THE PHILIPPINE REVOLUTION (1896-1901) WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF ASIAN HISTORY: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF ANTI-COLONIAL MOVEMENTS IN ASIA, 1857-1918

Oscar L. Evangelista *

This paper situates the Philippine Revolution against Spain and the United States, 1898-1901 within the context of anti-colonial movements in Asia, 1857-1918. The year 1857 was chosen as starting point of the study as it commemorates the Indian (Sepoy) Mutiny of 1857-58, an important landmark in Asian History. It marked the intensification of Western imperialism in Asia, and served as symbol of resistance against imperialism. In turn, 1918 was the end of World War I, another landmark which brought significant changes in the tempo of Asian nationalist movements and paved the way for later revolutions. The paper asserts that by examining the Philippine Revolution against the events of this period, we see that it was well ahead of time. Other nationalist revolutions, with the exception of China, took place in the 1940's and 1950's.[1] To understand the place of Philippine Revolution in Asian history, it must be compared with other colonial movements in Asia that occured during the period under study.

Anti-colonial movements took different forms. Before the advent of Asian nationalism in the mid-19th century, resistance against western imperialism was expressed through revolts, millenarian/messianic movements, social banditry, etc. The Philippines, stemming from various motivations.[2] Indonesia and Java in particular, had many peasant revolts in the 19th century.[3] These were signs of anti-colonial discontent. It may well be argued that no colonial revolution took place in Asia before 1900, except that of the Philippines.[4]

* Oscar L. Evangelista, Ph.D., is concurrently Vice-Chancellor for Community Affairs and a faculty of the CSSP, Department of History, University of the Philippines, Diliman, Quezon City.

A Western author considered 1900 as the beginning of the era of the "Awakening of Asia".[5] There is reason for this since nationalist movements had taken roots in India, China, and parts of the Arab world; and were beginning to manifest in Burma, Vietnam and Indonesia. But the only other political revolution during the period under study was the Chinese Revolution of 1911.

It is therefore against the backdrop of mid-19th century pre-nationalist anti-colonial movements, and the nationalist stirrings between 1900 and 1918 that the place of the Philippine Revolution in Asian history will be situated. A survey of the tightening of colonial rule from the mid-19th century, and the corresponding responses of the colonized Asian countries follow, to further highlight the place of the Philippine Revolution.

The 1850's was a turning point in the expansion of Western colonialism in Asia. The Industrial Revolution and the French Revolution made the European powers stronger politically, and wealthier economically. Add to these factors the rise of European nationalism, with its emphasis on the glorification of the nation-state, and you have the motivations for more colonial ventures. Petty economic concessions and indirect influences over Asian territories no longer sufficed, as bigger stakes beckoned.

The first county to 'fall' was China. Between 1840 and 1860, China was subjected to political and military pressures through the Opium Wars, inevitably being opened up through equal treaties imposed on her, first by Great Britain, and later by other European countries which invoked "Most Favored Nation" clause to obtain similar privileges given to the British. This was to be the beginning of China's woes which will culminate in what is referred to as the "slicing of China like a melon" in the first decade of the 20th century. The Manchu leaders were, however, slow in responding to these pressures, although there were peasant uprisings which were more anti-Manchu than anti-western powers.

The first positive response to Western imperialism in China was K'ang Yu Wei's "100 Days of Reform"(1898) but since this was basically still in Confucian terms, the reform movement did not succeed. It was the entry of Sun Yat Sen and his Kuo Min Tang party that set the stage for the Chinese Revolution of October 10, 1911, and the establishment of the Republic of China in 1912. Of relevance to this paper is Sun's *San Min Chu I* (Three Principles of the People) where he defined his concept of

nationalism as one of love for China. The Republic unfortunately met one reversal after the other under Yuan Shish Kai. By 1916, China was a divided country with the northern area under warlords, and the south under Sun. While it is beyond the concern of this paper, the entry of Communism in China and its utilization as a nationalist ideology by Mao Tse Tung made civil war a necessity in the 1940's.

Japan was the next target in East Asia. In 1853, Commodore Perry became the instrument to likewise impose on Japan unequal treaties which forced Japan to terminate its seclusion policy started in 1640. Unlike the Chinese, the Japanese leaders responded more positively, and in the ensuing internal struggle for power, the Shogunate was abolished, the western Daimyos spearheaded what would be called the Meiji Restoration.

The modernization of Japan and its victories in the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1995, and in the Russo Japanese War of 1904-1905 gave Japanese nationalism a different flavor. By becoming an industrialized country and assuming the status of the Westerrn powers, Japanese nationalism became ultra nationalism, paving the way for the expansionist moves of the Japanese leaders.

In Southeast Asia, Britain acquired Burma in a three-pronged annexation move: 1823; 1853; and 1886, to safeguard the integrity of the British Indian Empire against possible French encroachments. The latter was slowly building its own empire in Mainland Southeast Asia by the conquests of Cochin-China in 1862; Annam in 1867; and Tonkin in 1883; Cambodia in 1863; and Laos in 1893. France's occupation of "Indo-China" was motivated by the need to have access to China.

There was resistance from the local powers. Burma's *Konbaung* dynasty tried diplomacy and negotiation to ward off British presence in Burma, and in 1886, there was a rebellion in Lower Burma led by the *Thugyis,* which lasted for five years.[6] The Nguyen dynasty of Vietnam offered military resistance to French, to no avail. These types of resistance, although anti-colonial, were defensive in nature, involved only the ruling class, and were not nationalistic in nature.

Burmese nationalism manifested itself in the first decade of the 20th century, and drew inspiration from Buddhism. One of the early arms of Buddhist nationalism was the Young men's Buddhist Association,

obviously pattered after the YMCA of the West. Until the end of World War I, no radical movement developed in Burma.

The tradition of nationalism in Vietnam had a long history dating back from their long struggle against China. Vietnam was not lacking in reformers like Bui Quang Chieu and his Constitutionalist Party, and Pham Quynh's Tonkinese Party. As in Burma, no extremist group existed prior to1925.[7] Ho Chih Minh used communism as a nationalist ideology in fighting French colonialism.

Siam remained independent largely because of its "remarkable kings and officials" for leaders, [8] and for its policy of "dancing with the wind". Sensing that the British were in an expanding mood, the *Chakkri* dynasty decided to give economic and extra-territorial benefits to the British. Under Mongkut and Chulalongkorn, Siam underwent a modernization process that opened up the country to western influences.

With a national identity securely in place, Thai nationalism was directed against Chinese interests in the early 1930's.

In Island Southeast Asia, the Netherlands East Indies had become a national unit, directly ruled by the Dutch Government by the mid-90's. Dutch colonialism in what would become modern Indonesia share similarities with Spanish colonialism in the Philippines. The Dutch East India Company (V.O.C) started its commercial ventures in Java in the early 17th century, eventually moving into the outer islands, completing a process of colonization by the 1820's. While the Dutch ruled Java indirectly through the local rulers until the 1820's, the Dutch presence in Indonesia is as long as the Spanish presence in the Philippines. This is important to consider since the Philippines, Indonesia and Malaya were creations of Western imperialism. The process of becoming a nation was a long one considering the diversity of cultures and peoples that had to be welded together.

By the first decade of the 20th century, a form of cultural nationalism appeared in Java, with the formation of *Budi Utomo* in 1908 by Dutch educated Javanese. With the establishment of *Sakerat Islam* in 1912, a mass movement was gradually formed, and during the fourteen years of existence, " groups of every persuasion enrolled under its banner.[9] Starting off with anti-Chinese feelings, the issues expanded as the movement for change gained grounds, and the organization became

militant. Local rebellious incidents in 1919 were met with force by the Dutch government.[10]

British Malaya came into being with the incorportion of the ports of Malacca, Penang and Singapore into one unit, and the addition of the Federal Malay States (Perak, Selangor, Negri Sembilan, and Pahang) in the 1870's. Due to the nature of the plural society that emerged, with the Chinese and the Indians forming the community with the Malays in the lead, no visible nationalist movement emerged until the 1940's.

The case of the Philippines is an exception to the rule as far as colonialism is concerned. The Spaniards, who established a colonial government in 1565, managed to control most of the Luzon and Visayan regions by 1665, making *Filipinas* the first true colony of Asia. The establishment of a centralized government, putting the different regions of the country under one system of law and administration, was a first step in gradually welding together the different ethnic groups. This was followed by the Christianization of the ethnic groups, again giving the Philippines a somewhat dubious distinction as the only Christian country in Southeast Asia. The 333 years of Spanish colonial rule were punctuated by revolts. By the middle of the 19th century, Spain succumbed to the lure of international trade, and had completely opened the country to foreign trade. This was a key factor that would bring dramatic changes to the economic and material life of some mestizos and natives who began as marginal recipients of the economic progress, and later became the intelligentsia called *ilustrados*.

In British India, the Indian (Sepoy) Mutiny of 1857-1858 is significant for the Indians as it is regarded by nationalist Indian historians as its war of independence.[11] The British East India Company had ruled India since 1762, and the completion of the empire in the succeeding decades brought in several grievances of political, economic, cultural and military nature resulting in a collective grievance against the British rule. Although it was led by the Indian elites, and confined to Delhi, the United Provinces and parts of central portion of India, the fact that the mutiny lasted for eighteen months was a testimonial to the support that it obtained from the different groups of Indians. For the British, the mutiny was the signal to terminate the rule of the British East India Company, and to put India under the direct rule of the British Parliament. Gradually, a core of educated Indians led in the development of Indian nationalism under the aegis of the Indian National Congress. Other Hindu-oriented groups

emerged to give the early phase of Indian nationalism, a Hindu type of nationalism.

After 1900, B.G. Tilak espoused a radical nationalism, but it was Mahatma Gandhi's non-violent movement that attracted the masses of Indians in India's fight to obtain *Swaraj* from the British. The base of the mass movement was in place by the end of World War I.

Over in West Asia, by the mid 1850's, the Ottoman Sultan had become a figurehead, with the Western Powers propping him up for their individual ends. Britain and France had shown interest in Egypt since the advent of the 19th century because of the strategic passageway that it offered through what would become the Suez Canal. France managed to build the canal, but the British maintained their presence, and when opportunity permitted with the bankruptcy of Khedive Ismail, a dual control of Britain and France was set-up and in 1885, Britain occupied Egypt. British presence in Egypt lasted until the 1950's.

Russian interest in the area lay in its desire to have a passageway to the Black Sea, while Germany wanted to have public works concessions linking their interests in the region.

In response to Western encroachments, West Asia resorted initially to Arab nationalism, a movement idealizing the greatness of the past, the common language, territory, culture, and aspirations for independence. The word "Arab" assumed a political, national character and became a basis for identity regardless of ethnic or racial background. H.A.R. Gibb thus defined Arab as "all those ... for whom the central fact of history is the mission of Mohammed and the memory of the Arab Empire and who in addition cherish the Arabic tongue and its cultural heritage as their common possession."[12] Syrian Christians influenced by the Syrian Protestant College, later to become the American University of Beirut, first broached the idea of Arab nationalism directed against the Ottoman Empire. Eventually, the direction turned to British and French imperialisms as the Ottoman Empire disintegrated after World War I to become secular to Turkey, but the weakness of the movement lay in the national character of the supposed participants. Egypt had always been a reality as a badge of nationality from early times even when Britain and France had to curve up the Arab World into Palestine, Lebanon and Transjordan. Iraq was likewise a creation of the British which was an aftermath of the settlement

with the Hashemite family for supporting the British through the Arab revolt in 1916.

Thus far, the survey of the period 1857 to 1918 has the following implications:

1. The mid-19th century was a significant dividing line in Asian History since from that point there was an obvious tightening of Western imperialist control over Asian countries in response to the demands of international trade and the ensuing rivalry that it espoused. Aside from direct rule, as in India and the Netherland East Indies, other forms of control were imposed. China, Japan and Thailand., among others, had to subscribe to other treaties; spheres of influence were set up in China, the Mandate system was used in West Asia.

2. Anti-colonialism during the period under study, took different forms: pre- and proto-nationalist revolts, millenarian/messianic movements, social banditry, brigandage, defensive wars' and the nationalist revolutions of the Philippines and China.

3. Nationalist movements before 1900 were confined to India, some parts of the Arab World, and the Philippines. After 1900, there was a general awakening of Asia as Burmese, Vietnamese and Indonesian nationalism began to stir; Indian nationalism was expressed through Sun Yat Sen's movement; and Japanese nationalism turned to expansion.

Clearly, the Philippine Revolution stands out as the first nationalist anti-colonial revolution in Asia. Why is the Philippine revolution a special case in Asian history?

First of all, compared to other colonized areas, Spanish colonization lasted for three centuries, longer than other colonized areas. The 333 years of Spanish exploitation and oppression brought both beneficial and negative results. On the beneficial side, the different ethnic communities were welded together into one community under a common system of law and governance. The Catholic Church and the missionary groups did their share in molding a basically Filipino-Christian community. On the negative side, the three centuries of oppression and exploitation took their toll in providing common grievances against Spain, and help explain why the time was ripe for a revolution, given other factors that shaped the nationalist movement in the Philippines.

The Philippines benefitted from the turbulent 19th century Spanish history where the struggle between the forces of liberalism, influenced by the ideals of the French Revolution, and the forces of conservatism represented by the Crown, the Church and the Military, affected Spanish plans and policies in the Philippines. For one thing, conservative and liberal regimes alternated with each other, bringing repressive regimes, and liberal ones. It was under a liberal administration that the Philippines was opened to World Trade, a momentous event because some Indios and mestizo Sangleys benefitted from the economic progress that followed the opening of the Philippine ports to foreign trade. From these families came the *ilustrados* who led the campaign for reforms and conceptualized the idea of a Filipino nation. These elites articulated the issues and fought for change. With economic progress, a leadership, an oppressed people, and the formation of a radical mass-based organization, the way was paved for a revolution.

The first phase of the Revolution against Spain ended in a truce and by December 1897, the Filipino revolutionary leaders went on voluntary exile to Hong Kong. The revolution resumed in May 1898 as an alliance was forged with America, then engaged in her own war against Spain. A "dictatorship" was initially formed, and as the revolutionary government replaced the dictatorship and strenghened its hold against the enemy, Spain withdrew and America decided to keep the Philippines. The Filipino-American war was a one-sided affair, but the Filipinos drew a heavy toll against the Americans through guerilla warfare.

The revolution was a failure in liberating the Philippines from colonial bondage, but in the context of Asian history, it had notable achievements. Aside from being the first anti-colonial revolution in Asia, the Philippines was also the first country to declare its independence. A republican system of government was established, guided by a constitution that recognized the separation of Church and State, gave more powers to the President because of the war-time conditions, had a cabinet, a supreme court, etc. It had an educational system from the primary to the tertiary levels, topped by the creation of the *Unibersidad Literaria de Filipinas*, the forerunner of the State University.

The Philippines is celebrating the centennial of the Revolution of 1896, but outside of Southeast Asia, the Revolution has not been given its due honors.[13] Asian history textbooks, especially those written by Western scholars, rarely mention the Philippine revolution. Even

Southeast Asian and Philippine history textbooks have confined themselves to stock knowledge about the Philippine Revolution, ignoring the changes in perspectives, and recent studies that give new directions to Philippine nationalism and the revolution.[14]

Presently, even Philippine history textbooks continue to perpetuate and accept as historical facts popular notions about the nationalist movement and the Revolution, such as the following: (1) Nationalism was first imbibed by the *ilustrados,* and later filtered down to the masses; (2) the leading propagandists were reformers; (3) the *La Liga Filipina* founded by Dr. Jose Rizal in 1892 was a reformist organization; (4) Andres Bonifacio and the leaders of the Katipunan, the secret organization whose aim was separation from Spain, were of plebeian origin; (5) the Katipunan membership was confined to Luzon, etc.

In the last fifteen years, mainstream research with new perspectives like the *Nouvelle Histoire* inspired by the French *Annales*, and recent studies in the U.P. Department of History under the perspective called *Pantayong Pananaw*[15] have enriched the literature on the Revolution, and provided revisionist interpretations of the perpetuated popular notions, and many more controversial issues.

On nationalism as an ideology, Romeo V. Cruz' pamphlet, "Ang Pagkabuo ng Nasyonalismong Filipino" argues that the idea of nationalism first took root among the Peninsulares, Spanish residents in the Philippines born in Spain, who were then called "Filipinos". The Peninsulares were influenced by developments in Europe and in Spain as the ideals of the French revolution spread throughout the continent. Cruz identified different types of nationalism starting out with the imperial type. The *ilustrado* Propagandists exemplified the liberal-imperial type of nationalism. Radical nationalism emerged with the establishment of the Katipunan, and the outbreak of the Philippine Revolution in 1896. Cruz' contribution to our history was to show that nationalism did not begin with the *ilustrados*, but that the Peninsulares had a role to play in the development of Philippine nationalism.

Reynaldo Ileto's controversial, if not monumental study, *Pasyon and Revolution* may eventually revolutionize the history of the development of nationalism as it debunks the earlier notion that the development of nationalism was an elite phenomenon. Ileto' study, using the "history from below" perspective, argued that the idea of *kalayaan* was

indigenously imbibed by the masses through the *Pasyon,* the popular reading fare especially during the Holy Week. Christ was not only the martyred son of God, but was himself a revolutionary figure. Using the *Pasyon Pilapil* version, Ileto focused on the Lost Eden/ Fall/ Redemption sequence of the passion of Christ as argument for the revolutionary effects on the masses. To Ileto, the idea of *kalayaan* among the masses was quantitatively different from the *ilustrados'* concept of *independencia.*

Onofre D. Corpuz' two-volume work *Roots of the Filipino Nation* published in 1989 puts in a new perspective certain aspects of the Propaganda Movement and the revolutionary situation. Where the Propaganda Movement tended to be called a failure in that it was directed at *Madre* Espana, Corpuz cites "unintended" effects like radicalizing some *ilustrados,* and politicizing young non-*ilustrados* in the Philippines like Andres Bonifacio and Emilio Aguinaldo. The twin development "promoted the revolution of nationalism, from reformism, through radicalism to revolution".[16]

Some of the radicalized *ilustrados* who later joined secret societies and eventually the Revolution were Graciano Lopez Jaena, Antonio Luna, Jose Alejandrino and Edilberto Evangelista. Jose Rizal himself abandoned reformism when he left Spain to go to Hong Kong where he planned the formation of *La Liga Filipina,* on his return to the Philippines. The structure of the *Liga* was proof that he was no longer associating with Spain. That the Liga Filipina was a secret organization patterned after the Masonic structure was proof of the revolutionary character of the organization, and the change of heart of Rizal about reformism.

Where Teodoro A. Agoncillo speaks of the "Revolt of the Masses" and the plebeian nature of its leaders, there are now studies, among them Fast and Richardson's *Roots of Dependency, Political and Economic Revolutions in 19th Century Philippines,* showing that Andres Bonifacio was of lower middle class status based on his work as a *bodegero* and the salary that he was receiving. That Bonifacio and other leaders of the first phase of the Revolution were of elite status changes the nature of that phase of the Revolution as a mass-based movement in terms of leadership.

The foregoing samples of revisionist studies have been the product of mainstream research using the Positivist School of history, with the exception of Ileto's study which is social history, and therefore has made use of literature and related fields to reflect the history from below

perspective. Another group based in the U.P. Department of History has come up with the *Pantayong Pananaw* perspective which is anchored on culture as the root of history, and is written in the Filipino language. It goes beyond the study of the document, and makes use of ethnography, ethno-linguistics, hermeneutics and other multi-disciplinary tools. A new periodization is presented in which continuity is the rule and colonialism as a landmark is not given the importance that most textbook writers have given it. The interpretations of this group on the Philippine Revolution add a new dimension to the continuing study on the Revolution.

The bulk of these "new studies" are compiled in the book KATIPUNAN: *Isang Pambansang Kilusan*, published jointly in 1994 by the U.P. Department of History and the Historical group called ADHIKA. As the title connotes, the *Katipunan* as operative in the Revolution of 1896, is seen as a national movement. Following the *pantayong pananaw* framework, the Revolution is no longer studied as a political phenomenon alone, but is seen in its totality, and in the lasting effect that it has had on the nation. The important point is that a regime fell and it was replaced by a structure shaped by the revolutionist in the name of the people. The Revolution may have been waged by members of a small group, but in their movement, they formed a strong force that joined the fight against the Spanish Government.[17]

To show that the Katipunan was a not just Tagalog based, the book mentions initial studies of the presence of the organization in Batanes; in Piddig, Ilocos Norte; Bicol; Palawan through the more than 200 deportees in 1896 who had connections to the Katipunan and the Revolution; and in Cebu. There were uprisings in Misamis, in Cotabato, and in Zamboanga, all in the southern island of Mindanao, but these were not necessarily Katipunan-inspired.

Ferdinand Llanes, the editor of the book, provides the various dimensions in the study of the Revolution. The "totality" covers such topics as local issues, cultural, intellectual, organizational, demographical, and sectoral (women, military, professional) concerns.

Between the mainstream and new studies on the Revolution briefly discussed here, one can see the changing face of the Philippine Revolution, and the interest that Filipino scholars and Filipinologists are giving to further stress the importance of that Revolution not only to the Philippines, but to Asian history as well.

In conclusion, this paper has examined the anti-colonial movements in Asia between 1857 and 1918, and has shown that the Philippine Revolution was ahead of its time with the Philippines being the first Asian country to wage a nationalist political revolution against Western Imperialism. Only China waged a similar revolution, but this took place in the next decade. Other anti-colonial agitations before 1900 were either pre- or proto-nationalist, while the period 1900 to1918 witnessed either the beginnings of nationalist movements led by the elites, or the growth of mass-based nationalism as in the case of India.

As the Philippines celebrates the centennial of its Revolution, various dimensions and interpretations of the Revolution have come out to further put in place its role both in the country, and in Asia. Our Southeast Asian neighbors like Malaysia and Indonesia have recognized the place of the Revolution. It is our hope that as more Asian history textbooks are written by Asians, a better treatment of the Philippine Revolution will be made.

****

Endnotes

[1]For example, the Indonesian Revolution against the Dutch began in 1946, while the Vietnamese Revolution against France started shortly after World War II and ended in 1954.

[2]The revolts were caused by different motivations: (a) grievances caused by Spanish oppressive practices; (b) religious issues stemming from a desire to restore the old pre-Spanish religion; (c) agrarian problems, and (d) generally a desire to regain lost freedom.

[3]See Sartono Kartodirdjo, *Protest Movements in Rural Java*, Oxford University Press, 1973.

[4]The Meiji Restoration of 1875 was in itself a revolution from the top, but since it was "self-induced" to make Japan at par with the Western Powers, it is an exception to the prevailing pattern of anti-colonial revolutions.

[5]Jan M. Romein, *The Asian Century: A History of Modern Nationalism in Asia*, 1962.

[6]D.G.E. Hall, *A History of Southeast Asia*, p. 693.

[7]*Ibid.*, p.718.

[8]Milton Osborne, *Southeast Asia, An Illustrated Introductory History,* Allen and Unwin, 1988, p.73.

[9]Joel Steinberg, et. al., *In Search of Southeast Asia,* Praeger Publisher, 1971, p. 294.

[10]*Ibid.*, p. 295.

[11]Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India*, Oxford University Press, 1985 edition, p.323

[12]Bernard Lewis, *The Arabs in History*.

[13]For example, Michael Edwards' *Asia in the European Age, 1498-1955*, Thames and Hudson, 1961, dismisses the Philippine Revolution with this one line: Revolutionary activities amongst the Filipinos resulted in some relaxation of clerical rule. G. Robina Quale's *Eastern Civilizations,* Meredith Publishing Co., 1966, had also one line in reference to the Revolution of 1896: " In 1896 armed revolts began."

[14]See my paper "New Studies on the Philippine Revolution: An Analysis", read at the International Conference on Philippine Studies held in Honolulu, Hawaii, April14-17, 1996.

[15]The *Pantayong Pananaw* was pioneered by Zeus Salazar and other faculty members of the U.P. Department of History in the early 1980's. The word "pantayo" is translated as "among us", connoting an inclusive relationship. Thus writing in the Filipino without pretensions to addressing the outside world, nor being apologetic or defensive for what the Filipino and his culture is.

[16]Corpuz, vol.II, p.193.

[17]Llanes, p.iv.