

Research Article

Narratives of Hope During the Japanese-Philippine War in the Plains of Central Luzon: A Content Analysis of 'The Plowman', 1945

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ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes the articles published in *The Plowman*, which is the official student organ of the Central Luzon Agricultural School (1907), now Central Luzon State University (1960). The purpose of this study is to determine the narratives of Filipino students on their experiences and views on the historical context of 1945, which is the end of the Japanese occupation. Data coding was used to collect and analyze data in relation to the extent of coverage and content of 30 articles in the organ. Analysis of the articles shows that hope is the common theme for all the articles. Hopes were expressed through narratives of capture and escape from Japanese soldiers, revitalization of arts in the campus, rebuilding peace and order, and creating institutional changes for education. This study reexplores the life of students during and aftermath of the Japanese Occupation and the period of American influence in the school, which is important to understand the colonial history and how this affected the socioeconomic lives of the people as well as the local politics that evolved.

Keywords: *Japanese occupation, 1945 Central Luzon, student publication, Filipino youth, historical analysis*

INTRODUCTION

Japanese occupation occurred in the Philippines from 1941 to 1945. These were relatively short period of colonization, but they were also marked with various narratives. Most literature on Japanese colonization in the Philippines have focused on the casualties of the war in Manila, and the narratives of the people there. Less documents have been analyzed on the narratives and experiences of students especially in the rural areas of the Philippines and in Central Luzon in particular. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to present an alternative discourse on the experiences of CLSU students at the Central Luzon Agricultural School during the first few months of the post-war period.

Contextualizing 1945: History of Japanese Occupation

The year 1945 was marked as the bloodiest year during World War II in the Philippines. Bloodiest, literally, because this period alone caused the death of 100,000 civilians who were fighting for their lives against the oppression of the Japanese. When the Japanese already knew that they could not make it out of the war alive, they displayed their frustrations and anger to the Filipinos that they encounter in Manila. The atrocities of the Japanese forces were not only limited to the cases of rape and murder; they also burnt and blasted buildings and infrastructures which are the primary foundations of social institutions such as schools.

During the Second World War, the Japanese forces in the Philippines carried out the horrifying task of dominating the country and the people who live there. The people experienced many kinds and levels of violence from the onset of the invasion in 1941 to late 1944, Central Luzon was also the site of ground warfare between the Japanese army and the resistance group known as the *Hukbo ng Bayan Laban sa mga Hapon* (HUKBALAHAP). The Huks (shortened to Hukbalahap or Huk) had created a force that took the plain of Central Luzon under control.

Central Luzon Agricultural School During the War

The Central Luzon Agricultural School was founded as a farm school and was established in 1907. The ideal of the CLAS was to promote agriculture in different aspects. Central Luzon Agriculture School (CLAS) was created on April 12, 1907, through Executive Order No. 10 by the then Governor of Nueva Ecija.

During the Japanese occupation, CLAS became a station of the Japanese forces in the Philippines. In February 1945, one of the students of the Central Luzon Agricultural School, Vivencio Saulong, died during the war from a bullet from the Japanese.

Research Objectives

The main objective of this paper is to present alternative narratives to the experiences of Filipinos in 1945, the period of Japanese occupation in the Philippines. Specifically, this paper aims to answer the following questions:

1. What were the emerging themes of student articles in *The Plowman* in 1945, given the historical context?
2. How did these narratives reflect the experiences of students during the Japanese occupation and right after the liberation?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Materials

For this paper, the researchers used publications from “*The Plowman*”, which is the official organ of the student body of the Central Luzon Agricultural School during the 1940s. A compilation of these materials is currently on exhibit at the CLSU Agricultural Museum as part of its section on the history of Central Luzon State University.

The materials for analysis were primary sources written by students in their student publication. Part of the attempt to explore a variety of issues concerning the content of the organ, its chief focus is to include all articles including literary works such as poems, short stories, and feature articles.

A total of 30 articles published in *The Plowman* in 1945 were analyzed for this paper. The following authors and titles were written in 1945:

1. Christmas Recipe for Farmers by Isabel Loria
2. Editorial by Victorio Busine
3. Light and Gloom by Adjula
4. In Memoriam (Dedicated to Vivencio Saulong) by Mario Gonzales
5. What Christmas Brings by Guillermo Gambito
6. Then the Bells Rang by Angelo Julaton
7. The Ripening Grains by Dalmacio Cruz
8. Christmas Spirit (Poem) by Salvador Mulrong
9. Christmas Then and Now (Poem) by Eulogio Gaspar
10. Christmas on the Way by Melencio Tabule
11. Memorable Christmas by Victorio Busine
12. Call to Sinners (Poem) by Prospero Pajarillaga
13. Christmas is For All by Guillermo Tiongson
14. Duties to the Commonwealth by Major Albert H. Nosun
15. Pitak ng Wikang Pambansa by A. B. Dalangin
16. Pasko by Eligio Santos
17. Numerous Donations Made by the US Army (News)
18. Kaiwi Sponsors Programme (News)
19. General Luna Honored (News)
20. Guest Attorney Exhorts Youth (News)
21. Necrological Rights for Vivencio Saulong Held (News)
22. Our Student Government (News)
23. School Makes Purchases (News)
24. Sports Roundup (News)
25. Results of the Intramural Games (News)
26. With the Student Farmers (News)

27. Athletic Goods (News)
28. With the School Projects (News)
29. Society News: First Wedding Rites in C.L.A.S. (News)
30. With the Faculty and Employees (News)

Latent content analysis

Content analysis has been defined as a systematic and replicable technique for compressing many words of text into fewer content categories based on explicit rules of coding (Barelson, 1952). Here, it will help the study discover and describe the focus of individual, group, institutional or social attention. In this method, researchers discover the content of the text.

The process of coding follows the suggested five Cs of historical thinking (Andrews and Burke, 2007). These include change over time, causality, context, complexity, and contingency. Nevertheless, the authors recognize that context has already been established during the selection of the year to analyze. The publications in 1945 were specifically chosen because this year involves the 'reconstruction and rebuilding' process after the Japanese occupation and World War II. Causality and contingency were used in this paper to discuss prior conditions that may have led to the writing of these articles and to further explain their meanings.

The authors used a coding system to analyze articles and texts (Bengtsson, 2016; Neimark, 1983). Although the authors recognize the variety of genre and article types written in the school paper, ranging from news and feature articles to poems and other literary works, each article was coded to determine the underlying themes. The authors determined the general theme of the articles and culled out specific excerpts from the texts that further support these themes.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Presenting hope from narratives of capture

Given the historical context of the publications, it is undisputed that some of the writings were narratives on the experiences of students with Japanese soldiers. Several articles from *The Plowman*, were stories about the students' experiences with Japanese soldiers.

In one article from *The Plowman*, written by Angelo Julaton, entitled "Then the Bells Rang", he narrated his experience of being captured by Japanese soldiers, and being tortured on Christmas Eve, and how he reckoned such an experience. He stated:

"Memories of the past came quickly and faster. How I found impish pleasure in the satisfying thought that those brutes who tortured me must have suffered when the hour of reckoning came. They must have burnt like roasted pigs in their caves as they fought desperately against the flame-throwers of our liberators. " (p. 2)

In a study by Griggs (2020) on Youth and Japanese occupation, it was noted that the Filipino youth “did not embrace” the ideas being pushed upon them by the Japanese, and most Filipino youth and parents were outwardly compliant with the teachings of Japanese occupation. This was attributed to the fact that these Filipino youth have been taught by the United States before the war. In memory of the cruel acts of Japanese soldiers that occurred during the occupation, many Filipino youth had recollections of these (Griggs, 2020).

In Angelo Julaton's 'Then the Bells Rang', he recalled how he was arrested by Japanese soldiers as he was on his way to visit his aunt, assuming that someone must have squealed that he was a guerilla. He stated how he was questioned harshly at the Japanese garrison. He described how he was slapped and kicked most of the time until his world went black, only to force him to admit he was a guerilla and to reveal his friends as well. He also mentioned how a soldier told him that it would be his last day. Finally, he recalled how he acted unconscious and pretended to be dead until he made his escape. And, these all happened on a Christmas eve.

Another article entitled “The Ripening Grains” by Dalmacio Cruz, shares a narrative of how some Filipinos were asked to work for the Japanese soldiers. In here, he talked about Leonerdo, a farmer who was asked to serve the Japanese in creating mountain defenses for the Japanese soldiers. It was quoted that he had no choice or else he would be called a “dorooboo” or a guerilla. However, as he was serving the Japanese soldiers digging tunnels for their defense, he kept thinking of his rice fields, and this convinced him to escape from the hands of the Japanese soldiers. Here, the author noted:

“Christmas was drawing near: still hostilities continued. When will this war end and when can we enjoy peace and have goodwill among men?” (p.3)

Another article entitled “Christmas on the Way” by Melencio Tabule, started with the following:

“If ever you evacuated on the 24th of December 1941, you can at least recollect some of the numerous incidents that happened on your way. Perhaps you remember the frenzied hurry of the throngs of people who followed the roads the children, the yelling of the men and the fright of the women must have made a lingering impression in your memory. The thunderous echoes of the coastal guns and the great flames that rose here and there made the masses think that the world was no longer safe to live in. ‘Where to go’ was their most serious problem.” (p. 5)

December 1941 was the start of the Japanese occupation (Executive Order No. 386, s. 1941). This short narrative by Melencio Tabule recalled how, on December eve, people helped each other as they struggled to look for a place to go to. These narratives narrated their experiences with Japanese soldiers and related them to the idea and hopes given by the Christmas season.

Revitalizing hope through arts

The capability of theatre plays in reminding the students about the atrocities and damage caused by the war was manifested in how the theaters were valued by the school in times of revitalization. The school considered its school theatre with great regard, so it was listed as one of the school's priorities to be restored, together with the restoration of the water, lighting, and other services required to rehabilitate the school. The purchase of a new projector and loudspeaker was proposed, and it served as one of the utmost priorities and later one of the notable accomplishments of the administration during that time (Roque, 1997). During the programs conducted in the school after the war, performances such as plays that depict the brutality and atrocities caused by the war to Filipinos entertain the CLAS community, this can be observed in the list of the school's activities after the war. It can be observed that each activity always includes a theatre performance for its audiences (The Plowman, 1945, p.16).

The condition of the campus during the war made it difficult for the community to perform relevant events and practices other than their military obligations. In the "Society News" of The Plowman, it is indicated that the first wedding rites in CLAS happened only a few months after the end of the war. Aside from this wedding ceremony, the church confirmation of a four-year-old child was also held on that same evening of December 8, 1945 (The Plowman, 1945, p.19). Reports on community engagement through sports were also reflected in The Plowman. In a report on 1945 written by J. Cayco, volleyball, softball, and basketball were played among the students. Students' enthusiasm for playing such sports can be seen in a report that states that sophomores of that year bought some second-hand athletic goods at their own expense. The items that cost around ₱35.00 includes a basketball, eight softballs, four bats, and many pairs of gloves (The Plowman, 1945, p.18). These sports events also gave entertainment to the community on the campus.

The existence of hostilities and abuses almost caused the community to lose interest in celebrating important events. The Philippines is a country that is known for celebrating Christmas the longest; four months a year. However, during the times of the Japanese occupation, the CLAS community was deprived of celebrating Christmas. The excitement of the people to celebrate Christmas in peace after the war was indicated in a poem written by Eulogio Gaspar entitled "Christmas Then and Now" (1945, p. 4).

The poems

Meanwhile, Christmas serves as a light of hope that dispels the horrors of the past years in an article written by Adjula (1945) entitled 'Light and Gloom'. In the article, he narrated how they turned their excitement as they prepared for the upcoming holidays into a gloomy day full of fear and grief. In the article, it states: "On 25 December 1941, the gloom began to creep in our school. We were preparing for a Christmas program that was never held. Mr. Asinas, then superintendent, had to deliver a Christmas message [of] grief." For the CLAS community, they consider the Christmas of 1945 as their "first real Christmas after four years of gloom (Adjula, 1945, p.13).

The expression of the enthusiastic welcome of the campus to the Christmas season was evident in the official organ of the School, as 13 of their 30 articles for the month of November and December were dedicated to wishing people well for the upcoming holidays. In an article written by Alba (1945 p.14) in *The Plowman*, the bountiful harvest can also be attributed to their belief in Christ which serves as the source of all blessings for the month of December.

The Filipinos' beliefs on how celestial bodies indicate the situation of the coming year and even the outcome of their harvest were also presented in *The Plowman* in the articles written by Dalmacio Cruz (1945, p.3) and Jacob (1945, p. 1). In Jacob's experience in his province of Pangasinan, some farmers believe that the heavens of December 25 to the middle of January indicate signs which can foretell the outcome of the next year's harvest. Cruz's story about the appearance of the celestial bodies during the month of December came from his father. The story narrates how celestial bodies such as the constellations appear differently in the December sky which inspires their prophesies. These beliefs are no different from the beliefs of the 16th-century natives in the Philippines who believe that the appearance of the celestial bodies suggests prosperity, fertility, and even the agricultural cycle (Scott, 1994, p.77).

Rebuilding hope by restoring peace and order

Efforts for restoration and reconstruction were prioritized after the Battle of Luzon and World War II. In addition to the restoration of damaged buildings and infrastructure in the school, the administration, headed by then-superintendent Jose C. Sadul, also exerted an effort to boost the morale of faculty, staff, and students who experienced the consequences of the war. *The Plowman* was able to testify to the efforts of the school in trying to get up from the knock-over of the war as jokes about living in a hundred years, and the beauty of being young was emphasized. These efforts can be also seen in the programs that were launched by CLAS after the war (*The Plowman*, 1945, p.16). Theatre performances, orchestras, declamations, and even comical intermission numbers, which involve most faculty, staff, and students, can be treated as one of their ways of coping with the nightmares of the war.

One of the published articles from the 1945 edition of *The Plowman* was a speech delivered to the CLAS students during the celebration of the 10th anniversary of the Philippine Commonwealth in the school. The speech was delivered by Major Albert H. Nosun, who was invited by the school principal, Mr. Jose C. Saddul. While Major Nosun was a structural engineer from New York, he also served in the army for 22 years. His speech had real substance and style that belied the current belief that a soldier, much less an engineer, cannot make and deliver a speech. His observation of the problems of the country is surprising for a soldier who has been in the Philippines for barely three months:

I suggested for today a spirit of thankfulness rather than jubilation and for reconsecration to the great task of eliminating foreign aggression... There is a need for greater home vigilance and unity to ensure everlasting peace and internal security.... Obey the laws of your government and dedicate yourself to the ideals for which your patriots have sacrificed and died. The task will be long and hard,

and its performance may take a long time unless you do your part as a democracy and peace-loving citizen. (p.8)

Amidst the destruction of the war, Major Nosun replaced the anger and sorrow that people felt at that time. A part of his speech he said, “the spirit of heroic patriotism, where devotion, loyalty, and courage will and shall remain in the hearts of the people.” A nation that is a source of freedom, happiness, and national security shall, as well, become a source of pride, he added. The event was closed with the following remarks: “*Students will lead the country on the path of progress as they will become intellectual leaders capable of executing the duties and responsibilities that placed them.*” This was an important event, especially in Philippine history because this indicates the period of American preparation of the Philippines for democratic self-government; and allows those capable to hold government offices.

On November 15, the reoccupation of the campus began. Some of the schoolteachers on campus occupied the emptied cottages of the US Army. The departure of the US military troops on the campus symbolized the return to normalcy of the CLAS as an agricultural school (The Plowman, 1945, p. 20).

Revitalizing hope for the country

After the war, appreciation of heroism rose as the need for a new bud of hope became inevitable. General Luna, who was slain in Cabanatuan, was honored by the School in October 1945, as he was born that month (Sanchez, 1945, p.15). Andres Bonifacio, and Gregorio del Pilar, two of the most-known revolutionary leaders during the Spanish period were also commemorated in November 1945, as they were both born in that month (P. Pajarillaga, 1945, p.15). Aside from these commemorative ceremonies, an event for youth leadership was also organized to recall the sacrifices of young and notable leaders in the region’s history which contributed to the ascendancy of what the speaker, Atty. Alfonso Espinosa of Cabanatuan would recognize as the first oriental democracy in the Far East. The speech of Atty. Espinosa also invited the youth to rehabilitate and reconstruct themselves to finally live in peace and happiness. The speaker concluded his speech by emphasizing how dignified the profession of agriculture is. This sense of prestige expressed by the speaker regarding agriculture can be deeply rooted in the difficulties and responsibilities faced by the sector during the war. In the study of Jose (n.d.), the ongoing shortage of rice during the war threatened the stability of the country. The effects of rice shortage can be seen even before the war; even the Spaniards and Americans faced many problems in the supply of rice given the export-orientated nature of Philippine agriculture during that time.

Bringing hope back for Education

a. Liberalizing Gender in Education

The advent of the 20th century already opened the opportunities for women to be educated as they liberalized school admissions from only accepting men to

expanding educational opportunities which reached women in any class (Torres, 1993.). In the context of CLAS, the opportunities for women to study expanded in October 1945, when for the first time in the school's history, young women were admitted as students. A month later, Modesta Cagurangan, one of the earliest women representatives of the school, took the oath of office during the flag retreat program on Friday, November 16, 1945. This manifest not just the triumph of women against the limitations brought by the Spaniards in attaining their rights to education, but also a development of the place of women in the field of agriculture in the province.

b. Institutional Policies

The institution's freedom from the war granted them a peek of freedom and self-governance. In 1945, the student court sentenced a first-year student named Elpidio Duque who violated the Anti-Smoking Law, the first case which was handled by the student court in 1945. The student was sentenced to render an hour of free labor consequently for his violation of the law (Sandique, 1945, p.17).

Additional laws were passed by the student council a few months after the war. An act to mandate all the students in attending flag ceremonies, retreats, and other programs was passed. The recovery of the lost properties of the school during the war was the end goal of Act No. 3 which seeks to award prizes to those students who can recover the highest number of properties (Sandique, 1945, p.17).

c. Agriculture

After reoccupying the lands that the Japanese armies occupied during the war, a meeting was held regarding the beginning of the rice harvest. During the meeting, the farm manager announced that the rice harvesting for the last months of 1945 will begin on December 12, 1945. For the first time, after the war, the CLAS community was able to harvest its harvest without the threat of war. These instances brought an urgency to the leaders of the institution. Principal Sadul, during a meeting in planning future harvests, emphasized the importance of the students' utmost participation and cooperation for the upcoming harvest since it marked the beginning of a new era. (The Plowman, 1945, p.18)

The food supply increased as the CLAS community had the opportunity to plant their crops on the land that was used by the Japanese for food production when they arrived on the campus on December 8, 1941 (Roque, 1997). In a report, around 1,000 kilograms of vegetables which consist of eggplants, tomatoes, upo, patola, condol, squash, and 250 square meter worth of pechay and mustard were harvested and consumed by the student farmers (The Plowman, 1945, p. 18). This event brought hope to the community who fled from the campus and suffered food shortages due to the threat and limitations brought by the hostile treatment of the Japanese armies on campus during the war.

CONCLUSION

This study is a quick survey to present alternative narratives to the Japanese experiences of Filipino youth or students in Central Luzon. The *Plowman* provided alternative or additional narratives to Japanese occupation experiences, especially among students and youth. On a historical note, these are important for deepening the understanding of how the Japanese occupation was. Nevertheless, these narratives expressed the hopes of the CLAS students, and the Filipino youth in general, into overcoming such a difficult period in history, and also of moving forward after the war. Their stories published in the 1945 issue of the *Plowman* were narratives of difficulty and hope, expressed in their aspirations and beliefs for the Christmas season, good harvest, and strong family and peer support. The researchers then recommend that archives of school papers, such as *The Plowman*, are also good sources of historical narratives worth exploring, especially for those who would like to capture the experiences of youth.

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