay, "The Beginnings of Institutional Care for Mental Patients: The Case of the Philippines in the 19th Century"; Evelyn A. Miranda, "The Emergence of the Philippine Oligarchy: The Case of the Filipino Legislative Elite, 1900-1920s"; Motoe Terami-Wada, "The Sakdal Movement in the Philippines"; Milagros C. Guerrero, "The Myth and Reality of Quezon's 'Social Justice' Program, 1935-1941"; Carmencita T. Aguilar, "A Study of the Clergy as the Dominant Elites during the First Two Hundred Years of Spanish Rule in the Philippines, 1565-1765"; Isagani R. Medina, "*La Madre de los Ladrones: Tulisanismo* in Cavite Province during the 19th Century"; Jose S. Arcilla, S. J., "*La Escuela Normal de Maestros de Instruccion Primaria*, 1865-1900"; Glenn A. May, "New Light on the Philippine Revolution of 1896: the Evidence from Batangas"; Chester L. Hunt, "Education and Economic Development in the American Period in the Philippines."

There were also papers on current Philippine issues: Alfredo G. Parpan, S. J., "The Republic of the Philippines Claim on North Borneo: A Second Look With Some 'Frontal' Proposals"; Maria Elena C. Sampson, "The Batangas Rebellion of 1949"; Carmencita T. Aguilar, "A Comparative Study of Philippine Foreign Policy under Six Presidents: 1946-1986"; Aurora J. de Dios, "The Aid Dimension in Philippine-Japan Relations . . ."; Luis Q. Lacar and Carmelita S. Lacar, "Economic Mobility and Ambiguity of Ethnic Identity: the Case of the Maranao Muslim Merchant Migrants' Children . . ."

It is not without interest to note that except for one or two papers, research on Philippine history focused on the late nineteenth century and contemporary periods. How does one explain this? Why do Filipino historians seem to fear investigating the pre-1850 history of the Philippines? Is it perhaps due to ignorance of Spanish? As everyone knows, what is taught in college is Spanish *grammar*, and hardly the masters and authors of the Spanish *language*. And certainly, anyone can memorize verb conjugations and still be unable to read, write, or speak Spanish. How many of those who have finished four semesters of Spanish in college are aware of Cervantes, Lope de Vega, Fray Luis de Leon, and the other classical models of Spanish? Some reading material is offered towards the end of the undergraduate program of Spanish in college, but they are almost exclusively writings of the nineteenth-century Filipino propagandists, certainly not the models of the Spanish style.

Not suprisingly, quite a number of the papers on the pre-American period were disappointing. Old cliches of Spanish corruption and friar immorality were repeated, the personal ambition and greed of the Filipino elite were castigated. When one of the speakers was asked if there was any evidence for the alleged questionable wealth accumulated, for example, by Osmeña early in his career, no satisfactory answer was given. And the well-read scholar would have found nothing new from the discussions on the early American period of Philippine history.

It would be grossly unfair to say that, based on the panels on the Philippines, the rest of the conference was a failure. Not at all. The contacts made, the friendships renewed, and, more importantly, the knowledge where historical study is at the moment — these are some of the benefits that these international conferences provide.