

Catalogue of Philippine Typhoons: 414-1703*

MIGUEL SELGA, S.J. (1879-1956)

TYPHOONS are a reality in Philippine life now and have been doubtless in the past too. Today satellites safely above the earth keep track of typhoons with vigilant camera eyes and varied sensors, and relay to memory banks comprehensive and essential data on each and every typhoon. Every typhoon is accurately recorded, its path plotted, its toll in life and property assessed, and even the typhoon is given a name. Before meteorology was born, not much information was recorded. Instead this information has to be inferred from scattered sources, many of them obscure, like diaries, letters, ship logs, and unrelated documents.

The nameless typhoons that are listed below were laboriously culled by Fr. Miguel Selga.¹ The earliest records of Philippine typhoons are found in Chinese chronicles. With the coming of the Spaniards, accounts of typhoons become more numerous and detailed.

Several synonymous terms appear which will be distinguished: typhoon, baguio, hurricane and cyclone (the Spanish equivalents being *tifón*, *baguio*, *huracán* and *ciclón* respectively).

* Edited by Victor L. Badillo, S.J., Acting Director, Manila Observatory. — THE EDITORS' NOTE.

¹ For the life and bibliography of Father Selga, see Hidalgo, Angel, "Miguel Selga, 1879-1956: Priest and Scientist," *Philippine Studies* 15:3 (April 1967), 307-47.

Cyclone is the name for tropical storms formed in the Bay of Bengal which strike the coasts of India and Bangladesh. Hurricane is the name for the storms in the Caribbean area. It comes from Hunrakan, the West Indian god of the big winds.² Tropical storms hitting the Philippines, China and Japan are called typhoons or baguios. Typhoon is derived from the Chinese *taifung*. *Fung* means any kind of wind while *tai* refers to a veering wind, one that changes direction.³ The Spaniards found the Filipinos using *bagyo* to designate storms or strong winds. This is probably derived from the Sanskrit *vayu* which merely means wind.⁴

A typhoon is a storm or vast system of violent winds rotating counterclockwise around a center of calm. Abundant rain accompanies the storm. The center itself has a relatively leisurely forward motion. This combination of motions has caused the stunned observer to speak with awe of a storm that turned around and came back. Typhoons are born in the Pacific, east of the Philippines. They then follow a curving almost parabolic path that in general cuts across the Philippines into the coastal regions of China and/or Japan. By the term Philippine typhoon is meant one whose influence was felt in the Philippines. Though a typhoon lasts many days, a single date is given most times, the day the historian felt the storm.⁵

1. The typhoon of 414

We learn of a typhoon in the China Sea in the year 414 of the Christian era from an account of an eyewitness, the Chinese buddhist Fa-hien. Fa-hien left China about the year 399 A.D. on a pilgrimage in quest of buddhist books of discipline. He traveled over Tibet and through India and finally settled in

² I. R. Tannehill, *The Hurricane Hunters* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Co., 1957), p. 7.

³ J. Algué, *The Cyclones of the Far East*, 2nd rev. ed. (Manila: Bureau of Printing, 1904), p. 11.

⁴ J. R. Francisco, *Indian Influences in the Philippines* (Diliman, Q. C.: University of the Philippines, 1964), p. 40.

⁵ This catalog is obviously incomplete. It is offered as a starting point for a more complete one.