Colonial Art as a Space of the Asian Modern

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Antecedents to a Modern Southeast Asian Art

The apparent and fruitful “re-discovery” of early or pre-modern art in different parts of Southeast Asia by contemporary artists such as Heri Dono and FX Harsono, should not obscure the historical presence of references to large-scale narrative representations which are no longer extant but for which there are reliable records. These sources were excavated by Sanento Yuliman Hadiwardoyo, among others, and reinforce that there were physically large paintings in Southeast Asia as early as the 15th century. Hadiwardoyo cites an apparent description of a wayang-bèbèr, or pictorial narrative scrolls, from Ma Huan’s 1416 Yingyai shenglan (The Overall Survey of Ocean Shores). Literary references therefore indicate the presence of paintings in Java with secular subjects from at least the 1400s, including picture-tales for oral narration.

Paintings or tapestries with figuration were brought to the Indonesian archipelago by the Portuguese in the 16th century, who also found there were long painting scrolls, sometimes of recent historical events, made for local rulers. The Dutch brought paintings and many prints, and several Dutch painters were active in Batavia from at least the 17th century. At the turn of the 18th century, illustrations were also done for a variety of British publications including Marsden’s 1811 History of Sumatra and Raffles’ 1817 History of Java, some of which were done for Raffles in 1811–1816 by Javanese and Anglo-Indian artists. Unfortunately, most of these drawings were lost in the fire of Raffles’ ship Fame in 1824 at Bengkulu (Bencoolen), Sumatra. However an extant contemporary
illustration by a Javanese artist, in another
book by John Crawfurd, shows the mode and
level of illustrative skills among some Javanese
before 1820. These show recession with per-
haps some knowledge of Chinese orthogonal
or parallel perspective drawing, but with keen
interest in shading and overall modelling via
light and shade.

No major paintings survived into the 19th
century but there does exist from after the
1820s a set of five paintings of Five Javanese
Court Officials (fig. 3.1), which could originally
have been a screen. This early large-scale paint-
ing has intriguing similarities to the painting
of the standing, vertical figures in a painting
done in Delhi around 1815. Hence it may
be deduced that Raffles’ entourage included
an Anglo-Indian painter, so one of the earliest
surviving links with European art in Southeast
Asia should also be seen through stylistic and
compositional resemblances vis-à-vis Indian
so-called “Company Painting.”

How all these different visual techniques
were communicated to 19th-century Javanese
artisans remains open to speculation. That the
Five Officials does survive indicates a high level
of copying competence (probably associated
with textile decoration skills), and elsewhere, a
rapid ability to master European representation
of the natural world. These issues suggest that
European modes of representation in a mod-
ern Asian art were neither culturally alien nor
technically unmasterable. Even if done under
the sway of a broadened colonial hegemony,
they were still capable of modification for lo-
cal expression and potentially, local counter-
appropriation.

The other major surviving pre-modern
pictorial form is Buddhist mural painting
which can be found throughout the Therava-
din countries, especially Siam. In present-day
Thailand, mural painting has remarkably few
surviving works from before the 18th century,
and almost none from the capital of Ayutthaya
which was sacked by the Burmese in 1767. We
can guess what some of the painting conven-
tions were from a paucity of surviving temples
and some manuscripts, as well as inferences
made from paintings which survive in Burma
where many painting artisans were among the
upwards of 30,000 Siamese taken captive.
decorative schemes in temples and palaces. There were four nameable painters before the 1850s: Pra Ajaarn Nak who worked for Rama I (r. 1782–1809), Khong Pae and Thong Yu who similarly did murals for Wat Suwannaram, Thonburi (now Bangkok Noi) circa 1831, under Rama III (r. 1824–1851), and Khrua In Khong, active from the 1850s to 1868, who could well have personally known the artists at Wat Suwannaram.

Much may also be deduced from works by Khrua In Khong, or those attributed to him. He was nameable and well-regarded; despite his position as the subordinate painter of a king, his reputation could not have been earned solely by virtue of his social standing. Indeed there are anecdotes which indicate Khrua In Khong was quite sure of his own métier, and this changed self-consciousness of the artist as a professional by the 1850s or slightly earlier, is certainly one index of modernity in art.

He would also have known of Wat Ratchaorot which was built late in the reign of Rama II in the 1830s, where there were definitely experiments with European perspective. These seem to have begun with the importation of mirrors by the Portuguese ambassador in 1818, followed by an order from Rama II for his own mirrors shortly thereafter.

Siamese visual discourses changed markedly in the 1820s and 1830s. The use of the mirror or symmetrical mirror reflections produced a kind of doubled image rather akin to one-point perspective. Some portraits from life began to be made of famous lay people and some monks, and the notion of a portrait sent as an index of a person appeared in contemporary literature. The visualisation of common people changed from elegant visual stereotypes at Wat Pho to quasi-realistic and individuated people in views of street activities in Wat Suthat. Almost certainly, the wider availability of full-size European mirrors from the 1820s in Bangkok must have altered personal perceptions of physique and its pictorial representation.

Finally, one must mention the increased use of allegorical manifestation of life-cycle scenes or other chosen elements to exemplify Buddhist values. These are quasi-abstract and analytical removals of the narrative scheme from habitual Buddhist visual discourse through the Jātakas, or moral narratives about Buddha’s previous incarnations (fig. 3.2).

Interestingly, two examples of these are by Khrua In Khong himself—the first at the ubosot of Wat Borom Niwat, possibly from the later 1850s, and the second from the scenes of
a single individual's life at Wat Mahasamanaram in Phetchaburi, close to Mongkut's summer retreat of Phra Nakhon Kiri after 1859. This obvious visualisation of allegory suggests they may have been painted based on a monkish text that felt secure enough to step away from conventional representations, and whose author one expects could have been Rama IV himself or someone close to him.

Khrua In Khong's work is very largely the application of drawing and painting techniques, pictorial composition and spatial construction which, considering the apparent explicitness of his use of Euramerican cityscapes for Jātakas, was derived from the illustrated books given to Rama IV by several foreign visitors. Khrua In Khong may also have had access to China trade paintings, given that there also exist in the royal collections, late Chinese portrait paintings of Rama IV and his crown prince, the future Rama V, which may have been commissioned from photographs brought to Canton in the 1860s.

Khrua In Khong's use of Euramerican imagery was underpinned by changes in Siamese thought of his time, particularly given the contemporary royal interest in European scientific ideas that must have allowed a more distanced, rationally constructed notion of the self and by extension, the visualising subject. Ideas about Buddhism changed in the period of Rama IV and his son Rama V, with more use of Western scholarship to understand them. Indeed, Rama V and his officials realised the Buddha birth stories encapsulated many notions of kingship that were not compatible with, and could present challenges to, the national state. These were bureaucratised via models borrowed from colonial administration. The tendency to allegorise stages of individual monk stories, as seen in some schemes by Khrua In Khong at Wat Mahasamanaram and the abstracted moral allegories using Western imagery seen at Wat Borom Niwat, has been unaffected by the propensity towards moral rationalism in decorative narrative.

American protestant missionaries were also active in Bangkok before 1851 and there was one American diplomatic mission in 1832–1834. These may very well have provided American townscape prints seen by Khrua In Khong at Wat Mahasamanaram and the abstracted moral allegories using Western imagery seen at Wat Borom Niwat, has been unaffected by the propensity towards moral rationalism in decorative narrative.

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images in Bangkok antedate Khrua In Khong by around 25 years.

The habitual Western art reservation about the Euramerican “inadequate copy” interpretive position does not mean that Khrua In Khong did not benefit from knowing how to generate his own images more accurately within the Euramerican tendencies he chose. Buildings were now depicted at Wat Bowonniwet and Wat Borom Niwat in Bangkok and Wat Mahasamanaram in Petchburi as larger than people, whereas previously, human figures, especially of persons particularly endowed with aura, were often shown to be too big to fit into buildings. His compositions are distinguished by broad expanses of sky and outlines sketched in black (unlike the red used even as late as the 1830s) and then filled with colour, with space marked out and left within the whole for buildings.

A further set of antecedents should be mentioned but is barely visible today, and as little studied. The circulation of various kinds of China trade paintings, including those on glass, accompanied the vessels of the Euramerican traders as well as the colonial navies. Remarkably early, by the 1780s, Chinese glass painters were producing works for distant Surat on the Indian side of the Persian Gulf, and one must assume that the glass paintings, originally commissioned in Chinese treaty ports, were soon followed by itinerant Chinese paintercraftsmen. These paintings on glass are also found prominently displayed in many Siamese temples from the 1830s and decorations of Thai subjects soon appeared in these locations, indicating that painters and their techniques must have moved from China.

Early Transfer of European Discourses

The Philippines, which had been “discovered” by Magellan in 1521, was ruled from Mexico until 1822, when different Roman Catholic religious orders were allocated their own geographical areas to administer. By the 1730s some teaching of drawing was taking place via a military engineer, and priests were being taught engraving. There was an art school founded by local worthies from 1821 to 1834 under Damián Domingo (1796–1834), and an art academy was authorised in 1845, regulated in 1848 and opened from 1850 to 1898. It was followed by the School of Fine Arts of the University of the Philippines from 1908 to the present day.

The Spanish arrived in the Philippines with their very specific use of icons for the

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15. For more on Chinese glass painters, see Susan S. Bean, Yankee India: American Commercial and Cultural Encounters with India in the Age of Sail, 1784–1860 (Salem: Peabody Essex Museum; Ahmedabad: Mapin Publishing, 2001), fig. 4., 22, 84.

16. The principal scholar to date in this field was the late Sasaki Seiichi. See Sasaki Seiichi et al., “Yooroppa Yūsaiga no Nihon dotchaku katei no kenkyū—Doro-e, Garasu-e kenkyū” [The settling-down process of European coloured painting in Japan—Research on gouache, glass painting], in Tama Bijutsu Daigaku Zairyōgaku Kenkyūshitsu Kiyō [Tama Fine Arts Uni-

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propagation of faith, and found quite a vivid and widespread discourse of anitos or ancestor figures, for which there are a number of observations by early Spanish writers.\(^{17}\) It is on this base of familiarity with icons, accompanied by a substrate of non-Catholic spiritual beliefs and practices as well as technical facility with their production, that the vitality and continuity of later Philippine folk art rests.

A second element in the formation of visual discourses was the direct result of Catholic proselytisation—not only did the use and systematic articulation of images spread, there was from at least the early 18\(^{th}\) century an increasingly educated class of elite native Filipinos to deploy it. The University of Santo Tomas in Manila was founded in 1645 and by 1690, the surnames of its graduates indicated two probable natives.\(^{18}\)

A third element was the involvement of Chinese craftsmen as painters and printers from the 1580s. Chinese were trained as reproducers of Catholic imagery, and their talent was widely recognised by Catholic priests. There were many incentives for the Chinese to become Catholic: By doing so they could have property rights, be recognised in a profession and form a guild, as they did in Binondo in 1687. By 1734, “about 380 families of Chinese mestizos were engaged in painting, sculpture, carpentry, and smithing.”\(^{19}\) The Chinese relationship with Philippines’ art is deep and longstanding, particularly via paintings and glass paintings done in the treaty ports which spread to the Philippines, and via tipos del pais, or sets of images of typical occupations.\(^{20}\) The latter had reached Manila from Canton in the 1790s and were a staple element in the production of Damián Domingo and some of his students from the late 1820s.\(^{21}\)

A fourth element was natural history research and drawing. This was evident from the 1690s and reached its culmination in the 1792–1793 Malaspina Expedition, whose report was only published in 1885. In addition, there was the unillustrated publication in 1845 of Flora de Filipinas, which was republished with luxury prints in 1879. Whilst there is often some delay between the drawings done during the research and their subsequent publication as illustrations, nevertheless one can see, as elsewhere in the colonial world, a widespread visual discourse of natural history illustration which in most cases employed metropolitan as well as local artists for its production.

The first significant Philippines’ academy painter was Simon Flores (1839–1902). His visual world can mainly be seen as a series of
pictorial types derived from this background by the time of his entry to the Academia de Dibujo y Pintura in Manila at the age of 18 in 1857. This brought him to a high level of formation, enabling him to set up his own studio in about 1861 where he accepted commissions for portraits, religious works and trompe l’oeil paintings. His uncle included a decorator of the ceiling in the governor’s Malacañang Palace, where two Italians were also active. There is speculation that another uncle might have been an artist who continued Damián Domingo’s studio after his death.  

If that were the case, Flores may have had direct links to Domingo, who as a Chinese mestizo constitutes a link to the whole discourse of Chinese craftsmen painters and printers which goes back to the 1590s. It had also been Domingo who, “by declaring painting as an object of formal instruction, raised [it] from the level of the mechanical to the plane of the noble arts. As a result, Filipino artists ascended in social standing.”

This possibility, as much a feature of Flores’ own genealogy as of the whole class of Filipino artists who entered the Academy in Manila (where the policy of racial segregation seems to have been abandoned around 1870), points to a recurrent phenomenon of modern Asian art. Whatever the contemporary social origin of the artist, whatever the genealogy of sensibilities and beliefs which links them to discourses other than those of the colonial authorities, many have worked almost entirely within, from, and not infrequently against those discourses. We look for their modernity in what they emphasise in their work that relates to their situation, and in their ability to relativise styles from the past with their own contemporary absorption and re-deployment of the real in some 19th-century cases, or of abstract déformation in later 20th-century cases.

The Transfer of European Salon Style: Raden Saleh

The transfer of European salon style was carried out in Java by a large number of overseas artists. The advent of aristocrats who became artists like Raden Saleh (c. 1811–1880), however, raised the social status of matriculated or certificated craftsmen. The later process of professionalisation of artists was drawn out in Java until after 1949 due to the lack of professional training except through the technical services
of the bureaucracy, and except some teacher-training curricula, for which Saleh did model drawings for use as pedagogical and copy aids. These have now begun to be investigated, and some works survive to permit analysis of the works of Saleh’s very few Javanese students.  

The few artists trained before 1949 in the technical services of the Dutch, such as the archaeological draftsmen, were self-taught then trained on the job, or had sufficient social status and resources to go to Europe. Unlike late 19th-century India, Japan or the Philippines, there was no art school in Batavia despite an extensive circle of expatriate art activities and some significant exhibitions. This created a situation wherein the Javanese lacked the technical certification through art school or workshop training the colonial artists had, with the exception of Raden Saleh in the 1860s and one or two others.

It is clear from surviving drawings that Saleh’s visual discourse was from the outset European; he received early training in drawing from 1819 to 1820 by the then Dutch (later Belgian) artist Antoine Payen. Saleh must also have been present when Payen did some of his in situ oil sketches of natural scenes which were later to be worked up by him in Europe into formal compositions. In fact the early in situ oil sketches of Payen should really be seen as the originator of landscape painting in Java, before Saleh in the 1860s or the Mooi Indië school of the 1910s to 1930s.

In Holland, Saleh was exposed to the studio training he received between 1830 and 1831 from Cornelis Kruseman (1797–1857), who had settled in The Hague. Kruseman had been in Italy from 1821 to 1824 and his works showed “the influence of Raphael filtered through that of Overbeck and Nazarene painting.” Kruseman taught Saleh drawing and painting for six months and Saleh had access to his earlier drawings from 1821 to 1825, including those from his two years in Rome which displayed his affection for warm Raphaelesque tones.

Dutch art of the 1830s—the world of Kruseman, and of Saleh’s other teacher from 1832 to 1833, Andreas Schelfhout (1787–1870)—was a diffident national representation of middle-class values which lacked clear definition or stylistic articulation, but manifested what might be called an amalgam of “soft critique” and “soft (un-named) romanticism.”

XIXe siècle (1792–1853)” [Antoine Payen, painter of the Eastern Indies: Life and writings of a 19th-century artist (1792–1853)] (PhD diss., Leiden University, The School of Asian, African, and Amerindian Studies, CNWS, 1995). I am also grateful for the opportunity to see and photograph Payen’s in situ oil sketches held at the Ethnology Museum in Leiden.

For further exposition, see Annemie Ouwerkerk, “‘Hoe kan het schoone geprezen, het middelmatige erkend en het slechte gelaakt worden?’ Nederlandse kunstkritiek in de eerste helft van de 19de eeuw” [How can that which is beautiful be praised, that which is mediocre be recognised, and that which is bad be strongly disapproved? Dutch art criticism during the first half of the 19th century, trans. T. Berghuis] in Op zoek naar de Gouden Eeuw: Nederlandse schilderkunst 1800–1850 [In search of the Golden Age: Dutch painting, 1800–1850], eds. Louis Van Tilborgh & Guido Janzen, trans. Thomas Berghuis (Zwolle: Waanders Uitgevers, 1986), 65. Ouwerkerk notes: “Before the 1830s, criticism was innocent, but there was a narrowing of the position of the artists after 1830 when there was an economic recession and also one in art when the artist hardly got any subsidy and the government did not buy from public exhibitions.”
Art criticism was in fact rather undeveloped in Holland, and there was also general avoidance of calling Romanticism by its name. From the late 1830s, Saleh had the great advantage of dealing with a series of culturally rich but politically small German states before the Prussian steamroller of unification ran over them all from the 1840s to 1870s. These German states presented an acquirable culture. Indeed, Saleh himself at times thought he had become German, and in his lost but partially reconstructed memoirs of 1849 expressed his dilemma thus:

Two sides, opposite to each other and yet both light and friendly, put their magic spell over my soul. There the paradise of my childhood in the bright sunshine, washed by the Indian Ocean, where my beloved one lives and where the ashes of my ancestors rest. Here Europe’s luckiest countries, where the arts, sciences and educational values shine like diamond jewellery, to where the yearning of my youth finally brought me; where I was lucky enough to find friends within the noblest circles, friends who replaced father, mother, brothers and sisters. Between these two worlds my heart is split. And I feel urged to offer both sides my loving thanks. I believe that I can do that best by portraying for my friends in Europe, the simple, innocent life and happiness of my people at home, and by outlining for my countrymen a picture of the wonders of Europe and the nobility of the human spirit.

We encounter here an artist–aristocrat who identified with two worlds, a Javanese one under Dutch colonial hegemony, and a European/German cosmopolitanism one under small dukedoms.

By the time Raden Saleh went to Paris in January 1845 he had been moving around in circles for 15 years (since his arrival in Holland and Germany) where French was commonly spoken or writings in this language circulated. Interestingly, a late 1860s visitor to Java mentions Saleh’s fluency in French and ability in German and English. His cultural and artistic hybridity was thus a linguistically constructed one that is perplexing for Euramerican art history. This has positioned salon painting as one style which needed to be overturned in his journey of artistic self-perception from the Romantic self, a choice not truly available to Saleh.

The mannerisms of one salon painter Horace Vernet (1789–1863) were important for Saleh. They evinced the soft compromise that Saleh himself followed in his success at establishing the transfer of a particular subject matter: The fight “with” animals or fight “between” wild and civilised animals (fig. 4.2).
This was to become an open if allegorical expression of his own ambivalence about the Dutch domination of Javanese culture.

Just as Saleh moved in more advanced intellectual and artistic circles in Paris, as he already had in Dresden and Coburg, he was shifted back into the stylistic ambivalences much beloved by both the new bourgeois in the France of Louis-Phillipe, and the increasingly shaky dukedoms and petty monarchies of the German federation so put to the test by the 1848 revolutions. At this juncture in 1845 he encountered the young linguist of Malay, Louis Auguste Dozon, accompanied by the poet Charles Baudelaire. They saw in his studio a *Chasse au Tigre* painting (attack of a tiger on horsemen in the forest or huntsmen on horses while they are stalking a deer or banteng), which was intended to be exposed in the Salon of 1846. It is not known how much Saleh knew of Baudelaire’s later vituperative critiques of Vernet and his mannerisms at the Salon.

By 1850, Saleh’s European demeanours were being criticised at a distance among the colonial class in the Dutch Indies, something of which Saleh was to become only too aware after his return to Batavia in 1853. In 1864, W.B. d’Almeida’s *Life in Java* records:

> I asked him whether there were any other Javanese artists who had obtained proficiency in the art, and he replied, not that he was aware of, adding humorously:—
> “Café et sucre, sucre et café, sont tout-ce qu’on parle ici. C’est vraiment un air triste pour un artiste.” [Coffee and sugar, sugar and coffee, that’s all one talks about here. It is truly sad-looking for an artist.]³²

Saleh displayed a certain duality upon his return to Java where, apart from one visit to Europe from 1875 to 1878, he lived until his death in 1880. He painted the famous arrest of Prince Diponegoro, whose defeat in 1829 ended effective aristocratic resistance to the Dutch in most of Java. This much-discussed painting, now restored, shows the proud defiance of the ugly Dutch by the beautiful, well-formed Javanese, among other allegorical references (*fig. 3.3*). Simultaneously however, he served the government as the King’s Painter in various capacities, including a natural science expedition in 1865 on which he painted the live volcano Merapi (*figs. 3.4 and 3.5*). The freedom with which Saleh had moved in many social circles in Europe was not matched in Java where he was subject to various kinds of prejudice in his personal life from both Dutch and Javanese, and treated as a suspect in a rebellion in 1869. This prominence but relative isolation may have accounted for the lack of many followers save one Sundanese student he took in 1873.³⁴ Much of Raden Saleh’s oeuvre

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³¹ From the unpublished biography of Dozon (who had been to the same lycée as Baudelaire), cited by Claude Guillot & Pierre Labrousse, “Raden Saleh, un artiste-prince à Paris” [Raden Saleh, an artist-prince in Paris], Archipel 54 (1997): 135. For a list of works painted or remaining in France, see ibid., 152.


³⁴ Ibid., 128–30.
was not seen in Java—his reputation there was not one of artistic renown through circulation of works in exhibitions but rather, the social repute he had gained by recognition from his European contemporaries.

Academy Mastery

The second figure in the transfer of European salon styles to his Asian homeland is Juan Luna (1857–1899) from the Philippines, who was trained by Spanish painters during the last stages of his adolescence from 1873 to 1876 during the sunset of the Spanish domination of the Philippines. Luna went to Europe from 1877 to 1894 for further training and participation in the art world where he was highly successful, and through his brother Antonio, was an active supporter of Philippines’ independence struggles to overthrow the domination of Spain from 1896 to 1897. He died very shortly after, while active as a diplomat for the nascent Philippines’ Republic about to be bloodily overthrown by the United States of America between 1899 and 1902.

Something of the ironical and pictorial position of Luna is shown by his commissioned allegories of the union of Spain and the Philippines, such as España y Filipinas (1884), which was envisaged as two women in sisterly embrace advancing up the well-regulated stairs of progress. These works reflect the desire for an assimilationist absorption into Spain with a parallel privileging of the Philippine elite ilustrado class, and perhaps the diffusion of Spanish as a lingua franca away from its hitherto monopolisation in the Philippines by the friars. The complexity of Luna’s oeuvre and the ambivalence of his reaction to colonialism, is found by these paintings being done at almost the same time as an indisputably anti-colonial masterwork, Spoliarium (1884, fig. 3.6).

Over a long artistic life during which Luna was active in Manila, Madrid, Rome and Paris, Luna was exposed to many different stylistics. These include the mannerisms seen in the loose scintillating texture effects in the bottom part of España y Filipinas, which came from then famous but now neglected artists such as the Barcelona painter Mariano Fortuny (1838–1874), and the history painter Alejo Vera (1834–1923). Luna became Vera’s studio pupil in Madrid and followed him to Rome where Luna lived for six years. Rome had an important sub-society of Filipino writers and painters at the time, including the contemporary of both Simon Flores and Juan Luna, Félix Resurrección Hidalgo (1855–1913). Art in Rome was a nexus for certain types of salon art in the mid-19th century which had escaped art historical attention outside the Spanish-speaking world due to the focus on Paris. 35
The teaching staff of the Academia de Dibujo y Pintura in Manila where Luna studied from 1874 were Spanish; Luna fell out with the Spanish director Augustín Sáez and was dismissed. This was indicative of the long-standing dissatisfaction in ilustrado or broadly liberal classes with Spanish art pedagogy and codes of valuation. Philippine artists had since the time of Damián Domingo in the 1820s been interested in competent art teaching, at least from a craftsman base. Some portraitists and painters of church subjects like Justiano Asuncion y Molo de San Agustin (1816–1896) attained a very high level of competency just before and during the period in which Luna was studying. By the 1870s, even young artists felt themselves able to criticise the competence, technical teaching methods and subjects passed on by their Spanish teachers, aware that there was a fairly long series of very competent and sometimes distinguished works which had been produced since the 1790s by mostly sangley, or specifically Chinese-Filipino artists. But the comparison between Spanish colonial teaching and that in Madrid was not always unfavourable, and in an 1879 letter to José Rizal about studying in Madrid, Hidalgo writes: “They are all very good professors, but you can be very sure that what you can study [in Manila] under Sr. Augustín Saez is exactly the same as what is taught here.”

The move to art school in Manila and later to Madrid privileged Juan Luna in being able to both acquire and critically assess mid-19th century Spanish academic technique and its training. It also provided him with a notion of academy style from which he would deviate in 2 ways over the next 20 years: towards dramatic, almost histrionic romantic-historical tableaux, and towards more intimate bright-toned pictures, sometimes with the scintillation effects of Mariano Fortuny (1838–1874), sometimes with a proto-Impressionist touch.

Around 1888 to 1895, Luna also moved towards expression of a socialist humanist sympathy with urban working classes in Paris of largely Italian origin, and with whom it is thought he could converse freely due to his own lengthy residence in Rome (fig. 3.7).

When Luna’s Spoliarium (fig. 3.6) won a gold medal in 1884 at the Madrid Fine Arts Exposition, Filipino nationalists saw this as national triumph. The painting’s theme was taken from Charles Louis Dezobry, Rome in the Time of Augustus, Adventures of a Gaul in Rome, and in a speech at a later celebratory banquet, Rizal saw Spoliarium as a reflection of “the spirit of our social, moral and spiritual life, humanity subjected to trials unredeemed, and reason in open fight with prejudice, fanaticism and injustice.” The celebrated orator Graciano López Jaena said: “The Philippines is more than a
veritable Spoliarium with all its horrors! There lie the mangled fragments, humanity massacred, the rights of man perverted! There is no semblance of justice for the common man, and liberty is cinders, ashes, dust!”

The intellectual historian Rafael calls translation “the double process of appropriating and replacing the foreign while keeping its foreignness in view;” a technique used by the friars to make Spanish codes acceptable to those who could not know Castilian, while simultaneously broadcasting the friars’ domination over the Spanish by the insertion of certain “untranslatable” Castilian words in local languages. The counter-demonstration of Filipino control over other metropolitan codes such as cuisine, dress and art, might all be regarded as analogues of the acquired translation techniques used by, and which were previously the exclusive prerogative of, the Catholic friars. Thus the prize-awarding in 1884 to Spoliarium had a subversive import even as one must presume the awarding judges thought they were privileging assimilation. Rizal’s second novel El Filibusterismo (1891), translated as “The Subversive” by contemporaries, was part of the ideological background which led to Rizal’s execution in 1896, the year when both Luna and his brother Antonio (later a revolutionary General) were also arrested.

If there is one change in Luna’s subject matter it is in portraiture. He is certainly one of the first Filipino artists to look seriously at the urban working class rather than just assemble picaresque types by occupation. Whether within the urban working class we are also to place his numerous studies of urban women, including poor flower sellers, stall holders and prostitutes, together with his erotic studies in the Roman idyll idiom of his time, including those of his wife, is questionable. These seem to be far more part of the male studio artist’s conventional repertory of the times. Befitting someone trained by the Spanish academicism against which he so often reacted, we do not habitually see social situations pivoted against religious figures or elite historical subjects. Luna had, one can deduce, a very firm idea of what his elite public would accept, but from the late 1880s he was certainly engaged with

42 An early sign of his populist sentiments sympathetic to nationalist aspirations was his reported marching as the banner bearer for an art association in the funeral cortège of Garibaldi in 1882.
43 See John N. Schumacher S.J., The Propaganda Movement 1880–1895: The Creation of a Filipino Consciousness, the Making of the Revolution (Manila: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1997), 296. He concludes that “even if all these reforms were to be attributed to the propaganda carried on by the Filipino reformists, the
depicting the urban working class who lived around him in Paris (fig. 3.7). The art historical significance of Juan Luna’s oeuvre remains cut off from his own country until after World War II. He can be seen as a colonial artist who successfully managed counter-appropriation and to a degree, achieved metropolitan assimilation, but as part of a reform movement which ultimately failed. This served briefly in the 1880s and 1890s as a model for other cultural transformations but only for a miniscule group, affecting educated elite competent in Castilian. The political situation in the Philippines did not allow the foundation of a new national art, and indeed after many vicissitudes in Spain the work *Spoliarium* only entered the Philippines in 1958.

As Flores has indicated, *Spoliarium* significantly anticipates the novel of Rizal, *Noli me Tangere* (Touch me Not, 1887). But after Luna’s commission for the *Batalla de Lepanto* (1887), Rizal criticised Luna for being a “Hispanophile, so […] he was never willing to paint anything against the Spaniards.” Accusation of cultural treason is very easy with an establishment painter like Luna who had already completed the *Pacto de Sangre* in 1886 (commemorating a blood oath in 1565 between the Spanish invader of the Philippines, Miguel López de Legazpi, and the Muslim ruler, Rajah Sikatuna of Bohol) which was publicly unveiled in November 1887, nine months after *Noli Me Tangere* was published. It was perhaps enough for Luna to show himself an assimilado equal of the metropolitan painters. Patriotic counter-appropriation of a metropolitan discourse is a difficult and necessarily complex position for a colonial, one which meets with cynical self-appraisal by the artist. Later on Luna saw himself as a member of the dissident salon Société Nationale des Beaux Arts and had a cool eye for bourgeois history painting, commenting: “All paintings depicting History are false, beginning with what is essential, which is the conception, and those that believe that a good composition, correct drawing, brilliant colour and a lot of period attire suffice for a fine painting are mistaken.”
But one may ask what range of imagery and technical expression was founded by Juan Luna and then carried on, perhaps with different intentions, by others. The 1896 Katipunan Rising seems to have surprised the *ilustrado* class which took part in it semi-autonomously. It created the first of two breaks with the 19th-century tendency towards assimilated acceptance of Spanish “colonial enlightenment” which one can see in Luna, and indeed Rizal, who died proclaiming his loyalty to Spain. It was the friars, with their anti-enlightenment cultural restriction of Castilian as well as their local manipulation and oppression of Filipino congregations, who were their main enemy.

Perhaps the American conquest in 1898 came too quickly for a social space to be opened in the new Philippine Republic—one that could be openly critical of the friars, and for which one would expect to see extensive satirical imagery that Luna might well have provided. What was passed on, probably determinatively, as a former Spanish painter became the first head of the art school at the new University of the Philippines (Rafael Enriquez, director 1909–1925), was a re-assertion of national types and a kind of (male-centred) erotics of self-determination seen above all in the work of Fernando C. Amorsolo (1892–1972), depicting beautiful female peasants engaged in noble agricultural toil.

**Portraits from Life**

The code of verisimilitude can bewitch, and there appear to be several cross-regional comparisons in portraiture possible despite the fragmentation of Southeast Asia in the 19th century by Euramerican colonial powers.

The commanding local ruler depicted in 1879 by Raden Saleh’s pupil, Raden Kusumadibrata, appears to be there in reality, looking at us as we dare to observe him (fig. 3.8). The hierarchically superior position of the Regent is figured in photographic lighting: We think this personage is truly embodied with power, or elegance, or a certain fierce resolve, because the image is linked indexically to that of whom it is also a representation. Here perhaps, is the first of a long series of portraits of powerful persons which continues into the postcolonial period in many parts of Asia.

But let us set this aristocratic portrait alongside the depiction of bourgeois delights in a settled, comfortable and secure family life, a colonial world which encloses by its comfort and allegorises security (fig. 3.9). There had been some antecedence for this display of colonial safety in Saleh’s 1832 depiction of the family in Holland of his Dutch colonial sponsor *The Baud Family in their Voorburg Country House*, but these predecessors were only implicitly present in pictorial discourse by the 1870s to 1890s.

If in a way, the cross-regional antecedent for representing a national, incipiently anti-colonial hero is Saleh’s quiet, dignified image of Diponegoro (fig. 3.3), Fabian de la Rosa’s portrait of the national hero (fig. 3.10) who had been executed six years earlier on 30 December 1896 is of someone intellectually earnest and emotionally fierce in his rejection of colonial hypocrisy, showing a secular honesty as opposed to the false religiosity of the friars which Rizal’s books ridiculed. De la Rosa’s Rizal portrait looks back at an only recently dead martyr in anticipation of a future where the values he embodied might serve as both a national reference and a template for future behaviour.

The past here becomes a personified allegory about a time in the future, one where the individual is completely Asian, having mastered the West in so many ways. In a mode of portraiture much followed later elsewhere in Asia, it is a modern Asian allegory about what sort of person should come to be. A local meaning has thus been made implicit within an art expression that was once borrowed—and afterwards utterly transformed by the new subjects it is mobilised to show.

Ileto opines that “a serious obstacle to contemporary understanding of the Katipunan is the established view that the rise of nationalism culminating in the revolution of 1896–1900 was purely a consequence of heightened Westernization in the nineteenth century.” However, he considers that despite the injustices perceived by *ilustrados* after their education abroad, the real ideological construction of Philippines’ independence comes from within and below the class of the *ilustrados*, and the turning of Catholic theology to notions of redemptive revolt by the very large bulk of the population who did not know Castilian, let alone went abroad. He continues his analysis of the conventional view of nationalism due to the Philippines being understood by *ilustrados* from outside: “It was only during their stay abroad that these young, educated Filipinos, called ‘ilustrados’ realized what freedom meant, heightened consciousness led to the dissolution of the ‘aura of authority and the halo of grace’ that has bound Filipinos to the colonial order. Realizing such injustices done to them, as forced labor, taxes, and inequality before the law, the *ilustrados* began to wage a propaganda campaign aimed to make Filipinos and Spaniards equal before the existing colonial framework; they wanted reforms not independence. In spite of their limited aims, however, the *ilustrados* are credited with having first conceived of a Filipino national community.” This anticipates the manipulation of fictitious images of the young Chairman Mao as the model personality for youth in 1960s China.
3.1 Anonymous
*Five Javanese Court Officials*
(detail of one painting)
c. 1820–1870
Cotton (textile), oil and gold paint (gilding) on paper
196.8 x 74.3 cm
Collection of Rijksmuseum
Image courtesy of Rijksmuseum

3.2 Khrua In Khong
*Allegory of Dharma showing horse racing*
c. 1850s–1860s
Mural in Wat Borom Niwat, Bangkok.
Photograph by Khun Pairin, with the kind permission of Wat Borom Niwat.

3.3 Raden Saleh
*The Arrest of Diponegoro*
1857
Oil on canvas
112 x 179 cm
Koleksi Istana Presiden, Jakarta
Photographer: Susanne Erhards
Photo © Goethe-Institut Indonesien
Raden Saleh  
*Merapi, Eruption by Day*  
1865  
Oil on canvas  
59.5 x 92 cm  
Collection of the Tan Family

Raden Saleh  
*Merapi, Eruption by Night*  
1865  
Oil on canvas  
58.6 x 91 cm  
Collection of the Tan Family

Juan Luna  
*Spoliarium*  
1884  
Oil on canvas  
422 x 766 cm  
Collection of National Museum of the Philippines, Manila
3.7 Juan Luna
*Unknown Heroes*
1891
Oil on canvas
195 x 258 cm
Collection of Biblioteca Museu Víctor Balaguer. Vilanova i la Geltrú
Image courtesy of Biblioteca Museu Víctor Balaguer

3.8 Raden Kusumadibrata
*Raden Adipati Kasumadiningrat, Regent of Galuh*
1879
Oil on canvas
196 x 128 cm
Collection of Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen, coll.no. TM-A-5752

3.9 Jan Daniel Beynon
*A Lazy Afternoon*
1859
Oil on canvas
43 x 53 cm
Collection of National Gallery Singapore

3.10 Fabian de la Rosa
*Rizal*
1902
Oil on canvas
64.6 x 48.8 cm
Collection of National Gallery Singapore