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CHANGING STATUS OF CHINESE IN THE PHILIPPINES+

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CITIZENSHIP FOR THE CHINESE

In April 1975, President Ferdinand Marcos executed an unexpected end run around discriminatory rules which had been issued against the overseas Chinese since the end of the American regime. He did this by a decree provoding for the granting of naturalization for Philippine citizenship upon the filing of a simple and inexpensive petition with the office of the Solicitor General.

By this measure he effectively freed the alien Chinese of the Philippines from a host of restrictions which hampered their activities. Such restrictions began to be introduced in Philippine law at the foundation of the Commonwealth regime in 1936 and by 1960 were extensive indeed. They included the exclusion of Chinese from public markets, the denial of their right to own either urban or agricultural land and their exclusion from the retail trade and from the corn and rice business. They were also barred from government employment and excluded from most professions 1.

Some Chinese reacted by going out of business and smuggling their capital to other countries. In 1958, the American Chamber of Commerce Journal estimated that Philippine Chinese had invested 216.6 million American dollars in Hong Kong². Undoubtedly the flight of capital has continued but there are still many wealthy Chinese who have been unable or unwilling to get their capital out of the country. Light manufacturing such as textiles and cigarettes has been legally open to Chinese and has attracted some capital. Probably the principal reaction has been to survive economically through subterfuge and bribery. The major technique has been the utilization of Filipino "dummies" who are listed as owners of business es actually managed by Chinese. The use of dummies and other expedients might enable the Chinese to survive, but there is no doubt that they were under a type of pressure which, to say the least, discouraged any expansion of Chinese business activity.

This restriction of Chinese economic activity seemed to have strong popular support. This is indicated not only by the actions of the politicians anxious for election but also by various surveys. Early in 1960, for instance, a sample of Filipinos in Manila indicated that 72 percent were in favor of restricting the business privileges and activities of those of Chinese ancestry³. Social-distance surveys of Philippine university students taken at various periods, both before and after World War II, indicated that the Chinese were the least favored of any foreign nationality⁴. A 1973 survey of a random sample of the population in Philippine cities reported similar attitudes⁵. The treatment and characterization of Chinese in Filipino literature reflects this negative stereotyping as well, and each of the major dialects has several pejorative terms for the Chinese.

There are two questions raised by this reversal of governmental attitude toward the Chinese. One is why the change was made, the other is what effect the lessening of discrimination will have on the assimilation of the Chinese resident in the Philippines.

MOTIVATION FOR THE CHANGE

This action of President Marcos is completely at variance with the long-standing attitude and behavior toward the Chinese in the Philippines. One unusual aspect lies in the almost complete absence of any commentary or public response. It would appear that, as in so many other decisions to come out of Malacanan, the naturalization decree was accepted by journalists and others as representing a force majeur, in the face of which nothing could nor needed to be said. In any event, the public press has been silent on the subject (as indeed it has been muted generally) and one can find little reaction expressed by public or private groups which, in the recent past, would ordinarily have responded vigorously. The decree apparently fell into the pond of public response without a ripple.

Another aspect for speculation lies in the motives of the President: why now, after all this time, with little in the social scene any different from previous decades? Pressure from Peking? Hardly likely in view of Peking's silence elsewhere. Pressure from Taipei? Extremely unlikely unless one considers the position of the Chinese communities in the Philippines.

The only logical explanation seems to lie here. Since it became obvious that President Marcos would, of necessity, have to recognize (in the diplomatic sense) the People's Republic of China, and that the establishment of formal relations with Peking would bring to an end the formal relations with Taipei, where would this leave Chinese aliens in the Philippines? Undoubtedly, then, leaders of the Chinese must have presented their difficulty to the President, indicating that, separated from any possible "pro-

tection" from Taipei, and ideologically separated from Peking, their only recourse lay in gaining Philippine citizenship.

A Filipino nationalist himself, it is unlikely that the President held any emotional response to the predicament of the Chinese, but as a pragmatic realist committed to the economic program for the country's future, he must have considered the possibility of a wholesale flight from the country by that portion of the business and commercial community controlling extensive capital resources, much needed for the programm he and his advisers had established.

What then is the profit and loss for the Marcos regime in following a pro-Chinese policy? It certainly is not the way to curry popular favor and even a dictator has to show some regard for public opinion. However, favorable treatment of the Philippines' Chinese has a potential payoff both economically and politically. The Marcos government is committed to rapid economic development which is a goal hard to achieve in the face of declining commodity prices. Chinese capital and entrepreneurial ability represent an obvious potential source of economic growth. Hence it may be that economic improvement resulting from greater Chinese business activity may more than offset the antagonism coming as a result of the equitable treatment of an unpopular alien group.

Both overt censorship and the present political climate inhibit the expression of any popular resentment at pro-Chinese measures. The obvious interpretation is that many Filipinos would view the naturalization measures as a sell out to alien exploiters in disregard of Filipino interests. Such an attitude does not make good propaganda for foreign consumption and hence would probably not be voiced by opposition forces even if they had the means to do so. In the event of an overthrow of the Marcos regime, however, Chinese naturalization facilitation might easily be an object of an attack which would help the new government to gain support from a public which has long considered the Chinese as exploiters.

This assumption of a reversion to previous discriminatory practices is by no means certain and it may be that many Filipino leaders would like to see the Chinese issue disappear from politics. One indication that Marcos may have reflected the attitude of the majority of Philippine leaders is found in the action of the 1973 Constitutional Convestion. Although these constitutional provisions were not implemented by the Marcos government they do indicate the trend of thinking in the country at that time. Among other things the proposed constitutional provisions provide that children of alien fathers and Filipino mothers would be considered Philippine citizens at birth. This is a sharp departure from the 1935 constitution which extended that privilege only to those who were children of Filipino fathers⁶.

For many years there has been little trade between mainland China and the Philippines but this appears to be changing. China offers a market for Philippine raw materials including rice which is now becoming an export crop and China is able to offer badly needed petroleum⁷. Disputes such as the Spratley Island controversy have been left to negotiation in the effort to avoid conflict⁸. Chinese in the Philippines might become facilitators of greater commerce with the Peking regime and in any event continued discrimination against the Chinese would hardly favor greater economic ties.

Politically, acceptance of the Philippine Chinese is difficult to attack in view of the shift from a western to an eastern orientation. Radical critics of Marcos tend to denounce him as pro-American. Certainly concessions to Chinese businessmen cannot be attacked on this basis. Indeed an acceptance of the Filipino Chinese can be defended as an acknowledgement of the importance of Asian elements in Philippine polity.

It may even be true that a conciliatory policy toward the Philippine Chinese can strengthen the government internally. Chinese support to Philippine guerilla movements such as the New Peoples Army would greatly increase the peace and order problems. Dissident movements among Muslims are already a major problem and foreign assistance to guerillas in the Christian areas might well make the position of the Marcos regime untenable. Under these circumstances the friendship, or at least neutrality, of the Peking government is a major concern.

Although Philippine anti-Chinese sentiment has seldom carried over to relationships between the two nations it is of course somewhat related. Here the Peking regime offers a contrast to the Taiwan government. The Kuomintang regime in Taiwan maintained the premise that overseas Chinese continued to be citizens of China. Thus it indirectly stimulated the charge by nationalists that the ethnic Chinese could never really be sincere Filipino citizens. On the other hand, the Republic of China based in Taiwan, whatever the degree of success it may have had on that island, was hardly a major power. Therefore, it was helpless to protect the overseas Chinese whom it continued to claim as its own.

The mainland People's Republic of China represents the world's most populous nation and is a major world power. Thus it commands at least a degree of respect. However, it has forsworn the claim to the allegiance of overseas Chinese and encouraged them to regard themselves as citizens of the country in which they live⁹. Since the government of the Philippines recognized the Peoples Republic of China in 1975, the Philippine-Chinese are now associated with a government which makes fewer demands on the host country and yet is able to offer more in terms of international power.

Granted that these are obvious reasons for ending legal discrimination against the Chinese, what effect will this have on their assimilation in Philippine society?

INTEGRATION OR ASSIMILATION

Easier naturalization has often been cited as a method which might be expected to accelerate assimilation of Chinese in the Philippines. Not only has this been advocated by Chinese but also by Filipinos who wish to promote friendlier relations between Chinese and Filipinos. This was for instance a major part of the program recommended in 1961 by the Philippine Chapter of World Brotherhood sponsored by Araneta University 10.

Tang Tack, one time Secretary General of the Federation of Chinese Chambers of Commerce sees naturalization as a major step toward assimilation:

Assimilation appears to be a necessity in modern times. ... To accelerate the assimilation of minority groups in the Philippine body politic, it is believed that the Philippine Naturalization as amended, should further be modified to make it substantially easier and less expensive to become citizens of the Philippines. At present, it is hard and often expensive for a Chinese to obtain Philippine citizenship. And the high cost of acquiring Philippine citizenship through naturalization is one problem that obstructs the policy of assimilation 11.

There is no doubt that facilitating naturalization should encourage the Chinese to commit their economic fortunes to the Philippines and thus secure a greater integration of Chinese and Filipino economic enterprise and capital. Whether or not the assurance of citizenship would actually lead to the type of cultural fusion in which Chinese identity is abandoned is another question. Will the Chinese, in spite of economic integration, continue to be a group of Filipinos with a distinctive sub-culture?

McBeath writing in 1973, sees many obstacles to assimilation 12. He finds that intermarriage is increasing and that Chinese and Filipinos are gaining a greater cultural similarity in food, language and religion, but he is not convinced that such trends are strong enough to bring about a complete assimilation. He notes that the family seems to be dominated by the strongest partner, usually a Chinese husband, who sets the tone for cultural preference. Thus even though the medium of discourse in a mixed marriage is likely to be English or a Filipino language, identification with the Chinese community tends to be promoted. He argues that the children of mixed unions tend to identify themselves more as Chinese than as Filipinos. Further, Chinese youth report a comparatively small percentage of non-Chinese friends and continue to speak Chinese in conversation within the group. In addition to notions of a cultural superiority which are cited as reasons why a "high" culture such as Chinese would not easily blend with a "low" culture such as that of the Philippine Christian society McBeath

finds that ethnocentric notions of Chinese superiority are apt to be transmitted by the Chinese father and accepted by the mother.

Resentment of the Filipinos against Chinese business success is reciprocated by a Chinese disdain of Filipine culture 13. Thus the success of integration measures may be threatened by Chinese ethnocentrism as well as by Filipino pride. A casual inspection of the Philippines reveals a tendency to cling to Chinese cultural traditions and organizations. Children of Chinese ancestry are found in the many Chinese schools which are voluntarily supported by Chinese business groups and offer both a Chinese and Filipino curriculum. The Chinese Chamber of Commerce is usually the most important economic organization in the area. The Chinese language continues to be important, and a survey by Tilman of Chinese students born in the Philippines found that sixty percent said that Chinese was their original language and the language of the home 14. There can be little doubt that Filipino anti-Chinese prejudice is matched by some degree of Chinese chauvinism which regards Chinese culture and society as definitely superior.

There is, however, considerable ambivalence in attitudes among both Chinese and Filipinos. This is indicated among the Chinese by a considerable degree of Filipinization which may be enhanced now that the discriminatory measures have been removed. The desire of the Chinese for total participation in the Philippine economy may be seen as leading inevitably to behavior which brings them into the orbit of Philippine culture.

Indigenous Chinese religious institutions have survived, usually in rather modest quarters, although outside the city of Cebu a spectacular Taoist Temple has been erected. Many of the Filipino-Chinese have become Christian. A 1970 survey of Chinese students in the Philippines indicated that only 14 percent identified themselves as Buddhists 15. The estimate of the Catholic directory in 1959 was that 17 000 out of perhaps 70 000 Chinese in Manila were Catholics 16. McBeath found that 86 percent of a sample of Chinese university students were Christian as compared to 58 percent of their parents 17.

There is an unknown number of Protestant Chinese, probably somewhat smaller than the Catholics. The Protestant Chinese are organized in exclusively Chinese churches and most of the Catholic Chinese are found in predominantly Chinese parishes. Thus even the acceptance of Christianity is hardly an indication of the complete acceptance of the Filipino institutions.

It is estimated that there may be over a half a million "ethnic Chinese" of known recent Chinese ancestry in the Philippines, although in 1970 the census showed a total of only 86 855 alien Chinese, that is Chinese without Philippine citizenship, residing in the country 18. During the periods of easy naturalization in 1975 and in 1977, 31 265 applications were filed 19. Since these applications included the wife and dependent children it seems logical

to conclude that most of the Chinese who would be affected by discriminatory legislation had applied for naturalization.

What is likely to happen when the barriers to participation in Philippine society are removed may be illustrated by the school attendance pattern of Chinese mestizos in the city of Cotabato in the southern Philippines in 1954. Chinese mestizos made up 65 % of the kindergarten children in the Chinese schools, but their proportion dropped to 20 % of the high school population²⁰. Presumably this indicates that mestizo children were enrolled in the Chinese school by Chinese fathers anxious to preserve Chinese culture and identity but a desire to assimilate to the larger Philippine society prompted a high proportion of the students to move to Filipino schools as they reached the intermediate and high school years.

One potent source of Filipino prejudice against Chinese has been their projection of the Chinese as an alien business group who dominated the economy. There is a good deal of controversy on the extent of Chinese influence and the formal statistics show that Chinese-owned business is much smaller in value than that owned by Filipinos or by Americans²¹. The statistics however are somewhat open to doubt since a good many of the "Filipinoowned" businesses are held either by ethnic Chinese who are Philippine citizens or by Chinese who have persuaded Filipino "dummies" to hold formal title to a business operated by the Chinese. One empirical indication of Chinese economic activity is afforded by an intensive study of the Chinese community in Iloilo, a city of a quarter million population in the central Philippines. The population of ethnic Chinese was estimated at between 5000 and 6000, and they were found to operate 520 businesses. Seventy percent of the Chinese men were self-employed shopkeepers and another 16 % were employees of Chinese concerns. The ethnic Chinese represented only 2 % of Iloilo's population but they paid 35 % of the business taxes²². Impressionistic observations suggest that the pattern in Iloilo is true in Manila and other Philippine cities, and while it is impossible to get an exact account of Chinese business activities there is no doubt that they are substantial in proportion to the size of the population.

The concentration of the Chinese in commercial pursuits exposes them to the enmity which usually centers on the alien commercial middlemen. Easy naturalization should open doors to such fields as education, farming, government employment and professional activity. This might lessen the stereotype of the Chinese as an overly competitive businessman but might also stimulte hostility among educators, independent professionals, farmers and government employees who have been protected against Chinese competition.

Another factor is the matter of intermarriage. Any "Who's Who" published in the Philippines since 1898 contains name after name of prominent Fili-

pinos, clearly indicating their Chinese ancestry: Yangco, Lichauco, Palanca, Tiangco, Cojuangco, Tambunting, Limjap, Lacson, Tan, Lim, and many, many others, including those whose names do not reveal the connection, such as Aguinaldo, Asmena, Araneta. In the early days of Chinese settlement the migrants were mostly male and in 1918 it was estimated that the sex ratio was 1 to 1323. As immigration has been almost completely cut off since 1936 it is assumed that probably now the sex ratio among the younger Chinese is approximately equal. The disorted sex ratio of the early period led to frequent miscegenation, much of it outside of marriage. This motivation is obviously less prevalent at the present time, but indications are that a fair proportion of those of Chinese ancestry are marrying Filipinos. The census reports indicate that, in 1973, more than half of the brides with Chinese citizenship married Filipino men and that approximately half of the Chinese men took Filipino brides 24 . An unknown number involved in such marriages may have been ethnic Chinese with Philippine citizenship but these figures still indicate the continuance of a substantial amount of intermarriage.

Intermarriage has been prevalent for a long time and the late G, Otley Beyer estimated that probably ten percent of the Philippine population had some Chinese ancestry 25 . Social distance surveys as recent as 1973 indicate a hostility toward intermarriage among Filipinos but this is often overcome by the effects of propinquity; the superior economic position of Chinese men is obviously a factor. The only survey of Chinese-Filipino marriages extant found that the income of the Chinese groom on the average was several times higher than that of the family of his Filipino bride 26 . This was a 1955 survey but there is no evidence that this situation has changed.

McBeath finds that Chinese cultural distinctiveness is promoted through institutions leading to Chinese communalism. These institutions include the Chinese newspapers, the Chinese schools, which enroll a large portion of the youth of Chinese or of mixed descent in the Philippines, a variety of associations including the Chinese Chambers of Commerce, and associations of a familial or social type. In addition he argues that there is a high concentration of Chinese in the larger Filipino cities which makes them a more cohesive group than might be indicated by their relatively small proportion of the total population. He concludes his discussion as follows:

It is impossible to be sanguine about the collective future of the Filipino Chinese in terms of integration hypotheses. Because of right wing authoritarianism in the community and the considered disinterest of most Philippine Chinese in either assimilation or integration, communalism remains a majority choice²⁷.

Not every one, however, is persuaded of the strength of Chinese resistance to assimilation. McPhelin dismisses the notion of the continued separateness

of the Filipino Chinese as merely a "sturdy myth". He finds that history illustrates the acceptance of assimilation:

This country provides an arresting example of extensive assimilation of the Chinese, worthy of attention not yet given it. Far from being the exception, assimilation seems to be the rule. One will search in vain for old Chinese families in the Philippines – families which have preserved their Chinese identity and purity of blood generation after generation, as some Spanish families have done here and as Jews have done all over the world. Pure Chinese are relative newcomers. ... In one class of Atenistas this year I had three Chinese students. Had anyone tested me in advance by asking me to pick out the three, I would have selected the wrong ones. This is hardly the country in which to go about saying that the Chinese are unassimilable. Jose Rizal himself had Chinese blood²⁸.

A Chinese commentator on this question, Bernard Go, says that Chinese is no longer an adequate term to designate those of Chinese descent who were born in the country. He suggests a new label, Pinsino. He denies that the Philippines' Chinese are a closely knit community and points out that there are competing Chinese Chambers of Commerce and Chinese newspapers and that Chinese associations of various kinds are continually splitting. He observes that even when the Pinsinos speak Chinese it is with a Filipino accent and says that the majority of younger Pinsinos have as many Filipino as Pinsino friends. He finds the Pinsino uninterested in Chinese conventions and etiquette and not particularly likely to be a member of a Chinese association. He says that physically many Pinsinos can pass for ordinary Filipinos since extensive intermarriage between Chinese and Filipinos in the past has blurred physical distinctions. While it is true that Chinese tend to have a high concentration in urban centers he finds that they are leaving traditional areas such as Binondo and moving out to the suburbs where they may associate more with middle and upper class Filipinos than with those of Chinese background. He adds that although they have not been completely desinicized they are far closer to Christian Filipino society than to any form of Chinese society or culture 29.

In a discussion of this kind there is always a question of the relation of acculturation to assimilation. McBeaths brings out some aspects of this discussion in his treatment of the religious adaptation of Chinese Filipinos. He finds that the great majority of Chinese students were Christian and that they were as likely to participate regularly in Sunday worship as were Filipinos. However, they were less likely to participate in Christmas celebrations, and the Catholic All Saints Day had been turned into a Chinese festival which was celebrated at the Chinese cemetery by Chinese of all religious persuasions. He concludes:

Cursory reading of the foregoing analyses may create an unclear picture of the exact state of cultural change manifested by Philippine Chinese youth. In each field of nonmaterial cultural change investigated, one is tempted to exclaim that Chinese youth have assimilated, that they are becoming indistinguishable from their Filipino peers. Yet each subsequent analysis introduces qualifications and reservations: Chinese students are proficient in Philippine languages, but they do not, in general, prefer to speak them; they read Englishlanguage newspapers, but what else is there that they can read? They are Christians, but they do not participate as expected in Christian celebrations; and they are likely to attend ethnically segregated congregations.

While it is clear that Chinese students have become highly adapted to conditions in the Philippines, it is equally evident that they are not fully acculturated to prevailing social patterns. In each case, they have become proficient in the social norm emphasized by their environment. But in no case have they replaced sinitic patterns with Filipino ones³⁰.

It is certainly true that the Philippines Chinese are not yet assimilated. The important question though, is the probable trend. Perhaps the best way to appraise these trends is to look at current developments in the light of an assimilation model by Gordon³¹. McBeath dismisses this model because of his emphasis on adaptation and integration rather than acculturation and assimilation. However, at the present time Gordon's model does highlight trends in the relation of Philippine Chinese with the total Philippine society. Gordon offers a model of assimilation based on six steps. Our current analysis indicates that the current movement along the lines of this model is toward assimilation.

	Stage o	f Assin	nilation	(Gordon	p. 169)
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Cultural or behavioral assimilation (acculturation)

Structural assimilation

Marital assimilation (amalgamation)

Current trend

McBeath indicates that in language, education and religion, adaptation - even acculturation - has progressed considerably.

School and residential patterns bring more Chinese into contact with Filipinos even though most of their primary contacts are still within the Chinese group.

Intermarriage is increasing despite a more nearly equal sex ratio.

Identificational assimilation (Development of sense of peoplehood based exclusively on host society)

Attitude receptional assimilation (Absence of prejudice)

Behavior receptional assimilation (Absence of discrimination)

Civic assimilation (Absence of value and power conflict) Younger Chinese are ambivalent but indicate a greater Filipino identification

Official policy no longer encourages prejudice

Easy naturalization will wipe out much of discriminatory treatment.

The main issue is Chinese economic participation which has been alleviated by simplified naturalization procedures. There is some tension on survival of a separate Chinese school system but this does not appear to be a major issue.

A final pertinent observation on the question of assimilation versus integration with cultural distinctiveness is found in the statement of Hubert Reynolds on the viewpoint of young people of Chinese ancestry as contrasted with their elders:

This generation of Chinese born in the Philippines is quite different from the previous generation. Whereas their parents (particularly fathers) came to the Philippines to make their fortune and then return to their home village in South China for retirement, these young people want to stay in the Philippines. They feel that they belong to the Philippines and anyway, they have no place to go.

The parents hold to a filial piety complex with a dominant economic orientation to serve: a) patrilineal family prosperity, b) loyalty to Chinese culture and people, and c) worship or respect for their ancestors. Most of the young Chinese people lean towards a dominant orientation of acceptance and status in the Philippines even though the majority of them have attended Chinese schools³².

The younger Pinsinos do not have any very strong connections with either Taiwan or with the Communist mainland. If naturalization procedures remove the economic barriers which have set them apart it seems plausible to assume that today's Chinese will rapidly become absorbed in Filipino society and that their Chinese origin may become mainly of historical interest.

CONCLUSION

A provision for simple naturalization for the overseas Chinese in the Philippines is an action of a dictatorial government which is hardly supported by popular sentiment even though many Filipino interests are. It may well be true that when the Marcos government passes from history a succeeding regime will try to undo many of its less popular acts including those favoring the assimilation of the Chinese. On the other hand the shift in Philippine identification from that of a Western outpost in Asia to an integral part of the Orient should inhibit the expression of resentment against ethnic Chinese. Likewise the dispersion of the Chinese into occupations not associated with the sensitive role of shopkeeper or agricultural processor may avoid the stimulation of ethnic antagonism. Further, the passage of time, the expansion of intermarriage, the increased association of Chinese and Filipinos, all may push toward an acceptance of the status quo. Finally, even though the Peking government has done little to protect the overseas Chinese its prestige would still serve to offset obviously discriminatory treatment against Chinese nationals. All of these tendencies indicate that President Ferdinand Marcos may indeed have engineered a measure which will promote the economic integration of the ethnic Chinese and lead to their ultimate assimilation 33.

Footnotes

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