

Europe Solidaire Sans Frontières > English > Asia > Philippines > The Left (Philippines) > History (The Left, Philippines) > **Left (Philippines) - Aileen San Pablo Baviera: Revolutionary at heart, more (...)**

Left (Philippines) - Aileen San Pablo Baviera: Revolutionary at heart, more than a China watcher

Sunday 5 June 2022, by [TADEM Eduardo C.](#) (Date first published: 25 March 2020).

Unknown to many, Aileen was also involved in the Philippine Left's revolutionary struggle

Contents

- [International liaison](#)
- [Back home](#)
- [Academic career](#)
- [Rethinking the revolution](#)

A LIFETIME OF ACTION. The late Aileen Baviera with the author in various periods. Photos courtesy of Ed Tadem and artwork by Jose Monfred Sy

MANILA, Philippines - The tributes that have poured in to honor Aileen San Pablo Baviera [1] have focused on her work as a China studies scholar. While there is no doubt that Aileen excelled in this field, in the 40 years that I have known her, it would be a disservice to her memory if she were to be typecast only as a China expert, a "Sinologist," or a "China watcher."

While China was her forte, she went beyond its confines in her research interests, her publications, the courses she taught, and in her public engagements. Unknown to many, she was also involved in the Left's revolutionary struggle.

At the height of Martial Law in the '70s, Aileen San Pablo was a foreign service student at the University of the Philippines Diliman. A socially-conscious student, she joined an underground left-wing organization affiliated with the Communist Party of the Philippines-National Democratic Front (CPP-NDF).

She was a campus mass leader as president of the UP Political Science Students Association. Her activism was at the above ground and legal level, and she was instrumental in the struggle to restore the University Student Council and the student paper, *Philippine Collegian*.

Aileen graduated cum laude in 1979 and proceeded to do an MA in Asian Studies. She joined the Foreign Service Institute (FSI), Department of Foreign Affairs in 1980. In 1981, she won a fellowship to do a two-year course at the Beijing Language Institute and to study Chinese history at Beijing University.

International liaison

Her passport application was initially rejected as it appeared that an intelligence dossier on her student activist days existed. Her FSI supervisors, however, vouched for her and she eventually secured her passport.

Aileen's first China sojourn coincided with her revolutionary work as she was part of the newly-formed International Liaison and Research Section of the CPP-NDF. Her designated political officer was Jorge Baviera, already a ranking party cadre. Jorge was smitten with Aileen and he arranged through a comrade for him to give her a pre-departure briefing. Despite their 15-year age gap, he managed to win Aileen's heart. (*Editor's note: Jorge died in 2018*)

In China, she was tasked to examine the momentous events after the fall of the "Gang of Four" and the return to power of Deng Xiaoping. The CPP was re-evaluating its predominantly Maoist line but was suspicious of Deng.

Aileen concluded that a specific Chinese road to socialism was taking place and proposed that the CPP should renew fraternal relations with the Deng-led party. The CPP leadership, however, took a hardline position reaffirming the line of the "Gang of Four." This later contributed to a split within the movement.

Back home

Aileen returned home in 1983, married Jorge and gave birth to 3 children - Mayi (1985), Mara (1986) and Vittorio (1991). She went back to FSI as a training officer, researcher, and instructor. In 1987, she joined the faculty of UP Diliman's Department of Political Science where she chose to teach Southeast Asian studies, realizing the need to broaden the scope of her academic scholarly work.

Given a new party assignment for her and Jorge to relocate to Spain, she suddenly resigned from UP. This relocation, however, was aborted and Aileen returned to FSI in 1993 as head of its Center for International Relations and Strategic Studies.

Aileen joined the Philippines-China Development Resource Center (PDRC) and became its executive director (1998-2001). An important project she undertook was a pioneering research on civil society anti-poverty initiatives in Asian rural areas. As PDRC head, she proposed the broadening of the organization's mandate to encompass the entire Asian region; a proposal that was rejected.

Aileen would soon leave FSI and PDRC to resume her academic career in 1998 with a full-time position as Associate Professor at UP Asian Center, a graduate institution for Asian and Philippine Studies.

Academic career

Aileen taught a range of courses that went beyond her China background including Asian security issues, Southeast Asian international relations, ASEAN studies, Asian regionalism, Philippine foreign policy, and research methods. Her researches expanded to cover Asia-Pacific security, territorial disputes, and regional integration.

She produced an impressive output of journal articles, book chapters, essays and commentaries, and books on Asian regional security, Philippine-China relations, regional peace and conflict, territorial disputes, geopolitics, US-Asian relations, multilateralism, Philippine politics, media, Chinese investments, and maritime issues.

As Dean of the UP Asian Center (2003-2009), she undertook the thoroughgoing overhaul of the 40-year-old Asian Studies curriculum, emphasizing comparative cross-country and thematic issues rather than the traditional country-specific studies. These changes were important and essential given the growing commonalities in socio-political and economic problems across societies and regions, new developments in geopolitics, and the globalization of trade and investments.

In 2003, she earned a PhD in Political Science from UP Diliman with a dissertation on China-ASEAN relations. She became full Professor in 2005.

Rethinking the revolution

Aileen's revolutionary career had, by then, undergone profound changes.

The hardline position taken by the party leadership on the 1980s China question had disappointed her as her experience and studies of the Maoist line taught her otherwise.

The split in the early 1990s further alienated her and she maintained her distance from both factions while keeping her personal friendships with former comrades. While she was critical of the CPP-NDF's post-1990s strategies, she remained to the end a radical and a revolutionary at heart.

Aileen thought that the Philippine Left had ceded mainstream politics to the elites while being embroiled in dogmatic and petty sectarian disputes.

She regarded China's path to socialism with Chinese characteristics as a model to pursue, meaning, that the Left should always consider the specific historical, cultural, and social context of Philippine society and its peoples.

Aileen San Pablo Baviera died on March 21, 2020 [2] at the age of 60 from complications related to the COVID-19 virus. Goodspeed, Aileen!

Eduardo C. Tadem

P.S.

• **Rappler.com. MAR 25, 2020 12:12 PM PHT:**
<https://www.rappler.com/nation/255719-aileen-san-pablo-baviera-revolutionary-at-heart-more-than-china-watcher/>

• **Eduardo C. Tadem, Ph.D., is convenor, Program on Alternative Development, University of the Philippines Center for Integrative and Development Studies (UP CIDS AltDev) and a retired Professor of Asian Studies at UP Diliman.**

Footnotes

- [1] <https://www.rappler.com/nation/255384-china-expert-ailen-baviera-obituary/>
- [2] <https://www.rappler.com/nation/255339-university-of-the-philippines-professor-ailen-baviera-dies-coronavirus/>