

Douglas Kammen and Jonathan Chen, *Cina Timor: Baba, Hakka, and Cantonese in the Making of Timor-Leste*. New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Southeast Asia Studies [Yale Southeast Asia Monograph Series 67], 2019, xviii + 240 pp. ISBN: 9780985042998, price: USD 37.00 (cloth); 9780985042981, USD 26.00 (paperback); 0985042982, USD 15.00 (ebook).

Until recently, the tiny Overseas Chinese community of Timor-Leste, known locally as *Cina Timor* (Timorese Chinese), had the dubious distinction of being one of the least-known Chinese communities of Southeast Asia. With Kammen and Chen's 2019 book, a detailed history of the community has become available, covering the period from about 1800, when Chinese settlers made their first appearance in the archival record, up until the end of the Portuguese colonial rule and the beginning of the Indonesian occupation in 1975. The book is organized in 9 chapters, which follow a roughly chronological order, interrupted only by a chapter discussing the demographic make-up of the community and how it changed over time. Chapter 9 beautifully concludes the book by taking the reader on a stroll through the Chinese cemetery of Timor-Leste's capital, Dili, recapitulating the most important historical events and developments by illustrating how they are reflected in the cemetery's graves and monuments. The book's final pages are occupied by two appendices: the first gives a list of Timorese ruling families who intermarried with ethnic Chinese. The second is a list of officeholders in several Chinese organizations in Portuguese Timor, starting in the early 1900s.

The origin and development of the East Timorese Chinese community is embedded in a detailed account of the broader geo-political context. Events that took place in Portugal and China obviously directly affected the ethnic Chinese in Portuguese Timor. Up to World War II, the Dutch East Indies were another major player. In fact, the roots of the ethnic Chinese community of Timor-Leste lie in the Dutch-held western half of Timor. Before the colonial spheres of influence on the island consolidated in the second half of the nineteenth century, West Timor's Kupang was the center of Chinese trading activities and settlement on the island. In 1942, Timor's strategic location at the intersection of Southeast Asia, Australia, and the Pacific caused it to become a theatre of war, with a small allied force attempting to repel the Japanese invasion. After the war, the Dutch colonial state was replaced by Indonesia, whose 24-year occupation of East Timor was a defining event in the nation's recent history. Researching the history of the ethnic Chinese of Timor-Leste thus necessitated locating and processing historical materials in multiple languages. The authors, Douglas Kammen and Jonathan Chen (Chen Jieyang), were uniquely qualified to undertake this work: Kammen has not only lived and

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worked in Timor-Leste, but has also extensively researched the history of the country, focusing in particular on conflict and violence. Chen's research focus is on Indonesia and its politics and includes Indonesian-Chinese relations as well as the ethnic Chinese communities in Indonesia.

Overseas Chinese communities have often simplistically been portrayed as either ruthless profit-makers exploiting indigenous populations, opportunistic collaborators of the colonial regime, a dangerous fifth column for communist China, or as innocent victims of racist violence. Kammen and Chen aim to draw a more nuanced picture of the *Cina Timor* community. They rely not only on colonial sources and other outsider reports but have also obtained writings of community members and conducted interviews, and are thus able to incorporate insiders' perspectives. Throughout the book, the authors also draw attention to the diversity within the community. The origin and linguistic background of the Chinese immigrants who made their way to Portuguese Timor are discussed in detail, as are the circumstances and causes of their immigration: some arrived as free traders or craftsmen, others as refugees in times of turmoil, and yet others were forcibly taken to Timor as deportees. These circumstances were intimately connected to immigrants' social status within the community. A further major difference existed between those who resided in one of the colony's major urban centers and those who settled down in remote rural areas. The former tended to have an ethnically Chinese social network and be in close contact with the Portuguese colonial authorities, whereas the latter, lacking such a network, tended to be more integrated into indigenous East Timorese society.

Among the goals of the book is to reconstruct "the making of *Cina Timor*" (p. 4) and the emergence of "a distinct *Cina Timor* identity" (see, for instance, pp. 4, 66). Today, there is "general agreement that people of Chinese descent who lived in Portuguese Timor and continue to live in present-day Timor-Leste are *Cina Timor*" (p. 165). First of all, it is important to mention that the term *Cina Timor* does not carry the racist overtones that are associated with the term *Cina* in Indonesia. It is unfortunate that this explanation only appears in a footnote to the book's final chapter. Secondly, it is also used as a self-designation by the ethnic Chinese of West Timor (Malagina 2015). Therefore, a little more discussion of the term, as well as its use in the phrase 'a distinct *Cina Timor* identity', might have been warranted.

The emergence of an East Timorese Chinese identity clearly was a very gradual process: the early immigrants of the nineteenth century would have primarily identified as being from a certain village, clan, or county. By the middle of the twentieth century, an ethnic Chinese community characterized by a high level of solidarity had developed, presumably in response to repress-

ive and discriminatory policies from the colonial authorities. While young East Timorese Chinese expressed a sense of pride in their adopted homeland, the majority of the Chinese community did not mingle much with the indigenous East Timorese (e.g., Nicol 2002:58). It was the Indonesian occupation (1975–1999) and the hardships endured by indigenous East Timorese and Chinese-Timorese alike which gave rise to a sense of shared East Timoresehood encompassing both groups (pp. 165–6, cf. England 1999). The evolution of a specifically East Timorese Chinese identity also appears to be closely linked to East Timorese Chinese refugees in Australia, who formed close-knit diaspora communities with a sense of identity distinct from the broader Chinese-Australian or Australian Hakka ones (p. 166, cf. Wise 2006). While it is clear that the emergence of an identity is not easy to extract from historical sources, perhaps the authors' take on its development could have been discussed somewhat more explicitly.

Finally, it would appear that there was some confusion, to the last moment in the printing process, regarding the book's subtitle. On the front cover, it is given as *Baba, Hakka, and Cantonese in the Making of Timor-Leste*; the back cover says *Baba, Hakka, and Cantonese in the Making of Timor*, and on the title page, it appears as *Baba, Hakka, and Cantonese in the Making of East Timor*. Given that the name Timor-Leste prominently evokes the modern independent state, which gained independence from Indonesia in 2002, the designation *East Timor* may actually have been a better choice for the front cover: as noted above, the book discusses the history of the *Cina Timor* community up until 1975 only, with events that took place after that mentioned only in a brief outlook on its final pages. Readers looking to find information about how East Timorese Chinese people contributed to Timor-Leste's independence from Indonesia will thus be disappointed.

As the first substantial piece of scholarship focussing on Timor-Leste's long-neglected ethnic Chinese community, Kammen and Chen's book does a fantastic job of putting it on the map of Overseas Chinese studies. It is an impressive piece of work which is meticulously researched, richly illustrated, and engagingly written, making it a highly valuable resource for scholars interested in social change in Timor-Leste, Overseas Chinese communities in Southeast Asia, and Hakka history and migration. Due to the affordable pricing, the book is not out of reach of the non-scholarly section of the target audience, that is, the people of Timor-Leste and in particular, those identifying as East Timorese Chinese, in Timor-Leste as well as abroad. It is to be hoped that its appearance is sufficiently publicized to these audiences so that interested individuals can read up on their community's history.

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