



Tropical Faustian: Nick Joaquin's Spenglerian Imagining of Colonial History in the Post-Authoritarian Philippines

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Abstract

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Keywords

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*This article discusses how Philippine writer Nick Joaquin applied the ideas of Oswald Spengler in his historiography, notably the collection *Culture and History* (1988), his contribution to the post-authoritarian renegotiation of a national history fraught with colonial conflict and loss. This article argues that Joaquin adapted Spengler's ideas, proposing the presence of a "Faustian" Filipino soul formed during the Spanish-colonial period, to a contradictory effect. It allowed him to assert a national identity that challenged the dichotomous ways in which Philippine history was conventionally conceived, but it also reintroduced Eurocentric and homogenizing schemes, reinforcing existing hegemonies in the postcolony.*

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I. Introduction

In 1988, two years after the fall of the dictatorship of Ferdinand Marcos in the Philippines, Nick Joaquin published a collection of historical essays, *Culture and History*, that, in its insistence on the first two centuries of Spanish colonial rule as the era in which the Philippine nation was forged, upset the ways national history had been conceived in both official and oppositional discourses. The ousted regime had sought legitimacy in the historic claim, exemplified by Marcos's ghostwritten *Tadbana: The History of the Filipino People* (1976), that it was the culmination of a great indigenous race which had evolved from precolonial origins, largely independent of colonial impositions. This official vision resonated with academic interest in the indigenization of the national narrative, which was pushed by mostly oppositional academics and persisted after the dictatorship was overthrown. A post-authoritarian renegotiation of national history was essential in coming to terms not only with history's cooptation by the regime, but also with the violence, traumas and dispossessions contained in the national narrative: 300 years of Spanish domination ended with the anticolonial Revolution of the 1890s, followed by a 3-year war against a new colonizer, the USA, whose four decades of supposedly benevolent rule were marked by uprisings, the devastation of World War II, and finally a decolonization that kept the country firmly in America's orbit. The postcolony experienced "the constant force of historical robbery," as

Charlie Samuya Veric argues.¹ It is unsurprising that, in the decades after formal independence was gained in 1946, Filipino historians sought to regain agency, reconstruct native culture, and locate the origins of identity in the indigenous tradition.² Nationalist historiography was fiercely anticolonial, denying the very possibility that Western invaders had brought anything worthwhile, lasting, or significant to the country. The dominant left-wing-nationalist view, based on Teodoro Agoncillo's 1956 *The Revolt of the Masses*, saw the nation's origins in the nineteenth-century class struggle against foreign domination and its local profiteurs, while the nativist perspective which had found its way into Marcos's *Tadhana* minimized Western colonial influence and asserted that an authentic Filipino culture had continued to exist among the unaffected majority.

Joaquin confronted both perspectives, claiming for the colonial experience the prime spot in the story of national genesis. His argument was largely based on Oswald Spengler's morphology (in combination with the ideas of Marshall McLuhan regarding the transformative social and cultural effects of media). Explicitly drawing on Spengler, he proposed the existence of a single and unique Philippine form with a Faustian soul that was born during the late-sixteenth to eighteenth centuries from the encounter of a supposedly primitive native society with advanced European culture introduced by Spain.³ Once established, the Philippine form could not in its essence be changed by the American civilizing mission or by contemporary attempts to revive pre-colonial culture. This article examines the historical works of Joaquin (focused on *Culture and History* but including other titles) for Spenglerian motifs of cultural development.

In so doing, I aim to contribute to the exploration of how Spengler's ideas were applied outside of the West to make identity claims in a post-colonial and post-authoritarian situation, as well as how the application of Spengler rendered the historiography of Joaquin problematic. A major contradiction in Spengler is the impossibility of comparisons across cultures versus the claim of identifying universal patterns of development; in Joaquin we see an application of not only such patterns but also specific Western form (the Faustian). Which raises the question whether other cultures, once they get subsumed by the expanding West, are merely affected superficially, as Spengler expected, or can take on Western form too, as Joaquin assumes for the Philippines. Joaquin's example provides insight into how Spengler's ostensible relativist morphology upholds a Western-centric model of culture which, in turn, convoluted the former's argument. How did Joaquin's resort to Spengler enhance the arguments he made about Philippine identity, and what complications arose from it?

II. The Writer-Historian Nick Joaquin

Joaquin is an ambiguous writer. His novels and stories — considered to be among the best Filipino fiction in English⁴ — contain expressions of unease with Americanized postcolonial

¹ Charlie Samuya Veric, *Children of the Postcolony: Filipino Intellectuals and Decolonization, 1946-1972* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2020), 11.

² For example, the 1960 conference of the Philippine Historical Association had as its stated aim to reassess history from the point of view of the colonized countries. Reynaldo C. Ileto, "Decolonizing History in Southeast Asia: Revisiting the Manila and Singapore Conferences, 1960-1961," *Bulletin of the Philippine Historical Association* 52 (2018): 1-13.

³ The McLuhanesque part of the argument, on which I will not expound further, is that the "media" or "tools" brought by Spain (including such things as Catholicism, agricultural technologies, and books) altered the local culture in all its aspects beyond recognition.

⁴ In 2017, Joaquin became the first Filipino writer to be included in the "Penguin Classics" series with the publication of a collection of his prose: Nick Joaquin, *The Woman Who Had Two Navels and Tales from the Tropical Gothic* (New York: Penguin, 2017).

modernity, nostalgia for the pre-American past, and a mystical Catholicism. His focus on the Manila-based, Catholic and affluent classes has led to criticism, specifically for its neglect of indigenous and lower-class perspectives and exclusive focus on elites and their conservative values.⁵ But Joaquin also liked to employ modernist literary devices, and his stories, often populated by strong female characters and good-for-nothing husbands,⁶ invite feminist and queer readings.⁷ Such interpretations relate to his Catholic mysticism that employs local mythology and folklore. He branded this mix alternatively as “Tropical Gothic” or “Tropical Baroque.” His use of both terms Gothic and Baroque suggests a Western form of the Philippine nation he imagined, and both relate to Spengler who saw these two cultural movements respectively as the formation and the climax of the Faustian soul of the West. Joaquin adopts this term “Faustian” for the Philippine culture created by the encounter with Spanish colonialism.

Joaquin’s work reflects on the significance of the past, keeping, as Vince Rafael puts it, a “notion of history wherein the past is always current [...] and where modernity was not the negation of tradition but its fictive kin.”⁸ Indeed, a text like “The Order of Melkizedek” can be read as a story of the Philippine present and its Americanized, outwardly devout Catholic elites being haunted by and eventual coming to terms with the mystical past.⁹ This account of a botched attempt to unmask a secret cult that revives the apocalyptic popular movements of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, also highlights the kind of past that supposedly morphed into the Filipino form: an amalgamation of (colonial) catholic and (native) folk mysticism. Elmo Gonzaga highlights Joaquin’s insistence on the Filipino as an “identity in progress” to propose a nation that is not “hierarchical and rigidly constant but dynamic and constantly changing.”¹⁰ But, as I argue below, the dynamism that can be gleaned from Joaquin’s fiction is contradicted in his historical methodology.

While Joaquin’s extensive historical writings have received little attention in scholarship on the author,¹¹ eminent Filipino historian Resil Mojares calls him “quite simply one of our most important historians.” Mojares’ remarks on *Culture and History* give a sense of how Joaquin sought to apply Spengler’s historical thinking:

Attacking the syndrome of shame over the colonial past and guilt over being “neither East nor West,” Nick [*sic* – Mojares knew Joaquin personally] celebrated hybridity. [...] Attacking nativism and other forms of exclusion, he quotes his favorite historian, Oswald Spengler: “Historic is that which is, or has been effective,” and he gloried in what the Filipino has and can become.

⁵ See, for example, Emmanuel A. F. Lacaba, “Winter After Summer Solstice: The Later Joaquin,” *Philippine Studies* 16/2 (1968), 381-390, 389.

⁶ See, for example, Nick Joaquin, “The Summer Solstice,” in *The Woman Who Had Two Navels and Tales from the Tropical Gothic*, 39-52.

⁷ See, for example, J. Neil Garcia, *Philippine Gay Culture: Binabae to Bakla, Silabis to MSM* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 2008), 33-34.

⁸ Vicente L. Rafael, *Motherless Tongues: The Insurgency of Language amid Wars of Translation* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2016), 59.

⁹ Nick Joaquin, “The Order of Melkizedek,” in *The Woman Who Had Two Navels and Tales from the Tropical Gothic*, 158-231.

¹⁰ Elmo Gonzaga, *Globalization and Becoming-Nation: Subjectivity, Nationhood, and Narrative in the Period of Global Capitalism* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 2009), 35.

¹¹ Gary Devilles and Jocelyn Martin, “Nick Joaquin Now: Texts, Contexts, Approaches,” *Kritika Kultura* 30 (2018): 411-417; 414.

In this process of “Filipino becoming,” Nick gave primacy to the Spanish-colonial experience, stressing a depth of influence that has been glossed over, as well as the creativity in the local appropriation or reinvention of this influence.¹²

Joaquin thus looked at Spengler in his efforts to bolster national pride in the face of colonial loss, rejoicing in colonial influence and positing Filipino hybridity (using this term, Mojares implies a connection, but neither he nor Joaquin himself make explicit reference to Homi Bhabha). Mojares advocates a re-reading of Joaquin’s “major intervention in historiography,” to attain a more pluralistic and heterogenous image of Philippine history.¹³ The ambivalence emerges that Joaquin is supposed to offer a more nuanced picture (hybridity, pluralism, heterogeneity), but does so in insistence on national pride and positive view of the colonial influence.

As I have argued elsewhere, Joaquin’s historiography tends to be more aligned with the nationalist mainstream than such assessments of him as an outsider suppose.¹⁴ The perception of Joaquin as an outsider must be partly attributed to his posturing as a “devil’s advocate.” Joaquin applied this term in the title of a collection of lectures and essays published under his penname Quijano de Manila, *Discourses of the Devil’s Advocate*, as well as in public speeches. For instance, his 1981 Thomas More Lecture held at the University of Santo Tomas in Manila, when he audaciously compared himself to the patron saint of that university:

Among the twelve Apostles, Thomas Didymus may be said to be the Devil’s Advocate, the skeptic who needs to save us from simply swallowing what may be error or delusion. [...] I have of late been engaged in delivering lectures on Philippine culture and history; and those lectures have been so controversial I have taken to announcing myself as the “Devil’s Advocate,” because the ideas and opinions I advance seem to shock the intellectual establishment. Yet all I’m doing is ask questions that, for some reason, have not been asked before.¹⁵

In broad strokes, the lecture made the same basic argument about Philippine history as *Culture and History*: the pre-colonial Philippines had been neglected by nearby Asian civilizations and only acquired a culture of sorts after the Spanish conquest (here referred to as the Christianization). Joaquin concludes that Christianity, instead of a foreign force of alienation, is itself at the roots of Philippine culture.

III. Philippine History, National Identity, and the Problem of the Foreign

With his historiography, Joaquin intervened in the debate on the proper place of the colonial past and foreign influences in the national narrative. Caroline Hau notes that Philippine nationalist discourses grapple with “an anxiety over “foreign influences” in Philippine culture,” a view that national history is “irreparably “contaminated” by its colonial encounter”

¹² Resil Mojares, “Discourses of the Devil’s Advocate: Nick Joaquin as Historian,” *Interrogations in Philippine Cultural History: The Ateneo de Manila Lectures* (Quezon city: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2017), 3-15, 10.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 15.

¹⁴ Hidde van der Wall, “The City as Nation: Nick Joaquin’s *Manila, My Manila* as Nationalist Historiography,” *Kritika Kultura* 33/34 (2019-2020): 226-246.

¹⁵ Quijano de Manila, “Technology: The Philippine Revolutions: The 1981 Thomas More Lecture, University of Santo Tomas,” in *Discourses of the Devil’s Advocate*, 183-200, 185.

which continues to subvert the post-colonial state.¹⁶ She argues that Joaquin's 1952 theater play *A Portrait of the Artist as Filipino* imagines an integrative approach to the challenge posed by foreign influence. His later historiography follows this cue. In the first pages of *Culture and History*, Joaquin states the problem that he seeks to address:

The problem of the Philippine historian is how to integrate what's felt to be a disagreeable first act into the national drama without making either the colonizer or the colonial embarrassingly prominent, and yet with no downplaying of their era; with the intent, in fact, of revealing how relevant, how important, that era was to us.¹⁷

With this statement, which implicitly reduces the precolonial to a mere preamble to the "national drama," Joaquin indicates his criticism of nativist views that downplay the colonial heritage. For him, such stances are grounded in a sense of embarrassment with the colonial legacy, which he seeks to address by emphasizing how technological innovations (introduced in the colonial period) helped locals shape a national community. Based on McLuhan's theory of how media transform societies, he calls such technology the tools "with which we acted and to which we reacted," hence even though this history centers on colonial domination "there would be no need to save national pride, since this would be purely Philippine history."¹⁸ He thus brands his history as a truly nationalist one, opposing the dominant nationalist unease over the colonial legacy, which may be summed up by Agoncillo's claim that "The more than three hundred years of Castilian overlordship did not yield for the Filipinos any degree of progress in the political, economic, social and agrarian fields."¹⁹

Agoncillo's argument, made shortly after formal independence from America, must be seen in its historical moment: Philippine history needed theoretical and methodological decolonization, to rid itself from Western models that dominated scholarly approaches.²⁰ Yet his *The Revolt of the Masses: The Story of Bonifacio and the Katipunan* (1956) initiated its own dogma. It "combined anticolonialism with a renewed emphasis on [...] "the Masses";" Lisandro Claudio argues. He blames this dogma for the failure of Filipino historians to produce critiques of nationalism from Marxist and subaltern approaches.²¹ Connecting "class positions with anticolonial nationalism,"²² Agoncillo imagined the masses as the mainstay of the nation: they constituted the true Filipino identity, and were driving force behind the revolution.²³ In *A Question of Heroes* (1977) Joaquin rejected this view by arguing that the revolution was mainly

¹⁶ Caroline S. Hau, *Necessary Fictions: Philippine Literature and the Nation, 1946-1980* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2000), 99-100.

¹⁷ Nick Joaquin, *Culture and History* (Pasig: Anvil, 2004), 7.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹⁹ Quoted in Reynaldo C. Ileto, "The Filipino Historian and the Unfinished Revolution," in *Reading Horacio de la Costa, SJ: Views from the 21st Century*, ed. Soledad S. Reyes (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2017), 117-142; 122.

²⁰ See Veric, *Children of the Postcolony*, 8-11, 20. The Agoncillo approach was dismissed by American scholars who professed a disinterested approach to historiography in avoidance of heeding to such decolonizing voices.

²¹ Lisandro E. Claudio, "Postcolonial Fissures and the Contingent Nation: An Antinationalist Critique of Philippine Historiography," *Philippine Studies: Historical & Ethnographic Viewpoints* 61/1 (2013): 45-75; 47-48.

²² Claudio, "Postcolonial Fissures and the Contingent Nation," 50.

²³ Filomeno Aguilar deems Agoncillo's assertion that the revolutionary Katipunan movement comprised of the "lowest stratum," "far from an accurate representation." Filomeno Aguilar Jr., "What Made the Masses Revolutionary?: Ignorance, character, and class in Teodoro Agoncillo's *The Revolt of the Masses*," *Philippine Studies* 68 (2020): 137-178; 141.

a bourgeois affair whose success depended on the organizing abilities of an elite that was fostered in a colonial process.²⁴ Claiming that the part of the 1896 revolution that was carried by the lower classes was limited to a single botched uprising, Joaquin jabs at Agoncillo: “Thus ended [...] no sooner than it started, the revolt of the masses.”²⁵

Agoncillo’s approach was panned in 1961 by the Jesuit historian Horacio De La Costa who criticized the “process of selection” by which historians sought to construct national identity along the lines of “such oversimplified categories as “foreign” and “indigenous”.”²⁶ Joaquin’s project expounds on De La Costa’s argument for a more diverse understanding of national identity and the revolution.²⁷

The left-wing nationalist discourse since Agoncillo linked class, nation and anticolonialism. This was often connected to a nativist longing for the pristine to which Joaquin objected: “Aboriginal purity is the phantom that haunts us.”²⁸ From the 1960s onwards, academics in the postcolony sought to drive out the specter of the foreign. The indigenization movement, as J. Neil Garcia argues, suffered from the “painful (and sobering) irony” that “rebellions against imperial knowledges” are often informed and fueled by “the very things they seek to challenge and reject”: “because the colonial is the “constitutive other” of the anticolonial, the contrary position that fancies itself the purest and most “native,” may well be the most colonially invested position of all.”²⁹ Nativism relies on the very dichotomy of native versus Western that was posited by colonialist discourses, and the imaginary of the “masses” as the true Filipinos untainted by foreign domination echoes colonial constructions of the pure but uncivilized native.

In his emphasis on Filipino agency in the colonial encounter, Joaquin has some affinity with Reynaldo Ileto’s 1979 *Pasyon and Revolution*. Ileto argued that the Philippines “creatively evolved its own brand of folk Christianity from which was drawn much of the language of anticolonialism in the late nineteenth century.”³⁰ Both Joaquin and Ileto show the colonial encounter as a site of transformation in which Filipinos adapted colonial introductions to suit their own needs. But while Ileto sees the essence of native culture unaltered by the specific forms that it took,³¹ Joaquin sees in these new cultural forms a whole new entity with a distinct soul, expressing a Spenglerian underlying metaphysics of history.³²

Although nationalist historians often opposed the Marcos dictatorship and were mostly left leaning, their project not only glosses over social and cultural heterogeneity but is also prone to being coopted by those in power. The nativist perspective was associated with Marcos’ project to write “a “truly” nationalist history that could help “repair the damage”

²⁴ Nick Joaquin, *A Question of Heroes* (Pasig: Anvil, 2005), 121 et *passim*.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 119.

²⁶ H. De La Costa, “History and Philippine Culture,” *Philippine Studies* 9/2 (1961): 346-354; 349.

²⁷ Joaquin, *Culture and History*, 333.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 75.

²⁹ J. Neil Garcia, “Nativism and Critical Theory: A Response to a Counter-Critique,” *The Postcolonial Perverse: Critiques of Contemporary Philippine Culture, Volume 1* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 2014), 68-83, 81.

³⁰ Reynaldo Clemeña Ileto, *Pasyon and Revolution: Popular Movements in the Philippines, 1840-1910* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2016 [1979]), 11-12.

³¹ Ileto argued that the vernacular text of Christ’s passion provided Filipinos with “a language for articulating their *own* values,” and: “After the destruction [...] of native epic traditions [...], Filipinos nevertheless continued to maintain a coherent image of the world and their place in it through their familiarity with the *Pasyon*, an epic that appears to be alien in content, but [...] reveals the vitality of the Filipino mind.” Ileto, *Pasyon*, 12.

³² Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West, Vol. I: Form and Actuality*, transl. Charles Francis Atkinson (New York: Knopf, 1926), 3.

wrought by the colonial experience,”³³ and justify the regime’s messianic historical vision: to bring about the rebirth of the great native culture whose eternal values would provide a common destiny. Entitled *Tadhana* (“Destiny”) the project, on which some of the foremost Filipino historians collaborated, sought to legitimize the regime through this palingenetic utopia.³⁴ Marcos’s vision was undercut by Joaquin’s notion of the Filipino form as result of the colonial encounter, an irreversible process that does not allow for a return to a pristine past. Joaquin’s history responds to both the Marcos-associated ethnonationalism and the anti-imperialist, class-based nationalism of the left-wing opposition. His provocation of nativism, then, can well be an attempt to overcome the implied monolithic, static and insular concept of culture, the notion of the nation as eternal instead of a socially constructed historical phenomenon, and to give a place to the foreign in the image of the nation without allowing this influence to diminish the national self-image.

III. Spengler and Postcolonial History

In opposing what he saw as two static views of Philippine history, Joaquin took to Spengler. But how does this conservative European thinker relate to Joaquin’s postcolonial situation?³⁵ Spengler’s discussions of empires in general (not just of the modern Western kind) rationalize and justify imperialism as the “natural current of expansive Civilization,” the product of destiny and “entirely futile to combat.”³⁶ For example, he presents the activities of Cecil Rhodes in Africa as a necessary phenomenon in the development of the West, heralding the Western version of the Roman and Qin Empires.³⁷ Imperialism in Spengler is accompanied by positive markers such as “glory” and “will.”³⁸ Acts of colonization like the Spanish conquests are romanticized as “dramas of uncontrollable longings for freedom, solitude, immense independence, and of giantlike contempt of all limitations whatsoever upon the home-feeling — these dramas are Faustian and only Faustian.”³⁹ While he laments the “tragedy” of the fall of Aztec culture, Spengler explains the annihilation by highlighting Aztec “feebleness of the will-to-power in the matter of technics,” as well as the Faustian “urge into distance” of the “forceful young civilization” of the West.⁴⁰ Thus, the Faustian “prime-symbol” of “Limitless Space”⁴¹ all but dictates that the West dominated the world: “The

³³ Rommel A. Curaming, “Contextual Factors in the Analysis of State-Historian Relations in Indonesia and the Philippines,” *Philippine Studies* 56/2 (2008): 123-150, 124.

³⁴ Gerard Lico, *Edifice Complex: Power, Myth, and Marcos State Architecture* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2003), 39.

³⁵ That Spengler’s philosophy of history was contentious among Filipino intellectuals can be gleaned from Marxist critic Edel Garcellano’s 1983 mockery of an epic poem by Cirilo Bautista about the sixteenth-century Spanish conquest of the Philippines, *Archipelago*, which he deems “a naked apologia for colonialism which [...] finds correlation in the *theological view of history as Spenglerian*, as in a cycle, a moral wheel that dissolves boundaries between good and evil, freedom and bondage.” Garcellano does not elaborate further, but what stands out is that Spengler seems to have been negatively connoted without needing such elaboration. Edel Garcellano, “Reportage on the State of Class War and Philippine Poetry,” *First Person, Plural* (Manila: self-published, 1987), 3-22, 13. Emphasis mine.

³⁶ Spengler, *The Decline of the West I*, 37. Note that by Civilization, Spengler means a stage in the late development of any culture. The quotation refers to ancient China which is here likened to modern imperialism.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 37-38.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 42, 337.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 336-337.

⁴⁰ Spengler, *The Decline of the West, Vol. II: Perspectives of World-History*, transl. Charles Francis Atkinson (New York: Knopf, 1928), 41-46.

⁴¹ Spengler, *The Decline of the West I*, 336-337.

discoveries of Columbus and Vasco da Gama extended the geographical horizon without limit [...]. Thenceforward the history of the Western Culture has a *planetary* character.”⁴² Anke Birkenmayer rightly calls Spengler “At heart an imperialist” who was “convinced of the natural expansion of “high cultures” over weaker ones”.⁴³

Spengler’s treatment of non-Western cultures and of cultural differences is paradoxical. His relativist insistence on the incomparability of cultures is at odds with his claim to establish universal laws of historical development.⁴⁴ This results in seemingly universal standards of comparison that (like what Philippine national hero, the novelist Jose Rizal called the “specter of comparisons”) uphold the West as the standard against which the rest is detrimentally judged. Wolfgang Krebs argues that for all Spengler’s pretense at taking a global perspective and being familiar with all cultures, globalization has discredited his insistence on the incommensurability of different cultures and exposed the provinciality of his thinking which did not transcend the narrow horizon of Western Europe or even just Germany.⁴⁵ Similarly, Kirk Wetters highlights the conventionality of Spengler’s thought over his seemingly inclusive attitude to non-Europeans:

Spengler’s relativist historicism includes non-European histories and developing ethnographic ideas, but he aims to produce a monolithic idea of History. [...] Spengler insists that his non-Eurocentric approach represents a “Copernican” revolution in the concept of history (UdA 24), but his terminology is conventional.⁴⁶

Rather than an inclusive, non-Eurocentric perspective then, Spengler imposes conventional European terms and standards on supposedly autonomous cultures.

A recourse on Spengler would hence hardly accommodate a conceptual decentering of Europe in the postcolonial world. Spengler’s idea of incommensurable cultural differences has an exclusive effect, reinforcing Eurocentrism. As Jörn Rüsen states: “Logically, cultures exclude each other. [...] Each culture is a clear borderline separating it from other cultures.”⁴⁷ For him, the problem of such a view is that “Since identity has always been grounded in difference from the otherness of others, the positive evaluation of oneself logically leads to a negative view of the otherness of others.”⁴⁸ For example, Spengler denies that “primitive man” possesses “*culture*” or can sense destiny.⁴⁹ Such an ethnocentric concept would also view Philippine native culture in a negative light — which may explain Joaquin’s insistence on the Faustian soul of the Philippines and his downplaying of the native legacy. Moreover, this notion of culture precludes the hybridity and dynamic entanglements of (post-)colonial cultures, which clashes with Joaquin’s critique of the essentialism of nationalist historiographic traditions. If cultures are unique and self-contained, how to account for the

⁴² Ibid., 334.

⁴³ Anke Birkenmayer, “Scenarios of Colonialism and Culture: Oswald Spengler’s Latin America,” *MLN* 128/2 (2013): 256-276.

⁴⁴ See Gregory Morgan Swer, “Timely Meditations?: Oswald Spengler’s Philosophy of History Reconsidered,” *Prolegomena* 17/2 (2018): 137-154.

⁴⁵ Wolfgang Krebs, “Kultur, Musik und der ‘Untergang des Abendlandes’: Bemerkungen zu Oswald Spenglers Geschichtsphilosophie,” *Archiv für Musikwissenschaft* 55 (1998): 311-331; 329.

⁴⁶ Kirk Wetters, *Demonic History: From Goethe to the Present* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2014), 95.

⁴⁷ Jörn Rüsen, “How to Overcome Ethnocentrism: Approaches to a Culture of Recognition by History in the Twenty-First Century,” *History and Theory* 43/4 (2004): 118-129; 120.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 120.

⁴⁹ Spengler, *Decline of the West I*, 55, 117.

dynamic foreign influences that, as Joaquin presumed, shaped the Philippines, unless we also accept the hegemony of a supposedly advanced West?

Despite such apparent difficulties from a postcolonial perspective, Joaquin is not the only non-Western writer to take interest in Spengler. In Latin America, a part of the world that like the Philippines emerged from Spanish colonialism and struggles with US-American hegemony, a number of intellectuals built on Spengler.⁵⁰ Spengler was instrumental for the Cuban writer Alejo Carpentier in constructing a Latin-American culture that was independent of Europe.⁵¹ To authors like Carpentier who were tired of being seen as culturally backward, Spengler provided the perspective that “if Europe was in decline, Latin America must be in an earlier, more promising stage of her own independent evolution.”⁵² Going further than such a straightforward conclusion, writers also took their cue from Spengler to look at history for the symbolic forms that might constitute their cultures.⁵³ Lloyd King notes that to the Mexican intellectual Alfonso Reyes, “the notion of the decline of the West suggested that America was destined to be the future abode of the World Spirit *since it had always been open to the heritage of Europe.*”⁵⁴ Birkenmayer concludes that writers in Latin America who read Spengler “devised ideas of self and other that said more about their hopes for their own culture than about their understanding of universal patterns of history.”⁵⁵ The same could be said of Joaquin, who modified Spengler in devising his own aspirations for and constructions of Philippine culture.

Spengler's philosophy inspires such reinterpretations and adaptations, but the contradictions that are central to it also permeate the ideas of his postcolonial followers. Spengler's morphology helped Joaquin construct his idea of the Filipino as a unique, organic cultural form originated in the colonial setting. But it also entailed a teleological concept of history as destiny, which in Spengler justified Western imperialism, and an organizing of history in inescapable patterns that deny the historical agency of those who fought foreign hegemony. The natural trajectory of Spenglerian cultural forms, following a life cycle of birth, blossoming, decline and eventual fall could have two opposing implications: either the old Western civilization is about to be replaced by new ones like the Filipino, or Filipino form is already established and decline is about to commence. From Joaquin's vigorous participation in shaping Filipino identities, we may infer that he was not inclined towards the latter option, but he does not propose the former either. And invoking the Faustian would imply a Filipino subservience to the foreign form, which Spengler saw as destined to decline. Which leads us to Joaquin's treatment of Spengler's cultural pessimism. While there is no sense of doom or decline in Joaquin, he does mourn the supposed loss of the Spanish-Baroque connotated culture of the colonial elites. As Joaquin ignores Spengler's imperialism, his adaptation of Spengler's concepts to a new context also imports some of their contradictions into his argument.

IV. Mythology of the Filipino Faustian

Far from new in *Culture and History*, Joaquin used the term Faustian in the 1981 lecture cited above to refer to a Western sense of time and history: summing up the characteristics of Christian Philippine culture, he named, among several technologies, “calendar and clock and

⁵⁰ See Lloyd King, “An Aesthetics of the Caribbean Basin: The Carpentier Perspective,” *Caribbean Quarterly* 31 (1985): 64-72; 65.

⁵¹ Birkenmayer, “Scenarios of Colonialism and Culture,” 258.

⁵² Roberto Gonzalez Echavarría, quoted in King, “An Aesthetics of the Caribbean Basin,” 65.

⁵³ Birkenmayer, “Scenarios of Colonialism and Culture,” 258.

⁵⁴ King, “An Aesthetics of the Caribbean Basin,” 65.

⁵⁵ Birkenmayer, “Scenarios of Colonialism and Culture,” 258.

recorded history and our sense of Faustian time.”⁵⁶ This view echoed in the later book, where he dismisses the idea that a pre-colonial sense of timelessness continues in the national habit of late-coming: a pre-colonial would not even understand late-coming, Joaquin claims, as it means “speaking in terms of the Faustian time that has since entered our culture.”⁵⁷ He thus posits, in a Spenglerian argument,⁵⁸ that having a sense of time and history sets the modern Filipino consciousness apart from original native culture, an indication of its supposed Faustian quality. This sense of historical time, with the symbolic significance of dates, fostered a “Philippine historical culture” and a “sense of community,” Joaquin concludes.⁵⁹

For Spengler, the Faustian describes the unique and characteristic “soul” of the West, based on the prime symbol of “pure limitless space,”⁶⁰ which extends into the distance and engenders a will-to-power, associated with a deepest consciousness of the “I” as the “center of the world.”⁶¹ This soul permeates all of Western culture, from its mathematics’ “*Faustian* tendency towards the infinite”⁶² to the grand scale of its architecture: a “style which drives through walls into the limitless universe of space.”⁶³ The resulting “Faustian Morale” is supposed to lack any trace of the “slave-morale,” instead producing “a long series of granite-men.”⁶⁴ Unsurprisingly, Spengler claims such strong traits for the West in favorable comparison with other cultures.

Joaquin claimed Faustian audacity in a 1977 speech to the nominees of a national playwriting award. He took aim at the nativist view that, as he saw it, lambasted Christian Filipinos (the vast majority of the population) for being out-of-touch with true indigeneity.⁶⁵ Joaquin by contrast distinguished a specific quality of “the Christian Filipino,” who would have the tendency to rise to and above challenges:

He can’t help it [...] He’s *sga* [proud], [...] he’s (here comes that fifty-peso word) Faustian. If he really sold his soul — well, devil take the hindmost!⁶⁶

The Faustian audacity to think big and beyond adversity, he continues, prompted the Filipinos to protest the denigration of national identity in the aftermath of the American colonization. Joaquin thus started employing the Faustian trope to contest a perceived double threat to national dignity: foreign domination itself, but also, and more importantly, what he saw as the denigration of existing Filipino culture by nativist desires to recover pristine indigeneity. In the face of such claims of cultural decline (from pure indigenous to corrupted colonial), he foresees a defiant attitude. If the Faustian meant aiming for greater things, Joaquin implies, Filipinos happily sold their indigenous soul to the colonial devil — which indicates how his adapting of Spengler’s terminology also entailed adopting its imperialist thrust.

⁵⁶ Quijano de Manila, “Technology: The Philippine Revolutions,” 200.

⁵⁷ Joaquin, *Culture and History*, 13.

⁵⁸ Spengler, *The Decline of the West I*, 11. Spengler had asserted that Indian “Brahmanian” differs from Western “Faustian” culture in that it knows no calendar and is fully ahistorical.

⁵⁹ Joaquin, *Culture and History*, 17.

⁶⁰ Gregory Swer, “The Revolt Against Reason: Oswald Spengler and Violence as a Cultural Perspective,” *The Philosophical Journal of Conflict and Violence* vol.3, no.2 (2019): 122-148; 127.

⁶¹ Spengler, *The Decline of the West I*, 310, 344, 350.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 75.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 224.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 349.

⁶⁵ Quijano de Manila. “Apologia Pro Tribu Sua: Discourse at the Palihang Aurelio Tolentino, June 1977,” *Discourses of the Devil’s Advocate & Other Controversies* (Mandaluyong: Cacho Hermanos, 1983), 1-10.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 8.

In *Culture and History*, Joaquin invokes Faustian traits to describe the cultural transformation brought about by the coming of Spain. Supposedly ignorant of masonry and architecture in the sixteenth century, by the eighteenth century, Filipinos took “pride” in their construction of “earthquake baroque” cathedrals, “noble” town halls, “massive” and “audacious” structures.⁶⁷ He goes on to claim:

Spengler cites among the things that characterize a culture its *choice of materials*. And a time-traveling Spengler who, after visiting us in pre-1521 and observing our choice of materials then (the soft, the perishable) and our style (small-scale, stolid), was transported to the late 18th century and found us building in hardwood and stone, and building big, high, massive and spirited, would reasonably conclude that the Philippines in the 18th century was inhabited by a race different from that which there dwelt before 1521. A similar conclusion might be made from a study of Philippine painting, where again, in an art previously unknown and alien to us, we were to become so adept that painting (which Spengler regards, along with contrapuntal music, as the most Faustian form of utterance) has become the premier art in our culture.⁶⁸

The supposed transformation is one from (native) mediocrity to the greatness associated with the Faustian. This suggests a student-teacher relationship between the colonial Philippines and Spain — a central trope of imperialist discourses. Another essay in *Culture and History* connects Faustian soulfulness and infinity drive with the idea of the nation:

The Conversion shattered for us the Magian cave of Tribe, from which we emerged Faustians, still infant Faustians it may be, but already evolving with the infinite *I* within, which we call soul, and the infinite *we* without, which we call nation.⁶⁹

This image of a Magian cave in which the pre-colonial “tribes” dwelled, reminds of both Plato’s allegory and Spengler’s idea that the expansive Faustian worldview differs from the Magian one in which all happening is felt as “expression of mysterious powers that filled the world-cavern.”⁷⁰ Pre-colonial, tribal culture (the seed of the nation in nativist historiography) is thus associated with this limited worldview, unable to imagine the larger community of the nation. Joaquin goes on to argue that one of the foremost nationalist heroes, the ruler Lapu-Lapu of Mactan island who killed Ferdinand Magellan in 1521, cannot be called a nationalist as he was “defending a local habitation he could personally encompass. But the nationalist is a madder chap. He worships and will defend a mystical extent of space that ultimately has no boundaries.”⁷¹ In rebuttal of nationalist skepticism of the colonial influence, Joaquin makes nationalism itself a product of the Faustian culture supposedly introduced by the colonization he euphemizes and sanctions as a “Conversion.”

With its supposed drive for greatness, the notion of the Faustian Filipino also becomes a remedy to the supposed indigenous “Heritage of Smallness” Joaquin scorned in an essay from 1966, one year after Marcos came to power. Defying the president’s trumpeting of national

⁶⁷ Joaquin, *Culture and History*, 14-15.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁶⁹ Joaquin, *Culture and History*, 114.

⁷⁰ Spengler, *The Decline of the West I*, 247.

⁷¹ Joaquin, *Culture and History*, 115.

greatness,⁷² Joaquin starts off by claiming: “Society for the Filipino is a small rowboat: the *barangay*.”⁷³ Reading history from cultural form, he supposes that the small scale of native social organization and cultural artefacts reflected a “smallness of spirit,” a lack of ambition and inability to think big, on which he blames the country’s perceived political disunity: “This attitude [...] explains why we’re finding it so hard to become a nation, and why our pagan forefathers could not even imagine the task.”⁷⁴ The opposition to Marcos’s aim to find greatness and common destiny in the indigenous heritage is clear. While Joaquin makes no reference to Spengler, the essay already has morphologic elements in its deducting historical claims from cultural forms, and reprinted in *Culture and History*, the notion of indigenous smallness is pitted against the type of the modern-colonial, Faustian Filipino that the book proposes. A return to native traditions would in this view mean a return not to greatness but to smallness.

Joaquin’s advocating of the idea of the Faustian Filipino degrades pre-colonial society and overlooks the violence of not just the colonial state, but also the Spanish conquest: “had there been no disruption from the outside” Filipinos would have remained “squatters within a static culture.”⁷⁵ He seems pleased with the “declension” of this precolonial culture. Against those who argued that native culture persisted after the conquest in ways that were more substantial to the majority than the colonial veneer, Joaquin invokes Spengler: such “terms and tokens from the old culture,” he argues, would not “disprove its declension,” since “such survivals, as Spengler has observed, may not be as true as they look and function differently in their new context.”⁷⁶ Little mention of the violent causes of such declension which he, in a Spenglerian invocation of destiny, calls inevitable: “we would sooner or later have emerged from tribalism.”⁷⁷ He thus contrasts native pre-colonial, “Magian” and small-minded tribalism to the colonial, “Faustian” and advancing nation.⁷⁸ Consequently, he is dismissive of “tribal” people in the mountainous and remote areas of the archipelago that did not get subjected to Spain, seen by nationalist discourses (and by colonial scholarship) as preserving native culture in pristine, uncorrupted form:

if our true history lies beyond the span and sphere of the colonizers, then Philippine history should be the history of these uncolonialized Filipinos. Why is it, then, that they have no history to show as do their corrupted brothers?⁷⁹

⁷² In his 1965 inaugural speech, Marcos proclaimed: “This nation can be great again. This I have said over and over. It is my article of faith, and Divine Providence has willed that you and I can now translate this faith into deeds. [...] We must renew the vision of greatness for our country.” Ferdinand E. Marcos, *Inaugural Address of his Excellency Ferdinand E. Marcos. Delivered at the Quirino Grandstand, Manila, December 30, 1965*, www.officialgazette.gov.ph/1965/12/30/inaugural-address-of-president-marcos-december-30-1965/ (accessed April 17, 2022).

⁷³ Joaquin, *Culture and History*, 351.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 356-357.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 67.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 114.

⁷⁸ In a text commemorating the 400th anniversary of the founding of colonial Manila on the site of the destroyed precolonial town, Joaquin writes: “Where a Magian maze had been, a cluster of arabesques, Legazpi implanted Faustian geometry.” Nick Joaquin, “400 Years A City,” quoted in E. San Juan, Jr., *Subversions of Desire: Prolegomena to Nick Joaquin* (Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1988), 77-78. Note how Joaquin’s title denies the pre-colonial settlement the status of city, and hence of civilization.

⁷⁹ Joaquin, *Culture and History*, 76.

In identifying the Filipino as Faustian, possessing a sense of time and history, Joaquin eradicates the historicity and agency of the “uncolonialized” people of the archipelago. He even comes to demean the passivity and physical appearance of the Igorot, a group in the high mountains of northern Luzon: “the Igorot, with his stunted figure, his calloused behind and his mouthful of decayed teeth, makes a rather pathetic symbol.”⁸⁰ A dubious departure from his culturalist argument, passing judgement on the indigenous body. The image of this emasculated native sitting passively by the side of the road resounds the imperialist myth of native laziness.⁸¹

Joaquin employs Spengler’s notion of a culture’s “soul” in constructing a Filipino national culture taking form in the colonial encounter with Spain.⁸² For Spengler, “visible history is the expression, sign and embodiment of soul,”⁸³ and history can uncover the soul of an entire culture.⁸⁴ For Joaquin too, the soul is knowable and, once formed, unchangeable as indicated by his retort to the idea that the American takeover might have changed national culture: “once the identity had been formed, no invasion could have changed what was now a Philippine soul.”⁸⁵ But Joaquin’s assertion that this soul stays the same⁸⁶ seems to disregard the Spenglerian dictum that any culture’s soul will at one point degrade into civilization’s intellect.⁸⁷ Instead, he sees the Philippine soul as unalterable destiny:

As Spengler sees it, when diverse elements fuse into a unit that begins to feel *itself* a culture-community, a people, a nation, then a “soul” has been born, unique and organic, having grown from a parent soil, and with so imperious a sense of destiny and identity that even should the people possessing (and possessed by) that soul deny it or resist it or try to change it, these very denials and revolts will only advance the destiny of that identity, as every change will at last be found to have merely evolved the identity on a farther plane.⁸⁸

Joaquin thus shifts Spengler’s theory on the formation of (larger) cultures into one on national becoming,⁸⁹ to deny the possibility that American rule changed the Philippine soul attained under Spain. In so doing, he treats the American colonial period in the same way that nativists (in his opinion) treat the Spanish one. His insistence on the inalterability of culture bars him from considering what shifts, connections, or conflicts might have resulted from American hegemony (in a Spenglerian view, the American period may be theorized to have inaugurated the shift from Philippine “culture” to “civilization”).

⁸⁰ Ibid., 92.

⁸¹ See: Syed Hussein Alatas, *The Myth of the Lazy Native: A Study of the Image of the Malays, Filipinos and Javanese from the 16th to the 20th Century and Its Function in the Ideology of Colonial Capitalism* (London: Frank Cass, 1977).

⁸² Joaquin, *Culture and History*, 22.

⁸³ Spengler, *The Decline of the West I*, 6.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 9.

⁸⁵ Joaquin, *Culture and History*, 22.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 22-23.

⁸⁷ Spengler holds up the example of Greek “Culture” and Roman “Civilization”: “In a word, Greek *soul* – Roman *intellect*; and this antithesis is the differentia between Culture and Civilization.” Spengler, *The Decline of the West I*, 32.

⁸⁸ Joaquin, *Culture and History*, 23-24.

⁸⁹ Throughout *The Decline of the West*, Spengler sees cultures, not nations or peoples, as the main units of historical development. See also John Farrenkopf, “Spengler’s Historical Pessimism and the Tragedy of Our Age,” *Theory and Society* 22/3 (1993): 391-412; 394.

Spengler's mystic "equation of history, nature and destiny,"⁹⁰ informs Joaquin's mystical view of Philippine history. Joaquin calls history "the mystic fuel on which the nation runs," providing the metaphors in which "the past lives as a continuous present: history as culture."⁹¹ Instead of questioning the politics of mythmaking, Joaquin takes on the task to provide these metaphors. He spins the myths of Philippine history as national destiny, in which the colony and the Philippine identity that was supposedly being formed there were continuously beleaguered. The Philippine form was supposedly embattled from its very inception, from the outside by "the effort of Dutchman, Englishman, Chinese Corsair and Moro pirate,"⁹² which Joaquin exaggerated to such dramatic proportions that the colony needed divine intervention to be saved.⁹³ But he saw the threat also coming from the inside as anticolonial rebellions supposedly showcased not a resistance to foreign domination but "a resistance to *form*: we resisted becoming "Philippine" or "Filipino"; we would revert to petty kingdom, tribe, clan, barangay."⁹⁴ He pits the anticolonial movements against the emerging nation. The historical mythmaking complements the concept of history as process, producing a teleology.

V. History as Process and *Telos*

Spengler problematically organized history in what Kirk Wetters calls "a fabric of historical parallels, which are totalized into a supposedly inescapable pattern."⁹⁵ This inescapable concept of history echoes in Joaquin's work. For instance, on Jose Rizal's refusal to join the revolution of 1896, Joaquin comments: "Our greatest anti-hero [...] had *rejected history*."⁹⁶ Such a notion of history as decree clashes with the intent to describe how colonized Filipinos acted with agency in shaping their culture. This is not a history driven by human agency, but one ensnared by mysterious and overwhelming forces.

In a 1979 public lecture, Joaquin commented on the plight of Philippine literature in English being lambasted as un-Filipino and out-of-touch with indigenous languages. Three years into the *Tadhana* project, his discussion must be seen in the context of the Marcos regime's approach to identity which complicated the status of writers like himself who wrote in the language of a former colonial power. He begins by reminding his audience that writing in English was once associated with "making us free, modern, democratic, scientific, nationalistic and progressive." This did not sit well with Joaquin who invokes the idea of history as irrevocable process to defend a different tutor:

This attitude was expressed in the remark that it took over 300 years of Spanish culture to produce a Rizal [the late-19th century novelist and national hero] but only 30 years of American culture to produce a Villa [Philippines' most famous poet in English]. In that remark is the overwhelming complacency that the Greeks called hubris, along with a *woeful*

⁹⁰ Wetters, *Demonic History*, 112.

⁹¹ Joaquin, *Culture and History*, 204.

⁹² Nick Joaquin, *A Question of Heroes* (Pasig: Anvil, 2005), 162.

⁹³ For example, his life-long obsession with La Naval de Manila, the feast commemorating the intervention of the Virgin Mary in a battle with Dutch corsairs who were supposedly intent on annexing the Philippines to their Asian empire (a threat Joaquin likely exaggerated). When successful, the Philippine form would be annulled, is the implication — and hence a clash between Spanish and Dutch colonizers is trumped up to one for the survival of a nation that not yet was. See van der Wall, "The City as Nation."

⁹⁴ Joaquin, *A Question of Heroes*, 162. Emphasis mine.

⁹⁵ Wetters, *Demonic History*, 95.

⁹⁶ Joaquin, *A Question of Heroes*, 118. My emphasis.

*misunderstanding of the historical process. Surely the over 300 years of Spain also went into the making of Villa?*⁹⁷

In response to the allegations of it being un-Filipino, Joaquin expresses the need for Filipino literature in English to “assert its roots outside of American culture” and “assert its continuity with the rest of our history,” lest it be seen as a “deviation, an alienation, a break from our true culture.”⁹⁸ In his reclaiming the Filipino-ness of literature in English, he conceives of Filipino identity as the result of long historical processes which replaced an oral with a written culture.⁹⁹ E. San Juan, Jr. criticizes Joaquin for excluding “the vernacular writers whose oral style, unaffected by the superior visual tradition of Spanish and English writing, possesses no “sense of history.”¹⁰⁰ Joaquin’s lecture indeed shows how his insistence on process and becoming, combined with the Faustian concept of a sense of history, negatively impacts on the indigenous tradition.

A similar concept of history as inescapable process emerges in *A Question of Heroes*. Its discussion of Antonio Luna, the chemist-turned-general in the Philippine-American War, who came from an elite family (his brother Juan gained international fame as a painter), hinges on Luna’s entrenchment in “three centuries” of history. Opposing the view that Luna was a revolutionary, Joaquin calls his actions “conservatory”: in its initial phase under Spain, Luna apparently rejected the Revolution, but when “the [American] Gringo loomed sinister,” he sought to “repel the invader” and conserve “what had been given form, the form we call Philippine.”¹⁰¹ Spain, already part of the imagined Philippine form, is not seen as foreign (nor sinister), which ties in with the kind of nation that Joaquin imagined: one based on and achieved by the elite classes of the Spanish colonial state, emanating from the colonial center, and with its own trademark Catholic character.

In *Culture and History*, Joaquin again emphasizes “the process [...] in the making of the nation” and claims it was propelled by the “technics” introduced in the centers of the colony.¹⁰² Which leads him to one of his most-cited statements:

History has our dates down in black and white, and knows that the Filipino, because he was created in the 16th and 17th centuries by a tool-forged fusion of tribes from Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao; Spanish and Chinese mestizos [...], cannot be traced farther back than that fusion and that form [...]. Before 1521 we could have been anything and everything *not* Filipino; after 1565 we can be nothing *but* Filipino.¹⁰³

The process goes back to the establishment of Spanish dominance over the Philippines: the arrival of Magellan in 1521 and the conquest by Legazpi in 1565, and the result appears inevitable. He then applies this view to once again reject the idea that American culture could fundamentally alter the course of Philippine identity:

the Filipino [...] did not, and could not, waver, for the simple reason that he could not go against history, which had decreed *him*. Against such a decree,

⁹⁷ Quijano de Manila, “What Price our writing in English?”, *Discourses of the Devil's Advocate*, 65-74, 66. Emphasis mine.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 67.

¹⁰⁰ San Juan, *Subversions of Desire*, 12.

¹⁰¹ Joaquin, *A Question of Heroes*, 162.

¹⁰² Joaquin, *Culture and History*, 19.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 21.

thinks Spengler, any effort at resistance will be as futile as a try to stop time.¹⁰⁴

Note the male connotation of national identity. Thus, drawing on Spengler, Joaquin makes a proclamation of destiny:

Until the Filipino fulfills whatever destiny was appointed for the genius of his race, he can only develop, with ever greater clarity and confidence the face (or fate) defined once and for all [...] during the 16th and 17th centuries.¹⁰⁵

Unlike Faustian culture in the declining West, Filipino culture apparently still has a potential to fulfill. Like Spengler, Joaquin ostentatiously attacks essentialist and static concepts of culture,¹⁰⁶ only to enforce a new essentialism of his own. This transpires when he, after once more highlighting (with reference to Spengler's "The method of a science is the science itself") the historical process in which technology fosters culture, claims that Filipinos only acquired Asian culture due to colonial-era trade:

Our problem is in the process, or rather, in history as a *becoming*, for what we cannot accept is that we *became* Filipino any more than we can accept that we *became* Asian.¹⁰⁷

While he dismisses the idea of a given primordial Filipino-Asian identity, he does wield the homogenizing "we" who during the colonial period became, and hence now are Asian and Filipino, which then do appear as tangible identities in the present. This way he avoids questioning the power dynamics involved in the continuing construction of such categories. Instead, he posits a "single culture" that developed from the supposed fusion of Western and Asian elements in the colonial Philippines, "an interfusion that Spengler would call soul-formation."¹⁰⁸ Once such a soul is formed, its substance is unchangeable in Joaquin's vision.

Invoking morphology allows Joaquin to proclaim a unique national form and debunk the belittling trope of Philippine culture as an unoriginal "soulless" copy of Western examples. In both colonial and neo-colonial writings, this trope posits the West as the original, justifying its tutelage of a copy culture that does not understand the forms it seeks to emulate. Joaquin instead insisted on the specific form of Philippine culture — a fusion of indigenous, Western-colonial, and Asian elements, but its own original.

VI. Modernity

Joaquin advocates the legacy of the Spanish colonial past over the continuing American hegemony. But his skepticism of America does not entail a Spenglerian apprehension of modernity.¹⁰⁹ As John D. Blanco notes, the critique of modernity in the Philippine context are closely tied with that of colonialism: as modernization was held up as an aspiration to the decolonizing Third World, intellectuals noted its resulting destabilizations and economic

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 23.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 24.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 48, 50

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 47.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ See David Rosner, *Conservatism and Crisis: The Anti-Modernist Perspective in Twentieth-Century German Philosophy* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2013), 11-14.

dependence, which associated it with the broken promises of colonialism.¹¹⁰ In this context, Blanco argues, Joaquin's literary "celebration and lamentation" of the Spanish legacy may seem bizarre, but must be seen as a provocation to "rethink our very notion of the modern, and the insufficiency of both postcolonial and anti-colonial critique to fully account for the present of the past in Philippine culture."¹¹¹ Joaquin embraced a modern Philippines in which the past constitutes and enchants the present.

In his optimistic take on modernity, Joaquin indulged in modern popular culture, and experimented with cultural and stylistic innovations. The novella *Cándido's Apocalypse* is instructive.¹¹² Bobby, the 17-year-old son of a middle-class family in 1960s Manila, has grown tired of the pretension surrounding him: the artificial, out-of-touch Americanness of their suburban gated-community lifestyle, encapsulated in his English first name. After learning that in pre-American times, given names were derived from the saint whose feast coincided with one's birthday, he privately takes on a new, supposedly authentic name: Cándido. He starts to imagine seeing the world through the eyes of this alter ego. While Cándido's eyes literally see through the facades that people put up to blend in with polite society and even bring him in a close encounter with God, his return to a pre-modern colonial identity brings Bobby/Cándido no solace. A two-day delirium — in which he runs away from home, insults his teachers, and almost kills a member of a rival youth gang — finishes with his acceptance of the status quo, the name Bobby and the previously despised monikers "mommy" and "dad." Like other writings by Joaquin, *Cándido's Apocalypse* presents fascination with youth culture, exemplified in its playful use of slang and invention of English-Tagalog neologisms. The positive view of modernity is also captured in the novella's modernist style, using multiple focalization and cinematic montage. Even if Americanism and modernity appear out-of-touch, meaningless and dishonest, they have become, however superficially, part of the garden that must be cultivated.

Conclusion

Adapting the ideas of Oswald Spengler, Nick Joaquin developed a historical morphology of the Philippine nation. He regarded the Philippines as an organic cultural form born during the late-sixteenth to eighteenth centuries from the clash of a supposedly primitive native society with the colonizer's European culture. The product of a colonial process of cultural formation, the Filipino identity he imagined was "Faustian": audacious and expansive as opposed to the supposed modesty and smallness of native traditions. Joaquin does not adopt Spengler's criticism of modernity and refrains from using history to predict the future. The cultural pessimism of Spengler seems a far cry from Joaquin's playful literary style. Instead of the doom visions of Spengler, Joaquin's adaptation of his historical philosophy may contain a more optimistic outlook: the past continues to be present in the form of a distinct and independent identity befitting the modern postcolonial nation. The Philippine identity he thus proclaimed departed from the ones proposed by both the Marcos regime and its left-wing opponents, as well as the main directions historiography took after democracy was restored.

Joaquin's reworking of Spengler may be seen as an opportunistic appropriation from the postcolony of discursive elements drawn from an authoritative figure of the hegemonic culture. Drawing on Spengler allowed Joaquin to assert a Philippine national culture that

¹¹⁰ John D. Blanco, "Baroque Modernity and the Colonial World: Aesthetics and Catastrophe in Nick Joaquin's *A Portrait of the Artist as Filipino*," *Kritika Kultura* 4 (2004): 5-35; 12.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 14.

¹¹² Nick Joaquin, "Cándido's Apocalypse," *The Woman Who Had Two Navels and Tales of the Tropical Gothic* (New York: Penguin Classics, 2017), 232-290.

integrated both the colonial experience and indigenous legacy. But Spengler's views on non-Western people are contradictory, upholding Western standards despite ostensible relativism, and his philosophy of historical stages of development ultimately justifies imperialism. While the Spenglerian maxim that all cultures develop following their own internal logic and have their own specific form means that none can be regarded as inherently superior to the other, notions of cultures having a destiny, soul, life cycle, and universal stages of development reintroduce colonial schemes, reinforce social hierarchies in the postcolony, and present history in a teleological manner.

Adopting Spengler's ideas hence gave rise to key complications for the identity that Joaquin hammered out. Purportedly rejecting essentialism and proposing hybridity, he spins his own homogenizing narratives, which are driven by a metaphysical sense of destiny, making the nation the inevitable result of a history of original primitivity and colonial tutelage. He disparaged the nativist perspective, which regarded indigenous pre-colonial culture as the only truly Filipino one, and the left-wing equation of nation and social class, as well as connected idealizations of non-Christian "tribes" and the "masses." But in seeking a more complex picture, he all but throws out the native legacy altogether, reducing it to a "heritage of smallness," a weak basis for a nation. Calling Philippine culture Faustian, i.e., Western, implicitly admits that the described historical processes were problematically one-sided. In claiming such historical processes as irreversible and necessary facts, Joaquin depoliticizes the colonial situation, overlooking the violence of the conquest and the oppression colonial state. Protesting problematic legacies of the country's colonial history, such as unequal economic, gender and political power relations, is made all but pointless by the concept of history as an inescapable process. In fact, Joaquin ignores questions of political and economic power relations, class-based analyses of national history, and other crevices in the postcolonial nation. His reliance on Spengler thus re-inscribes ethnocentrism, patriarchy, and class domination into the national narrative.

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