



**Nicole CuUnjieng Aboitiz.** *Asian Place, Filipino Nation: A Global Intellectual History of the Philippine Revolution, 1887-1912.* New York: Columbia University Press, 2020. 272 pp. \$35.00, paper, ISBN 978-0-231-19215-6.

**Reviewed by** Sarah Steinbock-Pratt (University of Alabama)

**Published on** H-Diplo (May, 2021)

**Commissioned by** Seth Offenbach (Bronx Community College, The City University of New York)

Within the last two decades, the fields of transnational and transimperial history have flourished, as have approaches that break down traditional historical subfields to draw connections across the lines of theory and methodology. Building on both of these recent trends, Nicole CuUnjieng Aboitiz's *Asian Place, Filipino Nation* situates the Philippine Revolution, as well as its ideological precursors and legacies, within the historical context of Asia and the long struggle against Western imperialism. CuUnjieng Aboitiz argues that the Philippine Revolution and its leaders can only be fully understood in conversation with turn-of-the-century Pan-Asianism, anticolonial revolution, and the nationalisms they helped build. In order to examine the long history of the revolution, she focuses especially on comparisons with and interactions between the Philippines, Vietnam, and Japan. While noting the influence of Western thought on anticolonial resistance, CuUnjieng Aboitiz declares that of equal importance were the ways in which Pan-Asianists interpreted and revised racial theories, claimed participation in a broader Asian (or Malay) race, and used ideas of place to make nationalist and regional connections.

Merging the theories and methods of area and ethnic studies with intellectual history, CuUnjieng

Aboitiz makes the persuasive argument that we ought to understand Pan-Asianism not just as a discourse, but as a practice and a process as well a material and affective network. This approach enables her to take the Pan-Asianism of the leaders of the Propaganda Movement and the Philippine Revolution seriously, noting that Pan-Asianism was multivalent and looked significantly different in the colonized periphery than in Japan. In areas of Southeast Asia currently colonized or actively resisting colonization, CuUnjieng Aboitiz argues, Pan-Asianism of necessity worked in service, rather than in opposition, to nationalism. In so doing, she pushes back against the notion that Filipino Asianists were not truly devoted to the ideals of Pan-Asianism but were simply and cynically utilizing its rhetoric to advance nationalist aims. Rather, CuUnjieng Aboitiz sees Filipino Pan-Asianism and anticolonial activism as informed by and supporting one another, and central to emerging notions of national identity and nationalism.

CuUnjieng Aboitiz begins by tracing the rise of the *ilustrado* class (the educated, professional, often mestizo class of elite Filipinos) and their role in founding the Propaganda Movement, which urged Spain to recognize the equality of Filipino elites and give them representation in the Spanish Parliament. Unlike prior revolts and reform move-

ments, she argues, the Propagandists used notions of both place and race to ground their nationalism. This focus on both Asia and the Philippines, and on Filipinos as *indios* or Malays, was an attempt to elide national divisions and construct a sense of national identity. Of course, CuUnjieng Aboitiz notes that, while the Propagandists deeply admired Japan, even to the point of claiming that the Japanese and Filipino peoples were both members of the Malay race, the formulators of this racial identity still excluded non-Christians living in the Philippines (with the exception of Isabelo de los Reyes, the sole member of the Propaganda Movement to argue against racial hierarchies).

In chapter 3, CuUnjieng Aboitiz examines the transimperial migrations of Filipino nationalists and the shifting understandings of place and race as the reform movement subsided and a revolutionary movement began. The cities of Yokohama, Hong Kong, and Shanghai became important havens for a diverse group of nationalists and revolutionaries, providing them a safe harbor close to home from which to continue their anticolonialist work and to make connections with other Pan-Asianists. CuUnjieng Aboitiz argues that the leaders of the Katipunan, the revolutionary secret society, were Asianists, even as they focused more heavily on the notion of a Tagalog race, which was meant to include all Christian Filipinos. After Emilio Aguinaldo's seizure of leadership, this understanding of race was expanded "in an attempt to make the revolution truly national" (p. 87).

CuUnjieng Aboitiz next focuses on Mariano Ponce's role as the "Pan-Asian emissary" of the Philippine Revolution. Comparing the activism of Ponce and Vietnamese revolutionary Phan Bội Châu, CuUnjieng Aboitiz highlights how Pan-Asianists on the colonized periphery viewed Japan both as an inspiration and as a potential provider of desperately needed material support. Châu and Ponce's Pan-Asianism, she claims, were indelibly tied to and in the service of nationalism and national liberation. In addition, CuUnjieng Aboitiz

argues that Ponce's activities demonstrate that Pan-Asian was as much a process of building networks based on emotion and personal connection as it was a theoretical discourse.

The book's final chapter examines the legacy of the Philippine Pan-Asianism developed at the turn of the twentieth century. CuUnjieng Aboitiz traces the influence of the Philippine Revolution especially on Indonesia, where José Rizal, the most famous Propagandist, became celebrated as a hero of the Malay race. She also argues that an Asianist orientation continued in the Philippines throughout the Cold War and can still be seen in modern Philippine politics and national rhetoric. The Asianism of the postwar period, of course, was shaped by the destruction of the war, the Japanese occupation, and the subsequent decolonization of Asia.

The primacy and longevity of the notion of a Malay race linking the Philippines with Southeast Asia gives rise to an important question that is not fully explored in CuUnjieng Aboitiz's work. How can we resolve a Pan-Malay vision that yet excluded Muslim Filipinos from belonging in the nation? This, of course, seems to point to the fly in the ointment of Pan-Asianism in the Philippines in general—that it could make connections along the lines of condition and racial identity with Southeast Asians, and yet still maintained an exclusionary vision of Filipino racial and national identity. CuUnjieng Aboitiz notes this exclusion, especially as it related to prejudice toward animists and more recent Chinese migrants in the Philippines. It would have been useful, however, to address how Pan-Malayism functioned when elite Filipinos considered (or ignored) Sulu and Mindanao, and especially the violent anticolonial resistance that continued there well after 1906.

Throughout *Asian Place, Filipino Nation*, CuUnjieng Aboitiz convincingly argues that anticolonial elite Filipinos were passionately committed to Philippine nationalism within the context of a united and anticolonial Asia. Her argument that

Philippine historiography has ignored this, seeing the Philippines as ideologically and historically outside of Asia, and aligned more with the Western Hemisphere, is less convincing. CuUnjieng Aboitiz cites multiple transnational scholars as influencing her theory and method, including Cemil Aydin, Partha Chatterjee, Christopher L. Hill, and Michael Goebel. Her work also aligns with Kristin Hoganson and Jay Sexton's recent call in *Crossing Empires: Taking U.S. History into Transimperial Terrain* (2020) to pay greater attention to transimperial histories. However, she also refers to several scholars whose work explicitly places Philippine history in a global and Asian context, including Resil B. Mojares, Caroline Hau, Takashi Shiraishi, Motoe Terami-Wada, Benedict Anderson, Rebecca Karl, and Megan Thomas. While her book's central thesis may run counter to traditional Philippine historiography, then, it would hardly seem contrary to recent works in the field. CuUnjieng Aboitiz explicitly refutes Sven Matthiessen's *Japanese Pan-Asianism and the Philippines from the Late Nineteenth Century to the End of World War II* (2015), which argued that elite Filipinos were not truly Pan-Asianists. Even if Matthiessen's work holds a prime position in Philippine intellectual history circles, CuUnjieng Aboitiz's refutation is unnecessary to justify a well-researched, important, and compelling book.

Overall, *Asian Place, Filipino Nation* is an impressive work of global intellectual history. By situating the Philippines within the broader context of Asia, and anticolonialism and nationalism at the turn of the twentieth century, CuUnjieng Aboitiz makes a real contribution to our understanding of the Philippine Revolution and its ideological forerunners and successors. This book will be an important addition to graduate courses, and of interest to any scholar of global history, nationalism, and Pan-Asianism.

*Sarah Steinbock-Pratt is an associate professor of history at the University of Alabama. Her book, Educating the Empire: American Teachers*

*and Contested Colonization in the Philippines, came out with Cambridge University Press in 2019.*

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at <https://networks.h-net.org/h-diplo>

**Citation:** Sarah Steinbock-Pratt. Review of CuUnjieng Aboitiz, Nicole. *Asian Place, Filipino Nation: A Global Intellectual History of the Philippine Revolution, 1887-1912*. H-Diplo, H-Net Reviews. May, 2021.

**URL:** <https://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=56183>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.