

# Brown Americans of Asia

By Renato Perdon

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Culturally, Australia has more in common with the Philippines than with any other nation in Asia—middle class life styles and consumer tastes, Christianity, liberal education and the continuing influence of their colonial past, British on the one hand and Spanish on the other. Whilst Australia has not been physically occupied by the United States, both countries have experienced the colonising influence of America during the course of this century. And yet, even though 260,000 Philippine-born Filipinos are now residents in Australia, Australians know little about the Philippines beyond the sensationalism presented by the media – natural disasters, crime, acute poverty, insurgency problems, mail order brides and Imelda's shoes – let alone are aware of the links that have been forged between the two countries dating back to last century.

The *Brown Americans of Asia* is a much needed contribution to Australia's understanding of the Philippines. It is a thoughtful analysis of how Australia perceives the Philippines and will prove a valuable reference for anyone seeking to understand the Filipino personality as a product of East-West synthesis and the dilemma of identity that is best reflected in their resilience, a quality that has enable the Filipino to survive, innovate and persevere.

The country's history testified to this – four centuries ruled by other powers – with only a few short years of self-rule at the end of the nineteenth century – the Filipinos proved sufficiently resilient to finally emerge as an independent nation, a nation underpinned by their ability to innovate and keep for themselves that which they considered important – Christianity from the Spaniards and republican and free enterprise from the US.

The first attempt at independence was short-lived, but its significance has not faded with time.

Patience they most certainly had been – for 350 years. But the government was short-lived. Its history makes fascinating reading and it is interesting to reflect on the response from other countries. Had other countries been more welcoming to the new government, the history of the country this century would have been very different.

But with America's declaration of war against Spain in 1898, and not having achieved recognition from other countries, the writing was on the wall. While the Spanish-American War lasted 113 days, the Filipino-American War would last three years.

An excellent short history of the Philippines, the *Brown of Americans of Asia* also records the history of contact between the Philippines and Australia from the time Torres sailed through the strait that bears his name, through the development of the pearling industry and the establishment of a thriving settlement on Thursday Island at the turn of the century (and at the height of the hyperbole whipped up about the threat posed to Australia by the yellow hordes to the north) to the mail-order brides media, sensationalism of the last decade or two.

Published to commemorate the centenary of the declaration of Philippine Independence, this work will contribute to the enhanced understanding of the Philippines and of those Filipinos who have chosen to make Australia their home.

Extract from *Brown Americans of Asia*

It is worth remembering that General Aguinaldo said in 1898 when establishing the Revolutionary Government:

‘It is an established fact that a political revolution, judiciously carried out, is the violent means employed by nations to recover the sovereignty which naturally belongs to them, when the same has been usurped and trodden under foot by tyrannical and arbitrary government. There, the Philippine Revolution cannot be more justifiable than it is, because the country has only resorted to it after having exhausted all peaceful means which reason and experience dictated...’

The *British Saturday Review* in reporting the capture of General Aguinaldo, which led to the end of the war and the establishment of American control, commented:

‘There have been more wicked wars than this... but never a more shabby war. It is nearly three years since the Americans, having gone to war with Spain for the liberties of Cuba, decided that it was their manifest destiny to deprive the Filipinos of their liberty. ‘This was called taking up the white man’s burden.’... Of all the curious mixture of sentiments, noble and ignoble, out of which the war with the Filipinos sprang, only the element of hypocrisy seems to have retained its original vigour.’

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