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## **Brains of the Nation: Pedro Paterno, T. H. Pardo de Tavera, Isabelo de los Reyes and the Production of Modern Knowledge**

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Resil Mojares. *Brains of the Nation: Pedro Paterno, T. H. Pardo de Tavera, Isabelo de los Reyes and the Production of Modern Knowledge*. Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2008, 565p.

“A shameless display of erudition.”

FILIPINOS are notorious for having short memories. This may explain why history is used in schools for nation building because many young Filipinos cannot see the past beyond their lifetime. This may also explain why history, both either as a discipline or an academic subject in schools becomes contested territory. Since history is never innocent and always has a point of view the question of whose version and why is often debated. To understand the past one must go beyond the dates, names, and events that fill textbooks and look at the way history is written; this is why an archeology of the sources for Philippine history is important, why a genealogy of Filipino thought is essential. Resil Mojares, eminent scholar from Cebu, has spent the past two decades writing up lives, biographies of Filipino thinkers of the nineteenth century from years of reading and note-taking. The tip of the iceberg is a timely and surprisingly readable book, *Brains of the Nation*:

*Pedro Paterno, T. H. Pardo de Tavera, Isabelo de los Reyes and the Production of Modern Knowledge*.

Many Filipinos have been reared on the idea that “nationalist history” or a history written and understood from a Filipino point of view began in the 1960s with the popularity of the works of Teodoro A. Agoncillo and Renato Constantino that became and remain standard history textbooks today. Their works obscure the fact that the writing, or re-writing, of Philippine history from a Filipino viewpoint began earlier, in the late nineteenth century, with a generation of expatriate Filipinos in Europe that formed a constellation whose shining star was Jose Rizal who published in Paris, in 1890, an annotated edition of Antonio de Morga’s *Sucesos de las islas Filipinas* (Events of the Philippine Islands) first published in Mexico in 1609. Unfortunately, this ground-breaking work is overshadowed by his novels *Noli me Tangere* (1887) and *El Filibusterismo* (1890). Rizal’s edition of Morga is seldom read today because Rizal did not write a history, he annotated one, but his notes, though obsolete, reveal the first Philippine history from a Filipino viewpoint. Rizal, however, was not alone as can be seen in a letter to him from the painter Juan Luna, from Paris on November 8, 1890, that reads in part:

I made a sketch of the death of Magellan based on the description of Pigafetta: it is a very important event in our history. If I give it the title “*La Muerte de Magallanes*” [Death of Magellan] it will be an admiring homage to this great man (a Portuguese to boot, according to Blumentritt) but if I give it the title as I want it to be “*Victoria de Si Lapulapu y huida de los españoles*” [Victory of Lapulapu and Flight of the Spaniards] instead of *La Muerte de Mgallanes* every silly fellow will criticize it and the painter and poor citizen will be pushed to a wall. At any rate, this sketch is dedicated to you if you like it. [Rizal 1961: Vol.II, Book III,

Part2, 588]

Embarking on a project that traces the genealogy of Filipino thought, Mojares highlights others of that generation who have long languished in Rizal's long shadow. Retrieved from the dustbin of Philippine history: Pedro Paterno (1858–1911), T. H. Pardo de Tavera (1857–1925), and Isabelo de los Reyes (1864–1938) are given their due. Like Rizal these men wrote a lot for a nation that does not read. Unlike Rizal, however, the few times Paterno, Pardo, and de los Reyes are taken out of the dustbin, they are exposed to ridicule for the political, ideological, or religious positions they took in their time. Not till now have their works been given competent and impartial study.

The neglect of their works is due to three things: First, their published works and manuscripts are rare, quite hard to find due to the destruction of the National Library, the National Museum, the University of the Philippines Library, and many private Filipiniana collections during the Second World War and the Battle for Manila in 1945. Second, their works are largely in Spanish, a language alien to a successor generation educated in English. Spanish used to be a bridge that connected Filipinos from different times and places but today it separates a young generation from its past. Third, these men have been oversimplified and painted as eccentrics with unpopular politics and, in the case of de los Reyes, an odd mix of politics and religion. Worse these men are overshadowed by others in the National Pantheon like Apolinario Mabini, Marcelo del Pilar, Mariano Ponce, and Graciano Lopez Jaena, whose works were compiled as a series known as “Documentos de la biblioteca nacional de Filipinas” begun by Teodoro M. Kalaw before the Second World War.

Paterno was prominent in his lifetime but is best remembered in school history today as the archetypal “balimbing,” the starfruit with many sides that has become the symbol of turncoats and

opportunism prevalent in twentieth century Philippine politics. Pro-Spanish during the Spanish colonial period, Paterno changed spots and rose to become president of the Malolos congress during the short-lived Philippine Republic, only to shift loyalties during the early years of the American administration when he tried in vain to get into the good graces of William Howard Taft. Pardo de Tavera is largely associated with the Federal Party and is often painted as a traitor to his own people for distancing himself from the Aguinaldo government and serving in the American colonial administration, thus obscuring his competent and pioneering works on bibliography, history, philology, linguistics, and even the use of Philippine medicinal plants. De los Reyes was known to Ferdinand Blumentritt before the latter corresponded with Jose Rizal, but his many works on history and folklore were overshadowed by his involvement in the labor movement and the Philippine Independent Church.

The lives of these three men make for an interesting read, and there are many primary sources to show how they took to each other. For example, Rizal commented on de los Reyes and his Ilocano point of view. Pardo called Paterno a fake and a plagiarist in annotated entries for his 1903 bibliography of Philippine books, *Biblioteca Filipina*. It is significant that two of the three subjects in the book served at the helm of the National Library of the Philippines, from that founded by Paterno in 1887 to the cultural agency headed by Pardo from 1923 to his death in 1925. Mojares goes beyond the stereotype caricatures, painting more complete, nuanced portraits in the round of figures we have only seen in sketches, as fleeting references in the standard work by the late E. Arsenio Manuel in four of the seven-volume *Dictionary of Philippine Biography* (1955–95).

From a study of lives to a consideration of their writings, Mojares, in a hefty 562 pages, places these three men in a projected genealogy of

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Filipino thought as outlined in the last section of his book (that could have come first) on the “Filipino Enlightenment” — this being a review of literature, a review of Filipino and other ethnological writings of the nineteenth century that bring the lives of Paterno, Pardo and de los Reyes in the context of the birth of Filipino thought and the birth of the nation. From the many references in this book, it is obvious that this but the first of more biographies. One can only hope that as Mojares publishes the rest of his studies in the near future, this work, this shameless display of erudition will inspire rather than stunt the continuous study of the past and the minds that formed it.

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## Reference

Rizal, Jose. 1961. *Cartas entre Rizal y sus colegas de la propaganda*. Manila: Jose Rizal National Centennial Commission.

Richard T. Chu. *Chinese and Chinese Mestizos of Manila: Family, Identity, and Culture, 1860s-1930s*. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2010, xx + 451p.

Works of scholarship are artifacts of their times. Edgar Wickberg’s magisterial study, *The Chinese in Philippine Life, 1850-1898* [1965], provided an overview of “Chinese” economic and social activities in the late Spanish colonial Philippines. Its concern with gauging the extent of “Chinese” involvement in the Philippine economy and highlighting the role of Spanish colonial rule in promoting anti-Chinese sentiment as well as cementing “Chinese” solidarity can best be understood as an attempt to lay bare historical patterns of economic and social change that shaped the post-colonial construction of the “Chinese Question” in

this part of Southeast Asia (itself an American construct that was mobilized for Cold War objectives).

Over the past two decades, the nationalist stereotyping of the Southeast Asian “Chinese” as economically dominant, culturally different and politically disloyal Other, to be “assimilated” or “integrated” into the post-colonial body politic, has ceded ground to a new and by now no less stereotypical image of the “Chinese” as exemplary postmodern transnational subjects who, in pursuit of individual and familial interests, practice a form of “flexible citizenship” [Ong 1999] that strategically combines migration with capital accumulation to “negotiate” (a keyword, along with “hybrid,” of transnationalism) their way through an increasingly globalized world where nation-states nevertheless remain weighty, often repressive, players.

Richard Chu’s *Chinese and Chinese Mestizos of Manila* deftly navigates between these two dominant paradigms for the study of the “Chinese” in Southeast Asia. The inaugural volume of a new Brill book series “Chinese Overseas: History, Literature, and Society” under the editorship of Wang Gungwu, *Chinese and Chinese Mestizos* seeks to understand the process by which hitherto fluid “Chinese” and “Filipino” ethnic identities became mutually exclusive as boundaries between them hardened in the Philippines, but eschews the assimilation-vs-integration debate and other “nation-state metanarratives” (p. 6) that have colluded in the “reification and essentialization” of ethnic identities. At the same time, its focus on a period that encompasses the final four decades of Spanish colonial rule and both American colonial and Philippine Commonwealth periods is meant to “provide a historical context to understand today’s modern Chinese transnational practices” (p. 9), rediscovering in the past cosmopolitan figures, values and lifestyles that prefigure the success stories and trends of current globalization.

Offering a “social history” of everyday com-