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# **Filipino Secret Agents, 1896-1910**

*Grant K. Goodman*



In the political maelstrom which followed the Revolution of 1896, the Spanish-American War and the Philippine-American War, a plethora of suspicions, intrigues and rivalries developed. These were variously intra-Philippine, Philippine-American and American-Japanese. Accordingly, secret agents, spies and paid informants were employed by the seemingly ceaselessly contending parties.

While the success of these elusive participants in the complex political maneuvering of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century Philippines is problematic, an examination of archival sources reveals something of their identities and of their use and/or misuse. This note will, then, attempt to sort out some of these shadowy figures and to describe their involvement in Philippine events. Their methods of operation and their methods of reportage to their respective employers will also be discussed.

## **Japanese Triumphs**

The victory of Japan in the Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895), and, in particular, the annexation of Taiwan by Japan aroused apprehension on the part of Spanish authorities in the Philippines. To some Filipinos, however, this development seemed fraught with significance and hope. For the first time an Oriental people, in emulation of the West, had put into the field a modern army equipped with modern weapons and had defeated the vast and ancient but now decrepit Chinese empire. The hope of many Filipinos was, of course, that they too, like their fellow Asians of Japan, could modernize and, above all, could assert their national independence. For, after all, the

remarkable triumph of Japan was proof positive that Orientals need no longer take second place to Westerners. The surge of pride, racial and national, which was felt by educated and articulate young Filipinos can not of course be measured. Nevertheless, the evidence seems clear. Nationalistically inclined Filipinos made a point of patronizing the few Japanese traders then in the Islands. Contacts with Japan suddenly increased as a number of Filipinos went to Japan to live, to study and, most importantly, to seek political support for Philippine independence. The chronological sequence of Japan's victory (1895) and the outbreak of the Philippine Revolution (1896) against Spain is surely coincidental, but the inspiration derived from the emergence of a powerful Japan in the Far East is demonstrated by the several ways in which Filipino revolutionaries sought Japanese moral and material assistance.

Before describing these requests and Japan's response to them, it seems worth while to note that their real significance lies in the image of Japan as the inspiration and stimulus of Philippine independence and the legend that Japan was the only nation which offered concrete assistance to the Philippine independence movement. The effect of these two popularly believed conceptualizations was to create a "redemptionist" continuum for the future of Filipino revolutionary movements which recurs in the histories of the Malolos Republic, the Hong Kong conspiracy, and the Tuguegarao and the Sakdal uprisings, namely the firm expectation of Japanese help. Again, it is interesting to note that in all these instances the actual extent of Japanese participation was far less than the legend which grew up about it. Moreover, the role of Japan, real or imagined, in each instance arose as a response to Philippine demands. This is not to say that on every occasion the Japanese were to be found totally unresponsive to Filipino pressures, but it is to assert that only the most romantic revolutionary could have been satisfied by the piddling and singularly unsuccessful "contributions" of Japan to the Philippine cause.

### **The Katipunan and Japan**

For some time the secret Philippine revolutionary society Katipunan (Patriots League) had been considering the dispatching to Japan of a committee of its members to seek arms. However, in 1896,

when the Japanese cruiser *Kongo* appeared in Manila harbor, the Katipuneros decided to negotiate directly, if possible, with officials of the Japanese government. The story persists that an agreement was signed between the Filipino revolutionaries and certain Japanese—mysteriously, according to the story, using assumed names, a custom which incidentally was far more typical of the Katipunan than of the Japanese.

A much more believable if less attractive version of the *Kongo* affair recounts a brief encounter between the visiting Japanese commander and a group of Katipunan representatives. The encounter was supposed to have taken place upstairs over the Japanese "Bazar," a Manila dry goods store, one of whose Japanese employees arranged the meeting. Katipunero Emilio Jacinto presented the Japanese admiral with a letter addressed to the Emperor requesting assistance for the cause of Philippine independence and suggesting that the potential role of Japan in the Philippines could be comparable to that of France at the time of the American Revolution. Apparently embarrassed by the nature of the occasion, the admiral replied rather formally and completely noncommittally that he was most pleased to meet everyone present, that he hoped all of them would visit Japan and, almost as an afterthought, that he joined his Filipino hosts in their desire to secure their independence. Certainly this latter account seems far more likely and far more realistic than the fanciful story of the supposed *Kongo* agreement. It is not difficult to speculate that when, as Professor Teodoro Agoncillo has written, "The hope of enticing the Japanese officials to help the Filipinos in their projected struggle for national liberation vanished into thin air," the Katipunan fabricated the purported terms for the supplying of Japanese arms in order to try to arouse support for the struggle for independence among their own countrymen.

Nevertheless, the hope of the Katipunan persisted that arms and ammunition from Japan for a revolt against Spain could still be obtained. As far as can be determined, at the outbreak of hostilities in the Philippines between the revolutionaries and the Spanish authorities, that organ of the Japanese government which was most concerned and felt itself to be most directly interested was the newly activated Taiwan Army. The Japanese were still in the process of organizing their control over the very recently acquired island of Taiwan, and hostile action of any kind in an area as close to Taiwan as the immediately adjacent Philippines was of particular concern to

the army which was responsible for the security of the island. Thus, immediately after the outbreak of hostilities, the headquarters of the Taiwan Army sent a military observer, Lt. Col. Kususe Yoshihiko, to the Philippines. After spending several months in the islands, Lt. Col. Kususe returned to Taiwan to recommend that an appropriate individual be sent to Manila in his stead and continue to report developments in a situation that was still very fluid.

Chosen for the post was one Sakamoto Shiroy (1872-1931), born in the former feudatory of Tosa and previously active in behalf of Japanese interests in Korea. Sakamoto left Taiwan in March of 1897 and moved into a house in the Binondo section of Manila. On the surface he acted as a civilian, posing as both a branch manager of an overseas trading firm with headquarters in Osaka and as a correspondent for Japanese newspapers. In the latter capacity he had remarkably free access to both the Spanish government and rebel headquarters, with the result that he filed with the Taiwan Army headquarters some 110 carefully detailed reports on developments in the Philippines. This information was particularly valuable since, although there was a Japanese consular official in Manila, he could not possibly move about with the freedom accorded to Sakamoto.

Sakamoto personally was deeply sympathetic to the rebel cause. On 15 August 1898, immediately following the end of the Spanish-American War, he addressed a most urgent telegram to the Taiwan Army Headquarters warning that the independence army was in dire danger of being overwhelmed by the United States Army and that Japan should not stand idly by. Sakamoto said that if one battalion of Japanese marines were at hand, Manila's defense could be cracked, Aguinaldo's independence forces would be greatly assisted and Philippine freedom assured. After consultations, Taiwan Army Headquarters replied:

This is not the time to undertake to manage [affairs] in the southern regions according to ideals. In order to prevent war damage in Manila do not get involved at all in the fighting directly. Protect the lives and property of the resident Japanese by maintaining strict neutrality (Irie Toraji 1943, 198).

Once more a proposed intervention, this time recommended by a Japanese, failed to produce any concrete results whatsoever. Nevertheless, both the *Kongo* incident and the freebooting of Sakamoto gave significant impetus to the image and the legend of Japanese support

for Philippine freedom, and in the excitement that surrounded the heroic but tragic Filipino uprisings of the 1890s, the reality of the failure of Japan to provide any help at all to the revolutionaries was completely submerged.

### Negotiations with Japan

On 17 June 1898 Felipe Agoncillo of the Provisional Revolutionary Government in Hong Kong gave secret instructions to two emissaries, Mariano Ponce and Faustino Lichauco, to proceed to Japan to secure loans, military assistance and diplomatic recognition for the revolutionary regime (*Translations* 1901). A month later one Col. Fukushima of the Japanese Army sent Lichauco, who was now in Japan, a series of questions probing the actual situation and, in particular, the financial status of the forces of Gen. Aguinaldo. The questionnaire and the replies were translated by Jose Anacleto Ramos who had earlier fled to Japan seeking refuge from the Spaniards who had correctly suspected him of rebel sympathies. On 20 July, Felipe Agoncillo, whose code name was Respe, wrote Aguinaldo, whom he addressed as "Mr. Rost," to let him know that negotiations to buy arms from the Japanese were ongoing. Further communications to Aguinaldo from Teodoro Sandico in Hong Kong seemed to indicate a strong likelihood that Japan would supply arms when and if an insurgency against the Americans were to develop.

By 20 August 1898, however, Respe informed Mr. Rost more realistically that, "It appears that we shall obtain nothing from Japan." By letter of the same date Ponce and Lichauco wrote "Mr. W. Jones" (Gregorio Apacible) in Hong Kong of their unsuccessful efforts to purchase guns in Japan. Ponce and Lichauco, while straightforward about the fact that Japan did not wish to do anything to offend the Americans, also were concerned about the amount and availability of funds in Hong Kong were it indeed possible to purchase weapons in Japan.

By mid-November a Japanese cabinet crisis was a new excuse for the Japanese to procrastinate again on the possible sale of weapons to the Filipinos. Apacible (code name "Kant") was also told by Ponce that the Japanese sought more information on the certificate of deposit which the Filipino emissaries assured them was in the Hong Kong Bank. However, the deposit of the Filipino Junta in Hong Kong had been attached by Aguinaldo's rival Artacho whose case was to be tried in the Hong Kong courts. Moreover, letters from Japan to

Aguinaldo indicated that the Japanese continued to prefer to deal with Jose Ramos who was on their payroll at \$40.00 per month. Clearly, since Ponce and Francisco Rivero, who had replaced Faustino Lichauco, hardly ever met key Japanese players, they were dependent on Ramos for their actual negotiations.

Amounts of money, numbers of rifles and quantities of ammunition continued to be discussed among Malolos, Hong Kong and Yokohama. At the same time Apacible in Hong Kong proposed to Aguinaldo that Rivero be relieved quietly because of "the danger which he exposes the government to." Since Apacible had by mid-December secured sufficient funds to accomplish the long intended purchase of armaments, he feared that security within his ranks might be compromised. He told Aguinaldo that he would henceforth use the address "Ignacio—Manila" for telegraphing further information about the proposed arms purchase. Ignacio was someone who could "be trusted by us," he wrote, and he told Aguinaldo to telegraph him "Carmen—Hong Kong . . . because I have information that we are suspected by the Americans and they have sent secret police here."

### **American-Japanese Relations**

Of course, the Filipino representatives did not know that while they were engaged in those prolonged and frustrating negotiations to attempt to secure Japanese support for their cause, the American Minister to Japan, Alfred E. Buck, was reporting to Washington the encouragement he was receiving from the Japanese government "to hold and govern these islands" in the interest of peace, commerce and good government (US Ministers 1898, Reel 572, no. 191). According to Buck, Foreign Minister Okuma Shigenobu "deprecated" returning the Philippines to Spain and warned against the Americans turning them "over to the insurgents, who, without the necessary experience and ability to govern, would be unable to sustain themselves and insure a good administration of affairs." (Incidentally, the original dispatch described above was marked by hand "Seen by the President" 28 September 1898.)

Clearly by January 1899 Minister Buck was fully apprised of the ongoing efforts of the Filipinos to purchase arms in Japan. The new Foreign Minister, Aoki Shuzo, however, assured Buck that "Japan could not and would not permit any step hostile to the interests of the United States in the Philippines" (1899a, no. 235). Interestingly

on that very same day, 9 January 1899, Emiliano Riego de Dios wrote from Yokohama to advise Aguinaldo (also known as Señora Rosalia Magdalo) of the complete failure of the Filipino attempt to procure arms in Japan. The next day Ramos and Rivero were reporting the same disappointing news to Apacible in Hong Kong. They wrote: "Japan is like a girl who loves one and wants to say 'yes' but who does not dare to throw herself into our arms for fear of consequence."

On 10 February 1899 from Tokyo, Minister Buck reported on what he saw as a reassuring meeting with Ito Hirobumi. Ito had expressed concern at the delay in the "pacification" of the Philippines and expressed confidence that as an Asian he could influence the insurgents to submit. Ito further told Buck that the Filipinos were incapable of self-government and that "their only safety was in quietly submitting to the authority and control of the United States" (1899b, no. 257).

After hostilities between Filipinos and Americans erupted, mutual suspicion among the Filipinos increased accordingly. In a letter to Aguinaldo from Paula Pardo dated 23 August 1899, the Filipino leader was told of Filipinos working with "the American municipal secret police" and was warned simultaneously about "bad Filipinos" who denounced their countrymen to the Americans.

A meeting on 11 October 1900 in the town of Amaya, Cavite between Lt. Gen. Mariano Trias and Hojo Taiyo, chancellor in charge of the Japanese consulate, became known to the Americans by virtue of the translation of a captured document. At the meeting General Trias seemed to speak obsequiously of the Japanese, expressing great admiration for the Japanese monarchy and the Japanese people who, he said, were tied to the Filipinos by blood. Moreover, once more seeking weapons from the Japanese, Trias suggested that in return for such help the Filipinos were prepared to offer to Japan "coaling stations in the island they preferred, freedom of trade and freedom to build railroads." Hojo indicated his interest in those proposals and urged the Filipino representatives to foster good relations with Japan by sending congratulations and appropriate gifts on the occasion of the forthcoming birthday of his imperial majesty.

When the account of this meeting reached Secretary of State John Hay, he telegraphed Minister Buck to protest to the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs. According to Hay, in the past the United States had ignored aid to the insurgents by individual Japanese, but, he wrote, "aid and comfort from official quarters represents a serious question" (1900, 1901a, 1901b, Reel J74).



On 11 March 1901, Buck sent the States Department a full report of the Japanese response to American inquiries about the Trias-Hojo meeting. The Japanese claimed that on the prior 11 October Hojo was en route back to Manila from an inspection trip to Cavite and had met Trias entirely by chance in a remote village. Hojo's story was that Trias's secretary did all the talking. He stated:

should we be provided with arms and ammunition enough to put 5,000 to 10,000 of our men in motion, it would be an easy task to drive away the American troops from these Islands within the space of a few months, and to eventually get our independence acknowledged. It is Japan only, we believe, that we may depend [on] for supplies and ammunition. Consequently, if Japan renders us assistance in this direction, we will concede to her permanently the right of establishing a coaling station, the freedom of trade and the right of building railways. (1901c, Reel J75, no. 544).

Buck was further informed that Hojo had told Trias that while he, Hojo, had no authority to reply to such a proposal, he thought that Japan would find it impossible to aid the insurgents. According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Hojo urged the insurgents to stop resisting. Nevertheless, because of American concern, Buck was assured that despite Hojo's innocence, out of consideration for the United States, Hojo had been transferred. By 17 May 1901 the United States regarded the incident as "satisfactorily terminated" (1901d).

Nevertheless, the suspicions of American authorities in the Philippines persisted, and in June 1904 Governor Luke Wright sent F.S. Cairns, Insular Surveyor of Customs, to Japan with the express mission of investigating the activities of disaffected and potentially dangerous Filipinos in Japan. Cairns submitted his report to Wright on 12 September 1904 (1904, Reel J79). According to Cairns, he had been provided by the US legation in Tokyo a list of all the names and addresses of the Filipinos living in Japan, a list which incidentally came originally from the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Cairns determined that the "most influential revolutionist in Japan" was Tomas Arejola whom Cairns described as a law student.

In order to infiltrate the world of Arejola, Cairns hired one Juan Santos who moved into Arejola's house in Tokyo as a "political refugee." Santos reported Arejola's principal Japanese contact was Fujita Sonetaka, a "Master of Ceremonies" in the Imperial Household. Fujita, a fluent Spanish speaker, in Santos's presence bemoaned the

Russo-Japanese War as resulting "disastrously" for the Philippines. Fujita contended that had Japan remained at peace material could have been provided to the Filipino revolutionary cause. Among Santos's other contacts, as reported to Cairns, were Jose de los Reyes, son of Isabelo de los Reyes; Francisco Ponce, brother of Mariano Ponce; and Mariano Carlos who had taken refuge in Japan in 1901. Unfortunately, however, Emiliano Legaspi identified Santos as an American agent, and Santos was unable to continue as Cairns's man inside the Filipino community.

However, Santos recommended the hiring of Mariano Carlos as his successor. Carlos accepted the assignment on the understanding that Cairns would assure him of a pardon for crimes committed while an officer in General Luna's army. Carlos, whose alias was "Antonio Bartolome," reported in detail to Cairns on the visit to Japan of Jose Lucban whose activities particularly concerned the Americans.

Carlos's story to Cairns was that Jose Lucban had arrived in Japan via Hong Kong in October 1903. Lucban's assigned tasks were (a) to purchase arms and (b) to establish friendly relations with the Japanese government. Shortly after his arrival, Lucban rented a European house luxuriously furnished in order to impress the Japanese with the wealth and importance of its occupant. Lucban also sought the help of Arejola and Fujita to ingratiate himself with Japanese officialdom as speedily as possible.

An interview with Okuma Shigenobu, then leader of the opposition in the Diet, took place at Okuma's house and lasted the entire day. Lucban also met with the manager of the Teishitsu Seido Chosakyoku (Imperial Household Investigation Bureau) which was charged with confidential investigations for the Japanese government and for the Emperor. At the latter meeting a Filipino named Antonio Villareal acted as interpreter.

Lucban also met Major Takisawa of the Japanese General Staff. Major Takisawa was formerly attached to the US Army as an observer during the Philippine-American War and had been suspected by the Americans of communicating with the insurgents. Lucban seemed well supplied with funds and gave a magnificent banquet at which were present Fujita, Arejola, Vilareal and Otto Scherer, a German formerly connected with the insurgents in the Philippines and in 1903-04 a teacher of languages in Tokyo and custodian of Filipino revolutionary funds in Japan.

In January 1904 Lucban left Japan and charged Arejola to continue the mission. Carlos further advised Cairns that Lucban was remain-

ing in Hong Kong since his brothers Vicente and Cayetano had been arrested in Manila and were to be tried for sedition. Apparently another American secret agent had infiltrated the Hong Kong Filipino Revolutionary Committee and was observing Jose Lucban closely.

Cairns concluded his report to Gov. Wright by stating that Filipinos abroad hate American institutions and are willing to assist any movement which would "embarrass the United States in the Philippine Islands." Cairns also wrote that while no Japanese arms were reaching the Philippines, continued surveillance was necessitated by the fact that Japanese officials were either "cordial and sympathetic" to the Filipinos or were at least willing to "keep in touch" with the developing Philippine situation. In short, Cairns maintained that, while perhaps Minister to Japan Lloyd Griscom would not agree, Japanese officials were "hand in glove" with Filipino "trouble makers." Indeed, Cairns was quite correct since Minister Griscom, although forwarding a copy of Cairns's report to Secretary of State Hay, told him that, in his (Griscom's) opinion, Cairns "in no way established any complicity on the part of Japanese officials in the shipment of arms from Japan or even in the moral encouragement of a revolutionary movement in the Philippines."

In a despatch to Secretary of State Elihu Root on 5 February 1906, Minister to Japan Huntington Wilson reported that the Philippine Secret Service had an agent in Japan to observe "any relations which might exist between Filipinos and Japanese" (1906, Reel J81, no. 386). The agent was the aforementioned Antonio Bartolome (Mariano Carlos), a Japanese-speaking Filipino whose salary was paid through the American legation. According to Wilson, Bartolome had come in to inquire about a rumor that the United States was considering the sale of the Philippines to Japan. Bartolome told Wilson that the Filipinos in Japan were very upset because they would dislike a Japanese-controlled Philippines even more than an American-controlled Philippines, especially in light of what they knew about Japanese rule in Taiwan.

As soon as rumors of Japan's possible purchase of the Philippines began to circulate in Tokyo, Tomas Arejola tried three times in one day to meet with Okuma who, according to Bartolome, had always been in close touch with the Filipinos in Tokyo. Okuma seems to have assured Arejola that "the Japanese had no designs on the Philippines." In this latter regard, Wilson wrote to Root that Okuma and his confreres must, in fact, have been disappointed with the American takeover of the Philippines since, Wilson observed, the "natural

trend" of Japanese emigration was to warm climates like Hawaii, witness the apparent failure of the government to stimulate significant immigration into Hokkaido or Korea. Wilson noted further that Baron Iwasaki Hisaya, the "wealthiest man in Japan" and the brother-in-law of the Foreign Minister, had told the Second Secretary of the American Legation that Japan did very much wish to own the Philippines to settle Japan's surplus population as well as for commercial reasons and that Iwasaki had asked how much the United States was asking for the Islands. Wilson concluded that, while Japan currently had its hands full in Korea and Manchuria, "yet the ambition and devotion of the Japanese people are so tremendous that one can set no bounds to their future policies in this part of the world. As this is a government with all the Oriental inscrutability and talent for intrigue, shrewd and calculating, there may be grounds for such fears, and Japanese protestations of disinterestedness may call for close examination."

## Conclusion

As much as these several accounts of secret agents, spies and paid informants may fascinate the contemporary observer, it is, I believe, evident from what I have tried to present that their activities were clearly marginal. The course of Philippine history was not determined nor was it seriously affected by the machinations described above. As most of us know, money talks in any language, so there is certainly nothing specifically Filipino about any of the individuals whose motivation for their actions was monetary. Indeed, like many so-called revolutionaries, before and since, ostensible or self-styled patriotism can rationalize almost any behavior. So, what has been recounted here, interesting as I believe it is, nevertheless, if put in proper perspective, can not be said to be of crucial historical significance.

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