



**Asia-Europe Institute**  
University of Malaya



**International Workshop**

**New perspectives on Asian Epistemologies: Japan**

**PANEL III— BALANCING RESPONSIBILITIES**  
**23 SEPTEMBER, 2003**

**Historical experience**  
by

*Professor Dr. Ricardo Trota Jose*

Email: [rjose@kssp.upd.edu.ph](mailto:rjose@kssp.upd.edu.ph)

**Asia-Europe Institute, University of Malaya**  
50603 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Tel : 03-7967 4645 / 03-7967 6910 / 03-7967 6921 Fax: 03-7954 0799 E-mail: [asia\\_euro@um.edu.my](mailto:asia_euro@um.edu.my)  
<http://www.asia-europe-institute.org>

### Panel III. Balancing Responsibilities: 1. Historical Experience

Ricardo Trota Jose  
University of the Philippines

On receiving the invitation to participate in this conference, I was a bit perplexed by how to deal with the topic assigned to me: Historical experience. Things were made a little more complicated because there were no key words attached to the topic in the program, and the key questions for paper presentors asked for personal experiences. One could approach the topic as a historical overview, or as a more personal experience dealing with what one learned in Japan and the impact of this. To solve the problem (and thus deviate a bit from the abstract), let me then divide this paper into two, the first part giving a historical overview of Japan and the Philippines (to highlight the relations between these two countries, but also to provide a basis for comparison for other countries). The second part is a more personal account of my own experience as a student of history studying the historical experience of both countries in World War II: a painful experience but one which must be studied. I will end by showing how this experience of studying in Japan has led to connections and joint studies with other countries and Japan.

#### I. Historical overview: Philippine-Japan relations <sup>1</sup>

Philippine-Japan relations go a long way, and have long historical roots. Even before the Spaniards arrived, Japanese and Filipinos were trading with each other, and some settlements of Japanese existed in the Philippines. These were contacts which were informal and involved the *wako*, or pirate traders. One of the products imported from the Philippines was the so-called Luzon jar, samples of which are still extant in some Japanese museums.

The colonization by the Spaniards of the Philippines from 1565 brought more formal trade relations with Japan, but also resulted in some tension between the Spanish colonial government and the Japanese shogunate. This involved recognition and jurisdiction between the two countries, and differing priorities in the relationship. Japan wanted skilled workers to help develop their defenses; the Spaniards sent missionaries. As tensions rose, the Japanese shogunate expelled one Christian daimyo, Takayama Ukon, and his followers to the Philippines (later, he became a symbol for early Philippine-Japanese relations). Some Japanese joined Filipinos in early revolts against the Spaniards, but the relations between the Philippines and Japan were cut when Japan adopted its closed-door policy. <sup>2</sup>

It is not clear whether Filipinos were able to go to Japan during this early period, nor is it clear what influences the Japanese had on Filipinos at this time. (Claims in some secondary works of early influences – such as the breeding of fish and ducks – have not been substantiated)

Relations between the Philippines and Japan resumed after Japan was reopened to world; during the Meiji restoration, some Japanese businessmen came to exhibit their wares, and

a Japanese consulate was opened in Manila. The Philippines initially imported coal and lumber from Japan, diversifying to include various types of furniture, fans, matches, porcelain and paper (of which one type would become known – as it is still known today – as *papel de Hapon*, or Japanese paper). Japan, on the other hand, imported sugar, Manila hemp, tobacco and other raw materials. The Japanese were able to make paper out of abaca fiber – from the Philippines – which became known as “Manila paper.”<sup>3</sup>

By this time some Filipinos began to look towards Japan as an example to learn from; others began to see Japan as a potential ally. Jose Rizal, who would become the Philippines national hero after his martyrdom in 1896, visited Japan in the early 1880s. Some Filipino fled Spanish oppression and went to Japan as political exiles. Andres Bonifacio, leader of the revolution against Spain in 1896, was hopeful that Japan would support the Katipunan; he had met the captain of a Japanese ship which docked in Manila. The Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895 had shown that Japan was an Asian country which had succeeded in modernizing, and had emerged as a power.<sup>4</sup>

When the Philippine Revolution against Spain broke out in 1896, Japan officially remained uninvolved, but some Japanese were sympathetic to the Filipino cause. The resurgence of the revolution in 1898 brought out a Philippine Revolutionary government, which sent emissaries to Japan to seek assistance arms. The revolution against Spain became a war of independence against the Americans, who had come to the Philippines as a result of the Spanish American War. Japan officially remained uninvolved, although there were ultranationalists (*shishi*) who wanted to aid the Philippine revolution. Some arms from Japan actually did reach the Philippines, and a group of Japanese officers and men made their way to join the Philippine revolutionary forces. But officially, because Japan was still a developing power, she did not want to antagonize the US.<sup>5</sup>

Despite Japan’s lack of formal recognition, Japan continued to be a potential ally to some revolutionists, even after the Americans were able to take over most of the country. Some groups continued to resist the Americans, and occasional revolts broke out even after hostilities were officially declared over. One Filipino general, Artemio Ricarte, refused to swear allegiance to the Americans and eventually sought exile in Yokohama. His presence there would remain a threat to the Americans and inspired some of the Filipino independence movements. The Americans, in fact, would use the threat of Japan – the so called “Japanese bugaboo” against those clamoring for Philippine independence.<sup>6</sup>

Aside from General Ricarte, other Filipinos went to Japan - some chose (either by design or otherwise) to study in Japan. Some saw new opportunities open to them; others saw Japan as an alternative to the U.S. One, L.R. Aguinaldo, would successfully put his skills and connections to use and open trade relations and a famous department store. In the late 1930s one Filipino entered the Japanese military academy and successfully finished the rigorous course. Other Filipinos in Japan were boxers, musicians<sup>7</sup>

There were Japanese in the Philippines, too: ranging from the Karayuki-san (prostitutes) in the first decades of the twentieth century, to unskilled laborers who worked on the road to Baguio and later settled down in Davao and other locations, broadening to semi-skilled

and skilled workers, like barbers, gardeners, vendors of sweets, photographers and others. There were businessmen and bankers and students. Filipinos saw in these Japanese professionals who were proud of their work, but seldom mingled outside of their jobs.

Japan was a close neighbor of the Philippines, and this would not be changed even after independence from the US. It was a reality which many recognized; despite free trade with the US, Japan rose to become second major trading partner with the Philippines, and the Japanese were well known. Some Filipinos saw Japan as a friendly neighbor and admired things Japanese: by the 1930s there was a periodical on Asian arts which highlighted Japanese traditional culture. These, the Japanophiles, saw everything to be gained from close relations with Japan. Positive feelings for Japan were further developed by Japanese government cultural programs for the Philippines during the 1930s.<sup>8</sup>

But other Filipinos were wary of Japan, particularly in the years of the Philippine Commonwealth, the preparatory period towards independence. Army officers looked suspiciously on the increasing number of Japanese immigrants and how they commanded strategic locations. President Manuel L. Quezon was well aware of Japan's geographical proximity, and visited Japan twice before World War II, hoping to cement friendly ties and gain some guarantee for Philippine neutrality. He would be very impressed on his visits and reputedly was so influenced by the Bushido that he tried to introduce some aspects of it in Philippine schools.<sup>9</sup>

The outbreak of World War II in the Pacific brought the pre-war relationship crashing down. It was a dark period in the relationship, but one which cannot be overlooked, as it is a key marker in the changing of perceptions. The Japanese Military Administration, the Kempeitai, shortages and inflation overshadowed whatever potential lessons might be learned from the experience. Some Filipino students, in a program paralleling the American pensionado program, were sent to Japan in 1943 and 1944; the impact of this experience has shaped their lives even until now.<sup>10</sup>

The end of the war brought an end to formal relations and all Japanese nationals were deported back home. A strong anti-Japanese sentiment pervaded the Philippines, demanding reparations and justice. War crimes trials were held in Manila, and most Filipinos favored a heavy-handed allied occupation of Japan to ensure that Japan would never again become a threat to peace.

But geographic and political and economic realities prevailed, and with the onset of the Cold War and changing US policy towards Japan, plus a grudging realization that trade with Japan could not be avoided forever, gradually led to a reopening of ties. The Philippines stuck to its reparations claims, even if the US advised that a friendly relationship with Japan was more important for stability in the region. Japan and the Philippines finally reached a compromise in 1956, and a reparations agreement was ratified.

Trade between the two countries had already resumed, although with some controversy at first; and sports diplomacy – swimming and boxing bouts between Japanese and Filipinos – helped develop friendlier ties. In the mid-1950s, students from both countries began to venture out and study; many would become authorities on the other's countries and some would become diplomats.<sup>11</sup>

Formal relations reopened, leading to trade, Official Development Assistance and other ties. The reparations agreement was implemented, and slowly the heated passions of the war subsided. In the 1960s, moves for a Treaty of Amity, Commerce and Navigation were started, but the debates proved stormy and the treaty was not formally approved until 1973, when the Philippines was under Martial Law.

While economic concerns dominated the early years of the normalizing relationship (leading to some sectors criticizing Japan as an economic animal), the relationship diversified to include greater educational and cultural exchange. Filipinos performed in Japan and Japanese artists came to the Philippines. In recent years, things have gone full circle, with Japanese performing Filipino songs and dances while Filipinos perform Japanese theater and other arts.<sup>12</sup>

There are many other concerns which came out: the comfort women and war responsibility; Filipina brides of Japanese; the Japayukis and Filipino laborers in Japan; the Filipinos of Japanese descent (Nikkei-jin) and others. These are all the subject of research by Filipinos who have studied in Japan.

For many of those Filipinos who studied in Japan, the experience opened new avenues: some became diplomats and were stationed in Japan. For others, it opened business contacts and facilitated trade relations. Still others wound up working in Japanese companies. A few married Japanese and some became naturalized Japanese.

The perceptions of those who studied in Japan varied greatly: some fell in love with Japan and opted to stay or establish long-lasting relations. Others grew skeptical of Japan; others were full of admiration. Some became disillusioned, while others were enlightened. Many who came back missed the conveniences of Japan and the reliability of transportation and communications; but not many missed the highly competitive Japanese society and its work pace. For some, it reinforced their pride in their own country, recognizing that there were similarities and differences between Japan and home. For still others, it exposed them to not only Japan, but also other Asians.<sup>13</sup>

Let me now shift to a more personal angle, and draw from my own experiences as a Filipino – an Asian – who studied history in Japan.

## II. Studying the War in Japan

As a social science, the study of history requires viewing a particular event or era from various points of view and coming up with a composite whole which will yield lessons as

well as explain the effect that event or era had. This is particularly true regarding wars and battles, or in the study of the historical relations between two or more countries.

My interest in Japan started in my youth, and was due to several reasons: Japan as the only Asian country represented in general histories of World War II; the scarcity of materials on the Japanese side of the war led to a desire to learn more about the Japan's perspective of that war. Stories told to me by my uncle – about his Japanese friends and how human they were contrasted with the tales of brutality often heard in the Philippines.

Anything in English on the Japanese side of the war excited me; but there were just too few of these available. I began interviewing participants of the war – Filipinos and Americans – but sought to interview Japanese, too, to get the other side. This led to contacts in the academe and involved trying to meet Japanese veterans' groups visiting their former battlefields. There was one major stumbling block, however: the Japanese language. Although I tried to study it in my spare time, it hardly developed beyond "kore wa hon desu."

Eventually the support of friends got me to Japan, first for a short visit, to a years' stay in Okinawa and then on to Tokyo. As I picked up the language I kept up with friendship begun in the Philippines and began breaking new ground among writers, professors, veterans and others. The freshness of the information was overwhelming, the stories moving and unknown outside the Japanese-speaking world. The number of books given me piled high, even if I could hardly read them.

Being a Filipino doing research in Japan had its own advantages and disadvantages. It opened some doors; some Japanese quickly opened up and waxed nostalgic over their years in the Philippines. In fact, some Japanese who allowed me to interview them did not allow Japanese researchers to interview them.) Obtaining access to sources similarly had its own advantages, and I was taken into the stacks of some libraries which even Japanese were not taken to.

There were some cases, however, where being a Filipino also closed doors; some veterans were hesitant and refused requests for interviews.

Knowledge of the language was crucial – and not knowing enough of it frustrating, knowing how much there was to learn and uncover. At first a friend helped interpret for me in early interviews. But when my friends who knew Japanese were not available, I had to fend for myself. The interest was there – and some of my interviewees were sympathetic – but imagine what it is like if you have had only two months of language lessons and you are face to face with a seventy-year old veteran who spoke no English. The only way to circumvent this obstacle was to study harder, and read more – especially trying to read books in Japanese.

Taking my Ph.D. in Japan exposed me to the Japanese academe in practice, and using Japanese language sources and discussing in Japanese brought on new disciplines. The

many nuances in Japanese had to be learned, as well as specific skills in learning to read the Japanese of the 1940s as well as military and government terminology.

By viewing the war years through various points of view, the deeper complexities of war and conflict came out. Historical research thus became a case of balancing responsibilities and widening one's point of view rather than sticking to simplified generalizations. The horror of war in all sides comes clear; as do shining examples of selflessness and humanity. These would not have come out if one had stuck to only one side of the story. Going through the Japanese sources and interviews, one gets to understand this deeper – how some Filipino guerrillas were extremely brutal and the like. Indeed, generalization became more difficult and many cases had to be dealt with individually rather than collectively. This was not the monolithic Japanese nation at war which the early books had pointed to; it was so much more complex than had been imagined.

The study of history in Japan (as well as knowledge of Japanese) also brought out, in sharp focus, the tensions in historical interpretation. I saw an commemorative war exhibit in Kyoto in 1986, and was so inspired by it that I got in touch with the organizers – without realizing the political color of these exhibits. I even assisted in the next years' exhibit, helping negotiate for the exhibit of some artifacts in the Philippines. Later I learned of the different spectrums of war exhibits in Japan – as I also began to see the different shades in war writings and war organizations. This is also reflected in memorials and memorial ceremonies, in Japan as in the Philippines.

The first time I was in Hiroshima – as an Asian I recognized the horrors of war; but also remembered the horrors in the Philippines. I was with Filipinos, and one of those in my group actually voiced his concern in the open. I studied in Okinawa and toured the battlefields there – and also saw how people suffered there. Some years later, I visited Pearl Harbor and also saw how that had its own kind of horror – as did the residents of the city of Manila in 1945. One who studies history must see all these and not just one incident or episode to recognize the magnitude of the war.

### III. Joint Research

The study of the Japanese occupation of the Philippines in Japan led to contacts with other Japanese professors – diplomatic historians; military historians; Philippine and Southeast Asian specialists. All told it led to greater depth in viewing the Philippine experience, allowing for comparative studies cutting across national borders and disciplines. There were conferences on the Japanese occupation of SEA; of comparative colonial policies; of international diplomatic history and so on. Specialization on the topic led to these contacts; and study in Japan as well as knowledge of Japanese proved an indispensable tool in unlocking the Japanese side – and broadening perspectives not only of the war but also of modern history and international relations. It was not an exercise in finger pointing or fixing the blame, but more of seeking to understand and to explain.

Insights on the Japanese occupation and the war in the Philippines arrived at through examining the Japanese side as well as Filipino and American perspectives made for interesting comparisons with similar research being done in other countries in Southeast Asia, and provided levels for further cooperation and awareness not only of Japan but also of the other Southeast Asian countries. There have been conferences on the Japanese occupation of Southeast Asia which have resulted in books which enable comparison of experiences – and are potentials for cooperative ventures. A landmark conference was one held in Singapore in December 1995 (sponsored by the Toyota Foundation).

A wider ranging project was a series of conferences on war and memory which was held in Japan; Singapore; and the Philippines, and covering various wars and their impact.

The 1980s saw an increase in international cooperative research among Japanese, Asian and other interested scholars. A research group was formed to study the Japanese occupation of Indonesia. In 1990, the Forum for the Survey of Records Concerning the Japanese Occupation of the Philippines was launched. This was followed by a similar group on Malaya and Singapore; and today there is one studying Burma. These groups involve historians, anthropologists, political scientists and others, Japanese as well as others, doing joint research and making their findings known in and out of Japan.

In 1998, the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs supported a joint research project involving Filipinos and Japanese as the Research Forum on Philippine-Japan Relations. This forum consisted of established scholars in the field, but also to develop and encourage younger scholars to make new contributions to the study of the history of Philippine-Japan relations. The main result of this forum is a book which came out this year in the Philippines, and which will come out in Japanese next year.

Thus, the prospects are bright for joint research projects, not only between scholars of one particular country and Japan, but from scholars of various countries, working together. The Asians who studied in Japan form a ready pool from which such scholarly endeavors can tap from. The same students can also train others to continue the paths now open.

---

<sup>1</sup> For historical overviews, see Lydia Yu-Jose, "Philippine-Japan Relations: the Revolutionary Years and a Century Hence", in Aileen San Pablo-Baviera and Lydia N. Yu-Jose, *Philippine External Relations: A Centennial Vista* (Manila Foreign Service Institute, 1998; also Elpidio Santa Romana and Ricardo T. Jose, "Never Imagine Yourself to be Otherwise: Filipino Image of Japan Over the Centuries," *Asian Studies*, (Vol. 29, 1991) pp. 65-94.

<sup>2</sup> See Iwao Seiichi, *Early Japanese Settlers in the Philippines* (Tokyo: Foreign Affairs Association of Japan, 1943)

<sup>3</sup> Isagani R. Medina, "Manira Nihon Ryojikan (Ang Konsulado ng Hapon sa Maynila, 1888-1898)" [The Japanese Consulate in Manila: 1888-1898], in Zeus Salazar (ed.), *Ang Kasaysayan: Diwa at Lawak*



[History: Its Scope and Essence] (Quezon City: College of Arts and Sciences, University of the Philippines, 1974).

<sup>4</sup> Josefa Saniel, *Japan and the Philippines, 1868-1898* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 1969; reprinted by De La Salle University Press, 1998 )

<sup>5</sup> See Saniel, *Japan and the Philippines, passim*; also see various works by Ikehata Setsuho. A Japanese who wrote about Japan's participation in the revolution was Kimura Ki, who published in the 1940s. His main work, *Nunobiki Maru Jikken* was reprinted several times and still is available in Tokyo.

<sup>6</sup> On Ricarte, see Grant K. Goodman, "General Artemio Ricarte and Japan", *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, (Vol. 7, No. 2, Sept. 1966), pp.18-60. Goodman has also done many pioneering works on Philippine-Japan relations during the American colonial period.

<sup>7</sup> For Filipinos in Japan, see Lydia N. Yu-Jose, *Filipinos in Japan and Okinawa* (Tokyo: Institute for the Study of Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa, 2002).

<sup>8</sup> See Grant K. Goodman, "A Sense of Kinship: Japan's Cultural Offensive in the Philippines during the 1930s," *Crossroads*, (Vol. 1 No. 2, June 1983) pp. 31-44. Motoe Terami-Wada and Lydia N. Yu-Jose have also written extensively on Japan and the Philippines during the American period.

<sup>9</sup> Goodman has several papers on Quezon's visits to Japan and the impact Bushido had on him.

<sup>10</sup> An overview of the war is Vol. 7, *The Japanese Occupation of Kasaysayan: The History of the Filipino People* (Manila: Asian Publishing/Readers Digest, 1998). A joint Japanese-Filipino research project is Ikehata Setsuho and Ricardo T. Jose, *The Philippines under Japan: Occupation Policy and Reaction* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University press, 1999).

<sup>11</sup> Among the Japanese was Takahashi Akira, who rose to become a professor of Tokyo University's Faculty of Economics and later on director of the Institute of Developing Economies, Tokyo. Among the Filipinos was Domingo Siazon, Jr., who rose to become Secretary of Foreign Affairs and is now Philippine ambassador to Japan.

<sup>12</sup> A general account of the post-war Philippine-Japan relationship is *Rebuilding Bridges: 50 Years of Philippines-Japan Relations 1948-1998* (Manila: Yuchengco Center for East Asia, 1999).

<sup>13</sup> Yu-Jose, "Philippine Japan Relations" p. 328.