

## Historical Distortions and Misconceptions: Exploring Problems and Issues in the Use of the Marxist Framework in 'Veneration Without Understanding' (1970) by Renato Constantino

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Francisco Jayme Paolo A. Guiang

### ABSTRACT

Renato Constantino's article "Veneration Without Understanding" is examined in order to see how the historian used a Marxist framework to ultimately produce his own version of the national hero, Jose Rizal. The article begins with an overview of Marxist historiography to provide an understanding of Constantino's methodology, then deconstructs the framework using structuralism as lens to demonstrate how the historian drew a historically anachronistic account of the national hero. Analysis is focused on Rizal's outlook on the Philippine Revolution of 1896. The study argues that there is need to reconcile the opposing views and interpretation of Rizal, and take into account other sources beyond the hero's controversial December 15 Manifesto, including the hero's key works and correspondences. Constantino's application of a Marxist framework to understand Rizal, this study contends, is inadequate and produces a historically anachronistic version of the national hero. The study per se does not aim to discredit the application of Marxism or the use of a particular theoretical construct but cautions against the rigid application of theoretical lenses in historiography and in the production of historical narratives.

**Keywords:** historical interpretation, frameworks and perspectives, historical anachronism, historiography, Marxist framework, structuralism

## Introduction

In studying Philippine history, it is important to note the various historical accounts that exist in order to explain and expound the complexities of the past. Historians create their narratives through a survey and analysis of primary sources available in the archives, libraries or the antique collections of document enthusiasts. The output can be a wide range of accounts that explain a nation's history.

However, the abundance of various historical frameworks and ideological perspectives allows any historian to adopt and apply methods to recreate the past unhampered. Throughout his lifetime Renato Constantino has produced some of the most compelling historical narratives about the Philippines. Constantino's Marxist interpretation of Philippine history not only provides readers a unique perspective about the country's colonial past but makes him one of the country's pioneering historians. A Marxist account of history, however, can raise a number of concerns about historiography. This paper argues that the inaccuracies produced from Constantino's rigid use of a Marxist framework to interpret the past leads to anachronism and misinterpretation of evidence and sources. To clarify, the aim of this study is not to criticize the use of frameworks and social theories in the production of narratives but to shed light on how their rigid application ultimately causes historical distortions and misconceptions.

An analysis of Constantino's famous article on Jose Rizal, "Veneration without Understanding," published in *Dissent and Counter-Consciousness* (1970) is undertaken to expound on the conjecture. As an overview, important issues concerning methodologies, perspectives, frameworks, and anachronisms are discussed. A brief survey of Marxism and historical interpretation is undertaken, using Eric J. Hobsbawm's article "Karl Marx's Contribution to Historiography" published in *Ideology in Social Science: Readings in Critical Social Theory* (1972) as takeoff. A survey of several works by Constantino is also presented to understand the rationale for a Marxist historical interpretation and how this was applied in his historical narratives. For this

study, Ferdinand de Saussure's theory on structuralism gives a general framework in the analysis of anachronisms committed in Constantino's historical interpretation. An overview of structuralism is first provided then used to dissect pertinent concepts to show how they were used out of context in several instances to aid historical interpretation. This methodology is utilized all throughout the analysis of Constantino's work, and in juxtaposition with some of Rizal's famous works such as *Filipinas Dentro de Cien Anos* (1889-1890), *Sobre La Indolencia de los Filipinos* (1890), and *A La Juventud Filipina* (1879). Constantino's version of Rizal is discussed through an analysis of the infamous December 15 Manifesto, contrasting this view with those held by historians such as Floro C. Quibuyen in *A Nation Aborted* (2008) and John N. Schumacher in *Rizal and Filipino Nationalism: A New Approach*. A careful examination of some of Rizal's letters is presented to understand how Constantino interpreted the national hero. The implications of a rigid application of theoretical lenses on historiography is discussed in the conclusion.

### **Problems in Marxist Historiography: Specific Concepts and Issues**

Traditional historical method allows historians to carefully translate, interpret and analyze primary sources in reconstructing the past. Aside from tedious research, it requires historians to rid themselves of bias which can lead to a distorted interpretation and understanding of facts. Bias often hinder historians from producing an accurate historical account of the words and deeds of historical figures. Occasionally historians utilize various theoretical frameworks to produce novel interpretations of the country's past. In applying theories to write historical narratives it is important to make sure the accounts are faithful to the primary sources. Oftentimes, distortions are created in an effort to fit theoretical lenses to historical narratives. Some historians even restrict their selection of primary sources to only those that correspond to the framework of choice. Whether intentional or not, the output would be a unique interpretation of the past at the expense of accuracy. It is also worth mentioning that in the process of applying theoretical frameworks and perspectives, historical anachronism is committed.

Historical anachronism is simply the misplacing of persons, events, customs or objects to describe an event in the past.

To understand how anachronisms occur and how evidence or sources are compromised in some narratives that adopt the Marxist interpretation of history, a brief discussion of Marxism is in order.

Marxism in historical analysis draws its thrust on the relationship of social classes, which utilizes the concepts of basis and superstructure. The theory posits that the base of the society constitutes the means of production (e.g. factories and its machineries). The relations governing production (i.e. employee-employer relationship), on the other hand, directly influence society's superstructure through components which include politics, religion, culture, etc. (Feuer, 1959, pp. 43-44). The notion of interacting social classes is eventually adopted by generations of Marxist historians to emphasize the importance of the economic basis of historical development and the succession of socioeconomic systems. What is introduced out of Marxist narratives are the concepts of class and class struggle in the history of mankind (Hobsbawm, 1972, p. 269). Marxist historiography no doubt contributed to an in-depth analysis of society based on the interaction of social forces which stimulates sociopolitical relations. Eric J. Hobsbawm, a prominent British Marxist historian, expounds on the important elements that prevail in the narratives of Marxist historians. According to Hobsbawm (1972) these elements do not necessarily indicate the actual theory Marx had formulated (pp. 269-270 & pp. 272-273). The relevant ones include the economic interpretation of history (an important factor in Marxist interpretation); the concept of base and superstructure; the predominance of class interest and class struggle; and the existence of historical laws and historical inevitability. Elements serve as impetus to explain the development of society in history.

Hobsbawm suggests that Marxism applied to history is not simply the revelation of class conflicts but the analysis of society as comprising different interacting levels (1972, p. 272). The interaction which inevitably happens allows history to unfold

through time. The Marxist interpretation of history recognizes human societies as systems of relations where human beings interact. These systems constitute a structure that maintains itself across historical developments. Hence, Marxist history may be regarded as having a different or unique structural-functionalist view of society characterized by internal contradictions. The “hierarchy of social phenomena” comprises the basis and superstructure (Hobsbawm, 1972, p. 273, 276). Hobsbawm’s dissection of the Marxist components of historical interpretation can be seen in Constantino’s works on Philippine history. Like Hobsbawm, Constantino treats Philippine society as a structure full of contradictions and class struggle (see Figure 1). In Constantino’s seminal works on Philippine history, particularly, *The Philippines: A Past Revisited* (1975) and *The Philippines: A Continuing Past* (1978), history is regarded as the collective struggle of the Filipino masses against colonization and neo-colonization. In fact, the historian had his own explanations about the origins of class divisions in Philippine society. In *The Filipino Elite* (originally published in Graphic in 1968), he traces the beginnings of the

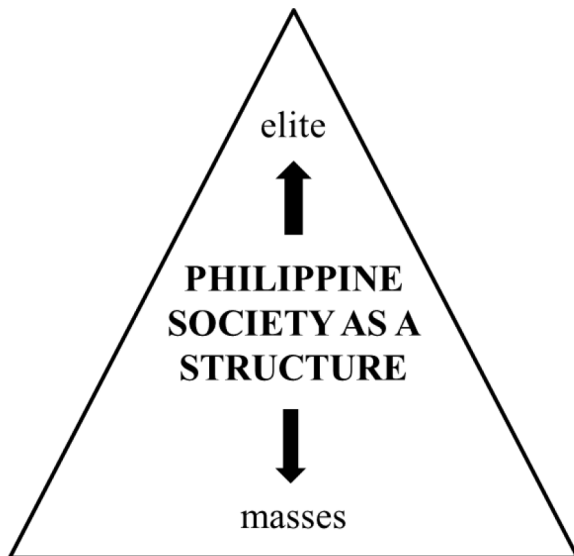


Figure 1

elite by studying the complex class arrangements during the Spanish colonial period (e.g. the Insular Filipinos, the *ilustrados*, the *principalia*, the *mestizos* – both Spanish and Chinese, and the *indios*) (Constantino, 1970, pp. 113-118). The continuous interactions among the classes in society and their conflicting interests create vital turning points in history. For example, in *Roots of Subservience* (originally published in *Graphic* on September 18, 1968), Constantino argues that the mass-led Philippine Revolution of 1896 was eventually betrayed by leaders of the elite class who, in the end, surrendered to American tutelage through a “false declaration” of independence on June 12. In *EDSA in Retrospect* (originally published in *Malaya* on June 10, 1988), the historian posits that the 1986 EDSA People Power Revolution was a mere change in political power staged by the elite and the middle class rather than a genuine revolution of the masses (cited in Ofreneo, 2001, pp. 222-224).

Noticeably, Constantino delineates classes in Philippine society into opposing sides, the elite and the masses, with historical figures falling into either one. Constantino takes into account important factors such as historical context and circumstances that serve as driving force for historical figures to act depending on the interest of their class. This process of creating history in the Marxist sense prompted Constantino to interpret historical figures on the basis of class orientation. It also allowed him to express his views regarding the importance of an alternative perspective on written history. Through Marxist lens, Constantino believes readers could be liberated from a colonial historiography, reoriented towards a “people’s history” which is grounded on an understanding of the Filipinos’ collective struggles in the past, and guided to make the past reusable in the present (Constantino, 1975, pp. 3-5, 8-11).

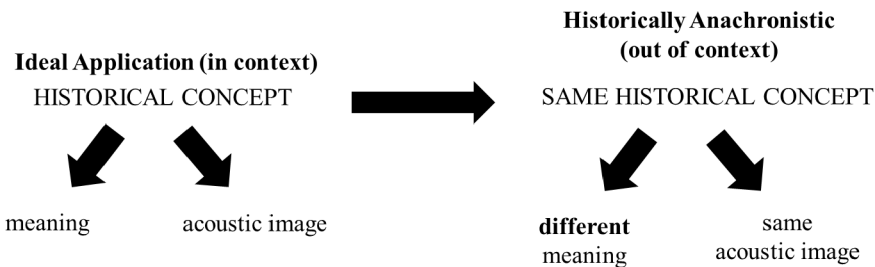
Sometimes various frameworks and social theories are used to aid in interpreting sources or evidence to produce narratives with novel perspectives on history. However, there are cases where these frameworks cease to function as methodological guides and become strict outlines in the creation of historical narratives. Consequently, sources or evidence are forcibly fitted, discarded, or

misinterpreted to comply with the historian's choice of framework. For example, the Jesuit historian Fr. John N. Schumacher argues that Constantino's *The Philippines: A Past Revisited* failed to cite and consult relevant sources which could have explained how religion contributed to the cultural and economic development of the country during the Spanish colonial period (e.g. religious traditions and the rise of *haciendas*). Moreover, according to Schumacher, Constantino did not elaborate on how the likes of Fr. Burgos contributed to the articulation of Filipino consciousness which led to the emergence of a national identity. Such flaws stem from Constantino's emphasis on class struggle against the abusive elite, barring him from using sources which contradict his Marxist view. These problems commonly occur when historians give primacy to frameworks and social theories in their narratives.

In order to grasp how historical anachronisms are committed in the Marxist interpretation of history, one has to deconstruct and analyze several concepts produced from reading society as a structure of contradicting systems. For the purpose of deconstruction, a different approach must be taken. Though normally used in literary criticism and linguistic analysis, Ferdinand de Saussure's theory of structuralism can serve as tool to examine the problems in Marxist historiography. Structuralism as a theory deals with the existence of a stable set of laws which governs any system. A system has individual components that produce change which conform to the set of laws that governs the system as a whole (Windschuttle, 1996, p. 18). This means that constant change may occur anytime. However, such change must conform to a standard pattern that applies to a set of events. When applied to linguistics, de Saussure holds that there is a standard system (*langue*) of signs in "which the only essential thing is the union of meaning and acoustic images" (Eagleton, 1983, pp. 96-97). Therefore in the system of language, a particular word or concept is comprised of an acoustic image associated with it and a meaning that has value (usage) which can change in time (Waterman, 1956, pp. 307-308 and Windschuttle, 1996, p. 18). De Saussure adds that the relationship between the meaning (or the signified) and the acoustic image (or the signifier) is arbitrary. The relationship

between the acoustic image and the referent (or the actual object that a word or concept pertains to) is also arbitrary. Hence, Saussure argues that “reality was not reflected by language but produced by it” because the components of language are arbitrary to begin with (Eagleton, 1983, pp. 96-97, p. 108).

However, it should be noted that language, and its components (i.e. words or concepts, acoustic image, etc.) evolves depending on historical context. Therefore, it can be argued that a word or concept may have different meanings depending on the context when the text is used. Historical anachronism is committed when a historian uses a word or a historical concept that is taken out of context and uses it to describe or interpret a past event. To assess if a historical concept used by a historian is anachronistic, three (3) components should be taken into consideration: the word (historical concept) itself, the meaning of the word, and the image derived from the word. A historical concept is deemed accurate when it is used in context (see Figure 2); conversely, a historical concept is deemed inaccurate when it is used out of context (see Figure 3).



**Figure 2**

**Figure 3**

Whether unintentional or intentional, there are significant impacts in the commission of historical anachronism. Stemming from the historian’s application of frameworks or perspectives in recreating the past, the use of anachronistic concepts inevitably produces a certain degree of historical distortion.



Presently, the predominance of frameworks and theories in the social sciences allow historians to interpret and reconstruct the past uniquely. Based on the available narratives on Philippine history, the application of frameworks and perspectives create novel insights and views about complex circumstances that surround a particular event in the past. Yet, the nuances in historical interpretation influenced by the utilization of social theories that offer new modes of analyses lead to problems in historiography. Historical anachronism and misinterpretation of sources are several issues evident in Constantino's attempts to address significant topics in history such as Rizal's stand on the Revolution of 1896 which this paper will examine.

### **Jose Rizal in Marxist History: Revolutionary or Reformist?**

Was Rizal revolutionary or reformist?

By looking at the highly debatable issue of Rizal and his stand on the Revolution of 1896, there are certain perspectives and frameworks that historians have used to arrive at definitive interpretations of the national hero. Renato Constantino's article *Veneration without Understanding*, delivered at the Third Rizal Lecture on December 30, 1969, and published in his book *Dissent and Counter-Consciousness* (1970) produces an image of the national hero seen through Marxist lens.

A popular compilation of essays that dissent from existing Rizal scholarship was published in 1968. The volume *Rizal: Contrary Essays*, edited by Petronilo Bienvenido Daroy and Dolores S. Feria, was timely not only because it challenged the dominant Rizal tradition but also because it coincided with the social atmosphere during the latter half of the 1960s. The period was marked by nationalist sentiments that fueled activism in the pre-Martial Law years. The anthology contains works by nationalists such as Claro M. Recto and Jose Ma. Sison. Recto's *Rizal the Realist and Bonifacio the Idealist* asserts that Rizal was, from the very beginning, a "revolutionist in ideas and reason" but would succumb to the reality that the revolution was premature, contrary to Bonifacio's idealistic convictions and deeds (1968, pp.

69-73). On the other hand, Sison's *Rizal the 'Subversive'* discusses the national hero's subversive role in the left-wing of the middle class and juxtaposes Rizal's personal struggle as a reflection of the collective struggle of the Filipinos which materialized in the revolution (1968, pp. 17-19). Both essays contribute to the idea that Rizal was a revolutionary and was instrumental to the revolution. Constantino's article, however, repudiates such idea by asserting Rizal's limitations due to his elitist upbringing.

In *Veneration without Understanding*, Constantino argues that the national hero was a product of American-sponsorship, a pure reformist and opposed to the revolution. Constantino's interpretation of Rizal was primarily a product of his reading of the Manifesto of December 15, 1896. In his work, he clarifies that Rizal's negative view of the revolution can be attributed to the hero's upbringing as a member of the elite class. According to Constantino, Rizal had voiced out the yearning of his class and had equated this as representative of the people's call:

To a large extent, Rizal, the ilustrado, fulfilled this function, for in voicing the goals of his class he had to include the aspirations of the entire people. Though the aims of this class were limited to reform measures, he expressed its demands in terms of human liberty and human dignity and thus encompassed the wider aspirations of all people. **This is not to say that he was conscious that these were class goals; rather, that typical of his class, he equated class interest with people's welfare** (emphasis mine, 1970, p. 135).

Constantino adds that Rizal cannot be blamed for objecting the revolution bluntly as he was raised an *ilustrado* and would have been limited to the struggles of his own class. He would therefore, be indifferent to the clamor of the masses in pursuing an armed struggle against Spain in 1896. For Constantino, Rizal was a "limited Filipino":

Though Rizal was able to win for his countrymen the name Filipino, it was still as ilustrado that he conceived of this term. As ilustrado he was speaking in behalf of all indios though he was separated by culture and even by property

from the masses... **Rizal, therefore, was an ilustrado hero whose life's mission corresponded in a general way to the wishes and aspirations of the people... he condemned the revolution because as an ilustrado he instinctively underestimated the power and the talents of the people.** (emphasis mine, 1970, pp. 138-139).

As already discussed, Constantino dichotomizes Filipino society during Rizal's time as one divided between the *ilustrados* or the elite on one hand and the general masses on the other. The historian's interpretation of Rizal and of Philippine society before the outbreak of the revolution clearly reveals a Marxist orientation in which class struggles and class interests dictate the outcome of historical events. Here, the more dominating class is construed to eventually shape history. Thus, Rizal and his view on the Revolution of 1896 was analyzed as an outcome of the deeds and actions of the economically powerful—the *ilustrados* or the elite.

What is problematic about Constantino's use of the Marxist framework is his tendency toward class reductionism, producing an interpretation of history that is limited to the conflicting interests of the elite and the masses. The application of a Marxist framework led to his use of historically anachronistic concepts that support his Marxist interpretation of Philippine history in dealing with the issue of Rizal and the Revolution of 1896.

Historical anachronisms can be seen when Constantino's notion of class and class interest is analyzed in terms of historical concept, meaning, and image. In Constantino's interpretation of Rizal, he concluded that the national hero struggled to advance the interest of his class. Class in the Marxist sense (see Figure 4), denotes an exclusive group of people who struggle to forward their interests. The image suggests a people with common social and economic stature belonging to either the elite or the masses. Constantino relegates Rizal to the *Ilustrado* class and views him as limited because of his elite background (see Figure 5). It is a fact that Rizal was raised in an elite atmosphere, was well educated, and regarded as belonging to the ranks of the *ilustrados*. However, to conclude that Rizal was not aware of the struggles of the masses

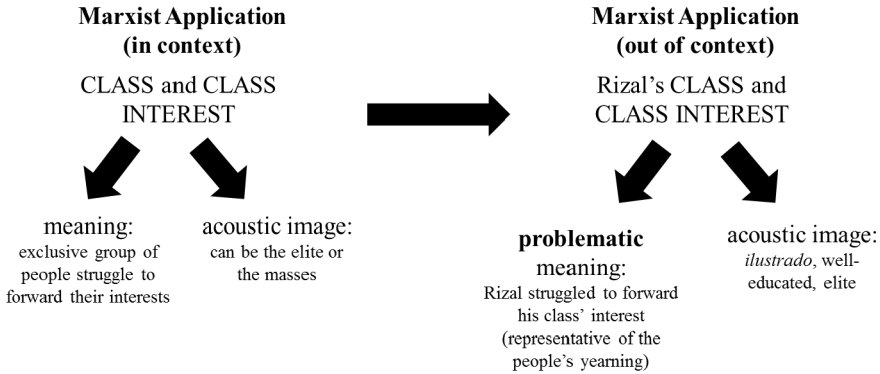


Figure 4

Figure 5

because “he was the product of his society and as such could be expected to voice only those aims that was within the competence of his class” (Constantino, 1970, p. 135) is too simplistic.

The historically anachronistic application of the concepts of class and class interest to describe and interpret Rizal may be tested by examining some of the national hero's writings. This way, Rizal's thoughts about the general masses and their yearnings may be contextualized.

In his famous work, *Filipinas Dentro de Cien Años* (The Philippines A Century Hence) published in installments in *La Solidaridad* from September 30, 1889 to February 1, 1890, Rizal mentioned that the continuous brutalization of the Malayan Filipinos would ultimately lead the suffering classes to forge a movement based on common woes and different from the various insurrections of the past. He specified that, “a common misfortune, a common debasement has united all the inhabitants of the Islands” (Rizal, 2012, p. 56). Rizal also claimed that the natives are subjected to the “same peril and wounded in the same feelings” and would inevitably unite to work for a common cause (2012, p. 16). The views of the national hero attest to the inclusive nature of his sentiments regarding the inevitable movement that would arise regardless of class or interest. Rizal mentioned that Spain would have to give greater law and liberty or suffer the natives' clamor for independence. And though he specified that the transformation

would have to come from the upper class to avoid the violence of mass movement (2012), this does not necessarily make him an exclusive champion of *ilustrado* interests.

In *Sobre La Indolencia de los Filipinos* (The Indolence of the Filipinos) which was also published in installments in *La Solidaridad* from July 15, 1890 to September 15, 1890, Rizal emphasized that the miseducation of the Filipinos brought their subjugation to Spanish control. He added that this miseducation had contributed to the lack of national sentiment which would have been crucial to the formation of Filipino nationalism (Rizal, 2009). These sentiments attest clearly to the importance that Rizal gave to education in general. His advocacy that proper education should be received by the Filipino youth in order to reject the yoke of slavery can be seen in his work *A La Juventud Filipina* (To the Filipino Youth cited in Craig, 1913, p. 110).

When Rizal stated that transformation should come from the upper class in *The Philippines A Century Hence*, he was not pushing for the interests of the elite class alone. Taken into context, it could mean that for Rizal proper education was an important prerequisite to construct a national movement successfully. Rizal highlighted the miseducation of the Filipinos under Spanish colonization in *The Indolence of the Filipinos*. He probably deemed this miseducation detrimental to a national movement at that time. Rizal concluded that any transformation should be led by those who received proper education.

Constantino's interpretation of Rizal as the *ilustrado* who strives for his own class' interests and who is unaware of the struggles of the masses is, therefore, inaccurate. Although Rizal was completely brought up as a member of the elite, it did not hinder him from understanding the plight of the Filipino masses. Based on his writings, he was well aware of the conditions of the Filipino people who were suffering under the colonial powers. What Constantino had committed in his version of Rizal is a perfect example of historical anachronism. Using a Marxist framework, he had interpreted the national hero inaccurately by attributing concepts which do not speak of Rizal at all.

## **The December 15 Manifesto: Conflicting Views and Interpretations**

Another problematic aspect in Constantino's use of the Marxist perspective can be found in his interpretation of Rizal's infamous Manifesto of December 15, 1896. This is probably the main source of Constantino's image of Rizal. Here, the nuances of primary source interpretation must be considered. Some of Rizal's letters or correspondences were juxtaposed to arrive at a careful reexamination of the December 15 manifesto. In addition, the views of historians Floro C. Quibuyen and Fr. John N. Schumacher were examined.

Looking at Rizal's December 15 Manifesto (1964), one can see why Constantino interpreted Rizal as anti-revolution:

... I have written also that reforms, to be beneficial, must come from above, and those which come from below are irregularly gained and uncertain. Holding these idea, I cannot do less than condemn, and I do condemn this uprising – as absurd, savage, and plotted behind my back – which dishonors that could plead our cause. I abhor its criminal methods and disdain all part in it, pitying from the bottom of my heart the unwary that have been deceived into taking part in it. (p. 348)

Rizal used strong words to condemn the revolution. Constantino concluded that the document was undeniable proof of Rizal's repudiation of the 1896 Revolution and his firm support of the assimilationists. Constantino justified his use of a Marxist framework by showing that there was indeed a division between Rizal as a representative of the elite class and the Filipino masses.

But Quibuyen (2008) gives an important counter-interpretation. Quibuyen argues that the manifesto, which was actually written on the 10th of December but dated on the 15th, is an exposition of the national hero's rejection of the revolution that occurred prematurely. Rizal, according to Quibuyen (2008, p. 58), did not actually reject the idea of the revolution but its timing. For Quibuyen, it was all a question of opportunity. He cites Leon Ma. Guerrero in examining another document Rizal wrote on December 12, 1896. This document, called the

December 12 Memorandum, clarified Rizal's declarations in the earlier manifesto. In the document, the national hero declared that he always wanted for his countrymen to be given the chance to exercise their democratic rights, the constant denial of which would assure repeated insurrections against the colonial powers. Quibuyen adds that in the memorandum, Rizal expressed the need for his countrymen to be united in the event of an uprising (2008, pp. 57-58). It is as if Rizal foresaw the uprising of 1896.

Schumacher's view regarding the December 15 Manifesto:

He [Rizal] did not condemn the revolution, but this revolution at this time, for which the country was not yet fully prepared. It neither possessed the logistical resources to fight successfully, nor more important to Rizal, was it yet formed into one nation, the object of his efforts from 1885, when he began the Noli, until the Liga Filipina in 1882. He was not, of course, in a position to know that Bonifacio also knew that the time for revolt had not come, but had had his hand forced by the discovery of the Katipunan. (2000, p.551)

Both Quibuyen and Schumacher agree that Rizal was not a pure assimilationist and that he did not reject the idea of a revolution against the colonial powers.

What Constantino overlooked is the importance of accurate primary sources which play a very significant role in producing interpretations about Rizal and the revolution. A certain document cannot be interpreted without identifying the full context of its author and the time when it was written. Constantino also gave too much attention to American testimonies (e.g. those by Governor William Howard Taft, Governor W. Cameron Forbes, and Theodore Friend in his book *Between Two Empires*) which created an image of a fully assimilationist Rizal. Although Constantino cites several documents by Rizal (Constantino cites three documents – the letter to Ferdinand Blumentritt dated January 26, 1887; “Data for My Defense” written in his cell on December 12, 1896; and an excerpt from the “Reign of Greed” in *El Filibusterismo* showing Fr. Florentino's sentiments), a careful examination of his other correspondences should have been undertaken to draw a definite image of the national hero.

In fact, some of Rizal's letters prior to 1896 reveal his detachment from the assimilationist cause. Some of Rizal's letters to Ferdinand Blumentritt, particularly those dated on April 23, 1891 and January 31, 1892, suggest that his view about the Propaganda Movement in Spain started to change significantly after the Calamba incident:

For this reason, I believe that it is now the opportune time for me to return to the Philippines and share with them all the dangers. For I have always been of the opinion that I can do more in my country than abroad. (2011a, pp. 339-400)

Now I tell you: I have lost my hope in Spain. For that reason, I shall not write one more word for *La Solidaridad*. It seems to me it is in vain. All of us are *voces clamantis in deserto dum omnes rapping* (voices crying in the desert where all are lost). (2011a, pp. 433-434)

It can be argued that because Rizal's family had been directly victimized by Spanish abuses, he had started to question the success of the propagandists' mission in Spain. His conviction to transfer the fight from mainland Spain to the Philippines was evident in his letter to the Filipino people on June 20, 1892:

I cannot live knowing that many are suffering unjust persecution on my account... I prefer to face death cheerfully and gladly give my life to free so many innocent persons from such unjust persecution... Moreover, I wish to show those who deny us patriotism that we know how to die for our duty and our convictions. What matters death if one dies for what one loves, for native land and adored beings? (2011b, pp. 697-698)

Rizal's message to Filipino people is clear, that the nation's redemption from the yoke of slavery is a struggle worth dying for. A letter written on October 1891 proves Rizal's capitulation from the propagandists' cause in Spain:

If our countrymen are counting on us here in Europe, they are very much mistaken. I do not want to deceive anyone. If there is no money, we cannot do much: We can help them with our life in our country. That general error



that we are here in this distant country is very, very wrong... The battlefield is the Philippines: There is where we should meet... The majority of our compatriots in Europe are afraid, they flee from the fire, and they are brave only so long as they are far from danger and they are in a peaceful country! The Philippines should not count on them; she should depend on her own strength. (2011b, pp. 629-630)

What is striking is the outright declaration that the Filipinos should not rely on the Propaganda Movement in Spain. This may have been driven by the worsening condition of his countrymen and the lack of actual reforms from the Spanish colonial government in the Philippines despite the campaign by the propagandists. By discerning Rizal's message in these letters, it can be seen that Constantino misinterpreted the December 15 Manifesto in two ways. First, the historian assumed that Rizal had completely rejected the Revolution of 1896 and secured an assimilationist stand. Second, the historian interpreted the manifesto likely without conducting a survey of Rizal's other writings and correspondences. These letters, as shown, can provide better understanding of Rizal's views on the revolution.

Constantino's misconstrued understanding of Rizal's view on the 1896 Revolution indicates how his Marxist orientation affected his interpretation of the December 15 Manifesto. His use of a Marxist lens to describe Rizal inevitably produced an anachronistic image of the national hero. This anachronistic image was exposed and dissected through de Saussure's linguistic structuralism, in addition to a survey of Rizal's essays. In order to justify a Marxist reading of Rizal, Constantino misinterpreted the December 15 Manifesto. The views of Quibuyen and Schumacher, along with some of Rizal's correspondences, show how the historian overlooked primary sources and failed to put them in context.

However, the context of the historian and the time when he wrote his article on Rizal should be taken into account as well. Constantino's nationalist and anti-American sentiments were a product of his youth. His father, maternal grandmother, and classmates in Arellano High School were staunch anti-Americans

and suspicious of American presence in the country during the 1930s. His nationalist views would come into fruition during his stint as editor of *The Philippine Collegian* in the University of the Philippines. His professors, classmates, and colleagues in the campus paper were either communist-leaning or strong social critics. It should be noted that Constantino denied being a Communist. In fact, he despised the factions of the left-wing (the CPP split in the 1960s) and aspired for a united left movement (e.g. the Movement for the Advancement of Nationalism in 1967) (Ofreneo, 2001, pp 2-3, 11-27, 170-176). Moreover, Marxism as a theory became an influential and potent tool for social analysis between the 1960s and the 1970s. Demystifying an American-sponsored national hero may have been Constantino's way of expressing his anti-imperialist views and strong political sentiments.

## Conclusion

Traditional historical methods require historians to interpret sources properly and create an analysis based on evidence. However, the vast expanse of frameworks and social theories allow the adoption of certain perspectives in recreating the past. In such instances, the historian's use of frameworks and social theories may unintentionally lead to anachronistic concepts. This can ultimately lead to the misinterpretation of primary sources.

Constantino's use of a Marxist framework to interpret Rizal and his stand on the Revolution of 1896 led to an anachronistic description of the national hero. Constantino branded Rizal as a pure assimilationist who came from the ranks of the elite, producing an inaccurate image of the national hero. He then justified this image of Rizal by interpreting the December 15 Manifesto using Marxist lenses and ignoring primary sources.

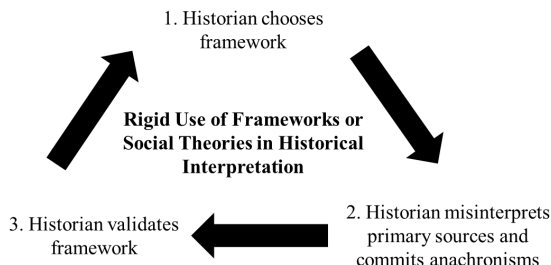
Using linguistic structuralism, this paper deconstructed and exposed the anachronisms in Constantino's Marxist image of Rizal. This, along with the views of Quibuyen, Schumacher, and those expressed in some of Rizal's own writings, show how Constantino's rigid use of a Marxist framework ultimately produced an inadequate understanding of the national hero. Constantino's background as a student shed light to the historian's nationalist

sentiments. The socio-political milieu of the 1960s and the 1970s also helps explain the emergence of literature that challenged the existing Rizal scholarship at that time.

It should be noted that this critique of Constantino's approach is neither a repudiation of Marxism as a theoretical framework, nor a rejection of the use of social theories in the production of historical narratives. The critique warns instead against the rigid use of framework or theory to recreate the past, as well as against the tendency to create historical distortions and misconceptions.

In order to fit facts forcibly into a certain framework, historians may be prompted to apply or use historically anachronistic concepts instead of creating accurate depictions of historical figures based on primary sources. The assumptions that the historian may produce out of this process creates a unique version of history which ultimately validates their framework (see Figure 6). This method of interpreting past events usually produce narratives or versions of history that have traces of factual distortions.

In proving a thesis or an argument, historians must keep in mind that perspectives or frameworks should not be forced to misread evidence. Rather, the available evidence should help the historian produce novel ideas about history through careful observation of appropriate historical methods. In essence, evidence from a pool of sources should be able to substantiate historical statements and aid historical inquiry. Frameworks and social theories, should be nothing more than guide in constructing narratives and validating claims about the past.



**Figure 6**

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**Francisco Jayme Paolo A. Guiang teaches Philippine and Asian history at the History Department of the University of the Philippines in Diliman. He received his BA History Degree from the University of the Philippines in 2012. He may be reached at faguiang@gmail.com.**

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## End Notes

- 1 In the preface to “A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy,” Marx sums up the sources of contradictions that create class struggle: “In social production men enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will. These relations of production correspond to a definite stage of development of the material sources of production. The sum total of these relations constitutes the economic structure of society – the real foundation, on which rise legal and political superstructures... The mode of production in material life determines the general character of the social, political, and spiritual processes of life.” (cited in Feuer, 1959, p. 43)
- 2 Hobsbawm argues that the classical Marxist theory is actually concerned with the relationship between different classes (which he also calls “levels”) in society rather than an emphasis on economic determinism which is not necessarily Marxist but had only been attributed to Marx by historians who use the theory. Hobsbawm distinguishes the latter as vulgar Marxism as opposed to classical Marxism.
- 3 In fact, Hobsbawm posits that the Marxist theory is generally different from the typical structural-functional theory attributed to Claude Levi-Strauss and Louis Althusser because the former is not static; rather, Marxism employs mechanisms for historical development or change.
- 4 In “Roots of Subservience”, Constantino asserts that the June 12 declaration of independence was not a genuine statement of freedom from the colonizers. Though it was a separation from Spain, the fact that the declaration needed the recognition of the Americans makes it a dubious symbol of freedom from any foreign power. The June 12 declaration only affirmed the Philippines’ status as a protectorate of the Americans. (see Constantino, 1970, pp. 100-102).
- 5 In Constantino’s *The Philippines: A Past Revisited* and *The Philippines: A Continuing Past*, it is noticeable how the intelligentsia (i.e. artists, teachers, academics, writers, etc.) as a separate yet decisive class can influence and tip the scale in the struggle between the elite and the masses. These different components of society shape the turning points in Philippine history.
- 6 Constantino cites Governor William Howard Taft who suggested to the Philippine Commission the idea of giving Filipinos a national hero. In fact, Theodore Friend confirms in his book, *Between Two Empires*, that Taft, along with other American colonial officials, chose Rizal as a “model hero” because Aguinaldo was deemed too militant, Bonifacio too radical, and Mabini too obstinate. Constantino also explores on Governor William Cameron Forbes’ ideas about Rizal; that the national hero never espoused independence and armed resistance but advocated instead for internal reform through public education.
- 7 This pertains to the deportation of the Rizal family and their struggle for land tenure in Calamba, Laguna. Rizal closely monitored the events in his hometown and supported the Calambeños’ fight for land by filing a case against the Dominicans in Spain’s Supreme Court. He believed frailocracy in the Philippines would be severely weakened if the Calambeños would emerge victorious against the clergy. More importantly, the deportation and the eviction of Rizal’s family from their land convinced him that the campaign in Spain had become futile (see Schumacher, 1997, pp. 246-249 and pp. 254-255)

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