"What was the first book printed in the Philippines?"

Vernon R. Totanes
PhD candidate, Faculty of Information
University of Toronto

This paper will show that the importance of the imprints lies in the fact that they effectively communicate the idea that printing in the Philippines—and Philippine history—is inextricably linked with the non-Filipino. The first books printed in the Philippines, though not strictly "Filipino," are a physical reminder of the plurality of the nature and culture of the Filipino and the Philippines.

The title of this article is a question that has been asked in numerous quiz shows and trivia contests in the Philippines. Aside from indicating that the answer is or should be common knowledge, the question also implies that the title of this first book is a proven fact. Well, it's not. You see, *two* books were printed in the Philippines in 1593. One of these books is commonly known as *the* first book, and the other book is hardly ever mentioned. Determining exactly why this is the case is beyond the scope of this paper, but some of the possibilities will be explored as a means to suggest further avenues for research.

Several accounts have been written about the history of the first Philippine imprints. These, however, were written from the point of view of historians and bibliographers, and several aspects seem to have escaped their attention. No new data will be presented in this article. Instead of focusing on the books themselves, this paper will examine what has been written—or not written—about the first Philippine imprints to, as May Jurilla writes in her new book, "situate history in the book and the book in history."[1]

** Revised version of the lecture delivered at the School of Library and Information Studies, University of the Philippines Diliman, 14 August 2008.*

Totanes, V.R. (2008). "What was the first book printed in the Philippines?" *Journal of Philippine Librarianship, 28*(1), 21-31.

Book History

This analysis will be used as a means to introduce the discipline called "history of the book" or "book history." While this relatively new discipline is related to bibliography, book history is not exactly the same because it goes beyond the study of the book alone, and considers the entire life cycle of the book—from publication to manufacture to distribution to reception to survival.[2] Let me illustrate each stage with a few questions:

- Publication – Who wrote it? Who published it? Where was it published? When? These are basic questions that catalogers ask.
- Manufacture – What kind of paper was used? How was it bound? How many copies were printed? Please note that publishing is not the same as printing. Publishers are essentially those who make the decision that a manuscript is worth turning into a book. Printers are the ones who get hired by publishers to produce a book. Occasionally, author, publisher and printer are one and the same person, but this is not very common—especially today.
- Distribution – Where was the book sold? How much? How many copies were sold? Some people take this for granted, but think about it: If a book is not available at any bookstore—whether online or off—would an ordinary reader exert extra effort to look for it? Would they even be aware of this book? Probably not.
- Reception – Who bought the book? Did they read it? What did they think of it? Consider this: Do you read all the books you buy? Of the books that you do read, do you actually write down what you thought of them? Most people don't, which makes this stage one of the most difficult in terms of coming up with evidence.
- Survival – Is it easy to find copies of the book? What kind of condition are the existing copies in? How much do they cost in mint condition? Used? If there are very few copies in existence, this does not necessarily mean that only a few copies were printed or that no one read the book. It could also mean that the book was so popular that all the copies were read to pieces.
- And then there are the political, economic, religious and cultural influences. What was going on when the book was making its way through all these stages? In many cases, the prevailing conditions

affected the book's life cycle, but in a few instances, some books have actually effected change in the larger society.

How many of these stages have been discussed in connection with the first Philippine imprints? Very few. Many books use the *Doctrina Christiana*'s title page as a full-page illustration, but they rarely devote more than a few sentences to the book itself. One such book uses its title page as a frontispiece. Its caption reads, "Title page of *Doctrina Christiana*, the earliest known book printed in the Philippines, published by the Dominicans in 1593."

The previous quotation and the following are taken from scholarly monographs about the history and literature of the Philippines:

1. "Printing came to the Philippines shortly before the beginning of the seventeenth century when *Doctrina Christiana* was published in 1593 by the Dominican printing press in Manila."
2. "The Tagalog-Christian *Doctrina* of 1593, the first book printed in the Philippines, included the following: *Pater Noster*, the *Ave Maria*, the *Credo*, the *Salve Maria*... "

It seems quite clear, so far, that only one book was printed in 1593. But there have been some dissenters. The next two are from articles written by different authors that appeared in the same volume of essays on Philippine literature.

3. "In 1593, the first book was printed in the Philippines, a *Doctrina christiana*, a bilingual text in Spanish and Tagalog, written it seems by Father Juan de Plasencia."
4. "The first books printed in the Philippines of which we have record were three little booklets produced under the auspices of the Dominican Fathers in 1593."

From one book to three booklets in the same volume? The next two quotes, taken from the first and eighth editions of a popular history textbook, are just as puzzling.

5. "The Dominicans are believed to have established the first printing press in the Philippines in 1593. In the same year, the *Doctrina Christiana en Lengua Española y Tagala*, the first book to be printed in the Philippines was produced." This is from the first edition published in 1960.
6. "The three earliest books published at the Parian of Manila in 1593 by wood-block printing were: *Doctrina christiana, en lengua española, y tagala*, Fr. Juan Cobo's *Wu-chi T'ien-chu cheng-chiao chen-ch'uan shih-lu* (A Discussion of the Real Traditional Propagation of the True Religion)

and *Doctrina christiana en letra y lengua china*." That's from the eighth edition, 1990.

What happened between the first and eighth editions? The simple answer is that, like the earlier example, the authors were different—not that new evidence was found. In any case, all these passages are from frequently-cited and well-regarded books published since 1959. None, however, say much more about the subject of this article than what you have already heard. The authors were, of course, writing about other subjects, and merely mentioned the first book—or books—as part of their narrative. This perhaps explains why all of them get the most basic fact about the first Philippine imprints wrong. Two books—not one, not three—were printed in Las Islas Filipinas in 1593.

Let us return to the five stages in the life cycle of the books. What do we know so far? The names of the authors and publisher have been mentioned in the examples cited. Nothing is said, however, about those who printed the books. Even the monographs and articles devoted to the first Philippine imprints contain very little information about the Chinese men who printed the books, which perhaps is the reason their contributions are not as widely acknowledged as the authors of the first imprints. But it could also be that their Chinese roots worked against them. After all, the Chinese have been largely invisible in the telling of Philippine history.

The amount of attention paid to the manufacturing stage, however, is much more than the practically nonexistent examination of the distribution and reception stages, which have never really been considered in any meaningful way, perhaps because there is very little evidence available. Then again, it could also be that scholars just do not consider these stages important at all, as the relative dearth of studies on the distribution and reception of any kind of book published in the Philippines will show. Finally, there is survival, which is one of the first things usually highlighted about the first books printed in the Philippines. While the discovery of copies of the imprints was very good, the circumstances surrounding their emergence from obscurity were not quite ideal.

The First Philippine Imprints

A review of how the first imprints have been discussed by scholars may be helpful in contextualizing a rather convoluted story of speculation, confirmation and confusion. In 1893, Trinidad Pardo de Tavera asserted

that the first book was printed in Las Islas Filipinas in 1610, saying that anything "printed" before then must have been in manuscript form because there were no printing presses in Manila before the 17th century.[3] This, however, was disputed by other bibliographers like Wenceslao Retana, who presented evidence that clearly showed two books were printed in 1593.[4]

Unfortunately, no copies of the books could be found then to prove that they were, in fact, printed books and not manuscripts. And so, for more than fifty years, the first imprints remained the object of speculation, until a copy of one book was discovered in 1946, and it was confirmed that the book was *not* a manuscript. But it was also clear that it was *not* printed on a press with movable metal type; it had, in fact, been printed using woodblocks or xylography, which the Chinese were using long before the advent of Gutenberg's printing press. Certainty about the imprints, however, gave way to confusion when two different books—not just one—surfaced in the next few years.

The first book found in 1946 is now known as the Tagalog Doctrina, the second book from 1948 is called the Chinese Doctrina, and the third book from 1952 has been referred to as the Tratado or Shih-lu (pronounced *Sher*-lu). Carlos Quirino first summarized the known facts in 1960, but changed his conclusions in 1973 after the Dutch Sinologist Piet van der Loon proved in an article that the Chinese Doctrina must have been printed after 1602.[5]

The Chinese Doctrina is unlike the other two in several aspects. Whereas the Tagalog Doctrina and Shih-lu are dated and bear the signature of the same government notary, the Chinese Doctrina is undated and unnotarized. Physically, it is also much smaller than the other two, which are comparable in size, and whose contents were printed on both sides of the paper, unlike the Chinese Doctrina, which is printed on only one side. Proof that the Chinese Doctrina was printed in the early part of the 17th century—and not 1590, as some have suggested—is based on the text's lack of linguistic uniformity.[6]

However, in spite of the work done by van der Loon and Quirino, it seems quite clear that historians and literary scholars are either not aware of *or* ignore their conclusions, as the quotations cited earlier demonstrate. The truth is that the Tagalog Doctrina was only one of two books printed in 1593, that the Shih-lu may have been printed a few months earlier, *and* that it is not possible to determine conclusively, based on the available evidence, which of the two was printed *first*.[7]

Pardo de Tavera and Retana

In the same way that authors have overlooked the fact that the Tagalog Doctrina could have been printed *second*, some points in the history of the first books have not been examined as thoroughly as others. For instance, very few writers advert to the speculation about the first Philippine imprints that took place toward the end of Spanish rule. None of the few who bother to mention the disagreement between Pardo de Tavera and Retana ever make a connection between their bibliographic work and their respective positions on the intellectual capabilities of Filipinos during the years leading up to the Philippine Revolution of 1896.[8]

It seems unlikely that Pardo de Tavera, a Filipino, and Retana, a Spaniard, were merely having a scholarly disagreement on whether the first book was produced by a Chinese or Filipino printer. After all, both had written for rival newspapers in Madrid, and the books from 1610 were either printed or written by a Tagalog in his own language. Pardo de Tavera could have viewed these books as proof that Filipinos were not as uncivilized or unproductive as Retana made them out to be in his other writings.[9] Pardo de Tavera also could not possibly have been unaware of the evidence presented by Retana, and so it seems likely that he made a conscious decision to disregard what was contrary to what he believed. That's a lot of speculation with no real proof, but this disregard for the facts could also be true of the few writers today who are aware that two books were printed in 1593, but insist on referring to the Tagalog Doctrina as *the* first book printed in the Philippines.

Tagalog Doctrina

The existence of the first books was confirmed when copies were found after the Americans finally "recognized" Philippine independence in 1946. Though both imprints are, in fact, "doctrinas christianas" in form, when references are made today to the *Doctrina Christiana* as the first book printed in the Philippines, these allude more often than not to the *Doctrina Christiana, en lengua española y tagala* or, in English, "Christian teachings in Spanish and Tagalog." The Tagalog Doctrina was written so that other Spanish missionaries could teach the Tagalogs how to pray in their own language.[10] This was accomplished by presenting the text of the Hail Mary, for example, in Spanish, its translation in romanized Tagalog, and *baybayin*, the original Tagalog script.[11]

In this way, the Spanish missionaries preserved, in print, Tagalog—and later, other indigenous languages—as spoken and/or written by the people they sought to convert. The significance of this contribution is better appreciated in light of the scarcity of documents written in indigenous languages—whether on paper, bamboo or other media—before the Spaniards arrived in 1521.[12]

Another detail frequently cited in connection with the Tagalog Doctrina is that the only existing copy may be found at the US Library of Congress in Washington, DC. In fact, many books and documents that are important in Philippine history and culture are not available in the Philippines. Due to several factors—including the poor quality of the paper used, the relative lack of concern regarding preservation of the materials, and the natural and man-made disasters that regularly plague the Philippines—very few of the libraries that existed before World War II still have their original collections intact.

Shih-lu

Based on evidence pointed out by Piet van der Loon, a scholar whose conclusions should be more widely known, the other book printed in 1593 was *Hsin-k'o seng-shih Kao-mu Hsien chuan Wu-chi t'ien-chu cheng-chiao chen-chuan shih-lu* or, in English, "A printed edition of the Veritable record of the authentic tradition of the true faith in the Infinite God, by the religious master Kao-mu Hsien."[13] The signature at the bottom of its title page also appears in the Tagalog Doctrina, but not the Chinese Doctrina.

Like the Tagalog Doctrina, the lone, extant copy of the Shih-lu is not in the Philippines. It was tracked down in 1952 by a Chinese priest to the Biblioteca Nacional in Madrid, Spain.[14] Why was a book obviously written in Chinese and meant for Chinese readers printed in what is now known as the Philippines? The answer lies in the importance with which China was viewed by Spanish missionaries; the strategic location of Las Islas Filipinas as the only Spanish colony in Asia; and the relationship the Chinese had with its

inhabitants, which accounted for the significant Chinese presence in the islands even before the Spaniards arrived.

The Shih-lu, unlike the Tagalog Doctrina, was intended to be used by the Chinese themselves, but there is no evidence that a copy ever made it to mainland China. Instead of basic prayers, the Shih-lu contains theological discussions and explanations of Western scientific concepts.[15] The language in which the Shih-lu was written explains, perhaps, why many authors—both Filipinos and non-Filipinos—neglect to mention its existence. (Maybe because it's so difficult to pronounce?) Then again, they may also just happen to be biased, and hence, disregard the possibility that the Shih-lu was printed a few months before the Tagalog Doctrina. After all, if Juan de Vera, a Chinese convert, was the first printer in Las Islas Filipinas, he could in fact have begun with the book written in his own language.[16] This, however, remains to be proven—if it can be proven at all. Meanwhile, the little that exists of the secondary literature on the Shih-lu are written primarily in Spanish and Chinese.[17] In contrast, most of the books and articles devoted to the Tagalog Doctrina are in English.

American Influence

The prevalence of English in the Philippines testifies to the contribution made by the Americans to Philippine culture. True, the Spaniards reigned for more than three centuries, and the Chinese traded with the Filipinos for an even longer period, but the Americans—who ruled for less than half a century—were able to get Filipinos to talk to one another using a common language by imposing English as the medium of instruction in the public schools they set up soon after they took over in 1898.

While the American influence could not possibly have been felt in 1593, it was certainly very much in evidence when the Tagalog Doctrina

was bought by an American, and brought to the United States almost immediately after World War II in 1946. I have not yet come across any record of how Filipinos reacted to the news of the book's discovery and journey to the US, but if the reaction to other comparable discoveries are used as indicators, it is quite likely that a few Filipinos were either excited or incensed, but most would have been indifferent. Incidentally, the Tagalog Doctrina has been digitized and may be viewed online.[18]

Conclusion

It cannot be denied that the Spanish and American colonizers—not to mention the Catholic Church and the Chinese—brought with them much that resulted in many deaths, including that of indigenous cultures. But any discussion of Philippine culture, especially the first books printed in the Philippines, would not be complete without acknowledging the contributions of foreigners, who were not always welcome.

The Tagalog Doctrina and the Shih-lu were written by non-Filipinos, printed by non-Filipinos, and were meant to be read by non-Filipinos. But Filipino scholars invariably insist on tracing the beginnings of printing in the Philippines to the Tagalog Doctrina and ignore the Shih-lu. The question is "why?" Maybe because the former provides evidence that at least some of the inhabitants of Las Islas Filipinas had a well-developed system of writing prior to the arrival of the Spaniards. Maybe the latter was disregarded because authors were unaware of what others had written, maybe the languages in which the book was written played a part, maybe they were pushing a nationalist agenda. We will probably never know for sure, but one thing is clear: Two books—not one, not three—were printed in the group of islands now known as the Philippines in 1593.

We do not know how many copies were made or what kind of impact each book had on its intended readers. We do, however, have one copy of each book in foreign libraries—and many more facsimiles—which allow us today to examine not only the books themselves or their contents, but to appreciate how the first Philippine imprints effectively communicate the idea that printing in the Philippines—and Philippine history and culture—are inextricably linked with the non-Filipino. And that Filipinos today would not be who they are without the Spanish friars who learned Tagalog and romanized the *baybayin* script, the Chinese who printed the first books and taught others their craft, or even the Americans who brought the language in which most of

the books and articles about the imprints are written.

In fact, a Filipino today is at least aware of Christian practices, and probably has some percentage of Spanish or Chinese blood, and familiarity with English, however poor. And the first books printed in the Philippines, though preserved in foreign lands and written for Spanish and Chinese readers, are a physical reminder of the plurality of the nature and culture of the Filipino and the Philippines.

The book history framework was very helpful in exploring the relationships between the first imprints and the issues I brought up in this paper—for instance, the lack of awareness regarding existing scholarship, the possibility that nationalism colors scholarly opinions, the invisibility of the Chinese, what it means to be Filipino. Historians, bibliographers and literary and other scholars can benefit from the questions that book history as a discipline asks.

Endnotes

[1] P.M.B. Jurilla, *Tagalog bestsellers of the twentieth century* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2008), 10.

[2] See T.R. Adams, and N. Barker, "A New Model for the Study of the Book," in *A Potencie of Life: Books in Society* (London: British Library, 1993), 5-43.

[3] "A learned Dutch orientalist… wrote me in 1885… telling me that in 1593 at Manila there was printed a Doctrina Christiana in Spanish-Tagalog… This is an error, and without doubt such a Doctrina was in manuscript, because in 1591 there was no press in Manila nor in any part of the archipelago, and today we know for certain and positively that the first book issued there appeared in 1610." T.H. Pardo de Tavera, *Noticias sobre la imprenta y el grabado en Filipinas* (Madrid: Hernandez, 1893), 8-9; translated from the Spanish and quoted in E. Wolf, [Introductory essay], in *Doctrina Christiana: The first book printed in the Philippines* ([Washington, D.C.]: Library of Congress, 1947), 16.

[4] The evidence was a letter from the Governor General to the king of Spain, "Sire, in the name of Your Majesty, I have for this once, because of the existing great need, granted a license for the printing of the Doctrinas Christianas, herewith enclosed—one in the Tagalog language, which is the native and best of these islands, and the other in Chinese…" Translated from the Spanish and quoted in Wolf, 6.

[5] Quirino's conclusions changed radically between 1960 and 1973, even though most of the original text remained the same. See C. Quirino, "The first Philippine imprints," *Journal of History* 8 (1960), 219-228, and "Foreword: The first Philippine imprints," in *Doctrina Christiana: The first book printed in the Philippines, Manila, 1593* (Manila: National Historical Commission, 1973), iii-xi.

[6] P. van der Loon, "The Manila incunabula and early Hokkien studies," *Asia Major* 12 (1966), 21-22.

[7] See van der Loon, 1-43; Quirino, "Foreword," iii-xi; and P.M.B. Jurilla, "What book? An introduction to the history of the book and prospects for Philippine studies," *Philippine Studies* 51 (2003), 530-557.

[8] See Wolf, 4-19; and M.A. Bernad, "An episode in Philippine bibliographical history: The discovery of the earliest books printed in the Philippines," in *Felicitation volumes of Southeast-Asian studies presented to His Highness Prince Dhaninivat Kromamun Bidyalabh Bridhyakorn on the occasion of his eightieth birthday* (Bangkok: Siam Society, 1965), 293-302.

[9] Pardo de Tavera was a Spaniard born in the Philippines, who self-identified as "Filipino," in addition to the fact that, according to the conventions of the time, his place of birth qualified him as a "Filipino." The book he insists was the first to be printed in the Philippines was Tomas Pinpin's *Librong pagaaralan nang manga Tagalog nang uicang Castila* (Bataan: 1610).

[10] Cruz writes that the Spanish missionaries decided that, "it was more efficient for them to learn the local languages than to teach Spanish to the entire native population. A consequence of the decision was serious efforts toward the production of tools in aid of teaching missionaries the local languages." J.M. Cruz, "Foreword," in W.H. Scott, *Barangay: Sixteenth-century Philippine culture and society* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1994), vii. Phelan notes, however, that, "The catechisms published in the various Philippine languages were not meant to be distributed to the Filipinos themselves, although they possessed a long tradition of literacy. The high costs of printing and the use of fragile rice paper ruled out the feasibility of instruction by means of written materials. Indoctrination was oral, and the catechisms were for the Spanish clergy." J.L. Phelan, *The Hispanization of the Philippines: Spanish aims and Filipino responses, 1565-1700* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1959), 58.

[11] Wolf, 3.

[12] The texts found on the Laguna copperplate inscription and the Calatagan pot are the most famous examples of pre-Hispanic writing, but neither has been satisfactorily authenticated or translated. Some have blamed the Spaniards for the systematic destruction of early indigenous literature, but there is very little evidence to support this claim. See J.G. Espallargas, "The Philippine Script at the Arrival of the Spaniards," *Philippiniana Sacra* 10:28 (1975), 73–94.

[13] Van der Loon, 2.

[14] Quirino, "Foreword," iv.

[15] D. Liu, "Western knowledge of geography reflected in Juan Cobo's Shilu (1593)," in *History of mathematical sciences: Portugal and East Asia II*, ed. L. Saraiva (Singapore: World Scientific, 2004), 49.

[16] Wolf, 50-51.

[17] See F. Villarroel, *Pien cheng-chiao chen-ch'uan shih-lu* (Manila: University of Santo Tomas, 1986), which includes introductory essays—on the Shih-lu's author, philological observations about its content, and the book's bibliographical and historical significance—that, except for short summaries in English, are written entirely in Spanish.

[18] The Tagalog Doctrina's digital version may be viewed at http://digbig.com/4tnba.