

philippine studies

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

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Philippine Studies vol. 53, no. 1 (2005): 59–90

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Fri June 27 13:30:20 2008

The Stories They Tell: *Komiks* during the Japanese Occupation, 1942–1944

Karl Ian U. Cheng Chua

This article examines sequential comic art during the Japanese occupation of the Philippines, and shows how the medium was utilized by Japanese and Filipinos to further their interests. It analyzes four comic strips published in the Japanese-controlled newspaper Tribune. Although the comic strips can be dismissed easily as blatant Japanese propaganda, a more nuanced perspective reveals the various strategies utilized by Filipino artists in presenting images as a lighthearted social commentary on the situation that confronted Filipinos during the occupation. Through the analysis of comic strips, this article constructs a story of Filipinos and Japanese using an alternative historical source.

KEYWORDS: *Japanese occupation, Second World War, propaganda, comic strips, historical sources*

The Second World War, especially the Japanese occupation of the Philippines, has been a popular topic of research for scholars in Philippine studies. In the early 1980s Resil B. Mojares (1982, 1) already made the observation in his keynote address to the Fifth National Conference on Local History held in Iligan City that the period was one of the most widely written about phases of Philippine history. However, most of the materials about the period focus mainly on two general aspects. The first deals with the military aspect of the war made available through texts from military histories describing the U.S. Army or the Imperial Japanese Army. The second deals with biographies and memoirs of participants of the period, from personalities such as presidents, foreign

dignitaries, and guerilla leaders to ordinary people such as housewives, children, and regular citizens.

In recent years the historiography of the Japanese occupation of the Philippines has seen the use of alternative sources to write about aspects of the occupation period that do not fit the usual mode identified above. Oral interviews of people who experienced the war and the occupation period are often used. *Under Japanese Rule* (Constantino 1994) is a collection of stories by people recalling their experiences during the Japanese occupation. It includes experiences of children, prominent personalities, and people from the provinces and guerilla forces.

However, one problem with oral accounts is that interviews are not necessarily accurate. It has been more than sixty years since the war ended and memories are not as acute as we would like them to be. For such a traumatic event such as the war, some people would rather forget about them, such as the case of comfort women who have broken their silence only recently. Or, in some cases, they tend to exaggerate some events. On a positive note, interviews give life to the historical narrative. Most of the time, primary documents do not give light to people's everyday life. By adding stories based on the recollections of individuals, an author can paint a broader picture of events rather than merely focus on political and military figures and events.

Memoirs or diaries written by people as they experienced the war and occupation period have been used by historians as another alternative source. Jose Ma. Bonifacio M. Escoda (2000) gives an account of the period based on diaries of his own family and friends. Related to this, an article by James J. Halsema (1994) offers a comprehensive survey of books written by foreign internees in the Japanese interment camps in the Philippines.

Photographs constitute another unconventional source for the historian. Ricardo Trota Jose and Lydia Yu-Jose (1997) blend English, Japanese, and Filipino sources and use pictures from newspapers and private collections, paintings, calendars, and leaflets to give readers a visual experience of the occupation period.

Mojares (1982, 2) suggested that the study of the nonmilitary aspects of the war and the Japanese occupation should be studied to gain additional insights on occupied Philippine society. He argued for a

writing of history that would not be just an act of commemoration of great battles and people of the time, but an act of understanding. In this light, I intend to use an unconventional source, *komiks* or sequential comic strips published in newspapers during the Japanese occupation, to provide additional perspectives on the period.

The dynamism of komiks lays in the fact that they are popular, being a simple form of medium that is easy to understand. Soledad Reyes, who has been an exponent of scholarship on Philippine komiks, voices her concern that despite the fact that komiks have played an important role in Filipino society very few scholars have studied this phenomenon. How interwoven is komiks with Filipino life? According to Reyes (1997, 291, trans. mine), "Readers would understand more the meaning of what characters such as Phantomanok or Kleng Kleng are doing than the effect of the increase of oil prices on the life of Filipinos." She further observes that a number of institutions have realized the significance of such a medium as komiks in shaping the mindset and beliefs of their readers. From this perspective, the medium has been used to promote policies of government offices and religious organizations; it has also been used for commercial and election campaign purposes (ibid., 295). Reyes adds that komiks do not only influence the readers' mindset but also attempt to influence the readers' actions. For example, komiks expounding the concept of the Green Revolution invite its readers to involve themselves by cleaning their surroundings and growing plants in their backyards. Clearly, komiks can exert a strong influence on the lives of Filipinos, which is why they have been used by various institutions to advance their objectives.

Komiks, therefore, offer a promising field of inquiry. It can provide new glimpses on the lives of ordinary people. It can also highlight the efforts by institutions to shape the lives of people through this medium. With these two objectives in mind, I intend to analyze comic strips that appeared during the Japanese occupation. By studying the four komiks published in the *Tribune*, I aim, first, to present the many facets of daily life of Filipinos and glean insights on the dynamics of Philippine society during the Japanese occupation; and, second, to present and evaluate efforts by the occupation authorities to restructure the lives of Filipinos. My goal is to help open the field of komiks as

a legitimate source for the historian, and to derive insights on Philippine society and the propaganda campaign of the Japanese authorities in the occupied Philippines.

I am not the first to deal with comic strips during this period of Philippine history. Jose (1990a, b) has published two very interesting articles in *Philippine Studies* that focus on the *Tribune* as a tool of Japanese propaganda. However, both articles simply present the different comic strips available in the pages of the *Tribune*. A study that is somewhat similar to mine is the Master's thesis of Helen Rivera (2000). A striking difference between Rivera's and my work is that the former focuses mainly on editorial cartoons before and after the Japanese occupation, while this article looks specifically at those that were published during the occupation.

***Tribune* as Japanese Propaganda**

On the latter days of 1941, Japan began one of its most ambitious plans by starting the Pacific War through the bombing of the U.S. naval base in Pearl Harbor. Japan also began to attack various points in Southeast Asia, including the Philippines.

With the imminence of fighting, numbers of Filipinos rushed to the nearest headquarters to get their army commissions—ROTC cadets anxious to fight their “first” war alongside the Americans. The news of the Japanese attack spread throughout the island with mixed reactions. While some Filipinos were confident of their American colonial masters, stating “Kayang-kaya ng mga Kano ang mga Hapon” (The Americans can easily beat the Japanese), there were others that scampered to bus and train stations wanting to go home to their respective provinces with the impression that they would be safer there (Escoda 2000, 46–47). Despite the resistance, the combined Filipino-American army was unable to repulse the Japanese onslaught. On 2 January 1942 the Japanese Imperial Army marched through the streets of Manila, which was declared an “Open City.”

While the fighting shifted toward guerilla warfare for the Filipinos and Americans, the Japanese busied themselves in regaining a sense of “normalcy” in the occupied territories. This task was given to the Pro-

paganda Corps, a group comprising Japanese civilians. Forming the group were six novelists and poets, four painters, nine newspaper and magazine writers, five cameramen, two broadcasting technicians, four printing technicians, fourteen Catholic priests, twelve Protestant ministers, and five movie people, including a cameraman (Terami-Wada 1990, 283).

In order to attain the goal of normalcy and pursue Japan's strategic interests, the Propaganda Corps decided on the following steps (ibid., 287):

1. Seize the newspaper companies and reopen them as soon as possible.
2. Seize the radio stations and repair broadcasting equipment so the stations could function again.
3. Immediately reopen all movie theaters.

Evidently, the Japanese authorities put a lot of emphasis on media because

they regarded the Filipinos as “cultured people with little reading.” The occupiers observed that the average Filipino read only newspapers and magazines. Filipinos preferred to spend their time listening to the radio or watching movies, “swallowing whatever entered the eyes and ears.” (ibid.)

As soon as the Japanese entered Manila, they seized and padlocked the offices of the *Manila Bulletin* and the *Philippine Free Press*. A casualty of the war was the office building of the DMHM (*Debate-Mabuhay-Herald-Monday Mail*) which was hit by bombs and destroyed (Jose 1990a, 49–50). The only newspaper that was permitted to run was the TVT (*Taliba-La Vanguardia-Tribune*) chain of Alejandro Roces, which headlined its 3 January 1942 issue, “JAPANESE TROOPS ENTER CITY” (ibid., 50). While the TVT chain came out with its editions regularly under censorship, the Propaganda Corps also drew up a list of conditions for anyone who wished to go into publishing (Lent 1971, 203):

1. They must first secure a permit from the military,
2. They must submit to military censorship, and
3. Any violators of the above will be severely punished.

With the exception of enemy nationals working in the *Tribune* who were interned, most of the *Tribune* prewar staff were held intact by the Japanese, with some new additions. Armando Dayrit, for a short while, continued to write "Good Morning Judge" until he left to join the underground resistance. Armando Malay decided to keep his job, which was to cover stories at the courts, because he had a family to feed. Joe Bautista maintained his position as editor of the *Tribune*, but it was merely titular because he no longer had a say on editorial policy. Francisco B. Icasiano, editor of the prewar *Sunday Tribune Magazine*, continued to write his columns "Mang Kiko" and "Off and On." The Grau sisters, Corazon (the society editor) and Consuelo, maintained their column "Brevities," while Pedro Hernandez kept his coverage of the sports scene. Artists such as Liborio Gatbonton (or Gat) and Tony Velasquez were occasionally called to illustrate for the paper, but those instances became infrequent as the number of pages of the paper dropped. There were also some newcomers such as Vicente J. Guzman, formerly with the *Manila Bulletin*, and Vicente Barranco and Esmeraldo de Leon from the *Herald* (*ibid.*, 59–62).

The *Tribune* attempted to present an image of normalcy through the milling out of regular articles such as the Grau sisters' "Home Front," which introduced practical tips for the home, such as recipes, tips on homecare and housework, and some general practical suggestions to make life easier in those hard times. Similarly, "Brevities" told of news regarding marriages, debuts, and other social events of families who could still afford the luxury (Jose 1990b, 137–38). The "Public Pulse" printed letters to the editor. Although most of the letters praised the government, a number of them voiced discontent over drastic price increases, profiteers, looters, and hygiene. The classified section had its share of "wanted to buy," "for sale," and other advertisements. "Sports Flashes" presented news on boxing, basketball, and other tournaments. "Follow the Ponies" was for racing aficionados, and "Theatre Week" reviewed the goings on in the local stage (*ibid.*, 138–39). The comic strip pages were a peculiar aspect of the newspaper, and these shall be discussed in the next section.

Reception of the newspaper was mixed. In some instances, people in the provinces where the Propaganda Corps went for their "goodwill

mission” would scramble for newspapers distributed by the Corps. According to Terami-Wada (1993, 283), these people were hungry for news, any news regarding the war. However, Teodoro Agoncillo quipped:

The periodicals of the period collectively enjoyed a big circulation not only because the people were hungry for news and stories, but because the vendors and merchants were in need of wrapping paper . . . (and) cigarette paper. (Constantino 1994, 19)

Most Filipinos were aware of Japanese “manipulation” of the newspapers. In some cases, when people read in the news that the Japanese shot down ten American planes, the reader would assume instead that ten Japanese planes were shot down. Probably what best represented the Filipinos’ response to what they read was a skit performed by two popular comedians *Pugo* and *Togo*:

Pugo and Togo wore many watches. Pugo asked Togo: What is so strong it can bring down many American planes? Togo would answer, one after the other: Machine gun? Anti-aircraft? Cannon? Other airplanes? Pugo would say no to all these. When Togo gives up, Pugo says that he has to give up all his watches if he wants to know the answer. Then, he would give the answer: The newspaper [*Tribune*] (which listed everyday the incredible number of American airplanes shot down). (Constantino 1994, 13)

The *Tribune* had its tragic end close to the war’s conclusion when the Japanese set fire to the TVT building, burning the offices, records, and the presses. After the war, the Roces family decided not to resurrect the *Tribune* as it was so badly tainted; rather, they relaunched the *Manila Times*, a weekly-turned-daily newspaper (Jose 1990b, 148–49). Thus ended the story of the *Tribune*, a newspaper tagged before the war as the “newspaperman’s newspaper” (Jose 1990a, 46).

The Komiks

In the early part of the occupation (January to March 1942) the *Tribune* printed American-syndicated titles. On 5 January 1942, “The Lone

Ranger” by Frank Striker, “Fritzi Ritz” by Ernie Bushmiller, “Donald Duck” by Walt Disney, “Tarzan” by Edgar Rice Burrough, and “Laff-a-Day” were found among the pages of the newspaper. On 7 January 1942, “Jane Arden” by Monte Barrett and Russell Ross was included among its comics repertoire. “Mutt and Jeff” by Bud Fisher was included on 9 January 1942. The last American strip permitted to run in the *Tribune* was “The Phantom” by Lee Folk and Ray Moore starting on 16 January 1942. However, these strips were printed sporadically and had no continuity in storylines. The last appearance of American comic strips in the *Tribune* was on 27 March 1942.

These American comic strips served as entertainment and an escape for readers who found the news about the war gruesome and off-putting. To spark readers’ interest in the newspaper, a number of these strips were published. Moreover, these comic strips probably had a large following who would have terribly missed them had they been discontinued outright, resulting in an immediate loss of confidence on the Japanese. Hence, the Propaganda Corps had no alternative but to print the American comic strips until they could produce their own comic strips.

The American strips were replaced by four komiks that were permitted by Japanese censors to appear on the pages of the *Tribune* from 1942 to 1944. These were: “The Philosopher of the Sidewalk” by Gat; “Now I’ve Seen Everything” by Ros; “The Boy ‘Pilipino’” by Keizo Simada; and “The Kalibapi Family” by Tony Velasquez.

“The Philosopher of the Sidewalk” had a run of twenty-nine strips from 25 January 1942 to 16 August 1942. Its main character was a man referred to as the Philosopher. Every strip was presented with only four panels, and had little or no dialogue at all. Its creator, Gat, was also used by the *Tribune* to illustrate another series in the paper called “Our Leading Personalities,” which featured Japanese generals as well as local and national government officials during the Japanese occupation. However, Gat is better known for his postwar works, such as his “Jappy Days in the Philippines,” a collection of illustrations criticizing and poking fun at the Japanese during the occupation. Rivera (2000) has made a similar observation of Gat being one of the more

prolific artists who illustrated editorial cartoons in various newspapers during the postwar period.

“Now I’ve Seen Everything” was supposedly a weekly feature, but it turned out to be very short lived. Only four strips appeared from 12 July 1942 to 23 August 1942. With only one panel, the komiks was presented almost like an editorial cartoon. It did not have any main character, but usually dealt with a specific theme such as bicycle thefts and Filipino ingenuity. Ros did not seem to have any illustrating work before and after the Japanese occupation and, unlike Gat, was not called to illustrate for any other portion of the newspaper after the print run of “Now I’ve Seen Everything.”

After a dearth of strips starting from August 1942, a comic strip drawn by a Japanese, Keizo Simada, and entitled “The Boy ‘Pilipino,’” was launched on 5 January 1943. It was a daily feature that lasted barely a month, with eighteen strips that ended on 23 January 1943. The strip was presented in a four panel format. It featured two protagonists, the main character “Pilipino” and an older companion, probably his father. The boy was devoted to the New Philippines and Japan. An interesting feature of the strip was that it contained no English dialogue. Rather, all the dialogues were written in *katakana* characters with their respective *romaji* translations placed at the bottom. Little is known about the artist, and the only information about him is from his introductory letter printed a day before the official release of the strip (*Tribune*, 5 January 1942, 3):

Dear Filipino Friends,

I take the liberty to introduce myself to the Dear Readers of the *Tribune*. I am Keizo Simada, a cartoonist by profession.

The *Mainichi Shimbun*, Tokyo and Osaka, the largest twin newspapers in Japan—and which have been running my cartoons for millions of Japanese readers—have dispatched me to the Philippines to draw cartoons and contribute to healthful recreation, an important phase of the cultural side of the construction of the New Philippines.

My sojourn to the Philippines is yet short and my sphere of observation is limited but I am putting my heart and soul into the preparation of cartoons for your enjoyment.

My friends of the Philippines, give me your kind applause if the
cartoons meet with your favor,

Sincerely Yours,
Keizo Simada
4 January 1943

Tony Velasquez's "The Kalibapi Family" was also a daily feature that began its run on 10 October 1943 and ended on 25 June 1944. It became a relatively long-running comic strip, with a total of a hundred and forty-six strips. It featured a family consisting of Kalibapi, the father; Inday, the mother; Bayani, the oldest son; Nene, the sister; Totoy, the youngest son; Tia Upeng, an aunt; Tio Tasyo, husband of Upeng; and Nena, daughter of Tasyo and Upeng. The works were formatted as four-panel strips using a blend of English, Filipino, and romaji dialogue. Interestingly, the family name of the characters, Kalibapi, resonated with KALIBAPI, which stood for *Kapisanan sa Paglilingkod sa Bagong Pilipinas* or The Association of Service to the New Philippines, created by the Japanese Military Administration to act as a "non-political service organization."

The KALIPABI served as the de facto political party of the Japanese to justify occupation of the Philippines. To enhance its credibility in carrying out its goal of pacification, the party was officially launched on 30 December 1942, to coincide with the death anniversary of national hero José Rizal. It had the following objectives (Banlaoi and Carlos, 2004):

1. To promote technical and scientific efficiency by coordinating all the activities and services dedicated to the national regeneration of the Philippines;
2. To make every Filipino a hard-working, self-reliant, courageous, well-disciplined, and progressive citizen;
3. To bring Filipinos together as one compact and vigorous body, free from any strife or regional division, and animated by a common desire to serve the nation with zeal and devotion;
4. To promote physical development of the people through proper guidance, athletic exercise, wholesome recreation, and outdoor activities;

5. To assist people in understanding the significance of, and to strengthen their adherence to, the principles of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere; and,
6. To do everything possible to ward off the Anglo-Saxon influence so as to bring Filipinos back to the fold of the Orient.

The komiks that used the Kalibapi name followed a similar set of objectives as that of the political party.

Another interesting feature was the choice of Filipino terms for some of the characters: Inday means Miss, Nene means little girl, Totoy means little boy, and Bayani means hero. Its creator, Tony Velasquez, is known as the "Father of Filipino Komiks," because of his works before and after the Second World War. One of Velasquez's endearing works was the development of a komiks character called Kenkoy during the American period. Kenkoy has been identified as the "Filipino-in-transition": he wore American-style clothing, spoke "carabao English," and influenced readers to assimilate American values rather than become "backward" like Kenkoy's friends and family, who insisted on traditional Filipino costumes worn during the Spanish period. Existing scholarship on Velasquez and his work Kenkoy tends to gloss over the Japanese occupation, as Roxas (1985) does, by merely stating that Kenkoy was used as propaganda by the Japanese, with no elaboration on how Kenkoy was actually used. No mention is made of the Kalibapi family.

While all four komiks dealt with a multiplicity of topics, in this article I will only look at two major themes. The first deals with the use of komiks to promote Japanese culture in the hope of eradicating the Filipinos' pro-American inclinations. The second deals with the government's use of komiks to present the problem of shortage of supplies and offer potential solutions. It will be pointed out that the second theme enabled some komiks artists to subtly subvert the solutions formulated by Japanese or local Filipino authorities.

Komiks as Propaganda: Language and Culture

Using the *Tribune* as their mouthpiece, the Japanese Propaganda Corps tried to eliminate aspects of American culture by overwhelming Fili-

pinos with Japanese culture through the newspaper's content. The comic strips represented an important element in this strategy. The main propaganda thrust was to integrate the Japanese into the everyday life of Filipinos by familiarizing the latter with Japanese language, culture, and lifestyle.

Language was a major concern because both parties, Filipinos and Japanese, could not understand each other. Only a handful of Filipinos knew how to speak Nippongo, while a number of Japanese who had lived in the Philippines prior to the war served as English or Tagalog interpreters for both groups. Most, if not all, of the Japanese soldiers sent overseas could hardly speak or understand English, let alone the native tongue of the country where they were assigned. According to Terami-Wada (1991, 175), most of the soldiers, specifically of the Propaganda Corps, did not even have an idea of their assignment. In order to remove barriers of communication with Filipinos, the Japanese Imperial Army through the Propaganda Corps launched a campaign to encourage Filipinos to learn Nippongo. Rather than the Japanese learning Tagalog or English, the occupiers exerted their power and made Filipinos learn Nippongo. Under Military Ordinance No. 13, Tagalog and Japanese were declared as the two official languages of the country, just as Spanish was banned and English was permitted only under the strictest conditions. English would have been totally banned had it not been the only language by which some Japanese authorities could communicate with Filipinos (Steinberg 1967, 51).

To support the language policy, the *Tribune* starting with its issue on 17 February 1942 came out with a weekly column called the "Japanese Corner." It taught Filipino readers how to read, write, and pronounce katakana characters, and provided them with a vocabulary list and a number of simple phrases. Every now and then, it would also print Japanese songs for readers to learn and sing along with the day's radio program, "Let's Sing in Japanese," by a Professor Kiguti. These songs included the lyrics in Japanese, the English or Tagalog translation, and the music sheet. Subsequently, the *Tribune* (2 January 1943) included a column entitled "Nihongo," which featured words, phrases, and a couple of "Asian stories" all written in katakana. Taking advantage of Ordinance 13, approved publishers sold Japanese-English and English-Japanese

dictionaries, and an instruction booklet entitled “Japanese Made Easy” at fifty centavos a piece. A number of translating services posted advertisements in the news, and several vocational schools offered short-term Nippongo courses. Radio station KZRH, one of the few permitted to broadcast in the Philippines, allocated a program for Filipinos to learn Nippongo. The program was called “Japanese Lessons” by a Professor Kusama, which ran every 6:30 PM in the early part of 1942.

Even the names of streets, buildings, and the like were changed to Tagalog or Nippongo, particularly those reminiscent of the American period. Dewey Boulevard was renamed Heiwa Boulevard; Taft Avenue, Daitoa Avenue; Harrison Boulevard, Koa Boulevard; and Jones Bridge, Banzai Bridge. Even the districts of Manila and nearby areas were renamed “in keeping with the city administration in Japan.” These districts were Bagumbayan (Port Area, Intramuros, Ermita, and Malate); Bagungdiwa (Pako, Pandakan, and Sta. Ana); Bagumpanahon (Sampalok, Santa Cruz, Quiapo, and San Miguel); Bagumbuhay (Tondo, Binondo, and San Nicolas); Balintawak (San Francisco del Monte, Galas, and La Loma); Diliman (Diliman proper, Cubao, and the University District); San Juan (San Juan del Monte); Kalookan; Mandaluyong; Makati; Pasay; and Parañaque (Agoncillo 2001, 348–49).

One of the earliest comic strips that tackled Nippongo was “Now I’ve Seen Everything” dated 23 August 1942 (figure 1). The strip persuaded Filipinos to learn Nippongo by highlighting certain benefits. Parents with children, who were beginning to learn and get a grasp of Nippongo, should do the same. A person who knew Nippongo enjoyed certain advantages over someone who did not. Nippongo could be used by lovers as a “secret” language even under the watchful eye of a stern elder. Nippongo could also help a merchant expand the customer base by being able to cater to Japanese customers, especially soldiers. Finally, the strip subtly hinted that, if a person could speak and understand Nippongo, then better relations could be had with Japanese soldiers. This last point was communicated through the statement of the boy in the lower left portion of the strip, “Biru? There’s a bar, tomodati!” (Beer? There is a bar, friend!).

With its Japanese creator, “The Boy ‘Pilipino’” focused on language in a way that the other komiks did not. This was much evident in the



Figure 1. “Now I’ve Seen Everything” by Ros, *Tribune* (Manila), 23 August 1943

artist’s use of Japanese phrases in katakana and romaji in the dialogue of the komiks characters—in contrast to the use of English in “Now I’ve Seen Everything” and “The Kalibapi Family.” The strip that appeared on 6 January 1943 included the message encouraging the youth to learn Nippongo (figure 2). In it Pilipino says “Nippon-go o benkyo simasu” meaning “I am studying Nippon-go.” An interesting aspect of this strip is that it not only uses Japanese phrases but also uses a Japanese onomatopoeic expression. Instead of the English “zzzz” to denote snoring, the artist uses “gu go.” Underscoring the propaganda value is the last panel which shows Pilipino using earmuffs so he can continue to study Nippongo and not be bothered by his father’s snoring.

Another aspect of Japanese culture that the Japanese sought to integrate into the daily life of Filipinos came by way of the requirement that Filipinos do morning exercises. Every morning at 7:00 AM a high pitched screeching voice in Japanese was heard signaling the start of

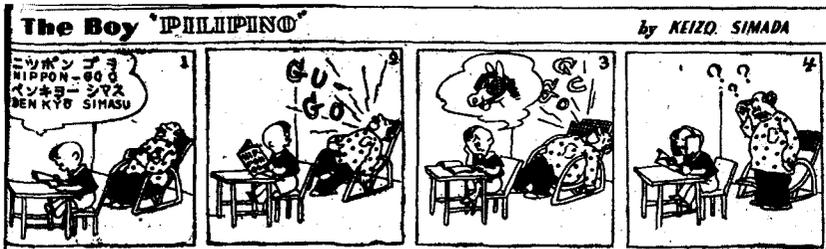


Figure 2. "The Boy 'Pilipino'" by Keizo Simada, *Tribune* (Manila), 6 January 1943

Radio Taiso. The Japanese were great exponents of the principle "a sound mind is a sound body," and tried to carry it out by making everyone do the Radio Taiso. Government officials, employees, personnel, and students all had to go through the exercises, if not early, then sometime later, in the morning or even in the afternoon (Hilario-Soriano 1948, 162). The *Tribune* printed the daily schedule of radio station KZRH, which broadcasted Radio Taiso, so readers could participate. In order for Filipinos to know and do the exercises, the *Tribune* provided the sheet music for the exercises as well as detailed diagrams and instructions in its issues of 30 August 1942 and 6 September 1942. In the early part of 1942, Radio Taiso ran once at 7:00 AM, along with another program, "How to Perform Radio Taiso," every 6:00 PM. It was only in the latter part of 1942 when Radio Taiso ran twice daily, first at 7:00 AM and again at 8:50 AM.

In the strip of 10 January 1943, Pilipino is shown doing the Radio Taiso exercises with his father (figure 3). After a few minutes, the father wanted to rest. However, Pilipino encouraged him to go on and, as a "punch line," tied his father's leg to himself so his father could not quit. The strip's message was that the exercises might be exhausting, but in order to build a New Philippines the New Filipino must work hard and be physically fit. Through the Radio Taiso, an image of superiority was also projected by the Japanese who mentored Filipinos. Uncannily, the Japanese gave commands in the Radio Taiso program for every Filipino to strictly follow without the Japanese being seen, only heard. According to Ricardo and Lydia Jose (1997, 126–27), the Japanese wished to inculcate a sense of discipline among Filipinos by requiring them to obey the daily commands of an unseen authority.



Figure 3. "The Boy 'Pilipino'" by Keizo Simada, *Tribune* (Manila), 10 January 1943

Komiks, Japanese Holidays, and Images of Japan

In addition to learning Japanese culture and language, Filipinos also had to adjust to a new time zone as official Philippine time was made to coincide with Tokyo time—an hour ahead of Manila standard time (Lichauco 1949, 137). Filipinos were also made to celebrate Japanese holidays.

A "Kalibapi Family" strip on 8 December 1943 did not celebrate the Catholic feast of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary; instead, it celebrated the Japanese triumph in the war and the "liberation" of the Philippines from its American oppressors, which the headlines tagged as "Greater East Asia Day" (figure 4). Indeed, during the day itself an afternoon parade was held, watched by a large crowd of spectators whose attendance was compulsory (Constantino 1994, 142).

In the strip, Tio Tasyo laments his poor dealings in the trading business and decides to call it a day (figure 4). Upon returning home, he is greeted by a huge spread of food. Tasyo inquires about the occasion and Inday (Mrs. Kalibapi) replies enthusiastically that it is the second anniversary of the "Greater East Asia War." The strip ends with the entire family greeting the readers "Mabuhay!" (Long Live!). Rather than condemn the war, the strip celebrates it.

Holidays usually meant celebration, but the Japanese had other ideas. In addition to parades and all the hoopla, these holidays were also venues for propaganda, with special "guest speakers" who addressed the crowds who were coerced to attend. What turned off most Filipi-



Figure 4. “Kalibapi Family” by Tony Velasquez, *Tribune* (Manila), 8 December 1943

nos was not that they were forced to celebrate Japanese holidays but that they were forced to stay and listen to the long and boring speeches. As a student during the occupation, Fernando J. Mañalac’s (1995, 58) memoirs illustrate how he and his classmates “survived” these mass rallies:

What really kept us able to bear the oppressive heat, the unintelligible, boring speeches and programs at the grandstand, with thirst and fatigue assailing us, were the humorous remarks being cackled by the students from under their breath. Moreover, the providential presence of the pretty Holy Ghost College girls and other private school girls adjacent to us, kept us busy with our attempts at flirtatious glances and chuckles, and occasional exchanges of pleasantries. It might have been a momentous proceeding for Tojo and those officials, but it was also momentous opportunity for us boys in our collective state of puberty to be so close to those charming and appealing maidens with whom we interacted.

Nevertheless, the images of Japan were varied. As earlier mentioned, the Japanese propaganda machine sought to “befriend” Filipinos with their campaigns and programs. Some programs, such as the language program and the celebration of Japanese holidays, were intended for this purpose, but they eventually backfired, causing Filipinos to hate the Japanese even more. In one aspect, the strips showed an authoritarian entity that compelled Filipinos to do its bidding, such as learning Nippongo and doing the Radio Taiso exercises. However, also promoted was the image of the Japanese who wished to befriend Filipinos

nos, by communicating and understanding them, by celebrating holidays with them, and by being tolerant and patient with them.

Interestingly, although the *Tribune* was under Japanese censors, only a few images directly portrayed the Japanese. Only about twenty out of more than two hundred strips contained an image of Japan or the Japanese, and most of these appeared in Keizo Simada's "The Boy 'Pilipino.'" It could well have been a tactic of the Propaganda Corps. Minimizing the number of times images of Japan or the Japanese were incorporated in the strips probably gave the komiks greater credibility than if such images were constantly there. Readers would see the komiks characters, such as the Philosopher, Pilipino, and the Kalibapi family, as "authentic" Filipinos cooperating with Japanese programs and policies. Another reason why most of the images of Japan and the Japanese were found in "The Boy 'Pilipino'" was that its artist was Japanese, and portraying Japan in his strips would have come naturally.

Despite variances, all the strips sought to make Filipinos understand the Japanese by endorsing Japanese language, culture, and holidays. However, Filipinos reacted adversely to most of these programs. Firstly, the Japanese were not successful in indoctrinating Filipinos to speak Nippongo and stop the use of English. In fact, the *Tribune*, the official mouthpiece of the Japanese during the occupation, never changed its language from English to Japanese. Even later, only two to three out of eight to ten pages of the newspaper had Japanese text printed on it. As Filipino survivors of the Japanese occupation recorded in their memoirs (Constantino 1994), only a few could write in Japanese and these few could write at most a few Japanese phrases. Secondly, the exercises of Radio Taiso were perceived as a complete waste of time, as seen in various complaints made by Filipinos in their memoirs (Jose and Jose 1997, 125). Thirdly, the holidays, which supposedly meant well, were also despised because attendance was mandatory. Finally, the newspaper readers found that they could not easily reconcile Japanese propaganda with their real life situations. Japanese propaganda of befriending Filipinos could not be squared with the harsh treatment of Filipinos by some Imperial Japanese soldiers.

Shortage of Supplies: Solutions

Even before the Second World War, the Philippines already had a number of economic dilemmas. The country was not self-sufficient in food, especially rice. Most agricultural lands were devoted to cash crops such as sugar, hence the Philippines had to import a number of food products from its Southeast Asian neighbors (Jose 1998, 205). The trade embargoes imposed by the United States caused the arrival of vital supplies to cease, leading to the problem of shortages Filipinos faced during the Japanese occupation.

When Manila was declared an Open City and both Filipino and American forces pulled out of the vicinity, massive looting erupted. Retreating forces were given a scorched earth order to burn the Pandacan gasoline depots to prevent the invading Japanese forces from using these supplies (Constantino 1994, 73). Bridges and highways were also blown up. With fuel reserves low and integral routes destroyed, supplies within the Philippines itself could not be transported from one point to another, which aggravated the shortages.

Given limited resources, the government imposed rationing. But priority was given to the Japanese. The occupation policy of the Japanese stated that “economic hardships imposed upon the native livelihood as a result of the acquisition of resources vital to the national defense and for the self-sufficiency of occupation troops must be endured” (Jose 1998, 207). For example, rice harvested in the Philippines would have to feed the Japanese occupation forces first and Filipinos second. Only the leftovers were distributed to Filipinos. To control consumption, goods such as laundry soap, matches, cooking oil, and cotton and rayon textiles were rationed at fixed prices. Every month, an adult was allocated 200 grams of laundry soap valued at 10 centavos, 200 grams of cooking oil valued at 15 centavos, and one box of matches at 3 centavos per box. Clothing was also rationed at two pairs of socks or stockings, three handkerchiefs, two towels, two shirts, and 500 yards of thread per year per family (*ibid.*, 180, 184).

A number of strips dealt with this problem of shortages. One of the earliest strips by Gat in his “The Philosopher of the Sidewalk”

tackled the shortage of rice. On 25 January 1942, the strip showed the Philosopher having to queue to purchase rice (figure 5). This was a criticism of the prevailing condition of Filipinos since such queues did not exist in earlier periods of Philippine history. When it was his turn, the Philosopher asked the vendor “Don’t you sell anything besides?” For the effort of queuing the Philosopher seemed to have wanted to obtain other scarce commodities, and was disappointed that the seller sold nothing else but rice.

The PHILOSOPHER of the SIDEWALK —by GAT



Figure 5. “The Philosopher of the Sidewalk” by Gat, *Tribune* (Manila), 25 January 1942

The strip “Now I’ve Seen Everything” took on the theme of soap shortages, which was a problem in some parts of the Philippines. Tranquilina Benozza, an occupation survivor, recalled that she could no longer clean her beddings because there was no soap; as an alternative she would scrape ashes from stoves and used it as “soap” to wash her clothes (Constantino 1994, 215). In such a situation, Ros, the artist, addressed the problem by suggesting a most innovative solution—have the men’s trousers altered to become short pants to minimize the fabric needing to be washed (figure 6). Ros made the suggestion humorous by showing men with different body types wearing shorts, from the perfect look to the short and fat and the lean and lanky. Despite the

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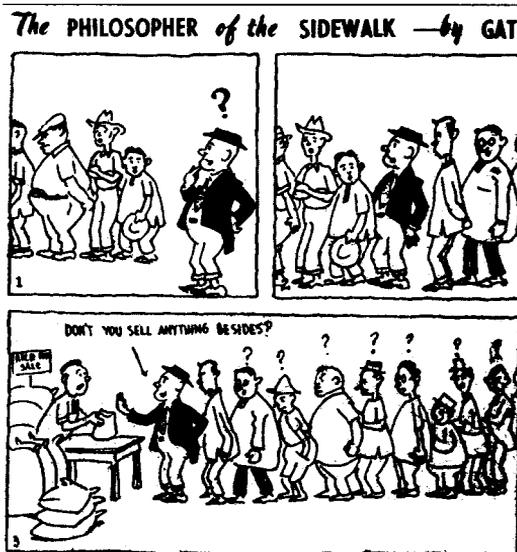


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hilarious perspective, it was a subtle criticism of the situation brought about by the war and occupation. More than that, the strip even contained a form of insult toward the Japanese. Ros noted that, in wearing shorts, “some men have all the luck and some just so-so,” the latter illustrated with a bow-legged man and captioned with “for ne’er the twain shall meet.” Filipino readers would have understood that the komiks poked fun at the bow-legged Japanese soldiers.



Figure 6. “Now I’ve Seen Everything” by Ros, *Tribune* (Manila), 12 July 1942

It should be emphasized that the occupation government and the Japanese forces were trying to create and promote solutions through the comic strips. To alleviate shortages, the government promoted a program of substitution, involving the replacement of scarce items imported to the Philippines with locally made and readily available products. The *Sunday Tribune Magazine*, for instance, ran an article to promote the use of coconut and soya bean milk. It was titled “Milk Substitute from 3 Billion Nuts” (*Sunday Tribune Magazine*, 8 March 1942,

2). Another article, "Mangoes Replace Peaches," advocated the use of mangoes in lieu of canned peaches and jams (*ibid.*, 15 March 1942, 2), and "Now is the Chance for Gogo," promoted a local plant known as "gogo" or "gugo" as shampoo (*ibid.*, 19 April 1942, 2). Not only did the articles suggest that Filipinos should use locally made goods, but they also mentioned other Asian countries where these products were produced and widely used, such as soya bean in Japan, Manchukuo, and North China; mangoes in Hindustan, Burma, and Malaya; and gogo in Malaya.

The strip coinciding with the gogo article portrayed in a funny way how effective local products were. In the strip, the Philosopher saw gogo being sold by a vendor who claimed that the product was an effective "dandruff remover and fast hair grower." The virtually bald Philosopher purchased the product hoping he could grow some hair. The product showed results by making the Philosopher's one strand of hair grow very long, contrary to his expectations (figure 7). This strip had a lot of implications. First, the vendor advertised gogo as a "Native Product," presenting the idea that Filipinos should consume local, as opposed to imported, products such as Palmolive shampoo, which the accompanying article mentioned. Second, it criticized the "vanity and

The PHILOSOPHER of the SIDEWALK —by GAT

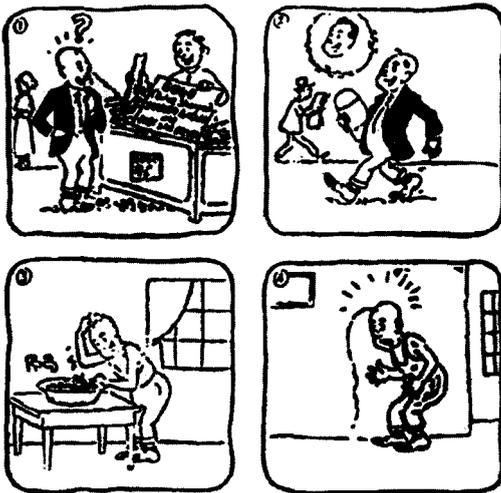


Figure 7. "The Philosopher of the Sidewalk" by Gat, *Tribune* (Manila), 19 April 1942

materialism” of Filipinos who would buy expensive imported (Western) products. Third, it implied that native products worked as effectively, if not better, than imported products. And, lastly, in conjunction with the article, the strip brought out the point that, Filipinos being Asians, they should buy and consume Asian products.

On 20 February 1944, Nene showed that *kamote* or sweet potato could be used as a substitute for bread (figure 8). While saying the Lord’s Prayer, she corrected herself by saying, “give us this day our daily kamote.” In the strip that appeared on 19 October 1943, Nene accidentally broke a bottle of vinegar and was punished for it (figure 9). To set things right, she fashioned some bamboo and made them into containers, telling her mother that she no longer had to worry about breaking these new containers, which were a product of the Philippines. While Nene could have tried to replace the broken bottle with a similar bottle, the strip chose instead to emphasize Filipino products. By promoting bamboo containers and implying that these were sturdier than glass bottles, the strip gave readers the impression that local products were superior to foreign (especially Western) ones. The picture



Figure 8. “Kalibapi Family” by Tony Velasquez, *Tribune* (Manila), 20 February 1944



Figure 9. “Kalibapi Family” by Tony Velasquez, *Tribune* (Manila), 19 October 1943

also included a bowl fashioned from a half shell of a coconut. Thus, the comic strips pushed for the use of local raw materials as substitutes for previous items of consumption.

Other practical solutions were suggested by artists in their strips. To deal with the cloth shortage, the artist gave a practical solution in the strip that appeared on 25 March 1944, which showed Mr. Kalibapi giving his wife a stack of neckties he no longer used (figure 10). Rather than throw them away, he asked his wife to convert them to rags. But Mrs. Kalibapi thought of an even better use for the ties. Within a couple of days, she managed to make children's clothes out of the ties. As shown by this example, what the artist did was to give hope to readers. Thus, the komiks, rather than dwelling on shortages as a lamentable problem, offered inventive suggestions and stimulated readers to act and solve these problems based on their own ingenuity.

It should be pointed out that the Philippines should not have had a clothing shortage. In an attempt to stabilize the Philippine economy and consolidate it with the Greater East Asian economy, the Japanese introduced a policy on the use of all available plots of land for cotton production. In particular, lands devoted to sugarcane during the American period were transformed to cotton plantations. But the cotton product was not intended for the domestic textile industry. Most of the harvested crop was to be exported to Japan for its textile as well as its explosives industries (Ikehata and Jose 1999, 176–81).

Shortage of Supplies: Subversions

Interestingly, the same Filipino artists who created the comic strips as a mouthpiece for Japanese propaganda also used them to promote subtle forms of counterpropaganda. The *Philosopher* had its share of strips that contained subversive themes masked as hilarious antics. Most of these strips adopted a solution-subversion technique: the artists would take a solution suggested or promoted by local authorities or by the Japanese and, at the same time, attack it in a discreet fashion.

Because scarcity was the foremost problem during the occupation, shortages in food and supplies were the main focus of the artists'

IT NEEDS BRAIN TO MAKE NOTHING FOR SOMETHING

By TONY VELASQUEZ



Figure 10. “Kalibapi Family” by Tony Velasquez, *Tribune* (Manila), 25 March 1944

criticisms. As already mentioned, the authorities fought the food shortage by advocating food substitution. A successful example was Ersatz coffee, which was made out of toasting rice and corn into a deep brown color, boiled, and served with sugar. It was popular and much favored by local consumers (Jose 1998, 460). However, not all food substitutions were accepted. In two strips with food substitution as theme, Gat gave two different messages against it. In one strip, which appeared with an accompanying article on coconut and soya milk as replacement for cow’s milk, the Philosopher is shown as waiting for the cow to yield milk, suggesting that people still preferred cow’s milk over the substitutes (figure 11). In another strip, the Philosopher attempted to get a mango from a tree for a little boy, but with no success (figure 12). This strip appeared in the same newspaper issue that featured an article on replacing canned peaches and fruit jams with mangoes. Although Filipinos might have been open to the suggested solution to the problem, the strip implied that the fruit seemed “uncooperative,” vaguely deflecting the problem to the fruit itself.

For his part, Velasquez presented a scenario that took substitution a bit too far. In the strip of 7 December 1943, Tasyo was shown trying to buy-and-sell in the downtown area (figure 13). He became hungry and went to a restaurant. Although shocked with the price of food, he had to feed himself to work later on. After his food was served, he overheard some people saying that cat meat was used as a substitute for chicken meat and pork. To Filipino readers, this substitution would be unacceptable, and would thus cast doubt upon what the authorities tried to promote.

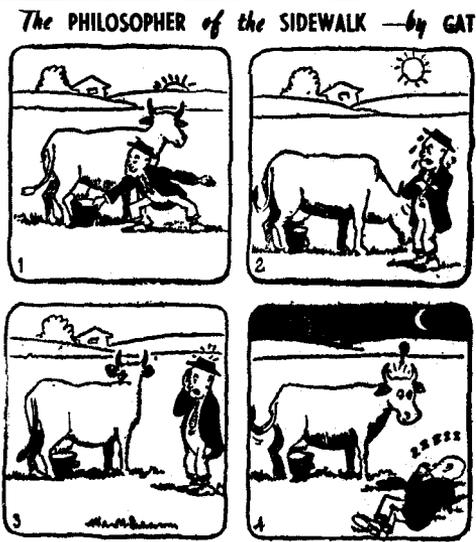


Figure 11. "The Philosopher of the Sidewalk" by Gat, *Tribune* (Manila), 8 March 1942



Figure 12. "The Philosopher of the Sidewalk" by Gat, *Tribune* (Manila), 15 March 1942

Although the strips depicted the rationing of daily supplies, such as rice, soap, and textile, they did not give an indication that the Japanese military administration took a lion's share of the supplies before distributing the remainder to civilians. To do so was not possible given the



Figure 13. "Kalibapi Family" by Tony Velasquez, *Tribune* (Manila), 7 December 1943

apparently iron-hand grip of the Japanese censors. Still, a number of strips were published with the simultaneous elements of solution-subversion. Such might not have been the intention of the artist in creating the strip, but the subversive message was latent and could be gotten hold of by the reader. The overall effect of the subversive side of the strips suggested that not all of the solutions suggested by the Japanese authorities were effective or, for that matter, followed by Filipinos. The example of the Philosopher insisting on obtaining cow's milk despite the availability of substitutes showed a touch of defiance. The cartoonists' strategy exemplified the observation that "[i]n the face of colonial impositions, Filipinos have been characteristically either accom[m]odating on the surface, but simmering with resistance underneath" (Barte 1992, 5).

A Second Look

The preceding sections of this article have presented what can be considered as merely this author's perspective on the Japanese-era komiks. But the attraction of studying komiks is found in the possibility of extracting multiple meanings from them and, indeed, in the inherent ambiguity of visual images. The komiks could be read in several ways.

Numerous themes did recur in the various strips published during the period that I have been able to compile. One recurring theme was that of the "lazy Filipino." In several strips the Filipino was repeatedly portrayed as sleeping. We can see this in figure 1, which shows the grandmother napping. In figure 2, Boy Pilipino's father sleeps while his

son is busy studying Japanese. This theme can be interpreted as criticizing the Filipino for not doing anything to alleviate the dire situation during the occupation. Figure 11 showed the Philosopher placing a bucket underneath the cow's udders without physically milking the cow yet expecting to get milk, a mark of stupidity. But why did the artists present negative images of (fellow) Filipinos? One possibility was that they wanted to satisfy the Japanese censors who monitored the artists' activities. The fact of censorship would explain why the komiks rarely put the Japanese in a negative light.

One can also interpret the Philosopher not as a subversive but as a fool. In figure 5, asking the rice seller "Do you have anything besides?" could be seen as silly because the Philosopher knew he had lined up for rice rations and should not have asked for something else. The Philosopher was also presented as a fool by placing him in humiliating situations, such as in figure 7, where he wanted to grow a full head of hair by using hair tonic with undesirable results. Not knowing any better in figure 11, the Philosopher, after he had boasted that he would easily get the mango fruit from the tree through a feat of strength, was ultimately ridiculed by the child. But why portray the Philosopher as a fool? It could probably have been created simply to draw humor, with no intent of subversion, and in this way offered a momentary means of escape from reality. The Propaganda Corps would have been satisfied if komiks enabled Filipinos to forget, even briefly, the trials and tribulations of the period.

The restoration of normalcy was also an issue, especially to the occupation forces and to the government. Apart from entertaining the reader, "The Philosopher of the Sidewalk" also portrayed the theme of normalcy. A series of strips portrayed the Philosopher as performing mundane activities, such as in the strip of 9 August 1942 when the Philosopher was shown going to the radio station to perform. The strip attempted to present to the reading public that radio stations were in operation, even if these were controlled by the Propaganda Corps (figure 14). Always containing a humorous aspect, the other banal tasks of the Philosopher involved his going to dances and parties, courting ladies, going to the beach, and traveling, thus projecting the image of peace and order during the occupation.

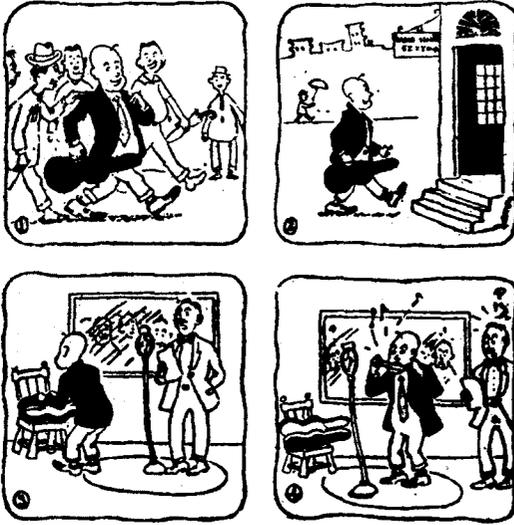
The PHILOSOPHER of the SIDEWALK —by GAT

Figure 14. "The Philosopher of the Sidewalk" by Gat, *Tribune* (Manila), 9 August 1942

Conclusion

This article has sought to demonstrate that komiks were utilized to promote programs of the Japanese Propaganda Corps, and integrate the Japanese into the everyday life of Filipinos. The Japanese launched programs forcing Filipinos to learn and speak Nippongo in schools, with the help of strips such as "A Boy Named 'Pilipino'"; sections from the *Tribune*; and program segments in radio. As a show of authority, the Japanese also required Filipinos to participate in Radio Taiso exercises every morning, to breed a Spartan lifestyle. Japanese holidays were introduced, and Filipinos were compelled to celebrate them by watching parades and joining crowds to listen to the speeches delivered by visiting dignitaries. Importantly, Filipinos were instructed to bow before the Japanese flag and Japanese nationals as a sign of reverence for their "liberators."

However, several programs failed in attaining their goals. Nippongo was taught but it was not actively used by Filipinos, as the *Tribune's* articles and komiks maintained English as its language. "A Boy Named 'Pilipino'" was an exception and an oddity. The celebrations attracted large crowds, but the participants were mandated to attend and, in the

end, hated the long-drawn speeches. The propaganda machine attempted to befriend Filipinos, but it stood in marked contrast to the reality of Japanese tolerance toward Filipinos.

The komiks dealt with the problem of food and supply shortages, and offered solutions to alleviate the situation. The komiks presented solutions that were intentionally amusing, such as transforming men's trousers into short pants, but also dealt with solutions of a serious nature, such as rationing and product substitution. Rationing had to be imposed due to the limited supply of food and other basic necessities, while substitution encouraged Filipinos to use local products and materials to replace scarce resources and imported products, such as kamote or sweet potato in lieu of rice, and soya milk in lieu of cow's milk. Interestingly, some solutions were attacked by the same artists through a solution-subversion approach, which entailed the cartoonists' conformity with official propaganda and discreetly criticizing it at the same time.

According to scholars of popular culture, the strength of comic strips lays in its combination of words and pictures in a way not possible with other print media. The dialogue and visual presentation convey multifaceted narratives about the Japanese occupation of the Philippines. In one level, there is the story the artist wishes to present, and, in another, the story the reader derives. As a printed medium, komiks give readers ample time to look and interpret a particular panel, and develop their own understanding of the message. Readers can quite easily reevaluate or reread the material over and over again at their own pace, something not possible in the real-time media of the period, such as movies and plays.

Note

This article is based on the author's Master's thesis titled, "The Stories They Tell: Sequential Art During the Japanese Occupation Period in the Philippines, 1942–1944," National University of Singapore, 2005.

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