

CHINESE SCHOOLS AND THE ASSIMILATION PROBLEM IN THE PHILIPPINES

by

Gerald Sussman

The first Chinese school in the Philippines was opened at the turn of the century, after the close of the Spanish regime and the beginning of American administration. Since then Chinese schools proliferated rapidly as the Americans, and the Philippine Government subsequently followed a benign non-assimilation policy toward the Chinese similar to that applied to Orientals in the U.S. mainland.

Today, Chinese schools are found all over the country; and these have generally acquired a reputation for providing education above the standards of Filipino schools. At this time, too, Chinese schools are being threatened with extinction as the Philippine Government is bent on removing obstacles to the assimilation of the Chinese. The Chinese school system in the Philippine experience had proven to be one of the most important institutions which tend to perpetuate Chinese separateness from the majority of Malayan Filipinos. The controversy over the Chinese school question was taken up in 1972 by the Constitutional Convention and the now-defunct Congress, and, more recently, by the martial law government.

Assimilation in Perspective

At this point, it would be best to give a brief historical account of how the Chinese have managed to remain a largely non-assimilated group despite their long presence in the Philippines which dated back to neolithic contacts as early as the third millennium B.C.¹

When the Spanish conquistadores arrived in the Philippine archipelago, they found a flourishing trade between Chinese and Muslim merchants, and a colony of Chinese living in Luzon.² Bent on destroying Muslim political and religious influence in the Island, the Spanish ended the Chinese-Muslim trade and drove the Muslims out of Luzon. The Chinese remained to serve as middlemen for Spanish trade in the Islands and other Spanish colonies.

While the Chinese served an important economic function, their presence was not otherwise appreciated. For one thing, the Chinese proved resistant to the Spanish friars' efforts to Catholicize the entire archipelago.³ Another problem was the Spaniards' embarrassing ineptness at business in comparison to the shrewdness of the Chinese.⁴

The 300-year history of Spanish rule in the Philippines is scarred with periodic genocidal attacks on the Chinese population, including several attempts to wipe out the *Parian*, the Chinese ghetto outside the walls of Intramuros. But always, some Chinese remained: those who were converted to Catholicism and the middle-level merchants whose business acumen was needed to keep the Spanish economic system intact. Several Governors-General asked Royal permission to banish the Chinese, but the Throne, recognizing the adverse effects on the economy whenever the Chinese population was badly diminished, always insisted on at least a residue group of Chinese. The Spanish had come to rely on the Chinese not only for trade and services, but even in activities formerly reserved for Filipinos, including agriculture, husbandry and other cottage industries.⁵

The Chinese did not passively accept Spanish rule. They continually objected to oppressive tributes and taxes against them as well as forced conscription into work forces, raids upon their living quarters and interference with their trade. A number of Chinese revolts broke out, but these were met by severe Spanish counter attacks which decimated the Chinese population periodically. The height of Chinese resistance during the early Spanish period occurred when the Chinese corsair, Limahong, attacked Manila in 1574 and the pirate, Koxinga, threatened to do the same a century later.

By 1898, when the Spaniards ingloriously left the Philippines, the Chinese were thriving. Although there are no reliable statistics on the Chinese population

in 1898, estimates range all the way up to 100,000.⁶ By dint of their positive traits of diligence, patience, intelligence and experience, and their unfortunate negative propensity toward bribing public officials, the Chinese survived the Spanish.

Philippine historical accounts state that the Chinese were well entrenched economically; but their position as Overseas Chinese made their legal status ambiguous. However, this posed no critical problem as the incoming Americans did not rigidly enforce immigration restrictions against them.⁷ The American application to the Philippines of the anti-Oriental policy similar to that in the U.S. mainland, excluding Chinese nationals from U.S. citizenship or naturalization,⁸ did not also present a problem to the Chinese in the Philippines. The Chinese remained legally non-assimilated throughout the American regime, subject to restrictions on trade and agricultural land ownership.⁹

Despite the "Yellow Peril" paranoia, the twentieth century brought new and expanded opportunities in political, social, economic and educational pursuits for the Philippine Chinese. The American economic policy of *laissez-faire* opened up trade to Chinese businessmen, many of whom became nouveau-riche merchants. An expanded class of Chinese elites was emerging.

Important members of the Chinese economic elite were later identified with the Kuomintang, particularly after the 1927 split in the KMT in the Chinese mainland; but not all Chinese were rightists. An all-Chinese military combat unit in the Philippine Japanese War was leftist-oriented and eventually joined up with the Hukbalahap movement. There was also a pre-war leftist Chinese political organization, the Tien Hwa Tian (China Hall), with the Kim Kuo Press serving as its information medium.¹⁰

Post-war independence brought the Republic of the Philippines into new international alignments. Following American foreign policy initiatives, the Philippine Government became staunchly anti-Communist and has supported, up to the present, the Chiang Kai-Shek regime in Taiwan. The vast majority of the Chinese are quiet about their political views while most of the Chinese business elites are unmistakably KMT members and Taiwan supporters.

The Development of Chinese Schools

In 1898, Tan Chue-Lion, the first Chinese Consul in the Philippines, established the Anglo-Chinese School. This was the first Chinese School in the Philippines as the Spanish had prohibited private Chinese education. Before 1898, very few Chinese could afford to attend the San Juan de Letran or Ateneo de Manila universities and fewer still were able to study at universities in China.¹¹

Starting with only 40 students, mostly Chinese, the Anglo-Chinese School later transferred to the Chinese Community Association at Ongpin St. in Binondo, Manila. Between 1900 and 1911, there remained only between 50-100 Chinese students.¹²

Despite American exclusion laws, the Chinese population (largely illegal¹³) was rapidly expanding during the 1920's and 1930's. With an equally increasing school population, Chinese schools totalled 58 by 1935. The War brought about the closure of the schools; but rapid post-war expansion further increased its number to 159 in 1964 with 52,000 students.¹⁴ At present, there are some 160 schools with about 70,000 students.

Changes in School Control and Curriculum

The early type of Chinese education consisted of the Four Books and the Five Classics, a system which was established during the Chou dynasty and which persisted until the end of the Manchu dynasty in 1911. Under American influence, English became part of the curriculum. Evening classes in English and Chinese were started in 1911. Separate instruction in Fukienese and Cantonese was maintained until 1926 when Mandarin was introduced as the medium of instruction. Several Chinese schools of the latter type were started by American Protestant missionaries and were opened to both Chinese and Filipino students. One such school, the St. Stephen Chinese School, founded by Anglican missionaries in 1917, is still in operation. During the Japanese Occupation, the Chinese schools were forced to close, but they reopened after the war, along with many new ones. These are all registered at the Taiwan Embassy.¹⁵

In 1974, a Treaty of Amity with the Philippine Government was negotiated by the Kuomintang, which was still the official government in mainland China after the war. This Treaty gave the Philippine Chinese, among other things, the right to operate schools for Overseas Chinese. The exact wording mutually gave the two countries "the liberty to establish schools for the education of their children. . ."¹⁶ Speaking for the 800 million Chinese on the Mainland, the Taiwan military government is still recognized by the Philippine Government; thus the Treaty of Amity still stands officially.

The 1950's is widely regarded as the most neurotic period of American foreign relations. American policy makers of the period such as Senator Joseph McCarthy and the Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, supported the bi-polar world view so ardently that there arose a most infectious "Red Scare" syndrome. In Southeast Asia, the fall of the French in Indochina in 1954 precipitated the founding of a military defense pact, SEATO, to "protect" Southeast Asia from a perceived threat of Chinese communism. The Philippines was no exception from the effects of the "Red Scare" syndrome. In the Philippines, this phenomenon manifested itself in talks of closing down the Chinese schools or at least purging them.

It might be pointed out that, during this period, most of the Chinese schools were registered, financed, and controlled by the Taiwan government with the help of local Chinese businessmen. This makes it difficult to understand the fear that Communist subversives were working within these schools. Nevertheless, the Philippine Government demanded complete supervision over the Chinese schools.

Diplomatic negotiations on the matter of Chinese schools in the Philippines were carried out by the then Vice-President (and Secretary of Foreign Affairs) Garcia and Taiwan Ambassador Chen Chi-Mai. The new agreement made it a requirement for all Chinese schools to register with the Bureau of Private Schools which will issue a permit and recognition certificate prior to the schools' operation. Also, the agreement included the right of the Philippines to decide on Philippine subject requirements, a provision on Chinese subjects, and the setting up of a joint technical committee for Chinese subjects and teacher standards.¹⁷

In spite of this initiative, the Philippines still remained the only country in Asia which had a dual system of education merely to suit another country.¹⁸

*Nationalization of Schools
in Other Southeast Asian Countries*

Thailand

Unlike most Asian countries, Thailand has made substantial efforts to assimilate its Chinese population into Thai society and culture.¹⁹ Starting in the 1920's, the Thai government took strict measures so that the Chinese would not continue to be a separate society within a society, having a distinctly different culture and a separate economy. Such measures included tight immigration quotas, means to make the Chinese use Thai names, the banning of Chinese-language broadcasts and advertising, and the phasing out of Chinese schools.

Unlike the Philippines, Thailand has provided citizenship on the *jus soli* principle. Anyone born within the kingdom is a Thai citizen. Using intermarriage as an index, assimilation is proceeding successfully. According to a *Pagkakaisa Sa Pag-unlad Report* No. 8, among Thai-Chinese, 30% of businessmen interviewed, 44% of the students and 64% of government employees had Thai members in their household. Other reports state that Chinese names and distinct physical features are disappearing.

The government has also taken strong measures in education. Since 1955, Chinese schools have been reduced from 500 to 167. No new Chinese schools can be opened and the secondary schools have been taken over by the Thais. Chinese subjects may only be taught ten hours per week in four years of elementary school while the use of Chinese language is officially discouraged. This has not produced

any strong reaction among the Chinese and few children of Chinese parents have opted for university education in Taiwan.

Unlike the Philippines, these restrictions on the Chinese, including education, have been carried out *despite* a similar Treaty of Amity in 1945 between Thailand and the China (KMT) government.

Indonesia

Following independence, and after promises of prosperity to the people, the Indonesia nationalist leadership embarked on a series of nationalization measures. In 1958, Dutch enterprises and estates were turned over to Indonesians. However, despite this measure, Indonesia was still faced with a serious problem of what to do with its economically well-entrenched Chinese population.²⁰ Hence, after 1957, Chinese entrepreneurs also became a target of the Indonesian nationalization moves.

In this connection, the Indonesian government worked out a Dual Citizenship Treaty in 1955 with the People's Republic of China turning over responsibility for determining the legal status of Overseas Chinese to the host country, Indonesia. The principle of *jus soli* was used as the basis by which the Indonesian Chinese could opt for either Chinese (People's Republic) or Indonesian citizenship.

In education, the Indonesian government was faced by a bigger problem. Since the Dutch never prevented the opening of Chinese schools (only the entrance of Chinese into Dutch schools), the Chinese provided their own facilities for education. After independence, Indonesians began constructing schools from scratch in a massive effort to raise their literacy and educational attainment. At the same time, nationalization was implemented in the school system and the Chinese schools were closed. As a result, the Indonesian-born Chinese were transferred to Indonesian-language schools. On the other hand, China-born "totoks" were allowed to attend a few strictly controlled Chinese schools. To make up for the school shortage, Chinese businessmen were constrained to finance new private schools.

Proposed Filipinization of Schools

The ongoing controversy over foreign-run schools in the Philippines was aired in 1972 in the House of Representatives and in the Constitutional Convention. Both the House and the "Con-Con" sought to Filipinize Chinese and other foreign-run schools, to which only the Taiwan government and certain Chinese elements in the Philippines had adverse reactions. The House bill had received support from the Department of Education and the Department of Foreign Affairs.

The proposed law (House version) would Filipinize the administration, supervision, instruction (including textbook control), and service staffs of all schools run by aliens and foreign nationals. This law would not apply, however, to the *ownership* of schools, the main point of concern to the Taiwan government and local Kuomintang members. Another aspect of the bill is aimed at regulating the ratio of aliens to Filipino citizens in foreign schools. In implementing this law, the Philippine Government would give a ten-year adjustment period.²¹

Since then the martial law administration of President Marcos has gone ahead with the Filipinization of Chinese schools. The new constitution, ratified in January 1973, provides in Article XV, section 8 (7): "Educational institutions other than those established by religious orders, mission boards, and charitable organizations shall be owned solely by citizens of the Philippines, or corporations or associations sixty per centum of the capital of which is owned by such citizens." Presidential Decree No. 175 gives Chinese schools four years to phase out by establishing a 3 to 1 Filipino-to-alien student ratio and by making school governing bodies and administrations 100 percent Filipino.²² American schools would be exempt from the Presidential Decree on the rationale that they are established for temporary residents of foreign diplomatic personnel and dependents.²³

The Taiwan Position on the School Question

In protesting the Filipinization bill, the Taiwan government, through Ambassador Liu Chieh, has insisted that such a move by the Philippines would be a violation of the 1947 Treaty of Amity, which authorized the Chinese to operate schools for their own nationals. He argued to Education Secretary Juan Manuel that the local Chinese have the right to continue to run their own schools.²⁴ Another argument raised by some local Chinese is that Chinese schools have high academic standards, take care of the education of some 70,000 students and employ more than 7,000 people, including 4,000 teachers in a country which suffers from a serious classroom shortage.

The Pro-Filipinization Position

The proponents of Filipinization believe that the Chinese schools perpetuate Chinese identity which results in the separation of Filipino and Chinese youth. This measure is also supported for "national security" considerations.

In response to Taiwan's protest, Secretary of Education Manuel had stated that the 1955 agreement between the Philippines and Taiwan gave the Philippines the right to control the curricula and to require registration with the Bureau of Private Schools, and that the Treaty of Amity was not violated by the 1972 House

bill since the 1947 Treaty, unlike the present understanding, presupposed the return of Chinese residents to the Mainland.²⁵

Critics of Chinese schools have pointed out that the Treaty of Amity is a "one way street." That is, while alien Chinese enjoy the privilege of having 15,000 students in Chinese schools in the Philippines, Filipinos have not pursued that privilege in Taiwan, or in China where travel has been illegal since 1949. There are no Filipino schools in Taiwan and there were only 11 Filipino college graduates from Taiwanese universities in 1971 and 12 in 1970. The critics have also claimed that Chinese schools discriminate against Filipinos in employment and encourage separateness through cultural distinction reinforced by Taiwan-published textbooks.²⁶ Renato Constantino, in a *Manila Chronicle* editorial, stated that the major interests behind the Chinese schools were wealthy Chinese businessmen like Antonio Roxas Chua, who, he claims, finance the schools.²⁷

The Politics of Filipinization

The move to put controls on Chinese schools follows the policy in the 1950's and 1960's of the Filipinization of the national economy. Retail trade, land, public utilities, the rice and corn industries, employment, wholesale merchandizing and most professions have been affected in previous nationalization laws. Even the 1947 Treaty of Amity is of dubious validity since it was negotiated with a government that no longer represents the Chinese people except in theory for some. The Philippine Government, at present, is still among the minority which officially adheres to this theory — that is, that Chiang Kai-Shek is the spokesman for the Chinese people. The China-born in the Philippines are almost all from the Amoy and Cantonese regions of China for whom only the government is in a position to speak or make treaties of agreements — the Peking government.

Up to now, the Taiwan government has been able to utilize schools in the Philippines to promote anti-People's Republic policies and attitudes. Until Filipinization of the schools is carried out, the Kuomintang education representatives from Taipei will continue to control the appointment of school principals and the tenure of teachers and promote textbooks which are non-Philippine in orientation.

Conclusion — The Ambiguity of the Philippine Position in Its Filipinization Policy

The most ambiguous aspect of Filipinization is the Philippine Government's attitude toward the status of the Chinese in the Philippine. If the government seriously wants to assimilate the Chinese, it cannot do so merely by making busi-

ness prospects difficult for the local Chinese businessmen or by bringing about a less exclusive method of education in Chinese schools. Assimilation involves more systematic plans than the above mentioned steps.

The Filipinization policy should provide the Philippine-Chinese an option for citizenship. In their precarious position, the Chinese have no place they can truly call home. A return to China is closed to the majority who would prefer to live in a capitalist society than in a socialist one. In a way, Filipino citizenship is also closed since the *jus sanguinis* principle of citizenship is almost impossible for the more than 80% of the Chinese born in the Philippines, except for the few who can pay the extremely high fees of naturalization. *Jus Soli* is necessary if the Philippines is seriously interested in integrating its Chinese. Naturalization should come second.

The second argument for Filipinization — that is, the maintenance of national security — also has contradictions as in the policies adopted in the 1950's. The fact is that the Taiwan government has close supervision over the Chinese schools, and if officials are afraid of 'Communist subversion,' the Philippines need not Filipinize the schools for that reason. The Taiwanese can handle it.

Of course, the most ambiguous aspect of all is the attitude toward the People's Republic of China.

The Chinese pay heavily for their privilege of staying in the Philippines (including the use of bribes and kickbacks to public officials). After centuries of living and struggling for survival under colonial regimes, it would seem that the Chinese have at least earned the right of citizenship and the privilege to prove that they can act as good citizens. Otherwise, if the Philippines continues to fail to realistically incorporate its minority groups into its national life (as is a problem in Taiwan), it should only expect anti-Filipino behavior from its disgruntled, oppressed and stateless Chinese. After all, the only major fault of the local Chinese, as far as most Filipino legislators are concerned, is that, in a "free enterprise" system like in the Philippines, the Chinese are particularly good at it.

Hence, the most important step toward the assimilation of the Chinese, as Indonesia and Thailand have shown, is the adoption of the *jus soli* principle on citizenship.*

*Since this paper was originally written, (1972) a new constitution, retaining the *jus sanguinis* principle, has been ratified.

FOOTNOTES

¹H. Otley Beyer, 'Philippine Pre-Historic Contacts with Foreigners,' *Chinese Participation in Philippine Culture and Economy*, Shubert S.C. Liao, editor (Manila: Bookman Inc., 1964), p. 2.

²Berthold Laufer, 'The Relations of the Chinese to the Philippines,' *Historical Bulletin* (Manila: Philippine Historical Association, 1967), pp. 11-12.

³Victor Purcell, *The Chinese in Southeast Asia* (second edition; London; Oxford University Press 1965), p. 515.

⁴Edgar Wickberg, *The Chinese in Philippine Life 1850-1898* (New Haven: Yale University Press 1965), p. 22 and particularly chapters 2, 3, and 4.

⁵Purcell, *loc. cit.*, and well developed in his chapters 51, 52 and 53.

⁶*Ibid.* p. 496.

⁷Khin Khin Myint Jensen. 'The Chinese in the Philippines. During the American Regime: 1898-1906' (unpublished Doctoral dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1956), p. 138-148.

⁸Adolfo Azcuna, 'The Chinese and the Law,' *The Chinese in the Philippines 1770-1898* Vol. II, Alfonso Felix, Jr. editor (Manila: Solidaridad Publishing House, 1969), p. 76.

⁹See Purcell *op. cit.*, pp. 534-551. Also a good account of laws pertaining to the Chinese in Antonio S. Tan, *The Chinese in the Philippines, 1898-1935: A Study of Their national Awakening* (Quezon City: R.P. Garcia Publishi in Antonio S. Tan, *The Chinese in the Philippines, 1898-1935: A Study of Their national Awakening* (Quezon City: R.P. Garcia Publishing Co., 1972), pp. 176-202.

¹⁰Purcell, *op. cit.*, p. 552. Also see Jensen, *op. cit.*, pp. 276-284.

¹¹Tan, *op. cit.*, p. 154. Also see Charles J. McCarthy, *Philippine-Chinese Integration* (Manila: Pagkakaisa Sa Pag-unlad, Inc., 1971), p. 147.

¹²Charles J. McCarthy "Chinese Schools in the Philippines," *Solidarity*, October, 1972, pp. 15-24.

¹³The Census of 1903 gave the total number of Chinese at 41,035. Between 1903 to 1909 the Chinese population tripled despite Exclusion. This could only be accounted for by a large degree of illicit entries. Purcell, *op. cit.*, p. 535, 538. Jensen, *op. cit.*, describes the methods of illegal entry, pp. 138-148.

¹⁴Tan *ibid.*, pp. 154-163. Also see Rodolfo Y. Ragodon, "The Problem of Chinese Education," *Sunday Times Magazine* (Manila), March 15, 1964.

¹⁵Ragodon, *ibid.*, p. 74. See also McCarthy, *Solidarity*.

¹⁶Article VI.

¹⁷Ragodon, *op. cit.*, pp. 75-76.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, p. 76.

¹⁹The data on Thailand, unless otherwise cited, are from Tulya Siritasna, "Thailand Assimilates Her Chinese Groups," *Manila Chronicle*, Aug. 17, 1971, p. 5. Also see the excellent Russian study of N.A. Simoniya, *Overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia* (Ithaca: Cornell Southeast Asia Program, 1961), pp. 83-88.

²⁰The data on Indonesia's Chinese are from Donald E. Willmott, *The National Status of the Chinese in Indonesia, 1900-1958*. Revised edition. (Ithaca, Cornell University, 1961), pp. 73-87.

²¹*Manila Chronicle*, May 6, 1972, pp. 1, 2.

²²*Times-Journal*, April 21, 1973, pp. 1, 2.

²³*Bulletin Today*, May 16, 1973 pp. 1, 8.

²⁴*Manila Bulletin*, May 5, 1972, p. 26.

²⁵ *Manila Times*, March 3, 1972, pp. 1, 8.

²⁶ *Philippine Herald*, May 7, 1972, p. 12.

²⁷ May 9 1972, p. 4.

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Agpalo, R.E. *The Political Process and the Nationalization of the Retail Trade in the Philippines*. Quezon City: University of the Philippines, 1962.
- Alip, Eufronio M. *Ten Centuries of Philippine-Chinese Relations*. Manila: Alip and Sons, Inc., 1959.
- Feliz, Alfonso (ed.). *The Chinese in the Philippines*. Manila: Solidaridad Publishing House, 1966. Two volumes.
- Freedman, Maurice. *The Chinese in Southeast Asia: A Longer View*. China Society, 1965.
- Jensen, Khin Hin Myint. "The Chinese in the Philippines During the American Regime 1898-1946." Unpublished Doctoral dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1956.
- Laufer, Berthold. *The Relations of the Chinese to the Philippines*. Manila, 1967.
- Liao, Shubert S. C. (ed.). *Chinese Participation in Philippine Culture and Economy*. Manila, 1964.
- McCarthy, Charles J. *Philippine-Chinese Integration*. Manila: Pagkakaisa Sa Pag-unlad, Inc., 1971.
- Pagkakaisa Sa Pag-unlad Research Papers
- Purcell, Victor and William Saunders. *The Chinese in Southeast Asia*. Second edition. London: Oxford University Press, 1965.
- Simoniya, N.A. *Overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia*. A Russian Study. Ithaca: Cornell Southeast Asia Program, 1961.
- Tan, Antonio S. *The Chinese in the Philippines, 1898-1935: A Study of their National Awakening*. Quezon City: R.P. Garcia Publishing Co., 1972.
- University of the Philippines Filipino-Chinese Student's Association. A Reader on the Philippine Chinese*. Diliman, Quezon City, 1970.
- Weightman, George H. *The Philippine Chinese: A Cultural History of a Marginal Trading Community*. Ithaca: Cornell University, 1960.
- Wickberg, Edgar. *The Chinese in Philippine Life, 1850-1898*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965.
- Willmott, Donald E. *The National Status of the Chinese in Indonesia, 1900-1958*. Revised Edition. Ithaca: Cornell University, 1961.

NEWSPAPERS:

- The Asian*
The Manila Bulletin (now *Bulletin Today*)
The Philippine Herald
The Times-Journal
The Sunday Times Magazine (Manila)