

standards for studying the everyday interactions of minority communities in their post-colonial societies and governments in Southeast Asia and beyond.

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The Philippines

The Chinese question: Ethnicity, nation and region in and beyond the Philippines

By CAROLINE S. HAU

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The Chinese question traces the history of the integration of the Filipino-Chinese (*Tsinoy*, from 'Pinoy' and 'Tsino') into Philippine society. Caroline S. Hau does this by looking at different representations of this process: novels written by Tsinoy and mainland Chinese, films with Tsinoy characters playing various roles, and critical events that hastened or impeded integration. The theme that binds the chapters, however, is Hau's discussion of the fascinating but also fraught relationship between Filipino-Chinese and Filipino nationalists.

After the People's Republic of China seized several atolls in the West Philippine Sea, anti-Chinese sentiments resurfaced, stoked by Filipino jingoistic intellectuals. Hau has anticipated these tensions and, in response, argues that Chinese and Filipino nationalisms were 'not always mutually exclusive' — at certain periods of history they shared 'intimate connections [of] love, friendship and betrayal, kinship and rejection'. This was first evident at the turn of the twentieth century when both nationalisms challenged the colonial powers trying to carve their own spheres of interests in China, and Spanish colonialism, respectively. The American colonial state tried to break this camaraderie by policing the Chinese community, but did so only temporarily. By the 1930s, this union was reinvigorated when the Chinese formed the Huaqiao warriors who fought alongside the guerrillas of the Partido Komunista ng Pilipinas (PKP, or Communist Party of the Philippines).

After the war, however, the Philippine Republic continued the colonial practice of treating the Chinese as pariahs, this time accusing them as a fifth column of Communist China and as undesirable 'aliens' bent on sabotaging state economic programmes. But not for long. By the mid to late 1960s, a generational shift happened, and the 'Chinese who came of age in the 1960s constituted the largest group of Chinese, a majority of them Philippine-born.' They were also 'the first group to lack direct and substantial contact with a China that had gone Communist and was therefore closed off to America's "Free Asia", and the first to receive a university education and have wide social contacts with non-Chinese'. The rise of this Tsinoy generation was one reason why President Ferdinand Marcos made the unprecedented move of issuing a presidential decree for the mass naturalisation of the Chinese and 'legally incorporated the Chinese "alien" into the Filipino nation'.

Naturalisation, however, came at a hefty price. Marcos extorted the Chinese business community and used its members as ‘front men’ for companies owned by the dictator and his family. In its last years in power, the dictatorship tapped Tsinoy money to shore up the country’s foreign reserves and pay for imports after the economy went into a free fall. After Marcos’s ouster, the government of President Corazon Aquino accused Tsinoy as ‘tax evaders, smugglers, hoarders, and black-marketers’ and they were blamed once again for causing the country’s ‘economic ills’. President Fidel Ramos’s national security adviser General Jose Almonte warned that the ‘insurgency problem [was] not in the Sierra Madres (mountains) of Quezon and Luzon provinces but in the boardrooms of Makati and Binondo where these titans plan out the conquest and total control of the country’s socioeconomic and political power’. The Tsinoy were the subversives plotting to destroy the Republic and the viruses eating away at the nation.

Such vindictive tagging made the Tsinoy community a target of kidnap-for-ransom gangs and the abduction of Chinese as hostages became a regular occurrence during Ramos’s and Joseph Estrada’s presidential terms. The kidnappings receded after President Gloria Arroyo reimposed the death penalty and had 95 kidnappers executed. In 2014, however, a new series of abductions worried the Tsinoy once again, although there were far fewer kidnappings this time around than in the 1980s, as the community had improved its security.

The kidnappings cost the Philippines an additional US\$1.4 million in tourism revenues and US\$1 billion in investment opportunities. Worse, they forced Tsinoy families to move their monies and children abroad. Tsinoy activist Teresita Ang-See estimated that between 1992 and 1996, US\$180 million in Tsinoy capital left the country and Chinese schools lost US\$14.4 million in tuition payment. But not everyone panicked. In fact, the wealthiest of Tsinoy families kept their capital in the country and continued to expand their investments. Moreover, by not leaving, the community’s most affluent (locally known by the informal name ‘taipan’) went on to bolster their domination of the Philippine economy. By the late twentieth century, 10 of the 16 Filipino billionaires and 12 of the 31 millionaires were of Chinese lineage, respectively. In 2006, of the top 100 companies in the Philippines, Tsinoy owned 12.

The public faces of the Tsinoy, however, were not always those of the rich taipan. In the late 1960s, Chinese students from the country’s elite schools joined the opposition against Marcos. Hau tells the story of Herman Tiu Laurel, son of a businessman, who, ‘having observed through media and only vicariously the politics and issues of the 1960s – from [the] Kennedy assassination in the US to the anti-US demonstrations of the *Kabataang Makabayan* in Manila — [wondered] what it was all about’. This curiosity led him to the writings of the anti-Nazi theologian and iconoclast Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the American moral philosopher Eric Hoffer, and the British philosopher, historian, mathematician, and activist Bertrand Russell. He was one of the first recruits of the Jesuits who were forming a social democratic organisation. When Marcos declared martial law, Laurel was ‘seconded’ to several opposition parties. Another famous Tsinoy activist is the writer Ricky Lee who was radicalised as a student at the University of the Philippines, when he went underground and was arrested and tortured in 1974. Released a year later, he honed his skills as a script-writer to become one of the best in the nation. He wrote for banal entertainment

movies, as well as some of the most powerful screenplays that were social commentaries of the time.

Lee and Laurel represented the progressive and radical threads of the Tsinoy story, wherein anti-American nationalism and Filipino liberalism mixed seamlessly with social democratic ideas, radical theology, and Maoist thought. Laurel represented the above-level, moderate reformist politics, while Lee was accustomed to Leninist-type underground work. In the post-Marcos era, however, both the social democratic and radical wings of the anti-Marcos opposition weakened, and protest politics shifted to groups like the Citizens Action Against Crime and Kaisa para sa Kaunlaran Incorporated (Unified for Progress), which zealously campaigned against the kidnappings. Kaisa's leader Teresita Ang-See, however, was a different kind of activist. Her concern was to keep the community protected and defended, while her predecessors — Laurel and Lee — saw the community as part of Philippine society, whose perils and hopes were no different from other Filipinos.

It remains to be seen whether Kaisa will eventually repeat what the activists of the 1960s and the martial law era had done. The prospects of this happening appear positive, for despite the abductions, Chinese integration continued. At the start of the twenty-first century, 'hundreds of Chinese [had moved out] of the commercial niche and join the professional class (as lawyers, doctors, architects, engineers), even producing some Chinese-Filipino cultural workers (writers, visual artists, filmmakers)'. Tsinoy had become television personalities as well as movie stars. The film series *Mano Po* (Seeking your Blessings), which centred on a Chinese-Filipino family, was popularly acclaimed, suggesting, among other things, that the Tsinoy were now finally part of the national culture.

Hau is one of the best Filipino-Chinese scholars of her generation, and *The Chinese question* is just another evidence of her depth. This book is a must-read if one is interested in the vibrant and complex world of the Tsinoy, who have embedded their stories in a larger Filipino narrative.

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Thailand

Ghostly desires, queer sexuality and vernacular Buddhism in contemporary Thai Cinema

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Arnika Fuhrmann's *Ghostly desires, queer sexuality and vernacular Buddhism in contemporary Thai Cinema* takes film, religious and queer studies of Thailand in exciting new directions. Thematically a series of chapter-length analyses of significant