

Asian place, Filipino nation: A global intellectual history of the Philippine Revolution, 1887–1912

By NICOLE CUUNJIENG ABOITIZ

New York: Columbia University Press, 2020. Pp. xi + 256. Notes, Bibliography, Index.

doi:10.1017/S0022463421000242

In this pathbreaking work Nicole CuUnjieng Aboitiz rescues two themes from the Philippines' founding moment that had been buried in the ash heaps of the Filipino–American War (1899–1902) and the Filipino–Japanese War (1942–45). The first theme is the initial grounding of Philippine nationalism on a 'sense of belonging' to the Malay race and its Asian place (p. 30). The second is the subversive, East and Southeast Asian alliances of 'the long Philippine Revolution of 1896–1906, which began against Spain and continued against the United States' (p. 1). She rescues both themes through an intellectual history of peripheral Pan-Asianism: a vision of an Asian 'federation of equals' that would replace Western imperialism (p. 24). Against conventional accounts, *Asian place, Filipino nation* convincingly argues that the Philippine Revolution was at the vanguard of a transnational movement of Pan-Asianists whose goal was to lead or aid nationalist uprisings in colonial Asia.

Western empires justified colonisation as part of their 'civilizing mission' to spread an 'idea' (such as Christianity) which they asserted as 'universal' (p. 6). CuUnjieng Aboitiz argues that Filipino intellectuals (*ilustrados*) and revolutionaries 'rejected the imperial primacy of idea as first qualification to rule' (p. 61). Instead they asserted the primacy of place, arguing that a nation has the right to rule the land it has long tilled. This assertion assembled prominent portions of the Philippines' past, practices, and places into a unifying narrative of national identity.

The *ilustrados* and revolutionaries, CuUnjieng Aboitiz argues, were Social Darwinists who thought of global politics and international relations in terms of natural selection and the survival of the fittest. They sought to raise their nation's lowly place in the Social Darwinist pecking order by including it within a wider camp. As part of Asia and the Malay race, the Philippines could share in China's ancient glory and Japan's modern rise. The *ilustrados*, for example, portrayed Filipinos and Japanese as 'racial brothers' (p. 62) who both possessed 'the qualities of nobility and virility that characterize the Malay' (p. 64). This political manoeuvre of locating 'the Filipino nation, firstly, within Asia' not only separated its history and destiny from those of Spain (p. 46), but also gave it a 'civilizational location apart from that of Europe' (p. 13).

Having secured a larger base, the *ilustrados* and revolutionaries employed two Pan-Asianist arguments to support their claim to sovereignty. First, they argued that races evolve separately because their varying environments require them to adapt differently from each other. This bolstered the primacy of place by embedding it in a nation's broader racial history. Second, they argued that the torch of 'universal civilization' had passed from East to West and was destined to return from West to East (p. 47). The Philippines' colonial subjugation was therefore not only temporary,

but, as ‘part of an Asian movement to spread independence to their neighbors and Malay brothers’, the Filipino nation was envisioned to be an engine of civilisation’s Eastbound train (p. 132).

Asian place, Filipino nation locates the origin of Filipino Pan-Asianism at the end of the nineteenth century with the ilustrado clamour for political reforms from Spain. To counter the European view of the archipelago as housing disparate primitive tribes, the ilustrados conjured up a ‘transnational imagined community’ (p. 39) where Filipinos were ‘definitively Malay in terms of race’ (p. 57) as well as ‘in their languages, customs, religious beliefs, social institutions, psychology, and cultural practices’ (p. 40). (Unfortunately, as CuUnjieng Aboitiz points out, this came at the cost of ‘largely blotting out the folk “little traditions” and the non-Christian and tribal minorities’ of the archipelago from the ilustrados’ imagined community [p. 61].)

After the reform movement was abandoned Filipinos turned first to secret societies and then to armed violence. Through a persuasive reading of the revolution’s writings and rituals, CuUnjieng Aboitiz shows how the revolutionaries interpreted race as ‘an active agent in the Philippines’s history of suffering’, ‘an organizing component to realizing its future’, and ‘an essential element to its ultimate purpose and vision’ (p. 86). It was this ‘deeply racial interpretive framework and Pan-Malay vision operative in the Philippine Revolution’ (p. 109) which the US empire attempted to erase after winning the Filipino-American War by highlighting the revolution’s liberal and republican goals and editing out its Pan-Asianism (Reynaldo Iletto, *Knowledge and pacification*, 2017, p. 10). Rejecting the political primacy of place, the Americans justified their colonisation of the Philippines as part of their ‘civilizing mission’ to spread their claimed universal idea of the ‘rule of law’ (Leia Castañeda Anastacio, *The foundations of the modern Philippine state*, 2016, p. 5).

Despite four decades of American colonial rule Pan-Asianism lived on as a fighting faith for many Filipinos, notably the exiled revolutionary general Artemio Ricarte, whose promise to ‘return, with Japan’s help’ continued to inspire mutinies and revolts against the Americans up until 1914 (Iletto, p. 166), who returned to the Philippines with Japan’s help during the Second World War, and whose death in 1945, by one account, ‘marks when the Revolution stopped’ (Nick Joaquin, *A question of heroes*, 2005, p. 214). The Pan-Asianists’ Social Darwinist worldview had ‘arrayed the world into separate camps’, the West and Asia (p. 31), which were bound to clash in a ‘race war’ (p. 142) where Japan would be a ‘potential ally’ and ‘protector’ (p. 26). Filipino and Vietnamese nationalists courted support from the Japanese, who, it turned out, ‘had little to offer their Southeast Asian friends’ (p. 73). CuUnjieng Aboitiz vividly portrays this dynamic in a chapter on the Pan-Asianist activities of the Revolution’s foreign emissary Mariano Ponce.

Pan-Asianists from the colonised world, like Ponce, were nationalists who dreamed of ‘a new diplomacy and new transnational political arrangement through a federation of equals’ (p. 24). Many of them would have disowned the Japanese atrocities in their countries during the Second World War. Many Filipino Pan-Asianists, for one, viewed these atrocities as a ‘Japanese disavowal of their blood compact with the Filipinos’ (Iletto, p. 193). In its aftermath ‘disillusioned Asianists’ would move

‘away from Pan-Asia and toward the Third World’ in pursuing their visions of a more equal transnational order (p. 162).

BRYAN DENNIS G. TIOJANCO
The University of Tokyo

Singapore

Eating chilli crab in the Anthropocene: Environmental perspectives on life in Singapore

Edited by MATTHEW SCHNEIDER-MAYERSON

Singapore: Ethos Books, 2020. Pp. 275. Notes, Plates.

doi:10.1017/S0022463421000229

This work is a pioneering effort. Not only is it one of the first to synthesise the stories of non-human natures in Singapore from interdisciplinary sources, it centralises youth voices rarely amplified in public discourse. All the contributors to this book are born in the 1990s. It thus presents an emerging environmentalist perspective of a generation steeped in digitally facilitated calls for action against climate change and sensitive to the future vulnerability of living in this epoch.

The introduction asserts, ‘There’s pain in these pages. There is frustration, disappointment, anger ... But there is also wonder, beauty and solidarity ...’ (p. 15). Impactful chapters in the volume deftly combine both, evoking wonder to elicit discomfort. Neo Xiaoyun’s elegiac title essay, interweaves the natural history of crabs with ethical issues arising from an omnivorous diet. Reading about crab cannibalism and the moulting process that renders these crabs delectable gives them personalities that one might not be able to forget when facing this dish. Sarah Novak uses art and photography to re-orient our optics on sand, its forcible displacement from the region and re-emplacement as reclaimed land in this city-state. Yogesh Tulsi and Ng Xin unpack iconic non-human foes — the spectre of ‘*Orang Minyak*’ and tigers respectively — to interrogate the ubiquity of ecological crime in a capitalistic context. While each essay begins with wonder, they frequently end with frustration. Tulsi could speak for almost all the contributors when he concludes that ‘Singapore, a “practical” nation operating within a global regime of insatiable fossil-fuelled capitalism, is becoming the orang minyak: a self-interested, oil-soaked actor willing to destroy traditional communities and ecosystems in the pursuit of comfort, recognition and wealth’ (p. 178).

Attendant with this frustration is mourning for the displaced. Fu Xiyao excavates Semakau for the histories of displaced Southern Islands indigenous communities. Heeun Monica Kim reflects on how Singapore’s self-congratulatory affection for otters refracts attention away from other declining species and Lee Jin Hee’s study on Javan mynahs compares them to unwelcome refugees and migrants to Singapore. While thoughtfully argued and well-written, in my view, they are unlikely to convince a general audience predisposed towards regarding these trade-offs as acceptable. Moreover, the foci on who and what was lost gives rise to the question of whether these narratives romanticise the past. A closer attention to history might be warranted as environmental