

A “hero of the people”: commemorations of Andres Bonifacio by Philippine revolutionary veterans (1910-1933)

Following the Philippine Revolution against Spain (1896-98), the turn of the twentieth century saw the islands declare their political independence, before being annexed by the United States as a consequence of the Spanish-American War in 1898. Despite the ensuing Philippine-American War (1899-1902/13), the first decade of the twentieth century saw the United States consolidate its colonial rule, during which time the figure of José Rizal emerged to dominate Philippine commemorative culture. The memorialisation of Rizal, a peaceful advocate for political reform during Spanish colonial rule and whom the Spanish had executed in 1896, was promoted by the American colonial authorities and those in the emerging Philippine government as a means to unite the country, whilst he also became a rallying cry for those calling for immediate Philippine independence.

Yet despite the ascendancy of Rizal and the proliferation of monuments to his name, many veterans of the Philippine Revolution and Philippine-American War united around the alternative figure of Andres Bonifacio as a symbol of the successful overthrow of the Spanish regime. Bonifacio had been leader of the Katipunan, a secret society who upon their discovery by the Spanish authorities had initiated the revolution. However Bonifacio’s opposition to Emilio Aguinaldo, the man who was elected as president of the revolutionary government, resulted in his eventual arrest and execution.

This paper examines Philippine Revolutionary veterans’ commemoration of Bonifacio as a counter-memorial to Rizal. While much of Rizal’s early memorialisation served to obscure memories of the recent Revolution and Philippine-American War, remembrances of Bonifacio brought the conflicts to the fore. These commemorations not only subtly undermined United States rule, but served to legitimatise the veterans’ own service to country and their roles in founding the Philippine nation state, almost thirty years before it would gain its independence.

Biography:

Kimberley Weir is currently completing a PhD as part of the Cultures of Occupation in Twentieth Century Asia (COTCA) project at the University of Nottingham. Her thesis explores the extent to which the United States shaped the public monuments erected in the Philippines during its colonial rule of the islands (1898 to 1946), and how these monuments have affected the way in which particular historical events have been memorialised and remembered. Kimberley has an undergraduate degree in American and English Studies from the University of Nottingham, and a Masters in Art Gallery and Museum Studies from the University of Manchester. She is Secretary for the Association of Southeast Asian Studies in the UK.