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History of San Pablo: Reviewed, Rewritten, and Retold

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History of San Pablo: Reviewed, Rewritten, and Retold

San Pablo City: Center for Agriculture and Rural Development, 2016. 164 pages.

Under the sponsorship of the Center for Agriculture and Rural Development (CARD), a number of scholars led by Francis Gealogo, an associate professor at the Ateneo de Manila University, invite readers to rediscover the history of San Pablo City, Laguna. This work undertakes a critical approach to the city's Spanish colonial past as it traces the historical path leading to the foundation of CARD. The six chapters reconstruct San Pablo's history using an interdisciplinary methodology as well as a multi-thematic approach, resulting in a work that differs from previous studies of local history and that can be read at a variety of levels. Earlier works, especially those related to San Pablo, have emphasized the institutional and political history of elites, ignoring aspects of economic history, gender relations, and the significance of popular religion. This volume tries to redress this imbalance by using demography, economic history, and gender and religious studies as well as a sociological approach to gain in-depth understanding of San Pablo's transformation mainly in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, although some references are also made to earlier periods.

The book begins with Armando de Jesus and Luz Rivera's essay, which explores the religiosity of San Pablo's residents from the time of the Spanish conquest to the present. They address the formation of a spirituality that emerged from the fusion of Tagalog beliefs and Catholicism, which has shaped their understanding of the world. In doing so, the essay places the town inhabitants as active participants in millenarian movements, like for example Hermano Pule's *Cofradía de San José*, which led to the Tayabas revolt of 1841–1842. In the second chapter Nicholas Sy explores the history of the monopolies of oil and wine in San Pablo. The novelty of this essay is that the author explains this history through the voices of subalterns, men and women who were part of the institutional and economic structure of the monopolies but did not hold power, like for example temporary workers, overseers, and small planters.

Maria Karina Garilao's chapter emphasizes the stories of women, providing a women's history that goes beyond their roles as housewives and

mothers. Garilao highlights their autonomous socioeconomic role, with the right to inherit, sell and buy properties, and establish independent households. She also reveals their importance in education and in the town's economy as shopkeepers and active participants in the monopolies of wine and oil. This exploration of subaltern and feminine voices is followed by Francis Gealogo's study of San Pablo's demographic history during the second half of the nineteenth century, that is, the last fifty years of Spanish domination of the Philippines. Gealogo analyzes the population fluctuations in San Pablo due to mortality and economic upheavals. He contextualizes the increasing number of *tulisanes* (bandits) in the area within this demographic framework to explain their eventual participation in the revolution of 1896, thus linking San Pablo's inhabitants to this foundational moment in the archipelago's history.

Rhina Alvero-Bonocan and Eileen Meneses's contribution explores the historical evolution of money lending and its connections with the *pacto de retroventa* (repurchase agreement). The authors describe how this indirect money-lending practice changed San Pablo's social and economic landscape, increasingly impoverishing the population and creating a deep inequality that survives to this day. Alvero-Bonocan and Meneses's essay is the perfect contextualization for the collection's last chapter, written by CARD's founder, Jaime Aristotle Alip. This piece explores CARD's evolution between 1986 and 1995 from a nongovernmental organization to a bank, emphasizing the socioeconomic capability of anonymous women and men to survive despite the socioeconomic inequalities of Filipino society. In particular, this essay discusses the role of women in San Pablo's economic life and their social importance as the unifying force of households as well as the social life of the town. In addition, the essay reemphasizes the tradition of money lending in San Pablo and offers a contemporaneous account that integrates the first five essays into a coherent narrative that assists in explicating CARD's contribution to the improvement of life in San Pablo.

Aside from this institutional narrative, which provides the historical context of CARD's *longue durée*, there is also another possible reading of this set of scholarly works. As essays that explore San Pablo's past, they highlight the importance of historical narratives from below to counterbalance traditional historical narratives that are centered on linear historical accounts made from an elite point of view. As such, this edited volume highlights the necessity to explore San Pablo's history at a deeper and broader level, not only to educate

the present generation but also to sustain the fight against the inequalities that have lingered since colonial times and continue to influence today's democracy. Extrapolating vital information from such local histories can contribute greatly to the enrichment of Philippine historiography and the understanding of the present.

Underpinning the book's interdisciplinary approaches is a thorough archival research that uses primary sources available at the National Archives of the Philippines, the Archdiocesan Archives of Manila, and other Philippine libraries and archives. The emphasis on primary documentation is accompanied by a discussion of the types of documents available and how they are used in these essays, a methodological approach that makes the volume not only a critical and informative work, but also an educational one. By highlighting the documentary richness of Philippine archives, the authors seem to encourage other researchers to study local history from different angles of inquiry as well as in a more nuanced and productive way. The authors of the six chapters in this volume read the primary documentation "from below," trying to find the traces left by the unseen and unheard people who populated San Pablo throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This strategy is deployed effectively in Garilao's essay, where she discusses at length the notarial documents (*protocolos*) to explore gender history and the role of women in San Pablo society, revealing a history that defies profoundly held prejudices regarding the supposedly small role of Filipino women in the public sphere. In addition, Sy's work uses documents of unknown individuals to explain the history of monopolies in San Pablo. With this new way of reading and approaching documentary sources, the essay brings to the fore a new and refreshing perspective on San Pablo's history.

Despite the book's attempt to nuance San Pablo's history as well as its extensive use of primary sources, it suffers from a deficiency that characterizes many works on the Spanish period in the Philippines: the absence of a clear historical contextualization that differentiates periods in specific spaces. More specifically, the essays have a hard time distinguishing between the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries, as if "the Spanish period" operated under the same policies, economic processes, and power relations without much variation from century to century. Perhaps this deficiency is not the fault of the authors alone; it may be due to the absence of more systematic research on the Spanish period between the time of the conquest and the mid-nineteenth century.

If the authors continue to develop and explore the topics contained in this volume, significant historiographical contributions can be expected to follow. This book exemplifies a new way to explore in depth the diverse local histories of the archipelago using the rich archives that exist in the Philippines. After all, addressing “history from below” allows for not only the contextualization of an institution that fights for the dignity of poor Filipinos, but also a deeper historical analysis by those who denounce the continuity of inequalities from the colonial period to the contemporary nation-state.

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ALFRED W. MCCOY

In the Shadows of the American Century: The Rise and Decline of U.S. Global Power

Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2017. 359 pages.

There have been many general works on the study of American decline and the limits faced by America’s empire, topics that actually date back to the 1970s, with the end of the US postwar boom, the onset of the oil crisis in the Middle East, and the reality of US political and military setbacks in Southeast Asia. However, only a few scholars have studied American decline in detail. In his latest book, *In the Shadows of the American Century: The Rise and Decline of U.S. Global Power*, Alfred McCoy—professor of history at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and a prolific scholar of Philippine history, US foreign policy and covert operations, and the politics of opium trafficking—undertakes an in-depth study of America’s supposed impending fall. The book argues that America’s policy-making elites have grown insular and “missed the significance of the rapid global changes in Eurasia” (27). Complacency, according to McCoy, endangers the very instruments the US has employed to maintain global hegemony, including “diplomatic alliances, CIA intervention, military technology, trade, torture, and global surveillance” (14).