



UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS PRESS

Immigration & Ethnic  
History Society

---

Review

Author(s): Catherine Ceniza Choy

Transpacific Femininities: The Making of the Modern Filipina by Denise Cruz

Source: *Journal of American Ethnic History*, Vol. 33, No. 3 (Spring 2014), pp. 86-88

Published by: [University of Illinois Press](#) on behalf of the [Immigration & Ethnic History Society](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5406/jamerethnhist.33.3.0086>

Accessed: 28/04/2014 20:23

---

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at  
<http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



University of Illinois Press and Immigration & Ethnic History Society are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Journal of American Ethnic History*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

era of global Philippine labor migrations (most of them undertaken by women), the task of fixing the gender identity of overseas Filipino men has become more urgent just as that identity has become more fluid than ever—doubly so at sea, where most Filipino seamen fill lower-rung positions in ship hierarchies, often in jobs that historically have been gendered as women’s work. And yet, returning to Manila loaded down with goods for their families, and hailed in the press as “new heroes of the nation,” Filipino seamen reassert their masculinity in multiple ways.

But, as Fajardo notes, that is only part of the story. *Filipino Crosscurrents* charts not only hegemonic meanings of manhood, but also the alternative masculinities sometimes crafted at sea, whether among transgressive ship-jumpers in Oakland or by “tomboys” who claim masculine identities in the fluid social spaces of the sea. Social theorists long have insisted that gender is a dynamic category; Fajardo’s richly mobile research provides empirical evidence to support the claim. And endows it with utopian possibility, hinting that alternative masculinities can “create other time-spaces of solidarity, resistance, critical learning, teaching, and beauty” (p. 183).

*Filipino Crosscurrents* is not easy to read: Fajardo earnestly engages with at least a dozen theoretical literatures (often addressing several of them in a single paragraph), and it is difficult to imagine *Filipino Crosscurrents* working outside advanced social science classes where students already would be familiar with its theoretical vocabulary. But patience rewards the effort. *Filipino Crosscurrents* is valuable reading for scholars seeking to undertake multi-local research, a persuasive argument for scrutinizing oceans as social sites, and an important reminder of the centrality (and unpredictability) of gender in migratory labor. This is not your parents’ immigration history. Fully globalized, unapologetically theoretical, forthrightly queer, *Filipino Crosscurrents* charts a course toward a migration studies for the twenty-first century.

Christopher Capozzola  
Massachusetts Institute of Technology

***Transpacific Femininities: The Making of the Modern Filipina.*** By Denise Cruz. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012. 295 pp. \$24.95 (paper).

Although Filipina migrants in the current global economy are a highly studied group, they are marginalized, if not excluded altogether, in studies of U.S.-Asian relations that focus on the first half of the twentieth century. In *Transpacific Femininities*, Denise Cruz’s study of the lively and dynamic debates about “the making of the modern Filipina,” Cruz brings to light a forgotten literary and political history in which discussions about Filipinas took center stage.

According to Cruz, throughout the first half of the twentieth century, defining the Filipina woman became “a cultural obsession” (p. 5). These debates over Filipina

identity peaked at key moments of colonization and decolonization: the transition between Spanish and U.S. colonial regimes in the 1890s, the granting of Philippine commonwealth status in the 1920s and 1930s, the Japanese occupation of the 1940s, and the emergent Cold War relations between Asian nations and the United States in the 1950s. The emergence of the Filipina suffrage movement, beginning with the formation of the *Asociación Feminista Filipina* in 1905 to when the vote was granted in 1937, was another important historical touchstone.

*Transpacific Femininities* makes two notable and original scholarly contributions. The first is Cruz's recovery and compilation of an archive of English literature by Filipino and Filipina writers who used print culture to celebrate as well as criticize the modern Filipina. Literary production in English was a direct outcome of U.S. colonialism in the archipelago, but it was also foundational to the imagining of new Philippine identities by Filipino and Filipina writers. Cruz's archive features novels, memoirs, collected writings, and a fascinating array of essays in newspapers, periodicals, and literary magazines. Some of the titles alone, like Perfecto Laguio's *Our Modern Woman: A National Problem* (Manila, Philippines, 1932), and Maria Paz Mendoza-Guazon's *My Ideal Filipino Girl* (Manila, Philippines, 1931), hint at the controversial and wide-ranging representations of Filipinas during the political time period just prior to the transition to Philippine commonwealth status and at the height of the Filipina suffrage movement. The variety of discourses supports Cruz's argument against the existence of any singular type of Filipina. Rather, her close readings show that "The Filipina" is composed of various representations: romantic heroines, uncaring coeds and fellowship students, fearless guerrillas, and feminist academics.

The second major contribution of the book is Cruz's definition of transpacific femininities: "women who are influenced by the contact between the Philippines and the United States, Spain, and Japan" (p. 6). Referring to representations of women and actual Filipina authors, Cruz's conceptualization foregrounds how multiple, overlapping, and relational layers of the Spanish, U.S., and Japanese presence in the archipelago shape the contours of debate about femininity over time and space. This multi-layered approach illuminates the rationale for the book's organization and for Cruz's feminist analyses of Jose Rizal's landmark novel *Noli Me Tangere* (Valencia, Spain, 1886), alongside those of writings by less well-known Filipina authors such as Felicidad Ocampo, Yay Panlilio, and Trinidad Tarrosa Subido, among others.

While the chronological scope of the book focuses on the 1890s through the 1960s, Cruz observes that representations of "the Filipina" remain dynamic and uncertain in the present day. Although print culture is the foundation of Cruz's archive, her epilogue connects her historical study with contemporary representations of Filipinas in multimedia, specifically David Byrne's recent album *Here Lies Love* (2010) about Imelda Marcos and her childhood servant Estrella Cumpas, and the work of Filipina bloggers.

Cruz's transpacific and feminist analysis reconceptualizes the current dominant framework of Philippine diasporic and Filipino American literary history, which has been anchored by the writings of Carlos Bulosan and Jessica Hagedorn. In the past decade, the emergence of a critical mass of Filipino American history has paid more attention to the analytical category of gender, but, with few exceptions, the studies that focus on the first half of the twentieth century have featured Filipino male migrants' construction and performance of masculinity. *Transpacific Femininities* re-frames and expands the boundaries of the study of race, gender, and empire in Philippine and Filipino American studies in a compelling transnational and global context. It is essential reading for students and scholars of Philippine, Asian American, and gender and women's studies.

Catherine Ceniza Choy  
University of California, Berkeley

***Chinese Chicago: Race, Transnational Migration, and Community since 1870.***

By Huping Ling. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012. 336 pp.  
Tables, figures, illustrations, and map. \$80 (cloth); \$24.95 (paper).

Huping Ling works to counterbalance the significant West Coast bias of Chinese American studies with this comprehensive history of the Chinese in Chicago from 1870 to present. *Chinese Chicago* is a community study that both focuses on a single city and maps a transnational web that links Chicago to China. Ling accomplishes this through detailed bilingual research that contributes more than geographical breadth to the history of the Chinese in America.

Historians already versed in Chinese American history may be most curious about what makes the Chinese experience in Chicago distinct. Particularly remarkable is the difference in numbers. In 1870, when there were over twelve thousand Chinese in San Francisco, the census counted a single Chinese man in Chicago. Ling argues that Chinese migrants on the West Coast found their way to Chicago when they were "redistributed" by several events: the anti-Chinese movement, the completion of the transcontinental railroad, regional recessions, and (later) the devastating San Francisco Fire of 1906. There were 172 Chinese in Chicago by 1880 and over five hundred by 1890 (whereas the population in San Francisco hovered around 25,000 during this period).

These demographic dissimilarities meant a markedly different reception by the multi-ethnic white community in the late nineteenth century. Ling reports that "the Chinese were initially welcomed in Chicago as a quiet and exotic people" (p. 24). The small population of Chinese in Chicago also allowed for unusual social and economic dominance by a single clan, the Moys. Revealing the power of communal migration networks, Ling reports that between 1898 and 1940, one in six Chinese immigration files for Chicago was under the surname Moy (p. 17).