Yuling Zhang


This book is authored by Yuling ZHANG, a young ethnic Chinese anthropologist teaching at Yamaguchi Prefectural University of Japan. It is revised based on her Ph.D dissertation. Four cultural symbols are examined in-depth in the book, including Chinese schools, lion dance, the Guandi Temple, and the Kobe Overseas Chinese History Museum with a focus on how these cultural symbols were embodied and exhibited in the cultural activities of ethnic Chinese of Yokohama and Kobe. Furthermore, it analyzes the identity of ethnic Chinese in Japan as well as the creation of ethnic Chinese culture.

This book consists of six chapters in addition to the Introduction and Conclusion. In Chapter One, the author traces the historical development of cultural activities organized by local ethnic Chinese that have taken place in Chinatown since the 1980s. In Chapter Two, the author explores Chinese schools in Japan and argues that these Chinese schools have been actively revising their education concepts as well as textbook contents in accordance with the historical requirements and adapting to the changes of ethnic Chinese community. In Chapter Three, the traditional form of lion dance is analyzed in chronological order. By doing so, the author convincingly shows how the younger generation of ethnic Chinese became aware of their Chineseness and gradually strengthened their identity as ethnic Chinese through participation in the lion dance related activities. In Chapter Four, the author reveals how local ethnic Chinese actively create a cultural symbol and assign a clear ethnic boundary by reconstructing the Guandi Temple as well as the Guandi festival in Yokohama’s Chinatown. In Chapter Five, the Kobe Overseas Chinese History Museum is chosen as a case study to show how the ethnic Chinese has grown with the development of Japanese society and how their history has integrated with or embodied into the Japanese history, which is a key theme to be emphasized. The author studies the images of ethnic Chinese in Japan with a focus on their contributions to Japan and the memory they share with the host society. In addition, the author contends that the history and culture of ethnic Chinese have been important elements in the cultural and economic landscape of Japan. In Chapter Six, an empirical approach is employed and more than ten cases of second or third-generation ethnic Chinese oral history recordings are...
chosen to illustrate the close relations between cultural activities and identity formation of local ethnic Chinese.

The author attempts to explore “the inner/invisible cultural symbol” such as concepts of values and cultures through analyzing “the outer/visible cultural symbol”. Previously, studies on ethnicity of ethnic Chinese would habitually define the culture of mainland China or the culture with which ethnic Chinese brought with them when migrating to Japan as “traditional” or “true and correct culture”. Meanwhile, quite often, previous studies would analyze and emphasize how those “traditional culture” was inherited from generation to generation among ethnic Chinese. As such, it is very unique for the author to highlight in her analysis that acculturation of an ethnic group is not an “extinction of traditional culture” but the “creation of culture.” What is more, the author argues that traditional Chinese culture currently being observed in Japan is actually newly created. The author also vividly describes, which is suggestive, how a transnational identity was gradually formed among ethnic Chinese in Japan through exchanges and interactions with ethnic Chinese communities in other Asian countries such as Singapore while learning the skills of the lion dance performance. Obviously, the transnational identity is easier for them to identify with as it goes beyond national borders. It would be confusing or even vexed if the younger generation of ethnic Chinese were being questioned in Japan whether she or he is Japanese or Chinese.

Much unfortunate incidences have been experienced or observed in terms of the historical bilateral relations between China and Japan such as the Sino-Japanese War and the Cold War. Inevitably these key issues have always attracted attention in both countries and have impacted on the growth and changes of ethnic Chinese communities in Japan. In this book, the author also stresses that factors, such as the Sino-Japanese bilateral relations, the assimilation policy adopted by the Japanese government, and discrimination in local host society, are key elements which would considerably influence the formation and change of ethnic Chinese identity in Japan. However, too much emphasis has been given to the positive aspects of the ethnic Chinese in Japan and the ethnic Chinese inheriting traditional Chinese culture is such a case in point, which the author labels as “Creation of Culture”. As a result, the negative aspects of the ethnic Chinese community are not paid the necessary attention. For example, the ethnic consciousness needs to be discussed. And the reason why ethnic Chinese of Japan have to create culture is simply because they had no other choice but to transform traditional culture to adapt to the needs and requirements of local society due to complicated Sino-Japanese relations and forced assimilation policy imposed upon by the Japanese authorities. It is