

The topic of "Historical Interpretation of Rizal's Retraction" is one of the most contentious and debated issues in Philippine history. It centers on the alleged document signed by national hero Dr. Jose Rizal hours before his execution on December 30, 1896, which supposedly retracted his Masonic affiliations and anti-clerical writings, and affirmed his belief in the Catholic Church.

Below is a structured collection of information, claims, and argumentations pertaining to this topic, focusing on historians' viewpoints and relying on reliable sources.

Republic Act: The Rizal Law PH

The primary legislative act related to José Rizal's legacy and its ongoing significance is:

Republic Act No. 1425, known as **The Rizal Law** (1956).

This law does not directly state whether Rizal retracted, but it is the legislative engine that keeps the retraction controversy relevant:

- **Mandate:** It mandates that all educational institutions in the Philippines teach the life, works, and writings of Jose Rizal, particularly his anti-clerical novels, *Noli Me Tángere* and *El Filibusterismo*.
- **Connection to Retraction:** The **Catholic Church vehemently opposed** this law. The Church views the document of retraction as proof that Rizal ultimately returned to the Catholic faith, which attempts to neutralize the revolutionary and anti-friar impact of his novels, the very works the Rizal Law forces schools to teach.

Historical Interpretations on Rizal's Retraction

The question of retraction is a "biggest mystery in Philippine history" because the primary sources are few, biased, and contradictory. Historians' interpretations are divided into two main camps:

A. Pro-Retraction View

This camp asserts that Rizal reconciled with the Church before his execution, often focusing on the existence of the document and eyewitness accounts.

HISTORIAN/SOURCE	INTERPRETATION AND CLAIM
FR. VICENTE BALAGUER, S.J. (PRIMARY)	Eyewitness Claim: Claims to have personally witnessed Rizal sign the retraction and performed his legal marriage to Josephine Bracken hours before execution.
JOSE MA. CAVANNA (SECONDARY)	Spiritual/Apologetic Logic: Argued Rizal, being a religious man, made a pragmatic and spiritual choice to die a Christian. His work was an "apologetic history" meant to repair the Church's image damaged by Rizal's novels.
NICOLAS ZAFRA (SECONDARY)	Fact of History: Called the retraction a "plain unadorned fact of history," believing the evidence presented by the pro-retraction camp is conclusive.

B. Anti-Retraction View

This camp argues the document is a fabrication inconsistent with Rizal's character and the circumstances of his death.

HISTORIAN/SOURCE	INTERPRETATION AND CLAIM
RAFAEL PALMA (SECONDARY)	Out of Character: Believed it was "illogical" that Rizal, a man of strong lifelong principles against friar power, would betray his convictions hours before death. Palma, a prominent Mason, was criticized for potentially "Idealizing the Hero".
DR. RICARDO PASCUAL (SECONDARY)	Inconsistencies/Forgery: Through handwriting analysis, he concluded that the document found in 1935 was not in Rizal's handwriting, suggesting forgery and manipulation.
AUSTIN COATES (SECONDARY)	Missing Evidence: Cited the lack of a proper Catholic burial (buried in an unhallowed ground) and the missing

	marriage certificate as strong evidence that the Church did not fully accept the conversion, or the retraction was not genuine.
THE CUERPO DE VIGILANCIA REPORT (PRIMARY)	Neutral Fact: This Spanish spy report stated that Rizal refused to sign the prepared retraction formula, though it mentioned he did sign a document he "had written." This ambiguity is used by anti-retraction scholars to argue that if he retracted, it was on his own terms and not the dogmatic formula produced by the friars.

I. The Affirmative Position (Belief in the Retraction)

This side argues that the document is authentic, primarily based on clerical records and the testimony of figures present during Rizal's final hours.

A. Historian Viewpoint & Claims

HISTORIAN	KEY ARGUMENTATION & REFERENCES CLAIMS
FR. VICENTE BALAGUER, S.J. (CONTEMPORANEO US SOURCE)	Claimed to have personally assisted Rizal in drafting the retraction document. Asserted that Rizal (often viewed genuinely converted with caution by back to Catholicism modern historians and died a pious due to his vested death. interest).
FR. PIO PI, S.J. (SUPERIOR OF THE JESUIT MISSION AT THE TIME)	Maintained that the retraction was real. Letters and later accounts He supervised the detailing the process and claimed the process, such as the copy of the those included in document published in works like <i>La Muerte Cristiana</i> 1897 was genuine. <i>Muerte Cristiana</i> Argued that the <i>del Dr. Rizal</i> . conversion was a

	<p>result of divine grace and Jesuit efforts.</p>
<p>RICARDO PASCUAL (FILIPINO SCHOLAR)</p>	<p>While not strictly a historian, his 1950 handwriting analysis (known as the <i>Pascual Report</i>) concluded that the signatures on the original retraction document were forgeries (a common misinterpretation of his work, but his <i>actual</i> conclusion was that the available documents were <i>suspect</i>). His later work, however, is often used to support authenticity by focusing on other factors. (Note: <i>Pascual's initial skepticism is often overlooked for later works used by the affirmative side.</i>)</p>
<p>AUSTIN COATES (BRITISH AUTHOR/RESEARCHER)</p>	<p>Wrote extensively defending the authenticity of the retraction. Argued that the sheer volume of supporting evidence from the Jesuits and the circumstantial evidence makes the retraction highly probable. He dismissed the skeptics' arguments as purely emotional or anti-clerical.</p>

Core Argumentation

- 1. The Jesuit Narrative:** The consistent and detailed accounts provided by the Jesuit priests (Balaguer, Pi, etc.) detailing the hours leading to the execution, including the final spiritual discussions and the preparation of the document.
- 2. The Discovery of the "Original":** The rediscovery of the alleged original document in 1935 by Fr. Manuel Garcia, S.J., which closely matched the text published in 1897.
- 3. The Motive of Piety:** Rizal, despite his criticisms of the friars, was deeply religious and educated by the Jesuits. The affirmative position argues that it was plausible for him to return to the faith of his childhood before facing death.
- 4. The Marriage:** The fact that Rizal was married to Josephine Bracken in the chapel immediately prior to his death is presented as evidence that he fulfilled the necessary Catholic requirements, which included signing the retraction.

II. The Skeptical Position (Rejection of the Retraction)

This side argues that the document is a fabrication, primarily based on the questionable historical context, inconsistencies in the published documents, and Rizal's character.

A. Historian Viewpoint & Claims

HISTORIAN	KEY ARGUMENTATION & CLAIMS	REFERENCES
DR. RAFAEL PALMA (HISTORIAN AND BIOGRAPHER OF RIZAL)	A leading voice of skepticism. Argued that the retraction was incompatible with Rizal's character and heroic nationalism. Questioned why, if the retraction was true, the original document was hidden for nearly 40 years, and why the "original" discovered in 1935 had discrepancies.	<i>Biografia de Rizal</i> (1949 English translation <i>The Pride of the Malay Race</i>).
AMBETH OCAMPO (PROMINENT HISTORIAN)	Focuses less on proving forgery and more on historical context and inconsistencies.	Numerous historical documents and analyses.

NT FILIPINO HISTORIAN AND COLUMNIST)	the <i>context</i> and <i>improbabili</i> columns and ty. Highlights the essays, inconsistencies in the particularly witnesses' accounts in <i>Meaning and History</i> (2001) (especially those of Balaguer and Pi) and the . political motive of the friars to discredit a deceased enemy.
DR. JOSÉ VICTOR TORRES (PROFESSOR OF HISTORY)	Emphasizes the textual Various critique, pointing out that historical there are at least four lectures and versions of the retraction academic text, all slightly papers on the different, casting doubt on subject. which, if any, is authentic. He also notes the lack of consensus on the handwriting analysis.
DR. AUSTIN CRAIG (AMERICAN SCHOLAR AND EARLY BIOGRAPHER)	Expressed profound doubt, <i>Rizal's Life</i> arguing that if Rizal had <i>and Minor</i> truly retracted, his actions <i>Writings</i> (1927 and attitude in his final). moments would have been entirely different. His writings and actions right up to the execution were those of an unflinching martyr.

B. Core Argumentation

1. The Forgery Thesis (The Document): The document found in 1935 is suspected of being a forgery (the "copy" found by Fr. Garcia was actually the "original"). Handwriting analysis results have been inconclusive or contradictory, and the text itself contains theological language uncharacteristic of Rizal.
2. Rizal's Character: Rizal's last writings, notably the *Mi Último Adiós* (written hours before the alleged retraction), and his unwavering stance against the Catholic hierarchy, suggest a man who would not compromise his principles merely to save his soul (as defined by the friars).

3. **The Motive of the Church:** The Catholic Church (specifically the friars) had a strong political and theological motive to fabricate the retraction to neutralize Rizal's martyrdom and discredit the revolutionary movement that utilized his secular ideals.
4. **Lack of Public Disclosure:** If the retraction was so vital to the Church, why was it kept secret from Rizal's family and the public for decades? His family was not given the original document, nor were they allowed access to him under normal circumstances.
5. **The Missing Canonical Vow:** The retraction document demands a solemn abjuration of masonry. Skeptics note that if Rizal genuinely returned to the faith, he would have needed to publicly affirm the canonical decrees and potentially undergo specific rituals, details of which are incomplete or suspicious.

Historical Interpretation: Rizal's Retraction

The historical debate generally falls into two camps: those who accept the document's authenticity (the Affirmative Position) and those who reject it (the Skeptical Position).

III. Conclusion: The Ongoing Historical Challenge

The debate over Rizal's Retraction remains unresolved because it relies heavily on interpreting conflicting primary sources and circumstantial evidence.

Modern Historical Consensus (Ambeth Ocampo, etc.)

Many contemporary historians acknowledge that definitively proving or disproving the retraction is impossible due to the nature of the available sources (mostly clerical accounts or disputed documents). Therefore, the focus has shifted from *authenticity* to *historical significance*:

- **The Historical Impact:** Whether real or fabricated, the retraction controversy fundamentally shaped how Rizal was viewed—either as a religious hero (by the Church) or as a secular martyr (by nationalists).
- **The Importance of Context:** Historians like Ambeth Ocampo suggest that the crucial point is not what Rizal *did*, but

what the colonial and clerical structures needed him to do to maintain control and delegitimize the anti-colonial cause

IV. Conclusion

The question of Rizal's retraction remains unresolved. While Jesuit sources and archival discoveries argue for authenticity, contradictions in testimonies, the suspicious timing of the document's discovery, and Rizal's own writings fuel skepticism. Modern historians (e.g., Ocampo) agree that it is impossible to prove or disprove conclusively. What endures is the historical impact: Rizal continues to be seen either as a Catholic hero reclaimed by the Church or as a secular martyr for nationalist ideals.

HISTORICAL INTERPRETATION RIZAL'S RETRACTION

MEMBER

ANNE CRYSTAL PILLATORA

DOMICIC PEREZ

MEGAN DAPITILLA

JANNA ESPINO