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**Ignorance at the Sorbonne:
Malaya, Indonesia, Borneo and the Philippines
by Charles Robequain**

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(the Congregation of the Immaculate Heart of Mary) we wish to express our deep respect for the type of missionary-scientist that that Congregation has been sending to and developing in the Philippines. They have been a great help not only in fostering religion but also in fostering Filipino culture.

ISAIAS X. EDRALIN

IGNORANCE AT THE SORBONNE

MALAYA, INDONESIA, BORNEO AND THE PHILIPPINES.

By Charles Robequain. Translated by E. D. Laborde. London. Longmans, Green and Company. 1955.

Monsieur Charles Robequain, Professor of Colonial Geography at the Sorbonne and one of the best known French authorities on Southeast Asia, has written a book which is extremely readable in its survey parts on the area as a whole, but incredibly bad in its more narrow focus sections treating the Philippines. A number of mistakes in the latter can be explained away on the basis of poor translation (the edition reviewed is an English translation of *Le monde malais* first published in France in 1950) but the book's most serious shortcomings must be described as sins of careless and sloppy scholarship.

As the title indicates, the area covered is Malaya and non-mainland Southeast Asia. The author does not limit himself to descriptive treatment of geological and topographical data but attempts to canvass the area systematically from an integrated ethnological, botanical, zoological and archeological-historical point of view. With this generalized treatment the author marshals substantial evidence to support existing theories of land-bridge connections and migration patterns between non-mainland and mainland Southeast Asia.

Unfortunately in his extensive treatment of the Philippines as a specific area, all pretenses of scholarship collapse. The Philippines has been in the "backwaters" of serious scholarship on Southeast Asia over the past half century and Robequain has obviously relied on few and inadequate source materials related to

ipinos have never been more than a small fraction of its population at any time. The present foreign population of Manila is certainly less than twenty per cent.

p. 329. The author states "a large part of the land, and the best at that, was handed over with its natives to the ownership of the Roman Catholic Church or to Spanish or half-caste families who were termed Caciques" through the *encomienda* system. Both contemporary descriptive literature as well as many historical works on the Philippines have misinterpreted the *encomienda* system, but few have misinterpreted it so completely. The *encomienda* grants gave no permanent title to land and gave no rights of "ownership" over individuals. It was more like a grant of specific taxing power in a particular area in exchange for the provision by the grantee of certain protective and religious services. *Encomienda* grants could not be handed down beyond the first generation, and at no time did such grants legally supercede the existing land ownership rights of the population within an *encomienda* area. The origins of *latifundia* in the Philippines is still not clear, but it is certain that neither the Catholic Church nor "half-caste families" (who were *not* called *caciques*) came into permanent possession of extraordinarily large areas of land through *encomienda* grants.

p. 359. Robequain states that foreign labor is employed for the cultivation of sugarcane in Luzon and Negros. This statement is in complete error. Foreign labor has never been employed to any extent in Philippine agriculture at any time, despite occasional interest in such a move in the latter part of the Spanish and early part of the American rule.

The factual errors canvassed above are but a minor part of the misinformation caught by this reviewer, but that should serve to establish the level of scholarship involved. Numerous translating errors (Banana for *banawe*, Bay Lagoon for *Laguna de Bay*, *Sebuan* for *Cebuano* are examples) and a fairly poor index also contribute to the book's inadequacy. It is certainly unfortunate for the Philippines that such a book has been published since it makes current point of so many errors concerning it. Perhaps new editions of the book can correct (re-write?) the Philippine material so that a good book can be salvaged from what is now a poor book.

THOMAS R. MCHALE