

Book Review
By Bert Drona, USA

Brown Americans of Asia

by Renato Perdon

Manila Prints Publication, Sydney, NSW, Australia

I have just finished reading two books a friend recently sent me from Australia: "**Brown Americans of Asia**" and "**As I see It - Filipinos and the Philippines.**" Both books are published in Australia. I found both books (paperback) pleasantly easy to read, extremely worthwhile and thus highly recommendable.

I am not in anyway a book reviewer (and I note the books have good reviews from acclaimed or known Filipinos), however I want to share here some of my impressions regarding these two books since I have found both very informative in terms of our country's history and of ourselves as a people, and because they introduced me to two Filipino writers (I confess ignorance about them) who offer **fresh** insights about us Filipinos; and a knowledge about Australia and Australians as they interact with us.

These two paperbacks among a few other books, most especially those by the late nationalist **Prof. Renato Constantino**, also address directly and indirectly, the roots of our colonial mentality, our so-called "damaged culture" which result to our lack of national consciousness, and therefore absent national unity and dignity, in turn the consequent underdevelopment and more aptly, the socioeconomic regression in our homeland.

The first book "**Brown Americans of Asia**" was by **Renato Perdon**, a Filipino historian based in Australia. Its catchy title, not new to the young and older Filipinos, who read history, is appropriate given the contents of the book. This book provides an excellent historical overview of our homeland, the Filipino character and culture. Though the book was originally written for Filipinos and Australians alike, it is relevant and educational also for any foreigner -wherever he is in the world- interested in learning about Philippine history and the Filipino people.

The book includes chapters on the historical linkage between Australia and our homeland and how we are perceived or seen by Australians, then and now, coupled with profound thoughts and great information which are both new to me and to many Filipinos, I venture to guess. I feel appreciative and grateful to find them here.

"Brown Americans of Asia" is split into two parts. Part 1 deals with what Perdon tagged as "**Current Images;**" Part 2 talks about "**Historical Issues.**"

In Part 1, Perdon begins with Australian historical and present perceptions, includes stereotyping, of Filipinos in our homeland and in Australia. He discusses mixed marriages, i.e. between Filipino women and Australian men and provides us with interesting commentary on the "why, what, how" of these cross-cultural marriages. On another chapter he dwells on the past and present symbols of Filipino ethnicity such as our flags, food, clothing and even names. Perdon leaves Part 1 by touching on our well-known image of being the only Christian country in Asia and our quite unique practice of faith and religion (mainly Catholic), about Church and State interaction, and the large divisive relationship with our Muslim brothers.

In Part 2, Perdon gives us a good refresher on Philippine history. He starts with the British invasion and its brief occupation of Manila during the 18th century, during which time Manila residents were made to take an oath of allegiance to King George III; he then continues on to talk about the rise of national consciousness, i.e. seeing and thinking that **"bayan"** represents the whole island territories as opposed to referencing just that little corner of province or region where one was born and/or live; and our forefathers' struggling for mainly political independence from the Spaniards.

Furthermore, the author informs us about the early trade links between Australia and Spanish Philippines that began in the mid-19th century and deliberates about Australian observance and indirect participation (actually cooperation) with the invading and later occupying, duplicitous Americans. Perdon also talks about Australian and British perspectives on the Philippine-American War and the British desire to purchase from and/or exchange our rich islands for the American protectorates in the Caribbean, as proposed by **Andrew Carnegie**, the richest man of the world at the time.

Perdon goes on by informing us about Filipino pioneers in Australia and speculating about their arrival during the 1850s; mainly in Thursday Island, northernmost part of Queensland (I say that seemingly we Filipinos are like the Chinese in being "all over the place;" most especially now that a significant number of us are forced mainly by economic reasons to leave, thanks to our traitorous leaderships in the last three decades to the present). In the last chapter, Perdon devotes it to a certain **Heriberto Zarval**, claimed to be the first Filipino (said to be a Portuguese-Spanish-Chinese-Malay hybrid) diplomatic agent to Australia sent by the Philippine Revolutionary Government in 1898 and who settled in Thursday Island.

In summary, I find **"Brown Americans of Asia"** one of the better outlines on Philippine history and people because of the author's insights, his novelty of topics, the inclusion of numerous historical pictorials (first time to see such a collection) and its good bibliographical sources from Filipinos, Australians and as usual, Americans.

"Brown Americans of Asia" is uniquely different from the common Americanized, standardized or popularized books on Philippine history given its insightful scope; thus makes it worth reading and having. **If only to learn about Australian-Philippine historical relationship then and now, the Aussies and their perception of us Filipinos, the book is worth buying and reading. To me, the book really offers more than that.**

Available from Manila Prints, PO Box 1267, Darlinghurst, NSW 2010 at \$25.00, including postage and handling