

## **The Missionary Ethnographer's Indigenous Interviewees: Colonial Knowledge Production, the Inquisition, and Tagalog Elites, 1686**

Nicholas Sy

Within the Spanish Empire, the voices of indigenous elites are usually heard in petitions, litigations, and revolts surrounding temporal privileges and needs. I explore these voices within a distinct if tangent dimension of life: the production of colonial knowledge about the spiritual world. In 1686, an indigenous woman named Ana Geronima confessed. She revealed that her neighbors from the foothills of Mount Makiling in the island of Luzon, Philippines were “idolaters.” They remained avid adherents of animism five generations after evangelization. In reaction, the archbishop mounted an inquisition. Using a single questionnaire his clerics interviewed nine respondents about (1) the locals’ practices, (2) how these locals had managed to hide those practices, and (3) how these locals saw Christianity. Their interviewees identified eight *pueblos* with animist activity within a forty kilometer radius around Mount Makiling. They described processions under the full moon into caves within ravines; *catalonan* (priestesses), dancing, convulsing, and speaking to pythons; fears that believers would be burned alive if the Spaniards heard about their practices; and hybridized Catholic and animistic beliefs. A summary of this investigation was later included in Vicente Salazar, O.P.’s (1742) chronicle of the Dominican mission entitled *Historia de la provincia de el Santisimo Rosario de Philipinas, China y Tungking . . . ano de 1669 hasta el de 1700*. Published in Manila, this volume was part of a literary corpus unwittingly chronicling (i) the increasing disenchantment with which imperial officials viewed the results of the initial evangelization and (ii) the growing skepticism with which missionaries began to view the moral-character of the indigenous. The animism at

the root of the matter was durable. Reports of worship in the caves near Mount Makiling resurface during the archdiocesan visitations of 1831, almost a century and a half after the aforementioned inquisition.

The transcriptions of the inquisition's interviews represent a rare and largely untapped opportunity to listen-in on the interaction between ethnographer and interviewee during the data gathering process of knowledge production at the empire's Asian frontier. Interestingly, none of the interviewees were catalonan—or in other words actual experts on these local beliefs—despite the availability of these priestesses during the investigation. Instead, all but one of the interviewees were *principalia*—indigenous leaders at the municipal level of the colonial order. Why were these nine respondents chosen? Why did they choose to cooperate? What were the individual vantage points from which they saw their community's beliefs? What was their role vis-à-vis the missionary ethnographer in the creation of colonial knowledge? In answering these questions, I contextualize the biographical notes written by the inquisitor on these *principalia* within the latter's early modern socio-economic realities and ties—ties that I map using parish registers. I then read between the lines of the inquisitor's questions and his interviewee's responses, watching for misunderstandings and unsolicited statements via which indigenous worldviews sometimes escaped the inquisitor's attempt to superimpose predetermined ideas over his interviewee's testimonies.

This project is part of a wider investigation I am conducting on the ambitions of indigenous political elites in the context of the early modern Pax Hispanica. I am part of a research team producing a four volume historical series on Philippine colonial history from the 1521 to 1898, a project funded by the University of the Philippines for the upcoming five-hundred-year anniversary of Iberian presence on our archipelago in 2021. As part of this project,

authors are given funding for two three-month trips to overseas archives. I will have access to archives in Valladolid, Madrid, and Seville from mid-May to mid-August 2019 and from mid-May to mid-August 2020, a fact that will facilitate my continued research into the late seventeenth century. With the present study I hope to contribute to the nascent historiography on indigenous intellectual life and knowledge production during the Spanish Empire.