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***The Chinese Question: Ethnicity, Nation, and Region in and beyond the Philippines.*** Caroline S. Hau. Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2014. 379 pages, ISBN 978-971-550-660-1.

DRAWING FROM LITERATURE and nonfiction, as well as from popular culture (i.e. movies), Caroline Hau examines how the Chinese presence in the Philippines and in Southeast Asia—including both the so-called “pure” Chinese and the Chinese mestizos<sup>1</sup>—is reflected not only in the national but also in the popular imaginary.

Previous works on the Chinese in the Philippines take on a more historical approach in examining their place in colonial Philippines, which was undergoing socioeconomic changes (Wickberg 1999; Wong 2001). Hau’s work differs from the aforementioned, since she also provides a more sociocultural frame of analyses while incorporating questions of political economy. More importantly, even as she reflects on historical issues, she also situates her subject matter in a contemporary timeframe, and even goes beyond borders to look into regional links and shared experiences.

The book is comprised of seven chapters that were previously published elsewhere, each one addressing the “Chinese Question.” Generally, it pertains to the “economic, political, and cultural concerns relating to the ‘national interest’” (7) that tellingly positions the Chinese in a “liminal space” (Bhaba 1994), where they are both included and excluded in the national imaginary—both past and present.

Each chapter in the book traces the journey of the Chinese Filipino to become a significant player in a country that held (and continues to hold) ambivalent perceptions about them. From issues of citizenship and national belonging to questions of integration highlighted by the Letter of Instructions 270 in 1975 when mass naturalization was implemented, the Chinese have become an epitome (or rather a metaphor) of the conflation of ethnicity and class. For Hau, this conflated image, however, goes beyond the boundaries of the nation-state, as the Chinese in the

Southeast Asian imaginary has been linked to notions of capital. Hau also highlights the important role of the Chinese in the Philippines during World War II, when the Wha Chi Guerilla movement fought alongside the Filipinos (chapter four). To fight for one's country (or adopted country, in the case of the non-naturalized Chinese) symbolizes how the Chinese want to be seen as Filipino and as part of the Philippine nation.

The "alienating capital" that characterizes Chinese Filipinos also saw them as victims in a country that seems to have failed to provide for their security, as seen in the numerous kidnapping cases that has plagued the Chinese community. Kidnapping, however, as Hau argues in chapter three, is a problem not only of (and for) the Chinese, but of everyone in the Philippines.

The book also emphasizes the significant role of the Chinese mestizo in the making of the Philippine nation and Filipino identity, as well as in "formulating" and "interrogating" the Chinese Question. The Chinese Filipinos became a class of elites that straddled economic and political capital. The Chinese mestizos have also distinguished themselves from the non-mestizo Chinese—the "Other"—and have culturally and linguistically merged with what and who is considered to be Filipino during colonial times.

Nevertheless, recent geopolitical shifts saw changes in Chinese identification within the Southeast Asian region. More significant in contemporary Philippine society is the "re-Sinification" of the Chinese mestizo, which coincides the rise of China in the world stage. What has been occluded in and by the Chinese mestizo, with his/her elite identification with the Hispanized Filipino, is now being acknowledged and celebrated; being "Chinese" is now claimed with pride, even if your Chinese ancestry dates back more than five generations. Claiming one's Chinese ethnicity has become a cultural and social capital, and this is no doubt illustrated when prominent business tycoon Jaime Zobel de Ayala, known to many as a "Spanish-Filipino," claimed to have Chinese roots (chapter six). Moreover, with the popularity of East Asian pop culture in the region—mostly in the form of television dramas (such as the Taiwanese show *Liuxing Huayuan* or Meteor Garden in the early 2000s), "Chineseness" has become chic.

However, the current location of the ethnic Chinese amid the escalating tensions between China and its neighbors (especially the Philippines) is noteworthy in a region that continues to show ambivalence towards the ethnic Chinese. This issue will most likely see perceptions of identity, national belonging, and nationhood evolve as they did in the past. The reader is kept wondering how the Chinese Question will be dealt with in the years to come. But one can expect that Hau is already trying to address this issue.

The book is no doubt an excellent, recommended contribution to the understanding of the Chinese Filipino. Hau's cultural studies approach manages to explore facets of the issue from not only a socio-cultural lens, but also from economic and political vantage points. The work challenges existing understandings of ethnicity, globalization, cosmopolitanism, region, and nation. And while the "Othering" of the Chinese has become a historical norm nonetheless, it still continues in the story of the nation—both in fact and fiction. *The Chinese Question* is not solely about the Chinese in the Philippines; it is also about the country (and the region) as a whole.

### References

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- Wickberg, Edgar. 2001. *The Chinese in Philippine Life, 1850-1898*. Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press.
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### Note

- <sup>1</sup> Chinese mestizos are those who are of part Chinese descent. Hau also mentioned that she agrees to reviving the term, "Chinese mestizo," for those who wish to emphasize their Chinese ancestry despite being distant from "either self-identification as Chinese or no longer have either linguistic or cultural affiliations with Chinese culture" (personal communication with the author, 22 December 2015). I concur with these terms.