

Book Reviews

America's Informal Empires: Philippines and Japan, edited by Kiichi Fujiwara and Yoshiko Nagano, Anvil Publishing, 2012, 354 pp., ISBN 978-971-27-2765-8.

IN *AMERICA'S INFORMAL EMPIRES: Philippines and Japan*, Kiichi Fujiwara and Yoshiko Nagano appropriated the term *informal empire* to refer to America's efforts in creating a strategic post-war, post-colonial archetype to control resources or people in the Asia-Pacific region. In numerous ways, the book presented alternative explanatory models to demonstrate how America's hegemonic influence on Japan and the Philippines established a new world order.¹

Fujiwara and Nagano did not disappoint. For one, there is a dearth of foreign-based scholars working on Philippine and Philippine-related studies today. Intersecting these with the works of Philippine-based scholars and in light of issues surrounding US-Japan relations is an added plus. Furthermore, the book worked on a variety of interdisciplinary themes and issues previously untouched in recent times. Most importantly, the authors discussed the state and the functional application of geographical variables in determining America's political behavior vis-à-vis Japan and the Philippines.

I was deeply impressed with the book's attempt to interrogate empire and nation-building, nations and nationalism, and the vicissitudes transecting the three parties involved. For instance, Reynaldo Ileto's "War with the US and Japan, and the Politics of History in the Philippines" rendered new perspectives on the nearly-forgotten Filipino-American War (1896-1902) and the Japanese occupation of the Philippines (1942-1945) by critiquing Theodore Friend's *Between Two Empires*, while drawing

parallelisms between the two wars in order to bring around residual perceptions about America's colonial presence as "a fall into darkness" and not as a "golden age" as it had been romanticized by many.

Temario Rivera's "American Impact on Elite Community in Post-War Japan and the Philippines" provides a counterpoint to Iletto's study. In contrast to America's clear mandate during the post-World War II period to eliminate Japan's ruling elite while sparing Emperor Hirohito, Rivera suggests that America restored the Philippine oligarchy while deflecting perceived threats brought about by the grouping of progressive forces in the democratic alliance.

Oscar Campomanes' "The Japanese Analogy as Liminal Crisis-Effect in Initial Filipino-American Encounters, 1898-1899" discussed how, according to Felipe Agoncillo's seminal account of Filipino republican formation at the end of the nineteenth century, Filipino mission in the United States was generally perceived like "Japanese" by many Americans. Agoncillo says, "You have heard little of us..." (99). Campomanes suggests that by knowing very little about the struggles and trials of Filipinos under Spain, America may have failed to fully grasp the contexts and nature of the nation they were supposed to have "liberated".

Floro Quibuyen's "Japan and America in the Filipino Nationalist Imagination: From Rizal to Ricarte" provides an interesting take on Artemio Ricarte as a "forgotten hero" who "passed away with not even a marker placed on his grave" (127). Quibuyen's study is a wonderful attempt to situate Philippine nationalist consciousness vis-à-vis Japan and America before, during, and after World War II. Like Iletto and Campomanes, Quibuyen fills in a gap in social and historical studies by using counter-narratives to explain how Philippine attitudes towards the two colonial masters were met with contrasting responses.

Yoshiko Nagano's "On the Same Terrain of Colonial Modernity: The Mystification of Jose Rizal and the Symbolization of the Japanese Emperor" suggests that Rizal was America's functional national hero, whose memory was brewed and bred to perpetuate the colonial master's grip on

the archipelago. In contrast, the Japanese Emperor signified ambiguity vis-à-vis Japan's attitudes toward issues surrounding the Pacific War—the creation of a Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere (Dai-tô-a Kyôeiken), the issue of comfort women, and so forth.

In discussing the paradoxical nature of Japanese emigration to the Philippines during the American Colonial Period, Patricia Afable, in “Baguio’s Early 20th Century Japanese Community: Culture, Society and Work in an American ‘Hill Station’ in the Philippines,” articulated the unique partnership between Japanese migrant workers and the American managers and capital owners. Meanwhile, “fruitful social and economic accommodations between Japanese and highland peoples on the one hand, and Japanese and Americans on the other, set the geographical and technological stage for the second half of the century,” Afable suggests (202).

Articulating the emergence of *salidummay* as a folk song in the Cordilleras vis-à-vis Japan's *sambika/shoka/gunka*, Michiyo Yoneno-Reyes suggests that at one level, modern folk songs in many places across the Philippines and Japan are “a form of bodily-aesthetical ‘surrender’ of the ‘Igorrots’ and Japanese to Anglo-Saxon musical tastes... as epitomized by the system of tonality and meter...” (255).

In the world of theater, latecomers may have to wait to be seated until an appropriate break in the performance comes through. As a belated colonial master, America seized every opportunity to break through early on, by exploring asymmetrical opportunities vis-à-vis the British empire to sit, stare and shudder. Collectively, the aforementioned scholars along with Julian Go in “The Philippines and US Imperial Identity,” Satoshi Nakano in “Memory and Mourning: Six Decades After the Two Wars,” Augusto Espiritu in “Competing Shadows: Japan and the USA in the Filipino American Imagination,” Nobue Suzuki in “Love Triangles: Filipinos, Japanese and the Shifting Locations of American Power,” and Hiromu Shimizu in “Refiguring Identities in an Ifugao Village: Sketches of Joint Projects from a Filipino Filmmaker, a Native Intellectual, and a

Japanese Anthropologist under American Shadow(s)” challenged many interdisciplinary interrogations on or about informal imperialism. By working on the US, Japan, and the Philippines these authors brought a renewed appreciation of “informal empires” in a manner so remarkably different from its standard British variety.

Despite attempts to problematize and reconsider the roles of commerce and culture in shaping America’s informal empires in West Pacific, it remains a puzzle why, after World War II, America privileged Japan—“the enemy”—over the Philippines—“the friend” and erstwhile colony. Japan’s economy grew by leaps and bounds, enough to create a dent in global affairs during the latter half of the twentieth century. In sharp contrast, America chose to maintain the Philippine ruling elite, which contributed greatly to political instability, economic collapse and over-all sorry state throughout the archipelago from the late 1960s onwards. Still, Fujiwara and Nagano’s book creates an opening for future scholars to explore many possible paradigms of understanding on the subject. Many other hows and whys of informal empires deserve to be constructed, deconstructed and reconstructed in the context of America’s dangerous precedents.

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Note

- ¹ Barton and Bennet (2010, 67) define “informal empire” as a “willing and successful attempt by commercial and political elites to control a foreign region, resource, or people.”

Reference

- Barton, G.A. and B.M. Bennett. 2010. “Forestry as Foreign Policy: Anglo-Siamese Relations and the Origins of Britain’s Informal Empire in the Teak Forests of Northern Siam, 1883-1925.” *Itinerario* 34(2): 65–86.