

Amando M Tetangco, Jr: Philippine history wrought in gold

Speech by Mr Amando M Tetangco, Jr, Governor of Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP, the central bank of the Philippines), at the Press Launch of the Asia Society Gold Exhibit, New York City, 7 August 2015.

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The Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas is pleased to be part of this pioneering exhibit of Philippine pre-colonial gold in New York with the Asia Society and the Ayala Museum.

For the first time, we will showcase in the United States the exquisite centuries-old gold ornaments crafted by our ancestors, some pieces of which are over 1,000 years old. If we look at our history books, we find that one thousand years ago, the colonization of the Americas by Europeans had not even started.

Ladies and gentlemen. Our pre-colonial collection provides insights into a glorious past we Filipinos can be truly proud of:

- first, that we had a distinct culture and art tradition that resulted from a fusion of indigenous and diverse foreign influences;
- second, that our ancestors had both the artistry and the technical ingenuity to craft these magnificent and complex gold pieces that remain much-admired by contemporary artisans; and
- third, that we had a flourishing economy with active domestic and international trade conducted through barter and gold payment.

Among the BSP gold pieces to be exhibited in New York is a “piloncito”, a gold nugget believed to be part of an early form of coinage system, whose value was determined by its weight. In addition, two “kandits” or royal gold belts will be on exhibit, one of which weighs more than one kilo. Looking at these gold objects, we can conclude that before Westerners came to our shores, we already had a thriving cosmopolitan trading center doing active trading with neighbouring kingdoms and islands.

Today, the Philippines is on the international radar screen as one of the exciting emerging economies on the basis of its remarkable positive economic performance and growth potential. This is therefore the most opportune time for the world to know more about our country and our people through our history wrought in gold.

Thus, the exhibit presents an excellent opportunity to showcase our remarkable heritage in that part of the world.

For your information, part of the BSP’s Gold Collection has been shown in Europe twice: the first was in the 1990s and the second in 2013 at the Musée du quai Branly in Paris in partnership with the French Government. In Paris, visitors were amazed at the sophistication and artistry of our precolonial gold ornaments.

Indeed, we at the BSP believe that our cultural properties promote better understanding and appreciation of our evolution as a nation.

Among Filipinos, this serves as a powerful catalyst for instilling a strong sense of national identity and love of country, attributes that foster social stability and economic growth. Thus, the BSP ensures that outstanding examples of Filipino genius in its gold, art, and numismatic collections are shared with the people through exhibits, books, CDs, social media, and provincial lectures.

In the Philippines, it is the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas and the Ayala Foundation that had the vision to acquire and preserve these priceless golden legacy from our ancestors.

Thus, while some precolonial gold pieces found by people unaware of their historical value have been irretrievably lost to melting, we can take comfort from the fact that we have two museums in Metro Manila where our people can visit golden treasures from our past – at the Met Museum at the BSP Head office along Roxas Boulevard and the Ayala Museum where we are gathered today.

So please help protect, preserve and promote our cultural heritage. And take the time to visit our museums with your family and friends.

Starting September this year to January next year, the people in New York and its visitors will have the same opportunity to experience the golden history of our country. Please invite your family and friends to visit and to spread the word about this rare exhibit.

Once again, I thank the Asia Society and the Ayala Museum for inviting us to be part of this exhibit on “Philippine Gold: Treasures of Forgotten Kingdoms.”

Thank you for your kind attention.

Maraming salamat at mabuhay po tayong lahat!