GOING TO THE PHILIPPINES IS LIKE COMING HOME:
Japanese Pan-Asianism and the Philippines from the Meiji Era to the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere

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Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the perception of the Philippines in Japanese pan-Asianist thought from the Meiji era (1868-1912) until the end of the Pacific War in 1945. Special focus will be given to the impact of pan-Asianist ideology on Japanese administrative policy in the archipelago during the Japanese occupation of the islands, from 1941 to 1945.

The Philippines is the only country in Southeast Asia with a mainly Christian population, and the impact of American rule in the country from 1898 to 1941 was extraordinarily strong. These two factors largely hindered the implementation of an ideology that propagated a return to “Asian values” in the islands. Philippine and Japanese literature on the Japanese occupation indicates that most Filipinos considered themselves not as Asians but as belonging to the Western hemisphere. This self-image of the Filipinos made the Philippines a special case among all those countries occupied by Japan throughout the Pacific War.

In my thesis, I will show how Japanese pan-Asianism developed over the years into an ideology that shaped the outline of Japanese foreign policy by the late 1930s. I will examine how the perception of the Philippines in this ideology changed, and how far pan-Asianism played a role in Japanese-Philippine relations. Furthermore, I will show that there were two concurrent factions within the Japanese pan-Asianist community: one an “exoteric” or traditionalist faction; the other an “esoteric” or realist faction. These factions had divergent views on the perspectives of the Philippines becoming part of the so-called Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. While the “exoteric” faction was very optimistic that the Philippines could be easily integrated into the sphere, the “esoteric” faction regarded the cultural differences between the islands and Japan as a major obstacle to the admission of the Philippines into the sphere. I will show how eventually the “esoteric” faction had a stronger impact on Japanese occupation policy. However, the pro-Americanism of many Filipinos, along with a pressing war situation for Japan, made the success of pan-Asianism in the Philippines impossible. Despite the propaganda efforts of Japanese administrators and some Filipino intellectuals who promoted pan-Asianist ideals, pan-Asianism could never establish roots in the islands during the occupation period.
I. Research Questions

1. What role did the Philippines play in Japanese pan-Asianist thought before the war, and what role did Japanese pan-Asianists envision for the archipelago within the GEACPS?
2. Did pan-Asianism influence the Military Administration and the administration of the Second Philippine Republic?
3. Did any form of Philippine Asianism have a notable impact on Philippine society? Did this Philippine Asianism interact with its Japanese counterpart?

II. Summary Chapter 2

At the beginning of the Meiji Restoration, opposition against the national policy of the government emerged in Japan. This opposition firmly criticized the adoption of Western behaviour and culture in the course of Japan’s modernization. Unlike the ruling Meiji oligarchs, the opposition leaders saw the answer to Western encroachment not in copying the enemy but by propagating a re-orientation towards original (and “superior”) Asian values, and the creation of an Asian bloc. In its early stages, this rather romantic pan-Asianism was focused on the Sino-centric sphere of China, Manchuria, Korea and Japan. On the other hand, Japanese nationalists, especially in the navy, advocated a southward expansion to secure Japan’s political and economic independence. However, these nationalists legitimated their agenda solely according to Japanese national interests and not with reference to the concept of cooperation between Japan and other Asian societies. Nationalists embraced imperialism while Asianists condemned it. For pan-Asianists throughout the Meiji period the idea of Japanese leadership within an Asian bloc became increasingly prominent, as they believed that only Japan would be economically and militarily capable of leading Asia towards unification and freedom. Throughout the Taishō era and early Shōwa period, the concept of a Greater East Asian Cooperative Body (GEACB) developed, and this was no longer limited to the Sino-centric area. Finally, nationalist concepts of southward expansion and the pan-Asianist idea of a GEACB melted into one and legitimized Japanese expansionism under the slogan of “Liberating Asia” as the antipode to imperialism, which was associated with an aggressive and oppressive Western policy. At the same time two different streams of pan-Asianism evolved: the “exoteric” stream and the “esoteric” stream. This contradiction within the pan-Asianist community largely centered on the question of the Nan’yō, and the Philippines in particular, becoming part of Greater Asia. This is what we shall explore in the next chapter.

III. Summary Chapter 3

In the wake of the Pacific War, pan-Asianism had become the outline of Japanese foreign policy and the moral justification for the Japanese expansion into the South Seas. The establishment
of a GEACPS was the manifestation of the Japanese pan-Asianist vision for a New Order in the Far East and the world. However, there was a discourse within the pan-Asianist community on how the goal of the GEACPS could be achieved, mainly in regard to the integration of the Nan’yō into this sphere under Japanese leadership.

One “exoteric” or “culturalist faction” argued for a simple application of the same principles underlying the old concept of an East Asian Community consisting of Japan, China, Korea and Manchukuo in the South Seas since these regions also had natural geographic and ethnological ties with Japan. Therein, the peoples of these regions (like the Filipinos) would automatically come to appreciate participation in a Japanese-led regional system that aimed to emancipate and liberate the colonised people from their Western overlords.

The other “esoteric” or “realist faction”, foremost represented by Rōyama Masamichi (1895-1980) and the Shōwa Research Association, was far more critical towards an integration of Southeast Asia into the sphere. Even though they advocated for the same fundamental principle of hakkō ichiu as the culturalists, they were also aware of the cultural and historical specifics, which made an integration of the region into the sphere difficult. Following geopolitical principles, Rōyama was convinced that the realization of the GEACPS was impossible without a people’s movement in the various regions towards becoming part of the sphere. By the wake of the Pacific War, Rōyama stated that such a movement in form of a “historical dynamic” did not exist yet and that the ties between the core region of the sphere (Japan, Manchukuo and China) and the Southeast Asian countries (among them the Philippines) were not strong enough to meet the preconditions for the establishment of the GEACPS. Whereas Rōyama was mainly concerned with the difficulties of integrating the South Seas into the sphere, his colleague from the Shōwa Kenkyūkai, Yabe Teiji, who also was a member of the Navy Research Commission, warned of possible danger for Japan if it allowed close contact of its people with the people of other parts of the sphere, like the South Seas. Despite advocating the establishment of the GEACPS, he emphasized differences between the various peoples rather than commonalities and feared a loss of Japan’s own identity if the sphere became a multi-cultural entity like the Roman Empire. Just as Rōyama, Yabe did not share the culturalist idea of one Asian unity under Japanese leadership.

In the history of Japanese imperialism, the Philippines had played a major role in the so-called Southward Doctrine as a possible colony that could solve the population surplus problem in Japan. Japanese pan-Asianists, who were very eager not to be associated with any kind of imperialism, largely ignored the Philippines until the mid-1930s. Thereafter, it was the “exoteric”, traditionalist stream of pan-Asianism that advocated making the Philippines part of Greater Asia (and later the GEACPS) while the “esoteric,” realist faction argued against doing so. Which of these two pan-Asianist canons (if either) had the stronger impact on occupation policy, and what was the Filipino reaction? This is what I shall examine in the chapters on the Japanese occupation of the Philippines. Another question will be if the “esoteric” faction used the “exoteric” ideology to access the Philippine population in the same way that the ruling elite in Meiji Japan had manipulated the Japanese public.
IV. Summary Chapter 4.1.

The Japanese Navy’s planning of the GEACPS involved a discourse among the participating scholars in the Navy Research Commission. The faction of Yabe Teiji and Matsushita Masatoshi finally prevailed and the treatise published by the commission highlighted a stance in which a strong position would be assumed by Japan as the leading power in a Japanese-dominated regional bloc. Yabe Teiji envisioned for the Philippines the role of a semi-independent protectorate and strongly opposed the “exoteric” approach to define a common Oriental identity based on cultural or even racial affinities. Overall, the navy’s outline for the creation of the GEACPS was very pragmatic and followed Japanese war aims. In its focus on Japanese nationalistic interests, it resembled the Southward Doctrine (Nanshin-ron) that the Japanese navy had pursued since the early Meiji era.

On the other hand, the Japanese army put a strong emphasis on winning over the present Philippine government, as can be seen in the report of the First Department Research Section. The “Proposed Measures with Commentary Dealing with the Philippine Islands in the Event of War with the United States” reflect the hopes of the pan-Asianists of the Dai-Ajia Kyōkai who were convinced that the Philippine government, as well as the Filipino people, would soon come to realize the substantial benefits that the Japanese policy had to offer. In this regard, the army’s planning stages for the Philippine occupation followed an overall “exoteric” pan-Asianist school of thought. Osamu Kuno described the Japanese military during the Meiji era as the only group “at the top of the power structure” that supported the “exoteric” ideology of unconditional emperor worship.

By the time of the invasion, it became apparent that the greater part of the Quezon administration, and President Quezon himself, would not change sides and cooperate with the Japanese as the “exoteric” pan-Asianists had predicted. Nevertheless, the army applying Kuno’s terminology to Japanese pan-Asianism regarding the Philippines, the army maintained its tradition of clinging to the traditionalist ideology. The army advocated an occupation policy that would convince the Filipinos of the benefits of the GEACPS. The “exoteric” approach would be the guidelines for the Japanese administrative policy in the Philippines and not simply be used as a façade to win over the masses.

Nevertheless, the army continued in its plans to rule the Philippines through the old Commonwealth elites. The fact that the Japanese government in Tokyo sent a Research Commission to the Philippines more than one year after the actual invasion took place shows that the overall planning of the administration policy followed a very strict timetable. Despite cultural and educational exchanges between Japan and the Philippines prior to the war and the research that had been conducted by Japanese scholars on the archipelago, there seems to have been an awareness within the Imperial Government that the Philippine case needed further examination, especially in regard to the implementation of pan-Asianist ideas. Assuming that Tokyo considered the possible difficulties in convincing the Western-orientated Filipinos of the concept of the GEACPS, a logical consequence seems to be that the “esoteric” pan-Asianist Rōyama Masamichi was sent to the Philippines. Rōyama had emphasized the obstacles to the establishment of the sphere imposed by cultural and historic specifics in Southeast Asia before the Pacific War broke out. His suggestions...
for a policy that would smooth the integration of the Philippines into the GEACPS demonstrate his conviction that Japanese pan-Asianism needed to adapt to Philippine circumstances. The report of the Research Commission reflects, to some degree, Rōyama’s caveats; at the same time, it provided a blueprint for the realization of Japanese “esoteric” pan-Asianism in the Philippines. In what form and to what extent did the Japanese administrators put this outline into action? The following sub-chapter will examine this question.

V. Summary Chapter 4.2.

In general, the outline of the Military Administration’s policy reflected the pan-Asianism of the realist, “esoteric” faction of the Shōwa Research Association. General Homma was completely aware of the difficulties in making the Philippines part of the GEACPS and demanded the development of a spiritual movement towards the establishment of the sphere among the Filipino people. In this way, he strongly resembled Rōyama Masamichi. The “culturalist”, “esoteric” faction of pan-Asianism represented by the Dai-Ajia Kyōkai had no real impact on the Japanese Military Administration’s occupation policy in the Philippines. In its announcements, the Military Administration emphasized the necessity of the Filipinos recovering their Oriental roots, as it was aware of the ongoing sympathy the population had for the Americans. In the planning for the occupation, the army and navy knew that the implementation of the idea of the GEACPS in the Philippines would not become a self-fulfilling prophecy as the “esoteric” pan-Asianists had predicted. Therefore, the military sought advice from the “esoteric” faction, and this “esoteric” stream of thought was indeed reflected in the policies adopted by the Military Administration during the first 20 months of the occupation (i.e., until the inauguration of the Second Philippine Republic). The economic policy followed Japanese war needs but as the Empire officially waged the war to serve the purpose of liberating Asia and establishing a GEACPS, this meant no contradiction to the principle of kyōzon kyōei in the eyes of the Japanese rulers. The great purpose of creating an “Asia for the Asians” justified the temporarily exploitation of Philippine resources, as the country would benefit from a Japanese victory in the Greater East Asia War. The “esoteric” pan-Asianism showed only in the propaganda measures of the Military Administration. While the government in Tokyo and Japanese administrators in the Philippines became fully aware of Philippine hostility to the Japanese occupation, they used “esoteric” terminology to justify their cause and persuade the Filipinos. This system of a small, “esoteric” elite using this “esoteric” ideology to control and manipulate the masses is the same as that which Osamu Kuno described in his analysis of the Meiji state in Japan. In this way, J. Victor Koschmann’s application of Kuno’s terminology of Japanese pan-Asianism works perfectly for the Japanese occupation policy in the Philippines. “Exoteric” pan-Asianism had become a façade, as it was clear to the Japanese administrators that they would need to adapt this ideology to Philippine conditions.

The KALIBAPI was an instrument which implemented the concept of the GEACPS in Philippine society and an attempt to create a public movement towards the establishment of a “New Philippines” as part of the sphere. This was the kind of “historical dynamic” that Rōyama
Masamichi had demanded as a precondition for the integration of the Philippines into the GEACPS prior to the war. Educational policy followed the same idea. The main purpose of educational reforms conducted during the occupation was to foster Philippine nationalism via Filipinization and secularization of academic bodies. It was believed that this would create a base for the establishment of a new self-image amongst Filipinos, and make them gradually come to appreciate the concept of the GEACPS. Educational policy, as well as the handling of religious affairs by the Japanese Military Administration during the short-lived Second Philippine Republic, took into account the cultural and historical specifics of the Philippines while promoting the concept of the sphere. This adaptation of pan-Asianism to Philippine circumstances followed the “esoteric” stream propagated by Rōyama Masamichi and the Shōwa Kenkyūkai.

The Second Philippine Republic was, by the time of its inauguration and until its end after less than two years of existence, nothing more than a Japanese vassal state. As was the case with economic policy, its foreign policy followed Japanese war interests, and diplomatic relations were limited to the Axis powers and other members of the GEACPS. One can only speculate as to whether the status of the Second Republic would have changed should there have been a successful termination of the Pacific Campaign for Japan. Throughout the war, the Philippines was a country with the status of a “semi-autonomous protectorate” as Yabe Teiji had envisioned in 1941. The Second Philippine Republic as a “New Philippines” within the framework of the GEACPS was a country under construction and it remained an unfinished project until the end. The Japanese tried to govern the Philippines through the old elites during the Military Administration and relied on large parts of the old Philippine Commonwealth administration when it came to the establishment of the republic. The way in which the Japanese attempted to deal with Philippine Catholicism shows the pragmatism of their occupation policy. Tokyo had no illusions about how deeply rooted the Catholic Church was in Philippine society and therefore followed the recommendations of the Research Commission about cooperating with the church and gradually diminishing its influence by secularization of academic bodies. The Japanese considered Catholicism a product of Spanish rule, and despite its positive effects in terms of nation building in the Philippines, they saw it as a source of alienation for the Filipino people from their Oriental roots. Therefore, the Japanese regarded Spaniards with suspicion even though the Franco regime was politically close to the Axis Powers.

The Chinese living in the Philippines were not treated according to the principle of “one script, one race” as the Japanese suspected them to be supporters of the US and the Chiang Kai-shek regime in China. While the Japanese viewed Spaniards with suspicion because they considered Spanish rule to have been one of the reasons for the Westernization of the islands, they mistrusted the overseas Chinese because the latter had been “poisoned” by Western influence.

Despite the widespread sympathy for the US among Philippine society, there were certain Filipinos who actively promoted the idea of pan-Asianism in the islands. Their motives and the influence of Philippine Asianism on Philippine society in general will be examined in the next chapter.
VI. Summary Chapter 5

The Philippine independence movement and the inauguration of the First Philippine Republic (Malolos Republic) in the final years of the 19th century had coincided with Japan’s rise as an industrialized state and Great Power. Therefore, Filipino revolutionaries like Mariano Ponce, José Ramos, Vicente Sotto and Artemio Ricarte looked to Japan as a natural ally in their struggle to end the Western colonisation of their country. However, apart from some moral support from various Japanese pan-Asianist groups, they did not receive much assistance, as the official outline of Japanese foreign policy at that time was to avoid any possible conflict with the US over the Philippine independence issue. The revolutionaries themselves were Filipino nationalists who, in the first place, had no concept of the Philippines being a part of a Greater Asia under Japanese leadership. Japan served as a role model for the emancipation of an Oriental country from the West, but none of the above-mentioned revolutionaries envisioned a New Order for Asia and the world as the Japanese pan-Asianists did.

In the 1930s, Benigno Ramos and Pio Duran appeared on the Philippine political stage. In contrast to the earlier revolutionaries they clearly supported the idea of Japanese leadership in Asia and joined a Japanese pan-Asianist organization, the Dai-Ajia Kyōkai. This organization also launched a branch in the Philippines to propagate pan-Asianism in that country and convince Filipinos that Japan did not intend to invade the islands after independence from the US. Since the “esoteric” pan-Asianists of the Shōwa Kenkyūkai were highly critical about the idea of making the Philippines a part of Greater Asia, only “exoteric” pan-Asianists attempted to strike roots in the archipelago. However, Japanese representatives like Imamura Chūsuke and Filipino Asianists such as Duran and Ramos underestimated the extent of pro-Americanism among the Philippine population. Their “exoteric” belief that the just motives of Japanese pan-Asianism would automatically instigate a grassroots movement in the islands completely failed. Even though Duran (and to a much lesser extent Ramos) were integrated into the administration of the Second Philippine Republic and parts of the Philippine intelligentsia cooperated by publishing pro-Japanese articles in the propaganda magazine Pillars, a popular base for Philippine Asianism could never be established. The president of the new republic, José P. Laurel, sympathized with Japanese culture, but like the revolutionaries of the late 19th and early 20th century, he was first and foremost a Filipino nationalist. He did not believe in the longevity of the GEACPS (the same might be true for scholars like Gregorio F. Zaide) and intended to use the occupation period to strengthen his own position for the time after the war.

Even though an “exoteric” pan-Asianist movement had existed in the Philippines since the mid-1930s, it never went beyond a rather small elite group of intellectuals who failed to correctly gauge the sentiments of the great majority of the Philippine population.

VII. Summary and Conclusion of the Thesis

In the introduction of this thesis, I raised three major research questions in connection with
Japanese pan-Asianism and the Philippines. The first question was about the role that the Philippines played in Japanese pan-Asianism before the war and the prospect of the archipelago becoming part of the GEACPS in the eyes of Japanese pan-Asianists. To answer this question, I examined the history and development of Japanese pan-Asianism. Pan-Asianism was never a monolithic ideology but constantly subject to change and diversified within itself. It went from an idea based on solidarity between Japan, China and Korea to a concept in which Japan had to take the leadership in the liberation of the whole continent, along with the creation of a new world order. By the mid-1930s, two main factions had developed within the pan-Asianist community, the “exoteric” faction (traditionalists or culturalists) and the “esoteric” faction (rationalists or realists). Their perception of Southeast Asia and their assessment of the chances for an integration of this region into the framework of Greater Asia differed remarkably. This was especially true for the Philippines, an archipelago that was culturally very specific in Southeast Asia. It was the only country in the region with a mainly Christian Catholic population. Furthermore, the impact of Spanish and American colonial rule in the islands was extraordinary strong. There is arguably no other country that could provide a more adequate example to highlight the diverging views within the Japanese pan-Asianist community regarding the establishment of the GEACPS. While the “exoteric” pan-Asianist faction in Japan was convinced that the Filipinos would come to appreciate the concept of the GEACPS automatically, as they were just misled Orientals waiting for liberation, the “esoteric” faction emphasized the cultural differences between the archipelago and Japan. In fact, the “esoteric” Shōwa Kenkyūkai opposed the integration of the South Seas region into the GEACPS because the conditions for such a step did not yet exist. Thus, by the time of the Japanese invasion of the Philippines, there was no consensus among the Japanese pan-Asianist community on the question of Philippine membership in the GEACPS.

The second research question dealt with the impact of pan-Asianism on the Japanese Military Administration in the Philippines and the administration of the so-called Second Philippine Republic. First, I examined how both the Japanese army and navy planned the occupation of the Philippines and what role pan-Asianism played in these early stages of planning.

The Japanese navy and army conducted research on how to administer the regions in the South Seas prior to the war. The Treatise on the GEACPS that a group of intellectuals worked out for the navy did not reflect the “exoteric” pan-Asianist approach of a common cultural heritage and racial affinity between Japan and the Philippines. The treatise was rather shaped by the “esoteric” canon. There was a strong emphasis on Japan’s superior role in the GEACPS and a limited degree of independence for countries like the Philippines. The army, on the other hand, was more amicable to the “exoteric” approach during the planning stages of the occupation. Its first priority was to win over both the Philippine population and government. The Army General Staff even shared the hope of the Dai-Ajia Kyōkai that Philippine President Manuel Quezon could be convinced to change sides and cooperate with the Japanese in the integration of his country into the GEACPS. As it during the first months of the occupation became apparent that the “exoteric” assumptions did not fulfil, the government in Tokyo sent a Research Commission headed by the influential Shōwa Kenkyūkai member Rōyama Masamichi, arguably the most prominent proponent of the “esoteric” pan-Asianist faction in Japan, to the Philippines. The Japanese administrators
enacted some of the suggestions of the Research Commission regarding reforms of the clergy and education but the Second Philippine Republic was too short-lived to show any change of attitude amongst Filipinos towards their self-perception as Orientals. In contrast with the occupied regions of the Sino-centric core of Asia, the Japanese did not try to assimilate the population, but simply to reawaken the Oriental spirit of the Filipinos and make them become aware again of their identity as Asians. The ways in which the Japanese administrators dealt with Philippine Catholicism provides a good example of this attempt to adapt Japanese pan-Asianism to Philippine circumstances. By removing clergy and personnel from teaching positions in private schools and by continuing the secularization of the administrative body that had already begun under American rule, the Japanese intended to weaken the influence of the Catholic Church on Philippine society. This was a long-term goal as it was obvious to the Japanese administrators that they could not remove Catholicism overnight. This very pragmatic approach is typical of the “esoteric” pan-Asianism of Rōyama Masamichi and the Shōwa Kenkyūkai, and widely followed the recommendations of the Philippine Research Commission under Rōyama’s leadership. Tokyo sent the Research Commission to the Philippines while the occupation of the archipelago was in progress. Furthermore, most of the personnel in the propaganda corps possessed no deeper knowledge of the Philippines and relied on the expertise of the few Filipinos who took part in the propaganda efforts. The army and the navy executed their concrete planning for the occupation of the Philippines only a few months prior to the invasion. The short-termed preparation of the Japanese military is one possible explanation why in particular on the side of the army the degree of Filipino pro-Americanism (and lack of Orientalism) was underestimated. Even though it was the “exoteric” stream in Japanese pan-Asianism, that since the mid-1930s advocated for the Philippines to become part of Greater Asia, the overall conception for the administration of the Philippines and its integration into the GEACPS tended to follow “esoteric” pan-Asianist ideas, especially after it had become obvious that the “exoteric” predictions would not fulfill. Only the propaganda efforts of the Japanese, mainly those of the Department of Information, reflected the “exoteric” approach.

Furthermore, only a few months into the Japanese rule in the islands the tide of the war increasingly turned against Japan. The occupation policy followed Japanese war needs instead of ideological aspects (even though the exploitation of Philippine labour and resources was justified by the ideological purpose of waging the war for the goal of the establishment of the GEACPS). While the civilian officials in the Foreign Ministry and the Greater East Asia Ministry were the ones most convinced of the concept of the GEACPS, the field commanders of the army were most of all concerned about the welfare of their troops and their military mission. The concept of winning over the Philippine population by establishing friendly relations with the natives became more irrelevant to them the nearer the American reinvasion drew. This led to an increase in atrocities committed by Japanese military personnel against Filipino civilians and consequently, lowered the credibility of the Japanese and their concept of the GEACPS even further.

The third question related to Philippine Asianism, its influence on Philippine society and its relationship with Japanese pan-Asianism. Overall, there was never a popular base for any kind of Asianism in the Philippines. The long years of Western colonisation had left Filipinos with the self-image of an Occidental people, and those revolutionaries who opposed American rule in the
The archipelago had a strict “Philippines first” mindset. Filipino intellectuals such as Pio Duran and Benigno Ramos, who joined the Hirippin Dai-Ajia Kyōkai and proposed that the Philippines become part of a Greater Asia under Japanese leadership, completely underestimated their fellow citizens’ degree of Westernization and their unwillingness to reverse this process. Therein they resembled their Japanese “exoteric” pan-Asianist counterparts. The “exoteric” pan-Asianist organizations like the Firippin Dai-Ajia Kyōkai never developed into mass movements, and the KALIBAPI as an institution designed to propagate Orientalism as a unifying feature among all Filipinos failed to turn the people of the Philippines into devoted citizens of the GEACPS.

In the postwar literature on the Japanese expansion into Southeast Asia and the occupation of the Philippines, one can distinguish four main approaches. The “façade theory”, propagated by the majority of Western, Filipino and Japanese historians who worked on the Pacific War, says that pan-Asianism simply functioned as a disguise for Japanese imperialism. A second theory claims that the Japanese army was never willing to implement pan-Asianism in Southeast Asia since it never had any ambitions in this region. Advocates of the “liberation theory” state that Japan indeed instigated the postwar independence movements in Southeast Asia and blame the incapable Japanese militarists in the occupation regimes for the failed implementation of pan-Asianism in the Nan’yō. Finally, proponents of the “postwar perspective theory” are convinced that Tokyo granted independence to countries like Burma and the Philippines only to prepare its own case for the time after defeat (which seemed inevitable to them from 1943 onwards).

The prewar conceptualization of the army’s occupation policy as well as the official outline of the Japanese Military Administration followed pan-Asianist ideas. Throughout the occupation period, administrators attempted to adapt the ideology to Philippine circumstances. Furthermore, the Japanese treated even allied nationals such as Spaniards and Germans in the Philippines as “Westerners”; they blamed especially the Spaniards for the decay of Oriental values in the archipelago. In this sense, pan-Asianism was more than a mere façade to hide Japanese imperialist ambitions in the islands. The Japanese militarists were not solely to blame for the failure of this concept in the Philippines. The tide of the war increasingly turned against Japan and ideological aspects became subsidiary to the war needs of the army. Towards the end of the occupation, pan-Asianism had become an issue of minor importance to the field commanders and common soldiers who interacted on a daily basis with the Philippine population.

It is also questionable as to whether or not Tokyo granted independence to the Philippines to prepare its own case for the time after defeat, as both the Japanese army and navy had already envisioned an independent Philippines in their respective pre-war plans for the archipelago. The inauguration of the Second Philippine Republic was no ad hoc decision by the government in Tokyo, but had been part of the official outline of Japanese foreign policy since at least 1941.

Finally, regarding the claim that Japan largely contributed to liberation movements in Southeast Asia, this does not ring true for the Philippines. Pre-war independence movements in the Philippines did indeed seek support from Japan, and some of the Filipino collaborators during the occupation were even “exoteric” pan-Asianists. However, the majority of the Philippine population was not opposed to American rule by the time of the Japanese invasion, and the archipelago was on the eve of independence. Therefore, the Japanese occupation period did not
trigger any additional independence movements, nor did it change the relationship between the Filipinos and the Americans. The US granted the Philippines independence on 4 July 1946, just as the Americans had promised to do prior to the war.

Rōyama Masamichi’s prewar assumption that the preconditions for the integration of Southeast Asia into the GEACPS did not yet exist held true for the Philippines. For the Japanese Imperial Army marching under the banner of pan-Asianism, going to the Philippines was never like coming home.