

China,
Across
the
Seas

The
Chinese
as
Filipinos

Edited by

Aileen S.P. Baviera

Teresita Ang See

PUBLISHED BY

**PHILIPPINE ASSOCIATION
FOR CHINESE STUDIES**

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The Chinese as Filipinos

Selected papers of a national conference on "The Chinese in the Philippines", December 6-7, 1990, Bro. Gabriel Connon Hall, De La Salle University, Taft Avenue, Manila. Organized by the Philippine Association for Chinese Studies and DLSU China Studies Program.

Introduction

This two-volume issue of *Chinese Studies* covers two distinct themes. The first volume, on Philippine-China relations, is entitled "China, Across the Seas". It consists of two articles and a brief reaction paper, all written for a symposium in 1989.

The first chapter discusses at the theoretical plane the Chinese view of the world and its implications for China's foreign policy, especially vis-a-vis the Third World and by extension, the Philippines. It focuses on Chinese tradition, history, culture, and philosophy as the foundations of such a world view, but alludes to how considerations of pragmatism and politics have exercised a moderating influence, if not primacy altogether, over past international policy frameworks. The next two chapters focus on practical issues in Philippine-China relations from the Philippine point of view. They give a general overview of the main problems in Philippine-China bilateral ties: the trade imbalance, the effects of the Philippine's growing ties with Taiwan, the overseas Chinese issue, and the question of conflicting claims to the Spratly islands.

In the three eventful years that have passed since the initial presentation of these papers, many changes, new trends and tendencies in the national, regional and international environment have come to our attention as important, if not decisive, factors in our relations with China. To name a few: the collapse of socialism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, the expulsion of American military forces from their Philippine bases, China's recognition by Indonesia and Singapore, Taiwan's growing economic and political clout. Moreover, the stupendous results and bold directions of China's reform and open-door policies have in the last few years made their impact felt on the region's upbeat economy. These raise new implications that clearly merit the attention of observers of Philippine-China relations.

The second part of this book focuses on the Chinese Filipinos. It consists of five papers presented in 1990, discussing various experiences of the Chinese in the Philippine setting, at different points in time and in different parts of the country. The contributors, most of them historians, document both the evolution of relations within Chinese society in the Philippines as well as of Chinese relations with main-

stream Filipino society. Aspects of their identity, integration, changing images, and roles are touched upon.

Many rare-known facts are revealed in this rather unique collection, which we hope will be a major contribution to contemporary scholarship on the Chinese in the Philippines—who they are, where they are and why.

The editors wish to thank all the contributors, the Chinben See Memorial Trust Fund, the Philippine-China Development Resource Center and the China Studies Program of De La Salle University, for their support for this project. Our gratitude also goes to Ms. Lilibeth Gramor for typing all the manuscripts. Finally, we wish to apologize for the delay in making available to the public the papers of these two conferences.

Teresita Ang See
Aileen San Pablo-Baviera

Editors

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China,
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China's Evolving World View and the Philippines

Aileen San Pablo-Baviera

Introduction

An old Chinese proverb asks: How could the swallow know the aspirations of the wild swan?

Studying China from a Philippine perspective is at times like a little swallow trying to understand the aspirations of the wild swan. While the Philippines and China may seem to belong to the same species in more ways than one—sharing an oriental culture, a common regional environment and the challenges of development, yet we are so different. And the difference cannot be more fundamental than the disparity of the way the swallow perceives its own smallness against the vast horizons, with the way the wild swan eclipses all in its shadow.

The relevant factor is not so much our respective sizes as the manner by which China and the Philippines contemplate the world and their respective places in it.

Many Filipinos possess paradoxical attitudes towards China—seeming to fear her strength, and at the same time despise her weakness. For a long time, the most common image of China that came to the Filipino mind was that of a fierce and menacing dragon poised to ingest its smaller neighbors. Such imagery was founded on our studies of ancient Chinese civilization, a vast empire whose influence spread far and wide in the Orient, tales of how the Sultan of Sulu paid tribute to the Emperor of the Middle Kingdom who was the Son of Heaven, as well as modern horror stories of the Cold-War variety about how the tide of communism would swell insidiously, overthrowing bourgeois governments every step of the way.

However, China has also been alternatively perceived as a champion of Third World causes, a loyal ally against superpower stratagem, a guarantor of regional peace and security, and a true advocate of

sovereignty and non-alignment. We need therefore to ask ourselves, which is the real China? How does she view the world and what designs, if any, does she have upon it?

Clearly, to develop a more rational attitude towards China and the Chinese, we need to understand her more, and to understand China means to see the world through Chinese eyes.

When we speak of a Chinese world view, this should comprehensively include how China understands the nature of man and of the cosmos, the logic and flow of history and social development, and a vision of an ideal existence. To accomplish this means delving deep into the domain of epistemology and the realm of antiquity, but we do not wish to be so presumptuous. Our interest here is much more limited—to gain insights on how China presently looks at the world in order to better comprehend her conduct of foreign relations, particularly with regard to the Philippines.

The ancient Chinese world view

We begin with the ancient Chinese world view and its relevance to current thinking. Scholars engaged in studies of world view believe that it is a mirror reflection of a self-image or of how one looks upon one's self. This may be singularly true for ancient China, considering the fact that for the greater length of their history, the Chinese believed that they were entirely surrounded by seas and mountains, beyond which everything was barbarian. Therefore, as far as the Chinese were concerned—China was the world.

The most important influence on the ancient Chinese world view was Confucian doctrine. Because it developed at a time of wars, corruption, and natural calamities, the greatest concern of Confucianism was the maintenance of order and harmony, first in human society, and secondly between man and his natural surroundings. Confucius was not absorbed with the supernatural nor in the after-life, but rather devoted all efforts to the solution of problems of the earth, which was referred to as *tianxia* or all below Heaven. The Confucian classics were more than anything else social and political treatise. As Hsun Tzu professed: "Heaven has its seasons; Earth has its resources; Man has his Government." The tranquility of nature and the occurrence of flood and drought were attributed to the success or failings of government,

and to the virtue or folly of the sovereign. Good government was seen as the key to achieving harmony and order. A good ruler was one who consciously strived toward moral reform.

Confucianism also prescribed a sociopolitical structure that was hierarchical and anti-egalitarian in nature. Traditional Chinese philosophy placed no value on equality. On the contrary, emphasized at every turn were the superior-subordinate relationships that existed between ruler and subject, father and son, husband and wife, elder brother and younger brother, between the superior class of scholar-officials on one hand, and peasants and merchants on the other.

This hierarchical conception of order extended to China's early relations with other peoples and nations. In its Sinocentric perspective, within the great unity of "all under Heaven", boundaries existed which separated the civilized from the barbarian. Cultural superiority and moral virtue were deemed the sources of her glory, not military strength nor material wealth.

Traditionally the Chinese did not conceive of themselves so much as a nation or a state, but as a civilization that would spread its influence by standing as an example to the barbarians. The principles of national independence, national sovereignty and national equality were non-existent in ancient China, running contrary to their sense of a universal civilization.¹ Relations with other political entities were conducted within the framework of the tribute system. Western traders bearing greetings from European sovereigns for the Emperor were treated with the same hospitality and indulgence extended to tributary missions from neighboring kingdoms or fiefdoms in Japan, Korea, Annam or Sulu.

What is perhaps remarkable is that in the long history during which China regarded itself as the Middle Kingdom, enjoying the allegiance and tribute of smaller states and exercising significant cultural influence over many outside peoples, there was no aggressive effort on her part to impose her will on non-Chinese states.

Early contacts with the West saw a clash of two civilizations both deeming themselves morally superior to the other. The Chinese, believing that their own knowledge and civilization were self-sufficient and that they had little to gain from exchange with the West, condescended upon the foreign devils. Meanwhile, the Europeans saw the Chinese as barbarian because they were not Christian. The difference was that while the Chinese welcomed the foreign devils in

the hope that they be Sinicized and be brought into the fold of Chinese civilization (*lai hua*), the Europeans were only too eager to employ superior weapons to Christianize the Chinese, not to mention to extract their abundant resources.

China's confrontations with the West eventually led to the formal abolition of the tribute system and its replacement with the treaty system. Reform of political institutions subsequently took place while the basic belief in Chinese superiority remained. The fear grew that exposure to Western ideas might corrupt and undermine the Confucian social order. The impact of Western aggression on the Chinese world view could perhaps be measured in terms of the following factors: first, it reinforced what some scholars call the anti-foreignism² of the Chinese, particularly following the imposition of unequal treaties; second, it gave birth to a true consciousness of nationhood and race among the Chinese in dichotomy to another civilization; and third, it questioned the old definitions of power insofar as virtue was no longer deemed sufficient without technology and weapons.

The Maoist world view

While the influx of Western thinking may have failed in transforming the Confucian order, Maoism may have been more successful.

Because of the commanding position that Mao Zedong enjoyed from 1949 until his death in 1976, the Chinese world view that evolved during this period was very much an echo of his personal perceptions and analysis of the world. Maoism was in fact a conscious attempt to change the manner the Chinese viewed themselves in relation to the rest of the world. Mao believed that Confucianism and imperialism had both contributed to the development of an inferiority complex among the Chinese masses.

Ever an optimist and a revolutionary romanticist, he sought to transform China's weakness—its huge, backward population—into its principal strength. He maintained that man, not technology, was the primary moving force in history. To prove it, he led a poorly equipped but committed Red Army to revolutionary victory, after which he embarked on transforming feudal China into a stable socialist state by mobilizing millions of Chinese peasants.

The revolution that he led was a conscious attempt to recast the old China—steeped in tradition, superstition and a bureaucratic hierarchical social system—into a completely bold, new, dynamic nation animated by the spirit of socialism. Yet, inevitably, Mao himself, together with his comrades-in-arms, were products of the old thinking, their world view inextricably colored by the ancient traditions even as its content and course were determined by the revolutionary imperative. We find, upon studying the Maoist world view, both aspects of the old and the new, of continuity and change.

As a Marxist, Mao believed that the development of China was but a part of a larger historical process of world development, that history moves forward and not in circles, that change is inevitable because of the existence of contradictions in all things, and that continual struggle is necessary if man were to make his own history. In contrast to the Confucian primacy on tradition, order and harmony, Mao called for change, for a new just social order to be achieved through hard struggle.

Egalitarianism was a primary value in Maoist China. Mao was committed to remove the differences between the rich and the poor, between the cities and the countryside, between mental and manual labor, and between officialdom and the masses.

Importance was also attached to self-reliant, voluntarist and mobilizational methods of social transformation, as well as protracted struggle. These were, after all, the factors which had proved crucial to revolutionary victory in 1949. This viewpoint is logical in a country such as China which, while suffering from a dire lack of technology and being unevenly endowed with the factors of production, has massive manpower resources. It is one of the reasons why Maoism held great attraction for Third World liberation movements.

Anti-imperialism was another key aspect of the Maoist world view. Mao's early revolutionary doctrine cited two major contradictions existing in China—that between imperialism and the Chinese nation, and secondly, that between the feudal landlord class on one hand and the Chinese workers and peasants on the other. The tasks of overthrowing imperialism and feudalism went hand in hand. Feudalism was referred to as the "social base" of imperialism, with the argument that imperialism invariably allies itself with the ruling strata, supporting and preserving the feudal structures while reducing an independent country to a colony or semi-colony.

In a situation where the principal contradiction was between imperialism and the Chinese nation, the struggle against the main enemy—imperialism—necessitated the establishment of a united front even with the Chinese bourgeoisie. The struggle against the feudal ruling elites became principal only after imperialism had been overturned.

How do these attitudes translate into China's perceptions of the world? Mao viewed everything around him from the kaleidoscope of class struggle. Whether attributable to the legacies of Lenin, to his own revolutionary experiences, or to antagonism towards the Confucian order—Mao saw the world as basically unequal—a hierarchy of modern, powerful imperialist states against a mass of oppressed and exploited nations. He defined the international system as a struggle between the defenders of a moribund status quo and revolutionary challengers seeking to establish a new and just world order. The antagonism between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie within national borders was seen as principal basis of civil wars and other national conflicts. Underlying all these was Mao's unshakable faith in the certainty of final victory—the victory of the proletariat over the bourgeoisie, and victory of the oppressed nations of the Third World over their oppressors.

From the moment of their own victory in repudiating imperialism and the old decaying order in 1949, China began to be seen as a model of revolution in the Third World. Its theory of protracted people's war gained adherents among national liberation movements, particularly in Asia, and its initial successes in socialist construction were an inspiration to other poor nations.

This being so, and in line with her duties of proletarian internationalism, China extended support to those waging what it termed "just wars" of national liberation, championing their causes in international fora, loudly propagandizing and cheering them on in their efforts to overthrow so-called oppressive bourgeois regimes. China has consistently been at the forefront of the clamor for a new world order. In the 1970s she played a crucial role in the United Nations in terms of raising the agenda of developing nations versus the agenda of the superpowers. This included active encouragement of the United Nations resolution for a New International Economic Order. China has symbolically aligned herself with the Third World on the basis of her semi-colonial experience, her proletarian standpoint, and her own