

LESSON 7

Mga Talang Pangkultura mga Manlalakbay Travelers

Have you been to the Philippines? What were your impressions?

Today, travelers to the Philippines can use the internet and look up travel blogs that give reviews on the islands, tips on where and where not to go for travel, and advice on safety. For example in recent years, bloggers had been writing about ferry trips along the Pasig River, until the ferry service was discontinued in December 2010. At <http://www.ambot-ah.com/about/>, the blogger writes:

Unfortunately, during the last decades of the 20th century, it (referring to Pasig river) has become Manila's dumping site for trash and raw sewage. If you ask Filipinos their impression of Pasig, they would tell you that it is “**mabaho**” (foul smelling) and “**puno ng basura**” (full of trash). I was surprised to find out how the Pasig River has changed these past few years. Although still relatively dirty, it did not give off foul odors as I have expected.

But what about foreigners who traveled to the Philippines during the Spanish and American colonial periods? Two interesting accounts are those of Paul P. de la Gironiere, (1797–1862) and Mary Fee, one of the first American public teachers to come to the Philippines. What was Pasig River like based on the accounts of Gironiere and Fee?

In *Adventures of the Philippine Islands* or *Adventures in the Philippines*, originally written in French in 1854, Gironiere writes:*

On a third side, the military town is separated from the trading town by the river Pasig, upon which are seen all the day boats laden with merchandise, and charming gondolas conveying idlers to different parts of the suburbs, or to visit the ships in the bay.

Gironieer also wrote about houses built along the river (33):

The newest and most elegant houses are built upon the banks of the river Pasig. Simple in exterior, they contain the most costly inventions of English and Indian luxury. Precious vases from China, Japan ware, gold, silver, and rich silks, dazzle the eyes on entering these unpretending habitations. Each house has a landing-place from the river, and little bamboo palaces, serving as bathing-houses, to which the residents resort several times daily, to relieve the fatigue caused by the intense heat of the climate.

* Gironiere, 33

More than five decades later, Mary Fee, in *A Woman's Impressions on the Philippines* (Chicago: A. C. McClurg & Co., 1910) wrote (45):

We were familiar with the magazine illustrations of the Pasig long before our pedagogic invasion of Manila, but we were unprepared for the additional charm lent to these familiar views by the play of color. The shipping was as we had imagined it—large black and gray coasters in the Hong-Kong and inter-island trade, a host of dirty little **vapors** (steamers) of light tonnage, and the innumerable **cascos** and **bancas**. The **bancas** are dug-out canoes, each paddled by a single oarsman. The **casco** is a lumbering hull covered over in the centre with a mat of plaited bamboo, which makes a cave-like cabin and a living room for the owner's family. Children are born, grow up, become engaged, marry, give birth to more children—in short, spend their lives on these boats with a dog, a goat, and ten or twelve lusty game-cocks for society.

Today, a century later, there is a campaign to relocate homes built along the river in an effort to clean up and rehabilitate the river. Gironiere and Fee's accounts, however, continue to remind us how the river was effectively used for transport in the past and the many possibilities the river could yet be.

Should you be interested in reading further on travelers' accounts of colonial Philippines, both books are available online through <http://www.gutenberg.org>.