Book Review

■ Nicole CuUnjieng Aboitiz, *Asian Place, Filipino Nation: A Global Intellectual History of the Philippine Revolution, 1887–1912*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2020. Pp. 272. Bibliography and Index. $35.00 (paper).

Reading Nicole CuUnjieng Aboitiz's carefully researched and finely argued *Asian Place, Filipino Nation: A Global Intellectual History of the Philippine Revolution, 1887–1912* provokes many surprising questions. Where in the world are the Philippines? Where do we think the Philippines are? Where have Filipinos thought they were? Answers drawn from both the history and the historiography of the Philippines can offer some equally surprising answers to non-specialists.

While the Philippines has much in common with the other Southeast Asian states, there are some important distinctions. Composed of over 7,000 islands whose people speak dozens of languages and dialects, this archipelago nation shares much in common with its neighbor to the south, Indonesia with its 17,000 islands and well over 300 different languages. As in Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, Burma, Cambodia, and Vietnam, the Philippines has a long history of commercial contact with China, leading to the creation of significant over-seas Chinese communities, widespread inter-marriage, and diverse patterns of assimilation. And like every country in Southeast Asia with the notable exception of Thailand, Filipino history is marked by Western colonialism.

But a few very significant differences separate the Philippines from the rest of the region. The islands were colonized twice, first by the Spanish monarchy from 1571 to 1898 and then by the American republic from 1898 to 1946. These centuries of colonization dramatically exceeded the three or four generations of French rule in Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos or British rule on the Malay Peninsula or in Burma. Spanish rule offers a fascinating paradox. As the monarchy was focused on trade with China and fearful of the creation of a creole population which might exploit the indigenous people or develop troublesome ideas about independence, the crown imposed strict rules limiting *Peninsulare* settlement to the city of Manila and a few other sites. Thus, no planter class developed as in colonial Latin America and, despite the global economic significance of Manila as a center of trade, there was relatively little economic impact on the islands as a whole. Admittedly, when the wars of Latin American independence ended the Manila galleon trade (1565–1815), the final stage

of Spanish rule did see a dramatic erosion of these policies, but this stands in contrast to the previous 250 years. Despite the regulation against settlement in the interior, the Spanish did encourage generations of missionaries to spread the Catholic faith and supplied the colony with priests and friars to attend to the Filipino's spiritual education. Thus, the Philippines and East Timor are the only Southeast Asian nations to have Christian majorities. In terms of politics, the Philippines also stands out as the first modern constitutional republic in Asia. Emilio Aguinaldo's Malolos Republic (1899–1901) predated Sun Yat-Sen's Chinese Republic by over a decade and Southeast Asia's post-Pacific War republics by two generations. Compared to the Dutch "police actions" in Indonesia (1945–1949), the British Malaysian Emergency (1948–1960), and France's First Indochina War (1946–1954), the Philippines also enjoyed a much more peaceful path to independence. With a formal treaty separating the new republic from the United States of America signed on July 4, 1946, the new Filipino nation-state led the way in the global process of post-war decolonization.

The idiosyncrasies of Filipino history from Magellan's arrival in 1521 to the post-colonial Philippines has led scholars to set it apart from the rest of Asian history. Indeed, some have linked the Philippines to Latin American historical narratives. That so many of the late 19th century intelligentsia, the *Illustrados* or "Illustrious Ones" – José Rizal being the most well-known—were educated in Western European universities only furthered the idea that Filipino history was more interwoven with Europe and the Americas than with Asia. Nicole CuUnjieng Aboitiz's *Asian Place, Filipino Nation* is a direct assault on this historiographic model.

Asian Place, Filipino Nation argues that we must resituate the Philippines in not just Southeast Asian but a greater pan-Asian history. CuUnjieng Aboitiz's stated goal is to pursue East-East relations at the turn of the 20th century. She persuasively illustrates that many of the *Illustrados* looked far less to Europe than to China, Japan, and Vietnam, as well as southward towards what is now Indonesia. According to her carefully constructed argument, the young men (and it was entirely men in this narrative) who made the revolution adopted Social Darwinism from the West but reconfigured the admittedly loose ideology to fit their Asian perspective. They dreamed of a revitalized Asia in which Filipinos, Japanese, and other sovereign Asian *volk* could re-establish control over their land, resources, and culture. Importantly, this intellectual history shows that they were part of global discourses about race and nation. While learning from and interacting with their European colleagues, they did not simply regurgitate Western ideas but rather modified them for an Asian context and repurposed them for their own agendas.

In their imagination, these Filipino nationalists were inspired by Japan's great transformation in the Meiji era (1868–1912). While many historians point to the significance of Japan's victory over Russia in the 1904–1905 war, CuUnjieng Aboitiz holds that the previous decade's Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895) was of far great significance for fueling the dreams of a new Asia. Filipino scholars read and then redeployed Western race science, situating

Filipinos as part of the greater Malay world but also claiming that the Japanese were Malay (she does not address what the Japanese thought of this notion). Such a trans-national imagined community fed a fantasy of pan-Asian racial solidarity against predatory Westerners, be they Iberian or North American.

These fantasies had some very real-world consequences. CuUnjieng Aboitiz details how Filipino revolutionaries traveled to Japan for education and inspiration but also for political networking and to secure military aid. She discusses a range of conspiracies including sending money, arms, and even former Samurai to serve as military advisors for the nationalist insurgents. While most of these schemes came to naught due to poor planning and coordination, a lack of support from the Japanese government, and even embezzlement, the intent was there. CuUnjieng Aboitiz tracks the circulation of Filipino revolutionaries through ports such as Hong Kong and reconstructs their connections with Vietnamese revolutionaries such as Phan Boi Chau and Chinese followers of Sun Yat-Sen. Meanwhile, they articulated their nationalist and pan-Asianist dreams in political and academic periodicals. Such information is not merely anecdotal, rather it casts Filipino agency in an entirely new light and raises questions about what could have been had not the movement failed and had not President McKinley received approval from God himself (or so he infamously claimed) to annex the archipelago.

Asian Place, Filipino Nation thus forces us to rethink historical possibilities, to consider potential Filipino historical trajectories not from the perspective of Washington or Madrid but from Manila and Malolos, as well as Tokyo and Hong Kong. It is important to note that this is a work of intellectual history. Even though many of these individuals' schemes and dreams did not transcend the world of fantasy, it is important to know that they were thinking such hopes and strategies. That these historical actors saw themselves in a world that challenges traditional historical narratives should inspire world history teachers to re-examine their assumptions regarding Asia at the turn of the 20th century. As a detailed monograph in the specialized field of Asian intellectual history, most teachers would have some difficulty assigning *Asian Place, Filipino Nation* to any course other than a graduate level seminar. However, as CuUnjieng Aboitiz's work serves as an important intervention into our understanding of where the Philippines are in world history, a wide range of educators would benefit from working her conclusions into their courses.

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