

Asian Place, Filipino Nation: A Global Intellectual History of the Philippine Revolution, 1887-1912.

Nicole CuUnjieng Aboitiz. New York: Columbia University Press, 2020. 272 pages. ISBN 9780231192156.

The binary link between metropole and colony is an enduring analytical structure in postcolonial studies, and a difficult one to escape. The seemingly inextricable link between imperial systems and the postcolonial nation-states they gave birth to creates a series of assumed geographies, cultural orientations, and philosophical foundations all centered on the empire. Nicole CuUnjieng Aboitiz's recent book, *Asian Place, Filipino Nation: A Global Intellectual History of the Philippine Revolution, 1887-1912*, challenges these assumptions; it reorients the Philippine Revolution away from imperial binaries and towards an elaborately diverse set of intellectual nodes scattered across East and Southeast Asia. Aboitiz's work offers a new and complex transnational contextualization of a much-studied subject.

The book focuses on the intellectual culture and writings of key Filipino nationalists, known as the *Ilustrados* or the Propagandists. By stressing the "global connections and [the] transnational transmission of ideas," Aboitiz unsettles the "traditional assumption. . . that the Filipino self-image is historically non-Asian" (3). She pushes this point further by centering her work on "East-East relations" and the discourses of Pan-Asianism that "proliferated across the transnational Southeast Asian canvas" at the end of the nineteenth century. This makes a dramatic break from more Eurocentric explanations of the Philippine Revolution (3). Using Japan and Vietnam to demonstrate her case, she allows readers "to consider the internal and early constitution of what would come to be the region of Southeast Asia" outside the strictly Western narratives of the empire (5). Questions of identity, place, history, and nation within the context of the Philippine Revolution are inextricably linked to constructions of race at the turn of the century. This is perhaps the book's most profound contribution. Aboitiz argues that Filipino nationalists "employed race as a

category and treated races as real, but they argued for an understanding of race through multilinear evolutionism rather than deterministic, orthogenetic Darwinism” (56). This marks an important departure from many of the literature on race in the Philippines, which overwhelmingly focuses on imperial efforts at race-making through censuses, ethnological studies, cultural representation, curation, and a host of other methods. With the Filipino nationalists’ emphasis on “Malayness,” they were barely participating in race-making, as they were engaged in the project of national race-locating. This represents a strong historical endorsement of indigenous agency and reveals profound intellectual projects occurring outside the colonial binary.

As with any work of this kind, the use of the term “Philippine nation” is fraught with intense controversy and contestation. The staggering ethnolinguistic, ethnoreligious, regional, historical, and class diversity characterizing the islands immediately problematizes any notions of a “nationalist movement” or even a “Philippine Revolution.” The position of the *Illustrados*—Manila-centric, highly educated, and upperclass—radically narrows the breadth of their ethnopolitical claims and geographic orientations. It should be noted, for example, that the *illustrados*’ engagement with a broader Asian identity was preceded by centuries of Moro identification with the Malay world to the south and west of the Philippines. While it is not reasonable to expect the author to engage in endless historical digressions exploring the islands’ diversity, it is important to thoroughly acknowledge the limits of a seemingly comprehensive intellectual and political revolution in the Philippines.

In sum, Aboitiz provides a deeply researched, thoughtful, and erudite volume, which would make a fine addition to any library. This book is an appropriate read for those interested in nationalist anti-colonial movements, the intellectual history of the Philippines, the Philippine Revolution, or transnational intellectual currents in Asia during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

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