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**Patrician Okubo Afable (ed.),
Japanese Pioneers**

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BOOK REVIEWS

Patricia Okubo Afable (ed.), **Japanese Pioneers in the Northern Philippine Highlands: A Centennial Tribute, 1903–2003**. Baguio City: Filipino-Japanese Foundation of Northern Luzon, 2004. 330 pages. Photos and illustrations.

Tributes avoid dwelling on the negative. *Japanese Pioneers in the Northern Philippine Highlands: A Centennial Tribute, 1903–2003*, written to commemorate the centennial of the arrival in the Philippines of the first large group of Japanese workers (to work on Kennon Road, now Benguet Road), emphasizes the sweet and the funny, and glances at the unfortunate only if necessary. It consists of thirteen chapters, including memoirs, fiction, a translation, and photographs and illustrations, by different generations of Japanese in the Philippines.

The interrelationships among its writers are such as to make one call the book a *family affair*. Patricia Okubo Afable, who wrote six of the chapters and the epilogue and who co-authored two other chapters, is daughter to Cecile Okubo Afable, who wrote the only piece of fiction in the book. Patricia is also niece to Bernardo Yoshikazu C. Okubo (born in 1919 and Cecile's younger brother), who wrote chapter 3, which is a first-person account by a second-generation Filipino-Japanese. Chapter 8 reproduces an account in a 1939 issue of the *Umi o Koete* by Hakumu Furuya, a first-generation Japanese resident in the Philippines. This was translated into English by Marie Dolores T. Escaño, a second-generation Filipino-Japanese and younger sister of the present Honorary Consul of Japan, Carlos Teraoka. Some thirty pages later, we

read that Hakumu Furuya is the penname of Shonosuke Furuya, who is written about in chapter 11, "The Furuya Photographic Collection." Shonosuke Furuya's collection supplied almost 50 percent of the more than three hundred photos in the book. Meanwhile, Furuya's son, Einosuke Rudy Furuya, contributed line drawings and images of modern-day Baguio.

Thus, as I go through its pages, I feel like a witness to a very private Filipino wedding, where the guests talk about themselves, their relatives, the newlyweds, and the courtship. The book is very informative, intimate, and polite. Some questions are not asked, and perhaps some answers that were given (in the interviews) are not to be published.

The volume begins by recounting the story of the Japanese participation in the building of Kennon Road, a story much loved by the Japanese. It seems that every Japanese in northern Philippines would like to trace his or her roots in the Philippines back to this event. Says Afable, "For the Japanese-Filipino community of the 1930s, the Kennon Road came to symbolize the hardships and persistence of their pioneering fathers and ancestors. . . . The community kept alive an ultimate historical link to the road" (p. 28).

What the editor-author does not say, however, is that the link is merely symbolic to the greater number of Japanese in the region in the 1920s and 1930s and to their descendants now alive. The fact is that most of the laborers left Baguio when Kennon Road was completed. Moreover, in the five years immediately following the completion of the road, there was a sharp decline in the number of Japanese going to the Philippines. This was partly because the Japanese government did not consider the experiment of sending laborers to Baguio a success and it became cautious in choosing which laborers to send. It was also partly out of consideration for the American Immigration Law allowing only skilled workers to enter the country (see Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs. 3.8.2-184. *Bei-ryô Hiripin guntô e honpôjin deka-segi ikken* [Matters on Migrant Japanese Laborers Going to the Philippines], vol. 3, pp. 75-87 and Hayase Shinzô, *Benguet imin no kyozô to jitsuzô* [Images and Realities of the Japanese Migrant Workers in Benguet] [Tokyo: Dôbunkan, 1989] for a detailed analysis). It is more accurate to trace the progeny of majority of Japanese in the Philippines to around 1910, rather than to the years between 1903 and 1905.

On reading the book, I sense that getting sources who could talk with authority on the well-known personalities among the Japanese who came between 1903 and 1905 was difficult, and making these interviewees, when found, remember and reveal more equally difficult. This is probably why they decided to reproduce in English the 1939 story of Hideo Hayakawa in *Umi o Koete*, a story so full of life's ups and downs but capped with a happy ending. The temptation to reprint it must have been so hard to resist. The book also gives us stories about a blacksmith, carpenters, farmers, masons, and sawmill workers. The buildings, bridges, and roads they built are named; the farms they opened up are located; and the flowers and vegetables they cultivated are identified. Glimpses into their lives, their relations, their first employers—whether American or fellow Japanese—are given. But I feel we are given only appetizers and a little of the main dish; certainly there is no dessert. There is the case, for instance, of Yoshi Otsuji, manager of the Filipino-Japanese Foundation of Northern Luzon, Inc. (FJFNLI), who came to retire in Baguio in 1986 after having worked in Japan for forty-three years. Why did she decide to retire in Baguio? Did the interviewers ask her so but got no reply? Or did they think that the question was not a proper one to ask? Very likely, the interviewers did not think this concern falls within the scope of their book, which is to tell the story of Yoshi Otsuji's parents, not Yoshi's own story.

Though the book is written with meticulous and expert care, it has inaccuracies. An example is when the author of chapter 12 writes: "Children from mixed marriages remember being called 'love children' (*ai no ko*) or 'mixed-blood children' (*konketsuji*) somewhat disparagingly" (p. 254). I was told, however, that one can play with the Japanese ideographs and use the homonymous ideograph which means love for *ai*; hence, "child of love." The transcription is incorrect, but it is sometimes deliberately resorted to, to subvert the prejudice embedded in the *ai no ko*, which just means "of mixed blood" or impure. Could the author have mistaken the informants' meaning when they used the word *ai no ko*?

The book does not make an issue out of whether or not the Filipino wives were married to their Japanese partners. This is a real issue in the case of the Filipino-Japanese community in Davao. But the book's literary chapter, "You Husband Me and I Wife You . . ."—

How They Got It Started,” gives us impressions of the beautiful courtship activities and wedding ceremonies between Japanese men and Filipino women. But why use fiction? The author does not explain.

Since the book is mostly about Japanese settlers who had Filipino wives, I would like to believe that the wives could be credited for half of the success of these Japanese pioneers. It is unfortunate that not much is written about them. Moreover, the oral histories could have been buttressed by documentary research and secondary sources. For example, the book states that “oldest sons tend to remain home” (p. 231) rather than seek employment overseas. Why was that the case? Lastly, it is obvious that the book shied away from telling the story of the Second World War.

However, as the editor says, the goal of the book is to begin (p. xxiii), not to tell yet the complete story of the lives of these pioneers. It is an impressive beginning, and deserves a good sequel.

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Rosario Cruz Lucero, **Feast and Famine: Stories of Negros**. Introduction by Resil B. Mojares. Afterword by Linda K. Albuero. Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 2003. 105 pages.

If one had to argue for the high place of *Feast and Famine: Stories of Negros* in the canon of Philippine literature, one would have much ammunition.

Set in Negros, the stories in this collection capture Negrense life, history, culture, cuisine, myths, customs, and stark class contradictions. Even the non-Negrense will delight in the description of place and people, particularly the evocation of the *bisayá* accent—characters exclaim “*Ay, ambot!*” and say “en-pi-eh” for NPA and “The Litol Mermaid starring Walt Disney.” In the afterword, Linda Kintanar-Albuero acknowledges the important contribution of this volume to the creation of a Visayan literature in English.