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The Chinese in Southeast Asia by Victor Purcell

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THE CHINESE IN SOUTHEAST ASIA. By Victor Purcell. Oxford University Press, London, New York, Toronto. 1951. pp. xxxvi-801

The author, at present a lecturer in Far Eastern History in the University of Cambridge, shows a fine personal knowledge of the subject of which he writes and has brought to his study a quarter of a century of experience with the Chinese as a Colonial official of the British Government in Malaya. The excellence of his work, however, lies not only—nor even principally—in his first-hand knowledge of conditions in that quarter of the globe, but chiefly—and almost entirely—in his painstaking research, his analytical approach, and his willingness to enlist the aid, and to welcome the criticism of those having a specialized knowledge of one or more of the subjects which fall within the scope of his work.

The subject is one which we should scarcely expect an author to attempt in a single volume. Mr. Purcell has solved this difficulty, however, by joining together what might be designated as separate monographs dealing with "The Area as a Whole", and then with each of the seven major sub-areas—Burma, Siam, Indo-China, Malaya, British Borneo, Indonesia, and the Philippines.

As the space allotted to this review would permit but a sketchy account of the book as a whole, its readers will probably welcome a fuller study of the general portions of the work and of the specific section dealing with the Chinese in the Philippines.

THE GENERAL VIEW

The writer decries the great lack of uniformity in the various estimates of the Chinese population of the area; but does not fail to note that the method of census-taking is not everywhere consistent and that the definition of "Chinese" is not at all adequate. In the many countries which surround the South China Sea, the original population has been reinforced by Chinese immigration over a long series of centuries. The bulk of the earlier colonists, and a goodly number of the more recent arrivals, have so intermarried with the native stock that no very large part of the present population is without some trace of Chinese blood. Mr. Purcell estimates that "the number of persons regarding themselves as of Chinese race in Southeast Asia . . ., probably exceeds $8\frac{1}{2}$ million in a total population of about 157 million." This, it seems, is a close enough estimate for the purpose of the study.

In describing the place of origin of these Chinese, he indicates that nearly all of them stem from the two southeast coastal provinces of Fukien and Kwangtung and from the island of Hainan. This may seem unimportant to one not sufficiently acquainted with Chinese economic history; but it becomes a point of major importance when

we recall that South China has ever been noted for the hardness, aggressiveness, and business acumen of its citizens.

Our attention is called to the clannishness (or family-centricity) of the Chinese which is, perhaps, one of the most outstanding characteristics of the people as a whole. The break-down of family solidarity under the impetus of communist ideology is rightly deprecated by the author who, nevertheless, clearly recognizes that the extreme family consciousness of the Chinese emigrant is not without serious disadvantages to the states of their adoption.

The question of the education of the Chinese in Southeast Asia is, likewise, rather adequately treated.

Where the author falls short, however, is in his treatment of the traditional Chinese religions, where he says:

Broadly speaking, the religion of the villagers of south China consists of the worship of Shen, Fu, and Yao in addition to the cult of their own ancestors. Shen and Fu are spirits from Buddhism and Taoism (especially the popular, corrupted, and confused aspects of the two religious systems); whereas Yao, a ghost, is from primitive ancestor worship via Confucianism . . . (pp. 47-48).

Actually, *shen* is the term applied to all of the minor deities that are worshipped along with higher gods in both Buddhism and Taoism and, to a lesser extent, in Confucianism. *Fu* is the Chinese name of Buddha; and *Yao* is the exemplary, legendary first ruler of the Chinese. Taoism professes a belief in "Nature"—referred to sometimes as *T'ien-ti* (Heaven-&-Earth), sometimes as *Tao* (the Way)—with which are associated the various *shen* (spirits of mountains, trees, etc.). Confucianism, in so far as it may be designated a religion, worships a "Supreme Ruler" (*Shang-ti*)—frequently referred to as "Heaven" (*T'ien*)—with whom, likewise, are usually associated a large number of lesser deities.

CHINESE IN THE PHILIPPINES

We are given a very fine statistical study of the Chinese population in the Philippines from the beginning of the Spanish period until the early years of the independent Republic of the Philippines. Among other interesting data, these pages discuss the local distribution of Chinese in the islands, the ratio of men to women (slightly over 3:1), the difficulties of census calculation, and the methods that have been taken either to promote or to restrict immigration and dispersal.

Throughout the period of Spanish colonization the history of the Chinese in the Philippines is a teeter-tottery struggle, with the Filipino natives and Spanish colonial officials endeavoring to gain the greatest possible advantages from the employment of the Chinese in less desirable occupations while restricting their liberties to a mini-

mum, and with the Chinese ever attempting to better their own condition at the expense of their hosts and neighbors. That the issues and motives of this perennial see-saw battle have scarcely, if ever, been depicted with objective impartiality is a point well emphasized in Mr. Purcell's study. He very appositely cites the "negative (bad)" and "positive (good)" qualities of the Chinese as classified in the "exhaustive and meticulous index to the fifty-five volumes of Blair and Robertson's monumental collection of books and documents on the Philippines," and follows them with the following paragraph:

It will be seen that the two lists are to a great extent contradictory and cancel one another out. Some epithets are favourable or derogatory descriptions of the same thing, e.g. fond of litigation, legally minded. In any case they convey the opinions of the Spanish regarding the Chinese over a period of 335 years, and are a warning to those who tend towards downright judgments of races other than their own. (p. 603)

Lest anyone should think that Mr. Purcell is here venting particular spite against the Spanish as a nation, it should be noted that he makes almost identical accusations against the British, French and Dutch documents dealing with Malaya, Indo-China, and Indonesia. He is only pointing out, and quite properly I think, that an objective judgment demands hearing the parties to both sides of any question.

To discuss the many vicissitudes affecting the Chinese in the Philippines during the Spanish regime is not within the objectives and scope of this review. Suffice it to say that, in my humble opinion, Mr. Purcell has given the subject both adequate and objective treatment.

When he comes to the history of the American regime, the author is equally objective and adequate; but it should be remarked that the historical materials are both more complete and more complex for this later period. Whereas the author had formerly to choose between an avowedly biased document (from either the one side or the other) and no document at all, he is now faced with a plethora of documentation for both sides. Moreover, the last half century has seen the Chinese population of the Philippines more than tripled, though it took a drop during and after the War years (43,797 in 1918 as opposed to 117,487, in 1939, and 100,971 in 1947); and has witnessed the introduction into the Orient of Western ways of life and thought. In this time, too, the greater emphasis upon trade and industry (coupled with the Chinese clannishness and monopolistic tendencies) has not failed to improve the lot of the Chinese at the expense of their neighbors. Consequently, new economic and social crises have arisen which would have been impossible during the more leisurely and less mechanical Spanish age. Then, too, more

rapid communications and the world-wide propaganda of philosophical, social, and economic ideologies have made a deep impression upon the Chinese in Southeast Asia just as they have upon other peoples in other portions of the world. And finally the creation—or should we say emergence?—of a new spirit of nationalism among the Chinese since the establishment of the Republic has not been without its effect upon the Chinese of Southeast Asia.

All these entirely new elements have made more difficult the task which Mr. Purcell set himself—and so excellently accomplished—in his treatment of this period.

In discussing the changes brought about during, and after, World War II and the establishment of the Republic of the Philippines, our author is, of course, handicapped by the recentness of the events. He has handled his subject commendably, however, and historians of the future need not pass too severe judgment upon his relation of the near-contemporary.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

In his "Conclusion," Mr. Purcell again calls attention to the fact that neither the accounts of the Chinese nor those of the non-Chinese are to be accepted as genuinely impartial and objective. His own conclusion, after considering all the available documents, is that "by and large, the Chinese were very law-abiding and gave the ruling Powers little trouble." (p. 660)

Perhaps some of the readers of this review will cavil at the conclusion. But let them not spurn it till they have investigated the premises with which he has so abundantly provided us in his *The Chinese in Southeast Asia*.

THOMAS D. CARROLL

THE KALINGAS: THEIR INSTITUTIONS AND CUSTOM LAW. By R. F. Barton. With an introduction by E. Adamson Hoebel. The University of Chicago Press, Chicago. 1949. pp. xii-275. 24 plates, 7 text figures.

To most non-specialists, even among Filipinos, the mountain regions of northern Luzon are peopled and cultivated by "Igorots." Those who have looked a bit closer speak rather of several distinct ethnic groups, among them the Ibaloi, Kankanai, Ifugao, Bontok, Tinggian and, the subject of the late Dr. Barton's book, the Kalinga (pronounced *Kalingga*).

A word about the author. Roy Franklin Barton is one of two outstanding Americans who were born in 1883, came to the Phil-