

Overseas Chinese College Students in the Philippines: A Case Study

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Introduction

The field research which serves as the basis of this paper was accomplished in January, February, and March of 1967 by four graduate students and two undergraduates, as part of a course on Social Science Research Methods taught by the writer at Silliman University.¹ A listing was made of 231 names of potential cultural Chinese college students, compiled from the University Registrar's record for Chinese names, and from the Silliman University Chinese Students Association (SUCSA) for Filipinized names of cultural Chinese. However, this number included numerous cultural Filipinos with Chinese names who were eliminated as discovered, bringing the number down to 152 cultural Chinese.

Research Method

After the questionnaire was prepared and pre-tested, each researcher started out with an assigned list of 33 names. He mailed a questionnaire with a covering

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¹The students involved were: Rosalinda Cuizon, Dylan Dizon, Clarita Macasieb, and Alma Temporal, Lynn Bostrom, Rowe Cadelina. Miss Macasieb did most of the processing of the data.

letter to each respondent, requesting that the questionnaire be filled out and returned before a certain deadline. It was further stated in the letter that after the deadline had expired, the researcher would fall on the respondent to assist him in the completion of the questionnaire, which in that case, was accomplished by interviewing.

In this way, a total of 106 self-administered questionnaires were completed along with 46 interviews. It is significant that only one cultural Chinese who failed to answer the questionnaire also refused to be interviewed (for reasons unstated).

The researchers had been trained beforehand in standard interviewing principles and techniques. In addition, personality tests — especially the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT) — were administered to the whole class from where the interviewers were drawn before and after the training in interviewing. This was done in accordance with recommendations made by Richardson, Dohrenwend and Klein in their book on *Interviewing: Its Forms and Functions* (1965).²

²The authors tested positively their hypothesis that personality change was not necessary for learning the skills of interviewing. The psychologist of the Negros Oriental branch of the PMHA, Miss Rosalinda Cuizon, conducted the psychological tests.

The Instrument

The research instrument employed was an adaptation of one developed by Dr. Li Yi-yuan of the Academia Sinica, Taiwan,³ combined with another used by Mr. Tull Chu in Japan. Dr. Li had made a study of Overseas Chinese College students in Taiwan, focusing upon their traditional Chinese attitudes compared with the cultures of the countries they came from and the previous colonial (Western) culture. The Silliman study requested the respondents to compare their traditional Chinese attitudes with the present Philippine culture and the former colonial (Western) culture. In addition, by utilizing a section of the Tull Chu instrument, a political dimension was added to the Silliman study. The instrument was so constructed that it could be either self-administered as a questionnaire or employed by the researcher as an interview schedule.

The research instrument contained 65 items arranged in three parts. Part I was designed to derive demographic and descriptive data about the respondent and his background. Part II sought to elicit the respondent's attitudes towards traditional Chinese culture in comparison with the present Philippine culture and the former colonial Philippine culture. Part III, finally, made an attempt at getting the respondents' reactions towards the divided political situation existing between the "Peoples' Government" of mainland China on the one hand, and Taiwan or the Republic of China, on the other.

The questionnaire was written in English in accordance with standard Philippine college classroom practice, and all interviews were conducted in English.

³ Dr. Li's instrument was based on one used by Robert and Ai-li Chin among college students of Taiwan.

This contrasts with previous research done by the writer among the older generation Chinese in Ilocos.⁴ In that case the language used was usually either Hokkien or the Philippine vernacular; only for more highly educated respondents, Mandarin or English had been used.

In this college student study, the usual length of interviewing time from 20 to 30 minutes, varying slightly with the situation. The questions were generally understood and answered without difficulty, except for the portion which called for the respondents to evaluate the colonial culture of the Philippines. Usually the answer given was that the respondent did not have enough background or knowledge to make a good evaluation. This was significant in suggesting not only a lack of experience and knowledge on the part of some, but also a reluctance to tell Filipinos that the situation for Chinese had been considerably better under the colonial regime.

The other portion of the questionnaire which caused some difficulty in answering was the one dealing with the Chinese "Fatherland". Non-contact with China was most often given as a reason if there was lack of concern, especially among those who are Philippine citizens or who expect to "elect" Philippine citizenship. For example, one respondent wrote that he was "more concerned about the Philippines" while another one wrote, "I am a Filipino."

While there are strong acculturative influences of Philippine culture upon second generation Chinese born and reared in the Philippines, it was found, as predicted by a few Overseas Chinese friends

⁴ See the writer's Ph.D. Thesis, "Chinese Acculturation in Ilocos: Economic, Political, Religious" (1964), on file in the library of Silliman University, or available through Microfilms, Inc., Ann Arbor, Mich.

who previously had read the questionnaire, that cultural Chinese would hesitate to reveal their inner feelings about the fact that their parents and families were better off under the previous colonial regime. Even though some changes have been for the better under Philippine independence, the discriminating nationalization laws and anti-alien laws have threatened their capacity to make a living. But how could they speak frankly of this problem in a non-personal, scientific study? Obviously, this was a limitation of the research project.

A similar limitation, of course, applies to the political questions. A Chinese in Communist China knows that he has only one political regime to support. Likewise, there is no option in Nationalist China. However, in such places as Japan and Hong Kong, he may have some freedom to support one regime or the other. In the Philippines, whose government recognizes only the Republic of China at Taipei, the Chinese again feels that he has little choice. But despite these limitations, due to the assurance that respondents would remain anonymous and that no answers would be used against them, a considerable variety of opinions were expressed.

The following tentative conclusions can be derived from an analysis of the data.

This generation of Chinese born in the Philippines is quite different from the previous generation. Whereas their parents (particularly fathers) came to the Philippines to make their fortune and then return to their home village in South China for retirement, these young people want to stay in the Philippines. They feel that they belong in the Philippines and anyway, they have no place to go.

The parents hold to a filial piety complex with a dominant economic orientation to serve: a) patrilineal family prosperity, b) loyalty to Chinese culture and people, and c) worship or respect for their ancestors. Most of the young Chinese people lean towards a dominant orientation of acceptance and status in the Philippines even though the majority of them have attended Chinese schools. While they seek economic security for their families and a large proportion of them still take training for business careers, Filipino acculturative influences as well as lack of contact with China have changed family values away from overriding concern with the patrilineal ancestral line towards a more bilateral approach. Women and girls have more status than their mothers had.

In the Philippines, this situation calls for a recognition of great social forces of diversity despite structured conformity at the barrio level. National leadership might well speak of "national unity in diversity without conformity," remembering the Visayans, the Tagalogs, and the Ilocanos and other large language groups as well as over 150 varieties of cultural minorities.

As a cultural minority, the Chinese likewise will continue to have a subculture. While a large proportion of them plan to "elect" Filipino citizenship upon reaching the age of 21, political assimilation does not necessarily result in a complete loss of their Chinese culture. Tolerance of differences is a necessary national policy for national integration.

Like the overseas Chinese in Taiwan and in Japan, the Chinese in the Philippines are proud of their Chinese cultural heritage and wish to preserve it. They rate Chinese culture above all others, except in the political aspect. In this latter

area, the Chinese of Japan and the Philippines express a common concern for democracy.

Also, a concern for the Fatherland is held by the majority of Chinese students. However, they do not support war as a method of settling differences. They prefer negotiation of unsettled problems, since they are all Chinese. Chinese solidarity is a prominent value, except for the government on Taiwan or the government in mainland China.

In the Philippines, it may be expected that the Chinese will continue to have a

sub-culture, even while they become more and more Filipinized. But they should not be condemned for this. Instead, even as Filipinos in the United States are encouraged to enrich American culture through a Filipino sub-culture, the Chinese in the Philippines should be expected to contribute their part in nation-building. They have talent and energy and industriousness to share. Moreover, large portions of investment capital now being exported to Taiwan and Singapore should be encouraged to remain in the Philippines, thus enabling the Philippines to make faster social and economic progress.