

Reflections on Meaning and History, the Philippines and Japan

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1.

THERE was a new wave of nationalism sweeping through the Department of History in the University of the Philippines (Diliman) in the late 1980s that grounded itself on understanding the past from the Filipino point of view and expressing it in the National Language, Filipino, instead of English that was seen as a language borrowed or imposed by a half-century colonial experience with the United States of America. Although I was not a UP student in the mid-1980s I was allowed to attend the undergraduate historiography class of Zeus Salazar who was the force behind the Pantayong Pananaw (Our Perspective) school of Philippine history. Since English was my first language, and the language of instruction in all my years of schooling from the primary to the post-graduate level I realized that some things did not translate easily between English and Filipino.

History, for example, could be translated into Filipino in two ways: *Historya* from the Spanish *Historia*; and *Kasaysayan* from Tagalog. *Historya*, according to Salazar, both as word and concept was inferior to the *kasaysayan* because (h)istorya like related words: *historia* (Spanish), *histoire* (French) and *geschichte* (German) was rooted in the word “story” or “narrative.” Salazar argued for *Kasaysayan* on the basis that it was rooted in two words: *salaysay* (story/narrative) and more importantly *saysay* (sense/meaning). *Kasaysayan* being a story about the past, that has meaning for its readers. This perspective was very liberating at a time when I was deciding on history as a profession.

In an idle moment, many years after I had sat in Salazar's class, I consulted 18th and 19th century Tagalog *vocabularios* or dictionaries compiled by Spanish friars in the Philippines in search of the earliest use of *kasaysayan* as the word for history and to my surprise the Spanish “*historia*” was translated into the Tagalog “*salita*” which means “word” in the 20th century but in the past referred to a story or narrative. In the 1860 edition of the *Vocabulario de la lengua tagala* (Vocabulary of the Tagalog Language) compiled by the Jesuit fathers Jose Noceda and Pedro de Sanlucar there were entries for *historia* and *historietta* with the later rendered as: “*monting salitang ualang casaysayan*” (a small word with no meaning). *Casaysayan* here spelled with a “c” rather than a “k” referred to meaning rather than history. This simple exercise at trying to unravel the origin or etymology of *kasaysayan* led me to realize: that history and meaning are related; that history and meaning are constructed by historians from primary source documents; that history and meaning are also constructed by people who read and try to make sense of history in their lives.

2.

Reflections on history and meaning in relation to the Philippines and Japan resulted from my participation in the 2014 Asia Leadership Fellowship Program (ALFP) of the Japan Foundation and the International House of Japan. When I began the program in September 2014 I asked myself what was so controversial about the Yasukuni Shrine in central Tokyo? For a visitor it seemed like a well-maintained memorial and shrine made more beautiful by the changing of the seasons, particularly the *sakura* or cherry blossom caught on many photos and tourist brochures. Why, I asked myself, does China and Korea make a big fuss when the Japanese Prime Minister pays his respects to the war dead? Manila was one of the most devastated cities during World War II why do Filipinos react differently? Is it because we have short memories compared to the Chinese and Koreans? Or is it because of the history that is taught in schools and textbooks? While I have learned about the Japanese occupation of the Philippines and the atrocities that were committed on unarmed civilians in Manila in February 1945 why don't I feel as angry as others still do? Was it because my parents lived outside Manila during the war? Was it because none of our relatives were killed or brutalized by the Japanese during the war? The only bad encounter recounted in my father's family is how one of my uncles, then a boy, was slapped by a Japanese soldier because he did not show respect by bowing.

Reflections on meaning and history came to me during the ALFP field trip to Nagasaki because of the atomic bomb dropped by the United States in 1945 that devastated the city, killed its people, and seared its soul. Aside from visiting the Peace Museum and the epicenter of the bomb blast we also visited another shrine that went further back in history to the persecution of Christians in the 17th century that gave the predominantly Roman Catholic Philippines its first canonized saint in Lorenzo Ruiz, a Filipino-Chinese, who was martyred in Nagasaki in 1637.

3.

Nagasaki is a name most people associate with Hiroshima and the atomic bombs that hastened the end of the Second World War. When I saw that the 2014 ALFP program included a field trip to Nagasaki I wondered why they did not take us to the more popular Hiroshima Monument and Museum, but in the end I think I left with more useful knowledge and experience because there were so many historical connections that link the Philippines and Nagasaki, connections that predate the Japanese Occupation of the Philippines in World War II and go all the way down to the 16th and 17th centuries not well covered in our textbook history.

The Nagasaki Peace Museum, built close to the hypocenter of the explosion, did not disappoint. Photos, artifacts, and videos were carefully curated to deliver the shock value that would make all visitors leave fully resolved that nuclear weapons should never be used

ever again. The atomic bombs that devastated Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945 marked the first and last time nuclear weapons have been used, but in our age of extremism and terrorism the possibility of some lunatic launching nuclear weapons to destroy the world is a scary reality since we have no real-life James Bond or Superman to thwart them.

Walking through the museum one could not help but feel sympathy for the destruction of Nagasaki, one could not help but be repelled by the images of charred corpses, mangled limbs, and bodies burnt so badly the victims wished for a quick death to end their agony. When I stepped out of the dark museum back into natural light I could not help but ask why did the Peace Museum depict Japan as a victim? It is true that the innocent inhabitants of Nagasaki were victims of the bomb, but the museum had only one reference to Japan's occupation of the Philippines and other parts of Southeast Asia and this stopped short of acknowledging the brutal conduct of the Japanese Imperial Army in occupied Asia. As a Filipino historian I felt that Japanese visiting this museum should be reminded not just of the atomic bomb, but also of Japan's part in the war that made the atomic bombs necessary.

When I asked a Japanese to comment on this he replied: "it is true that Japan did evil things to your country and countrymen, but the majority of the people killed in Hiroshima and Nagasaki were non-combatants, they were innocent civilians." I replied, "Young Japanese should know about the sins of their forefathers. In February of 1945 the Japanese Imperial Army, knowing they were on the losing end of the war, decided to torch Manila and massacred innocent civilians—women, children and seniors in the most barbaric ways: infants tossed in the air and bayoneted in front of their wailing mothers; women brutally raped in front of helpless husbands, fathers, and brothers who were then shot or beheaded after the soldiers had satisfied their lust. Violation did not stop there, as there were reports that Japanese soldiers then poked their hands into the private parts of dead women in search of money, watches and jewelry they believed were hidden there. These things are not in the Japanese history textbooks and if young Japanese learn of these then maybe we get a stronger resolution to prevent war and the use of nuclear weapons." After I said this I also realized that while Philippine school textbooks cover the Japanese occupation, the details of these atrocities are left out.

After the visit to the Peace Museum we walked down to a simple black memorial that marked the hypocenter of the nuclear blast over Nagasaki and while everyone was taking souvenir photos I wondered if there was any residual radiation we would unknowingly catch there. Friends had been warning me to avoid Japan after Fukushima but I go anyway. They say I should avoid eating contaminated fish or drinking contaminated water but I do anyway. I tell my concerned friends in jest that people with cancer and other ailments pay a lot for radiation in Philippine hospitals so why shouldn't I stock up in Japan where it comes free?

The first Philippine reference I found in the Nagasaki trip was in the Peace Museum where a timeline provided the chronology of events leading to the bombing of Hiroshima on

August 6, 1945 with a bomb that used uranium and the bombing of Nagasaki on August 9, 1945 with a bomb that used plutonium. When the choice of targets was drawn up 17 cities were identified as places where the impact was to cause maximum damage to life and structures, it was also decided that damage was not only to be physical but psychological and cultural as well. In May 1945, after a succession of meetings, targets were whittled down to three: Kyoto, Hiroshima and Niigata. Kyoto was written off the list by US Secretary of War, Henry L. Stimson, who visited Kyoto before the war for his honeymoon. Stimson was a name that rang a bell in my head because he had served as Governor-general of the Philippines from 1927–1929.

Stimson was not the only Philippine historical reference I found on this trip to Nagasaki because next day, to learn more about the “hidden Christians” in Japan, we visited the Shrine to the 26 Martyrs of Japan who were martyred by crucifixion on a hill outside Nagasaki in 1597, this group included San Pedro Bautista who came from the Spanish Philippines. Then, in 1637 another groups of Christian martyrs met slow and terrible deaths in the same hill in Nagasaki that included Lorenzo Ruiz, the first Filipino saint.

4.

Nagasaki used to be one of Japan's major trading ports, one of a handful open to foreign trade long before the Atomic bomb was dropped over the city in 1945. Visitors interested in World War II are brought to the Atomic Bomb museum (Number 1 attraction according to TripAdvisor) and from there one can visit related sites like: the hypocenter of the blast now marked with a simple black stone pillar, the Nagasaki Peace Memorial Hall for the Atomic Bomb Victims, and the Nagasaki Peace Park. Visitors interested in heritage different from the Japanese temples of the Buddhist or Shinto kind should visit Glover Garden that maintains nine Western homes built from 1868–1912 that survived the atomic bomb. One walks inside the houses get a glimpse of the lifestyle of foreign traders long extinct as dinosaurs. Glover Garden is located on a hilltop that provides arguably the prettiest views of the port. As a bonus there is he invented association with the Puccini opera *Madame Butterfly*. On this point romance, imagination, and tourism trump history because no Madame Butterfly ever lived there even in fiction.

Catholic tourists are reminded that Nagasaki used to be a Christian enclave in feudal Japan so it is not surprising to see Western-style churches there like Oura church near Glover Garden that is not a place of worship anymore. Urakami Cathedral is being put up for inclusion in the UNESCO World Heritage list for its historical past even if the structure is not eligible having been completely rebuilt after World War II. TripAdvisor top ten attractions of Nagasaki suggest a choice of yet another park, yet another museum, and a Penguin Aquarium! Ranked 30 in a list of 139 attractions is the 26 Martyrs Museum and Shrine that I insisted on

visiting not because I am Catholic but it is a place of pilgrimage for a historian for it connects the Japan and the Philippines.

In the Catholic calendar February 6 is dedicated to the Feast of St. Paul Miki and Companions who were Christians first executed in the suppression of the Faith in Japan under Hideyoshi. They were arrested in Kyoto and Osaka, imprisoned, beaten, and tortured to make them renounce their faith. Stubborn to the end, they were bound and marched all the way from Kansai to Nagasaki. At one point their left ears were cut off to permanently disfigure them and serve as a stern warning to the other Japanese Christians along the way that they would suffer the same fate if they held on to their faith. They were then brought to Nishizaka hill where 26 wooden crosses had been prepared, each was bound to a cross and raised up, then two men were stationed at the base of each cross and at a given signal they drove their lances through the sides of the martyrs body to exit on their backs near the shoulders, forming a gruesome “X” resulting in a slow and painful death.

Of the 26 Martyrs of Nagasaki: six were Franciscan friars (four Europeans, one Indian and one Mexican), twenty were Japanese (three Jesuits and the 17 lay people including three young boys: Tomas Kozaki (14 years old), Antonio de Nagasaki (13 years old), and Luis Ibaraki (12 years old). Beatified in 1627 and canonized as saints in 1862 the group is now celebrated in the church calendar as “Paul Miki and Companions” that makes us forget the other 25 martyrs except Felipe de Jesus, the first Mexican saint. I am sure that when the Catholic church in Mexico celebrates the February 6 Feast of Paul Miki and Companions they focus on their patron saint Felipe de Jesus and do not care to know the names of the other 25 companion martyrs.

If we go by rank and importance at the time of the execution, the most prominent of the martyrs was San Pedro Bautista (1542–1597) who served as a missionary in the Philippines before he met his end in Japan. Pedro Bautista founded the ancient church in San Francisco del Monte a.k.a “Frisco” on jeepney signs that ply this Quezon City route. In the church compound and parish that now bears his name you will find the cave where the saint sought God in silence and solitude. San Pedro Bautista discovered the healing properties of the Laguna hot springs he called “Aguas Santa” (Holy Waters). Bautista was sent by the Spanish Governor-general in Manila as an ambassador to the court of Hideyoshi in Japan where he impressed Hideyoshi who land in Kyoto where the Franciscans established a church and a leprosarium. When the political weather changed Pedro Bautista led the group of martyrs of 1597 whose names are worth remembering when you have a special intention. Popular saints might be too busy to help and you are better off seeking the intercession of: Francisco Blanco, Francisco de La Parrilla, Gonzalo García, Martín Aguirre de la Ascensión, Buenaventura de Miyako, Cosme Takeya, Francisco Fahelante de Miyako, Francisco Médico de Miyako, Gabriel de Ize, Joaquín Sakakibara de Osaka, Juan Kinuya de Miyako, León

Kasasumara, Matías de Miyako, Miguel Kozaki, Pablo Ibaraki, Pablo Suzuki, Pedro Sukejiro de Miyako, Tomás Idauki de Miyako, Juan de Goto, and Diego Kisai.

Some saints have feasts all to themselves the 26 Martyrs of Nagasaki share the same day like the martyrs executed in the same hill in 1637 now celebrated in the Catholic calendar under “Lorenzo Ruiz & Companions, Martyrs.”

5.

Although I had visited Yasukuni Shrine before, going there after seeing the Peace Museum in Nagasaki made me realize that the shrine grounds also contains the Yushukan or the Military and War Museum. Outside the museum are different memorials: one to all the horses and dogs that died in war and are not remembered, there is a memorial to an Indian magistrate who dissented during the War Crimes Tribunal, then there is a statue of a Kamikaze pilot, an exact replica of which was erected in the town of Mabalacat, Pampanga. The controversial Kamikaze monument in Mabalacat was erected in 2004 by the local government generating some negative feedback. I was at the time Chairman of the National Historical Institute of the Philippines and was repeatedly advised by one of the members of the Institute Board to make a statement against the monument, and take steps to have it taken down as an insult to those who suffered and died at the hands of Japanese in World War II. While I acknowledged this sentiment I also had to acknowledge that historically Mabalacat, Pampanga was the birthplace of the Kamikaze missions. The Yushukan Museum did not mention the dark side of the Japanese occupation of Southeast Asia and this made me understand why the shrine, its memory, its history, its meaning can generate very strong feelings.

6.

The ALFP experience made me reflect on my own encounter with Japan.

I was eight years old when I first visited Japan for Expo '70 in Osaka but my encounter with Japan came much earlier when I would visit an uncle's love hotel in Angeles City, a town an hour's drive north of Manila that used to have a US Air Force base. I was told that when US servicemen came to the love hotel with Filipina prostitutes my moralistic aunt at the Front Desk would ask them to produce a marriage certificate before they were checked in. So I guess they did not do much business. The hotel was called Tea House and was built on the site of my uncle's old home but they had preserved the authentic Japanese Tea House in the center that came complete with a pond, stepping stones and a landscaped garden. My uncle's cook was trained in Japan and long before it became popular in the Philippines we enjoyed: *sukiyaki*, *tempura*, and *teppanyaki*. My uncle had four daughters and would often borrow me from my parents for weekends where I saw Japan from a privileged and happy childhood. My stay in the International House of Japan brought back the memory of Tea

House and my uncle's gardener who did not have a name and was simply called "Number One" because he was my uncle's first employee and as he claimed he was the best.

Before my actual visits to Japan I had a sense of the country and its culture from my experience in my uncle's Tea House and the stories of my parents, uncles and aunts who as major dealers in Japanese appliances were invited tour Japan each year. When my mother passed away we painfully went through all of her belongings and in one of her photo albums we relived a story we were told about a tour when my father took the challenge to play strip *janken pon* with a *maiko*. The loser of each round had to remove a piece of clothing. The Filipinos thought they were being clever by giving my father all their watches, handkerchiefs, socks and coats but when the game started the Maiko calmly took hairpins from her head each time she lost. Before long my father was naked while the Maiko had more than half her hairpins and her clothing intact. At this point my mother grabbed an *oshibori* from the table and threw it at my father to end the game.

It was only much later that I realized that the "Filipino" traditional game known as "jak-en-poy" was actually imported from Japan where it was known as *janken pon*. It was also much later that I realized that the Filipino word for bottle caps "tansan" came from the brand of Japanese carbonated water "Tansan" that was available in bottles in the prewar Philippines.

7.

My ALFP experience generated many narratives with different memories and meanings. Conflicting ways of remembering the same event made me ask why was my father's eldest brother such a Japanophile? What made him build a Japanese tea house in the 1950s when Filipinos who survived the war would contemplate murder and revenge at the sight of any Japanese tourist in Manila? Looking back at my personal history in search of answers I realize that my parents grew up outside Manila during the war and were spared the orgy of murder, pillage, and rape that saw the end of the war in the Philippine capital in February 1945. Looking back on the way I learned about Japan outside of school I realized that my family's experience of the war was better than most, and that the experience of the war was not the same, it was not universal.

As a historian I know that nobody learns from history and that the person who said that history repeats itself simply did not want to take the responsibility for his own actions and blames history instead.

Textbook history is used to instill a sense of identity by tracing their origins and moving up to the emergence of nation. Textbook history teaches young people civics, love of country, and patriotism encouraging them to look inward so identity can take root. In time, however, history should go beyond the textbook level to acknowledge the difficult parts in the

national narrative that are left out and not taught the young. History is more than chronology, it teaches one to think critically, to find connections and relationships in the search for truth.

These ideas came out of the seminar inputs during the ALFP program and were nurtured during discussions between fellows in a friendly informal setting such as meals or simple walks around the neighborhood. We constantly reminded ourselves to reflect on the theme: the future of Asia after Development and Growth and try to figure it out using our own disciplines and backgrounds. I tackled mine using history because I saw by connecting the histories of Japan and the Philippines that there were many points of intersection that could bridge the gap between peoples, languages, cultures and nations. Reflecting on the way World War II or the persecution of Christians was remembered, memorialized and re-presented in Japan and the Philippines made me see that the past is what we make of it. History could either bridge people together or be a wall that keeps them apart.

Young people in the 21st century are connected in a way different from any other time in history. The internet has made the world a smaller place but also a complicated one with a barrage of different narratives and meanings. People in the 21st century are different from people in previous times because they are now seeing themselves beyond nation and nations in the world to a global context where the issues of history, memory, and meaning will either unite or divide.