

WELCOME REMARKS

“Revisiting the Korean War: History, Memory, and Its Implications on Contemporary Nation Building”

Leong Hall Auditorium, Ateneo de Manila University
October 27, 2016, 9:00 AM to 12:00 PM

by **Dr. Maria Luz C. Vilches**
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His Excellency, Kim Jae-shin, Ambassador of Korea to the Philippines; Honorable Jose de Venecia, Jr., our keynote speaker at this conference; Dr. Nandy Aldaba, the Dean of the School of Social Sciences; Fr. Jose Cruz, Vice President for University and Global Relations.

We have a list of special guests that I'd like to mention here. We have with us Ambassador Kim Jae-shin, the Defense Attaché, Lt. Col. Lee Youngjin. We also have Dr. Oh Choong Suk, the Director of the Korean Cultural Center in Manila.

Our guest speakers today, we welcome them: Dr. Ricardo Jose, the Director of the Third World Studies Center and Professor of the Department of History at the University of the Philippines Diliman; Dr. Arnel Joven, Chair of the Department of History at the University of Asia and the Pacific; and our own Mr. Neville Jay Manaois, Instructor at the Department of History in this university.

We honor especially today, as well, our representatives of the Philippine Expeditionary Forces to Korea Veterans Association, Incorporated, and we'll give them again another round of applause for gracing this occasion. They'll be introduced later, so I will not steal that from the scene right now.

We have other administrators in this university: Dr. Melissa Lao, the Chair of the Department of Political Science; Dr. Lianne Habana, the Chair of the Department of History; and Ms. Sarah Domingo-Lipura, the Director of the Korean Studies Program.

So, I'd like to welcome you all to the university for this conference.

This is the 3rd Ateneo Korean Studies Conference on an apt theme, and the theme is "Revisiting the Korean War: History, Memory, and Its Implications on Contemporary Nation Building." We honor, through this conference, the 66th anniversary of the Philippine Expeditionary Forces to Korea.

At this conference, the topics interweave interdisciplinary perspectives in recalling narratives about the Korean War in the 1950s. There is something to be said about telling stories. It is a very effective medium for communicating human experiences.

History is about storytelling. It is important who tells the story, though, and what the motivations are for telling the story. Nevertheless, it's only through storytelling that we can appreciate meaning-making. We can harvest lessons from history by doing so—lessons that continue to impact on the

political, economic, and socio-cultural aspects of Korean life in particular, and the global community in general.

The interest in Korea has exponentially increased in the Philippines. For one thing, Korean telenovelas have captured many audiences. I know of a faculty member who does not miss any episode of a Korean telenovela. Korean pop musical groups have suddenly created a following among the youth. Korean food continues to be among the select choices for dining out. In the area of cosmetics and grooming, Korean beauty products are among the crowd-drawers for women in malls—even Korean hair salons.

Korean language has competed with any foreign languages as part of curricular offerings in schools. In Ateneo de Manila, our Korean Studies Program is fairly new, but it has attracted more students to the study of Korean language faster than any other foreign language has done in a short period of time.

The Minor in Korean Studies includes a study tour to Korea, which parallels the study tour to France, Germany, Spain, for those who do courses in French, German, and Spanish. Among our brilliant students in Ateneo are Koreans as well.

All that is Korean seems to have already captured the sensibility of Filipinos. This reality is a building block towards greater interest in Korean culture and Korean history, not just for what we can know about Korea, but also for what we can know better about ourselves as Filipinos through our historical links with Korea.

When Yolanda, or Typhoon Haiyan, struck the Visayas in 2013, South Korea's humanitarian mission was one of the very

first strengths of hope in Tacloban. I know that because I come from the place myself.

On my first home visit to Tacloban after the typhoon, my brother took me to Barangay Candahug in Palo. There I saw the Korean Veteran Memorial Park, distinguished by its rock formation and statues. It graces the ground in honor of the friendship between Koreans and Filipinos. In the 1950s, the Philippines aided South Korea in the Korean War. In 2013, the Koreans came to the rescue of Filipinos, aiding in the rehabilitation of lives and place during the aftermath of Yolanda. I was very touched with what I saw on one of the rock formations. It was a statement which says, and I quote, “We repaid your sacrifices of blood with our sweat drops.”

The Koreans spent sweat and efforts in helping the people of Tacloban stand on their feet again from the disaster. This was a way of paying for blood and effort that the Filipinos spent to help South Korea in the Korean War. That is a story that has taken on a new meaning and bears repeating in historical records.

I would like to thank the Korean Studies Program, the History Department, and the Political Science Department for their collaborative effort at staging this conference. I hope that this conference will show us not just the events of war but also the narratives—the narratives that illustrate the tenacity of the human spirit, the narratives that show the kindling of positive forces, such forces that form the fabric of the present as we look with hope to the future.

Have a good conference.