In 1897, the Filipino Mariano Ponce, a propagandist leader and representative of the Revolutionary Committee in Hong Kong, sent a letter to his Cuban friend, José Alberto Izquierdo. The content of the correspondence indicates the close friendship they had established over many years (Ponce calls Izquierdo “my dear friend”). One of his purposes is to request a copy of Martí’s “Manifiesto de Montecristi”:

I would appreciate if you could provide us with any pamphlets or publications about the revolution that you believe can enlighten and educate us, especially official documents such as the Manifesto of José Martí and General Gómez at the beginning of the war and others.

le agradecería nos dé cuantos folletos y publicaciones tenga acerca de la revolución que crea pueden ilustrarnos y enseñarnos, sobre todo los documentos oficiales, como el manifiesto de José Martí y Gral. Gómez á principios de la guerra y otros.

(Ponce 7)

The letter shows that Ponce was well aware of the ongoing war of independence in the other colony in the Caribbean. More importantly, it reveals his interest in (and admiration for) Martí and his nationalist principles of revolution that could “enlighten and educate” Filipinos in their struggle for freedom. Given that the “Manifiesto de Montecristi” is Martí’s last political essay and that it arguably represents the culmination
of his anti-imperial trajectory, Ponce’s interest in the manifesto should not be taken lightly. The celebratory tone in his allusion to Cuba also reminds us of Simoun’s connection to the Caribbean island in Rizal’s *El filibusterismo*. It suggests the possibility that some Filipino *ilustrados* had a kind of “Cuban model” in mind, believing that the Caribbean sister colony could offer ideas to reinforce the independence movement in their own country. As I show in this chapter, the correspondence between Ponce and Izquierdo is part of the larger web of network between Cubans and Filipinos in the late nineteenth century. In other words, although Martí and Rizal never communicated with each other during their lives, their political thoughts had such a crucial impact on their contemporaries that they established real interactions between the Caribbean and Southeast Asia.

Ponce was one of Rizal’s closest associates in the Propaganda Movement. If Rizal symbolized the boiling heart of the emerging Filipino nationalism, Ponce was the quieter administrator of political campaigns. They exchanged many letters, in which Rizal affectionately called Ponce “my distinguished countryman and dear friend” (“mi distinguido paisano y apreciado amigo”) (*Epistolario rizalino*: II, 7). In one of his letters written in Tagalog (November 11, 1889), Rizal explained the significance of his manifesto to him:

I will extend the ‘Philippines within a Century’ and use all my power; let’s see how we will surprise ourselves and catch each other’s tricks.

Ang ‘Filipinas Dentro de Cien Años,’ ay aking pahahabain, at ilalabas ko ang aking galing; bahala na kaming mag hulaan, at mag hulihan ſg salamanká.

(*Epistolario rizalino*: II, 238)

Considering the strong tie between Rizal and Ponce as well as Ponce’s above-mentioned letter to Izquierdo, it would be difficult not to imagine that Rizal had at least some knowledge about Martí. Rizal was certainly aware of the insurrections against the Spanish empire that were taking place in Cuba. In fact, he almost had the opportunity to travel to the Caribbean island toward the end of his life. While exiled in the island of Dapitan in 1896, Rizal expressed interest in going to Cuba in order to serve as a physician for Spanish troops and thus escape his death sentence. Although his petition was eventually turned down by the colonial authority, his willingness to support the Spanish military has led some historians to question Rizal’s status as a quintessential