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Richard T. Chu

Chinese and Chinese Mestizos of Manila: Family, Identity,  
and Culture, 1860s–1930s

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permits, increased consumption or spending on house construction, or other multiplier effects. In other words, we need to understand how the community “pays back” in terms of improved services. I am sure municipal records should have been able to yield some salient information. Likewise, we need to understand the role of financial institutions such as rural banks, cooperatives, or microfinance institutions in mentoring migrant families to be productive or entrepreneurial. Perhaps these are not within the study’s parameters, but something that other studies could look into in the future.

All told, the wisdom *Maalwang Buhay* has provided, at least for me, is the missing link or the explanation for some forms of migrant behavior that have continued to baffle us in our work. This study is to be commended for giving us a useful tool for improving the body of knowledge, and enhance the work of migrant advocates, to benefit our modern-day heroes in ways they truly deserve.

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RICHARD T. CHU

## **Chinese and Chinese Mestizos of Manila: Family, Identity, and Culture, 1860s–1930s**

Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2010. xviii, 451 pages.

Focusing on the 1860–1930 period, Richard Chu’s book deals with an important aspect of Philippine history that has been relatively neglected in recent years. It contributes to transnational histories by documenting the flexible border-crossing diasporic strategies of a select number of Manila-born “Chinese mestizo” merchants and their families. The illustrative cases include those of Joaquin Barrera Limjap and his son Mariano Limjap, Ignacio Sy Jao Boncan, Ildefonso Tambunting, Cu Unjieng, Carlos Palanca Tan Quien-sien as well as Bonifacio Limtuaco (a mestizo born in China unlike the others and saw himself decidedly as Chinese). Chu argues that these Chinese mestizos deployed identities flexibly and strategically, especially during the late nineteenth century. Excelling in “liminal virtuosity” (300), they retained a Chinese mestizo identity, but concomitantly identified

themselves as Chinese (*chino* or *sangley*) and were also naturalized Spanish subjects (*españoles naturalizados*)—a flexibility seen in their diverse and ethnically crisscrossing relationships. Settling on a particular identity as either “Filipino” or “Chinese,” Chu contends, did not occur until the 1920s and the 1930s, when singular identities hardened and were reified due to developments in Chinese and Filipino nationalisms.

These interesting points are pursued by describing in rich detail various familial practices ranging from dual families and residences (usually one in China and another in the Philippines) to the malleability and multiplicity of names, religious practices, adoption of children, inheritance practices, business practices, public presentations of self, linguistic adaptability, and so on. Akin to a subplot, kinship hierarchies oppressive of women and children are also discussed.

Chu emphasizes that, whereas Edgar Wickberg focused on macrohistory, his book’s focus is microhistory. Nonetheless, some assertions in the book are intended to rewrite Wickberg. In particular, the assertion that in the late nineteenth century Chinese mestizos did not necessarily identify with “Filipinos” or *indios*—or, more accurately, the *naturales*—is decidedly revisionist.

It should be noted that Wickberg’s broad canvass of history is supported by quantitative data gathered by Daniel Doeppers (listed in the book’s bibliography), which demonstrate a considerable decline in public identification with the mestizo category during the 1880s and 1890s. In Manila Chinese mestizos accounted for 10.6 percent of all announced burials in 1868–1870 and 10.2 percent in 1881–1882; however, by 1892 Chinese mestizos represented 5.2 percent only of the total. The reduction by half is demographically exceptional (unless large numbers emigrated to China or moved en masse to the provinces) and could be explained only by the large-scale shift in social identities during this period. This overall sea-change in identities did not preclude the existence of both the *gremio de chinos* and *gremio de mestizos* in Binondo, the existence of which Chu refers to as emblematic of the vibrancy of the mestizo category (252). It is known that the gremios were not formally dissolved despite the abolition of the tribute and the attendant legal categories of indios, mestizos, and chinos in the 1880s.

By 1903 US census data on males of voting age (21 years and above) in the city of Manila showed a substantially diminished group that publicly identified itself as mestizo. Removing Americans, Europeans, and Japanese

from the total count, we find that the 802 mestizos represented a mere 1 percent of Manila's population of "browns" (75 percent), "Chinese" (24 percent), and mestizos. The diminution of the mestizo category signified a shift to either the naturales or the chino labels: more likely the majority identified with the former. By implication, they rejected their Chinese heritage, at least in their public persona. In contrast to this macrohistorical portrait, Chu argues that "from the perspective of micro-history *and* first-generation Chinese mestizos (even the upper class) like Mariano Limjap, the picture looks different" because these mestizos "were very much in touch with their 'Chinese-ness,' even if, as in Mariano's case, they may publicly or officially identify as 'Chinese mestizo,' 'Spanish mestizo,' or even 'indio'" (255). One wonders, however, just how many mestizos were in a situation similar to Limjap's. The progressively diminishing percentage of those who publicly identified themselves as Chinese mestizos, as macrohistory informs us, is rather difficult to reconcile with Chu's assertion about the flexibility of identities, unless one imagines some sort of coordinated strategy to mask identities or one argues that census categories based on self-identification are totally unreliable. I believe the jury is still out on Chu's claim that his study "forces us to rethink Wickberg's thesis that Chinese mestizos 'rejected' their 'Chinese-ness'" (20).

The shift in the Spanish colonial state's taxation policy in the 1880s abolished the legal distinction between natural and mestizo, in which context holding on to the mestizo identity had become "optional." The last two decades of the nineteenth century would appear to be the period of greatest flexibility in identities—even as many mestizos apparently took advantage of this flexibility by identifying with the naturales. This trend can be seen as the drawing of some sort of boundary line, especially among mestizos whose kin had been in the mestizo category for several generations, for some for a century or even more. This dramatic change in the 1880s and 1890s, however, tends to be underestimated (252) because of the book's emphasis on the microhistory of the wealthy merchant class and their border-crossing strategies. Moreover, the repeated emphasis on the "nationalization of citizenship" under American rule unwittingly gives the mistaken impression that US colonialism was primarily responsible for the official erasure of the mestizo category (251). As Chu states at the outset: ". . . the Americans established new citizenship laws in the Philippines that divided its people

into 'Filipinos' and 'aliens' (thereby removing the three-way classificatory system of *sangleys*, Chinese mestizos, and indios instituted by the Spanish government in the Philippines) . . ." (16).

That individuals like those from the handful of merchant families discussed in this study deployed flexible border-crossing strategies need not be doubted, however. But it must be stressed that they formed a tiny elite. Moreover, other elites elsewhere during this period acted in a similar way. An official of the Aguinaldo government yet a naturalized British subject who had become wealthy in northern Queensland, Heriberto Zarcal, for instance, apparently held on flexibly to dual identities. The opium capitalists of Singapore studied by Carl Trocki were similarly flexible and imaginative in their regional and crossborder business networks. The Manila-based merchant capitalists discussed in this study need to be seen in this broader landscape.

Moreover, for the elite mestizos that Chu studied, retaining (or not abandoning) one's Chineseness might well have been the case. Due to altered historical conditions, from the late nineteenth century to the early twentieth century a sizeable Chinese community existed in Manila with whom someone like Mariano Limjap could identify as circumstances warranted. The behavior of these elite Chinese mestizos would not be surprising, given that elite identities can be highly situational in plural societies depending on economic and political considerations. But what is important to note is that in an earlier period, roughly from 1740 to 1850, even the most affluent of the Chinese mestizos of that time generally did not have the option of identifying with a Chinese community because there was none, for the number of Chinese was reduced to social insignificance after the expulsion edict of the 1770s. Identifying with a Chinese community was not a historically feasible option. The absence of the ethnic Chinese during this period was in fact the primary reason for the ascendancy of Chinese mestizos as a distinct social category. At the same time, identities could be changed legally: for a fee, mestizos could request to be included in the tribute list of the naturales, as Rizal's grandfather did, signifying some room for shifts in social identities.

In this discussion the very term "Chinese mestizo" is a stumbling block. As Chu stresses, "These [Chinese mestizo] men were not the same Chinese mestizos often mentioned in Philippine history books such as José

Rizal, who were two, three, or four times removed from their first paternal Chinese ancestor” (239). In other words, there were Chinese mestizos of an earlier period and Chinese mestizos of a later period (the book’s focus). But in both cases these social groups are referred to by the same term, “Chinese mestizo.” However, the distinction between the different groups and generations of “Chinese mestizos” is crucial for without it there is much confusion. In Chu’s study, for instance, the cultural practices of the Chinese mestizos of the earlier period (like food and attire discussed on pages 199–202) are imputed to the mestizos of the later period covered by this study, unintentionally homogenizing and reifying mestizos. Thus the following statement, which attributes what is Filipino to “Chinese mestizos,” is fuzzy to say the least:

In this chapter [5], I tried to show the situation in Chinese mestizo households during the latter part of the nineteenth century, at a time when intermarriages (at least until 1892) between Chinese men and local women were quite common. As one can see, many of what are considered today as “Filipino,” such as kinship terms used or food cooked in Filipino households, arose from such interactions between these men and women in personal and intimate settings. (236)

This statement is applicable to the earlier generations of Chinese mestizos discussed by Wickberg (1740–1850), but inapplicable to the mestizos discussed in the book, indeed especially if the latter held on to their Chineseness, as Chu asserts.

There is much that is useful and thought provoking in this book, which deserve attention and closer scrutiny, but they are clouded by the lack of clarity in the periodization of the history of Chinese mestizos in the Philippines and their changing historical contexts. The author is eminently capable of making this clear, and I hope he will do so in future work.

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WILLIAM POMEROY

## **Bilanggo: Life as a Political Prisoner in the Philippines 1952–1962**

Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 2009. 214 pages.

The true measure of freedom lies in one’s capacity to embrace the necessity to defend people’s rights to sovereignty, a life of good health, safety, and freedom. This is the great theme of William Pomeroy’s *Bilanggo: Life as a Political Prisoner in the Philippines 1952–1962*. A brave progressive and internationalist, Pomeroy embraced the goals of the old Partido Komunista ng Pilipinas (PKP), which during the 1940s led the “country’s most effective guerrilla organization, the Hukbalahap” (213). Of working class origins from upstate New York, Pomeroy was one of the US soldiers who took part in the landings of the US army in October 1944. When the war ended, coming back to the Philippines as frequent as he could became his singular goal.

Pomeroy fell in love with the country and its struggling people. He studied at the University of the Philippines and became one of its respected writers. The spirit of internationalism pushed the power of Pomeroy’s pen and ink to their logical conclusions: the armed rebellion and a passionate love for one of its most brilliant and brave daughters, Celia Mariano. Together they lived through the most violent attacks on freedom. Yet through it all, theirs was a partnership that was made strong and constant by the struggle for national liberation against US imperialism.

The book documents their capture in 1952 when they were sentenced to life imprisonment, “and served ten years before being pardoned by President Carlos P. Garcia” (213). For all its honesty and relevance to the current struggle to free political prisoners, one cannot but be astounded by how *Bilanggo* reveals the uncanny yet resilient anti-imperialist standpoint of a white man. Pomeroy came all the way from the belly of the beast right into the fray. The Philippine national liberation movement and its armed component were sincerely embraced by him in all their compelling urgencies, actual dangers, and genuine promises:

When we joined the guerrilla struggle, it was with the full awareness of the possible consequences, which for thousands of our fellow Huks was death. While we were in the mountain forest, we had repeatedly faced death in many forms. If Celia had died in the open struggle, I