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Commentary

BAO MAOHONG

On Studies of the History of the Philippines in China

This essay offers an overview of studies of Philippine history undertaken in China since the 1930s. These studies are periodized into three waves. The changes in historiography are attributed to China's internal dynamics and the evolving relationship between China and the Philippines and between China and the overseas Chinese. The challenges confronting the study of Philippine history in China today are discussed along with the author's suggestions.

KEYWORDS: AREA STUDIES · COMPARATIVE HISTORY · IDEOLOGY · MODERNIZATION

The history of the Philippines ought to be interesting to Chinese intellectuals and ordinary people. The Philippines is a neighboring country of China inhabited by overseas Chinese who have lived and worked there for centuries. While this so-called Latin American state in Asia may sound so different from China, both countries share a long historical relationship. In Basilan, for instance, archaeologists found coins dating from the Tang dynasty (618–907). The *History of the Song Dynasty*, dating to the Yuan (1279–1368), includes the earliest written material on the merchants from a Philippine kingdom called Ma-i or Mait who were trading in Guangzhou. Although accounts pertaining to the islands of the Philippines are numerous in Chinese classical documents, the study of Philippine history in China is just in its formative stage. As late as 2007, for example, only two papers on Philippine studies were published in China (Shen 2007, 133–53; Huang and Yang 2007, 295–312). None was on Philippine history—despite the Philippines's seeming importance as a neighboring country and the numerous sources available in China. But what has been the state of studies of Philippine history in China? What can we expect from China scholars working on Philippine history in the early twenty-first century? In this essay, I will attempt to answer these questions by reviewing the historiography of the Philippines in China, tracing its history, theory, and future development.

The First Wave

The first book on Philippine history in China was *History of the Philippines* compiled and translated by Li Changchuan in 1936. This book was a translation of *A Brief History of the Philippines* written by Philippine nationalist historian Leandro Fernandez in 1919. As a textbook for the seventh grade adopted by public and private schools in the Philippines, it emphasized the birth of Philippine nationalism and Philippine prehispanic history using archival or documentary evidence. As the starting point for all China scholars working on the Philippines, the use of this textbook meant that the foundation of historical studies of the Philippines in China began immediately with an emerging nationalist historiography.

After the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, Chairman Mao Zedong encouraged the Chinese to learn the history of foreign countries, including that of the Philippines. According to Chairman Mao, every foreign country should at least have a history book written by

a Chinese historian and a history book from that country translated into Chinese. In the light of what Karl Marx and Frederick Engels (1845/1976, 28) stated — “We know only a single science, the science of history” — Chairman Mao sponsored the socialist cadres to learn the history of foreign countries, if they would like to predict the future of international society and master the universal truth of human development. However, it was very difficult for Chinese historians to meet this important political task during the period of isolation and Cultural Revolution (1949–1976) because China did not have diplomatic relations with the Philippines, resulting in a lack of necessary primary historical materials and opportunities for academic exchange. It was just around the establishment of Sino-Philippine relations in 1975 when some books were translated or written to satisfy the reading demand of some government leaders and diplomatic staff. This was the first wave of studies of history of the Philippines in the PRC.

Among the publications of the first wave were the Chinese translations of Gregorio F. Zaide’s *The Philippine Revolution* (1979a) and *The Republic of the Philippines (History, Government, and Civilization)* (1979b). Zaide was one of the distinguished students of Leandro Fernandez and a well-known nationalist historian in the Philippines. In the illustration and preface of the Chinese versions of his two books, the translators pointed out that Zaide had exaggerated the roles of capitalist intellectuals and belittled the Philippine masses. Simultaneously, the translators stated that he praised the struggle against the Spanish colonizer but constructed the American imperialist as a benign and wise colonizer of the Philippines. These contradictory viewpoints were attributed to Zaide’s capitalist background and idealist view of history. In the mind of the Chinese translator, the dogmatist theory of class struggle was present in Zaide’s work.

Apart from translations of Zaide’s books, China produced its first Philippine history books that were not mere translations of any foreign works. These were *The Concise History of the Philippines* (Feilubin Jianshi) (1977a) (fig. 1) and *The Draft History of the Philippines* (Feilubin Shigao) (1977b) (fig. 2), the products of the Theoretical Group of Workers of the First Manufacturing Factory of Automobiles in Guangdong Province and the Research Section of Southeast Asian History in Sun Yat-Sen University’s History Department, respectively. In these two books the framework of the Chinese authors’ historical analysis of the Philippines was explicitly Marxist, which emphasized the succession of five modes of production, namely, the

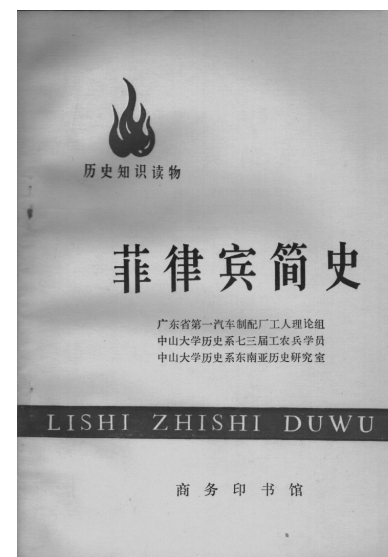


Fig. 1. Cover of *Feilubin jianshi* [The concise history of the Philippines] by The Theoretical Group (1977a)



Fig. 2. Cover of *Feilubin shigao* [The draft history of the Philippines] by the Research Section of Southeast Asian History (1977b)

transition from primitive society, slave society, feudal society, semicolonial and semifeudal society, capitalist society, to the inevitable socialist society. Following the Marxist principle that the masses should write their own history through a combination of worker, peasant, and intellectual labor, these two books were compiled collectively by groups from these three kinds of people. The professional historian, while being of the petty-bourgeoisie, was necessary. However, the historian was to be guided by the political righteousness of the proletariat in the context of a proletarian dictatorship.

These four books were not published for a wide consumer market, but rather for government officials, particularly those dealing with the Philippines. The two Chinese-authored books were meant to be mirrors from which one could draw lessons in history, while the two by Zaide were meant to be subject to criticism for their capitalist ideology. Comparing the four together and contrasting the historical views of the bourgeoisie (Zaide) and proletariat (Chinese masses) gave Chinese officials insights into the Philippine bourgeoisie and American imperialist history, which strengthened their confidence in the construction of a socialist society under the Chinese Communist Party.

The Second Wave

The second wave of historiography of the Philippines in China occurred from 1978 until the turn of the century. In 1978 China began to reform and practice an open door policy. Overseas Chinese in the Philippines visited their ancestral hometowns not only to invest but also to conduct academic exchange. Meanwhile, some Chinese from the mainland were invited by their relatives to visit the Philippines where, among other activities, academic exchange also took place. Growing relations and trade between the two countries contributed to a rising interest in the history of these relations, with substantial interest on trade and economic relations. In order to satisfy the need for historical understanding, some books on the history of the Philippines and the history of Sino-Philippine relations were published. These include *The Collection of Historical Material on the Philippines in Chinese Classical Books* (Zhongguo guji zhong youguan Feilübin ziliao huibian) compiled by the Institute of Southeast Asian History of Sun Yat-Sen University (1980); *History of Overseas Chinese in the Philippines* (Feilübin huaqiao shi) written by Huang Zisheng and He Sibing (1987); *Tradition in the Modern: Studies on Chinese Society in the Philippines* (Xiandai zhong de chuantong: Feilübin huaren shehui yanjiu) written by Chen Yande (1998) (fig. 3); and *The History of the Republic of the Philippines* (Feilübin shi) edited mainly by Jin Yingxi (1990).

The Collection of Historical Material on the Philippines in Chinese Classical Books gathered together invaluable historical materials on the Philippines from 117 Chinese books, ranging from official histories of the Song dynasty (960–1279) to diplomatic materials from the Qing Dynasty (1644–1911), and from official gazetteers to travel diaries. From this hodgepodge Chinese scholars drew new understandings of the history of Sino-Philippine trade, cultural exchange, and some aspects of the social, political, and economic systems of the Philippines, including the history of the Filipinos' struggle against Spanish colonizers. This collection became the primary resource for Chinese research into Philippine history. Meanwhile, Huang Zisheng and He Sibing's (1987) book became the first one in China to tackle the history of the overseas Chinese in the Philippines spanning the years 1570 to 1945. Huang and He look at the policies of the colonial authorities pertaining to the overseas Chinese and analyze the latter's struggle against colonialism within the context of their changing economic situations. Chen Yande's (1998) book is focused on the transformation of Philippine-Chinese society from a traditional to a modern one and attempted

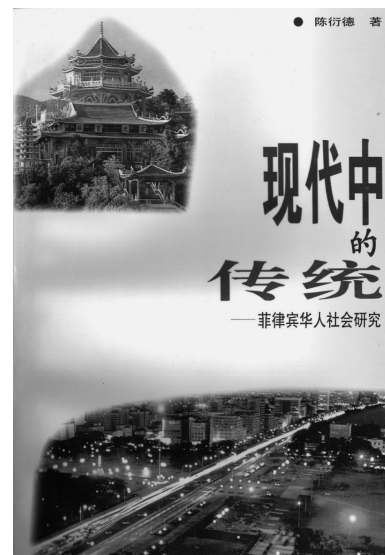


Fig. 3. Cover of *Xiandai zhong de chuantong: Feilübin huaren shehui yanjiu* [Tradition in the Modern: Studies on Chinese society in the Philippines] by Chen Yande (1998)

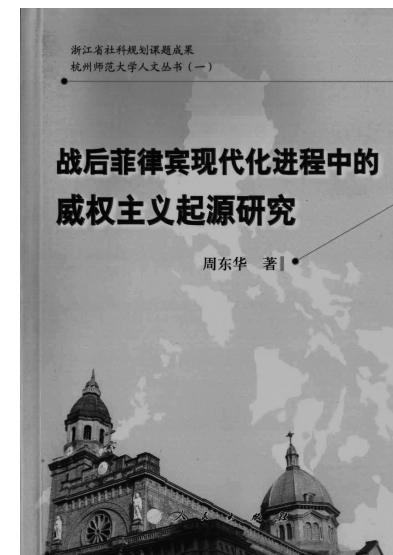


Fig. 4. Cover of *Zhanhou Feilübin xiandaihua jincheng zhong de weiquanzhuyi qi yuan yanjiu* [Studies on the origin of authoritarianism in post WWII Philippine modernization] by Zhou Donghua (2010)

to answer why and how the Philippine Chinese managed to preserve some values of their traditional culture while assimilating into Philippine society. But the most important book then was, and even today is, Jin Yingxi's (1990) book, with its broad coverage beginning in prehistory and reaching until the 1986 People Power Revolution. It focuses on the colonial period and the Philippine struggle for independence and, like other works in this second wave, looks at this struggle in the context of economic change.

The second wave continued the emphasis on the anticolonial struggle, while making new inroads into the exploration of economic history. Under the framework of Sino-Philippine relations, economic history became the main topic for Chinese historians delving into Philippine history. This development marked a deepening of China's historical understanding of the Philippines, but was also a response to the challenges resulting from reform and the open-door policy. Thanks to overseas Chinese investment in China, part of which was earmarked to support academic research, overseas Chinese history remained, during the reform era, a major fixture in historical studies of the Philippines and other countries playing host to Chinese communities. It is also important

to note that studies of the colonial struggle in the Philippines began to emphasize, in a more balanced manner, the “double mission” of colonialism rather than its one-sided criticism. The constructive or civilizing mission was studied to balance the previous emphasis on its destructive mission. Philippine historiography in China was beginning to be less ideological, with the dogmatic Marxist history giving way to a more complex history.

The Third Wave

The third wave is being pushed mostly by young scholars who earned their doctorates in the twenty-first century. Representative books on Philippine history after the turn of the century include: *Catholicism in the Philippines under Spanish Rule: Colonial Expansion and Religious Syncretism, 1565–1898* (Feilubin tianzhujiao yanjiu: Tianzhujiao zai Feilubin de zhiminkuozhang yu wenhuatiaooshi [1565–1898]) by Shi Xueqin (2007); *Studies on the Origin of Authoritarianism in Post WWII Philippine Modernization* (Zhanhou Feilubin xiandaihua jincheng zhong de weiquanzhuyi qi yuan yanjiu) by Zhou Donghua (2010) (fig. 4); *The Draft History of Chinese Newspapers in the Philippines* (Feilubin huawenbao shigao) by Zhao Zhenxiang and others (2006); and my *Forest and Development: Deforestation in the Philippines, 1946–1995* (Senlin yu fazhan: Feilubin senlin lanfa yanjiu [1946–1995]) (Bao 2008) (fig. 5).

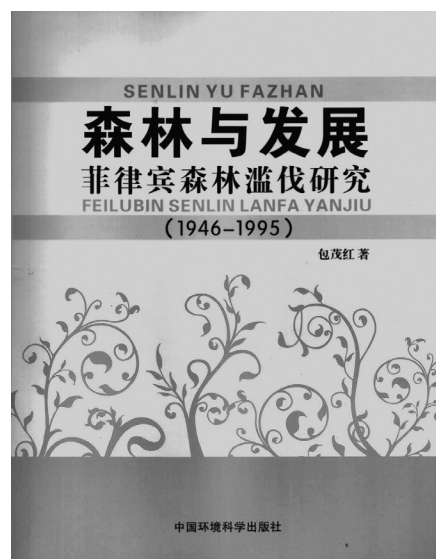


Fig. 5. Cover of *Senlin yu fazhan: Feilubin senlin lanfa yanjiu* [Forest and development: Deforestation in the Philippines, 1946–1995] by Bao Maohong (2008)

Just from the titles of these books, we can see the increasing plurality and complexity of Philippine historical studies in China, whether in perspective, methodology, or theme. In a departure from the general historical writing prior to 2000, recent historical studies of the Philippines in China are becoming thematic and more detailed.

Shi Xueqin’s (2007) book describes Catholicism’s transformation from an instrument of colonial expansion to becoming an integral part of Filipino national culture through an analysis of the mutual processes of catholicization of the Philippines and the filipinization of Catholicism. As Catholicism was propagated and transformed in the Philippines, Shi argues, it was inextricably linked to politics and produced a form of religious nationalism. But, although this religious nationalism held some universal value, it did not emerge as the dominant political culture of the Philippines. Shi combined historical research with perspectives from crosscultural theory. Zhou Donghua’s (2010) book borrowed the methodology of modernization theory and developmental politics to explore the origin of authoritarianism in the Philippines. He argues that the collapse of American-style democracy in the Philippines was inevitable because the United States left a legacy of dependence and underdevelopment that was replaced by the “constitutional authoritarianism” or “one-man democracy” of the ambitious president, Ferdinand E. Marcos, who inherited and mixed the political culture of José Rizal and Manuel L. Quezon. The book of Zhao Zhenxiang et al. (2006) describes the ups and downs of Chinese newspapers in the Philippines from 1888 to 2006. On the surface, it appears to be a superficial history of Chinese media and communication in the Philippines; however, it is concerned with the changing relations between the media, economy, and politics of Filipino-Chinese and the Philippines as a whole by historicizing and contextualizing it. My book (Bao 2008) negotiates various viewpoints to attribute the deforestation in the Philippines to the one-sided development strategy pursued by the developmental state. This is the first environmental history book in Chinese historical studies of the Philippines and the first one in world history research in China.

Chinese scholars have also continued their long tradition of collecting historical material for future research through a joint publication spearheaded by scholars from both China and the Philippines. In 2004 *A Collection of Archives on the Relations between China and Southeast Asian Countries in Qing Dynasty (Philippine Volume)* (Qingdai zhongguo yu dongnanya

geguo guanxi dang-an shiliao huibian [di er juan: Feilubin Juan]) (2004) was published by Guoji Wenhua on behalf of the Number One Historical Archives in Beijing. The archival materials collected in this book range from 1724 to 1911 and include materials on tribute and trade relations between Qing China and the Sulu Sultanate, the establishment of the Chinese embassy in Manila, and the eruption of Taal Volcano in 1911. Also included are a number of materials in English and Spanish as well as some maps and photographs. All these materials were drawn from China's First Historical Archives, photocopied and published in a book with a useful chronological index. The materials made available in this book represent a very important achievement in the study of Sino-Philippine history.

The pluralism in the third wave has been paralleled by the deepening and growing plurality of historical thinking in China in general. After almost twenty years of exposure and experimentation with new historical ideas since 1978, Chinese historians, especially young scholars who have significant experiences abroad as visiting scholars or exchange students, have become more open minded. They are increasingly more familiar with the latest trends of international historical studies of the Philippines and prefer to conduct their own studies in a more thematic manner that is more accommodating to different perspectives. The topics they chose for research are clearly the result of two factors: One is the desire to push forward research into the genealogy of scholarship or historiography; the other is the recognition of the usefulness of Philippine history to a developing China. Compared with the usefulness of learning about the revolutionary experience of the Philippines in the first wave, studies of Philippine history in the third wave are useful to show China how to develop in a sustainable way by learning the lessons of the rupture of political democratization and the slow transformation brought about by the unsustainable economic development strategy in the Philippines.

From the first to the third wave, it is evident that there has been tremendous progress in the historical studies of the Philippines in China.

Characteristics of Historiography of the Philippines in China and its Challenges

In comparison with historical studies of the Philippines undertaken in the US, Spain, and Japan, those in China are not very developed. However, it is developing rapidly and acquiring certain characteristics.

First, Chinese historical studies of the Philippines have been strongly influenced by China's own internal political culture and circumstances. When the theory of class struggle was the orthodoxy in China, the history of the Philippines was constructed as a history of the succession of modes of production and the history of capitalist, ethnic, and democratic revolution. When the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) changed its stance and began pushing economic development and modernization, Philippine history was reconstructed as a history of the growth of modernity and evaluated in terms of its economic growth rate. Perhaps it is interesting to Philippine scholars based outside of China that the historiography of the Philippines in China parallels the political culture of the CCP. However, this has been the characteristic of Chinese historiography in general since 1949.

Second, Sino-Philippine relations and overseas Chinese history remain among the primary foci of historical studies of the Philippines in China. Before the Chinese government gave up the policy of dual nationality in 1955, the history of overseas Chinese was a marginal part of Chinese history. After that, the histories of the overseas Chinese were considered part of the history of their respective host nations. However, as China opened its door, the histories of overseas Chinese written in China began to emphasize how they supported nation building and national economic construction in China while assimilating with their host societies. Financial support for history writing extended by overseas Chinese in the Philippines seeking their cultural roots played a major role in the development of this field. For instance, the Angelo King Foundation supported Zhou Nanjing to be the primary editor of the twelve-volume *Encyclopedia of Overseas Chinese* (Huaqiao huaren baike quanshu) (1995–2001), which is the most comprehensive collection of works on overseas Chinese in the world. Support for historical research by scholars in China is a phenomenon that testifies to the cultural communication between China and the Philippines in this increasingly connected world.

Third, Chinese historians have had a long history of seeing Philippine history against the background of Southeast Asian history. Even before 1949 the Philippines was considered part of the so-called Nanyang or South Seas. After 1949 Chinese scholars recognized the Philippines as a nation-state in Southeast Asia, following the model of Asian studies in the former Soviet Union wherein the history of the Philippines was written as a very small part of Asian history (Liang 1999; Liang and Liang 2005). After 1978 Chinese

scholars adopted the model of area studies in the US and wrote Philippine history as a part of Southeast Asian history. The area studies model led to the creation of some institutes of Southeast Asian studies in China, such as the Institute of South Sea Studies (now School of South Sea Studies) at Xiamen University, the Institute of Southeast Asian History Studies (now School of Asia-Pacific Research) at Sun Yat-Sen University, the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies at Yunnan Academy of Social Science, the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies at Guangxi Academy of Social Science, the Center for Southeast Asian Studies at Peking University, and the Institute of Asia-Pacific Research at the Chinese Academy of Social Science.

Fourth, historical studies in the field of Southeast Asian studies have been on the decline in China. In the Mao period, the focus of Southeast Asian studies was historical research. However, after the importation of the American area studies model in 1978, history took a backseat to linguistic and other social science disciplines. Area studies is a multidisciplinary arena where linguistic and social science training are given primary considerations. But unlike the American model, history has been given little importance in China. Even when trained in history, scholars have tended to shift their research to contemporary and nonhistorical topics. In the Chinese structure, readers have a greater demand for contemporary knowledge, compelling professional historians to shift their research from the historical to the contemporary. This change has diminished the value of Philippine history as a discipline even if it has enlarged the audience for whom these scholars write. This trend continues till today. Historical research has become increasingly marginal in the field of Philippine studies. The junior scholars who earned their doctorates in history from universities have shifted to other professional occupations. Although they profit from having a background in historical training, they are not practicing as professional historians. This marginalization of historical studies of the Philippines is a result of China's transformation from a socialist planned economy to a socialist market economy.

Fifth, Chinese historians of the Philippines have relied heavily on historical materials in English found in China and also those found in US archives. Many of these historians would like to adopt local or indigenous perspectives but are limited by the available materials, thus preventing them from expanding their perspective and expressing the "small voice" of the masses. As a result of this dependence on English-language materials,

particularly from US archives, the temporal focus of China's historical studies of the Philippines has centered mainly on the American colonial period and the Republic of the Philippines. Precolonial history, Spanish colonial history, and Japanese colonial history in the Philippines are hardly researched in China because Chinese historians of the Philippines cannot understand materials in Spanish, Tagalog, or Japanese. Although there are some area studies centers in China, linguists have not done joint research with historians, and historians have been unable to invest time and receive opportunities to learn indigenous languages because of difficult administrative divisions and tensions among different disciplines in universities. This is a problem that must be overcome if the study of Philippine history in China is to progress.

Nevertheless, given all of the historical constraints (long years of isolation), methodological issues (lack of linguistic training), and theoretical paucity (years of Marxist ideology), historical studies of the Philippines in China have come a long way. But their present development remains slow and their status marginal. Given China's growing relationship with the Philippines, this is hardly satisfactory. Improvement and expansion of China's historical studies of the Philippines will be needed if we are to form adequate and informed responses to future challenges.

Suggestions

Historical studies of the Philippines need to return to the mainstream of area studies in China. Without the deepening of historical studies of the Philippines and the important historical perspective they provide, the studies of economics, political science, sociology, and linguistics will not develop further. More training and time need to be invested in the training of professional historians. This would entail intensive training in language courses (Spanish and Tagalog), especially for graduate students who are focusing on the history of the Philippines. Language departments need to open their doors and allow history graduate students to cross the disciplinary lines. Graduate study in history requires more financial support and more tolerance in the crossing from one department to another. Opportunities to do field work in the Philippines and conduct academic exchanges with Philippine institutions should be provided. New doctoral graduates in Philippine history should be guaranteed positions in university or government to continue their research. It is imperative that, within the same center or

institute, the income and space of historians should be commensurate to that of economists, political scientists, and linguists.

Chinese historians of the Philippines should actively seek to set up joint programs with their Philippine colleagues. Chinese historians of the Philippines could contribute their own perspective as outsiders and help provide access to valuable Chinese historical material on the Philippines hitherto unknown, unused, and unavailable to other scholars. Filipino historians can share their familiarity with untapped archival materials in Spanish and the oral tradition or local knowledge of remote areas to assist Chinese scholars in acquiring the perspective of insiders. Undoubtedly, this exchange requires a form of cooperation that will be of benefit to all the participants. I can envision different research groups that ought to be established. I would like one research group to examine natural disasters and environmental history in China and the Philippines, and another group to pursue historical comparisons of China and the Philippines, including revolution, nation building, development or modernization, environmental governance, and so forth.

Finally, Chinese historical studies of the Philippines should be increasingly done on four integrated levels. The first is local, such as studies of Mindanao or Sulu; the second is national; the third is regional, such as ASEAN or the Asia-Pacific world; the fourth is global. It is only when we can see Philippine history from these four perspectives that we can do it well. Along these four levels of perspective, Chinese historians can hope to weave a multidimensional history that includes political, socioeconomic, cultural, and environmental histories. As an environmental historian, I propose to reconstruct the history of the Philippines in accordance with the latest trends in environmental history in the world. It is my hope that this kind of history will contribute to the writing of a new, more complete but also more complex and more engaging history of the Philippines.

Note

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