Introduction

“The Chinese Question” Revisited: The Tsinoyes in the Philippines

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As Caroline S. Hau has cogently argued, “the idea that ‘Chinese’ migrants and their descendants constitute a ‘foreign’ group who pose political, economic, cultural, and social ‘problems’ for the postcolonial Philippines nation-state”¹ lies at the core of the predicament faced by the Tsinoyes in the Philippines. From the early days of the Sangleys to the 1896 revolution led by José Rizal, Andrés Bonifacio, and Emilio Aguinaldo, the history of the Chinese in the Philippines has been characterized by mixture and marginalization. According to Edgar Wickberg, the history of the Tsinoyes dates back to the Sung Dynasty.² Wickberg claims that the role of the Chinese and Chinese mestizos has been “of great significance to Philippine historical development.”³ He points out that the Chinese demonstrated their talents in commerce and “rose to prominence as . . . middlemen wholesalers of local produce and foreign imports.”⁴

- 1 Caroline S. Hau, *The Chinese Question: Ethnicity, Nation, and Region in and Beyond the Philippines* (Singapore: National University of Singapore Press, 2014), 6.
- 2 Edgar Wickberg, *The Chinese in Philippine Life, 1850–1898* (1965; rpt. Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2000), 3.
- 3 E. Wickberg, “The Chinese Mestizo in Philippine History,” trans. Go Bon Juan (1964; rpt. Manila: Kaisa Para Sa Kaunlaran, 2001), 1.
- 4 *Ibid.*, 47.

Likewise, Evelyn Hu-DeHart notes that “European trading posts in Southeast Asia, such as Manila and Batavia, attracted a large number of Chinese migrant merchants.”⁵ Chinese merchants played a key intermediary role in the Manila Galleons, which sailed between Manila and Acapulco and maintained the vital trade network between the Pacific and the Atlantic. In those years, the Sangleys went back and forth between Macao, Manila, and Mexico. The establishment of Manila’s Chinatown, the first of its kind, in 1594 testifies to the fact of the Chinese settlement in the Philippines and their thriving economy. By 1603, the population of the Chinese had reached approximately 20,000, while the Spaniards numbered only about 1,000.⁶ In short, the history of the Philippines, as Chinese Filipino historian Richard T. Chu has claimed, has been “more Tsinoy than we admit.”⁷

In recent years, tensions have risen in Sino-Filipino relations due to the dispute over the islands in the West Philippine Sea. There has also been a heightened sense of anti-Chinese sentiment in the Philippines as a result of the growing presence of new Chinese workers, immigrants, and merchants. Consequently, we think it is high time to revisit the “Chinese question” in the Philippines and we are delighted to include four research papers and one filed note in this special issue. Together they cover the Tsinoy in the Philippines past and present and point toward new directions for the future.

The first paper, “Infodemics and Deadly Racist Viruses: COVID-19 Response in the Chinese-Filipino Community,” written by Teresita Ang See, the founder and director of KAISA Heritage Center in Manila, updates us about the “Chinese question” in the wake of COVID-19. Ang-See accounts how the last decade has experienced an escalation of anti-Chinese sentiment due to many factors, particularly the growing presence of illegal immigrants, the continuing dispute between China and the Philippines over the islands in the West Philippine Sea, and President Duterte’s China policy. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the already heightened anti-Chinese sentiment. She thus explores the racism vented against the Chinese and how the local Chinese-Filipino

5 Hu Qiyu [Evelyn Hu-DeHart] 胡其瑜, “Shiliu shiji yilai de Meizhou huaren yimin yu quanqiu hua 十六世紀以來的美洲華人移民與全球化 [Chinese Immigration to America from the Sixteenth Century to the Present and Globalization],” trans. Wu Yeqi 吳彥祺, in *Yidong zhi min: haiwai huaren yanjiu de xinshi 移動之民：海外華人研究的新視* [*I’m Migrant: New Perspectives of Overseas Chinese Studies*], eds. Chang Chiung-hwai 張瓊惠 and Liang Iping 梁一萍 (Taipei: Guoli Taiwan shifan daxue chubanshe, 2018), 31.

6 Wickberg, *The Chinese in Philippine Life*, 3–4.

7 Phrase from the title of Richard T. Chu, ed., *More Tsinoy Than We Admit: Chinese-Filipino Interactions Over the Centuries* (San Francisco: Arkipelago Books, 2015).

communities have responded through positive actions to help mitigate anti-Chinese sentiment.

While Ang See focuses on the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, Alvin Jason Camba and Shirley Lung turn to social media and present fascinating analyses in their article, “Chinese Capital as a Cultural Object: Self-Identification and Filipino-Chinese Discourses on Sinicization, Brokerage, and Distinction.” Camba and Lung analyze how Chinese capital inflows in the Philippines have been shaping the self-identification of Chinese Filipinos. Through a discursive analysis of five Filipino Chinese social media groups with a combined total of at least 25,000 participants, they argue that comment writers in these Filipino Chinese groups readily interpreted Chinese capital in the Philippines. They identify three distinct discourses—the Sinicization discourse, which defines Filipino Chinese through a singular definition of Chineseness; the brokerage discourse, which represents a synthesis of Chinese, Filipino, and Western identities; and the discourse of distinction, which distinguishes Filipino Chinese as being different from either the mainland Chinese or the native Filipinos. Specifically, they are interested in the impact of China’s rise on the self-understanding of Chinese Filipinos and how Chinese capital in the Philippines has shaped the self-identification of Chinese Filipinos across the country. Camba and Lung, by making available information collected from social media comment writers, thus provide us with stimulating big data analyses for research.

The third paper, “Deportation of ‘Undesirable’ Chinese in the Philippines, 1837–1882,” by Jely Agama Galang, examines the deportation of “undesirable” Chinese in the Philippines between 1837, when the first group of Chinese “criminals” were transported, and 1882, when the government suspended deportation and opted for expulsion as a state policy. Using previously unutilized primary materials in Philippine and Spanish archives, Galang seeks to understand why and how the colonial government resorted to this form of regulation in order to remedy some pressing concerns related to crime and criminality. He probes the actors, institutions, and processes involved in transporting the “criminals.” By analyzing a number of cases of Chinese deportees, Galang argues that while deportation served its punitive and rehabilitative purposes, the Spanish authorities also pragmatically used it to address the state’s dire need for labor.

The last essay, “A New Embassy from Taiwan: The Zheng Regime as Extraterritorial Arbiter of Ethnic Peace in Manila, 1662–1683,” by Patrick Stein, offers a historicized reading and extensive analysis of letters written by Zheng Chenggong and Zhen Jing in 1662 and 1663 to Spanish officials in Manila. Stein argues that these letters proffer some of the only surviving records of the Zheng leaders’ involvement in the rights and privileges of Chinese migrant

merchants. He maintains that these documents provide a seventeenth-century Chinese perspective on colonial Spanish policies regarding Sino-segregation. The Zheng regime's active intervention, in contrast to Qing's disinterest in overseas Chinese, forced the Spanish to reduce their oppression of the Chinese. The Zhengs' intermediation is therefore compared to an "embassy," for, as Stein puts it, "For the first time in history, the Sangleys had found an active, energetic state willing and able to intervene on their behalf."

Finally, Richard T. Chu, in his research note, "The Chinese in Cuba, Trinidad and Tobago, and Panama: Lessons in History, Identity, and Culture, and Interconnections with the Chinese in the Philippines," provides interesting thoughts on a comparative approach to the Chinese in the Caribbean and those in the Philippines. His aim is threefold. First, he describes a general history of the Chinese diaspora in the three Caribbean countries and discusses some of the contemporary issues these communities face as ethnic minorities in their respective countries. Second, Chu compares the experiences of their members with those of the Chinese in the Philippines. Third, he discusses how scholarship on these Chinese diasporic communities can provide us with ideas on what frameworks can be similarly applied to further studies of the "Chinese question" in the Philippines.

Taken as a whole, the five papers provide us with important insights on "the Chinese question" in the context of COVID-19, the rise of social media, the nineteenth-century anti-Chinese deportation, the seventeenth-century Zheng regime's intervention, and the comparison with the ethnic Chinese communities in or around the Caribbean. They cover a wide range of time periods and include various island states besides the Philippines, such as Cuba, Trinidad and Tobago, and Taiwan, as well as Panama. Together, they signify the vast implications of "the Chinese question" in the Philippines and beyond. It is our sincere hope that they'd serve as a signpost for future studies.