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Documentary on Spanish language in the country to be premiered; FDCP hosts French film festival

Filipino scholar Fernando Zialcita rues the Philippines' neglect of its Spanish heritage

By Brylle Tabora
Contributor

AS PART of the celebration of Philippine-Spanish Friendship Day, the Embassy of Spain and Instituto Cervantes de Manila will present "El Idioma español en Filipinas" (The Spanish Language in the Philippines). It will be screened at the Salón de Actos of the Instituto Cervantes today, July 1, at 7 p.m.

The documentary, produced by the Asociación Cultural Galeón de Manila, was first premiered in March 2012 in the head office of Instituto Cervantes in Madrid. It features a string of interviews of Filipinos who speak Spanish as a heritage language and the relevance that it brings to contemporary Philippine culture.

Written and directed by Javier Ruescas, the documentary features Filipino Spanish speakers such as Premio Zobel Award winner Guillermo Gómez-Rivera; author and economist Benito Legarda Jr.; anthropologist Fernando Zialcita; writer and historian Macario Ofilada; and other prominent figures.

In an e-mail interview, Zialcita, a professor of anthropology, notes that the Philippines is being left behind in the reintegration of Spanish culture, far behind neighboring countries that are steadily incorporating Spain's global heritage in their system.

"Spanish is the second most widely-used international language," he says. He explains that other Asian countries—Korea, China, Malaysia—seek to acquire a facility in Spanish and Portuguese because the Iberian community of nations in Europe and the Americas has become very influential.

In contrast, Filipinos remain insular.

Zialcita says Filipinos deprive themselves of knowledge of their history and identity because they have abandoned their Spanish heritage.

"It would be hard to know the history of your town [and] city or even your own family without knowing Spanish," he says. "Even during the American period, Spanish

was still widely spoken."

Even researchers on pre-Hispanic Philippines must know Spanish since many of the old documents of the initial Spanish contact are in Spanish.

"Most of the primary eye-witness documents are in Spanish. Translations are not always correct, as I found out," Zialcita says.

Zialcita, who wrote the celebrated book, "Authentic though Not Exotic," on the need to preserve the country's Spanish heritage, says Filipino historians and researchers seeking to provide a nationalist reading of Philippine history must learn Spanish.

"Much of the nationalist literature of the 1870s-1940s is in Spanish," says Zialcita. "So are the foundational writings of the Republic. 'Bayan Ko' was written by Gen. J. Alejandrino in Spanish. Too bad the Tagalog version dropped the scathing criticism of US imperialism."

He says Spanish is considered a Philippine language.

"The procedure in the Surian ng Wikang Pambansa (now Komisyon ng Wika) is to safeguard Tagalog. If a new word is needed, first see if there is a Tagalog equivalent. If none, see if there is a Spanish word that has been in use in Tagalog for 100 years. If none, then accept the foreign word."

Zialcita warns against residual anti-Spanish feeling, which has made the Philippines lag behind Asia in embracing Spanish language and culture which has become globally dominant.

"Why is Spanish widely taught all over China, Taiwan, Korea and Japan in universities and institutes, not only on the undergraduate but likewise on the grad level? Much more than here! Because Spanish is the second most widely used international language. Hispanic world is a huge market to which these countries export.

"Also, Korea, Japan, China want to craft a truly independent foreign policy—not one dependent on the US.

"In Seoul in 2008, during the international conference on Latin American Studies, Koreans said that they wanted to position Seoul as the center of Latin American culture in Asia!"

Zialcita adds that Malaysia is trying to revive its Portuguese heritage.

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"Making use of Malacca's Portuguese heritage, the National University now promotes Latin American Studies to project the country in Latin America," says Zialcita. "We are being left behind!"

The screening of "El Idioma Español en Filipinas" is presented by the Philippine-Spanish Friendship Day Committee and the Asociación Cultural Galeón de Manila. Admission is free on a first-come, first-served basis.

Instituto Cervantes is at 855 T.M. Kalaw, Ermita, Manila.

French films

France, the birthplace of cinema, is home to many remarkable films that are classics of world cinema. And as a celebration of France and the Philippines' shared passion for the cinema, the Film Development Council of the Philippines (FDCP)

brings to the country a series of French films.

The movies will be screened at the FDCP Cinematheques: Baguio, July 5-9; Iloilo, July 14-17; and Davao, Aug. 2-4.

Five titles are included in the selection: "Ensemble, C'est Trop/Together Is Too Much" (2010), about the decaying relationship of Marie-France and Henri that eventually affects the lives of the other family members;

"Angele et Tony" (2010), a multi-awarded film about the relationship between a beautiful young woman and a professional fisherman—Angel and Tony—who end up taming each other by learning one another's trade;

"Liberte" (2009), the most popular film in the Montreal World Film

Festival. It covers the story of a family of Gypsies who are fighting for their freedom to live and travel;

"Qu'un Seul Tienne et les Autres Suivront" (Silent Voice, 2009), an award-winning film telling three stories of love, treachery and deception, co-mingling in the visitor's center of a prison;

And "Les Neiges du Kilimandjaro" (The Snows of Kilimanjaro, 2011), a film nominated for the Un Certain Regard section of the Cannes Film Festival. It centers on a couple seeking vengeance after their house was robbed.

The event is organized by FDCP in partnership with the Film Cultural Exchange Program (FCEP), and in cooperation with Alliance Française and the Embassy of France.