

THE DE MANILA A DAGUPAN

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TRANSPORT history has not attracted too much attention in Philippine historiography, and this is perhaps due not so much to the lack of data (for several bundles of documents in the Philippine National Archives and at the Philippine National Railways Museum have remained untouched and must have their store of incunabula) as to the suspicion that there is possibly no history to write about. The scenario of 19th century Philippine society did not indeed seem to alter on account of changes in the modes of travel during the period. In countries like England, the United States, Mexico, and China, mass transit altered the nature, in some degree or another, of the societies concerned. The changes effected in some instances could be described in nothing less than revolutionary terms. One might ask in any case what the Philippine experience was like and whether it was of a considerable kind, not to say a radical one.

The idea suggested in this paper is that the establishment of the railroad system known as the *Ferro-Carril de Manila a Dagupan* did bring about social change but that this was less of a dramatic sort than what one might expect, judging by the experience of countries that went through their own "Age of the Railroad." This lack of drama, it is further suggested, is not because the change was minimal but because it was part of a larger event—the 1896 Revolution, no less. Through the decade from 1887 to 1897, the *ferro-carril* literally plodded along. Instead of generating change *per se*, in 1896, it took a minimal role as the conflict raged at the southern end of Luzon.

We must hasten to add that while this view is what the present data appear to yield, considerable research—and rewards—lie ahead. The view offered here is largely inferential and derives mainly from official reports. Much data remain to be gathered; information from rural histories, especially con-

cerning towns within the radius of the railway, could be invaluable. This paper is presented by way of merely showing the lay of the land.

1

The need for a transport system that would move goods from rural areas to Manila, where they might be shipped abroad, had been apparent since the country began to move slowly from a subsistence agricultural economy to commercial agriculture. By the 19th century British capital was already impinging on Philippine agriculture; and the structures for its commercial exploitation had been laid. The lackadaisical economic system established by Spain to capture profitable commerce in, say, sugar manufacturing had been penetrated by the British operating from their Asian colonies. Thus, a railroad system in the Philippines would not only be a profitable enterprise in itself to the British, but a vital asset in moving Philippine agricultural products particularly to British markets. Experienced empire-builders, the British had seen how Indo-China and China had succumbed to "railroad imperialism." It was expected that the Philippines, being the Spanish colony that it was, could not hold out for long. But Spain's colonial administrators, although consistent in their manner of meeting the colony's economic problems with incompetence, had an option which they could exercise and which perhaps the British did not count on. This was the colonial administration's bureaucratic arrogance. The Philippine native, the much disparaged *indio* whose brawn both the British and Spanish could depend on, was allowed hardly a pittance in these calculations. For their part, the educated *indios* themselves knew that the alleged indolence ascribed to them was but a response to the unimaginative and corrupt bureaucracy obtaining.

The respected economist Gregorio Sanciano, a prominent figure in the Propaganda Period, described in 1881 the difficulties that farmers of the day faced owing to the lack of transportation facilities. Taxes had been increased, he pointed out; yet nothing was done to channel the money thus raised into public works improvements. The price of rice fluctuated depending on the nature (land or water, for example) of transport used to bring the produce to the market, and on the season (wet or dry) of shipment. This condition was true not only

in the provinces but in Manila as well, and the latter particularly could not even boast of a transport system of any worth.¹

2

In the 19th century Philippines, and for centuries out of mind, walking was the most favored means of conveying one's person from one place to another. With modest means, one might afford the two-wheeled horse-drawn *carromata*, an improvement on riding on carabao or horseback. If one had ample means, a four-wheeled coach, also horse-drawn, was available. Manila's poorly paved streets and the outlying districts saw much of these vehicles; and a stretch of sunny days meant blinding dust in the streets while the briefest episodes of rain transformed the dust to mud and caused pools of water to form. The hapless pedestrian was under constant threat of being splashed upon by carriages speeding away with some inconsiderate government official or friar aboard.² The popular tune lost none of its authenticity in the minds of foreigners who happened to be visiting the Philippines in the middle of the 19th century.³

Seis meses de polvo,
Seis meses de lodo,
Seis meses de todo ...

If the traveller in Manila was at least reassured by some apparent urbanity in the city, only an adventurer endowed with a strong physique and driven by an equally strong motivation would dare sally forth into the countryside. If he were a European, he was well advised to provide himself with quantities of quinine, Browne's chlorodyne, and Eno's fruit salt. He must arm himself with a revolver. One travelled light as a rule. With a compass to guide him, a towel to wrap around his neck, and a servant (preferably an Ilokano) to attend to his personal needs, the tourist could set out for the outlying provinces with some confidence. He should, however, start early

¹ Gregorio Sanciano, *The Progress of the Philippines*, Madrid, 1881, trans. Encarnacion Alzona (Manila: National Historical Institute, 1975), p. 26.

² Jose Rizal, *The Social Cancer*, trans. Charles Derbyshire, 2nd ed. (Manila: Philippine Education Co., 1961), p. 61.

³ John Bowring, *A Visit to the Philippines* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1895), p. 73.

on a morning; at that time of day he would most likely find his native men companions helpfully sober.⁴

The late days of December and on till May was considered the best time for travel, for then the cool dry weather prevailed. Where a steamer could negotiate the numerous navigable rivers on Luzon, the traveller was welcome to the convenience. From a steamer's landing, a *carromata* would deliver him to his next destination. The German ethnologist Feodor Jagor roamed the province of Bulacan in this manner. The *carromata*, "a brightly-painted, shallow, two-wheeled box covered with an awning," took him along roads shaded with fruit trees, coco and areca palms.⁵

The traveller in Luzon had three routes to choose from if he wished to make an overland trip to the provinces. The *noroeste*, a distance of 545 kilometers, would take him to Laoag; the *nordeste*, a distance of 565.5 kilometers, would take him to Aparri; the so-called *sur* promised a journey of 480 kilometers southwards to Albay.⁶ The *cabeceras* (provincial capitals) depended on these routes for communication. When the rains came, these roads were impassable owing to mud, swollen rivers, and swept-off bridges. Travel was not only difficult but also singularly dangerous, since towns were distant from each other and generally isolated. A journey could be enhanced by putting draft animals to use.⁷ John Bowring, a British diplomat who visited the country in the 1850's, wrote of seeing abandoned carriages along the country roads and travelling in mud that reached up to one's thighs. Cutting through forest growths in order to fray a path was not unusual.⁸

In 1890, John Foreman, an English tourist and observer of Philippine affairs, described the route the future railroad would take. From Manila to Bulacan, Tinajeros was the initial

⁴ John Foreman, *The Philippines* (London: S. Low, Marston, 1890), pp. 260-261. Foreman stayed long enough in the Islands to be truly familiar with the difficulties he described. A popular view of travelling the countryside during this period is in Mary Marshall, "Traveller's Tales," *Archipelago*, III A-27, pp. 9-17. The article is illustrated with cartoons depicting various means of travel, the work of Gustave Tobler whose *Adventuras de Filipinas, Album Humoristico* was privately published over a hundred years ago.

⁵ Feodor Jagor, *Travels in the Philippines* (Manila: Filipiana Book Guild, 1965), pp. 43-44.

⁶ Jose Algue, *El Archipelago Filipino*, I (Washington: n.p., 1900), p. 321.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 322.

⁸ Bowring, *op. cit.*, p. 73.

stop; this could be reached by either carriage or steamer. One then travelled from Tinajeros to Sibul by *carromata*. Foreman allowed himself three days to cover six towns of Bulacan. Access to Pampanga was easier on account of the navigable rivers in that province. The traveller, for instance, could take a steamer from Manila to Guagua; service was available twice a week, the trip averaging six hours' sailing time. From Guagua, the *carromata* provided the connection all the way to Camiling, Tarlac. If the traveller wished to proceed to Pangasinan, he might use the same means of transport—i.e., the *carromata*—as far as Dagupan. To spare himself all that jolting, not to mention the dust of the road, he might try the twenty-seven-hour voyage⁹ down Manila Bay and northwest-wards along the Zambales coast and past Cape Bolinao to Lingayen Gulf and, finally, Dagupan harbor. Clearly, in terms of mode and time consumed, travel in the 19th century was more of an ordeal than a pleasure.

The colonial government did little toward alleviating the problem. It was not until 1875 that rail travel in the country was given some thought—that is to say, nearly three quarters of a century after the era of railroad transportation had begun. Western capitalists were already investing on railroad construction in their respective countries and elsewhere. They now felt that the time was right for expansion into new areas.

American investors themselves could not overlook the temptation offered by Mexico, then a fledging state if already some fifty years separated from Spain. Recognizing the potential of a railroad line between Veracruz and Mexico City, one United States minister commented without hesitation that the investment could pay good dividends even if the costs should come to \$200,000 a mile.¹⁰ The line promised an income close to 991,697 pesos annually; the national treasury would be enriched tenfold.¹¹ In 1873, 420 kilometers of track were in fact laid out between Veracruz and Mexico City. The succeeding years saw in the regions served by the line. Towns along the route were the immediate beneficiaries; spurs soon linked isolated areas to the main stations. New industries appeared,

⁹ Foreman, *op. cit.*, pp. 464-465.

¹⁰ David Fletcher, "The Building of the Mexican Railway," in *Hispanic American Historical Review*, XXX (February 1950), p. 27.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

and the railway became a valued employer. Veracruz flourished as an *entrepot*. The venture was clearly a success.¹²

Although Mexican financiers were involved in the construction of their country's railroad, the majority of participating entrepreneurs had been British. The latter had probably the advantage over any other group, both in financial resources and in experience. It was they who spread the so-called railroad fever in Asia. With a base in India, the British took the weakening political system in Imperial China as their cue. The Chinese, however, were hardly ready to expose their country to the imminent contamination by barbarian civilization, and opted for a wait-and-see policy.

Understood in the context of British imperialism, the fears of the Chinese were not unfounded. Capital investments and expertise could only mean further incursions by foreigners into their territory. Another problem had to do with Chinese cultural values. It was held that spirits of the earth would turn malevolent once the "belching monsters of speed" appeared on the Chinese countryside. As an imperialist monster, the railroad was not without its ready symbol in the Chinese consciousness.¹³

All this did not faze the British. Entrepreneurs like Jardine, Matheson and Richard Rapier finally convinced the Chinese of the desirability of setting up an experimental line. By 1876, one such became available and it immediately drew opposition from the Chinese quarter. The Chinese government bought it, dismantled it, and scattered the parts in the river and around the countryside. British persistence, however, paid off. By 1889, China had acquired approximately 139 kilometers of track. Eventually, this became the core of the Imperial Railway.¹⁴

But the system proved unsatisfactory. Writing for Manila's *Revista Catolica Filipina*, a Spanish journalist bewailed the lack of waiting rooms for first class passengers—the British did not believe progress would ever come to China. Indeed, the British viewed as scandalous the Chinese attitude toward the railway. Popular as trains would surely become in the future,

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 60.

¹³ G. C. Allen and A. G. Donnithorne, *Western Enterprise in Far Eastern Economic Development, China and Japan* (London: George Allen and Unwin, Ltd., 1954, p. 134.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 135.

the Chinese were bound to regret their regard for it as a malevolent spirit particularly made more dreadful because of its novelty and speed.¹⁵

The peninsular was undoubtedly unenthusiastic, recalling how in his native Spain a line had been constructed connecting Santander with Cantabria.¹⁶ Like the Chinese, the Spaniards were latecomers to the "Age of the Railroad." No line had been in existence in the Iberian peninsula before 1848; in any case, the government had preferred to leave the work to private enterprise. It was only in 1855 that a distinction was established between lines for general and those for private service and that the system received subsidies from the government. Though the financing was Spanish, the expertise was French and English.¹⁷ The instability of the government and the general lack of interest in technological innovation were two factors responsible for this situation, which was in sharp contrast to that obtaining in other parts of Europe, notably England and France, where 19th century technology had already taken a firm hold. As Spain's Asian colony, the Philippines was to have its taste of this technology only some thirty years after the Iberian peninsula was introduced to it.

4

While by 1864 the clamor for better roads and particularly for a railroad was heard in the Philippines—and from leaders in the commercial community like Nicholas Loney who represented early British traders in the Philippines¹⁸—the colonial government's answer did not come until nearly a decade later. In 1875, a royal decree was issued on the subject, followed by a prospectus the next year, entitled *Formularios para la reduccion de los anteproyectos de ferrocarriles*.¹⁹ Prepared by the Administracion de Obras Publicas, it set down the conditions to be observed by prospective railway constructors. Details covering the angle of earth embankments, the width of the tracks, and various stipulations concerning land values and

¹⁵ J. T. Meston, *Revista Catolica Filipinas*, 5 de Enero, 1889, p. 8.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

¹⁷ Rhea M. Smith, *Spain, A Modern History* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan Press, 1965), p. 421.

¹⁸ Nicholas Cushner, *Spain in the Philippines* (Quezon City, Ateneo de Manila University, 1971), p. 207. Around 1864, Loney toured Europe on behalf of the Philippine sugar industry.

¹⁹ *Formularios para reduccion de los anteproyectos de ferrocarriles* (Manila: M. Perez, 1876).

labor, were spelled out. These construction standards were to remain on paper, understandably, for some time.

The decree of 1875 which laid the basis for regulations covering railways in the Philippines evolved from earlier decrees that governed a system using animal power.²⁰ These decrees were the precursors of modern railway regulations that even in 1864 already exhibited elaborate features.²¹ The resulting prototype of rail travel in the country, the now famous *tranvia*, appeared in Manila's streets by 1885.

The tramway company was an enterprise of Don Jacobo Zobel Zangroniz, who had his eye on Manila's floating population then estimated at over 180,000. He would pile them into horse-drawn rail coaches from five points of the city. Awarded two concessions by the government, one in 1881 and the other in 1884, Zobel's *Compania de las Tranvias de Manila* began to serve the combined permanent and floating population and opened a lucrative route that connected the then burgeoning manufacturing center of Malabon with the rest of the city.²² According to Zobel's estimate, wheeled traffic in the streets along Calle Real de Manila, Escolta, Nueva, and Puente de España, averaged a total of 20,750. Five service lines called *Lineas de Intramuros, de Malate, de Sampaloc, de Malacañang, and de Tondo* were estimated to cost at their initial installation 850,000 pesetas; the daily operation costs would be some 1,080.80 pesetas.²³ Fare would be .04 centavos, second class; and .08 centavos, first class.²⁴ To capture the merchandise freight produced by industry around Malabon, Zobel brought that area closer to the city by setting up a line estimated to generate 136,592.19 pesetas in traffic.²⁵

Considering the expense of hiring private coaches and the general inconvenience of travel during rainy days, the *tranvia* presented a much more preferable means of transport than anything else conceivable. It was cheap, convenient, and safe. Full operations, however, did not materialize until 1889.

²⁰ *Railroad Laws and Regulations in Force in the Philippines, Including Police Law of Railways and other Provisions of a Similar Character* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1900), p. 25, et seq.

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 21-24.

²² Adolfo Bayo and Jacobo Zobel, *Compania de las Tranvias de Filipinas, Memorias y Estatutos* (Madrid: Fortunato, 1885), p. 8.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

²⁴ Eduardo Lachica, "The Spanish Houses," Part IV, *Saturday Herald Magazine*, September 2, 1961, p. 12.

²⁵ Bayo and Zobel, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

The tramway company was at once plagued by problems.²⁶ Felix Roxas, the company's secretary, wrote that the problems were varied and often odd. How were the horses to be identified for proper registration? And which horses pulled the coaches more efficiently—those that were fed on peanuts, or those on corn or *palay*?²⁷ The tramway, in any case, offered a slow but generally pleasant journey. Concerning its curious source of energy, a foreign visitor wrote:

One sympathizes with the single pony that does the pulling as he sees thirty people besides the car and his load, and it is no uncommon thing on a slight rise or sharp turn for all hands to get off and help the vehicle over the difficulty. The driver holds the whip by the wrong end and lets the heavy one come down with double force on the terribly tough hide of the motive power.²⁸

Once all seats had been taken, the tram went on its way and did not stop—even, it was said, for the Archbishop of Manila! A law made placing stones, or any form of obstacle, along the path of the tram a punishable offense. But not everybody was pleased: the *Guardia Civiles*, for example, confused the tram's whistle for their own signals. Although later on trumpets were resorted to, the befuddlement persisted.²⁹ It was against this background that 19th century Philippines was introduced to yet another form of transportation.³⁰

5

About the same time the tramway was off to a colorful start in Manila, the cornerstone for the first railroad system was laid. It was now 1887, a good ten years and more after the royal decree of 1875 and the initial show of attention with which Obras Publicas engineers favored the project. The planning is credited to Eduardo Navarro, one of the government engineers. But nothing came of his efforts; it is of record that only in 1885 did the government solicit tenders for the Manila-Dagupan line.

²⁶ Felix Roxas, *The World of Felix Roxas* (Manila: Filipiniana Book Guild, 1970), p. 74.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

²⁸ Joseph Earle Stevens, "Yesterdays in the Philippines," in *The Philippines Circa 1900* (Manila: Filipiniana Book Guild, 1968), p. 193.

²⁹ Lachica, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

³⁰ "Tranvia," according to the folklorist, Isabelo de los Reyes, was the term used for hookers. See *El Folklore Filipino* (Manila, 1889), pt. 2, p. 254.

A terminal at Dagupan would be the only practicable outlet for products from Pangasinan and from land-locked Tarlac province.³¹ A line consisting of 120 miles was contemplated, and the government offered a subsidy of \$7,650 per mile. After three biddings, an acceptable contract was negotiated, with modifications that stipulated an 8 per cent interest on the maximum capital of £4,964,473.65.³² Edward Ketts, an Englishman, took the offered concession. A royal decree of 1887 later consigned the offer to a London firm, the Manila Railroad Co., Ltd., which was to be responsible for the construction and operation of the system.³³

The Manila Railroad Company was required to complete construction within four years from 1887. The line was favored with a gratuity over public lands through which the tracks would pass. The company was also franchised to import construction and maintenance materials. The government demanded, however, that the company follow the plans laid out by Spanish engineers. All the company assets after ninety-nine years would revert to the Spanish government at no cost.³⁴

These were none too favorable conditions, but the foresighted British braced up for the enterprise. Several English companies had been engaged already in Luzon-based businesses; their presence was a decided encouragement. Indeed, since these houses were in the agricultural export trade, the railroad would be supportive of British interests in general. As it turned out, the British would count on a 33% control of Philippine foreign trade by 1890, as the railroad was nearing completion.³⁵ They had also earlier pioneered in other communication and transport systems in the region with marked success. The British Peninsular and Oriental Company, for one, maintained shipping operations between Hong Kong and Manila; and, for another, there was the British Extension Australia and China Telegraphic Company,³⁶ that in 1880 set up the undersea cable hook-up between Manila and Hong Kong, via Cape Bolinao. Through these efforts the British had forged the link between Manila and world economies. By 1892, they

³¹ Foreman, *op. cit.*, p. 305.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 306.

³³ Algue, *op. cit.*, p. 322.

³⁴ *Ibid.*; also Foreman, *op. cit.*, p. 306.

³⁵ Lachica, "The Last Decade," Part VII, *loc. cit.*, September 30, 1961, p. 12.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

duplicated in the Philippines what they had accomplished in mainland Asia; they brought the country into the so-called "Age of the Railroad."

6

It was a motley crowd that gathered 5:30 in the afternoon, July 31, 1887, at Tutuban, in the *arrabal* of Tondo. Here was laid the cornerstone of the first *ferrocarril*, the attending officialdom led by the engineer Don Carlos de Bertodano and Mr. Edmond Sykes Ketts, of London. The blessing was given by Archbishop Pedro Payo.³⁷

As construction work began, curious problems began to appear. The Spanish blueprints required faithful compliance. There were also innumerable difficulties related to labor gangs, dealing with landowners across whose properties the line would pass, and handling customs as well as sensitive municipal functionaries. The biggest obstacle was of course the bureaucracy itself. Very little delight and enthusiasm can be gleaned by the reader today from the correspondence between the railroad builders and the government officials they had to work with.

John Foreman alleged that at one point the company, having already somewhat lost its corporate patience, expressed itself strongly against further greasing an official's palm.³⁸ Company employees reported constant harassment by the authorities. Neil Mcleod thought that the construction was a bad enough mistake altogether: the tracks were being laid out too low. The blueprints did not always jibe with the terrain; thus, some areas would have a line extending for a mile and at the end of it the construction crew could go no farther. Proper surveys, according to Mcleod, could have avoided this problem and brought down the cost.³⁹ Horace Higgins, who served as the last engineer-director of the company during the terminal years of Spanish rule in the Philippines, had his own

³⁷ Philippine National Railways Museum (henceforth PNRM), *Copia de Acta Sobre la Locacion de Primera Piedra del Ferro-Carril de esta Capital a Dagupan a Requirimiento del Señor Carlos Edmundo de Bertodano y Pattison. Por ante Abraham Garcia y Garcia, Notario del Territorio y Archivero General de Protocolos en la Capital de Manila, 31 del Julio de 1887*. MS—4 leaves.

³⁸ John Foreman, *The Philippines*, 2nd ed. (New York: Scribner's, 1899), p. 301.

³⁹ Neil Mcleod, "Appendix," in Willis B. Wilcox, *Through Luzon on Highways and Byways* (Philadelphia: Franklin Book Company, 1901), pp. 228-31.

observations. He pointed to unnecessary constructions expenses; to the use, for example, of concrete instead of lime; to stations and sheds set up at locations where they were not needed; to indiscriminate building of all kinds. The government's blue-prints demanded those; Higgins felt he had to give in.⁴⁰

In spite of the intransigency of the Spanish bureaucracy, the necessity of importing rolling stock and construction materials from England, even the difficulty of raising capital, the project had its creditable aspects. The flat terrain through which the line must pass was, in Mcleod's words, something to exult over: here was "the finest country for railroads."⁴¹ Labor was cheap; workers were not difficult to obtain locally. The company hired as many as 5,000 laborers for each section of the line, and at an average daily wage 0.32½ cents (Mexican) per person. Imported labor from other provinces received slightly higher wages. On one occasion, an entire crew of Pangasinan workers disappeared after a day's stint; a Tagalog crew was easily brought in, the fresh gang proving just as good at the building of earth embankments as the previous one. The railroad builders apparently knew their workers well. Chinese labor, for example, did not appeal to them although they resorted to it on occasion. According to Higgins, the Chinese did not favor working in water-logged terrain, a condition which his Filipino counterpart did not seem to mind.⁴²

7

Thus relying largely on native Filipino labor, the railway builders went full blast after 1888. Seeing the progress being made, some Spaniards became in fact enthusiastic: the *Revista Católica Filipinas* announced that in the coming first days of January 1890 the country would witness a "novelty never before seen in the archipelago." This would be none other than the inauguration of the Dagupan section of the line, for which some grand festivities were now being planned. The town would undertake the preparations "as a symbol of its gratefulness

⁴⁰ Horace Higgins, "Testimony," in *Report of the Philippine Commission, 1900-1901*, p. 318.

⁴¹ Mcleod, *op. cit.*, p. 229.

⁴² Higgins, *op. cit.*, p. 322. There has been little research so far on colonial labor, particularly the manner in which wages were depressed at the same time that labor was extracted. One impression gathered from available data is that labor was manipulated by setting up one language group against the other—i.e., Pangasinanese against Tagalogs. The Chinese laborer was apparently expensive to hire, preferring piece work to group work at weekly wages.

and (in) recognition of the railroad's benefit (*sic*) to progress." The *Revista* indicated that Mangaldan or thereabouts would see the blessing of "the first stone"⁴³—a treat for a busy but gloomy town ("triste y humido" was a friar's description of it). Like others on the line, the place would be transformed in the course of time.⁴⁴

To the enthusiasm generated by the prospect of the railroad's arrival was added the element of exaggeration. Already agricultural production stimulated by British capital had given the provinces of Pangasinan, Tarlac, Pampanga, and Bulacan a certain measure of prosperity. The arable lands in these provinces were now under cultivation for sugar, rice or both. Small industries, hat-making, and others had appeared in the small towns.⁴⁵ Poor transport discouraged further growth, however. It was fortunate that Pampanga, Bulacan, and Pangasinan had access to water routes; Tarlac could not count on this advantage, and even when access was possible—as in the case of Mangaldan, Pangasinan—the country routes were impassable for long periods, not only due to heavy *carreton* traffic but owing to the outright neglect of the roads.⁴⁶ The promise of better times offered by the railroad seemed indeed worthy of celebration.

On behalf of the railroad company, Don Carlos Bertodano in December 1890 wrote to the Governor General requesting that 43.8 kilometers of track from Manila to Bagbag be opened to public service. This would bring "real benefit to the public and to our concession," he wrote. Perhaps the Governor General could contribute solemnity to the inaugural by honoring the occasion with his presence. The tone of Bertodano's letter underscored the importance of the project to both parties. Wrote Don Carlos:

. . . the name of his Excellency representing the glorious Spanish nation and its August Royal Family will always be united with the inauguration of the first railroad in the Philippine Islands and,

⁴³ *Revista Catolica Filipinas*, 26 de Diciembre, 1889, p. 300.

⁴⁴ Rafael Magno, *A Historical Retrospect on the Town of Mangaldan, Pangasinan (1600-1898)* (Manila: n.p., n.d.), p. 40.

⁴⁵ A few guidebooks (*memorias*) exist that might yield quantitative data on early cottage industries. For a general view there is F. G. Varea, *Guide for the Americans in the Philippines*, trans. F.C. Fischer (Manila: Chofre y Comp., 1899). Gregorio Flormata, *Memoria Sobre la Provincia de Pangasinan* (Manila: Imprenta la Democracia, 1901) *passim*, has a detailed piece of regional history.

⁴⁶ Magno, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

better still [with] an act that will leave an indelible record in the history of the country.⁴⁷

The dawn of a new era for colonial Philippines had come. Eventually, on March 25, 1891, the first section of the line was opened. Working without serious obstacles, the labor gangs extended the track in eleven months by 86.7 kilometers. This was opened to service on February 19, 1892 and connected Manila with Mabalacat, Pampanga. Four months later, Tarlac was reached with 119.3 kilometers of track. Finally, six months later, on November 24, 1892, the link was made to Dagupan, Pangasinan; the total distance from Manila was now provided with 195.392 kilometers of track.⁴⁸

Whole towns turned out along the route to witness the inauguration of this section line.⁴⁹ Streets were festooned with streamers; bands played martial music, competing with exploding firecrackers. An eye-witness, describing the route through which the train passed, used the words "enchanting", "varied", and "picturesque" for the portion of the journey from Manila to Bulacan⁵⁰ and farther on, through Pampanga and part of Tarlac, noted that to be seen were

sun-soaked fields and emerald green of the sugar cane plantations. Towards the northern end of Tarlac was a shadowy forest and beyond were extensive fields of rice, like those of the great plains of Pangasinan. The monotony of the level ricefields was interrupted only by files of coconut trees.⁵¹

In the meantime, some 5,000 people had gathered around Dagupan Station to welcome the inaugural train. Amidst the blaring of four brass bands, the waving of hats and kerchiefs, shouts of "Viva España", and "Viva Filipinas", rent the air as the *Don Alfonso III*, followed by the *Felipe II*, emerged up the track. The Manila officialdom on board—Governor General Conde de Caspe, the Archbishop of Manila, and an entourage of bureaucrats—attended a *Te Deum* after the ceremonies. At

⁴⁷ PNRM, Expediente de la inauguracion del Ferro-Carril de Manila a Dagupan (letter of Carlos Bertodano to the Governor General) Manila, December 17, 1890, Ms.

⁴⁸ Algue, *op. cit.*, p. 322.

⁴⁹ Felipe Lagon, "When the First Train Roared into Town," in *Philippine Herald Magazine*, January 14, 1956, pp. 10-11. The newspapers that covered the event according to Lagon, were *Diario de Manila*, *El Resumen*, and *La Oceana*.

⁵⁰ *La Ilustracion*, Ano II, No. 53, 28 de Noviembre, 1892, p. 410.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

the banquet which followed the mass, a toast was offered to the glory and prestige of Church and State.⁵²

8

The jubilation concealed a number of difficulties. Construction had been six months behind. Service had commenced although the Calumpit River bridge had not yet been completed. At substantial cost to the Company, passengers had to be ferried across the river. Another bridge, the one spanning the Rio Grande, was likewise unfinished; it would be put to use only by 1894.⁵³

But the railroad, such as it was, was changing the scene in lower and middle northern Luzon. The first nine months of operations provide sufficient indications of this trend. In merchandise alone, some 3,003 tons were moved along various points of the line that year. Some 2,120 tons of rice (approximately 33,920 cavans)⁵⁴ constituted the bulk of that freight. This despite the fact that the line was operational only for 43.8 kilometers. With 119.3 kilometers completed, connecting Manila with Bagbag and Mabalacat, the railroad was to haul in 1892 some 31,929 tons, including 12,702 tons (approximately 203,312 cavans) of rice and 7,179 tons of sugar. The Company had anticipated some 70,000 tons; yet the freight output was not all that disappointing and could be logically explained. The railroad was a pioneer mode of transportation and a water transport system was in existence to give it some competition.⁵⁵

The presence of the system became, however, quite manifest. It was once noted that rice mills, often steam-powered—like those at Calumpit, Gerona, Moncada, Bayambang and onwards to Dagupan, according to Foreman—appeared along various points on the line. The Calumpit, Bayambang and Gerona mills, by 1893, accounted for processing an average of

⁵² Lagon, *op. cit.*, p. 11. An *Apuntes historicos* is in the subsequent issue of *La Ilustracion*, II, No. 54, 14 de Diciembre 1892, p. 426. praising the British for their unique diplomacy, affability, gentlemanliness and persistence—qualities which no doubt came into play in making the railroad a reality.

⁵³ Foreman (1899 ed), *op. cit.*, p. 303; also, Higgins, *op. cit.*, p. 313.

⁵⁴ Weight per cavan varied according to region, with Camerines at 132 pounds and less in other provinces, 126 pounds being the lowest on record. See Robert McMicking, *Recollections of Manila and the Philippines* (Manila: Filipiniana Book Guild, 1967), p. 174.

⁵⁵ *Guia Oficial de las Islas Filipinas Para 1894* (Manila: 1894), p. 458.

from 40 to 50 tons each for the various producers of Pangasinan, Tarlac, and even those from distant Nueva Ecija. Heretofore, milled rice from these parts reached Manila by water; it was now the railroad that served the rice industry.⁵⁶

Sugar production, likewise, became an early beneficiary. Realizing the undeniable advantage in shipping sugar by train instead of by river barge (in the latter case, one risked exposing the sugar to excessive moisture), sugar producers converged their *fardarias* along the rail route.⁵⁷ Sugar packers formerly operated in random districts of Manila and Malabon; now they moved closer to the railroad stations and the sources of sugar production. The success of sugar as a cash crop, in the meanwhile, eventually altered the growth of commercial centers in the region. Towns served by river traffic diminished in importance as activity along the rail route increased.⁵⁸ Mexico town, which had flourished as a market center on the branch of Rio Grande de Pampanga, now yielded in importance to towns like Angeles and San Fernando, even as the river channel began to silt up. Bacolor gave way in like manner to the more conveniently-situated San Fernando. San Fernando and Angeles by this time had become crucial stops for the train.⁵⁹

It was in passenger traffic that the system effected considerable change—and derived profit. In 1891, the coaches carried 324,957 passengers, mostly third class. In 1892, passenger traffic attained the half-million mark—545,335 to be exact.⁶⁰ Passenger behavior was also something of a phenomenon. People loved to travel and had become fond of the train. It was a new experience in convenience and speed. Travel time from Dagupan to Manila had been reduced from 27 hours by steamer to eight by train. This meant that a farmer might set for the city to sell his chickens and baskets of fruit and make enough money for the trip back home within the day. He could, largely out of novelty, repeat the adventure the next morning.⁶¹

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 462-463. Also Foreman (1899 ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 319. In *Filipino Martyrs* by Richard Brinsley Sheridan (London: Bodley Head, 1900; Reprinted, Quezon City: Malaya Book, Inc., 1970), p. 70, the author identifies Smith, Bell and Co., as proprietors of rice mills in Bayambang.

⁵⁷ *Guia Oficial*, 1894, p. 463.

⁵⁸ John Larkin, *The Pampangans* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), pp. 101-102.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ *Guia Oficial*, 1894, p. 468.

⁶¹ Higgins, *op. cit.*, p. 317.

Some educated Filipinos did not seem too impressed, however. The Filipino paper *La Solidaridad* did not find the inauguration of the railroad worthy of a paragraph.⁶² Rizal did try the train in 1892. But his curiosity was understood by undercover agents to be motivated by discovery of some political expedient which rail travel might serve.⁶³

The railroad was, in fact, to deal Rizal a personal tragedy. As he wrote his friend Blumentritt in April 1891, "Well, the first blow of the railroad is for me!" For early that year Rizal did receive word that his fiancée of eleven years, Leonor Rivera, had married the Englishman Henry Kipping, an engineer of the Manila Railroad Company.⁶⁴

Between 1892 to 1896, the railroad functioned routinely, earning its keep on an average of \$40,000 a year from freight and \$192,500 from passenger traffic.⁶⁵ Two years later the railroad was to play a role in the Filipino nation's struggle for freedom.

With the construction of the *ferrocarril* culminated British economic presence in the colonial Philippines of the 19th century. The British were to strike a different economic posture in the succeeding period, and with accustomed skill. For even during the course of the Filipino-American War, they managed to keep control of the operations of the railroad, exhibiting here an astuteness that for General Aguinaldo became a source of embarrassment. Aguinaldo, then meeting the threat of American armed successes while moving inexorably toward the proclamation of Filipino independence, was confronted by a railroad workers' strike. The strikers' demand was for higher wages from the railway management, which was held anyhow by the British. It was Aguinaldo's task to make a response to the strikers. He came up with an admonition in his proclamation of September 23, 1898, a document that revealed the nature of his leadership:⁶⁶

⁶² Marcelo Del Pilar, *Escritos de M. H. del Pilar*, I (Manila: Biblioteca Nacional, 1970), p. 204.

⁶³ Horacio de la Costa, S.J., ed. and Tr., *The Trial of Jose Rizal* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1961), p. 82.

⁶⁴ National Heroes Commission, *Rizal and Blumentritt Correspondence*, Vol. II, Part (Manila: 1963), p. 69.

⁶⁵ Higgins, *op. cit.*, p. 317. Also, *Guia Oficial 1894*, p. 460.

⁶⁶ John R. Taylor, *The Philippine Insurrection Against the United States*, III, Exhibit 257 (Pasay City: Eugenio Lopez Foundation, 1971), p. 360.

Our union [the proclamation read in part] should not concern itself with small matters like what you have done, i.e., refusing to go to work—which discredits you and all of us in the eyes of other nations....

For what Aguinaldo suspected was that enemies had been busy: friars had instigated the strike. Their intention, as always, had been to bring disgrace and misfortune to the Filipino.⁶⁷ Aguinaldo instructed the Provincial Chief of Pangasinan to exert zealous efforts to keep the railroad in operation. A breakdown, he warned, would be “bad”; it would affect adversely “our growing culture.” He was above all apprehensive of the injury to commerce, trade, and agriculture—whose “existence and progress” he pointed out, were “intimately connected” with the railroad enterprise.⁶⁸

At this point, the records are silent about the strike. It is clear, though, that Aguinaldo had two main concerns: to rid the Philippines of the influence, real or imagined, of the friars; and to maintain a “civilized” posture for the world to see. It was an illusion, as Aguinaldo would soon realize. No world power was willing to recognize his dream.

Aguinaldo’s former adviser, Apolinario Mabini, formulated a more realistic appraisal of the strike. Why not dangle a bait?, he suggested to his friend, Fernando Canon. This could come in the form of the grant of a concession. “Let us tell Higgins,” Mabini is quoted as saying, “to work on his government so that it would recognize us as a nation and help us. . .”⁶⁹ But putting all politesse aside, unlike Aguinaldo, he continued:

This is the only way to silence those insolent foreigners who, in their excessive pride, treat us like unreasoning and unthinking children.

Mabini, moreover, suspected Higgins to be a spy.⁷⁰ This was a possibility. Higgins could indeed be more involved than that; for it is known that by July 1899—Filipino-American hostilities broke out in February, earlier that year—he had become already associated with the Philippine (Schurman) Commission.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 361.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ National Historical Commission, *The Letters of Apolinario Mabini*, (Manila: 1965), pp. 64-65.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.* As railroad director, Higgins had free access to Filipino-held lines. See also the account by Richard Sheridan, in *The Filipino Martyrs* (London: The Bodley Head, 1900), reprinted by Malaya Books, Inc., Quezon City, 1970.

Epilogue

The documents on the fundamental changes in Philippine society attributable to the coming of the railroad have much to reveal. The image of the train pushing the Philippines of the 19th century toward social change provides an expressive metaphor for the period. The British economic presence, its pioneering effort in the area of transport and communications, brought the Philippines into the worldwide network of the capitalist economic system, British entrepreneurship having provided the wedge that split the Spanish empire in this part of the globe.

The Philippines in the 19th century offered an arena for contending social forces. On one side was the force which evolved out of the politico-religious and racist posture of the Spanish officialdom and friars. On the other was that which grew out of the shift in socio-economic structures as a result of British entrepreneurship in Manila and the provinces.⁷¹ The emergent Filipino, represented by the peasant and the ilustrado, had to contend with these two forces whose objective collaboration, at this point in time, was particularly clear. The peasant and ilustrado could not but forge an alliance. It was an uncertain alliance but nonetheless a potent one.

Under the leadership of the ilustrados and Aguinaldo, the emergent Republic was irresistibly drawn to the appurtenances of a "civilized" nation. Thus the inauguration of the Republic was not without a banquet of French provenance: a Constitution and a Congress. As a further item on the festive board—a railroad.

On September 10, 1898, the first president of the Republic was transported by train to his inaugural at Malolos.

⁷¹ Nicolas Cushner suggests this broadly in "Colonialism, Modernization and Nationalism in Southeast Asia," *Solidarity*, March 1970, pp. 8-11. Industrial and agricultural modernization led to an emerging class that could provide the core of the reform movement.