

COMPLETION REPORT

University of the Philippines
Gonzalo Abreu Campoamor II

【Subject of Research Project】

Wartime Comic Visual Literature: The Kenkoy Comic Strip During The Japanese Occupation of The Philippines

A total of 110 wartime issues of the Kenkoy comic strip (between 1942 and 1945) were retrieved. Major findings are as follows. It is notable that characters who speak Japanese, or more specifically, utter Japanese words, almost always become the strip's source of humor. In the 10 August 1942 issue, Talakitok (Kenkoy's supposed rival to the ingenue Rosing) responded with an "arigato" to a Mr. Taba after he was entrusted with the latter's store. But when a customer came and offered to buy all the goods for P100, Talakitok sold everything for a third of the offer. In this simple strip, Talakitok's preference to use Japanese is effectively compounded with his weakness in simple arithmetic. There are five or six other strips with the same theme. Note that at the same time, the Japanese Military Administration began teaching basic Japanese, or more precisely, word-level Nihongo, to Filipino students.

Japan's war strategy includes the so-called sōryokusen or the war against Western ideas in the temporal region Greater East Asia. It is not uncommon for issues of the comic strip to talk about American customs, as if clinging to Western ideas, but from time to time the central character Kenkoy can be biased towards, if not completely in approval of, the Japanese ways. In the strip that appeared on 31 July 1942, Kenkoy's idolization of Superman somehow escaped the strict censorship at the time. But a year later, in the 23 October 1943 issue, or around the same time as the inauguration of the Second Republic during the Japanese occupation, Kenkoy expressed his approval of the government's policy that directs people to queue for bus or trambia rides. Moreover, the same strip seems to criticize both American hedonism and Spanish religious feudalism.

However, more than the argument of how the Kenkoy comic strip criticized or endorsed the Japanese occupation, Kenkoy can be appreciated more for its contributions to Philippine wartime historiography. Among the topics that Kenkoy often discussed were food security and the Japanese government's drive for local backyard gardening, transportation crisis and increasing commodity costs, and the Filipino ingenuity in adapting to the situation.

All in all, I think one of the most effective reasons for Kenkoy's undeniable popularity is that the comic strip was able to portray the most extreme conditions of war and poverty. And despite the direst situation the Filipinos were in back then, it was able to at least occasionally make them smile. This can be reflected in the last two issues of Kenkoy just before the Battle of Manila February 1945. In the 6 January issue, Kenkoy was about to take a siesta when he heard a boy selling bukayo sweets in front of his house. He chose to get up and buy from the boy, thereby help him and his family get by during such rough times. But he will not be able to sleep that

afternoon because other children started to come to his house to sell him other stuff. In the 13 January issue, Kenkoy's father was determined to slaughter their last remaining chicken as their special food for the new year. But that chicken suddenly disappeared so they were forced to eat the common ginatan. And when the chicken suddenly returned the next day, Kenkoy's father no longer wanted to slaughter it.

Publication of the Results of Research Project:

Verbal Presentation (Date, Venue, Name of Conference, Title of Presentation, Presenter, etc.)

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