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Madrid historian Rodao: Knowing about 19th-century Spain is knowing the Philippines as well.

**T**IN stood at the center of the ring, his traje de luces (suit of lights) shimmering in the hot Sunday afternoon. His gaze panned the crowd at the Plaza Toro de Monumental, finally falling on the toro de lidia grunting by the railings. Their eyes locked. This was the moment.

Tin waved the red banner and the angered toro lunged forward, gleaming horns steadily pointed at his chest. Calmly he swished the banner over his head, to the approving roar of the crowd. Yes! He had the upper hand now.

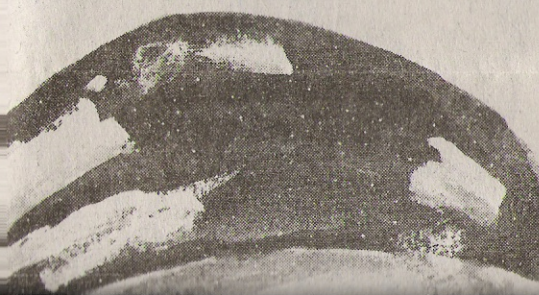
Sharpened silver lance in hand, he plunged it into the back of the bull as though stoking a pit of flaming charcoal. The animal staggered, trying to keep from falling, but alas! It slowly dropped to the ground and reluctantly bowed to its new master.

Just like his favorite *torero* and namesake, Florentino "Tin" Rodao wanted to be a bullfighter. "I was five or six years old," he says in a thick Castilian accent. "I wanted to be just like Tin. A lot of people don't like bullfighting because they say it's barbaric. Actually, bullfighting is a (duel) between power and intelligence, a domination of a 500-pound bull by a 80 to 90-pound person. What is important is to make the strongest and meanest animal do anything you want."

But along the way, from pubescence through manhood, there were some changes. Now 32, Rodao merely watches from the bleachers, cheering the *torero* on. If he's in Madrid, that is.

His field? History. "I like traveling and in my field I have to go out," he says.

Meeting him at a birthday lunch at a UP Village house where he is a guest, Rodao appears so unlike the typical morose historian given to persnickety conversations. The ex-future *torero* is a double PhD candidate at the University of Tokyo and Universidad Complutense de Madrid. He is also a picture of loquacious ebullience, complete with animated hand gestures, as he talks of his travels, not



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Rodao's itinerary:

- Columbia, where, despite the breathtaking Andes mountain range running from north and south, his trip was cut short because of the "problems of violence;"
- Guatemala, which was a breather, with Central America's Tajumulco mountain and its lush forest of mahogany, cedar and rosewood, as well as brightly colored macaws and parrots;
- Germany, which was so-so—"I was a poor person there because of my identity. The superiority complex was so intense;"
- Japan—"I love it! My being foreign helped a lot. And no one there told me that bullfights should be stopped;"

- Philippines—"The Filipinos are good in music and are very nice but they always ask me if I'm married; especially in Negros."

Armed with an invitation from Ateneo de Manila and a fellowship grant at the Centro Cultural of the Spanish Embassy, Rodao flew in from Japan for a lecture series on 19th- to 20th-century Spanish history. "It was a very good lecture," he concludes. "Filipinos are very open-minded. We were able to share experiences and opinions because knowing about 19th-century Spain is to know about the Philippines as well."

Alongside the lectures he was giving left and right (six at Ateneo, two at the University of the Philippines and one at Centro Cultural), Rodao managed to squeeze in some research of his own for his Tokyo dissertation. "It's on the Spanish community in the Philippines after 1898," he explains. "I'm interested in the Spaniards who went to the Far East, who ruled and who did not." A pro, he braved our boats and sailed to Cebu, Bacolod, Negros Occidental, Iloilo, and Boracay alone. Surprisingly, with his very foreign accent and countenance, no problems were encountered on any of his trips.

Here are Rodao's tips to fellow backpackers. "You have to take care of yourself. Don't show you're a tourist anywhere you go. You've got to blend with the crowd." Add to that knowing the country's history and language. "For example, in Japan, you can't stay there if you don't know the language. I spent at least six hours a day for six months learning the characters." That means all of 1,850 characters just to be able to read the newspapers and books.

Inevitably, settling down is part of Rodao's long-range plans but he's "in no hurry." He's seriously involved with his 400-page thesis, *Franco and The Japanese Empire*, which will be published after his December defense in Madrid. "It's like my wife," he quips. Of course, there's also his Tokyo studies (the Mambusho scholar still has three years to go before his second PhD degree); the April 1993 conference of the International Association of the Historians of Asia in Hong Kong; and the *Asociacion Española de Estudios del Pacifico Revista* to manage—"It's open to Filipino researchers who want to have their works published." As you can see, the man has his hands full.

And so the travel continues. He can't wait to get back to Madrid. (Yup, he missed the Barcelona Games. Bummer.) "I haven't been home in three years," he sighs. "I miss my family."