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**Nobert Dannhaeuser,
Chinese Traders in a Philippine Town**

Review Author: Richard T. Chu

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BOOK REVIEWS

Norbert Dannhaeuser. **Chinese Traders in a Philippine Town: From Daily Competition to Urban Transformation.** Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2004. 264 pages.

Dannhaeuser's research on the Chinese merchants of Dagupan is a welcome addition to the increasing number of books about the Chinese in the Philippines that focus on their business practices. It fills a gap in the scholarship on the Chinese in rural areas and the provinces. Beginning in the 1960s, the author spent four decades doing fieldwork, visiting and living in Dagupan at different times.

His main aims are to look at the survival strategies of the Dagupan Chinese and to show how these strategies helped shape and contribute to the changes in the city. To achieve these, he traces the personal and commercial lives of the family of Nelson Ang (fictitious name) and a number of prominent Dagupan Chinese. The book is divided into two parts. Part I (Chapters 1–5) examines the intersection of familial and business practices of these Chinese merchants. Part II (Chapters 6–11) looks into the commercial transformation of the city and the political participation of these Chinese.

In Chapter 1 the author describes certain practices that Chinese storeowners use to outstrip their main competitors. Such practices include ripping the price tags off the products of their competitors' stores or pirating their employees (17–23). He also discusses the unscrupulous

pulous practices of customers and the storeowners themselves. The author attributes these merchants' "less than scrupulous trade practices" to their businesses' low-margin profit. Part of this survival strategy can also be seen in how they competed to obtain prime real estate locations for their stores, as Chapter 2 describes. In Chapter 3, the author discusses the joint ventures that his main subject and other Dagupan Chinese merchants enter into with foreign merchants or companies, and also points out that the aggressive practices of the new wave of Chinese merchants from mainland China resemble those of "the parents and grandparents of the current Philippine-born Chinese" in Dagupan (72). In Chapter 4, the author examines how familial decisions, specifically those involving marriage, form part of the merchants' business practices. For instance, Nelson married his wife Julia because she had Filipino citizenship, which allowed her to own property and continue operating Nelson's businesses by placing these under her name. The author adds an interesting section on how Chinese families resist the idea of their children marrying Filipinos as a practice connected to economic considerations. This discussion on the intersection between kinship ties (specifically to adopted kin and in-laws) and business success is continued in Chapter 5. For example, Dannhaeuser points out that Nelson both profited and lost from his business dealings with brothers-in-law.

From a discussion of the business and familial practices of these families and individuals the author goes on to examine the relationship between the changing economic and political climate in the city and the business practices of its people. Chapter 6 traces the economic development from the 1950s to the 1990s in Dagupan, describing, for example, how the Chinese gradually replaced the small grocery stores with big department stores and supermarkets. Chapter 7 describes the efforts of two main competitors, a Chinese mestizo named Lazaro Dy and a Chinese woman named Belen Fernandez, to outbid each other in constructing the city's first shopping mall. Thus, the advancement of commercial modernization in Dagupan can be attributed mainly to the new and massive enterprises that the Chinese introduced since the 1970s, which include fastfood branches/franchises, supermarkets, department stores, malls, and—in the periphery of the city—warehouse clubs. In Chapter 8, Dannhaeuser contrasts the business and public

relations styles of Dy and Fernandez. The author also describes the way the Chinese trading community perceives these two individuals. Despite the fact that Lazaro is a Chinese mestizo, the Chinese trading community prefers him to Belen, who is “pure” Chinese. Part of the reason could be that Lazaro is not only male but also married, while Belen is both female and single. In Chapters 9 and 10, the author presents the motivations of both Lazaro and Belen in entering politics, and analyzes the reasons for the successes and defeats that both experienced in running for office. His last chapter focuses on Nelson and his family’s foray into real estate. He concludes the book by summarizing the difficulties and challenges that the Dagupan Chinese had and continues to go through, including their rising concern regarding the increasing competition that non-local Chinese bring to their business interests.

Dannhaeuser does an admirable job of chronicling and describing the familial and business practices of the Chinese merchants in Dagupan. His in-depth study of their practices provides us with a better and more intimate understanding of how members of an ethnic minority group manage to survive the challenges they face by their willingness to adapt to the changing times. Furthermore, his work does not resort to essentialist notions of “Chinese” business practices to explain their successes. For instance, he points out that, despite the fact that both Lazaro and Belen have different business styles, the former being more “Westernized” while the latter more “traditional” and family-oriented, he maintains that neither of these “contrasting idioms account[s] for differences in success” (162). Lastly, his work describes certain practices among the Dagupan Chinese that are not only interesting but also relevant to anyone interested in the study of ethnic relations and ethnicity in the Philippines. For instance, while the Chinese trading community in Dagupan can be very resistant to Chinese-Filipino intermarriages, and look down upon anyone who may be too Westernized, as in the case of the mestizo William Dee (36), it can overlook these “shortcomings” and accept someone like Lazaro Dy, another mestizo. Part of the explanation is Lazaro’s active involvement in the Chinese community. He is a member of the Chinese Chamber of Commerce of Dagupan and was responsible for hiring a Chinese teacher in one of the local Chinese schools. Another interesting aspect

of his work is his description of how Dagupan Chinese merchants settle their differences with one another. Sometimes they bring their conflicts to the local Chinese Chamber of Commerce and, for bigger cases, to the Manila-based Federation of Filipino-Chinese Chamber of Commerce. But how much they have recourse to the local and national Philippine judicial and legal system to redress their grievances is not so clear. If anything, the representatives of the state—policemen, tax collectors, inspectors, officials—are depicted here as people who take advantage of these merchants.

And what about the Chinese female merchants? Do they have access to the predominantly male Chinese Chamber of Commerce? If there is one thing that I wish the author had done more it is to provide his analysis of Dagupan's interethnic and intraethnic relations. Nevertheless, in publishing his research, Dannhaeuser has provided other scholars with plenty of material to think about and investigate further.

RICHARD T. CHU

Department of History

University of Massachusetts, Amherst



Thomas Headland and Doris Blood (eds.). **What Place for Hunter-Gatherers in Millennium Three?** Dallas, Texas: SIL International and International Museum of Cultures, 2002. 129 pages.

The phenomenon of culture change has long been a concern of anthropologists; and, rightly so, since the discipline was founded on events in world history that forced the confrontation of “the West” and “the rest.” Colonization led to the encounter between cultures that were eventually arranged in a hierarchical social order. From then on, the lives of those at the bottom of the hierarchy were never the same and were characterized by two kinds of struggle—the struggle to conform and the struggle to resist.