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The Hybrid Tsinoy: Challenges of Hybridity and Homogeneity as Sociocultural Constructs among the Chinese in the Philippines

JULIET LEE UYTANLET

Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2016, xx+261pp.

How do present-day Tsinoy (colloquial term for Chinese living in the Philippines) self-identify? How can Christian churches in the Philippines use this knowledge to better carry out their mission to Christianize them? These are the two main questions that drive this latest work on the ethnic identities of Chinese in the Philippines. Sub-questions include: Do they see themselves as “Filipino,” “Chinese,” or cultural hybrids? What factors help them to identify more with one identity than another? Divided into six chapters, *The Hybrid Tsinoy* specifically focuses on Chinese and Chinese mestizos in Manila and utilizes an ethnographic method (e.g., conducting surveys, using participant observation) to analyze how 86 respondents of varying gender, class, immigration status, religion, and generation understand, negotiate, construct, and reconstruct their ethnic identities.

Chapter 1 spells out the aims, goals, research methods, significance, and limitations of the study. It also has a section on the definition of key terms and a review of related literature. The second chapter provides an overview—from the Spanish colonial period to the present—of how Chinese and their family members have been categorized and racialized. It demonstrates how through time the local population and the state “liked and disliked, welcomed and unwelcomed” them (p. 55). Chapter 3 discusses the different theoretical frameworks on ethnicity used for the study. Examples include Jan Nederveen Pieterse’s concept of hybridity and Fredrik Barth’s situational identity model. Chapter 4 can be considered the “meat” of the study, in which the author presents the results of her investigation. She divides the respondents into six categories: Old Immigrants (OI), New Immigrants (NI), Tsinoy, and first-, second-, and third-generation Chinese mestizos (CM1, CM2, CM3, respectively). Accounts that are included in this chapter include how the OIs viewed the NIs, how Tsinoy encountered resistance from family members to date or marry Filipinos, how CMs of different generations self-identified, and how Tsinoy experienced living as an ethnic minority in the Philippines (as well as abroad for those who emigrated). Uytanlet

also lists the five factors that affect the construction of an ethnic identity: parents, school, friends, environment or location, and will factor.

Using data gathered from the study, Chapter 5 analyzes the ethnic identifications of the informants. The author concludes that her subjects, constantly shaping and reshaping their identities, can be considered “constructivists” rather than “primordialists.” Furthermore, those who intermarry with Filipinos, along with their offspring, tend to become more “Filipinized,” although efforts are made within most households to retain some Chinese cultural practices or traditions by sending the children to Chinese schools. The last chapter is aimed primarily at discussing how the study can benefit Christian churches or organizations in the Philippines. Having demonstrated that modern-day Christian Chinese, like their earlier counterparts, practice a kind of “syncretic” Christianity, the author echoes the missionaries’ call to “evangelize, re-evangelize, and/or disciple the Chinese Filipino Roman Catholics and Protestants to become authentic believers and faithful followers of Jesus Christ” (p. 180). Apart from these six chapters, the book contains appendices that include a chart with information about the respondents, a short history of Chinese mestizos, and the rise of ethnocentrism in China.

The rich ethnographic details in this study provide new and interesting data for historical and anthropological studies. For instance, it is rarely known nowadays among the younger generation that *kabise* also was a word used to refer to the Chinese. The word is derived from the Spanish *cabeza*, meaning “boss” or “head” (of a company or business). The first time I learned about the word being used was when, several years ago, my mother told me that in Tarlac—a place where she grew up, located approximately 100 kilometers north of Manila—people referred to Chinese as “kabise.” However, she explained that the word was derived from the Minnan words *kap-yi-se*, which literally mean “to speak to him.” Hence, a kabise was a Chinese boss whom one approached to discuss an important matter. As we know the original usage of this word from Uytanlet’s work, the term as it was used elsewhere can be regarded as an instance of people appropriating the meanings of foreign words to make them their own.

Another example of how this study enriches our knowledge of the history of Chinese in the Philippines is found in the account of one respondent named Bee-hua. She met her Chinese Filipino husband in China, and when they decided to flee China after the Communist takeover in 1949, her Filipino mother-in-law falsified her papers so that she could come in as her daughter who was born in China. In other words, Bee-hua became her husband’s sister. This phenomenon of paper daughters coming to the Philippines is little understood in the history of Chinese in the Philippines and can be an area of future study. Another interesting finding in the study is the practice of endogamy that persisted over time. In particular, daughters of Chinese Filipino households, whether Chinese or Chinese mestiza, are often married off to fellow Chinese. My own study of Chinese merchant families in Binondo in the latter part of the nineteenth century demonstrated that Chinese men who married local women preferred Chinese mestizas. The female mestizo

offspring of such unions also were often married off to Chinese men. Thus, a pattern can be seen in which daughters repeated the practice of their own Chinese mestizo mothers of marrying back into the Chinese community, thus slowing down the “indigenization” process of such families when traced matrilineally. A similar pattern of Chinese mestizo daughters marrying Chinese men can be seen in the matriline of the respondent named Halley. Halley is a Chinese mestiza whose mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother—all Chinese mestizas like her—married “pure” Chinese men. These women’s lives thus challenge the traditional narrative of Chinese mestizos becoming Filipinos over time, as advanced by scholars such as Edgar Wickberg and Antonio Tan. Their histories also show that Chinese families utilized and continue to utilize their women to uphold Chinese patriarchy by opposing intermarriage with Filipinos while allowing their Chinese or Chinese mestizo sons to marry Filipino women.

My only quibble about the book is that structurally, it could have been edited so that it does not read like a dissertation. Also, it seems problematic for the author to use perspectives and approaches from cultural anthropology and ethnic studies that are critical of “regimes of truth and power” to create homogenized and monolithic identities, then conclude at the end of the book that Christian churches need to find ways to re-evangelize their followers so that the latter become “true” Christians. These shortcomings aside, the study has much to offer to scholars of ethnicity in general and the history of the Chinese diaspora in the Philippines in particular.

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Siege of the Spirits: Community and Polity in Bangkok

MICHAEL HERZFELD

Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2016, xii+267pp.

Heritage is not the first thing that springs to mind when people think of Bangkok. Rather, modern skyscrapers, traffic snarls, glitzy shopping malls, chaotic markets, red light districts, and ornate temples dominate its popular image. Yet, the city’s pulse beats strongly in vibrant pockets of life that are often hidden amidst the urban sprawl. These distinctive localities give Bangkok a richness and complexity that make it one of the most fascinating cities in the world. Michael Herzfeld’s new book focuses on one of these neighborhoods, Pom Mahakan—a tiny community of 300 people adjacent to the fortress built in 1783 after which it is named. For almost 25 years, city authorities have attempted to evict the community’s residents in order to replace Pom Mahakan’s artisans and traditional wooden houses with a public park paying tribute to the monarchy and nation.

Although heritage conservation policies have existed since the early twentieth century, these