

Rizal and the Woman of Enigma

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On December 30 last year, officials of the Philippine Embassy in Tokyo placed a bouquet of flowers on a grave at Zoshigaya Cemetery in Tokyo. The inscription on the tombstone reads: "Alfred Charlton and His Wife Sei-ko."

The man who knew the significance of this visit is Ki Kimura, a novelist-historian who took the Filipino officials to the tomb.

To the Philippine officials, December 30 was the date when Jose Rizal, the Father of the Philippines, was shot 65 years ago by a Spanish firing squad. Sei-ko was a Japanese lady who left an indelible memory in the mind of young Rizal when he came to Japan as an exile. The Embassy officials were recalling their hero's romance when Rizal's centennial was scheduled for June this year.

A centennial celebrating the birth of the Philippine patriot will be held in Manila on June 19 this year, which falls on Rizal's birthday. Various activities, including an international academic conference in memory of the Philippine nationalist, are scheduled. The Philippine Embassy, which is busy collecting data on Rizal's footmarks in Japan as part of their Government's world-wide investigation, has only recently identified "Osci-sm," as she was referred to in Rizal's diary — a girl called "Woman of Enigma" by Philippine

historians and a name hitherto unknown even to Ambassador Adeva in Tokyo.

According to Ki Kimura, who helped the embassy identify the girl, Rizal arrived in Tokyo in the spring of 1888 for a brief stay from March to early April. During his month and a half stay, Rizal visited various places. He went to Hakone, Nikko, Kyoto, Nara and Osaka. He took delight in the cherry blossoms, visited shrines and temples, attended Kabuki performances — which he appreciated more highly than the Chinese plays he saw in Hong Kong on the way, and was touched by "Sendaiha-gi" and "Chushingura," it is recorded.

Rizal's heart must have been heavy, however. For, he was on his way to exile in Europe after his novel "Noli Me Tangere" (Don't Touch Me) had angered the then Spanish authorities in Manila, who branded the book as "revolutionary." Actually, he was under constant watch by the Spanish legation in Tokyo.

Nevertheless, being a genius gifted with an artistic talent, he practised Japanese painting and it is said that he painted a picture shown in the photo. He was also a linguist and learned to speak Japanese fairly well during the short stay and even took lessons in judo, which art he demonstrated in Europe later.

It was during this tour of Japan that he met "Osei-san" as a guide-interpreter. And this encounter proved to be the beginning of a Platonic love which he confessed in his diary preserved by the National Library of Manila and partly copied by Ki Kimura during the last war when he went to Manila. Mr. Kimura said that most of his reminiscences of his stay in Japan recorded in his diary consisted of confessions of his intimate feelings toward "Osei-san." Mr. Kimura lost the copy but a Japanese translation of that part of Rizal's diary written in English is available, which, translated back into English, runs as follows:

" . . . Osei-san, sayonara, sayonara!



Seiko Urai

I spent a valuable month shining like gold. Will such a wonderful life be repeated in my life? . . . To think that I should be giving it up and going on a trip filled with the unknown and uncertainties when I am offered a chance to live a peaceful life filled with admiration and love. . . . (Note: the Japanese Government offered him a job.)

"Osei-san, I devote to you the last chapter of the memories of my youth. No other girl ever loved me more than you did. And, no other girl have been more devoted than you were. You are pure, fresh and chaste. Sayonara, sayonara . . . "

According to Mr. Kimura, his search for the identification of Osei-san started during the war when he was dispatched to the Philippines by the Army Air Force to write for a Japanese newspaper. He frequently visited the National Library and inspected Rizal's diary and other documents connected with the Philippine patriot. It was there that he found the photo of Osei-san! It proved to have been preserved by Trinidad, a younger sister of Rizal.

After Mr. Kimura returned home from Manila, where he stayed for three months, he made inquiries to identify Osei-san and found likely persons, who proved to be wrong persons. Meanwhile, the war ended.

Last May, Josefa M. Saniel, a woman professor of history, University of the Philippines, came here as a Fulbright Professor to conduct research on Japan-Philippine relations to provide data for the centennial this year. Mr. Kimura helped her with research and it was then that the "Woman of



*Schoolers at the grave of Seiko Usui.
At the right are Ki Kimura and Prof.
Saniel of U.P.*

Enigma" was identified as a fine Japanese lady.

Motomu Hashimoto, a former managing editor of the Kodansha Publishing Company who happened to know of Mr. Kimura's interest in Osei-san, informed him that he (Mr. Hashimoto) used to be a boarder at Osei-san's home for three years in his university student days and that he knew where Osei-san's grave was located. Another man, Takiguchi by name, who was married to one of Osei-san's daughters, was also tracked down.

According to Mr. Kimura's research and these persons' recollections, Osei-san's real name was Seiko Usui and she was born in 1865, three

years before the Meiji Restoration, in Edo (now Tokyo) to a samurai, who became a trader in Yokohama after the Restoration. She was 23 when she met 27-year-old Rizal. She married an Englishman, Alfred Charlton, who taught chemistry at the Peers' School, received honors from the Japanese Government and died in 1925. She lived until 1947 and died in Hagi City in Yamaguchi Prefecture in western Japan where she had moved during the war from Tokyo to avoid bombing.

She could speak English and French and was especially good at English. According to Mr. Hashimoto, who knew Osei-san as the wife of Professor Charlton, she spoke a clear-cut English but the couple seldom talked in English, because Mr. Charlton, who was a real friend of Japan, preferred to speak Japanese. Mr. Takiguchi said that he had to admit in spite of her being his mother-in-law that she was a beautiful woman. Both old Japanese gentlemen agreed that she was modest and kind, and that she especially took care of young university students. In particular, Mr. Takiguchi, emphasizing the fact that she revealed her memories of Rizal only after her encounter with the patriot was reported in a vernacular paper by Mr. Kimura during the war and Mr. Takiguchi, who suspected, asked her (unidentified then) if the story referred to herself, said that she hated her private affairs being publicized and that she would not welcome being publicized again — as this story is actually doing it — if she were alive. (He showed his understanding later).



A Japanese painting by Rizal

Osei-san, however, was not the only girl that Rizal loved in his life. She was the second girl out of three the "Great Lover," as he is called by the Filipinos, loved during his brief life on earth. Mr. Kimura indicated that one of the reasons why he gave up Osei-san and left for San Francisco was Leonor, the girl of his first love whom he still loved. The third and last girl was Josephine, with whom he made a dramatic marriage in prison on the very morning of December 30, 1896, when he was executed. Josephine joined General Aguinaldo's Revolutionary Army which was inspired by Rizal's execution and rose up against the Spanish in the next year.

As the June centennial to be held in Manila approaches, various things, usually dwarfed by the more important history of Japan-Philippine relations, are being recalled.

One is Rizal's episode during his Pacific voyage after he left Osei-san. Aboard the *Belgic*, an English steamer, he happened to meet Tetcho Suehiro, a first-rate journalist in those days, who first took the great Filipino as a Japanese because he looked one. They became friends and Rizal initiated Tetcho, who was ignorant of Western customs and manners, in the art of how to eat, live and dress in Western ways. The encounter gave Tetcho a motive to write a political novel "Great Waves in the South Seas" with Rizal as its hero.

It is also recalled that Rizal's "Noli Me Tangere" was translated, although in summary, into Japanese by a novelist Bimyo Yamada and published in 1902, 17 years after the publication of the original in Berlin. The book, which describes oppression of the Filipinos by the Spanish officials and Catholics, is not widely read here but Mr. Kimura, who is a novelist, praised the book as one that can compare with Dostoevski, Balzac or Melville.

Another episode, which is not directly connected with Rizal but is worth recalling on this occasion, is a little-known fact that some Japanese volunteers joined Aguinaldo's Army and even tried to send ammunition to the general by a Japanese boat,

Nunobiki Maru, which was shipwrecked on the way and could not reach the destination.

Meanwhile, the Philippine Embassy is planning to erect a statue of Rizal or a marker on the site of the "Tokyo Hotel," where Rizal stayed. Ambassador Adeva met Governor Azuma of Tokyo on December 21 last year and asked for permission, with official decision being awaited. The Embassy wants the plan to be carried out as a project supported by private citizens of the two countries to make it a chance to cement Japan-Philippine friendly relations. Records, however, suggest that the hotel existed across the tracks of the Metropolitan Streetcar System between Hibiya Park and the Imperial Hotel.



New Building of Mindoro Lodge No. 157

Preparations are being made for the laying of the cornerstone of Mindoro Lodge No. 157 at San Jose, Occidental Mindoro which will be held on June 10, 1961. The lot as well as the building are donated by Col. Bro. Flaviano L. Ramirez, well-known local philanthropist, who in the past has given both cash and real estate for public use and charity. The new Lodge will be constructed in the heart of the town, on a lot of about 500 square meters. The lot is ideally situated, a stone's throw from the new municipal building, and in the immediate vicinity of Mina de Oro Rural Bank and the new building of the Development Bank of the Philippines now under construction. The famous Balalaika Hotel and Club owned by and where Bro Ramirez lives is just across the road from the proposed site. Bro Ramirez was made a Mason in 1960, but at the rate he is helping the Fraternity, he will eventually be one of the most outstanding members of the Craft in a short period.

The proposed building will be an all-concrete two-storey affair. The first floor will be used for recreational purposes while the upper floor will be used exclusively by the Lodge.

At the laying of the cornerstone, prominent brethren from the MW Grand Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons of the Philippines will be invited to attend and officiate.—LNT.



At left, the author of the foregoing article, Mr. Sasagawa. (Photo: Asahi Evening News)