

But more interesting, and fearsome, about the sun and the moon are the eclipses. A solar or lunar eclipse is known as "paglalaho" (vanishing) or "kinain ng laho" (eaten by nothingness), *laho* being a Tagalog word meaning *nothing* or *nothingness*.

Comets, as elsewhere, are associated with foreboding of great evil or disaster just as in Julius Caesar (Act II, scene 2) Calpurnia says:

"When beggars die there are no comets seen;

The heavens themselves blaze forth the death of princes."

In the Philippines, the last two great comets observed were Ikeya-Seki, in 1965, and was associated with the destructive eruption of Taal Volcano that same year; and Bennet, in 1970, and associated with the great earthquake of April 7, 1970.

Before the Pacific war in 1941, a comet was seen in the Philippines and when war came after Pearl Harbor in December the Filipino naturally attributed it with the appearance of the comet.

The universality of the interest in astronomy is shown by these few facts, from Shakespeare's lovers through the Filipino Christianized by foreign invaders, down to the present era of quasars and collapsars — and prove that all men are astronomers in varying degrees, each with his own expertise or the lack of it.

COLOR OF THE ECLIPSED MOON

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What is the color of a shadow? Though the ancient Dayaks did not formally set out to settle this question, they furnished some answers. This may be gleaned from their folk beliefs concerning lunar eclipses. There is always some substratum of truth in beliefs that the modern person dismisses as superstition. In general, most peoples before the advent of astronomy explained the disappearance of the moon during a lunar eclipse by saying that some animal was devouring it. So they made all sorts of loud noises to frighten away the best. Apparently this worked. The moon always did reappear! Various peoples, various animals. Among the peoples of India the monster's name was Rahu. The Dayaks took the same word but added a variation. They spoke of three Rahus, to wit: *Raho-bahuang*, *Raho-tambaga* and *Raho-ambon*.

If the moon during the eclipse is black or not visible, the devouring monster is *Raho-bahuang* (literally, bear eclipse). If the eclipsed moon appears reddish, the attacking monster is *Raho-tambaga* (copper eclipse). If the eclipsed moon appears gray, the menacing monster is called *Raho-ambon* (fog eclipse).¹

Before proceeding to the significance of this folk belief, a few notes concerning the translation will be helpful. *Bahuang* means bear², which in Spanish is *oso*. But it has always been misprinted as *oro*³, which says the exact opposite, gold instead of dark. *Raho-bahuang* literally means bear, i.e. dark Rahu. However Blumentritt and Hardeland render this respectively as *eclipse de oso* and *Baren-Finsterniss*. That is, Rahu signifies either the monster or the eclipse, the cause or the effect. In Tagalog, *laho* is the animal or the eclipse.⁴ (Note the familiar R-L shift). One might detect the animal aspect in the following riddle:

Kinain na't naubos
nabubuo pang lubos.

(Though eaten and consumed, it reappears total and entire). In present day Tagalog, though, the animal aspect has receded into the background. Interesting too is another term for fog, namely *abu-abo* meaning like ash or grayish.