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**Aristotle C. Dy, SJ**

## **Chinese Buddhism in Catholic Philippines: Syncretism as Identity**

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In light of Macli-ing's death Castro briefly mentions the formation of the Cordillera People's Alliance (CPA) in 1984 but seems to emphasize the establishment of the Cordillera Administrative Region in 1988 as the highlight of the struggle. This brief narrative was set against the backdrop of organizations and individuals splitting up and shifting allegiances, as groups broke away from the CPA and NPA because of conflicting interests and ideologies (81–83). Unfortunately, the book does not elaborate on key questions about the Cordillera's status as a separate region: state–society relations, the process of devolution of state authority, integrating the Cordillera into the nation-state, the use of arms by locals as a feasible peace-keeping measure, the restitution of land, and the dynamics that sustained the indigenous people's struggle for their rights over ancestral domains.

Nevertheless, Doyo is able to explain the reach of Macli-ing's persona even after his death: from the early formation of groups who struggled against the dam and claimed ancestral domain rights to the solidarity among multisectoral organizations who continue to commemorate the struggle every Cordillera Day on 24 April, Macli-ing's death anniversary.

Cordillera autonomy has not yet been realized—for Castro, “the establishment of an autonomous region for the Cordillera remains an ‘elusive dream’” (83)—and in this quest Macli-ing Dulag continues to be a symbol that civil society groups mobilize in different contexts.

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ARISTOTLE C. DY, SJ

## **Chinese Buddhism in Catholic Philippines: Syncretism as Identity**

Mandaluyong City: Anvil, 2015. 266 pages.

The Jesuit priest Aristotle Dy, inspired by his exposure to a mixture of Buddhist and Catholic practices while growing up Chinese in the Philippines, decided to specialize on the study of religions at the School

of Oriental and African Studies in London, where he completed the PhD dissertation that produced the book under review. Conducting fieldwork in the thirty-seven temples that dot the small Buddhist landscape of the Philippine archipelago, Dy interviewed ritual masters (monks and nuns) and lay leaders and practitioners, collected and read liturgical texts and spells, and observed elite and popular levels of participation in various temple activities. Armed with rich ethnographic data, he has written an important book detailing Buddhism's entry into and adaptations to a predominantly Catholic Philippines. These adaptations, open-ended mixtures of two or more religions in a dynamic process called syncretism, are sufficient to tell the story of Buddhism's small-scale but continued success in penetrating and remaining relevant in the Philippine religious arena. This story is the book's most important contribution to Philippine studies, where no major studies of local Chinese religious practices exist in English. Dy then could have chosen to reorganize his book to focus solely on this narrative. In what follows I outline the order by which I believe the book should be read to highlight the virtues of Dy's contribution.

Beginning with the short introduction, one should proceed to the first half (103–15) of chapter 3, "Buddhism as a Chinese Religion," where there awaits a deft summary of a vast literature on Buddhist adaptation in China from the fourth to the thirteenth century that demonstrates how "unique Buddhist teachings evolved in China independently of India, and provided a direction for its later development among overseas Chinese" (106). The success of syncretism as a strategy of seeking acceptance serves as a valuable point of comparison when Buddhism later enters the Philippine Catholic setting. In China the Buddhist incorporation of Confucian filial piety into its teachings, for example, is mirrored in the Buddhist offering of prayer services in the Philippines on 2 November (All Souls' Day) as a complement to traditional Chinese days for venerating the dead that usually falls on an April by lunar calendar reckoning (142). Dy's thoughtful discussion (115–23) of monastic reforms during the Republican Period (1912–1949) in China and corresponding developments in Japanese- and later Guomindang-controlled Taiwan lays the context for the first half (21–39) of chapter 2, "Chinese Buddhism in the Philippines." Dy first shows that Buddhist temple communities could only be established in the archipelago during the late nineteenth century when "there was declining interest in converting the Chinese" to Catholicism (22). He then goes on to map out the fascinating

twentieth-century transnational networks that brought monastics, nuns, and lay sisters called *caigu* from mother temples in Fujian and Taiwan to the Philippines and shows why they readily went beyond ritual to charitable work. Interestingly, in Dy's dissertation the book's chapter 3 is chapter 2 and vice versa, a more logical and chronological progression that leaves one puzzled with the decision to switch the chapters when the manuscript went to press.

Chapter 4, "Scriptures and Devotions," identifies the key texts, sutras, and spells that inform the liturgies and reveal the ritual concerns of both monastics and lay followers. As in China, predominant in the Philippines are funerary texts and prayers for the dead, which mark great concern for the afterlife, while those for the living lie mostly in the realm of averting disasters (*xiaozai*). Special attention is given to the popularity of the devotion to the bodhisattva Guanyin. Dy again is good at highlighting the transnational links between southern Fujian, the nearby island of Putuo (which Guanyin traditionally inhabited), and the Philippines. Due to their striking resemblance in appearance and character, Chinese and even Filipinos conflate Guanyin and the Virgin Mary, thereby providing a vivid example of how syncretism operates to allow for "double belongings" (173). Understanding the primary concerns of followers and contrasting them with the motives of monastics allow us to better comprehend the structure of religious activities in the temples (39–43). There is popular Buddhism, in which most followers go to temples to allay personal concerns and engage in "not properly Buddhist" practices, such as the use of Guanyin oracle sticks. Monastics tolerate such practices in the hope that people "can be weaned away from folk practices and move toward a deeper understanding of Buddhism" at a later time (42). Temples also provide for special needs. Apart from those concerning death rituals, people seek monastics for the blessing of homes, businesses, and marriages. Monastics aim to promote a "deeper practice" involving greater meditation and study of the teachings enshrined in sutras, but they have only succeeded in producing a small group of devotees.

Chapter 5, "Planting Good Roots, Creating Affinities, and Practicing Compassion," moves away from the rituals and devotions to document the charitable activities of temples that have been both a product of a long history of Chinese and overseas Chinese charitable organizations and the creative use of the Buddhist concepts of "Planting good roots [*luo shangen*] and creating affinities [*jieyuan*]" as "Chinese Buddhist strategies for propagating

Buddhism” (194). In a nation with a high poverty incidence and frequency of disasters, such altruism may provide a means for bringing Buddhism to a larger non-Chinese audience, even as the organizers of Buddhist groups such as Tzu-chi, famous for their work in the aftermath of Typhoon Haiyan in 2013, do not openly proselytize in the course of charity work. Ongoing changes in contemporary Buddhism such as the rise of humanistic groups like Tzu-chi lead Dy to a comparison of Chinese Buddhist experiences in other parts of Southeast Asia (123–32) and consideration of the possible futures that Chinese Buddhism might take in the Philippines (99–102). With more temples today beginning to offer English services, we are looking at the possibility of “an overseas Chinese Buddhist community giving way to a local form of Buddhism” (102).

As the above summary demonstrates, the book and its underlying research are well suited for demonstrating the utility of syncretism in accounting for the limited success of Buddhism in the Catholic Philippines. However, Dy is intent on using his data to argue against the dominant view that syncretism is proof of Chinese acculturation. Instead he sees it as a “strong marker of Chinese identity” (xix). Because “all religious traditions have some form of syncretism” (162), it is not clear how syncretism itself is helpful to mark Chinese identity. When one looks more closely at his arguments, it becomes increasingly clear that rather than syncretism it is the practice of the Buddhist side of the Buddhist-Catholic syncretic coin that marks one as Chinese. Exposure to the bodhisattva Guanyin and visits to Buddhist temples where rituals and texts that go back to Buddhism’s long history in China are performed in the Chinese language serve to highlight what one might call “Chineseness.” The conflation of Guanyin and Mary and the accommodation of All Souls’ Day into the schedule of Buddhist funerary services only highlight acculturation to a Philippine context and do not signify a distinctly Chinese identity. Dy asks us not to “place ethnic categories on the same level as a religious category” (218), but how does one explain that a Chinese Protestant who engages in no syncretism at all may still be identified or self-identify as Chinese simply by virtue of ethnicity (228)? Associating Chinese identities with Buddhist practices also risks essentializing Buddhism as an inherent part of being Chinese throughout nineteenth-century to present-day Philippine history. Only at the end, however, does one discover that Dy’s argument is really generational, for his “key informants were either born in China or had parents who were

born in China” (220). It is also rather telling that, instead of hammering his thesis into every chapter and marshaling his evidence to support it as any well-argued book would do, the first glimpse of a sustained discussion of identity only appears three-fourths of the way on page 154, leaving this reader with the impression that much of the data were better suited to seeing Buddhism in the Philippines on its own terms rather than forcing it into the author’s own personal agenda to explain past experiences and his hopes as a priest of the Catholic Church for future inculturation (xiii–xv). As Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper have argued in “Beyond ‘Identity’” (*Theory and Society*, 2000:1–47), an influential article curiously missing from Dy’s bibliography, the use of identity as a category of social analysis is fraught with many contradictions, ambiguities, and connotations. Dy’s analysis, while brave, unfortunately exhibits some of these problems.

Dy finished his dissertation in 2013 and in the same year became president of Xavier School in San Juan City. In 2015 the book version of his dissertation was published. The time to convert the dissertation to a book was short and neither normal nor ideal. As far as I can ascertain, very few changes, mostly cosmetic and at times unhelpful such as the switching of chapters 2 and 3, have occurred. Distracting remnants of the dissertation appear here and there such as the reference to an Appendix D (44) where not even an Appendix A can be found in the book. The reader’s flow is blocked by the presence of lists that are not well integrated into the text and would have been better off as real appendices. Apart from a survey of literature (xvii–xx) that is a mere listing, Dy has squeezed in lists of Buddhist schools (48–91) and Buddhist temples (182–90) that are complete with physical addresses, contact details, and short descriptions of their monastic inhabitants and activities. I mention these details because talented scholars like Aristotle Dy need to be given time and space to do their work and not rushed. I understand that as a Jesuit with a vow of obedience to his order, he has taken the responsibility of leading Xavier School to the detriment of his own scholarly work. The publisher, Anvil, has not only failed to properly copyedit the book, but it has also failed to subject the book manuscript to a refereeing system, which could have provided Dy with an opportunity to improve his book. But perhaps that was not the aim of the scholar busily transitioning to his new position.

As Dy tells us, there is much more work to do. “There are at least as many Daoist or folk temples throughout the country” (xvii) waiting to

be studied. Dy has shown us that he has the ethnographic skills and the necessary background in religious studies to do the work that remains to be done if only he had the time to do so. Perhaps it is only when we have really considered all sides of the Chinese syncretic coin, not just Buddhism and Catholicism but also Daoism and others, that we may begin to think about what “Chineseness” might mean, but until then I suggest that it may be wise to heed Brubaker and Cooper (ibid., 36) when they ask us to “go beyond identity—not in the name of an imagined universalism, but in the name of the conceptual clarity required for social analysis and political understanding alike.”

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JUAN ANTONIO INAREJOS MUÑOZ

## **Los (Últimos) Caciques de Filipinas: Las Elites Coloniales antes del 98**

Granada: Comares, 2015. 157 pages.

Juan Antonio Inarejos Muñoz presents a snapshot of late–nineteenth-century municipal politics in the Philippines and thus sheds light on the conditions of the last decades of Spanish rule. Inarejos largely uses archival documents on the elections of *gobernadorcillos* (mayors) in a wide variety of Philippine towns to catch a glimpse of how colonialism operated at the municipal level and failed to address the problems of corruption. Although he reaches conclusions that are similar to those of other historians who have studied the same electoral process, he delves into aspects of *gobernadorcillo* elections that have received scant attention thus far. While he does recognize the Spanish friars’ dominant political role in local elections, he goes beyond this trite observation and explores how other actors—such as *principales* (chiefs) and provincial governors—and other elements—such as economics and race—played their part in the dynamics of *gobernadorcillo* elections. What emerges at the end of the book is a nuanced portrayal of nineteenth-century local politics whereby different actors used similar mechanisms at their disposal to achieve their own personal ends.