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Exploring Filipiniana Rare Books and the State of Filipiniana Rare Books Management

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Abstract:

This paper provides an overview of Filipiniana rare books and Filipiniana rare books management. It discusses the nature and scope of Filipiniana rare books and by surveying their status in select libraries in the Philippines, this study attempts to draw the state of Filipiniana rare books management in the country. Accordingly, it posts recommendations on how the issues and concerns identified in this study may be addressed.

Keywords: Filipiniana, Philippines, rare books, rare book libraries, rare book librarianship

I. INTRODUCTION

Collecting Filipiniana has been a national affair for more than a century now while the formal establishment of rare books sections in Philippine libraries began as early as 1967. There are a number of institutions in the country that maintain a collection of Filipiniana rare books; however, the virtually inexistent literature on them is indicative that little is known about them yet.

This paper aims to provide an overview of Filipiniana rare books and Filipiniana rare books management in the Philippines. It will discuss the nature and scope of Filipiniana rare books and by surveying their status in select libraries, this study will attempt to draw the state of Filipiniana rare books management in the country. Accordingly, this paper will post recommendations on how to address the issues and concerns that this study has identified.

II. FILIPINIANA AND RARE BOOKS

Filipiniana rare book, as a term, is a fusion of two concepts: rare book and Filipiniana. A rare book, in this paper, is used in its plain meaning: “a book which copies are scarce and hard to obtain” (Traister, 2003a, p. 538). The term Filipiniana, on the other hand, draws various meanings but those of Retana and Medina are the definitions often cited, the others being variations of or were culled from those the two Filipinologists had given. Retana in 1906 referred to them as:

1. Those that were printed in the Philippines irrespective of the subject they treat of, because all of those are indispensable for the accurate study of the typography of the Archipelago;
2. Those that are about the Philippines, no matter in what language they were written or the place where they were printed because they are more or less necessary for the study of the country; and,
3. Those that were written by Filipinos on any subject, regardless of their imprint, because they are of great use to measure the intellectual capacity, laboriousness, taste, ambitions, etc. of Filipinos. (NLP Website, 2011a)

In 1972, Medina defined Filipiniana as “book and non-book materials about the Philippines, produced in or outside the Philippines, by Filipinos or non-Filipinos, in any of the Philippine languages or dialects or in a foreign language” (p. 6).

The term Filipiniana, as it is spelled now, first appeared in Act No. 1635, a law passed in 1909 by the then Philippine Commission to consolidate all government libraries for the creation of “The Philippines Library.” The law formally created as part of the library “a division of Filipiniana” and its mandate was implied under Section 8 therein:

Sec. 8. The Philippines Library Board shall make a special effort with the means at its disposal **to procure and preserve from time to time all books, papers, documents, and periodicals of every kind or class which relate to the history of the Philippine Islands or to the Filipino people**, and to provide a chief of the division of Filipiniana with proper qualifications to classify and arrange said historical collection. (emphasis added)

The conscious governmental effort to collect Filipiniana materials nevertheless started as early as 1903. In that year, Act No. 688 was passed authorizing the appointment of a collecting librarian to visit different countries for the purpose of purchasing books and manuscripts relating to the history of the Philippine Islands, with the view to the foundation in Manila of a public historical library upon the subject of the Philippine Islands.

III. FILIPINIANA RARE BOOKS

On February 3, 1967, (Department of Education) Department Order No. 3 formally created the Rare Books and Manuscript Room of the National Library. ‘The Room’ was mandated

1. To consolidate all the rare books and manuscripts housed in various sections of the building in an air-conditioned and well-equipped room.
2. To intensify the program of enriching the core collection through purchase and donation.
3. To encourage a more enlightened approach to the treatment, use and recognition of our rare books and manuscripts available at the National Library.
4. To enhance scholarly pursuits by providing ample guides and better facilities to researchers.

The formal establishment of the Rare Books and Manuscript Room of the National Library marks the beginning of rare books collection management in the Philippines. It was the first time that rare books were consolidated and housed separately.

Also in 1967, the *The National Library Survey and Development Plan* was published and this became a basis for the policy direction of the National Library. The Plan is where the National Library traces its reformulated criteria in determining Filipiniana rare books, namely:

1. All books about the Philippines printed before 1945;
2. All books printed in the Philippines prior to 1945;
3. All books belonging to the Tabacalera Collection;
4. Notable specimens of bookmaking, illustrations, and binding;
5. All early and rare Philippine manuscripts including the original manuscripts of Dr. Jose Rizal;
6. All out-of-print Filipiniana books of great historical value. (NLP Website, 2011b)

These criteria in turn set for the National Commission on Culture and the Arts a basis in adopting a definition of Filipiniana rare books for the Implementing Rules and Regulations (IRR) of Republic Act 10066 otherwise known as the “National Cultural Heritage Act of 2009,” that being, “all Filipiniana books printed or published before 1945. It includes original manuscripts, exceptional collections, and other publications of historical importance.”

A. All books about the Philippines printed before 1945

It is not easy to find readily available information on the extent of loss that the National Library incurred from the World War II. There was no comprehensive listing or inventory of the Filipiniana holdings of the National Library although shortly before the outbreak of the war and following the creation of its Research and Bibliography Division, the National Library conceived preparing a bibliography of all Filipiniana materials. The project unfortunately never materialized and if it was completed before the war broke out, the bibliography would have listed titles covering a period of 420 years starting from 1523, the year *De Moluccis Insulis* was published (Mendoza & Martinez, 2000).

It has to be noted that the National Library set the year 1945 in its first criterion in determining Filipiniana rare books. The first criterion is suggestive of the devastation that the

war brought to Filipiniana materials and that these materials printed before 1945 are now scarce and not easy to find. It considers as rare all books about the Philippines printed before 1945, regardless of place of publication and authorship. They were published either in the Philippines or abroad, by Filipinos or non-Filipinos, and, in any language. This criterion is in variance with Retana's third category of Filipiniana materials for unlike the latter, the National Library criterion specifies that the book published before 1945 must be "about the Philippines" and not just "on any subject."

B. All books printed in the Philippines prior to 1945

The second criterion set by the National Library in determining Filipiniana rare books covers all of those published in the Philippines before 1945, either by Filipinos or non-Filipinos, in any language. It can be observed that this second criterion does not require any subject, therefore, as long as a book was published in the Philippines prior to 1945, irrespective of the subject matter it treats of, it is still to be considered as a Filipiniana rare book. This is in conflict with Retana's second category of Filipiniana and Medina's definition of the term because under the said category and definition, for a book to be considered as Filipiniana, it must foremost be "about the Philippines."

1. Philippine incunabula (1593-1640)

Book printing in the Philippines started in 1593 when *Doctrina Christiana* and *Shih-lu* were published (Totanes, 2008). The first books printed in the Philippines are collectively called Philippine incunabula and historians consider that they were published until 1640. As adduced by Retana, there are two justifications for the choice of 1640 as the concluding year. First, the year 1640 was the last year of any printing work by Tomas Pinpin, considered as the "Patriarch of Filipino Printers," and also, 1640 was the year of the publication of the *Historia de la Provincia del Santo Rosario*, "the most monumental book that saw the light in the Archipelago in the 17th century" [W. Retana. (1911). *Origenes de la Imprenta Filipina* (pp. 65-66), as cited by Villaroel, 2006]. Within this period, some 40 titles were printed of which the National Library at present has 8 extant copies in its holdings (Morallos, 1998).

The only known existing copy of the *Doctrina Christiana* is that of the US Library of Congress'. Wolf 2nd in 1947 published a facsimile edition of the book and there wrote his conclusion on why so few of the Philippine incunabula have survived:

The paper on which they were printed was one of the most destructible ever used in book production. The native worms and insects thrived on it, and the heat and dampness took their slower but equally certain toll. Add to these enemies the acts of providence of which the Philippines have received more than their share – earthquakes, fire and flood – and the man-made devastations of war, combined with the fact that there was no systematic attempt made in the Philippines to preserve in archives and libraries the records of the past, and it can well be understood why a scant handful of cradle books have been preserved... (pp. 1-2)

It can be said, therefore, that a primary challenge in managing existing Philippine incunabula is inherent to the distinctive material composition from which they were made up.

C. All books belonging to the Tabacalera Collection

The Tabacalera Collection was purchased in 1913 from the Compañía General de Tabacos de Filipinas, then the leading company in the Philippines, for the amount of Php 200,000.00 although had it not for the generosity of the company it could have easily fetch not less than 1-million peso purchase price (Morallos, 1998). The collection was housed in *Compañía's* headquarters in Barcelona, Spain and it was acquired by the company in 1904 after it came across a catalog of Filipiniana prepared by Pedro Vindel and Wenceslao Retana. *Compañía* eventually hired Retana to prepare a separate catalog with the assistance of the company's librarian, Jose Sanchez. This catalog became the three-volume *Aparato Bibliografico de la Historia General de Filipinas deducido de la Coleccion que Poseo en Barcelona de Compañía General de Dichas Islas* (1906). The catalog contained 4,623 titles arranged in chronological order. Of these titles, 3,385 amazingly survived World War II.

D. All early and rare Philippine manuscripts including the original manuscripts of Dr. Jose Rizal;

It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the appropriateness of including manuscripts in the category of rare books, but it has to be pointed nonetheless that such has been a criterion set by the National Library perhaps because manuscript libraries are often organizationally related to or identical with rare books libraries (Traister, 2003b). The IRR of the "National Cultural Heritage Act of 2009" defines manuscripts as "works prepared by hand including handwritten or typescript drafts of the publication papers or works not otherwise in multiple copies." The National Library holds a great number of manuscripts and the most highly-priced of them are those of the national hero, Dr. Jose P. Rizal.

E. Notable specimens of bookmaking, illustrations, and binding; and, all out-of-print Filipiniana books of great historical value.

Medina speculated that the first book published in the Philippines containing illustrative materials was Fr. Paul Klein's *Ang Infiernong Nabubucsan* (1713). In the 17th century, the famous Filipino engravers were Nicolas de la Cruz Bagay, Laureano Atlas, Vicente Atlas, Cipriano Romualdez Bagay, Felipe de Sevilla, Esteban de Sevilla, and Jeronimo Castro de la Correa (Medina, 1977). One author whose works were also valued because of its illustrations was Francisco Manuel Blanco. His *Flora de Filipinas* series is the first comprehensive books on Philippine flora and they contain superb illustrations.

The National Library's criteria on notable specimens of bookmaking, illustrations, and binding, and, all out-of-print Filipiniana books of great historical value give flexibility for determining Filipiniana rare books. Those materials that are not or cannot be included in any of the other criteria can be justified as a Filipiniana rare book once it was demonstrated that a particular book has outstanding bookmaking, illustrations and binding quality, and/or, that it is an out-of-print Filipiniana book of great historical value. The two criteria do not limit to specific period and they may possibly include even those that were fresh from the publishing houses. For the latter criterion, it is possible to group here books that have significant custodial or administrative history.

IV. STATE OF FILIPINIANA RARE BOOKS MANAGEMENT

There are a number of libraries that maintain a collection of Filipiniana rare books although it could not be said with certainty how many of them exist across the country. In Manila, there are a few and to take them as representative of the whole rare books collections in the country would not be unreasonable since collecting rare books, as Wolf 2nd (1965) observed, generally and historically flourishes in a highly-developed, cultural center. This study will then look into the Filipiniana rare books collections of ten institutions. These include four (4) private universities [Ateneo de Manila University Rizal Library (ADMU), University of Santo Tomas Miguel de Benavides Library (UST), De La Salle University Library (DLSU), and, the Far Eastern University Library (FEU)], a state university [University of the Philippines Diliman Main Library (UPD)], four (4) special libraries [Filipinas Heritage Library (FHL), Lopez Memorial Museum and Library (LMM), Ortigas Foundation Library (OFL)] and UP Jorge B. Vargas Museum and Filipiniana Research Center (VM)], and, a national and public library [National Library of the Philippines (NLP)]. A survey questionnaire was sent to these institutions. Respondents in the present study were librarians, either the ones directly in charge of managing their respective rare books collections and/or the ones who supervise such sections.

A. *Collection development*

The IRR of the National Cultural Heritage Act of 2009 defines Filipiniana rare books and the National Library formulated criteria in determining them. Despite of these, the other libraries surveyed still have their own definitions for the term, most are divergent or substantially different from those provided by law and NLP's criteria. It cannot be gauged whether or not the respondent libraries are aware of the law definition and the NLP criteria. It can be concluded however that the understanding of the respondent libraries of the concept of Filipiniana rare books is wanting.

Four respondents provided a definition that upon scrutiny are more apt for the term Filipiniana *per se*. One of the respondents indicated that it is yet to formulate a definition. One respondent provided a very general definition: "Books published from the 16th to the early 20th century, the procurement or acquisition of which may no longer be possible or ascertainable because they are either out of print or are the only existing copies available." Only UST provided a definition closest to that of NLP's: "Filipiniana rare books are books or materials that have historical value to the Philippines published during the year 1945 and earlier, or, those written by Filipino authors, or books written about the Philippines whether by Filipinos or foreign authors, or books published or printed in the Philippines regardless of subject contents." Interestingly, apart from NLP and UST, one other respondent underscored 1945 as a reckoning year.

The rare book holdings of the libraries range from small to large collections. VM has the smallest while NLP unsurprisingly has the biggest collection. VM indicated about 566 rare book titles and this is no longer expected to grow since VM's collection includes only those obtained from the collection of the late Jorge B. Vargas, the first Executive Secretary of the Philippines. Only FEU (779 titles, 1,476 volumes) and VM provided definite number of holdings while NLP's data is still the very number it indicated in a 2006 survey (8,135 titles; 14,722 volumes). The other libraries provided only estimates (from about 700 to 4,000 titles). This finding highlights a necessity for these libraries to gain better bibliographic control of their respective collections. And perhaps, one reason why most of the respondent libraries

cannot provide a definite number as yet is because they are still in the process of determining or defining what should comprise their rare books collections. One of the libraries indicated: “As of this time, [the number] is still undetermined since the Library is still in the process of gathering Filipiniana books that may be included in the [Filipiniana rare books] category.”

There is one feature which appears as a commonality in the development of rare books sections in most of the libraries surveyed. The books that now comprise their respective rare books collections used to be part of their general collection. Reminiscent of the National Library experience, the other libraries also consolidated their rare books to form a separate special collection on Filipiniana rare books. The UST experience, nonetheless, is unique. UST Library’s Rare Books Collections was inaugurated in 1968, just a year after NLP’s (Quiason, 1968). What comprise its present rare books collections (General, Filipiniana Rare, Spanish Collections), essentially, was “The Library” in the early centuries of the University” (Villaroel, 2006). Those of LMM, OFL and FHL’s rare books, on the other hand, were accumulations from book collecting efforts of private individuals.

B. Conservation and preservation

Microfilming is a popular conservation initiative. NLP and UPD reported that they have microfilmed almost all of their rare books collections (90%) while FHL and ADMU noted fifteen-percent (15%) and ten-percent (10%), respectively. LMM reported that it has already microfilmed all its rare books and this was done prior to their digitization. LMM’s rare books collection can now be accessed digitally, however, only on-site. LMM allows its users to print them in grayscale. NLP and UPD are two of the five institutions that are part of the Philippine e-lib project, a digitization project that started in 2003 to cover all Filipiniana materials. There is no available data on how many rare books have already been processed in the said project. FHL and UST are in the initial phase of digitizing their rare books collections while a handful of rare book titles are now available in the NLP’s Digital Collections website.

LMM, OFL and UST have state-of-the-art facilities for restorative conservation. On the other hand, NLP opened its Conservation Center in August 2010. The Center aims to develop the existing conditions of storage and resources in NLP for the posterity and preservation of the country’s written and printed cultural heritage. The first restoration projects implemented by the Center were those of the Dr Jose Rizal’s manuscripts: *Noli Me Tangere*, *El Filibusterismo*, *Guillermo Tell* and *Mi Ultimo Adios*. They were restored from April 27 to May 13, 2011 with the help of professional conservators from Germany and in partnership with the German government (NLP Website, 2011b).

C. Reference and access

LMM and OFL require that a researcher must be at least college student while UST and UP require that an outside researcher is an enrollee in a graduate or post-graduate studies, writer of books or research papers, or an alumnus. In NLP, a research request must provide information about the researcher and specify the purpose of his or her research. NLP rare books users are mostly historians, graduate and post-graduate students, professionals and foreign researchers. In the case of the FEU, a request letter must be both endorsed by the University Librarian and approved by the University Chair.

All the libraries surveyed generally do not allow photocopying of their collections. UPD users can have print-outs from the microfilmed copies. In LMM, it is possible to have print-outs in gray scale of the digitized copies of their rare books. FHL and ADMU offer scanning services although such has to be done only by their staff.

D. Staffing

Perhaps, the most immediate need that must be addressed in Filipiniana rare books management, apart from rare books preservation and conservation, is the inadequate training of Filipiniana rare books librarians. NLP stressed that “there is need for [such trainings].” The respondent from LMM indicated, “In my 32 years of service, I did not encounter such trainings and if there would be one, we would attend.”

The lack of trainings in Filipiniana rare books librarianship can be accounted to some factors. First, there is no formal training available for rare books librarianship as a specialization. The University of the Philippines School of Library and Information Studies (UP SLIS) is the premier library school in the country and based from its latest subject offerings (2011 course descriptions) (UP SLIS, 2011), the nearest related course from which one could have a possible training on Filipiniana rare books librarianship is on a course named “Filipiniana Archival Materials.” It is a 3-unit graduate elective course described as follows: “Manuscript and printed sources of Philippine history and culture; the introduction of printing and products of the early presses in the Philippine; problems of acquisition, preservation and use.” Another factor would be the lack of available literature on Filipiniana rare books and in Philippine rare book librarianship in general. In addition, there is lack of ‘experts’ who can ably train present rare book librarians. The nearest available trainings which rare book librarians could attend are those on archives management and conservation.

V. CONCLUSION

Rare books collection management in the Philippines began in 1967 with the formal creation of the Rare Books and Manuscripts Room of the National Library. However, up to now, little has been discussed about Filipiniana rare books and their management. Rare book librarianship in the Philippines has barely been under close scrutiny and discourse in the field is a dearth in literature. This situation is perhaps understandable because there are only a few rare books librarians in the country. In addition, their attention and efforts, at present, are more focused on meeting the immediate challenges confronting the preservation and management of their physical collections. As such, rare books librarians are encouraged to network and facilitate a consortium or a professional interest group where they can discuss common issues and concerns and share knowledge of best practices. Managing Filipiniana rare books cannot be done in isolation and so rare books libraries in the country must bring their acts together to ensure the posterity, availability and accessibility of this important documentary heritage.

There is a need for our libraries to revisit how they determine Filipiniana rare books and the IRR of the National Cultural Heritage Act of 2009 and the NLP criteria ideally should guide them. Based from the NLP criteria, the criteria applicable to all Philippine libraries are:

- 1) All books about the Philippines printed before 1945;
- 2) All books printed in the Philippines prior to 1945;
- 3) All early and rare Philippine manuscripts including the original manuscripts of Dr. Jose Rizal;

- 4) Notable specimens of bookmaking, illustrations, and binding; and,
- 5) All out-of-print Filipiniana books of great historical value.

Philippine incunabula or books printed in the Philippines from 1593 to 1640 are included.

Maintaining a Filipiniana rare books collection is a highly-specialized work. It is a kind of library service that requires more than what is necessary in managing conventional information resources. A great step in improving rare books collection management in the country is equipping our rare book librarians with the training and skills needed for them to effectively carry out their work. Since there virtually are no available specialized trainings on rare book librarianship in the country, it is very likely that the librarians who are being or will be assigned to manage our rare books are the uninitiated ones. This is a situation that our library schools and professional associations must also take into view.

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