

REVIEW

BOOK

Historia mínima de Filipinas

By Paulina Machuca

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Historia mínima de Filipinas, by Paulina Machuca is part of the series collection “Historias mínimas” (*compact histories*) edited by El Colegio de México. In this case, the objective of Machuca's book is to provide a concise overview of the history of the Philippines. At the same time, this work represents the first academic account to write the entire history of the archipelago from Mexico.

The book contains ten chapters. The first one describes the physical environment of the Philippine archipelago, highlighting the importance and influence of geography in the historical development of the archipelago. Chapter 2 summarizes an extended period, from the Austronesian migration, c. 4000 BC up to the 15th century AD. The third chapter is dedicated to the “decisive interlude” during 1450 to 1565, describing the arrival of Islam and the first European expeditions to the region. Chapters 4, 5, and 6 discuss the Spanish period from 1565 to 1898, explaining the Hispanicization process in the Philippines, the implications of the *reformas borbónicas*, and the forming of a developing identity, respectively. Chapter 7 deals with the “Double Philippine Revolution” by depicting the emergence of the Katipunan and the consequences of the struggles against Spaniards and Americans. The eighth chapter recapitulates the US colonial period from 1899 to 1946 and addresses the Japanese Occupation interval. Chapter 9 concisely portrays the independent period from 1946 to 2016. Finally, Chapter 10 approaches the contemporary challenges of the Philippines.

This book represents a brief introduction to the history of the Philippines. Among its main strengths is the attention dedicated to environmental factors, mainly at the beginning of the work, stating the significance of mountains,

volcanoes, earthquakes, typhoons, and the Philippines' megadiversity. Machuca not only describes the distinctive features of the Philippines' biodiversity and climate but also establishes the relationship between humans and nature by mentioning the uses and importance of some species of trees. Along with this, she points out environmental problems, especially the deforestation problem and the acceleration experienced during the last decades of the twentieth century (256-257). Useful maps about the archipelago's political regions, volcanoes, ethnolinguistics, and geopolitical positions complement this. Since works on Philippine history tend to devote excessive attention to the island of Luzon and especially to Manila, the consideration in this narration of spaces such as the region of Mindanao should be considered another success of this book. In this sense, Machuca inserts the historical deeds, problems, and challenges for people such as the *Moros* from the southern Philippines in her narration, a subject matter scarcely attended in the Spanish language historiography.

Historia mínima de Filipinas also succeeds in synthesizing the history of the Philippines, from the early times to the year 2017. Machuca did this by establishing a common thread depicting the main historical processes in the archipelago. In this sense, it is possible to summarize the processes described by Machuca in the following way: The Austronesian diaspora arrival and the Neolithic period, a decisive interlude that marked the arrival of Islam as well as the Europeans, the Spanish phase, the American colonial period, and finally, the independent era. Throughout the processes described by the author, specific patterns and phenomena predominate, primarily based on migrations, maritime trade, cultural exchange, and political changes. Since the early times, the Philippines has been the destination of peoples such as Austronesians, Chinese and Muslim traders, Spaniard conquerors and friars, and people from the former Americas. Alongside migration and due to the archipelagic nature of the country, trade has also been a constant in its history. Machuca's book also narrates the involvement of the archipelago in long-distance trade networks since at least the year 1001, when it took part in the first of the so-called "tributaries" mission as part of the *Nanhai* trade sustained with China (40). Machuca also recalls how varied cultural influences arrived in these islands due to the maritime trade, including Hinduist influences like the *baybayin* alphabet (43) or the arrival of Islam. Likewise, the Philippines has been central to critical trade networks like the Manila Galleon, which held exchange networks from Fujian to Acapulco, Mexico, and farther.

By reading Machuca's book, it is possible to appreciate the reciprocal influences that permeated the maritime exchange across the Pacific Ocean through cultural and environmental interchange. People, goods, and cultural influences traveled back and forth from Manila to Acapulco—for instance, influence from the Nahuatl language, an indigenous language from central Mexico, in Tagalog. Likewise, new practices arose on the Western coast of Mexico, including using coconut palms

to make coconut and palm wine known as *tuba* (100). Other examples of these exchanges included the introduction of new fruits and foods. For example, in the Philippines arrived the pineapple, from which the traditional clothing known as *barong tagalog* is made (101). Machuca interestingly describes all the issues mentioned above since the environmental exchanges between the Philippines and Mexico are her expertise.

The book also provides a glimpse of the political transformations in the archipelago, for instance, in Chapter 5, which corresponds to the eighteenth century, and in subsequent chapters. On this, the Spanish rule attempted to reorganize a more effective administration during the eighteenth century through the reforms known as *reformas borbónicas*. In contrast, in the twentieth century, the US relied on local Filipinos to ensure the application of their rule over these islands. Nonetheless, the book states the local agency by mentioning the weight of José Rizal's thoughts and works, the emergence of the Katipunan, the First Philippine Republic, and the struggle of Filipino revolutionaries against both Spanish and American powers. In the last chapters, the political difficulties confronted by the Philippines are also described, including the consequences of the Japanese occupation and the difficulties that had characterized the political scenario, including clientelism, corruption, exploitation of the new country by familiar clans, the dictatorship of Ferdinand Marcos, and once again, the weightiness of environmental challenges.

The form in which Machuca ends the book represents a good closing, given that the last chapter offers a panorama of the predicaments and challenges for the Philippines by the second decade of the current century. Thus, she offers the reader a short portrayal of internal and external contemporary problems for the archipelago, namely, the Muslim question in the south, the West Philippine Sea disputes, rapid deforestation, Overseas Filipino Workers, economic challenges in the global era, and the war against drugs.

One of the main problems in the historiography written in the Spanish language about the history of the Philippines is the overwhelming consideration of the Spanish era, particularly topics like the Manila Galleon trade. In *Historia mínima de Filipinas*, this pattern is also reflected in a certain measure, owing to the quantity of space devoted to the Spanish epoch in the work. Although Machuca succeeds in addressing issues like the historical particularities of the Muslim populations, it would have been enriching to offer more information about these themes or, otherwise, about the multiple ethnic groups that inhabit the Philippines. Despite some references to ethnolinguistic groups, such as the Aetas or the Pampangos, this matter deserves more attention. Gender is another area that Machuca subtly explores, but only in specific passages, including the one on the Philippine Revolution; however, this is also a subject that, having received more attention, would have broadened the perspective of the book.

It is essential to mention that given that the book is part of the collection of compact histories mentioned before, it does not include formal quotations or references. That is because this collection of books mainly aims to inform a wider audience, rather than scholars, about their contents. However, Machuca incorporates a brief bibliographical essay that may serve as a departure point for readers interested in delving into specific topics of Philippine history.

In sum, this book offers an excellent introduction to the history of the Philippines, summarizing the most important historical processes in the archipelago, whether economic, political, or socio-cultural. Machuca sheds light on still little-studied themes like the Moro question and points out the relevance of environmental factors. Likewise, themes that are more well-known in Spanish language historiography are revisited and, in some cases, enhanced with new relevant information, for example, in the case of the biological exchanges between the Philippines and Mexico. This work may be a valuable resource to undergraduate students interested in the history of the Philippines. In addition, professors conducting courses on the history of Asia may rely on this text to fill the gap concerning the modern history of the Philippines. Undoubtedly, it would be exciting to publish this book in Filipino or English for a Filipino audience to read about the history of the Philippines, as viewed from a Mexican academic perspective.

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