Introduction: Before a Vast Ocean

Navigating world history is an ambitious but limited goal, one quite distinct from the unattainable aim of "mastering" the topic. No one can learn all of world history. Anyone who pursues such a goal is sure to become lost.[1]

– Patrick Manning, 2003

It is now high time for us, Filipinos, to be convinced that in the years to come it is not American and European influence emanating from the other side of the globe ten thousand and more miles away that is destined to play in important role in the development of our national independent life; it is the conduct of and the contact with our neighbors of the Orient that will ultimately be the decisive factor in shaping the future national policies of the Philippine Islands.[2]

– Pio Duran, 1935

Getting Lost

In some ways, the goal of this book, drawing subversive inspiration from the epigraph from famous world historian Patrick Manning above, is to become lost. Not in a vain or vein effort to find mastery, mind you, but in an effort to uncover new veins of inquiry and contact as well as new vanes that might point the way.[3] This book mostly takes place in the spaces now widely considered China and the Philippines in the era now widely recognized as the early twentieth century under the Gregorian calendar, but when historians or historical figures wander elsewhere, it follows them for a spell.[4]

[1] Patrick Manning, *Navigating World History: Historians Create a Global Past* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003), x.

[2] Pio Duran, "Philippine Independence and Asiatic Monroeism," *The Far Eastern Review* 31 (February 1935): 50.

[3] David A. Bell cautions against "turning" endlessly and thoughtlessly like weathervanes. See David A. Bell, "Questioning the Global Turn: The Case of the French Revolution," *French Historical Studies* 37, no. 1 (2014): 1.

[4] This book follows scholar Dipesh Chakrabarty's lead in treating "China" and "the Philippines" as "hyperreal terms" that refer to "figures of imagination whose geographical referents remain somewhat indeterminate." See Dipesh Chakrabarty, "Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History: Who Speaks for 'Indian' Pasts?" *Representations* no. 37 (1992): 1.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 15 Nov 2026 at 22:10:57, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009359207.001

However, as much as possible, this monograph observes Pio Duran's prescriptions by privileging interactions within and actors from Asia.

This book explores an understudied nexus of interaction. It shows how, in the first half of the twentieth century, leading Chinese educators toured the Philippines to learn about and replicate its vocational education system, Chinese pundits debated the ideal feminine form at Manila Carnival pageants, and Chinese merchants navigated innovative exclusionist legislation in the Philippines. At the same time, it shows how Filipino musicians populated jazz cabarets and exemplified classical music in Shanghai, Chinese from the Philippines fashioned themselves as superheroes destined to save their ailing hometowns and China, and Filipino athletes put their bodies on display, competing with Chinese peers in regional athletic competitions. These intrepid travelers and thinkers weaved extensive and durable connections across Asia, exemplifying a rich but nearly unknown history of Sino–Philippine entanglement.

Yet this history has largely lived in obscurity despite its depth and significance. The aim of this book, therefore, is twofold. In addition to uncovering and restoring the entangled history of an important subregion of Asia, this book explores how methodological and disciplinary blinders have limited such research in the past, and how new ideas and approaches can help readjust research agendas for the future. The title of the introduction, "Before a Vast Ocean (曾经沧海)," which comes from a liberal translation of a famous Tang dynasty poem-turned-idiom by Yuan Zhen (元稹), invokes a nostalgic vision of a past trip to the "blue sea," or vast ocean. In the same way that Filipinos and Chinese stood before and navigated this literal vast ocean, creating improbable new lives for themselves and their families in the early twentieth century, this monograph stands before the metaphorical vast ocean of historiography, charting a course through the seas of world, global, and transnational history to craft a connected history of the Philippines and China.

This introduction starts with a brief visit to the historical ocean in an introductory scene-setting anecdote and a walk-through of the Sino–Philippine link. It then steers toward the oceans of historiography, first observing world, global, and transnational methodologies from a distance before approaching and untangling those methodologies. It concludes by casting a new framework that helps brings the Sino–Philippine link into focus.

Act 1, Scene 1

The following is a brief introductory anecdote designed to bring our attention to key themes in this monograph. It is the year 1936 and we find ourselves in the middle of two commemorative volumes celebrating the anniversaries of important

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 15 Nov 2026 at 22:10:57, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009359207.001

Chinese institutions in the Philippines. Standing at center stage is a statement from the former Chinese Consul General to the Philippines, K. L. Kwong (Kuang Guanglin 鄺光林). In the background stands a contrasting statement from Lin Yu (Lin You 林幽), lead editor for the China Critic, *who carries a grim look on his face.*

K. L. KWONG: Today the Philippines stands on the threshold of a new era – ready to play its important role in the drama of the Far East. And China, her nearest neighbor, cannot but look upon her aims and aspirations with understanding and sympathy.[5]

LIN YU: Facts tell us that the Sino–Filipino relationship has been excellent in the past, but lately there appear some disturbing signs, which, like "a little cloud out of the sea like a man's hand," if not checked in time, will develop into storms.[6]

Visibly flustered, the short statement of the Consul General to the Philippines exits on the left as a new, extended statement by Dr. Candido M. Africa, head of the Department of Parasitology at the University of the Philippines, flips onto the stage from the right. Lin Yu remains behind Dr. Africa. The lights focus on the third-person anecdote of the spectacled professor, as his words leap off the page, but Lin Yu's remarks remain on guard.

DR. AFRICA: While attending the London School of Tropical Medicine he was once mistaken for a Chinese by a friend. Desiring to rectify his true nationality, he immediately corrected that he was a Filipino and not a Chinese. "What the hell is the difference anyway," retorted his friend in a twinkle . . . . While it is good and honorable to be a Filipino, it is just as good and honorable to be a Chinese for theirs is a great and admirable race that has built up a civilization which reaches far back to the earliest historical record. The writer would be pleased if he were mistaken again for a Chinese abroad.[7]

LIN YU: I am aware that many of your public men, with the best of intentions, are saying that there is no such thing as an anti-Chinese movement . . . . [But] as you look around, you see the Chinese carrying on the greater part of the retail and wholesale business in your land. You want to control your own business just as you like to take the political destiny of your country into your own hands.[8]

[5] K. L. Kwong (Kuang Guanglin), in *Feilübin Minlila Zhonghua shanghui sanshi zhounian jiniankan* 菲律濱岷里拉中華商會三十周年紀念刊 *[Philippine Chinese Chamber of Commerce Thirty Year Anniversary Publication]*, ed. Zhonghua shanghui chuban weiyuanhui 中華商會出版委員會 (Manila: Minli yinshuguan 馬尼拉：民立印書館, 1936), 20.

[6] Lin You (林幽), "An Open Letter to the Filipino People," in *The Fookien Times Tenth Anniversary Number: 1926–1936 [Xinmin ribao* 新閩日報*]* (Manila: Fookien Times Co., 1936), 55.

[7] Candido M. Africa, "Future Sino–Philippine Relationship," in *Feilübin Minlila Zhonghua shanghui sanshi zhounian jiniankan* 菲律濱岷里拉中華商會三十周年紀念刊 *[Philippine Chinese Chamber of Commerce Thirty Year Anniversary Publication]*, ed. Zhonghua shanghui chuban weiyuanhui 中華商會出版委員會 (Manila: Minli yinshuguan 馬尼拉：民立印書館, 1936), 29.

[8] Lin You, "An Open Letter," 55–56.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 15 Nov 2026 at 22:10:57, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009359207.001

The professor pauses before striking a different tone.

DR. AFRICA: Before closing the writer who is without doubt voicing also the sentiments of his many colleagues in the Philippines, wishes to take this rare opportunity of extending to their many Chinese friends their sincere greetings and good wishes. May they succeed in their very laudable common ambition of ultimately rescuing their Motherland from so many forces that tend to cause her disintegration.[9]

LIN YU: I have been unusually frank in the above, I hope you will not take it as an offence, for I am speaking from the very bottom of my heart. I hope I am not mistaken in pleading for a frank discussion of the Sino–Filipino relations, for a true understanding and genuine cooperations [*sic*] between our peoples.[10]

The lights fade as the narrator closes the two commemorative volumes and turns to his keyboard in quiet contemplation. End scene.

Some documents read like the scene of a play. The drama seeps through the letters from the past, bringing to life the animosities, anxieties, and anticipations of historical actors.[11] In this instance, the passages come from two commemorative volumes published in 1936. The first, which featured Consul General K. L. Kwong and Dr. Candido M. Africa, commemorated the thirtieth anniversary of the Philippine Chinese Chamber of Commerce – a critical organizational and advocatory institution for Chinese in the Philippines. The latter, which featured Shanghai-based editor Lin Yu, who stood in the background to represent his distance from Manila, commemorated the tenth anniversary of the *Fookien Times* – a leading Chinese newspaper in the Philippines.

Dr. Africa adopted an optimistic tone, overlooking recent violent events and discriminatory legislation targeting Chinese residents in the Philippines, as well as the underlying racial tensions, while Lin Yu kept those issues front and center. Together, they help us set the scene for the "drama of the Far East," as the Consul General called it, that unfolds in the chapters that follow. They channel the complicated relationship between China and the Philippines, which was fraught with racialized animosities and legislative gatekeeping, yet filled with camaraderie, modeling, collaborations, and even romances. These figures help open our eyes to the complexity of and contradictions within the Sino–Philippine link.

[9] Africa, "Future Sino–Philippine Relationship," 29.
[10] Lin You, "An Open Letter," 56.
[11] For an instructive conversation on the "theatricality" of history, see Greg Dening, *Performances* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1996), 104–105.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 15 Nov 2026 at 22:10:57, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009359207.001

A Walk-Through of the Sino–Philippine Link

This book started from a simplistic notion that geographical proximity implied close collaboration and intense interaction, but it became clear in the early stages of research that histories of Asia tended to point in a different direction. It is a common adage in Southeast Asian studies, for instance, that colonialism disrupted many long-standing local networks as imperial imperatives redirected the economic, educational, and religious routes of Southeast Asians away from close neighbors toward the imperial metropole and other colonies of the empire.[12] In other words, according to the standard formula, this era of international business conglomerations and global empires featured connections mostly between and within those businesses and empires.

This formulation only tells part of the story, however, as it turns out that empires, in the end, "were never fully self-contained or hermetically sealed systems."[13] New steamship networks might have encouraged intraimperial travel, but unexpected connections also formed between close neighbors.[14] In other words, despite changing historical circumstances and a historiography that suggests otherwise, China and the Philippines remained intertwined in the twentieth century. This book takes us to this rich and largely unexplored theater of interaction that starred athletes and educators, carnival queens and pundits, jazz musicians and lawyers, and politicians and poets. It brings to life a colorful and dynamic world full of passion and hubris, engagement and disintegration, and cooperation and catastrophe.

The Sino–Philippine link of the twentieth century built on a long history. Some of the islands now collectively recognized as the Philippines appeared in Chinese written records as early as the Tang dynasty (618–907).[15] Later, during the Spanish colonial period (1571–1898), traders from southeastern China, leveraging kinship, hometown, and business networks, began to move to the Philippines in large numbers, filling crucial roles in the colonial society. The Chinese population

[12] For one summary of this imperial division of Southeast Asia, see Norman G. Owen, ed., *The Emergence of Modern Southeast Asia: A New History* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004), 78.

[13] Tony Ballantyne and Antoinette Burton, *Empires and the Reach of the Global, 1870–1945* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 12.

[14] In my dissertation, I called these "Accidental Connections of Empires." See Phillip B. Guingona, "Crafted Links and Accidental Connections of Empires: A History of Early Twentieth Century Sino–Philippine Interaction" (PhD diss., University at Buffalo, 2015).

[15] For early Chinese references to the Philippines, see Ching-hong Wu, "A Study of References to the Philippines in Chinese Sources from Earliest Times to the Ming Dynasty," *Philippine Social Sciences and Humanities Review* 26, nos. 1–2 (1959): 1–182.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 15 Nov 2026 at 22:10:57, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009359207.001

in the Philippines blossomed from an estimated 150 people in 1570, when Spaniards first established an outpost in Manila, to as many as 30,000 by 1603.[16] The population fluctuated through most of the Spanish colonial era as colonial officials alternatively encouraged migration and choreographed pogroms, but turmoil in China beginning in the 1850s and Spanish need for labor led to steadier migration patterns in the latter half of the nineteenth century. In the American colonial period, which began in the early 1900s, the Chinese community in the Philippines remained relatively stable despite the extension of the Chinese Exclusion Act to the islands.

China, for its part, had welcomed delegates from what is now considered the Philippines as early as the Song dynasty (960–1279).[17] Most early travelers from the archipelago came as merchants or diplomatic representatives who performed their parts in the tributary "system."[18] Because "Filipino" is a recent term forged by sojourning Propagandists in the crucible of early Bourbon–Restoration-era Spain, however, it is hard to speak of a parallel "Filipino" population in China before the nineteenth century.[19] However, by the midway point of that century, people from the archipelago had found work around the world, including China, in seafaring industries, which helped them form a sense of shared identity and affinity for the home islands.[20]

Two episodes have garnered outsized attention in the history of Sino–Philippine entanglement: the Manila galleon trade and the revolutionary era of the Philippines. In the galleon trade, Spanish ships labored across the Pacific from Acapulco to Manila and back, while Chinese junks completed the circuit by meeting them in Manila.[21] Years later, Filipino revolutionaries launched three successive but ultimately unsuccessful revolutions at the turn of the twentieth century, restructuring the Sino–Philippine relationship

[16] Huang Zisheng 黄滋生 and He Sibing 何思兵, *Feilübin Huaqiao shi* 菲律宾华侨史 *[History of Huaqiao in the Philippines]* (Guangzhou: Guangdong gaodeng jiaoyu chubanshe 广州：广东高等教育出版社, 1987), 2.

[17] Henry William Scott and Go Bon Juan, *Filipinos in China before 1500* (Manila: De La Salle University, 1989), 1–3.

[18] Ibid., 14; and Roderich Ptak, "From Quanzhou to the Sulu Zone and Beyond: Questions Related to the Early Fourteenth Century," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 29, no. 2 (September 1998): 289.

[19] For more on Filipino nationalism and the propagandist movement, see John N. Schumacher, *The Propaganda Movement, 1880–1895: The Creators of a Filipino Consciousness, the Makers of Revolution* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1997).

[20] See, for example, Filomeno V. Aguilar, Jr., "Manilamen and Seafaring: Engaging the Maritime World beyond the Spanish Realm," *Journal of Global History* 7 (2012): 366.

[21] See, for instance, Birgit Tremml-Werner, *Spain, China, and Japan in Manila, 1571–1644: Local Comparisons and Global Connections* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2015).

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 15 Nov 2026 at 22:10:57, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009359207.001

by "teaching China the meaning and viability of revolution as a solution to its national problems."[22] However, while these episodes are important, they have commanded outsized attention in our history books, obscuring equally important episodes and actors.

As outlined earlier, the proliferation of empires and the rapid expansion of transportation networks in the nineteenth century enhanced existing Sino–Philippine ties and fostered new connections by the twentieth century. These connections led Filipino musicians, veterinarians, and clerks to move to China's booming port cities to carve out new lives for themselves while Chinese businesspeople, students, and lawyers traveled to the Philippines to live and learn. Meanwhile, wealthy Chinese entrepreneurs and self-styled heroes from the Philippines leveraged their significant assets and networks of powerful acquaintances to fund infrastructure projects and steer political organizations in the archipelago and China. At the same time, Chinese and Filipino athletes and diplomats turned basketball courts and banquet halls into proxies for progress, while pundits transformed their columns into arenas for politicking.

Chinese people lived in the Philippines and married Filipinos, they discussed the archipelago and its people in the pages of popular newspapers and journals, and they copied Philippine innovations in governance and education. For many Chinese people, the Philippines represented progress and opportunity, while for many others it represented tyranny, especially after Filipino lawmakers legislated limits on Chinese freedoms. Either way, the Philippines loomed large. And China filled the same role for Filipinos who moved north for work, wrote about China in dailies and reviews, or traced their heritage there. In many ways, China became a crucial benchmark and strawperson that Filipinos used to measure themselves in all facets of life and governance.

This monograph argues that in the early twentieth century the Philippines and Filipinos played a significant role in Chinese history, and China and Chinese people likewise played a significant role in Philippine history. Their histories were connected. This straightforward argument, however, sails against the flow of existing scholarship, which largely overlooks the depth and significance of Sino–Philippine contact and mutual influence during this period. So, before we can move on to the connected history of China and the Philippines itself, we must first explore the web of historiography to devise strategies to tease out and recover lost voices, which will lead us to the second argument of this book. The next section asks why histories such as this one

[22] Nicole CuUnjieng Aboitiz, *Asian Place: Filipino Nation: A Global Intellectual History of the Philippine Revolution, 1887–1912* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2020), 151. See also Rebecca E. Karl, *Staging the World: Chinese Nationalism at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), 83–113.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 15 Nov 2026 at 22:10:57, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009359207.001

have remained hidden, and it experiments with ways to leverage global, world, and transnational history approaches to bring them to light.

Observing and Untangling the Human Web

World history is a metaphor. Or, rather, one of its most significant contributions to the study of history comes in its metaphors.[23] Practitioners of global, transnational, and world history regularly employ vivid and imaginative terms such as circulations, flows, links, circuits, and networks to compel readers to think critically and see and know in new ways.[24] In his call for researchers to explore "connected histories," for instance, Sanjay Subrahmanyam touts the use of "intrepid analytical machetes."[25] Transnational historian Pierre-Yves Saunier, meanwhile, asks us to set "our historical butterfly net" to "transnational mode."[26] Laura Briggs, Gladys McCormick, and J. T. Way, opting for a different but equally incisive metaphor, describe transnationalism as "the conceptual acid that denaturalizes" the nation.[27] Whether it is with machetes, butterfly nets, or acid, historians of the global have a way of cutting through complex topics, burning through old paradigms, and capturing historical butterflies with potent metaphors.

One metaphor that has successfully ensnared many world, global, and transnational historians is the web. The web captures the complexity and breadth of global interactions, the longevity and stickiness of its exchanges, and the interconnectedness of it all.[28] This metaphor has

[23] For an interesting take on "metaphorical suggestiveness" in history, see Charles S. Maier, "Consigning the Twentieth Century to History: Alternative Narratives for the Modern Era," *American Historical Review* 105, no. 3 (2000): 811. For critiques of the abuse of metaphors in academic writing, see Ann Curthoys and John Docker, "The Two Histories: Metaphor in English Historiographical Writing," *Rethinking History* 1, no. 3 (1997): 259–273; Stefanie Gänger, "Circulation: Reflections on Circularity, Entity, and Liquidity in the Language of Global History," *Journal of Global History* 12, no. 3 (2017): 303–318; and Stuart Alexander Rockefeller, "Flow," *Current Anthropology* 52, no. 4 (2011): 557–578.

[24] C. A. Bayly, Sven Beckert, Matthew Connelly, Isabel Hofmeyr, Wendy Kozol, and Patricia Seed, "AHR Conversation: On Transnational History," *American Historical Review* 111, no. 5 (2006): 1454.

[25] Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "Connected Histories: Notes towards a Reconfiguration of Early Modern Eurasia," *Modern Asian Studies* 31, no. 3 (1997): 762.

[26] Pierre-Yves Saunier, "Transnational History – Introduction," in *Transnational History*, *HAL Archive ouverte n Sciences de l'Homme et de la Societe*, January 6, 2014, https://halshs.archives-ouvertes.fr/halshs-00922207. Saunier adjusted the wording to "camera set" in the published version; see Pierre-Yves Saunier, *Transnational History* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 10.

[27] Laura Briggs, Gladys McCormick, and J. T. Way, "Transnationalism: A Category of Analysis," *American Quarterly* 60, no. 3 (2008): 627.

[28] For the most famous use of this metaphor, see J. R. McNeill and William H. McNeill, *The Human Web: A Bird's-Eye View of World History* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2003). See also Tony Ballantyne, *Webs of Empire: Locating New Zealand's Colonial Past*

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 15 Nov 2026 at 22:10:57, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009359207.001

also proven helpful because it hints at the difficulty historians face should they desire to untangle, chart, or even just observe the overlapping strings of global history. If researchers bypass the web and focus solely on the aciniform silk cocoon that happens to contain an embalmed national history, to extend the metaphor, they will likely miss much of the story of human history contained in the broader web, such as the extensive contacts between China and the Philippines in the early twentieth century that are the subject of this book.

This book leverages transnational methods to observe, untangle, and rebuild the web of Sino–Philippine connectivity in the early twentieth century, with implications for exploring other such webs around the world. In her book on the connected histories of Rangoon, Penang, and Bangkok, historian Su Lin Lewis begins by plotting the routes of the "inter-connected web of mobility and exchange," and this monograph starts much the same way with the previous section.[29] The current section, in turn, conducts an audit of global, transnational, and world histories, exposing their limitations and blinders with the goal of designing a path toward renewal.

This section focuses on two major issues that weigh on the approaches: disciplinary and methodological siloing, which is caused in part by the vastness of the fields themselves, and Eurocentrism and coloniality, which are lingering legacies of two centuries of imperial historiography and the funnel web of the archives. The section after recasts a more open and expansive orb web by highlighting and expanding upon key innovations of global historians that inform and inspire this book. It focuses on sub-global regions and scales in history, interactions among people of the Global South, selective silences, and disintegration in transnational inquiry.

World historians have long embraced new approaches to enhance their research. For example, proponents of what some have called "new world history," "new global history," and the "transnational turn," among many other things, have, over the past couple of decades, weaved a more balanced and interdisciplinary approach to history that takes seriously "peripheral" influence on the "metropole" rather than just the other way around, cultural and material cultural flows in addition to capital flows, global feminisms and subaltern studies in addition to elite machinations, and public health and environmental histories and their place in the human web.[30] These scholars cast transnational history as

(Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2012); and J. R. McNeill, *The Webs of Humankind: A World History* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2020).

[29] Su Lin Lewis, *Cities in Motion: Urban Life and Cosmopolitanism in Southeast Asia, 1920–1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 1.

[30] For an overview of some of these changes, see Maxine Berg, ed., *Writing the History of the Global: Challenges for the 21st Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013);

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 15 Nov 2026 at 22:10:57, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009359207.001

a way of seeing that embraces "methodological diversity," and many of them have inspired this research on the Philippines and China.[31]

However, while the critical and necessary adjustments these scholars have made have breathed new life into world, global, and transnational history, the scholars making those changes, myself included, remain consciously or unconsciously influenced by universalist and stadialist baggage that continues to shape agendas, steer funding, and damage the reputation and utility of the approaches.[32] Leading world historians have admitted that the field can be prescriptive and totalizing and that it often privileges the perspective of its loudest and most endowed acolytes, who happen to mostly hail from North America and Europe for the time being.[33] Ultimately, historians of the global have reached a point where, while we can name the problems of the approach and recognize the impact of historical baggage, actually applying research to counterbalance or offset those issues remains difficult.[34]

This book and this introduction are designed to address some of the questions surrounding global, transnational, and world history while highlighting ways to leverage the strengths of these approaches. But what are global, transnational, and world history? After fumbling through several formulas, Patrick Manning flippantly writes, "At the most expansive level, I could claim that all historical studies have now become world

Sebastian Conrad, *What Is Global History?* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016); Ross E. Dunn, Laura Jane Mitchell, and Kerry Ward, eds., *The New World History: A Field Guide to Teachers and Researchers* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2016); Bruce Mazlish, *The New Global History* (London: Routledge, 2006); and Douglas Northrop, ed., *A Companion to World History* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012).

[31] Bayly et al., "AHR Conversation: On Transnational History," 1454.

[32] For a brief summary of that baggage, see Ranajit Guha, *History at the Limit of World-History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).

[33] See, for instance, Frederick Cooper, "What Is the Concept of Globalization Good for? An African Historian's Perspective," *African Affairs* 100, no. 399 (2001): 189–213; Richard Drayton and David Motadel, "Discussion: The Futures of Global History," *Journal of Global History* 13 (2018): 1–21; Gabriela De Lima Grecco and Sven Schuster, "Decolonizing Global History? A Latin American Perspective," *Journal of World History* 31, no. 2 (2020): 425–446; Roxann Prazniak, "Is World History Possible? An Inquiry," in *History after the Three Worlds: Post-Eurocentric Historiographies*, ed. Arif Dirlik, Vinay Bahl, and Peter Gran (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), 221–239; Heather Sutherland, "The Problematic Authority of (World) History," *Journal of World History* 18, no. 4 (2007): 491–522. For the growth and potential of global, world, and transnational history, see Sven Beckert and Dominic Sachsenmaier, eds., *Global History, Globally: Research and Practice Around the World* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018).

[34] There are signs that this era is coming to an end. Jürgen Osterhammel, for instance, argues that the time when reflections on global history "outnumbered attempts to put all those ambitious recipes into historiographical practice" seems to be ending. See Jürgen Osterhammel, "Global History," in *Debating New Approaches to History*, ed. Marek Tamm and Peter Burke (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019), 21.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 15 Nov 2026 at 22:10:57, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009359207.001

history."[35] In a similar vein, when describing global history, Sebastian Conrad writes, "Once it is established that global history is everything, everything can become global history."[36] In other words, definitions vary so much that even the most seasoned practitioners find it difficult to isolate common strands. They eventually do cobble together more concrete definitions, of course, but their frank admissions can lead to confusion.

Transnational, global, and world history are also caught in theorization and citation cycles.[37] Because the approaches are so expansive as to include nearly everything, entry into them is taxing. Scholars often venture in with distinct linguistic backgrounds, regional specializations, and even global lenses.[38] As responsible academics, they either get lost in efforts to understand and rationalize the fields like I am doing here, cite the citation magnets of one of the meta-approaches, or engage in digital search aided "side-glancing," as historian Laura Putnam calls it.[39] At the same time, many scholars have been swept away by terms like "transnationalism," which, according to C. A. Bayly, has become "merely a buzzword among historians."[40] Critics and confused advocates then lump this scholarship together. As Laura Briggs, Gladys McCormick, and

[35] Manning, *Navigating World History*, 7. For similar sentiments, see C. A. Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World, 1780–1914* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 469; and Osterhammel, "Global History," 26.

[36] Conrad, *What Is Global History*, 8. Conrad addresses overapplication and ambiguity in the conclusion; see ibid., 232–233. C. A. Bayly, on the other hand, introduces another layer of ambiguity, writing, "I think that the distinctions between world, global, and transnational history have never adequately been explained." See Bayly et al., "AHR Conversation," 1442.

[37] For more on self-aggrandizing citation cycles, see Robert Cribb, "Circles of Esteem, Standard Work and Euphoric Couplets: Dynamics of Academic Life in Indonesian Studies," *Critical Asian Studies* 37, no. 2 (2005): 289–304.

[38] Some historians remain caught up in a debate over the difference between world, global, and transnational history, as well as various related approaches, such as diplomatic, connected, comparative, international, and big history. These debates can be constructive, but they often dissolve into posturing and territorialism. For a brief introduction to this topic, see Kenneth Pomeranz and Daniel A. Segal, "World History: Departures and Variations," in *A Companion to World History*, ed. Douglas Northop (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 15–31; or Dominic Sachsenmaier, *Global Perspectives on Global History: Theories and Approaches in a Connected World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 59–109.

[39] Lara Putnam, "The Transnational and the Text-Searchable: Digitized Sources and the Shadows They Cast," *American Historical Review* 121, no. 2 (2016): 377–402, esp. 380. Many of the most well-known and well-cited world histories come from synthesizers. See, for instance, Jared Diamond, *Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1997); Yuval Noah Harari, *Sapiens: A Brief History of Human Kind* (New York: Harper, 2015); and Ian Morris, *Why the West Rules – For Now: The Patterns of History and What They Reveal about the Future* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2010).

[40] Bayly et al., "AHR Conversation," 1441.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 15 Nov 2026 at 22:10:57, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009359207.001

J. T. Way, who are all affiliated with the Tepoztlán Institute for Transnational History, put it, "one can say a great many contradictory things about what is wrong with transnationalism and they will all be true about someone's transnationalism."[41]

In theory, global approaches should open new spaces for interdisciplinary collaboration, and indeed they have on many occasions, but the very size and ambition of those approaches sometimes ironically serve as an impediment.[42] Many scholars of migration studies, imperial history, sports history, critical race and gender studies, New Qing history, diplomatic history, and other subfields, many of whom inspire this book, still tend to look past one another and over some forms and spaces of interaction even amidst history's transnational turn. In many ways, global history has become an unwieldy and unnavigable tangled web, feeding the laments of critics who watch as world history scholars struggle to remember the paths through their own theoretical structures. Histories, especially ones that breach the borders of nation-states, are inherently messy, but world history methodology should not rival those histories in complexity and messiness.

The second major factor constraining global history research is the two centuries of imperial Eurocentric historiography that have rummaged through the webs of the past like a three-ton elephant. Historian Dipesh Chakrabarty's observation three decades ago that legacies do "not disappear simply because some of us have now attained a critical awareness" of them still rings true.[43] Global histories, as Jeremy Adelman observes, sometimes feel like "another Anglospheric invention to integrate the Other into a cosmopolitan narrative on our terms, in our tongues."[44]

[41] Briggs, McCormick, and Way, "Transnationalism," 626. Sebastian Conrad similarly describes how some historians "hijacked" the term "for a variety of different purposes"; see Conrad, *What Is Global History*, 6.

[42] Some scholars are also critical of the tendency to "transnationalize" or "globalize" everything. See, for instance, Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); 111–112; and John-Paul A. Ghobrial, "The Secret Life of Elias of Babylon and the Uses of Global Microhistory," *Past & Present*, no. 222 (2014): 58–59.

[43] Chakrabarty, "Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History," 2. Durba Ghosh admits that her greatest fear when writing imperial histories is that she will "Unintentionally reaffirm the place of Europe as the central point of reference." See Durba Ghosh, "AHR Forum: Another Set of Imperial Turns?" *American Historical Review* 117, no. 3 (2012): 782.

[44] "Our" presumably meaning American or European? See Jeremy Adelman, "What Is Global History Now?" *Aeon*, March 2, 2017, https://aeon.co/essays/is-global-history-still-possible-or-has-it-had-its-moment. For similar sentiments, see Matthew Brown, "The Global History of Latin America," *Journal of Global History* 10, no. 3 (2015): 365–386; De Lima Grecco and Schuster, "Decolonizing Global History," 425–446; David A. Segal, "Worlding History," in *The New World History: A Field Guide to Teachers and Researchers*, ed. Ross E. Dunn, Laura Jane Mitchell, and Kerry Ward (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2016), 317–328; and Micol Seigel, "Beyond Compare:

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 15 Nov 2026 at 22:10:57, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009359207.001

So, while many Latin Americanists and subaltern studies scholars have cast innovative transnational webs, many Africanists and Southeast Asianists have weaved compelling world histories, and many East Asianists and Europeanists have knit pioneering global histories of economic entanglement, the approaches remain bound to a European historiographical tradition and its continued "epistemic privilege of classifying."[45]

The nature of archives and digitized databases has only amplified the obstacles global historians face. In his unique study of the Indian Ocean world in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Thomas Metcalf confesses that archival limitations have relegated a flourishing and well-connected Indian Ocean world to historiographical obscurity.[46] Historians are still often bound to, and as a result privilege the voices from, European, Japanese, and American metropolitan and colonial archives and digital databases.[47] These source bases and the studies they feed funnel readers to and from the colonial metropole, rather than exposing them to a range of histories. As a result, historical actors from the so-called West still dominate our world histories, acting as either key agents of, or major impediments to, change and dynamism.

So, after recognizing the limitations of global, world, and transnational history, and after trudging through decades of other trendy methodological

Comparative Method after the Transnational Turn," *Radical History Review*, no. 91 (2005): 62–90.

[45] For more on "epistemic privilege," see Walter D. Mignolo, "Forward: Yes We Can," in *Can Non-Europeans Think?*, ed. Hamid Dabashi (London: Zed Books, 2015), xiv. For some pathbreaking transnational histories, see Prasenjit Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation: Questioning Narratives of Modern China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); and Diane M. Nelson, *A Finger in the Wound: Body Politics in Quincentennial Guatemala* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999). For some innovative early world histories, see Philip D. Curtin, *Cross-Cultural Trade in World History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984); and Donald R. Wright, *The World and a Very Small Place in Africa* (Armock: M.E. Sharpe, 1997). For some captivating global histories, see Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World*; Kenneth Pomeranz, *The Great Divergence: China, Europe, and the Making of the Modern World Economy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000); and Priya Satia, *Empire of Guns: The Violent Making of the Industrial Revolution* (New York: Penguin Press, 2018).

[46] Thomas Metcalf, *Imperial Connections: India in the Indian Ocean Arena, 1860–1920* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 9.

[47] For other critical takes on archival limitations, see Antoinette Burton, ed., *Archive Stories: Facts, Fictions, and the Writing of History* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006); Brian Connolly and Marisa Fuentes, "Introduction: From Archives of Slavery to Liberated Futures," *History of the Present: A Journal of Critical History* 6, no. 2 (2016): 105–116; Putnam, "The Transnational and the Text-Searchable," 377–402; Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "The Rani of Sirmur: An Essay in Reading the Archives," *History and Theory* 24, no. 3 (1985): 247–272; and Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009).

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 15 Nov 2026 at 22:10:57, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009359207.001

turns, should historians still embrace the transnational?[48] I would argue that we should, but, as with everything, with a healthy dose of humility. Untangling the human web is a tiring endeavor, but the process allows us to see and appreciate a more nuanced, representative, and ultimately accurate vision of world history. Hopefully, the untangling act in this introduction can make it easier for future scholars to work their way through their own historical and historiographical webs. As you will see from the footnotes, I have benefited greatly from reading the scholarship of many inspiring individuals. The next section highlights some critical interventions by them, as well as this book's own contributions.

Casting a New Human Web

While global, transnational, and world history have weathered their fair share of critiques, the approaches remain valuable, and with some adjustment, will continue to reveal new insights. As highlighted earlier, the complexity of the theoretical frameworks used, and the volume of scholarship adopting the frameworks, has sometimes prevented collaborations, leading many global historians to speak over or past one another. This monograph attempts to cut through some of this complexity and disciplinary and methodological siloing by engaging with and combining three distinct but related transnational history approaches in each part. Then, by combining those parts, it shows both the unique and vibrant connected history of the Philippines and China and a connected interdisciplinary methodological web that can be applied to study other peoples and places around the world.

Historian Engseng Ho, noting that "in the enthusiasm for globalization, scholarly practice surged ahead of theory," has attempted to bring order to transnational research agendas by encouraging scholars to follow "mobile societies" and explore transregional connections across intermediate scales.[49] This book responds to Ho's first point by following Filipino and Chinese actors as they crisscrossed the globe. Part I, for

[48] For critiques of historians' affinity for turns, see Bell, "Questioning the Global Turn," 1–24; and Susan K. Cahn, "Turn, Turn, Turn: There Is a Reason (for Sports History)," *The Journal of American History* 101, no. 1 (2014): 181–183.

[49] Engseng Ho, "Inter-Asian Concepts for Mobile Societies," *Journal of Asian Studies* 76, no. 4 (2017): 921–922. For similar interventions, see Richard T. Chu and Caroline S. Hau, "Region and Microhistory: Writing the Chinese Diaspora in the Philippines," *Kritika Kultura* 21/22 (2013/2014): 299–306; Akira Iriye, *Global and Transnational History: The Past, Present, and Future* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 19–35; Dominic Sachsenmaier, "World History as Ecumenical History," *Journal of World History* 18, no. 4 (2007): 465–489; and Roy Bin Wong, "Comparing States and Regions in East Asia and Europe: Is Southeast Asia (Ever) Part of East Asia?" *Southeast Asian Studies* 48, no. 2 (September 2010): 115–130.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 15 Nov 2026 at 22:10:57, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009359207.001

instance, highlights how the same forces that lured Chinese to the Philippines and aided in their transplant – the prospect of improved livelihood, supportive kinship networks, and overlapping imperial circuits – fostered the reverse flow of Filipinos to China. The section thereby bridges a major rift in migration studies, which is an important world history subfield, juxtaposing the mirrored diasporas of Chinese in the Philippines and Filipinos in China. This framing provides balance and a fresh perspective on a topic that often veers into discussions on state control, native-place and business networks, and acclimation and assimilation.

All the chapters in this book also pay close attention to Ho's second point on scale, following both the global itineraries of Chinese and Filipinos and their local meanderings. This book is indebted to world historians who have made compelling arguments to incorporate a variety of scales, large and small, vast and narrow, in research.[50] Part IV of this book, which pivots from a Shanghai sporting event in 1921, to classrooms in Springfield, Massachusetts, in the ensuing years, to the boardrooms in Manila in 1934, challenges the boundaries established by area studies while recognizing and paying homage to the interdisciplinarity at the heart of the area studies mission. These chapters, as well as the other chapters of this book, spin a supranational but still navigable web.

Recently, innovative scholars of the comparative have realigned their research, exploring the "connected histories" of two locales and casting "reciprocal comparisons," especially between countries of the so-called Global South.[51] This has helped grow our understanding of global connectivity beyond the dusty cobwebs of American, European, and Japanese

[50] See, for instance, Matthew Pratt Guterl, "AHR Forum: Comment: The Future of Transnational History," *American Historical Review* 118, no. 1 (2013): 130–139; Douglas Northrop, ed., *A Companion to World History* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 6–7; Bernhard Struck, Kate Ferris, and Jacques Revel, "Introduction: Space and Scale in Transnational History," *The International History Review* 33, no. 4 (2011): 573–584; and Sebouh David Aslanian, Joyce E. Chaplin, Ann McGrath, and Kristin Mann, "AHR Conversation: How Size Matters: The Question of Scale in History," *The American Historical Review* 118, no. 5 (2013): 1431–1472.

[51] For more on "connected histories," see Arjun Appadurai, "How Histories Make Geographies: Circulation and Context in a Global Perspective," in *The Future as Cultural Fact: Essays on the Global Condition* (London: Verso, 2013); Donna R. Gabaccia and Dirk Hoerder, eds., *Connecting Seas and Connected Ocean Rims: Indian, Atlantic, and Pacific Oceans and China Seas Migrations from the 1830s to the 1930s* (Leiden: Brill, 2011); Tansen Sen, *India, China, and the World: A Connected History* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017); and Subrahmanyam, "Connected Histories," 735–762. For the concept of "reciprocal comparisons," see Gareth Austin, "Reciprocal Comparison and African History: Tackling Conceptual Eurocentrism in the Study of Africa's Economic Past," *African Studies Review* 50, no. 3 (2007): 1–28; Pomeranz, *The Great Divergence*, 8–10; and Jean-Laurent Rosenthal and Roy Bin Wong, *Before and Beyond Divergence: The Politics of Economic Change in China and Europe* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011).

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 15 Nov 2026 at 22:10:57, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009359207.001

empires and business networks.[52] Adopting this geographical and methodological orientation helps us recover critical extra-imperial connections such as those forged by educators in China and the Philippines.[53] Recovering such connections, in turn, reveals novel insights. Part II of this book, for instance, argues that Chinese educators and students viewed the Philippines as a unique educational model that offered a non-militaristic path to "modernity," rather than an American colonial laboratory.

Connected and reciprocal histories have also illuminated ways to challenge coloniality, Eurocentrism, and other blinders that stick to many world histories. Global historians increasingly recognize and make central in their mission the necessity of "looking from the bottom up at globalization."[54] Self-described adherents of transnational history especially have inspired myself and others by introducing subaltern, decolonial, and feminist studies methodologies to the writing of global history, calling for the application of "epistemologies of the South."[55] *China and the Philippines* weaves what some have called a "translocal," "transcolonial," or "pluriversal" historical narrative of world history that foregrounds actors from the Global South who co-opted, utilized, and shaped imperial and economic systems of power to spin their own webs and advance their own agendas.[56] This book makes room for such actors

[52] For research on extra- and inter-imperial connections, see Augusto Espiritu, "Inter-Imperial Relations, the Pacific, and Asian American History," *Pacific Historical Review* 83, no. 2 (2014): 238–254; Devleena Ghosh, "Burma–Bengal Crossings: Intercolonial Connections in Pre-Independence India," *Asian Studies Review* 40, no. 2 (2016): 156–172; and Huei-Ying Kuo, *Networks beyond Empires: Chinese Business and Nationalism in the Hong Kong-Singapore Corridor, 1914–1941* (Leiden: Brill, 2014).

[53] For scholars who research educational linkages in Asia, see James A. Cook, "Currents of Education and Identity: Overseas Chinese and Minnan Schools, 1912–1937," *Twentieth-Century China* 25, no. 2 (April 2000): 1–31; Faye Yuan Kleeman, *In Transit: The Formation of the Colonial East Asia Cultural Sphere* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2014); and Lewis, *Cities in Motion*.

[54] Lynn Hunt, *Writing History in the Global Era* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2014), 64. See also Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 32–33; Xin Fan, *World History and National Identity in China: The Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 11–15; and Willem van Schendel, "Geographies of Knowing, Geographies of Ignorance: Jumping Scale in Southeast Asia," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 20 (2002): 661.

[55] Fiona Paisley and Pamela Scully, *Writing Transnational History* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019), 2–5. For "epistemologies of the South," see Boaventura de Sousa Santos, "Epistemologías del Sur," *Utopióa y Praxis Latinoamericana* 16, no. 54 (2011): 17–39, quoted in De Lima Grecco and Schuster, "Decolonizing Global History," 440. Many scholars point to C. L. R. James ' *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (New York: Dial Press, 1938) as an inspiration.

[56] For more on "translocality," see Urlike Freitag and Achim von Oppen, eds., *Translocality: The Study of Globalising Processes from a Southern Perspective* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), esp. 4–8. For more on "transcolonial," see Brian Bernards, *Writing the South Seas: Imagining the Nanyang in Chinese and Southeast Asian Postcolonial Literature* (Seattle:

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 15 Nov 2026 at 22:10:57, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009359207.001

from the Global South to answer Hamid Dabashi's wearied question, "can Non-Europeans think?," with their decisive actions.[57]

Like the scholarship that inspires it, this book aims to subvert the power dynamics that continue to reinforce the strands of Euro-American agency while discarding the connections formed by other agents in world histories. Adopting a decolonial approach that moves past the diagnosis phase of postcolonial research to a stage that proactively challenges the continued influence of coloniality is a critical element in this endeavor.[58] This book, therefore, as highlighted in the note on what is missing, implements a form of selective silence that shifts who dominates the dialogues and who appears on screen. It centers Filipino and Chinese actors who have largely been overlooked in global histories, such as Honorio Evangelista, Albino Z. Sycip (Xue Minlao 薛敏老), Regino Ylanan, Dee C. Chuan (Li Qingquan 李清泉), Huang Yanpei (黃炎培), Encarnacion Alzona, Thomas H. Suvoong (Shu Hong 舒鴻), and Gan Bun Cho (Yan Wenchu 顏文初).

To restore these voices and circumvent the world historians' archive dilemma, this book uses rare archival and published material in Chinese, English, and Spanish, much of which has not been used in historical research. For instance, this monograph taps into a trove of Chinese-language publications from the Philippines that were largely destroyed in Philippine collections during World War II but survived in far-flung libraries across the People's Republic of China, Australia, Japan, and the United States. These unique journals and letters, which are only now being digitized, reveal a complicated and sometimes contradictory position for Chinese in the Philippines, which scholars of the community have only partially captured. This is one of the topics covered in Part III. This book also uses unique archival material, such as Shanghai Municipal Orchestra band committee notes and private reservation requests from the Shanghai Municipal Archives, which provide a window into the lives of Filipinos in Shanghai, as seen in Part I.

University of Washington Press, 2015), esp. 23–24; and Dane Keith Kennedy and Durba Ghosh, eds., *Decentring Empire: Britain, India, and the Transcolonial World* (Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 2006). For more on "pluriversal," see Walter D. Mignolo and Catherine E. Walsh, *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018), 2–3.

[57] Hamid Dabashi, *Can Non-Europeans Think?* (London: Zed Books, 2015).

[58] For moving past the diagnosis phase, see bell hooks, "Postmodern Blackness," *Postmodern Culture* 1, no. 1 (1990). For decolonial approaches, see Walter D. Mignolo and Catherine E. Walsh, "What Does It Mean to Decolonize?" in *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018), 105–134; and Aníbal Quijano, "Coloniality of Power and Eurocentrism in Latin America," *International Sociology* 15, no. 2 (2000): 215–232.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 15 Nov 2026 at 22:10:57, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009359207.001

In their push to analyze border crossings and transnational flows, some world historians have romanticized human mobility and interconnectivity, leading others to call for "narratives of global life that reckon with disintegration as well as integration."[59] If global histories are to be honest to the past, they must recognize that historical webs were torn asunder just as often as they were spun. The final chapter of this book, which is titled "Disintegration," heeds this call by exploring how many of the transnational strings established by Chinese and Filipinos began to unravel in the build-up to World War II. Of course, many actors formed new ones in the years after, but that is a topic for another book. Many sections of this book, meanwhile, circumvent the romanticization of human mobility by following the lead of scholars who substitute the movement of humans for the mobility of ideas.[60] The final part in particular explores discursive flows and media debates, adding an important element to a monograph otherwise dominated by humans and their institutions.

And now, it is almost time to move to the main content of the book, but, before we proceed to the cases themselves, let us return to the elusive definition of global, world, and transnational history. After all, we never did define it. Sorry to disappoint, but we are not going to here either. That is because these approaches can indeed be everything. They inspire and frustrate specialists from around the world, guaranteeing definitional ambiguity, but that is not a bad thing.[61] Scholars will only settle on a definition when enough of them have abandoned the project, clearing space for land grabs and the ramblings of purists who attempt to implement their orthodoxies, but I hope this day never arrives. This book attempts to appreciate the complexity of and bring some order to the webs of world history, but ultimately, it thrives in and celebrates ambiguity and getting lost.

This book offers an interdisciplinary, decolonial, connected history of China and the Philippines that pays attention to disintegration as well as creation, implements selective silences, centers cultural and discursive

[59] Adelman, "What Is Global History Now?" See also Cooper, "What Is the Concept of Globalization Good For," 189–213.

[60] For scholars of media spheres and representations, see Alexander Des Forges, *Mediasphere Shanghai: The Aesthetics of Cultural Production* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007); Akira Iriye, *Across the Pacific: An Inner History of American–East Asian Relations* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1967); and Lydia N. Yu-Jose, *Japan Views the Philippines, 1900–1944* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1992).

[61] Others are also happy to keep the definition vague. See, for instance, Alessandro Stanziani, *Eurocentrism and the Politics of Global History* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2018), 6.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 15 Nov 2026 at 22:10:57, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009359207.001

flows between peoples of the Global South, and explores unencumbered articulations of race, modernity, and gender. This approach itself makes up the second thesis of the book. But there are many equally compelling ways to write world history. It is hard to analyze a web, let alone untangle and weave one. So, let us remain humbled by our ignorance, knowing that any attempt at a world history is guaranteed to be a novice's attempt. And now, it is time to get lost.

Chapter Descriptions

Part I, Mirrored Diasporas, leverages imperial history, migration studies, and urban history to explore parallels and differences between the Chinese community in Manila and Filipino community in Shanghai. The chapters in this section argue that, while many Filipinos and Chinese mostly secured reliable jobs in these modern cities, they occupied an uncertain and evolving position in racial–imperial hierarchies as foreign Asians sans imperial protection, leaving them vulnerable to arbitrary political and legal regimes. To better understand these mirrored diasporas, this part follows their pioneers as they traversed overlapping imperial formations on hulking new passenger steamships.

Part II, The Philippine Model, incorporates research pioneered in Asia and the colonial world. Scholars of the tributary "system" and New Qing history have helped us reimagine the extent and form of inter-Asian interaction in the early modern period, and this chapter extends this critical perspective to the early twentieth century by following "cultural tributarists" who, like their cultural internationalist counterparts, sought to connect Asia through education, shared democratic ideals, and professional institutions. In so doing, it challenges a concept derived from the French colonial world known as the "laboratory of modernity," which posits colonies as testing grounds for liberal colonial reformers. The chapters in this part argue that Chinese students, educators, and scholars viewed the Philippines as a unique model of modernity, not a colonial derivative.

Part III, Nationalisms of the Founders, explores the overlapping and congruent nationalisms of elite Chinese in the Philippines through a microhistorical account of "the Founders," a group of wealthy self-styled heroes who founded the China Banking Corporation. The chapters in this part portray them as multifaceted yet conceited individuals who saw no contradiction in aligning with and spearheading various nationalistic visions simultaneously. The founders imagined themselves as saviors destined to rescue their hometowns, create an independent, bandit-free

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 15 Nov 2026 at 22:10:57, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009359207.001

Fujian, and help China restore its sovereignty and achieve national salvation.

Part IV, The Pivot, uses sports history, area studies, and event history to explore Sino–Philippine interactions at the Far Eastern Championship Games – an early Asian Olympiad. The chapters in this part highlight three turning points: coalescence in Shanghai when athletes and journalists from around Asia gathered in the city in 1921, possibilities at Springfield College in the United States through the 1920s when young students from China and the Philippines undertook parallel journeys of discovery, and disintegration in Manila in 1934 when politics overshadowed the games and disagreement over Manchukuo led to the unceremonious end of the Far Eastern Championship Games. The chapters in this part show how the Games as an event linked the fortunes of Filipinos, Chinese, and Japanese across rigid area studies boundaries into a "triangle offense."

The Conclusion, The Ghosts of the Present, bucks the trend of earlier chapters by focusing on only one theoretical framework – historical memory. It positions the exploration of the connected history of China and the Philippines as a means to dispel the ghosts of the present.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 15 Nov 2026 at 22:10:57, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009359207.001