

THE SILENT MINORITY

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Drawing from the findings of two researches he conducted in 1967-1968, Prof. Benito Lim discusses the nature of the Chinese as an ethnic minority in the Philippines vis-à-vis the common generalizations and stereotypes about them. The Chinese do not constitute a tightly-knit, organized ethnic community, in spite of the presence of ethnic and linguistic homogeneity and formalized social institutions. Rather, they are splintered into factional groups by dialect, religion, business, and clan associations. One does not find communal cohesiveness, a common political ideology, a common religion, an efficient network or information system, an awareness of their condition of alienation in the Philippines or a strong leadership. The generalizations which the author analyzes are related to the following: (I) Chinese Separateness; (II) Chinese Schools; (III) Mixed Marriages; (IV) Media; (V) Chinese Business; and (VI) Observance of Life-Crisis Rituals. The data show that the Philippine Chinese are more strongly oriented to the Philippines.

This morning I wish to share with you a portion of my study of the Chinese communities in the Philippines during 1967-1968. Large sections of my findings are omitted, for the full report will come out in a separate publication. This paper is based mainly on two previous researches. The first research project was conducted when I was a graduate student in 1967, a research funded by the University of the Philippines Institute of Mass Communication to study the "Communication System of the Binondo Chinese." The second research project was undertaken in 1968 when I worked as a research supervisor for the Chinese segment of the International Research Associates project to conduct a national survey of the "readership and listenership" of the different media in the Philippines. The Binondo study, which began as a study of the extent to which the Chinese use their own newspapers, radio broadcasts and TV shows to communicate their values, problems, business and social affairs, was expanded to cover much of their social institutions from musical associations, photographic societies, health clubs, dramatic clubs, and clan associations, to the Federation of the Filipino-Chinese Chambers of Commerce. I suppose it is hardly necessary to dis-

cuss before an audience composed mostly of students of the Philippine Chinese community that Chinese newspapers hardly carry the most significant types of information. In fact, a systematic content analysis of three major Chinese newspapers and two radio broadcasts for a period of six months yielded a very minimal coverage of news that mainly concerned the Chinese. In the Binondo project, I was fortunate to receive the help of three newspapermen (from Chinese Commercial News, the Fookien Times, and *Kong Li Po*) who arranged for interviews with presidents and secretaries of nearly all Chinese clan associations, business, charity, and educational institutions in Manila. In the second study, I was aided by eight Chinese interviewers and given the opportunity to visit and interview 20 large Chinese communities in the Philippines from Vigan to Sulu.

The findings in the two research projects conducted from 1967 to 1968 disprove the common generalizations regarding the nature of the Chinese as an ethnic minority in the Philippines. Contrary to these generalizations, the Chinese do not constitute a tightly-knit, organized, ethnic community. Despite indications that seem to point in that direction, the essen-

tial components that make up a truly cohesive and unified community are sorely lacking. What we find are the outward trappings, the coloration of an endangered species rather than the vigorous, regenerative powers of creatures capable of controlling their own destiny. But let us turn to these stereotype generalizations levelled at the Chinese.

A Set of Stereotypes About the Chinese

The first and the most obvious is that the Chinese speak their own language, live in separate and compact quarters where they have their own separate facilities and other amenities of life. The Chinese possess, staff, and operate their own schools, newspapers and other media facilities, hospitals, civic, and other community halls and even their own cemeteries. All their social activities are channelled through their own associations which prevent them from participating in Filipino community life. Instead, the Chinese continue to observe only their own life-crises rituals, the most notable of which is the *lauriat*, and this is principally interpreted as an extravagant and wasteful display of wealth derived from the resources and labor of the Filipinos. Coupled with non-participation in the larger Filipino social activities, the Chinese are rarely converted, or if converted, are half-hearted followers of the major religions in the Philippines, especially that of Roman Catholicism. According to this reasoning, because of their physical and cultural separation, inter-marriages of Chinese and Filipinos are very rare. The last in the series of stereotyped generalizations is the frequent cause of tensions and frictions between Filipinos and Chinese, and this is that the Chinese are the capitalists, financiers, and managers of their business firms which employ Filipinos only as laborers, and that they "control" or have a "stranglehold" over the Philippine economy.

Upon closer examination, however, these generalizations cannot be fully supported by facts, or they are merely exaggerations, distortions, and half-truths. My researches showed that the so-called tightly organized and unified

Chinese community is nowhere to be found. To put the matter in a theoretical framework, the mere physical presence of ethnic and linguistic homogeneity and formalized social institutions do not necessarily bring about a sense of community among its members. Let us examine these generalizations applied to the Chinese, one by one, in order to obtain a clearer and better understanding of the nature and characteristics of the Chinese in this country.

Chinese Separateness

The first contention is that the Chinese cluster together in separate quarters. Let us remind ourselves that the tendency to seek out one's own kind is a truism for any ethnic, national, and linguistic group whether Ilokano, Chinese, Japanese, or American. In the case of the Chinese, the coming into being of "Chinatown" is not only the direct consequence of the truism that people of similar nationalities cling together, but stems from several historical forces, many of which were deliberately and artificially induced. We need not dwell on the fact that from the early beginnings Philippine-Chinese contacts were on the whole motivated by trade. Chinese merchants, ships, and enterprises antedated Spain by at least 200 years, and in spite of the long, numerous, and widespread trade contacts, no conquest of territory or people was ever attempted. When Spanish hegemony was established in Luzon, these earlier Chinese trade relations were changed and reshaped to suit colonial policies and practices.

The increase of Spaniards and Europeans in Manila and other centers attracted larger numbers of Chinese to settle in those places and to seek other pursuits besides those directly related to import and export trade. This European settlement attracted and drew together a whole array of services which the "Indios" were not willing or trained to perform, and in which the Chinese were quite adept. Thus apart from merchants, the Chinese counted among their ranks artisans in jewelry, furniture making, weaving, tailoring, bakers and cooks, blacksmiths, printers, — a variety of skills hitherto unknown to

the larger native populace which was engaged in agriculture, fishing, and handicrafts. Although pursued mainly on a subsistence level, these allowed them some measure of self-sufficiency without being forced to work for the colonizers as wage earners. Within approximately a century, native self-sufficiency was in due course shattered. The "Indios" were swallowed up in the colonial economy in ways that, as we all know, placed them unjustly as economic losers in their own land.

But to return quickly to how Spanish colonial policy became instrumental in creating "Chinatowns," we have seen how the very presence of Spaniards attracted more Chinese to flock to the Philippines in large numbers. This situation intensified in time by the force of its own momentum, but the most significant factor in providing a prominent economic role to the Chinese was operation of the Manila Galleon Trade. This trade, oriented towards Chinese goods in return for Mexican silver, made Manila merely an entrepot where Chinese middlemen were the indispensable brokers. The Galleon Trade epitomizes the Chinese role as middlemen in Philippine economy. This analogy can be applied to more recent times, wherein Chinese act as salesmen, distributors, and middle-level entrepreneurs, manufacturers of local materials and resources, informal bankers, buyers, sellers, and transporters of goods. There thus developed a sort of mutual dependence and a tense relationship between Spaniards and Chinese. The former who took the risks to control enterprise became dependent on the entrepreneurial acumen of the latter. It should not, therefore, come as a surprise that the Spaniards saw in the large number of Chinese settling in their colonial "empire" and engaging in businesses of all kinds a potential rival against whom they systematically instituted discriminatory laws and practices.

The creation of the *parian* wherein Chinese dwellings and activities were restricted was the inevitable outcome of this Spanish hostility towards the Chinese. Needless to say, the Chinese were confined in an area where they could be under direct and easy control. Taxes, corvee

labor, and other forms of tribute were exacted, but public facilities were not provided. In time as the population grew, the *parian* became no longer a mere stopping place for temporary sojourners, but a full-blown settlement with shops, schools, and churches, and along with these, overcrowding and isolation from the total Philippine community became endemic. The physical expansion of the *parian* from its nucleus near Plaza de Binondo to include all of Binondo, portions of Tondo and Santa Cruz took over 350 years, representing years of labor and capital accumulation. Despite the high price of real estate, the unsightliness and the lack of public services in these districts hardly make them enviable places to live in. By now it should be clear that the physical separation of the Chinese has been largely the result of historical forces over which the Chinese had very little control.

Besides, the phenomenon of the *parian* is true only of the city of Manila, and is hardly present in other towns and regions. The physical separateness of "Chinatown" becomes more pronounced also because it is located in the nation's capital that offers many important goods and services from *panciterias* to machinery. And what can be said about the attitudes of the denizens of the *parian*? Why hasn't Chinatown fizzled out along with the Spanish colonial rule? Answers to these questions have already been suggested in the previous discussion. There are other sides of these questions that ought to be brought out. In interviews conducted among Binondo dwellers, most of them said that they would not mind moving out of "Chinatown" if they could afford it and their livelihood did not necessitate their constant presence there.

In regions where business firms are more dispersed, Chinese readily live among Filipinos. Given the opportunities of education, training, and economic means, Chinese prefer to live like most Filipinos in the suburbs where there are better amenities for living. In the provinces, Chinese live among Filipinos and often, because they are inconspicuous, participate in the social life of the community. It is of course possible

to find clusters of Chinese in the provinces. They are either in commercial districts, or Chinese who are unable to fend for themselves. Instead of becoming mendicants, they live among other Chinese from whom they receive support and aid. So much for the so-called separateness of the Chinese. Let us turn to the Chinese schools, which are often considered the "bastions of Chinese chauvinism" and the principal hindrances to assimilation or integration into Philippine society.

Chinese Schools

Contrary to usual misconceptions, Chinese schools are not agencies of political indoctrination and inculcation of a set of social values to insure loyalty to any one leader or to the Chinese community itself. Chinese schools do indeed have as part of their curricula Chinese language and history, the materials of which center on the traditional Chinese values based on Confucianism and the advocacy of the cause of the Republic of China (Taiwan). But my studies from in-depth interviews, conducted from 1967-1968 with students, teachers, administrators, parents, members of the school board and school benefactors as well as my own close personal experience with Chinese schools in various parts of the country showed that they are not effective instruments for their stated and avowed aims. On the whole, there is wide agreement that the schools fail to cultivate in their students any kind of significant values based on Chinese civilization. At the same time, it is felt that there is an ever-widening disparity between book learning and the realities of life in the Philippines.

Students and some teachers have grown skeptical about schooling itself, especially in the Chinese schools. Many of them think that education in a Chinese school does not necessarily assure them of higher income or even of a job. According to them, the rich Chinese with little or no education will be rich, while poor Chinese, even highly educated, will end up serving the interest of these rich Chinese. What they can point out as the positive function of

Chinese schools is that they serve as socializing centers for the young until they are old enough to "earn a living." While they agree that the Chinese schools equip them with some literacy in Chinese, a little English and some Pilipino as well as some skills in science and mathematics, they consider these of minimal importance. What is clear from my findings is that Chinese schools are not the rallying points for communal sociopolitical causes.

It should be pointed out that the Chinese schools are of great variety and show remarkable differences between each other in terms of organization, institutional affiliation, and means of support. Some are organized according to provincial or regional groupings, others are organized on religious lines, Catholic, Protestant, for example, with still wide divergences among them. Others are organized according to dominant dialect groups that attend the schools, i.e., Hokkien or Cantonese. Although their Philippine curriculum follows the one prescribed by the Department of Education and Culture, supervised directly by the Director of Private Schools, their Chinese curriculum is something else. Some of them follow strictly the guidelines set down by the Republic of China through its embassy in Manila, others formulate their own curriculum according to their religious orientation or the availability of staff and teaching materials.

Given this diversity, it is difficult to see how the Chinese schools can be instruments for transmitting a single ideology to the school children.

Mixed Marriages

It is the general belief that Chinese rarely marry Filipinos. On the whole, my findings indicate that there are many factors that the Chinese consider. National ethnic origin is not considered paramount in choosing a mate, but a combination of many factors; among them are religion, socioeconomic status, education, business connections, and personal compatibility. The only Chinese who still believe that Chinese should only marry another Chinese

who speaks the same dialect are those who are illiterate, the very old women, and the middle-income group who derive their main livelihood from Chinese-associated firms. And even this group which still believes in strictly Chinese marriages are dwindling. To the very rich and the very poor, national ethnic origin is a negligible factor in their choice of a mate.

I would like to raise an important question regarding the assumption that mixed marriages would automatically bring about integration of the Chinese into the Filipino community. Field findings seem to suggest the opposite. Of the 40 couples of mixed marriages studied, almost 75 percent of the Filipino partners were integrated into the Chinese community. They are integrated into the Chinese system in the sense that the Filipino spouses learn to speak some Chinese, send their children to Chinese schools, and observe or undergo Chinese life-crises rituals. The Filipino spouses also live in the Chinese community and orient their lives according to Chinese practices. Those Filipino partners integrated into the Chinese system are mainly wives dependent on their Chinese husbands for their livelihood. Of the 25 percent where the Filipino is not absorbed, but on the contrary takes the Chinese spouse to the Filipino community are those who possess relatively high socioeconomic status, better education, and generally have strong personalities. All of these findings show that the idea of mixed marriages does not necessarily ensure assimilation into the larger Filipino community. What is clear is that assimilation depends on many factors, and not simply on bringing together couples of different national ethnic origins. Finally, let us remind ourselves that intermarriages are rare simply because the Chinese constitute less than two percent of the total Philippine population, and therefore even the intermarriage that does take place seems imperceptible.

Media

Generally, except for the Chinese language and the personal notices regarding deaths and

marriages, the contents, nature of presentation, treatment of news, and the principles of selectivity exercised in the media are the same as those found in their Filipino counterparts. In fact, most news items in the Chinese media are taken mainly from the Philippine media.

Ironically Chinese media were not effective vehicles of Chinese public opinion. Sensitive issues that involve Philippine-Chinese relations were carefully avoided. There was no systematic attempt to educate the Chinese about the conditions in the Philippines and policies of the Philippine government regarding Chinese or other foreigners doing business in the Philippines. About the only time that the Chinese media try to rally the Chinese community is when they want to solicit funds for some charitable causes such as aid to victims of natural disasters when there is a nationwide campaign given to it by Philippine media. What were printed were the political opinions sympathetic to the Republic of China. News about mainland China were usually printed by one paper (the Chinese Commercial News) and even then these news items were invariably translations from Western press agencies such as AP, UPI, AFP, etc.

Chinese media transmit the same popular culture which Philippine media transmit, such as Hollywood movies and movie stars, TV and radio personalities, with the added difference that aside from American and Filipino celebrities, Hong Kong and Republic of China movie celebrities were also covered. Fashion shows, romantic escapist literature, and a great deal of advertising mainly of Japanese, American, and Republic of China products were the common fare. From our content analysis of the media, about the only common value the Chinese media cultivated was to exhort the Chinese to consume more and more of the advertised products, and to foster a great degree of colonial-mindedness and escapism from the realities of day-to-day life.

However, I should like to point out one important role of the media namely, that they kept the Chinese language alive, and through

this means reinforced the sense of Chinese identity. It is recognition of this that most probably led some American religious missions and the Voice of America to broadcast some of their programs in Chinese.

Chinese Business

Indeed it is in trade where the Chinese have a system of interlocking interest and cohesion. Here we need to qualify that reference is made to Chinese who are now naturalized Filipino citizens or natural-born Filipinos of Chinese ethnic origin. We find Chinese operating crucial sectors of the economy from manufacture to milling of staple cereals, the processing and distributing of copra, farm produce, import-export business, domestic distribution of goods, warehousing, etc.

But this system of economic relationship is mainly the consequence of long historical experience of the Chinese in these businesses and other enterprises rather than, as has been suggested by some observers, as a deliberate attempt on the part of the Chinese to have a stranglehold on the Philippine economy. The system was developed and grew by accident of history. For at the very beginning, as we said earlier, Chinese contact with the Filipinos was primarily for purposes of trade. With the coming of the Spaniards, the economic policy thrust upon the Chinese the role of traders and was intended to confine them to such related activities. The Chinese were barred from engaging in mining, agriculture, and many of the professions. American rule in the Philippines did not differ to any considerable degree from the Spanish practice when it came to the dealings with the Chinese. The discriminatory policy against Chinese immigration was in fact laid down by those two colonizers. Present policy toward the Chinese in a way echoes two previous colonial governments, and has shown little evidence that the Chinese are welcome into the Philippine polity. As a consequence of this long historical experience in commerce, industry, and manufacture, the Chinese became adept in adapting to the

government policies and the conditions in the country. It is no wonder then that in the Philippines, unlike in countries where Chinese are not confined only to mercantile activities, the Chinese are less likely to produce scientists, philosophers, or creative writers.

Since Chinese through history have become specialists in Philippine economy, they have evolved not only the economic network for efficient and profitable business transactions but also developed within this network a system of social control whereby members in the system can be pressured to comply. More than by churches and schools, social control is more effectively exercised by this business network. This network comprises capitalists, financiers, creditors, debtors, middlemen, distributors, agents, salesmen, and retailers in related businesses. When social control is enforced, it is mainly by means of mediation using the clan associations as venue. The aim of this mediation is to ease sources of conflict or to reach a compromise if resolution of conflicts cannot be achieved. It is within this business network, which includes the respective families and followers in the network, that we can pinpoint the values inculcated most effectively by the Chinese: business acuity, cunning, ability to deal with people and lead them, negotiating skill in business transactions and with Philippine government officials and agents, strong business and sometimes political connections, and most of all, the importance of wealth. Interviews with members of this business network, observations, and personal experience do not show enough evidence that the system is used for any other ulterior purpose than for business and profits.

Observance of Life-Crises Rituals

Life-crises rituals such as a birthday celebration, baptism, engagement, wedding, and funeral rituals form the most visible focus of social activities that dramatize Chinese communal values. They are the spectacles that Filipinos generally consider as distinctly

Chinese. Yet to the Chinese scholars and those who know authentic Chinese rituals in China, these practices are localized only among the southern coastal provinces of Kwangtung and Fukien. Even then, these ritual practices were carried out only among the middle and lower strata of these Chinese provinces. Moreover, through the years, the rituals have been transformed into something which is a distinctly Philippine-Chinese subculture, perpetuated by a generation of elderly women who came over to the Philippines before World War II. This does not mean that these rituals are only observed by this age group. Actually they are undertaken by all who can afford them. Seventy-seven percent of the sampled couples who were going to be engaged or to be married were interviewed, and said that they would undergo these elaborate rituals. And almost 92 percent of all Chinese interviewed, whether rich or poor, said that they would carry out funeral rituals. Yet when interviewed at length, 60 percent of those who carried out or underwent such rituals could hardly explain the meaning of the rituals. And those who claimed that they understood them gave varying explanations and different versions. There was very little agreement on the actual meaning of the rituals and the elaborate sequences and paraphernalia they involve. But with or without comprehension, about 65 percent of the Chinese interviewed claimed to have spent almost half of their lifetime savings for these rituals, especially for engagements and weddings.

More confounding, perhaps, is that 75 percent of those who went through these rituals claim that they did not completely believe in the rituals. Married couples who underwent the elaborate rituals of engagement and wedding claimed that they were "expensive" and "impractical." Still, when asked whether they would undergo the same rituals all over again, more than 60 percent said they would.

Regardless of the fact that these rituals are often regarded by the Chinese themselves as "expensive," and "impractical," they do serve many crucial functions. In very practical ways, most of the participants get some returns from

their expenses in the form of monetary and material gifts. Some even gain a profit over and above the actual cost of the celebration and feast. But more important than material returns is that these rituals function as the affirmation of the celebrants' personal achievements and social status. It is only during such occasions that the individual Chinese can gather other Chinese and Filipino friends in a celebration that centers on his person. If it is a wedding celebration, it is the recognition that the parents have successfully brought up a son or a daughter who has now reached the age of maturity and who now can bring him grandchildren.

On another level, this is an affirmation of Confucian values, and on still another it is a recognition of the parents' lifetime achievement. Symbolically, the capacity to gather people, particularly those who wield power within the Chinese community and among Filipinos who hold important government offices, means that the ritual celebrant is a man of consequence. The length of time given to the ritual, the lavish and elaborate feast, the attendant publicity in the form of invitations, newspaper announcements, and large numbers of visitors invited, all serve to show that the celebrant has economic means and a large network of business connections. It is here that the Chinese gain recognition for their lifetime efforts as successful traders. The intense concentration of the Chinese around the performance of these rites can be interpreted as the consequence of the limited avenues for human achievement open to them, and the rituals therefore become outlets for self-realization. Indeed, one can say that the socialization process among the Chinese young can be summed up in the phrase *chuan chi*, "able to earn money." The possibilities open to Filipino children are wider in scope. They can aspire to become the President of the Republic, a statesman patriot, a religious leader and saint, a great artist, a great thinker, or even a revolutionary. These are not only denied by circumstances to the Chinese, but they are consistently suppressed and scorned as neurotic aberrations

only engaged in by the misguided children of the very rich or by the *huana*, meaning Filipinos.

The observance of life-crises rituals has also provoked another misconception, according to which such celebrations are observed by the Chinese as means to assert their separateness from the larger Philippine community. But from our detailed discussion and analysis of the significance of these rituals from the point of view of the Chinese, the more prominent aspect about these rituals is that they reveal their need to become persons of significance in the community. If the sense of being different or the idea of separateness is projected, it is an inadvertent by-product experienced especially by the uninvited outside observers. What these rituals actually mean is that the Chinese traders and merchants, as they are, hanker with a universal human need, to derive some meaning out of their lives and efforts, and that these rituals somehow best dramatize and fulfill this human need.

The foregoing discussion shows that the Chinese are not a tightly knit group, socially, ideologically or, for that matter and despite a common language, even culturally. What holds them together is their dependence on each other for trade which involves a system of credit, business connections and information. In their business transactions, they prefer to deal with other Chinese. Even here this is true only of the small wholesale and retail trade. In terms of large corporations (which are owned by naturalized Filipinos), such arrangements as credit without receipts, or preference for Chinese dealers, distributors, and executives, are not uniformly or consistently observed.

Neither is their observance of life-crises rituals an indication of communal unity.

What we can find actually in the Chinese community is a tenuous network of personal contacts, associations, blood relations, and business connections; a remnant of the Chinese culture in the form of language; a faint echo of Confucian precepts such as filial piety; and other material culture — foremost of which is the Chinese cuisine. We do not find in the Chinese community communal cohesiveness, a common political ideology, a common religion, an efficient network or information system, or an awareness of their condition of alienation in the Philippines. There is no strong leadership which can organize or rally them together to work for their common interest. They are fragmented, splintered into factional groups by dialect, religion, business and clan connections. They are, in fact, competitive to the point of waging economic aggression against each other, and their young people, especially the more educated and sensitive ones, are demoralized; for they see no future in their own generation in the light of more and more stringent government policy and legislation directed mainly against the Chinese.

Considering this evidence, it is unlikely that the Chinese in the Philippines can constitute a "fifth column," as has been hinted by some writers. Our study shows that there is no evidence that a "fifth column" of any ideological coloration will materialize. What is clear in our study is that the Chinese need the avenues to become part of the Philippine community, and that like all Filipinos, they want a prosperous and peaceful country, and if given a chance, they would give their full allegiance to the Republic of the Philippines.