

philippine studies

Ateneo de Manila University · Loyola Heights, Quezon City · 1108 Philippines

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in Mano Po and Crying Ladies**

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Philippine Studies vol. 53, no. 4 (2005): 491–531

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Fri June 27 13:30:20 2008

Conditions of Visibility: Resignifying the “Chinese”/”Filipino” in *Mano Po* and *Crying Ladies*

Caroline S. Hau

*Historically identified with commerce, capital, and communism, and long defined by its problematic relationship with Philippine nationalism, “Chineseness” has been reconfigured over the last three decades in line with the geopolitical, demographic, economic, social, and cultural transformations of the Philippine nation-state and society. This article analyzes the potentials and limits of “Chineseness” in such films as *Mano Po* and *Crying Ladies*, which draw on the discourse of national integration to situate the “Chinese Filipino” within the territorial boundaries and conceptual parameters of the Filipino nation-state. The films also point, however, to the ways in which “Chineseness” and “Chinese identity” have come to epitomize regional, rather than strictly national, capitalist and cultural flows that the nation-state seeks to capture and appropriate, but always at the risk of being transformed by these flows. Where *Mano Po* attempts to reterritorialize “Chineseness” by embedding the “Chinese Filipino” within the Philippine nation, *Crying Ladies* seeks to defuse the class tensions and nationalist resentment ignited by deterritorialized “Chineseness” by turning “Chinese” flows and connections into new sources of social power and capital .*

KEYWORDS: Chinese, film, integration, regionalization, capital

In a short span of three years, from December 2002 to December 2005, five major films that prominently featured the ethnic Chinese were released in the Philippines. Regal Entertainment’s *Mano Po* (2002, Figure 1) was the top box-office draw at the Metro Manila Film Festival (MMFF), grossing P65 million (Daza 2003; the entry on “Regal Films” in *Wikipedia* puts the figure at P67.2 million) and garnering

twelve awards (including Best Picture, Actor, Actress, Director, Screenplay, and Story). The critical and commercial success of *Mano Po* spawned a franchise of unrelated “sequels.” *Mano Po 2: My Home* (2003) was the MMMFF People’s Choice for Best Picture, and picked up five other prizes, while *Mano Po 3: My Love* (2004) received seven (notably Best Picture, Actress, and Actor). *Ako Legal Wife: Mano Po 4*, a comedy inspired by the plot and dialogue of *Mano Po 2*, was released in 2005 and won the Best Actress and Best Supporting Actress awards. *Mano Po 2* lost the 2003 MMFF Best Picture Award to the highly touted *Crying Ladies*, which bagged a total of eleven local and international awards and took in P65 million at the local box office (Salterio 2004).

Regal Entertainment producer “Mother” Lily Monteverde described *Mano Po* as a “dream project” (Arcellana 2002, 10), born out of her desire to pay tribute to her parents, the copra tycoon and Fujian-born Domingo Yuchu and Sorsogon-born Profetiza Buban, by recasting their romance into an exemplary Chinese-Filipino family saga. Spanning some forty years, this “rags to riches” (ibid.) epic is narrated by the rebellious third daughter of a Chinese immigrant, who had married a Filipina against the wishes of his parents, chosen to settle down in the Philippines and, with his wife’s help, founded a copra empire that eventually expanded into a conglomerate. Monteverde shared the credit with screenwriter Roy Iglesias for crafting the stories of *Mano Po 2*, about the three squabbling widows and multiple households of a murdered Chinese-Filipino tycoon; *Mano Po 3*, about an intrepid anticrime crusader torn between her family and her long-lost lover; and *Ako Legal Wife: Mano Po 4*, which, according to Monteverde, was inspired by “people I know in the Chinese-Filipino community” (Red 2005).

There is more to the issue than a simple case of translating a Chinese-Filipino producer’s life experiences and observations into movies about the “Chinese” in the Philippines. Screenwriter Roy Iglesias credited his *Mano Po* series with “cement[ing the Filipinos] love affair with Asia” (Cabreza 2004, 1). The film heralded the “Asian renaissance in Philippine pop culture”: a mere five months after the release of *Mano Po*, the Taiwanese TV drama *Liu Xing Hua Yan* (Meteor Garden, originally broadcast in 2001), based on the Japanese comic (*manga*) by

Kamio Yoko, *Hanayori Dango* (Boys over Flowers, 1992–2003), sparked a “chinovela” craze centering on the drama’s four male stars, all members of the Taiwanese pop band F4 (Flower Four). Iglesias argued that, while the advent of the heavily promoted chinovelas contributed to “Asianizing” Filipino moviegoers, this Asianization was mediated by the global success of Asian culture industries that churned out the martial arts movies of the 1970s, the gangster and action movies of the 1980s, the Mainland Chinese epics of the 1990s, and other cultural products such as music, manga, *animé* (animated cartoons), magazines, and fashion. Philippine cinema has traditionally taken its cues from industrial behemoth Hollywood’s nod of recognition and approval: *Mano Po* has been compared to the 1993 Chinese-American film *Joy Luck Club* (Chen 2002), and Iglesias is quoted elsewhere as saying that Viva Films’ Vic del Rosario “was sure ‘Mano Po’ would be a hit because [Taiwanese director] Ang Lee’s ‘Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon’ [2000] scored in Hollywood” (Cabreza 2004, 3). But the astounding popularity of F4 and Korean dramas especially in China, Japan, Vietnam, the Philippines, Singapore, Malaysia, and Thailand throws light on the gathering weight and force of the regional circulation and consumption of Asian cultural products.

Unitel Productions’ blockbuster *Crying Ladies* (2003, Figure 2), which focuses on Filipino professional mourners working at a Chinese wake



Figure 1. *Mano Po* (2002)

Figure 2. *Crying Ladies* (2003)



and funeral, similarly rode the crest of the “Asian” wave. Novice director Mark Meily submitted the original screenplay, “Bayad Luha” (which can be translated as “Pay for Tears” or “Pay with Tears”), to the workshop run by noted scriptwriter Armando Lao in 2000. He subsequently persuaded “megastar” Sharon Cuneta to accept the lead role in the movie by telling her that “it would be the kind of role Gong Li [the Chinese actress and former muse of internationally acclaimed Chinese director Zhang Yimou] would portray” (Cu Unjieng 2004, 9).

Iglesias and Meily’s statements underscore the confluence of national, regional, and global forces and circuits of cultural commodity production, marketing, and circulation in contributing to the success of films like *Mano Po* and *Crying Ladies*. That these commodities are in the form of images and signs attests to the existence of multibillion-dollar “image production industries” powered by flexible accumulation and operating within and across nationally segmented culture markets. These media industries are capable of turning images and signs of geopolitical and cultural differences into commodities that can be consumed by populations across vast stretches of space (Harvey 1990, 290ff.), even as they now also mediate the production of commodities for local—and increasingly regional (Otmazgin 2005)—markets.

Chinese Filipinos such as the Monteverdes of Regal Entertainment and Robbie Tan of Seiko Films are among the Philippine entertainment industry’s most prominent, prolific, and powerful film distributors, producers, and star makers. (In fact, one of the characters in *Crying Ladies* dreams of being discovered by an “intsik” [Chinese] producer.) More crucially, the fact that cultural products encode meaning demands serious contemplation. What kinds of realities, but also what kinds of dreams, wishes, and fantasies do films like *Mano Po* and *Crying Ladies* speak to or speak of? What forms of association and identification do they invite and orchestrate? How much are these meanings bound up with “being Chinese,” and in specific representations of the “Chinese” who figure as principal subjects in and of these films? What are the conditions of visibility (and perhaps invisibility) that have enabled the “Chinese” to emerge as cinematic subjects of representation? Who are these “Chinese”?

This article links representations of “Chineseness” in recent Philippine cinema to the construction and transformation of the “Chinese” in the Philippines. Variouslly identified with commerce, capital, and communism at different points in Philippine history, and long defined by its problematic relationship with Philippine nationalism, “Chineseness” has been reconfigured over the last three decades in line with the shifting geopolitical, demographic, economic, social, and cultural terrain of the Philippine nation-state. This article locates the politics of “Chineseness” not only in “Chinese” everyday life and negotiations, but in a Philippine nation-state in the throes of profound transformation. It situates these seemingly local, national developments within the broader global and especially region-wide (East Asian) capitalist development, and looks at how the politics of “Chinese” ethnicity and representation are implicated in emergent, market-mediated forms of national and regional identification and consciousness. Representations of the “Chinese” in such films as the *Mano Po* series and *Crying Ladies* draw on, while also popularizing, the state’s adoption of a discourse of national integration that seeks to domesticate the “Chinese”—historically constructed as the “other” of the Filipino nation—in order to embed the “Chinese” more firmly within the territorial boundaries and conceptual parameters of the Filipino nation-state, or, to paraphrase the popular integrationist slogan, to help the “Chinese” find their “place under the Philippine sun.” These cinematic representations, however, also point to the ways in which “Chinese culture” and “Chineseness” have also come to epitomize regional, rather than strictly national, capitalist flows which the nation-state seeks to capture and appropriate, but always at the risk of being transformed by these flows. Competing “Chinese” imaginaries, which reinforce the historical conflation of “Chinese” and capital, inform the pluralist discourse of citizenship and national belonging propagated by advocates of integration as well as the Philippine state, while indexing multiple identifications and recalcitrant longings, desires, and fantasies that exceed the bounds and claims of Filipino nationness.

Integrating the “New Chinese”

Mano Po is not the first mainstream Filipino movie to paint a nuanced portrait of the “Chinese.” In 1973, three Filipino writers, including

Chinese-Filipino Herman Tiu Laurel and an uncredited Ricky Lee, co-wrote the screenplay for *Dragnet*, a crime action movie (starring Joseph Estrada) that reacted against the anti-Chinese sentiments of the time by offering a sympathetic portrait of the “Chinese.” Three years later, Eddie Romero’s masterpiece *Ganito Kami Noon, Paano Kayo Ngayon?* (1976) made a place for the “Chinese” in Philippine history. Its portrayal of the heroic Intsik Liu, a nineteenth-century Jackie Chan who befriends and sacrifices his life for protagonist Kulas Ocampo, marks a departure from the abject alien (Ah Tek in Lino Brocka’s *Maynila, Sa Mga Kuko ng Liwanag* [1987]), comic relief (ranging from Chiquito’s loveable *Mr. Wong* in the eponymous series to Mike de Leon’s powerful female movie producer-cum-Chinese Mafia agent in *Kakabakaba Ka Ba?* [1980]), and victim (kidnapped in Erik Matti’s *Ekis* [1999]) who populate Philippine cinema (see Hau 2000a, 233–35).

Ganito Kami Noon, Paano Kayo Ngayon? was one of the first mainstream films to articulate the integrationist stance broached by academics (McCarthy 1975, 22) and later taken up so prominently by organizations such as *Kaisa para sa Kaunlaran*¹ and by *Mano Po*. It is not an accident that Romero’s film was released one year after Ferdinand Marcos signed Letter of Instruction (LOI) 270 which implemented the mass naturalization of the Chinese, more than 60 percent of whom applied for naturalization (Wang 2003, 330). Signing LOI 270 in conjunction with the normalization of diplomatic relations between the Philippines and the People’s Republic of China, Marcos was not merely following American Pres. Richard Nixon’s lead in seeking rapprochement with China. His new Asia policy, formulated in the late 1960s in light of the imminent expiration of the Laurel-Langley Agreement and the decline of Philippine trade with the U.S. (hitherto the primary trading partner), sought to strengthen Philippine trade links with Asian and socialist countries (Lim 2001, 278). In addition, the Marcos government needed to secure oil supplies from China to deal with the 1973 oil crisis, and to undermine the Communist movement in the Philippines by asking China to adopt a “hands-off policy” toward Philippine internal affairs (Lim 2001, 281; Tiglao 1990c, 71).

The mass naturalization of the Philippine Chinese led to the acquisition of Filipino citizenship by a substantial portion of the Chinese

population, whose changing demographic profile during the postwar era made naturalization an attractive option. The Chinese who came of age in the 1960s constituted the largest group of Chinese, but also the first to lack direct and substantial contact with a China that had gone Communist, and the first to receive university education and have wide social contacts with non-Chinese (Wickberg 1997, 170–71). Mass naturalization legally incorporated the Chinese “alien” into the Filipino nation; by relying on the administrative and presidential legislative process, it relaxed the conditions for acquiring citizenship, which in previous decades had been difficult and protracted.² Citizenship enabled a number of Chinese to move out of the commercial niche and join the professional class (as lawyers, doctors, architects, engineers), even producing a number of Chinese-Filipino cultural workers (writers, visual artists, filmmakers).

More important, mass naturalization entailed a shift in the discourse of nationalism away from monoculturalist and melting-pot claims of assimilation, routinely associated with ideas of absorption and amalgamation, toward a strictly political definition of national belonging, which held that ethnic or minority groups could be “integrated” into Philippine society while preserving their cultural identities (Cariño 1988, 47).

The ascendancy of the integration discourse over assimilation was a product not only of domestic policy and social change but of international developments, scholarly debates, and political struggles. The aftermath of the world wars and decolonization saw important changes in the discourses, technologies, and models of race management (Goldberg 2002, 211). Race came to be recoded in “colorblind” terms as problems of illegal migration and criminality (cf. *ibid.*, 212–13), on the one hand, and replaced by the de-essentialized but amorphous category of culture, on which the emergent discourse of ethnicity was based, on the other hand. Integration was first used in discussions of apartheid in South Africa in 1940, and gained ground through the African-American civil rights activism in the segregated American South in the 1950s and 1960s. Racial democracy in Brazil, ethnic pluralism in Europe, and official multiculturalism (a policy first implemented in Switzerland before gaining currency in Canada and Australia in the late 1960s and early 1970s and, less successfully, in Great Britain in the 1990s) sought to

allay fears of the viability of national identity in countries where mass immigration had created sizeable and distinct cultural communities. The integrationist discourse argued that the “uniqueness” of cultural groups does not detract from peaceful coexistence and meaningful exchanges among these groups within a single polity, and the “cultures” of these groups enrich the national culture rather than impede its development.

The call for integration shaped the scholarship on the Chinese in Southeast Asia, even as scholarly works provided ammunition for the reformulation of state policies on the “Chinese.” In the first few decades of the postwar period, Southeast Asian states were concerned with stabilizing their regimes and viewed the presence of Communist China and the political activism of Chinese populations in their territories as external and internal threats, which had to be addressed through a combination of repression, containment, and control. State policies and practices formulated the “Chinese Question” by constructing the “Chinese” as the “other” of the national community (for the Philippine case, see Hau 2000b and n.d.), but states were also engaged in modernization projects that required the selective inclusion and exclusion of Chinese minorities who played an important role in their respective economies (cf. Ong and Nonini 1997, 7). Scholarly debates reflected, but also effected, the evolution of state policies and practices. In his survey of the field, Wang Gungwu (2003, 221–47) notes that scholarship on Chineseness before the 1950s worked within the parameters defined by what he calls nationalist and historical identity, before giving way to the preoccupation with framing Chineseness through the study of local, communal, and cultural identity in the 1950s and 1960s and the reconfiguring of cultural identity into “ethnic identity” as well as the popularity of class analysis in the 1970s.

Efforts of organizations such as *Kaisa para sa Kaunlaran* to promote integration as an alternative to assimilation, along with similar advocacies by other organizations and individuals, have contributed in no small measure to mainstreaming the integrationist stance (Hau 2000a; see also Cariño 1988). *Mano Po* leans heavily on the *Kaisa* platform in the final segment of the film, in which the young Chinese-Filipino artist Jimmy edits his documentary. Entitled “Tsinoy: A History,” the documentary employs the blanket term “Tsinoy,” a label closely identified

with Kaisa advocacy. The documentary opens with a montage of Filipino national heroes of Chinese ancestry featured in actual Kaisa-Angelo King Heritage Center exhibits as examples of prominent historical “Tsinoy.” The storyline also amplifies the integrationist message through the selfless actions of Richelle, the black sheep who defies the wishes of her family and patriotically involves herself in the affairs of the nation. When she is apprehended at a drug den, she agrees to work as a civilian agent to uncover the identity of a leading Filipino drug dealer. Despite pressure from her family not to testify against the drug dealer, who turns out to be a Philippine National Police director and a long-time “friend” of the family, she puts her own life (and her family’s) in danger; to compound matters, she falls in love with her Filipino police handler, Rafael Bala. The integrationist message is spelled out at the end of the film, when Bala’s voiceover tells the audience: “Pinatunayan ni Richelle sa akin na hindi ka kailangang ipinanganak sa Pilipinas para maging Pinoy” (Richelle proved to me that you don’t have to be born in the Philippines to be a Filipino). The final words in the film also echo this point: “Bagama’t magkakaiba ang ating pinanggalingan, iisa ang ating kinabukasan” (Even though our origins are different, we share in the same future).

In addition, critical reception of *Mano Po* has tended to situate the politics of the film’s depiction of the new Chinese, now labeled “Chinese Filipino” to distinguish them from the old Chinese,³ squarely within the integrationist discourse propounded by Kaisa. While criticizing the film for reinforcing the stereotype of the Chinese as wealthy, reviews nevertheless lauded *Mano Po* for promoting “more dialogue and understanding between Chinese Filipinos” (Dy 2003, 15; See 2003), for accord- ing “mainstream respectability” to Chinese Filipinos (Zulueta 2002), for showing that the “Chinese belong among the Filipinos of whom they are inescapably a part” (David 2002), and—directly borrowing from Kaisa parlance—serving as a “testament” to the “heroic efforts” of the Chinese to find their “place in the Philippine sun” (Chen 2002).

The struggle of “Chinese Filipinos” for their “place in the Philippine sun” is a legacy of economic nationalism and political disenfranchisement, which restricted “Chinese” presence in areas such as retail trade while making the acquisition of citizenship extremely difficult, pro-

tracted, and expensive, double moves that helped consolidate the Filipino elites' command over politics and the uppermost reaches of the economy. It is not the "pure Chinese" but the socially dominant and politically powerful class of Filipino and mestizo families that owns and controls the biggest companies in the Philippines (Cariño 2001, 108; see also Rivera 1995, 9). Nevertheless, mass naturalization qualified Chinese Filipinos to move into the areas that had been sealed off from them. Despite the periodic political and economic crises that afflicted the Philippines, enough capitalist transformation was taking place to enable a small number of Chinese Filipinos to engage in capital accumulation on a far larger scale than had been possible, resulting in the absorption of a strata of "Chinese" into the changing Philippine class structure, increasingly characterized by a small concentration of "new rich" and the creation of new middle classes (Pinches 1996, 103–33; Pinches 1999, 275–301). A good number of taipan fortunes were consolidated in the postwar period, as Chinese-Filipino big business expanded from manufacturing (where big merchants had shifted following the retail trade nationalization act in the 1950s) into real estate, finance, and other economic activities. Small and medium-size enterprises, however, have had to contend with the challenges of fierce competition among themselves and from non-Chinese Filipinos and foreigners, and the threat of "trade concentration" (Dannhaeuser 2004, 2) in areas such as the retail trade sector.

Changes in class structure further cement the conflation of Chinese ethnicity with capital and render the "Chinese" not only visible, but also vulnerable, as evident in the kidnapping phenomenon (Hau 2000a). The visibility of the "Chinese" is partly conditioned by the visible effect of "Chinese" capital not just on the economy, but on the Philippine urban landscape, with the *sari-sari* and family-owned neighborhood stores giving way to malls, department stores, supermarkets, and high rises. A report in the *New York Times* links space, visibility, and "Chinese" vulnerability: "The highly visible role of the Chinese in Philippine economic growth—the Chinese-owned shopping malls and high rises that are transforming Manila—have made them obvious targets of extraction" (Mydans 1996).

While Chinese visibility had historically been conditioned by the conflation of Chineseness with commerce and money,⁴ the difference is that “Chineseness” is no longer identified simply or necessarily with mercantile capital, but is now associated with large-scale strategies of accumulation the scope of which extends beyond the territorial bounds of the Philippine nation-state and is characterized by unprecedented diversity, flexibility, and mobility (cf. Nonini and Ong 1997, 3–4).⁵ The scale of “Chinese” capital is suggested in *Mano Po* by the way in which Luis and Elisa Go are able to parlay their copra business into food manufacturing and other ventures, now consolidated under the “Go Group of Companies” and presided over by their eldest daughter Vera (Maricel Soriano). The labor of the merchant, routinely denigrated as parasitical (for a critique, see Hau n.d.), is transmuted into the magic of large-scale and endless capitalist accumulation, the ability of capital to be fruitful and multiply and generate fabulous wealth and opportunities for display and consumption far in excess of what the wealth of the “Chinese” merchant used to command. This magical quality of Chinese capital is captured by filmic montage. In *Mano Po 2*, Antonio Chan confidently tells his wife Sol, “Madali pela dito Manila” (Money easy here Manila), when they first move to Chinatown and, in the next shot, miraculously secures, presumably through his “Chinese network,” a P250,000 loan from, of course, China Banking Corporation. The shot of the “Golden Dragon” sign being hoisted atop their store dissolves into a shot of the spacious warehouse in which Antonio supervises the preparation of a shipment for Korea.

The mainstreaming of a pluralist and accommodationist stance on national identity is bound up with the shifting strategies over three decades of the Philippine state (see Aguilar 1999, 315–20). Adopting an integrationist stance enables the state to pursue its policy of attracting capital and technical flows, especially from the emergent East Asian region, which will be discussed in detail in the next section. In hopes of generating much-needed income, the state has resorted to commodifying citizenship by granting permanent residency to moneyed foreigners in hopes of attracting investment. It has also sought to reterritorialize the flows of Filipino migrant workers and settlers abroad

by deploying the term *balikbayan* to refer to Filipino immigrants and their descendants (Szanton Blanc 1996). Relying on a discourse of “Filipino values” that supposedly underpin “family, communal, and national ties” connecting “Filipinos” (especially in the U.S. and Canada) who have become naturalized citizens as well as their second- and third-generation offspring to the Philippines, Gloria Macapagal Arroyo signed the Dual Citizenship Act to “extend more economic and political opportunities to Filipinos overseas in the name of national unity, solidarity and progress” (*Philippine Daily Inquirer* 2003). The state acknowledges its reliance on the remittances of overseas Filipino workers by relabeling the OFWs as OFIs or “Overseas Filipino Investors.” The effort to generate revenues is even more pronounced in the state’s periodic programs for legalizing “illegal aliens” (overwhelmingly defined as “Chinese”). The Alien Social Integration Act (ASIA) of 1995, for example, undertook to bring “illegal aliens into the mainstream, and make them active participants [in the country’s] development”—participation here being interpreted in strictly monetary terms of P200,000 per Chinese, P50,000 for spouses, and P25,000 for dependents, with the state expecting to earn P40 billion (*Manila Chronicle* 1995).

The state endeavors to reterritorialize the flows of people, capital, and skills by relying on the discourse of national development and recoding these deterritorialized flows as “Filipino” so as to channel them into the bounds of the Philippine nation-state.⁶ But its notion of nationness cannot avoid the contamination of money, which breeds fear and suspicion about the commodification of citizenship and the loosening of the bonds between state and nation, territory, and Filipinoness.

For instance, resentment of so-called balikbayan and professional OFWs, most often voiced by the middle classes and intelligentsia (Hau 2004, chaps. 5 and 6), fuels public debates over “brain drain” and has made a nationalist “sacrifice” (or, rather, “virtue”) out of the act of staying put in the Philippines instead of seeking opportunities abroad. These anxieties are induced by the capacity of deterritorialized “Filipino” flows to create new sources of social power and social reproduction (in matters of fashion, taste, and public opinion) that cannot be fully controlled or coopted either by the state or by the Filipino

elite and middle classes. After all, these flows have seen immigrants and OFWs acquire middle- or upper-class status without going through the longstanding channels of middle-class and elite socialization within Philippine society; even though they register in elite consciousness as *nouveaux riches* and *parvenus*, they effortlessly command public attention as objects of admiration and emulation. That these flows come from “outside,” not to mention their relative proximity to geopolitical powers (especially America) that affords them unmediated access to sources of symbolic capital, endows them with a *cachet* that rivals that of the socially dominant and cosmopolitan Filipino elite, part of whose own prestige lies in their command over the languages, signs, gestures, and objects from the “outside” (see Cannell 1999, 222).

But these anxieties are not exclusively a product of the “narcissism of small difference” (to borrow from Freud’s “The Taboo of Virginity” [1975]), of elite and middle-class self-perception and worth being challenged by those who are most like them, and the redirection of their feelings of hatred, envy, and aggression toward those who are “nearly-we.” Popular sentiments are not entirely free of ambivalence, for example in questions of language use. Elite domination had long been secured through the use of English, but the dissemination of Filipino and other Philippine languages through the mass media and the market over the past decades has unsettled the preeminence of English as the language of social power and privilege, and has marked out spaces in which the use of English—deliberately and ironically expressed as “spokening in dollars”—can be interpreted as an assertion of unwarranted superiority, and provoke resentment and perhaps even outright violence. Class disparity in the Philippines is a “daily, tangible experience”: class difference is “particularized in a thousand material objects,” such as “canned peaches versus boiled sweet potato, plate glass versus nipa tiles, the air-conditioned chill of supermarket aisles versus the village store” (Cannell 1999, 20). In “standard” English versus “barok” English, one risks humiliation by having her grammatical errors or accent (of which she is often unaware) exposed by someone else who claims a better command of English. Difference is particularized not just by objects, but by persons on whom varying degrees of cultivation are imputed. The violence of spokening in dollars inheres in

the act of speaking, which not only distances the speaker from those who cannot speak it well or with the right accent, but forces the latter into the uncomfortable position of risking mockery and humiliation by another. These embodied differences—of which language is but one—that divide the rich from the poor have catalyzed many of the political and social crises that periodically wrack the Philippines. Most important, celebrations of the deterritorialization of Filipino nationness run up against the enforced rootedness of the majority of Filipinos, the most indigent among whom remain confined within the boundaries of a nation-state the legitimacy of which is constantly put into question by its inability to fulfill its obligation to safeguard the “Filipino people” it claims to represent.

If the continuing conflation of “Chinese” with capital makes the “new Chinese” the visible embodiment of class difference (despite evidence of class disparities and social divisions among “the Chinese”), how can “Chineseness” be purged of its alien attributes and domesticated for Filipino consumption?

Regional Flows and the Resi(g)nification of “Chinese” Mestizness

The way *Mano Po* goes about domesticating the alien “Chinese” is by foregrounding mestizness as the defining characteristic of the “Chinese Filipino.” The film, in fact, marks the resignification of the “Chinese mestizo” in contemporary Philippine imagination. From the late nineteenth century onward, the “Chinese mestizo” had been a sliding signifier that could be articulated with either “Filipino” or “Chinese” interests, and could therefore disappear⁷ into either “Chinese” or “Filipino” (Hau 2000a). The disappearance of the “Chinese mestizo” into “Filipino” or “Chinese” took place alongside the alienation of the “Chinese” from the Filipino national community and was crucial to the development of Philippine nationalism (Hau 2000a, 133–76). The historical figures who appear at the end of *Mano Po* as “Tsinoy” do not, for example, fit the definition of “ethnic Chinese” advanced by *Kaisa para Kaunlaran*, which has actively embraced Chinese mestizos as Tsinoy on the basis of their Chinese ancestry.⁸ The mestizo’s capacity

to mediate the social hierarchy of the colonizer and colonized, of “insiders” and “outsiders,” is characteristically viewed as its most important historical attribute (see Rafael 2000). What is interesting about mestizness was its subsequent delinking from “Chinese” in the popular imagination, so that for most of the postindependence years, the term “mestizo” mainly signified “white” (defined as North and Latin American and European) rather than “Chinese” ancestry.

With East Asian regional economic development and the rise of China over the past three decades, however, bicultural “Chinese” now appear to take on the attributes of the Chinese mestizos (Wickberg 1997, 177) because the term “Chinese” is no longer defined solely by its problematic place within the nation, but by its additional revaluing as a signifier of not just global but *regionally specific* capitalist development. This revaluation was partly triggered by the explosion of studies of overseas Chinese business and networks in the 1980s and 1990s, and the deployment of this type of scholarship for political and ideological affirmations of “Chinese capitalism” and its role in the economic growth and dynamism of the region (Pinches 1999, 16).

The emergent “East Asian” region, with porous and shifting boundaries stretching from China, Japan, and South Korea to Taiwan, the Philippines, and Hong Kong to Vietnam, Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, and Brunei, is largely the creation of market forces (Katzenstein and Shiraishi 1997). It is characterized by the increasing density of networks of crossborder linkages (both formal and informal), interdependence, cooperation, and collaboration in the realms of trade and investment, technology and production, financial services, transportation and communication, population flows, popular culture, and disease control (Pempel 2005, 2). Regional economic integration in East Asia under the shadow of the American imperium (Katzenstein 2005) and in the wake of Japanese economic success has seen the rise of China and the “Four Dragons” (Hong Kong, South Korea, Taiwan, and Singapore). That four of the economies of East Asia—China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Singapore—are populated mainly by “Chinese,” that several others—Japan, Korea, Vietnam—are thought to be influenced by Confucian thought (which stresses strong family, commit-

ment to education, dependence on kinship, collective welfare rather than individual good, and social networks), and the visible economic role played by “overseas Chinese” communities in many Southeast Asian countries (Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Philippines) and in China’s economic growth—all of these have generated interest in “Chinese” links to regional capitalism. The term “Chinese capitalism” has been used to characterize capitalist accumulation in the Pacific Rim.

One of the popular arguments concerning the role of the “Chinese” in East Asian development is that “China” itself is no longer limited to Mainland China and its official state and cultural boundaries (Ang 1998, 225). Some scholars now advocate the use of the term “Cultural China” to encompass not just the societies populated by “Chinese” (Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore), but also “overseas Chinese” communities in Southeast Asia, and intellectuals or professionals working in China or on the Chinese world (Tu 1991, 22). This idea of “Cultural China” serves to direct attention not to Mainland China as “core,” but rather to the so-called “periphery” of smaller Asian countries and the so-called “Chinese diaspora” in Southeast Asia that are now viewed as engines of capitalist development. This idea assumes that even though the “Chinese” have been physically separated from “China”—the source of “Chinese culture”—nonetheless they have not lost their sense of “Chinese identity” (Wu 1991, 160). Another term, “Greater China,” has gained currency as a description of the shared identity generated by interactions among Chinese-language speaking populations in different countries in East Asia, mainly through the circulation of popular cultural products such as music, films, and TV shows and through the dissemination of information and the youth culture (Chun 1996, 127). The “Chinese” can now be viewed in a positive light and even as objects of desire, as evident in the current public clamor for generic “East Asian”-looking (i.e., *chinito* features and a different shade of “white” skin) Taiwanese and Korean telenovela actors who play rich, successful, and/or powerful men and foreground the attractions of affluent East Asia as *the* leading growth center of the global capitalist world economy.

Terms like “Cultural China” and “Greater China” are imaginable because they rely in part on cultural explanations to account for both

the economic success and the cultural distinctiveness of the “Chinese.” “Chinese” cultural traits and factors are said to operate in the form of *mianzi* (face), *xinyong* (trust), *guanxi* (relationships or connections), family-centered kinship structures, and ideologies that supposedly form the bulwarks of “Chinese” business and the “Confucian” or “Chinese model” of East Asian capitalism, and ethnic-based social, business, and transnational networks. These cultural explanations are actively propagated by the popular media (including journalism), scholarship, states like Singapore, schools and books, everyday “observations” at the ground level, and to some extent by the self-representation of those who call themselves “Chinese.” Business management schools and their textbooks now routinely use *guanxi*, *mianzi*, and *xinyong* to describe Chinese economic practices, arguing that these cultural traits are necessary to ensure harmonious work relations in family firms and make good management decisions (Yao 2002, 12). Culture is constructed, authorized, institutionalized, and subjected to different political uses. In Singapore, Confucianism is used as a state ideology to explain its achievement of economic growth and modernization through an “Asian way.” In Taiwan, the government has sought to legitimize its claim that it is the true representative and guardian of Chinese culture.

But there are clear limits to “culturalist” perspectives on “Chinese” identity and economic power. Many of the cultural explanations assume that Chinese are a linguistic and cultural group who evince remarkable cultural cohesion and economic power. But to speak of “Chinese culture” is to immediately raise the questions: what is Chinese and how Chinese is “Chinese” culture? The question of who is “Chinese” is a difficult and contentious issue considering that “Chinese” is often defined as the majority “Han” population who constitute 94 percent of the Mainland Chinese population, even though the non-Han population is spread out over 60 percent of Chinese territory (Wu 1991, 167). The Bai people of Yunnan assert their difference from other Chinese, even though these differences are partly defined and promoted by the Chinese state policy on minority peoples. The *peranakan* of Indonesia call themselves Chinese, even though many of them no longer speak any Chinese language. In Papua New Guinea, poor Chinese are often not counted as Chinese, but are considered native (*ibid.*, 170–76). Mainland

Chinese call themselves Hanren (referring to the Han Dynasty), but many overseas Chinese call themselves Tangren (people of the Tang Dynasty) and refer to their homeland as Tangshan (Tang mountains), which is not China, but their local village(s). A politics of Chinese language is at work in that Mandarin is considered the official language, while other Chinese tongues are referred to as “dialects” to mark their subordination to the official language, even though many of these dialects are mutually unintelligible. As for “Chinese” dominance of the Southeast Asian economies, the figures cited often reveal nothing about how the amounts were arrived at (Hodder 2005, 8–9; 25–26 n.1).

In the Philippine case, the fabled “Chinese networks”—routinely invoked in accounts of Philippine Chinese economic success—across the Asian region do not really hold conceptual and empirical water. Chinese-Filipino investments in China do not rely on preexisting ethnic-based linkages with Filipino-Chinese, other overseas Chinese, or even Mainland Chinese capital, but on the formulation by the Chinese government of policies specifically to make investment attractive for overseas Chinese (Gomes and Hsiao 2001, 15). Theresa Chong Cariño (2001, 111) shows that, among Chinese big business, there is more evidence of competition than cooperation,¹⁰ and joint ventures with Hong Kong or Taiwanese companies are based on considerations of expertise, technology, and capital rather than common ethnic ties. She also argues that the diversification of Chinese-Filipino business is not a “method of rationalizing business, but of hedging against economic downturns or vulnerabilities in situations of high economic and political volatility” (ibid., 117). Neither is there anything essentially “Chinese” about Chinese business practices, given the heterogeneity of business styles employed by the biggest Chinese companies. No research has ascertained whether small- and medium-scale “Chinese” enterprises share a “cultural style” of business management (ibid., 23).

Neither are “Chinese” cultural traits such as thrift, industry, perseverance, and sacrifice uniquely “Chinese.” Not only are they produced and reinvented in specific histories and societies and not only are their “ethnic” origins uncertain, they have been reified so as to serve as ideological justifications *for* authoritarianism and *against* socialism. In this formulation, so-called “Confucian” values and practices are said to

ground a historical form of capitalism, which had hitherto been constrained by socialism but which, allowed to flourish in nonsocialist “Greater China” (Singapore, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and “overseas Chinese” communities in Southeast Asia) and in a post-Maoist China now undergoing capitalist transformation, allegedly constitutes a *superior* capitalism to that which developed in the West because of the former’s communitarian (as opposed to individualist) ethos (see Dirlik 1997; Cheah 2001). The problem with using cultural explanations to account for Chinese economic success in East Asia is that these explanations rely on simplistic, homogeneous notions of “Chinese culture” or “values” transmitted unproblematically over time. They do not explain exactly how cultural factors take shape and function (or fail to function), under conditions marked by contingency, to mediate entrepreneurship by investing the “making of business” (*zuo shengyi*) with social and existential meaning (Yao 2002, 99).

It is not possible to adopt a unified and homogeneous notion of “Chinese” culture and assume that this culture is equally shared by all ethnic Chinese. Rather, “Chineseness” is part of a politics of ethnicity by which states, communities, and individuals attempt to construct or inculcate national and ethnic identities for different purposes. Culture and identity are subject to negotiation and contestation as they are selectively chosen, continually reinvented, adapted, resisted, or circumvented by even self-defined “Chinese” in the course of their everyday lives. What is ironic is that using culture to explain capitalist development in Asia coincides with efforts by individual Asian countries to disentangle national politics from questions of cultural identity. Even though the myths of “Chinese” capitalism and culture do not withstand serious scrutiny and historical experience, these ideological constructions retain their political and popular appeal.

What stands out in *Mano Po* is its deployment of mestizonez as the metaphor for the hybridity of “Chinese Filipino” identity. Since most Filipinos are likely to view mestizo and “pure” Chinese as simply “Chinese,” internal distinctions between “pure” and “mixed” ancestry matter less in current Filipino ideas of the “Chinese” than in historical terms like *mestizo* and the Hokkien *tsutsiya*. Although popular Filipino notions of the “Chinese” do not always concern themselves with

blood lineage, this however does not mean that the “Chinese” is completely free of the racialist taint of not being *kadugo* (of one’s blood) or *kalabi* (of one’s “race”). For this reason, the assertion of mestizeness is especially meaningful to “Chinese Filipinos” who are concerned to stress their double heritage. At the same time, their preference for using the English word “Chinese” as a “neutral” term of self-reference has to do with the fact that *Chinese* enjoys a regional/global currency that the locally oriented *tsinoy* and traditionally loaded *intsik* lack. *Mano Po* holds up the crosscultural marriage as the emblematic representation and resolution of the historically entangled but fraught relationship between “Chinese” and “Filipinos.” It is not content to argue that the intermingling of Filipino and Chinese cultures is a social fact; it seeks to make the comingling of cultures an incontestable genetic reality. Romantic love that defies the deep-rooted racial prejudices of both Filipinos and Chinese leads to the successful creation of a family unit composed of a Chinese father and Filipino mother (or, less frequently, Filipino father and Chinese mother) and their children. This foregrounding of the cultural mestizeness of the “Chinese Filipino” through the metaphor of biological mestizeness allows the “Chinese Filipino” to claim a “Chineseness” that is indissolubly tied to “Filipinoness” without making “Chinese” reducible to “Filipino.” In effect, this enables the “Chinese Filipino” to be safely “Filipinized” without curtailing its ability to mediate, if not acquire, the external sources of social power created by the expanding “Chinese” regional and global economy. In *Mano Po*, the Go family fortune is founded on a Filipino-Chinese marriage, and the union of the third daughter and her Filipino police lover not only continues that crosscultural tradition but makes their offspring “natural” beneficiaries of the privileges and opportunities that accrue to their multiple claims of belonging.

To some extent, the resi(g)nification of mestizeness is rooted in the demands of the market. Women are the target audiences and female actors the main attractions of family dramas.¹¹ The *Mano Po* films were expensive to make, and they needed to recoup their big budgets by capitalizing on bankable stars, many of whom, in line with the traditional Filipino preference for light skin color, are mestizos. At the same time, these mestizos have to be coded securely as “Chinese” in the eyes

of the moviegoers, hence the filmmakers' decision to resort to contrivances such as making them wear silk Chinese costumes or extensive eye makeup and prostheses. In *Mano Po 2*, the decision to cast Christopher de Leon was explained away in the film by having his character trace his ancestry to a British Army officer stationed in China.

But, far more important, the resi(g)nification of Chinese mestizness allows the "new Chinese" to be internally differentiated from other mestizo and Filipino elites while simultaneously laying down the conditions for a reconsolidation of elite symbolic capital and power. "Chinese" mestizness does not simply empower the "Chinese Filipino" to mediate between the Philippines, on the one hand, and Spain, America, Europe or the cosmopolitan West, on the other hand. The "Chineseness" of the "Chinese Filipino" now grants her access to the equally cosmopolitan but also specifically regional social capital produced by cultural and economic flows originating from East Asia. Even though *Mano Po* often depicts the Chinese culture of the past as being feudal, traditional, and backward, the emergence of China as an economic powerhouse and the association of "Chineseness" with "thoroughly modern 'Asian'" affluence (to use a phrase from Szanton Blanc 1996) have made the "Chinese" an object of fascination and aspiration even for non-"Chinese" Filipinos. This has led even some ethnic Southeast Asian Chinese to selectively resinify themselves by restoring their Chinese surnames and acquiring a Chinese-language education. The decision of the mestizo scion of the polygynous Antonio Chan to take up Asian Studies in *Mano Po 2*, for example, attests to the elites' growing inclination to partake of the benefits and opportunities afforded by the growing significance of "Asia" as a region of economic growth. Corazon Aquino's 1988 visit to Hongjian Village in Fujian Province, China, ancestral home of her great-grandfather, brought the Chinese Question out of the closets of the Filipino elite, even though acknowledgment of Chinese ancestry has not completely become a social and political asset.¹²

The resi(g)nification of "Chinese" mestizness may be read as a symptom of the fissures in the ideology of elite domination. Michael Pinches (1999) has argued that the ideological leadership of the Filipino elite has come under pressure in recent decades because of the contin-

ued failure of the Philippines to lift itself out of its economic malaise. Scholars like Yoshihara Kunio (1995) have even blamed Filipino underdevelopment on the Philippine state's repression of the Chinese minority. To this extent, Chinese entrepreneurship has come to connote positive associations of dynamism and industry (Pinches 1999, 287), which the elites have perforce to ideologically coopt. The shockwave generated in 1995 by the Metro Pacific Corporation—an Asian conglomerate chaired by a Filipino, Manuel Pangilinan, and an arm of the Sino-Indonesian Salim Group, which led a 16-member consortium that included Malaysian tycoon Robert Kuok to outmaneuver Ayala Land by bidding P30.2 billion for the 117-hectare chunk of Fort Bonifacio—demonstrated the “money power” of Southeast Asian capitalists now operating transnationally and in the Philippines. But lest this creates the mistaken impression that “Asian” capital signifies purely “Chinese” capital, we need only remember that ethnic Chinese tycoons in the Philippines have also formed profitable alliances with the Philippine elite in their business ventures, as did Henry Sy with the Ayalas and John Gokongwei with the Lopezes (Tiglao 1990a, 70). When Metro Pacific ran aground during the Asian financial crisis, its Fort Bonifacio shares were eventually bought by Ayala Land in partnership with Evergreen Holdings (of the Campos Group). Moreover, all but one of the Chinese-Filipino tycoons (and all of whom were already Filipino citizens well before the 1975 mass naturalization of Chinese) are not members of the Chinese Chambers of Commerce, as the most successful Chinese-Filipino firms are precisely the ones that have relied least on “Chinese” ties (Cariño 2001, 114). In other words, upper-class “Chinese” are able to move and mix in the highest Filipino social circles. Furthermore, a Chinese-Filipino tycoon like Emilio Yap (owner of *Manila Bulletin*) was able to foil the bid of the Malaysian state-linked (now state-owned) conglomerate Renong to take over the Manila Hotel by benefiting from Filipino nationalist sentiments, which figured in the Supreme Court's decision to declare the Manila Hotel a “national patrimony” in 1997 and give preference to Filipino bidders. And while the identification of Chinese with money renders the Chinese vulnerable to accusations of capital flight, a number of Filipinos and Chinese Filipinos have argued against the fear of Chinese capital flight by pointing

out that most of the Chinese stood by the Philippines during its most troubled times instead of funneling their money abroad (Tiglao 1990b, 68)—an argument that sets up a moral contrast between the “old money” Spanish mestizo families and the “new money” Chinese.

Racist sentiments may continue to color elite evaluation of the Chinese new rich, who are derided for their nouveau riche tastelessness, but the cultural authority interminably enjoyed and exerted by the old mestizo Spanish and Filipino elites can no longer be fully exercised over “Chinese” claims to an alternative (but not necessarily oppositional or subversive) modernity and aesthetics (Pinches 1999, 294–95; Ong and Nonini 1997). In light of the Philippines’ deepening integration into the East Asian regional economy, the resi(g)nification of Chinese mestizness is part of an ongoing process of elite reconsolidation of symbolic capital and power through the integration of the “Chinese” and, by extension, “Chinese” identification with East Asian capital, into the bounds of the Philippine official national imaginary.

The Limits of “Chineseness”

But if *Mano Po* identifies the potentials of “Chinese” identification with a changing, pluralist Philippine state and with regional capitalism, it also exposes the limits of this multiple identification.

Foremost among the limits is the mediation of “Chinese” dealings with the state and its various agencies and representatives by money. *Mano Po* shows how the Chinese attempted to overcome their vulnerability by relying on their own family for support, and on their money to circumvent state repression and exploitation. Money is the main currency for establishing “Chinese” connections with—or, more accurately, for “speaking” to—Filipinos, especially state officials; it may be considered a form of lingua franca by which “Chinese” (Filipinos, too!) speak to the state. The *Forrest Gump* shots of the apolitical Go patriarch Don Luis hobnobbing with various presidents and government officials testify to the everyday Chinese survival tactic of forming guanxi relations with the state to ensure protection of their businesses and interests. In *Mano Po*, when Philippine National Police director Dioscoro Blanco—a long time “protector” of the family—complains

to Daniel Go (Tirso Cruz III) about his daughter Richelle's plan to testify in court and identify Blanco as the notorious "White Sky" involved in drug smuggling and pushing, Go hands him a check for P5 million with the words: "Tanggapin mo ang pagpaumanhin ko" (Accept my apologies). In *Mano Po 2*, Johnson (Jay Manalo), the son-in-law of murdered businessman Antonio Chan, pays the investigating detective P2 million to implicate Chan's first wife, Sol, in the murder charges, but Sol's daughter, Grace, pays the same cop a bag full of money to expose this scam. When the cop protests that his life is on the line ("Buhay ko ang nakataya dito, ma'am"), she replies, while handing over the bag: "Paniguro ng kinabukasan mo" (Insurance for your future).

In *Mano Po*, the exchange between Vera and her sister Richelle's boyfriend, police officer Rafael, hinges on "Chinese" reliance on money to solve difficult problems, especially when the problem takes the form of the state and its claims, or, in this case, the Vera's youngest sister Richelle's love affair with the cop, with whom she is working on a drug smuggling exposé. Here, Vera tries to get Rafael (Raf) to break off his relations with her sister.

Vera: Wala ka ng perang mapagpala sa kanya. (You won't be able to milk her of any more money.)

Raf: Alam mo, ang problema sa mga taong katulad mo na mayaman, ang tingin mo sa lahat na bagay, may katumbas na pera. (You know, the problem with rich people like you is that you think everything has a price.)

Vera: Talaga namang ginagatasan mo kaming mga Chinese eh. (But you really do milk us Chinese.)

Raf: Kung ganyan ang tingin mo sa amin, bakit naman dito ka pa sa Pilipinas? (If this is what you think of us, why are you still in the Philippines?)

Vera: Aminin mo na, talaga ngang pera lang ang tingin mo sa aming mga Chinese di ba? (Admit it, you only think of the Chinese in terms of money.)

Raf: Bakit ganyan ang tingin mo sa sarili mo? Dito ka na pinanganak, dito ka na lumaki, ang kabuhayan ninyo nandito na. Pilipino na rin kayo. (Why do you see yourself this way?)

You were born here, you grew up here, your life is here. You are also Filipino.)

Vera: Tinuring mo ba kaming kagaya niyo? Sa sampung kinidnap, ilan ang Chinese? O baka naman talagang nagkataon lamang mas marami sa amin ang gusto ninyong kidnapin? (Did you treat us just like one of you? For every ten kidnappings, how many are Chinese? Or is it just a coincidence that you want to kidnap more of us?)

Raf: Maglaban kayo, magkaisa kayo...Ang problema sa inyo, wala kayong tiwala sa amin. (Fight back, unite...The problem with you is you don't have faith in us.)

Vera: Five million, Mr. Rafael Bala.

Raf: Sa ginagawa mong iyan, iniinsulto mo ang sarili mo. (You insult yourself by doing this.)

This exchange discloses, among other things, a “nationalist” logic at work in a number of spectacular kidnapping incidents that victimize rich ethnic Chinese.¹³ But it also reveals the two characters’ fundamental ambivalence toward the nation. Raf’s attitude, which oscillates between affirmation of the “Filipinoness” of the Chinese (“Pilipino na rin kayo”) and resentment of the rich (“mga taong katulad mo na mayaman”), reflects the tension within Filipino nationalism between the capacity for inclusiveness of the Filipino nation, on the one hand, and the exclusions generated by class that create deep divisions within the nation, on the other hand (Hau 2000a). Vera’s responses, which strongly negate Raf’s (and the state’s) good intentions, also lay bare the limits of nationalism by justifying Chinese lack of trust in the state authorities who have traditionally exploited the discourse of nationalism to fleece the Chinese. Her cynicism indicates the extent to which the Chinese—historically identified with money—have relied on money to speak and act for them precisely because the nationalist rhetoric and practice of citizenship and belonging are not just inadequate to shield the Chinese against harassment but often serve as the very instruments of extortion. In *Mano Po 3*, the daughter of anticrime crusader Lilia Chiong Veloso tells her aunt at the police station that the police were asking for money, and when the aunt confronts the police about fleecing the Chinese

(“Pinagiinitan ninyo dahil Chinese” [You’re putting the heat on us because we’re Chinese]), the irate police respond by saying that they are doing their job, and express their resentment of the rich (“Paninindigan namin ito” [We stand by this]). Lilia herself explodes when she hears the released kidnap gang leader, a cop, declare brazenly his innocence on television.

While money has the capacity to transform ethnic Chinese into kidnap victims, it can also be used to pursue a brand of justice not often available in official courts. In talking to the authorities to try to find their father’s killer in *Mano Po 2*, daughter Janet (Carmen Villaroel) asks her sister Grace (Judy Ann Santos): “Magkano daw para may masabi sila?” (How much does it take to make them speak?) Money can be the main instrument for exacting vengeance: when Lilia is feared missing, her son attempts to interrogate the chief kidnap suspect by offering money, and, when the suspect laughs it off, tells him: “Kung may kinalaman kayo, alam namin kung saan ka nakatuntun” (If you have anything to do with [her disappearance]...we know where you are).

But if money can buy justice and protection not obtainable from the state, the roots of Chinese vulnerability also lie in the capacity of money to provoke popular resentment and retribution. When Antonio Chan is murdered, the family finds it hard to believe that the murder is a *random act of robbery*. Even the police begin their investigation by asking if Chan had fired or humiliated an employee. Class relations being so contentious in the Philippines, Chinese capitalists become vulnerable to a form of “nationalist” vengeance,¹⁴ which crosses over class *ressentiment* into retribution aimed at redressing the shame and loss of dignity caused by humiliation or rejection.

The threat and terror of state violence and popular vengeance thus expose the limits of “Chinese” belonging. In *Mano Po 3*, Lilia loses her first love Michael (Christopher de Leon) when the latter’s family migrates to the U.S. to escape harassment by the state after Michael is detained for possession of anti-Marcos documents and involvement in the anti-Marcos movement.

Thus, however careful *Mano Po* may be in adumbrating the integration of ethnic Chinese into the Filipino nation, the fact that characters like Vera make the decision not to leave the Philippines indicates that,

had the rescue operations ended in tragedy, the Gos may “choose” to leave after all, as millions of working Filipinos have done in light of the failure of the state to deliver welfare, security, and prosperity to the Filipino population. The situation of the second sister, Juliet Go-Co, whose husband plans to set up business in Shanghai, underscores the way in which “Chinese,” like the capital with which they have become identified, have the potential to create new channels of flows that may potentially breach and exceed the boundaries of the nation-state.

Like *Mano Po*, *Crying Ladies* weaves together multiple, conflicting strands of associations surrounding money and its identification with the “Chinese.” But whereas *Mano Po* looks at Pinoy-Chinese relations from the perspective of the Chinese Filipino, *Crying Ladies* views Pinoy-Chinese interactions from the viewpoint of Filipinos. Not surprisingly, the *Crying Ladies* brand of happy ending provides an altogether different resolution of the problem of Chinese identification with money. Where *Mano Po* attempts to reterritorialize “Chineseness” by embedding the “Chinese” within the Philippine nation, *Crying Ladies* attempts to defuse the class tensions and nationalist resentment ignited by “Chineseness” by turning deterritorialized “Chinese” flows and connections into sources of Filipino self-advancement. In other words, whereas *Mano Po* puts a premium on the value of Chinese Filipino attachment to the Philippines, *Crying Ladies* suggests that the value of being Chinese Filipino lies precisely in its ability to mediate connections with the outside, especially the Philippines’ economically better-performing East Asian neighbors, and in so doing provide capital and opportunities that Filipinos can tap.

Crying Ladies follows three Filipino professional mourners hired by a young Chinese Filipino, Wilson Chua (Eric Quizon), to work at his father’s wake. The main protagonist, Stella (Sharon Cuneta), had once been jailed for estafa, and finds out that the dead man for whom she must cry was the one who had her jailed. Stella comes off as a trickster figure whose main preoccupation is with money, be it to obtain money or evade the obligations entailed by monetary exchange. The estafa case is an example of her attempt to escape monetary obligations by passing bouncing checks, but so is Stella’s ploy of getting a free jeepney ride. Stella also exploits an ongoing workers’ strike (directed at a corporation with the revealing name of El Rico, “The

Rich”) to collect contributions from her fellow bus passengers. Stella’s laborious efforts to make money are mirrored in her predilection for gambling, the allure of which lies in its promise of generating money out of thin air through the machinations of luck (*suwerte*).

Here, money, or the threat of its absence, weighs heavily on Stella and her family. Stella’s disillusionment with the ability of the state to provide services and a decent living is summed up in her frustrated exclamation at the repeated blackouts: “Brownout na naman, among klaseng gobyerno to!” (Brownouts again, what kind of government is this!) Her inability to give up her trickster ways and her perennial indebtedness from gambling and from constantly asking for *bale* (cash advance) from her Chinese employer (whose own business is not flourishing) force her to relinquish her son to her ex-husband and his second wife, who plan to relocate to Cagayan de Oro (note the reference to gold) and offer the child a stable family environment and a future. Stella’s need to earn a living forces her to leave her son under someone else’s care; when a fire breaks out, Stella teeters on the brink of hysteria at the thought that her son may have been trapped alone in their house. Stella’s attempts to apply for a job abroad as a cultural singer are thwarted by the state in the form of a black mark on her record kept by the National Bureau of Investigation (NBI). Not surprisingly, her thoughts are almost always of money—money problems even enter her subconscious in the form of an extended dream sequence in which Stella by sheer luck wins a slot as a contestant at a “Salapi o Salakot” TV game show.

The gambling and tricksterisms she engages in are but small-scale versions of speculative capital that is generated in such “legitimate” venues as the stock market and real estate. While gambling operates on the premise of magical accumulation, the odds against winning often end up impeding capital accumulation.¹⁵ The magical qualities of capital, the ability of capital to multiply manifold, are spotlighted at the dead Chinese capitalist’s wake—each day of the wake, a calligrapher writes down in Chinese characters the amount of donation in the tens of thousands of pesos from family friends of the dead man. Not only can money enable the dead Chinese’s widow to buy grief (Wilson’s mother at one point sharply tells Stella and her friends that they are

being paid to mourn, not joke and laugh) to ensure her husband's safe passage to paradise, it allows the young Chinese Filipino son to continue paying lip service to a dying tradition he no longer believes in. More, the death of the capitalist does not truncate capital accumulation, but inspires yet another round of accumulation. Professional mourning—now “subcontracted” to Filipinos because there is no more Chinese labor for hire and because the practice itself is dying out in the Chinese community—is a commodification of the ideology that seeks to marry wealth with virtue: those who are rich also have to earn virtue by being good and helpful, so that the outpouring of grief following their death assures them an easier passage to heaven. Money supplements private grief by securing the merit and virtue of the dead.

Stella's one-dimensional view of the dead man is complexified by the testimonials of the dead man's friends, but their positive portraits of the man are sealed off from her by her inability to understand Hokkien. The use of Chinese languages in the Philippine setting is one of the primary markers of “Chinese” alienness. Conversations conducted in Hokkien among “Chinese” in front of Filipinos have been known to elicit Filipino jokes about “Binebenta na tayo” (We're being sold), remarks that derive their amusement/reproach value from the commonsensical identification of “Chineseness” with commercial and capitalist exchange.¹⁶ *Crying Ladies*, like the *Mano Po* films, strives to render the “Chinese” scrutable by providing subtitled translations of the Hokkien dialogues. But the fact that these dialogues are translated (sometimes not accurately) into English rather than Filipino reinforces class difference in linguistic terms by linking Hokkien to the language of power and privilege in the Philippines and, in so doing, making the act of speaking Hokkien equivalent to “spokening in dollars” in their common allusion to money and exchange.¹⁷

But *Crying Ladies* is also at pains to defuse the potential antagonisms generated by class-coded ethnic difference, but it does so by distinguishing the “new Chinese” from the “old Chinese.” Although the “Chinese” family's grief speaks to Stella across the chasm of their class differences, and moves her, class reconciliation in the film is mainly posited through Stella's deepening friendship with the dead Chinese's male heir, Wilson, whose business connections grant her access to Chi-

nese money and, most important, connections.¹⁸ Unlike his dead father, who can no longer speak for himself and whose good character and human frailties are spoken of in private and mainly in Hokkien, the culturally mestizo Wilson is “Filipino” enough to be able to communicate with Stella across the barriers of class, language, and ethnicity, but his added value for Stella inheres in his “Chinese” connections. The dead father remains as alien to Stella as the Philippine state itself: she knows him only as the *intsik* who had put her in jail and who, she hears, once had someone beaten up for failure to pay his or her debt. Her encounter with the son of the dead Chinese proves more rewarding: Wilson gives her a fat bonus and subsequently introduces her to a Japanese production company looking to hire karaoke video talents. Stella finally establishes herself as an award-winning video actress and presumably begins earning a decent living.

Crying Ladies tracks the socialization of Stella from trickster (whose attempts to conjure money are penalized as inappropriate by the system) into karaoke talent (whose wage-determined contract labor, now appropriate, buys her social respectability). Stella’s trickster ways are attempts to evade the strictures of a state that has failed to alleviate the miseries of the majority of its population. (Similarly, her enterprising Filipino neighbor sidesteps Philippine laws prohibiting gambling by buying unclaimed cadavers and staging fake funerals as a front for gambling. Fake mourning and its commodified rituals have become a form of livelihood.) If the dead “Chinese” had once acted as an agent of her penalization by the state, his “Chinese-Filipino” heir becomes the agent of her socialization into the culture of chance and dream of upward mobility, all without recourse to state intervention. *Crying Ladies* makes the “Chinese” the exemplar of accumulation and the epitome of regional flows. Stella’s connections with Wilson Chua are vital to her social upliftment and legitimacy because it is Wilson’s *guanxi* networking with fellow East Asian entrepreneurs, such as the Japanese videoke producer, that lead to Stella’s discovery as an actress and delivery from the drudgery and inadequate living of manual labor. More crucially, this *guanxi* network enables her to circumvent the penalties of a permanent black mark on her NBI record which had long prevented

her from being able to work abroad. In the fantasy world conjured up by *Crying Ladies*, a personal guarantee from Wilson is enough to persuade the Japanese producer to overlook Stella's estafa conviction and judge her not on the basis of the state's penalizing of her past actions but on her talent, potential, and "true" worth as a human being. Ironically, then, this form of meritocracy is dependent precisely on "Chinese" connections that have often been viewed as typical of East Asian capitalism yet also stigmatized as "market corruption" because they bypass state regulation and legitimation.

Crying Ladies and *Mano Po* anchor their plots on the stereotypical identification of the "Chinese" with capital. Yet these films already stand at a distance from the nationalism of anti-Chinese films such as Lino Brocka's *Maynila, Sa Mga Kuko ng Liwanag* (see Hau 2000a), not because Chinese ethnicity is no longer conflated with capital (on the contrary, the identification is closer now than ever), but because the kind of commercial ethos that prioritizes capital accumulation and consumption has become a lot more pervasive, and is embraced by growing numbers of Filipinos who, through internal and international migration, find themselves living and working in urban market-mediated environments.

Mano Po and *Crying Ladies* show that, while Pinoy-Chinese relations are viewed differently by non-Chinese Filipinos (as opportunities for tapping "Chinese" capital and regional "Chinese" networks) and by Chinese Filipinos (as opportunities for demonstrating "Chinese" embeddedness in the Filipino nation while also appropriating regional "Chinese" flows), these two seemingly opposite views are integral aspects of two mutually determining processes—the concomitant revaluation of both "Chineseness" and "Filipinoness." The imperative for integrating the Chinese into the nation is partly conditioned by the Philippine state's desire to utilize "Chinese" capital and connections in the region and beyond. The Chinese Filipino's perceived access to regional and global capital in turn adds to the social and cultural capital of being "Chinese" and "Filipino" in the Philippines. The Filipino now finds in either her "Chinese" ancestry or her "Chinese" neighbor a means of identifying with emergent, affluent "Asia" even as she or a member of

her family is part of a diaspora that includes Chinese Filipinos. Growing regional identification on the part of the Philippine state, the “Chinese,” and the “Filipino” does not erase nationness; it reinvents it.

But despite the growing visibility and desirability of “Chinese” entrepreneurial and social power embodied by the hybrid “new Chinese,” the category “Chinese” itself remains deeply entangled with the issue of class, which defines its fraught relationship with the Filipino nation and which can potentially reactivate deep-seated ambivalence about, if not resentment of and violence against, alien capital/ists. Adopting the viewpoint of Chinese Filipinos who are particularly sensitive to the real and potential effects of this ambivalence, *Mano Po* attempts to resolve this issue by providing a politically acceptable resolution that anchors the “Chinese” firmly to the territorial bounds and narratives of the Philippine nation-state. Even as it bolsters the commonplace view of the transnationality of “Chinese” networks through its account of second daughter Juliet Go-Co’s husband’s connections in Shanghai, the film opts to conclude by reaffirming the rootedness of the Chinese Filipino within the Philippines, hence its recourse to ending the story with eldest daughter Vera’s decision to forego her plan to move to Canada for her peace of mind following the traumatic kidnapping of her sisters: “Umalis man ako sa Pilipinas, sa ayaw’t gusto ko, dala ko pa rin ang Pilipinas. Kaya bakit ko pa aalisan ang di ko namang lubusang matatakas?” (Even if I were to leave the Philippines, whether I like it or not, I carry the Philippines with me. So why should I leave what I cannot completely escape anyway?)

Cristina Szanton Blanc has commented on the Chinese-Filipino unease with fully embracing the regional narratives and models of Asian modernity (and mobility) propounded by emergent economies such as Malaysia or Singapore, noting that Taiwanese investments in the Philippines have been resisted by both Chinese and non-Chinese who view them as economic competition and quoting Chinese-Filipino members of *Kaisa para sa Kaunlaran* as saying: “How can we emphasize our Chineseness when we still need to make ourselves acceptable to a Filipino electorate?” (Szanton Blanc 1997, 272, 275).

This inability to embrace enthusiastically East Asian modernity may also have to do with the kind of position occupied by the Philippines

within the region. Unlike the other countries, the Philippines has not been privy to the kind of dramatic economic growth that shaped the myth of the “East Asian economic miracle.” A World Bank (1993) report, in fact, omitted the Philippines from the list of Asia’s “miracle economies.” Periodically buffeted by political and economic crises, the Philippines made the historic decision in the mid- to late 1970s to officially export its labor, a sizeable percentage of which, heavily feminized and concentrated in domestic work and services, is now based in East Asia. Filipino efforts to partake of East Asian affluence are shadowed by the reality of Filipino workers—mainly female—providing the labor that shores up a number of East Asian economies, feminized labor that uncovers the underside of exploitation of foreign and native labor by state and private sector alike to underwrite the so-called Asian economic miracle. This asymmetry in economic relations between the Philippines and its more prosperous East Asian neighbors does not only take the form of a gendered division of labor and a division between skilled and “unskilled” labor (Hau 2004, 227–70), but assumes a racial cast in the contrast between “Chinese” employer and “Malay” employee.

Not immune to the contagion of regional fantasies of capitalist success and consumption, the Philippine state has been largely unsuccessful in realizing its mission of national development. Under the administration of Fidel Ramos (1992–1998), the Philippines attempted to generate growth rates similar to those in the neighboring countries by initiating a series of financial liberalization programs in hopes of being able to benefit from the windfall of capital flows and investments sweeping through the region. With the Philippine state already so colonized by private interests that it had not been able to reinvent itself along the lines of the developmental state regimes in Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan, a combination of circumstance, happenstance, and structural constraints ensured in the 1990s that “[a]fter protesting vehemently that it is an East Asian economy, not a Latin American one, the Philippines returned to the region’s ardent embrace by being swept into the Asian currency crisis” (Montes 1999, 263).

Seen in this light, the ongoing resignifications of Chineseness remain fraught with tension. The Philippines’ position within the international capitalist order does not allow it to fully and uncritically embrace the

regional discourse of urban middle-class consumption and economic growth. Moreover, the viability of the region depends on its ability to sustain economic growth and offer stability and prosperity (Shiraishi 2006, 268)—the yawning gap between the rich and poor and between urban and rural populations within and, equally important, between nations may engender social crises and rekindle nationalist sentiments, which elites can capitalize on to protect their vested interests and which ordinary people can draw on in order to articulate their demands for social justice. The figure of the “Chinese,” like the dead capitalist in *Crying Ladies*, bears the embers of nationalist ambivalence and still haunts the new orthodoxy of pluralism and national integration. While *Crying Ladies* imagines a scenario in which class differences and the potential conflicts sparked by class disparity can be doused by the twinned discourses of meritocracy and chance, and *Mano Po* celebrates the cultural hybridity and enrichment wrought by national integration, the films cannot fully paper over “Chinese” vulnerability to state violence, popular vengeance, and the demand for social justice on the part of those, “Chinese” and non-“Chinese” alike, whose everyday lives give the lie to the fantasies of accumulation and consumer satisfaction peddled by the ideology of global capitalist triumph.

Notes

I thank Ina Cosio for her invaluable help in obtaining some of the materials for this article, and Jojo Abinales, Jun Aguilar, Robby Kwan Laurel, and especially Takashi Shiraishi for their comments and encouragement. All errors in this article are my responsibility.

1. See Hau 2000a for an analysis of Kaisa’s deployment of the discourse of citizenship.

2. It remained expensive, though: The P6,000 to P10,000 fee required for application barred indigent Chinese from acquiring Filipino citizenship.

3. Kaisa has argued for the need to distinguish between “Chinese Filipinos” and “Filipino-Chinese”:

Filipino-Chinese refers to the traditional or older Chinese who are predominantly Chinese in identity but Filipino in citizenship. When used in names of organizations, it means that these groups have members who are either Chinese or Filipino citizens, i.e. Filipino-Chinese Chambers of Commerce, Filipino-

Chinese Fire Prevention Association, etc. *Chinese Filipino* refers to the young, mostly native-born ethnic Chinese who identify themselves as Filipinos first, but still maintain their Chinese cultural identity. (Kaisa para sa Kaunlaran 2005).

Tsinoy, on the other hand, is used somewhat loosely to encompass even national heroes of Hokkien descent who did not identify themselves as “Chinese.” While noting the inadequacy of these terms to account for how the “Chinese” is figured as foreign and/or Filipino (see Hau 2004, 15–62), this article employs the term “Chinese Filipino” to directly allude to the above definition while also interchanging it with the term “new Chinese.” “New Chinese” is often used by scholars to refer to Chinese who migrated from post-Maoist China, and this category of “Chinese” sometimes serves to distinguish new immigrants from second- or third-generation “Chinese Filipinos” (who have been known to differentiate themselves from recent migrants by pejoratively referring to the latter as *chekwa* or “G.I. [genuine *intsik*]”), but this article deliberately uses “Chinese,” “new Chinese,” and “old Chinese” to play up the slippages between terms like “Chinese Filipino,” “Filipino-Chinese,” *tsinoy*, *intsik*, *tsutsiya*, and G.I./*chekwa*. I define “new Chinese” as a form of “Chinese” identification (rather than an established identity) that emerged out of the post-Marcos era and the transnationalization of “ethnic Chinese” business and populations. “Old Chinese” refers to older forms of identifying “Chineseness” with commerce, capital, and communism, most notably crystallized in the construction of “Chinese” as the “other” of Filipino nationalism. Conceptual slippages may create confusion, but it is precisely these ambiguities that make “Chineseness” such an eminently useful and exploitable term of (self-)identification, which can be appropriated, reinvented, or deployed for different political, economic, cultural, and personal projects.

4. See Hau 2000b (152–65) for a theoretical discussion of the visibility and “alienation” of the Chinese merchant.

5. This is not to say that “Chinese” capital in the past was solely confined within one nation-state; the size of contemporary “Chinese” capital, however, dwarfs that of earlier “Chinese” capital, and the amount of investment abroad has also expanded.

6. On the concepts of deterritorialization and reterritorialization, see Deleuze and Guattari 1983.

7. On the Chinese mestizo as a “special kind of Filipino,” see Wickberg 1964 and 1965. On the fluidity of “Chinese mestizo” identity, see Chu 2002.

8. “*Ethnic Chinese* are people with some measurable degree of Chinese parentage, who can speak and understand at least one Chinese dialect, who have received a minimum of Chinese-language education, and who have retained some Chinese customs and traditions enough to consider themselves and be considered by their neighbors as Chinese” (Kaisa para sa Kaunlaran 2005). Some of the historical

“Tsinoy,” including José Rizal, were not completely immune to anti-“Chinese” racism. For a compelling discussion of the racialist cast of *ilustrado* nationalism, see Aguilar 2005.

9. For a useful overview and critique of the “cultural and structural accommodation” that organizes the study of overseas Chinese, see Hodder 2005.

10. Dannhaeuser 2005 has also noted the same phenomenon of intraethnic competition among ethnic Chinese small- and medium-scale entrepreneurs in Dapunan.

11. *Mano Po* showcases the participation of women in “Chinese” big business in the Philippines through its depiction of the Filipina matriarch and the eldest Chinese daughter-CEO. In *Mano Po 3*, the protagonist strong woman is a celebrated activist and anticrime crusader. But the emphasis on the dead patriarch and his disavowed eldest son in *Mano Po 2*, and the subordination of second daughter Juliet in *Mano Po*, point to the circumscribing of the “Chinese” family by patriarchal elements working in and through the highly personalized conflicts centering on romantic love, filial piety, and family duty. Even as the *Mano Po* films show the strong women characters defying patriarchal “Chinese tradition,” their plots and characterizations continue to locate the ideals of passion and family within the orbit of male validation and heterosexuality. In *Crying Ladies*, which celebrates female bonding, the women’s career and life trajectories are propelled by their connections to the male-dominated church, video production company, and film studio.

12. The threat of “Chinese” alienness is still used as a weapon in political campaigns and economic competition. Alfredo Lim’s presidential candidacy was dogged by challenges from opponents who questioned his Filipino citizenship on the basis of his Chinese ancestry. Similar challenges were leveled against William Gatchalian by his business rivals.

13. The visibility of “Chinese” kidnap victims does not preclude the fact that kidnapers have become a lot more “democratic” in their choice of victims, targeting rich and poor, Filipinos and foreigners alike.

14. For the link between nationalism and vengeance via the politics of translation and foreignness, see Rafael 2005.

15. For an illuminating discussion of gambling and its relationship to capital, labor, elite domination, and the state in the context of colonial Philippines, see Aguilar 1998.

16. In *Mano Po*, Rafael Bala’s father expresses his reservations about his son’s relationship with Richelle Go by pointing to such a discomfort when he tells Rafael: “Kapag usap ng Intsik sa harap mo, mailang ka” (If Chinese were spoken in front of you, you will be put off). Public conversations in Hokkien may also provoke “ching-chong-chang” mimicry which disrupts spoken Hokkien with onomatopoeic echoes that empty the language of its content while highlighting the discordant foreignness of its sound—a form of unsolicited participation in the absence of translation.

17. The linguistic identification of Hokkien with English works differently in the *Mano Po* scenes set in “feudal” China among the indigent “Chinese.” In the “old” China scenes, English subtitles merely mark spoken Hokkien as the alien tongue of an alien culture. But when used in scenes set in the Philippines, they work to displace the potentially more disturbing alienness of the “Chinese” Tagalog of the elder generation of “Chinese.” Because “Chinese”-accented, broken Tagalog risks provoking laughter or, worse, ridicule from the audience, Hokkien is quarantined from “Chinese” Tagalog by being rendered as written, and therefore safely unaccented and for the most part grammatically correct, English. Given the absence (or, more accurately, death) of the “Chinese” past and patriarch in *Crying Ladies* and the Chinese-Filipino characters’ command of fluent Tagalog, Hokkien functions as an exclusive insider’s language like English.

18. Although the film accords more attention to three female protagonists rather than to young Chinese Filipino, their stories unfold against the backdrop of the Chinese funeral. The Chinaman’s wake serves as a catalyst for the transformation of the three women’s lives and careers. The has-been actress (Hilda Koronel) receives much-needed validation from a fan, and the church worker (Angel Aquino) heeds her friends’ advice and decides to give up her relationship with her adulterer boyfriend.

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