

CONSTANTINO, ERNESTO. 1982. *Isinay text and translations.*

Tokyo: Institute for the Study of Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa. Pp. 516.

Reviewed by Isagani R. Cruz, De La Salle University

There are less than ten thousand Isinays in the Philippines, yet the literature written in the Isinay language cannot be said to be negligible in the field of vernacular Filipino literature. The legends, folktales, riddles, proverbs, folksongs, prayers, and a full-length play collected and translated by linguist Ernesto Constantino span the whole range of folk literature and even venture into what is known (inaccurately) as 'mainstream literature'.

Isinay Texts and Translations prints Constantino's phonetic transcription of tapes taken during a 15-year research project funded first by the University of the Philippines and then by the National Research Council of the Philippines. The Isinay texts, including written material such as diaries, are then translated by Constantino in the usual bilingual edition manner opposite the originals. There is a sketchy introduction, but the main value of the book lies in the heretofore unknown Isinay literary texts.

Isinay stories turn out to be strikingly familiar. The folktales, legends, ghost stories, fables, and 'oral histories' (as Constantino calls them) are variants of texts already found in other ethnolinguistic groups. Unlike more ethnically 'pure' versions in other groups, however, the Isinay texts are relatively heavily 'corrupted' by Christian references, perhaps a result of the group's current Christian character. Similarly, the riddles and proverbs are variants of well-known Philippine proverbs, except for texts which clearly come from a time not earlier than the eighteenth century. Examples of Christianized proverbs are: 'There's always an end to all, like the saying of "Amen Jesus" of the one praying' (194-95) and 'A child who's kind will always be helped by God' (196-97). It is interesting that proverbs are sometimes referred to by the Isinays as 'proverb', a sign that the Isinay literary sensibility is modern.

More interesting are the Isinay songs, which gain complexity and merit because of Christian influences. The long poems 'We Who Are Here Suffering' (232-37) and 'Hymn to Our Mother Saint Catalina, Virgin and Mother' (235-45) successfully blend folk musical tradition and western Christian influence. Not surprisingly, two of the songs collected by Constantino are Christmas carols, adapted from 'Whispering Hope' (244-47) and 'Silent Night' (246-47).

Some historical value can be attached to the personal narratives and diaries transcribed and translated by Constantino. The three narratives about the Second World War are particularly revealing, with graphic material about Japanese atrocities. Also of interest to researchers, particularly anthropologists, should be the short section on 'Old Customs'. Similarly, the prayers taken from an 1876 *Catecismo* should prove invaluable to those who take a historical linguistic view of Isinay, since—as Constantino points out—'this *Catecismo* uses many "old" words and expressions which cannot be understood by present-day Isinays except for a very few old ones' (11).

But the most significant text in the whole book, from a literary point of view, is the 'comedia-estoque-Isinay' entitled *Bilay Don Juan Pugut si Reynoar Escocia* (Life of Don Juan Pugut of the Kingdom of Escocia), technically belonging to the *komedya* genre. There are very few *komedya* texts currently in print. This Isinay one, being typical of the genre, should help advance the field already well-explored by researchers such as Nicanor Tiongson in *Kasaysayan ng Komedya sa Pilipinas: 1766-1982* (1982).

The field of vernacular literature cannot but be expanded with the publication of this seminal work by Constantino.