

Cross-Cultural Views on Contemporary Philippine Literature in English

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Abstract

This study explores cross-cultural views on contemporary Philippine literature in English, focusing on how foreign critics engage with and interpret Filipino literary works written in the postcolonial language of English. While Philippine literature in English has gained traction globally, varying interpretations among foreign critics reveal a unique reception shaped by differing cultural frameworks. However, a gap exists in fully understanding how these cross-cultural perspectives influence both the global visibility of Philippine literature and its local authenticity. This study aims to investigate this gap by analyzing the critical reception of contemporary works, where colonial and postcolonial identities are often discussed but less often reconciled. The research employs a qualitative content analysis method, drawing on secondary data from literary reviews, journal articles, and critiques from publications. The analysis reveals that while foreign critics often appreciate the political engagement and thematic depth of Philippine literature in English, they may overlook its cultural specificity, leading to a somewhat generalized perception. The study concludes that greater cultural sensitivity in criticism could enrich global understanding and appreciation of Philippine literature. It also recommends more collaboration between Filipino scholars and foreign critics to address these cross-cultural disconnects. The findings underscore the importance of critical discourse in enhancing the global literary standing of Philippine contemporary works.

Keywords: Philippine literature in English, cross-cultural perspectives, foreign criticism, postcolonial identity, qualitative content analysis, global literary reception, cultural sensitivity.

Introduction

Philippine literature in English reflects a complex cultural identity shaped by colonial history and globalization. Blending Spanish and American influences with indigenous traditions, it offers a rich subject for cross-cultural analysis (Rosca, 1990). Writers traverse multiple languages and identities, employing techniques to express resistance and reflect on power dynamics (Cruz, 2011). The nature of this literature challenges traditional notions, necessitating a postcolonial interpretation (Garcia, 2014). Even foundational works in Spanish demonstrate the intricate interplay of Eastern and Western influences (Lifshey, 2008), providing a valuable lens for exploring postcolonial identity, cultural hybridity, and the tensions between local and global narratives.

And so, research on Philippine literature in English reveals these complex dynamics. Zialcita (2007) emphasizes the dialectical process between Western and indigenous influences, resulting in a transformed culture. McMahon (2004) examines early Filipino novels in English, highlighting their critique of American colonialism and the debates surrounding resistance in colonial settings. Bautista &

Bolton (2008) discuss the distinctiveness of Philippine English as a linguistic variety and its impact on literary creativity. They also explore sociolinguistic contexts, linguistic features, and literary production in Philippine English, collectively underscoring the importance of considering cultural, historical, and linguistic factors in analyzing Philippine literature in English, while also pointing to the need for further research on its reception and interpretation across cultural boundaries.

This paper addresses the lack of comprehensive understanding regarding cross-cultural interpretations of contemporary Philippine literature in English. While previous studies have examined Filipino authors' thematic concerns and literary contributions, the role of foreign critics in shaping these works' global standing remains underexplored. This study tries to fill that gap by analyzing how foreign critics interpret key themes, such as postcolonial identity, and how these interpretations align or differ from local perspectives. This was meant to understand how cross-cultural views shape the global perception of contemporary Philippine literature, particularly in terms of its authenticity, political engagement, and aesthetic value.

Examining the views of foreign critics, this paper hopes to contribute a deeper understanding of how cultural differences influence literary interpretation and global positioning. It could inform future literary criticism, offer strategies for more culturally sensitive critiques and promote greater collaboration between Filipino scholars and international critics. It could enhance the visibility and appreciation of Philippine literature in global literary discussions, urging a deeper grasp of the country's rich literary heritage.

The Problem

Contemporary Philippine literature in English made it to the global literary scene, its reception influenced by varying interpretations from foreign critics, shaped by differing cultural contexts. There is a gap in how these cross-cultural views affect both the global visibility and the cultural authenticity of Philippine literature, particularly concerning postcolonial themes. This study sought to address this gap by analyzing the critical reception of selected works by Filipino authors, exploring how foreign critiques impact the perception of these works, and offering insights to foster more culturally sensitive and informed literary discourse.

Specifically, the study was guided by the following questions:

1. How do foreign critics interpret the key themes in contemporary Philippine literature in English?
2. In what ways do cross-cultural perspectives from foreign critics influence the global visibility and cultural authenticity of contemporary Philippine literature in English?
3. How can the disconnects between foreign and local critiques be addressed to foster culturally sensitive literary discourse?

The Literature

The cross-cultural views on literature reflecting diverse critical perspectives (Hakutani, 2002) are shaped by readers, critics, and scholars from various backgrounds, as they either connect with or distance themselves from, the cultural themes in the literature (Ezekiel, 1982). Integrating national literature into world literature is the involvement of translation and cross-cultural interpretation through linguistic conversion and cultural adaptation (Li & Guo, 2013), allowing literature to transcend its national boundaries to global conversations. The idea of world literature, as envisioned by Goethe's *Weltliteratur*, navigates cross-cultural encounters, highlighting minor literary traditions in the global landscape (Prendergast & Anderson, 2004).

Oftentimes, contemporary literature defies mere categorization in postcolonial contexts, interweaving with intricate socio-political realities of globalization, state-building, and nationalism. (Bhumika R, 2019). Postcolonial writings often challenge traditional linguistic norms, developing new narrative forms that are expressive of societal complexities (Shcherbak, 2020). The recent Arabic migration literature is a good example, exploring new forms of subjectivity from border experiences and mass migration, shifting the traditional discourses on exile (Sellman, 2018). This evolving body of works reveals the fluidity of postcolonial identities, presenting authors' "anxiety" as they undergo shifting cultural and political landscapes (Kanaganayakam, 2003). New subgenres that resist old binaries and offer fresh perspectives on postcolonial life emerge.

This cross-cultural dynamic is especially apparent in Philippine literature in English. From its advent in the early 20th century, Philippine literature in English has come of age, showcasing varied themes that characterize Filipino culture and society (Francia, 1993). Amid their colonial past, Filipino writers persistently worked to deviate from American and British influences (Hidalgo, 2004). Code-switching in their works became a powerful tool in crafting identity and challenging traditional language norms (Cruz, 2011), a practice that highlights how Philippine literature showcases its colonial past while carving a niche for a distinctly Filipino voice.

The translational nature of Philippine literature in English, however, presents peculiar challenges. Garcia (2014) notes that achieving realism in this literature can be challenging sans the monocultural foundation as it struggles within multicultural and linguistic spheres. Amid these challenges, significant growth in the field has been noticeable, more so with the establishment of creative writing programs that paved the way for stylistic diversity in short stories (Hidalgo, 2004). These programs have strengthened the Philippine literature in English into reaching new thematic depths and narrative styles.

As Philippine literature in English evolves, its postcolonial and syncretic qualities manifest. Critics ought to recognize the distinct challenges Filipino writers encounter as they interact with global literary currents while preserving a unique cultural identity. As Garcia (2014) argues, appreciating these complexities could provide a better grasp of this literature's input to world literature. Acknowledging its cross-cultural nature could enable critics to properly interpret and situate Philippine literature in its rightful place within the global literary landscape.

The Method

This paper used qualitative content analysis as it is particularly suitable for understanding the complexities of cross-cultural engagement since it focuses on interpreting textual data. It gathered secondary data such as published reviews and critiques of Philippine literary works in English, both from local and foreign critics. Then, these texts were analyzed to identify recurring themes, patterns, and cultural interpretations, particularly those on colonial and postcolonial identities, as well as the critics' engagement with the socio-political and cultural context of the works.

The qualitative content analysis following an inductive approach allowed the themes to emerge from the data. The cross-cultural disconnects explored may not have been easily captured, as the aim is to allow for a more flexible, open-ended interpretation of the critics' perspectives. The methodology involved coding the texts to categorize different themes and to assess how foreign critics' interpretations align with or diverge from local perceptions. The study also incorporates a comparative analysis between the perspectives of foreign critics and Filipino scholars. This was to identify the key areas where cross-cultural disconnects and potential gaps occur, to reveal how foreign critics engage with Filipino literature, and wh-

ere greater cultural sensitivity is needed.

The Results

After investigating the cross-cultural reception of contemporary Philippine literature in English, the following results surfaced, derived from a content analysis of data sources, journal articles, literary reviews, and critiques by foreign critics, coded and categorized to assess how cross-cultural perspectives influence the interpretation, visibility, and authenticity of contemporary Filipino works in English.

Foreign Critiques of Philippine Literature in English

A rich and dynamic field, contemporary Philippine literature in English grapples with the intricate tensions between colonial and postcolonial identities. The English usage as a literary medium, drawn from the country's colonial past, takes center stage in this struggle. Scholars like Garcia (2014), Brewster (1995), McMahon (2004), and Rosca (1990) delve into the ways these works traverse the terrain of identity, nationalism, and cultural transformation, providing key insights into how literature reflects and shapes Filipino consciousness.

Garcia (2014) highlights the translational nature of Philippine anglophone literature, suggesting that writing in English itself is a form of translation. That being the case, it forces writers to journey between the local cultural context and the global reach of English, complicating and diversifying any representation of Filipino identity (Wong, 2019). The tension between the authentic, localized experience and the globalized, colonial language leads to syncretic writing—a blending of different cultural and linguistic elements. Such syncretism, as Garcia argues, challenges the idea of a pure or realistic representation of Filipino identity, requiring a postcolonial interpretation. In other words, understanding these works necessitates an acknowledgment of how contemporary global forces and colonial history shape the production and reception of literature, with postcolonial theory providing the tools to dissect power dynamics embedded in language, identity, and narrative form.

Focusing on how contemporary Philippine literature reflects themes of national identity and cultural modernity, Brewster (1995) takes this analysis further. In Brewster's view, literature turns into a space where Filipino nationalism evolves and is negotiated. Embedded in this literature is the struggle to articulate a national identity comprising colonial, indigenous, and modern influences. Filipino anglophone writers question and redefine with their works what it means to be Filipino in this postcolonial world. Tension as a theme recurs between the colonial past and the national present, the literary practices themselves being part of a broader cultural transformation. Employing English as a former tool of colonial domination—writers explore new possibilities for expressing Filipino identity and complicate, in the process, the very notion of modernity (Arong, 2019).

McMahon (2004) provides a historical lens after analyzing early Filipino novels in English. His study reveals that these works oftentimes critique American colonialism, showing the complex relationship between the colonizer and the colonized (Hernandez, 2020). These novels debate assimilation, resistance, and cultural hybridity, exemplifying how early 20th-century Filipino writers engage with colonial resistance issues within literary forms. McMahon's analysis suggests that, in their nascent stages, Filipino anglophone writings were already concerned with colonial power structures and Filipino identity that resisted total subjugation.

On the other hand, Rosca (1990) addresses the more existential and philosophical challenges Filipino writers face in shaping identity amid linguistic diversity and colonial heritage. The multiplicity of

languages in the country “where regional languages coexist alongside the colonial imposition of English” results in a fragmented sense of self. Such linguistic diversity complicates the development of a national identity and questions the role of language in the formation of individual and collective identities. Moreover, the colonial past casts an extended shadow over these literary ventures, as writers should grapple with the colonization legacy while attempting to forge a path forward. The mythic dimension that Rosca perceives in Philippine literature refers to how writers use symbolism and narrative in dealing with the lasting cultural and psychological colonization impact. This use of myth enables a deeper questioning of memory, identity, and cultural continuity amid historical trauma.

These scholars collectively underscore the syncretic qualities of Philippine anglophone literature. Garcia (2014) argues that this syncretism is not just a blending of cultures but a dose of resistance to self-reinvention. Brewster (1995) suggests the literature is a reflection of the country’s ongoing negotiation with its colonial past and the present. McMahon (2004) emphasizes how early anglophone novels actively engaged with colonialism, while Rosca (1990) highlights the existential struggle of constructing identity in a multilingual, postcolonial context. Altogether, they paint a picture of a literary tradition deeply engaged with the themes of cultural transformation, nationalism, and modernity.

The philosophical implications of these works rest on their challenge to essentialist notions of identity. Instead of presenting a fixed or pure Filipino identity, contemporary Philippine literature in English renders identity as a constantly contested, evolving, and hybrid construct. It refuses to accept the binary of colonizer-versus-colonized, embracing instead the complexities of postcolonial subjectivity where identity is a constant flux, shaped by both individual agency and historical forces.

By using English—a language that abounds with colonial history—Filipino writers subvert its dominance, transforming it into a vehicle to express their realities. This linguistic reappropriation utilizes the power of literature to defy colonial legacies and assert cultural agency. It also calls for a deeper understanding of postcolonial literature that recognizes the fluid, hybrid nature of identity and culture in a highly globalized world. As these scholars emphasize, the critical engagement with Philippine anglophone literature should account for the complex interplay of history, myth, language, and identity that defines the postcolonial experience.

Cross-cultural Impact on Philippine Literature in English

The emergence of Philippine English as a variety represents these wider social-cultural-historical processes in the Philippines. According to Bautista & Bolton (2008), this type has its own lexical, phonological, and grammatical traces which set it apart from other English varieties. These aren't just deviations from Standard English but have a lot more to do with the country's colonial past and its indigenous languages. Philippine English proves the ingenuity and adaptability of Filipino speakers, turning what was once a colonial language into an instrument reflecting cultural geographies.

Garcia (2014) identifies one of the most important characteristics of Philippine English with its translational capacity that conceives it as contrary to traditional realist literature. It is an embodiment of the movement by which Philippine English and its literary tradition (which are not mere adaptations), have taken local experiences — experiences that all people share, from poverty to joy—into a global stage as a new form altogether. Borrowing English in the works of Philippine literature is not an act of complete and total surrender to a linguistic model that is incontrovertible as things get transmuted, and shape-shifted for Filipino readers. Hence, the literature in Philippine English is marked by a composite quality of Western and Filipino cultural traditions which gives rise to non-realist literary works. The "translational" nature of

this literature suggests that writers are constantly negotiating between the local and the global, between their Filipino identity and the use of a colonial language.

While Philippine literature in English is aptly described by Bautista and Bolton (2008) as one that is 'creatively vibrant and sensitive to issues and trends across the globe', its international visibility is sheerly contrasted by the relative absence of the Philippine literary criticism's international visibility, with Cruz (2008) attributing this to linguistic barriers that shut off Filipino critics and scholars from engagement in the global academic community. Hence, while the use of Philippine English received full recognition as a manifestation of creativity and a feasible form of vernacular in creative writing, the same sort of recognition is yet to be accorded to Filipino criticism, specifically those written in local languages. In the landscape dominated by English in global academic discourse, non-English contributions will be construed as not only uninformed by the academic discourse but also advancing arguments that are perceived as entirely unrepresentative of the ongoing debates in the international academe.

This illustrates a more philosophical question concerning the inclusiveness of global academic standards. The philosopher David Cruz (2008) has argued that academic publishing based on citation-based metrics tends to privilege research published in the major global languages, particularly English. By obscuring the intellectual contributions of those writing in less common languages, such metrics function to continue a linguistic hegemony analogous to the colonial rule of the Old World. One might suppose that scholarship evaluated by citation metrics is the best work—or at least the best assessed—but this is not necessarily so. Rather, the use of citation metrics to evaluate academic work only reflects the accessibility of that work in the linguistic circuit into which it has been introduced. In this way, English-speaking scholarship comes to dominate a linguistic circuit that systematically keeps non-English contributions marginalized. This domination then renders them invisible as justifiable objects of scholarly attention.

In this context, studying Philippine English offers vital insights into postcolonial language dynamics and the language's role in shaping cultural identity (Tupas, 2004). Bautista & Bolton (2008) and Yoneoka (2009) underscore that Philippine English is not merely a linguistic curiosity, but a reflection of deeper intercultural communication processes. It is the language variety that embodies colonialism history and the ongoing struggle for postcolonial self-definition. As such, studying Philippine English is not merely about documenting linguistic differences but also about perceiving how these differences connect to questions of identity, power, and cultural negotiation in a postcolonial world.

Garcia (2014) proposes that more work must be done on the specificity of literary practices post-colonially to interrogate how Filipino writers use the English route to capture their very unique variations on socio-political orientations. It entails a deepened understanding of the relationship between literature and language(s) in the Philippines that will acknowledge English not only as a vestige of colonialism but also as a tool for critiquing, agency, and articulation. Therefore, Filipino writers are not merely patronized by a colonial language but revolutionize it through the process and deposit indigenous overtones beyond subversion.

Finally, Garcia (2014) takes on Filipino writers and critics to exhibit more self-reflexivity in their practice by demanding a greater focus that deals with the linguistic sensitivities of how and what makes literary works, and cultural choices. This need for self-reflection became apparent when studying the global literary market that forces Filipino writers and critics to see themselves as both visible (in speaking English) and also authenticity-complicated. Self-reflexivity here means that we are fully aware of the double-edged nature of English which is both a colonial bequest and a postcolonial instrument of freedom as well. Amid these tensions, Filipino writers find ways to create works that resonate with local and

international readers (Wong, 2019)—and wrestle with the politics of power on which their writing is managed.

The philosophical implications of these discussions have pertinence to an understanding of world literature more generally. This postcolonial Philippine English complicates the category of world literature, by dislocating a Western literary tradition that is geographically defined and—as Carrier refers to them: French empty signifiers. Philippine anglophone literature is indicative of a non-Western nation's use of world languages not solely for communication purposes but also as vehicles by which that same parting identity can be expressed in post-colonial disruption (Ponce, 2012). It asks us to reimagine the standards by which we evaluate global practices in both scholarly and literary contributions—by urging a more inclusive way or even unprejudiced yardstick, providing ways linguistic multiplicity is not only seen as deprivation of something but rather as diversity richness.

Bridging Literary Perspectives in Philippine Literature in English

Regarding foreign criticisms, local detachment may be a task for Philippine literature in English to overcome. The tension stems from the linguistic and cultural braid of the Philippines where English was a colonial language that crossed streams with native tongues and street-level pragmatics. As Garcia (2014) points out, the fact that any Philippine English literary text has to be translated as soon as it is produced means a very different thing from simply translating words into another language but figures of cultural apperception. For this reason, Philippine literature in English cannot be reductively interpreted under Western literary traditions without utilizing postcolonial critical tools that explore its complexities full circle.

The importance of Garcia's perspective lies in its ability to help readers and critics understand the cultural influences present, in Philippine literature effectively when writing in English—a language associated with colonization—Filipino experiences take on a global dimension while still retaining their local nuances and significance within the language itself this dynamic challenges conventional notions of realism that strive for absolute authenticity because using English as a medium entails navigating cultural differences, in every written word. The outcome is a collection of writings that straddles realms. Perpetually interpreting experiences in a foreign language comes with its cultural nuances.

Bautista and Bolton (2008) highlight the uniqueness of English as a variant, with its special vocabulary and grammar rules along with distinct sounds and accents developed over time in the country's literary works by writers expressing creativity through language use far, beyond mere mimicry of Standard English norms. Filipino writers can share their stories and perspectives in a manner that captivates readers both at home and abroad according to Bautista and Bolton's emphasis, on encompassing literary viewpoints highlighting the importance of a comprehensive understanding of this literature that recognizes the adaptable and blended essence of language along, with the creative decisions taken by writers.

According to Cruz (2008), Filipino critics and scholars face obstacles when writing in languages within the academic system. The preference, for English in the academic arena tends to sideline non-native contributions like those in Filipino or other regional dialects. Cruz questions the emphasis on citation-based metrics that tend to prioritize publications, in journals. This situation puts critics at a disadvantage as their literary theory contributions might not receive recognition just because they are not, in English language texts. Cruz's point underlines an inequality in the literary assessment framework where significant intellectual endeavors, in native languages often get left out of worldwide discussions.

The exclusion mentioned here is an example of the problem of linguistic dominance. A topic investigated

by Bolton and Bautista in their study on Philippine English in 2004. They tackle the discussions about schooling, language norms, and linguistic domination showcasing the wider conflicts between local and international impacts on language regulations and teaching methods, in the Philippines. The push, for teaching English in schools is frequently reasoned as a way to open up possibilities for Filipinos. It also sustains the supremacy of a colonial language while sidelining indigenous languages. This discourse goes beyond discussion and delves into fundamental issues of national identity, self-governance, and opposition. The enforcement of language norms linked to acts is a reflection of the power structures that still influence Philippine society even in its postcolonial era.

To bridge the gap between local criticisms as noted by these scholars' suggestions, a few actions need to be implemented. The first step involves acknowledging the cultural backdrop within which Philippine literature in English emerges. Foreign reviewers tend to carry with them biases based on norms that might not completely grasp the intricacies of Philippine literature. As Garcia (2014) points out in his argumentation, the interpretive lens applied to these works should consider the interplay, at hand. To grasp literature, one must appreciate how English serves not only as a means of communication but also as a platform, for cultural exchange and defiance.

Furthermore, it is crucially important to support translation endeavors. The worldwide literary community needs to encourage chances for Filipino literary analysis to be translated into English, enabling viewpoints to engage in international conversations (San Juan, 2009). Translation acts as a link between overseas outlooks facilitating a vibrant and varied sharing of thoughts and concepts. If we don't make these efforts, the important perspectives from the Philippines might get lost in portrayals, causing a gap between how Philippine literature is viewed at home and abroad.

According to Cruz (2008), there is a need to reassess the academic assessment systems in place currently. The focus on metrics based on citations and publishing in English journals tends to create a system that excludes native English-speaking scholars. To encourage a discussion that's more inclusive and culturally aware academic institutions and publishers need to expand their evaluation standards by acknowledging the importance of research created in regional dialects and environments. This change could lead to a portrayal of literary traditions and critical viewpoints which would greatly enhance discussions, in global literature.

Bringing together the viewpoints on Philippine literature in English from both local sources and abroad involves a complex strategy that takes into account language usage and cultural influences (Martin, 2018). By encouraging translation efforts promoting methods, and acknowledging the unique characteristics of Philippine English, we can start to connect foreign outlooks with local ones. The diverse linguistic landscape of literature, coupled with its postcolonial backdrop, pushes us to reconsider the traditional boundaries of literary analysis and realism. This challenges us to adopt an attuned and serious approach to studying global literature.

The examination uncovered discrepancies between critiques from abroad and those from sources. One major concern is how foreign critics often apply norms or structures to Filipino writings without considering the unique context and perspectives they possess. A specific instance is when literature's incorporation of realism is compared to the Latin American style without acknowledging the rich local mythologies and spiritual traditions that shape the Filipino interpretation of magical realism.

Conclusion

Foreign critics often commend the themes and political involvement found in modern Philippine literature

in the English language, especially the exploration of postcolonial identity and the unconventional use of English to reclaim history. But their tendency to overlook the influences rooted in indigenous and Spanish traditions within Philippine literature leads to a notion that limits its focus on the nation's American colonial history, reinforcing a simplistic postcolonial perspective that fails to fully grasp the intricacy of Philippine society. The development of English in the country highlighted the connection between language, culture, and identity in postcolonial discussions. However, criticism from foreign sources is restricted by language barriers and a lack of cultural insight. On the other hand, local critics often dwell on issues such as poverty and dishonesty in politics, providing practical insights into Filipino society. To fill this gap, Filipino and international scholars should work together through scholarship exchanges, publications, and utilization of shared academic platforms. This will lead to a culturally rich appraisal of the country's literature. These results thus emphasize the need for discussions and cooperation between local and foreign reviewers to enhance the global literary discourse.

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