

philippine studies

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

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Philippine Studies vol. 46, no. 4 (1998): 514–521

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Fri June 27 13:30:20 2008

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Teresita Ang See



The Huaqiao Warriors: Chinese Resistance Movement in the Philippines, 1942–1945. By Yung Li Yuk-wai. Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1996. 224 pages.

In 1995, when the world commemorated the 50th anniversary of the end of World War II, the Hong Kong University Press published Yung Li Yuk-wai's thesis, *The Huaqiao Warriors: Chinese Resistance Movement in the Philippines, 1942–1945*. This book has now been co-published by the Ateneo de Manila University Press, making this valuable contribution to Philippine historiography available to Filipino readers. It was also reviewed by Conrado Olazo in the October 1997 issue of *Philippine Studies*.

The book documents the history of the Chinese resistance movement in the Philippines and its impact on the Chinese community. Being versatile in English, Mandarin and Cantonese, the author has a decided edge over other researchers. She was able to do oral interviews with some of the old participants in the resistance movement in Mandarin or Cantonese, although most of her respondents spoke Hokkien, the *lingua franca* of the local Chinese community. Li's book is unique in that it gives more detailed and exhaustive information about the Chinese guerillas, not just from Philippine sources but also from Chinese publications and materials, as well as declassified American military records from the U.S. National Archives.

Early Anti-Japanese Campaigns

While the Philippines entered the Pacific War only in 1941 following Japan's bombing of Pearl Harbor, resistance against Japanese aggression was already carried out by the Chinese in the Philippines a decade earlier, particularly after Japan occupied China's Manchuria in 1931. The Mukden incident in Manchuria on the evening of 18 September 1931 triggered a frenzy of organized fund-raising, active propaganda, boycott of Japanese goods, and other activities launched by the Philippine Chinese to help China prepare

for war against Japan. The local Chinese were mobilized into a Philippine Chinese Salvation Committee originally based in Manila but later expanded into the provinces. They later formed an umbrella organization called the Federation of Chinese Anti-Japanese Salvation Associations.

At the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War in 1937, mass meetings, anti-Japanese propaganda, fund-raising for the war chest and other activities escalated. In fact, many Philippine-Chinese volunteers even went back to China to be trained as soldiers in the Chinese Army. Other efforts to help win the war against Japan were spent toward raising contributions to modernize China's air force, especially its fighter planes. Thus, when World War II finally broke out in the Pacific after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, many leaders of the anti-Japanese movement were forced to go into hiding or to go underground. They grouped themselves into guerilla units ready to do battle against the Japanese.

When the Japanese soldiers entered Manila on 2 January 1942, their first task was to round up prominent Chinese leaders whom they knew to be anti-Japanese. Even the diplomatic corps was not spared. On 4 January, Consul-General Young Kuangson and his men were arrested and subsequently executed in April by the Japanese authorities, triggering outrage and bitterness among the Philippine-Chinese. This served only to intensify their efforts at resisting the Japanese Occupation.

Instead of just giving an account on how the resistance movement was organized and what it was able to achieve, Li's thesis first analyzes carefully the historical and social background of the ethnic Chinese community and how they were organized, thus drawing out the reasons behind the movement and answering the basic questions: Why did the Chinese in the Philippines resist the Japanese? Is it normal for such a small foreign group to fight side by side with the host people and the ruling regime against the invaders?

Li's initial assessment is that it appeared unlikely for the Chinese to join hands with the Filipinos for the common cause of defending the latter's freedom. Citing earlier published sources like the works of Weightman, Blaker and Wickberg, Li describes the ethnic Chinese community as a much marginalized one, segregated from mainstream society and suffering from a history of massacres and discrimination. Hence, Li argues that the Chinese resistance movement was organized and inspired more due to their patriotic fervor for the defense of China and for avenging their homeland from the humiliation of an invasion. But the subsequent detailed account of the work of the different guerilla units would show that in the end, the Chinese fought an all-out war against the Japanese, admitting that their fates and destinies cannot be separated from the society where they now live.

Although Li suspects that a number of personal accounts of the guerillas published in official souvenir or commemorative programs may be self-serving, there is, nevertheless, a wealth of insights from the oral history of indi-

vidual guerillas that would have given richer information on their full commitment and dedication to the Philippine cause. Such commitment went beyond their identification with their mother country, China, and their desire to avenge the humiliating defeat and massacres of the Chinese back home. While the initial resistance movement was sparked by China, their full participation in the underground movement proved that they finally staked their commitment to the cause of Philippine freedom. They found no contradiction at all between the two.

Philippine-Chinese Resistance Movement

The book neatly divides the Philippine-Chinese resistance movement broadly into the pro-Kuomintang or rightist groups and the pro-Communist or leftist groups. At first, many people were not aware of the vast schisms between the two groups, which they later resolved by hewing to the United Front policy adopted by the resistance forces in China.

The main rightist groups were the Chinese Overseas Wartime Hsuehkan Militia (COWHM), the Chinese Volunteers in the Philippines (CVP), Philippine Chinese Youth Wartime Special Service Corps (an offshoot of the Philippine Branch of the San Min Chu I Youth Corps) and the United States-Chinese Volunteers in the Philippines (U.S.-CVP). Other miscellaneous groups and individuals joined either the U.S. or the Philippine guerilla units. The Pekek Squadron initially with the rightist COWHM but later joined the leftist side due to dissatisfaction with the ultra-rightist slant of the COWHM. It later coordinated most of its activities with the leftist Wha Chi and the leftist sources tend to include it among their groups.

The leftist groups were the Philippine Chinese Anti-Japanese Guerilla Force (*Wha Chi* or the 48th squadron, also spelled as *Hua Zhi* or *Wah Chi*), the Philippine Chinese Anti-Japanese Corps (PCAJVC usually abbreviated as *Kang Chu*) and the Philippine Chinese Anti-Japanese and Anti-Puppets League (*Kang Fan*). These resistance forces engaged in military and nonmilitary activities. They emerged from the prewar Chinese leftist groups made up mainly of members of the Philippine Chinese United Workers' Union (*Lo Lien Hue*). The *Kang Fan* was responsible for the underground activities in Manila, Samar, the Bicol region, Cebu, Iloilo and Cotabato.

Guerilla Activities

Most of the guerilla groups were initially urban-based, but groups like the Wha Chi and the CVP were forced to retreat to rural areas and also form bases there. Later on, they linked up with American units like those of Col. Agustin Marking and Col. James Green to ask for arms and ammunition. They were responsible for underground work in the city like propaganda, intelligence information and the expansion of organization. They also

ambushed Japanese convoys, fought the Japanese in hit-and-run tactics in the hills and swamps of Pampanga and Bulacan, and generally attempted an intensified attack against the occupiers.

Other groups organized conduits to the USAFFE supplying the necessary information on the activities of the Japanese troops, as well as providing help in financing and procuring of food and other supplies for regular Philippine Army troops, or remnants or escapees from Bataan and Corregidor. As the prisoners of war in the various camps were released, the organized units provided relief, food, clothing, and medicines for them.

Groups which were supplied with rifles and ammunition were assigned to patrol the national highways, guard government buildings and bridges, especially against Japanese dynamiters, and act as aircraft observers. These Chinese volunteers exacted a heavy toll among the Japanese. Many of these volunteers either perished in the battlefields or in the Japanese torture chambers.

Underground Publications

All the guerilla units published an anti-Japanese propaganda paper to boost the morale of the people and inspire the defenders. The COWHM guerillas had a weekly called *The Fuse*. The Pekek squadron also maintained an underground newspaper called *Extermination*. The CVP published its weekly newsletter called *The Soul of Great China* or *Tai Han Hun*. The Philippine Chinese Youth Corps published a newsletter called the *Vanguard* every three days, culling the news from the radio broadcasts of Chungking, New Delhi and San Francisco, including all the speeches and proclamations of Chiang Kai Shek. The PCAJVC or *Kang Chu* published the *Chinese Commercial Bulletin*, an underground newspaper and other anti-Japanese posters and leaflets, warning the collaborators and getting information from the Japanese, and forewarning persons in danger of being arrested. The *Kang Fan* published the *Chinese Guide*, a weekly propaganda paper distributed mainly in Manila and in Central and Southern Luzon.

Unity and Schisms

At the end of the war, U.S.-CVPs Vicente Lopez (Lee Pak Chay of La Union) tried to incorporate all the Chinese resistance forces into one single unit. Li wrote that American investigations revealed that the Chinese guerilla commands operated independently from one another. The cleavages and rivalries within the Kuomintang that were evident before the war were reflected in the different rightists guerilla outfits whose activities remained largely uncoordinated. This resulted in greater losses for each team and after the war, the difficulties in collaborating the real strengths, the number of casualties and the activities undertaken by the different groups.

The Chinese leftist resistance movement was extended outside Luzon, mainly in Iloilo, Cebu and Cotabato. Li's accounts reveal that the leftist groups generally had greater unity and coordination. The effectiveness of the coordination is found in the close relations among the three groups which helped one another in procuring supplies, information and manpower, as well as arrangements for the treatment of those wounded in the fields. On the other hand, members of the League who were exposed had the *Wha Chi* forces to turn to, leading to a close relationship that accounted for the survival of both.

During the liberation campaign, the various groups linked up with the Americans and provided the troops with information on enemy lairs and troop movements and helped in the orderly evacuation of civilians. They also actively participated in the clean-up campaign, going after the enemies who went into hiding, especially in the rural areas.

One postwar mission the guerillas carried out which created much rancor and controversy in the community were the liquidation missions. While the Chinese community lauded the liquidation campaign against confirmed Japanese "collaborators," notably the secretary-general and the vice-president of the Japanese-sponsored Chinese Association, what became divisive was the move against individuals liquidated only on mere suspicion. Some families justified the fact that the so-called "collaborators" were only forced to take that option and they did so only to protect the greater community but that silently, these people were covert supporters of the underground resistance movement.

Impact on the Community

Li concludes that the Japanese occupation and the resistance movement had nearly insignificant impact in the Philippines and that the common experience in the war did not lead to an endearment between the Chinese and Filipinos.

One reason is that the Chinese resistance movement was hardly noticeable in the background of widespread resistance against the Japanese in the Philippines. She cites the fact that the Filipinos put up a strong resistance against the Japanese such that in the entire country, there were 118,000 Filipino guerillas active in the field, while the Chinese had only 4,000 men. A U.S. War Office Information report says:

There were around 4,000 Chinese guerillas, a third of which operated in the provinces. Therefore, whatever trouble they caused to the Japanese during the occupation and aid they gave to the American recovery of the islands, the Chinese contribution to the overall resistance movement can hardly be claimed as distinctive or unique.

What Li's scholarship fails to point out is that using U.S. sources like the above would also have its built-in biases, since the Americans would tend to downgrade other people's participation to bolster their role as the "savior of the nation." That were it not for the Filipinos and the Chinese guerillas who provided valuable information to the Americans during the mopping-up operations, the civilian casualties would have been much higher and the unnecessary and wanton destruction they did would have been worse.

Li also fails to point out that there were only 125,000 Chinese out of the total population of 17,000,000 Filipinos at the outbreak of the war. If there were just 4,000 Chinese guerillas at that time, it would still mean that 3.2 percent of the Chinese joined the resistance movement compared to the 0.7 percent (118,000) of Filipinos who became guerillas. In short, relative to the population, there were nearly five times more Chinese who became part of the resistance movement. One American's assessment found in the same War Office report agrees with this conclusion: "If we take into consideration the size of the Chinese population in Luzon, we can safely assert that the Chinese underground movements deserve a share of the credit for the success of the active and passive resistance against the enemy."

Likewise, the number of guerillas could easily be more than 4,000, since quite a number of the Chinese guerillas refused to have their names listed in the roster, claiming that they risked their lives not for personal honor or glory, much less for the backpay, but for the country. Many thought that claiming reparation or backpay from the Americans was a disgrace. It is also a well-known fact that many Manila businessmen supplied the U.S. Army with their needs and supplies on credit but after the war, they tore up the I.O.U.s and did not collect anymore, chalking up these debts as their contribution to the war efforts.

Li cited another U.S. Office of War Information report that said: "Except for the leftist Hua Chih (Wha Chi), most of these Chinese guerilla organizations operated secretly chiefly in or around Manila, and had only comparatively small units in the provinces. The Chinese guerilla groups differed from the Filipino ones in that the former were chiefly urban in character and only secondarily rural while the latter were primarily rural and only secondarily urban." Again, what Li and the U.S. report fail to consider is the reality that while 70 percent of the Filipino population is rural-based, 45 percent of the Chinese population can be found in Manila and outlying cities while another 40 percent were based in urban areas outside Manila. Less than 10 percent can really be said to be living in rural areas. This is responsible for the urban-based nature of the Chinese guerilla units.

Lastly, Li concludes, that "fighting on the same side against the common enemy for three years did not create any sense of brotherhood between the Filipinos and Chinese . . . friendship did develop between Chinese and Filipinos on the leftist side, but it was too weak to influence the general attitude of the two peoples." While it is true that individual friendships did

develop, it was too weak to influence the general attitude of the two peoples. This is a peculiarity of Philippine society at the time and could also be attributed to the fact that the total Chinese population is just 0.7 percent of the whole population. The long-term effects of the intrinsic divide-and-rule colonial policy carried out from Spanish times to the American regime and emphasized even more by the short Japanese interregnum cannot just be erased overnight. However, the lasting effect of two peoples who lived, fought, risked their lives and protected one another cannot be discounted too.

Luis Taruc, in his book *Born of the People*, says that:

Every action they undertook, every ambush they laid, every movement they made had to have a social significance: a guerilla fighter, though of Chinese descent, was in every sense of and for the people . . . the members of Squadron 48 (Wha Chi) became much beloved by the people of Central Luzon who often went out of their way to give them special consideration in billeting, feeding and assistance.

Though Li concludes that the common experience in the war did not lead to any endearment between the Chinese and the Filipinos, those of us who have personally encountered Filipino and Chinese war survivors who had close experiences with one another and who talked warmly and fondly of one another, believe otherwise. I would lean more toward Dr. Antonio Tan's conclusion in this war episode: "The war helped to bridge the gap between the Filipinos and the Chinese. This process was effected through social upheavals that tended to blur the differences between Filipinos and Chinese. Chinese schools closed down and Chinese children attended Filipino schools and interacted with Filipino children. As Father McCarthy puts it, the post-war changes in the postwar Chinese community were simply the acceleration of changes which took place during the enemy occupation." Furthermore, a large number of Chinese evacuated to the rural areas, especially to the barrios and had direct social contacts with the Filipinos. My late husband often talked fondly of memories of their Filipino neighbors, in the impoverished barrio where they evacuated, helping his mother carry his younger brother rather than save their own meager belongings. As Tan said: "Identity in struggle paved the way for a sense of community, of oneness, of mutual sympathy and help, to surmount the difficult times."

Conclusion

Dr. Norman Owen, the author's adviser at the University of Hong Kong, writes in the preface of the book: "In writing Philippine history, the Chinese immigrants and their descendants are acknowledged in discussions of economic development, but they tend to disappear when it comes to politi-

cal history, especially those great crucibles in which the nation's identity was forged, the Revolution and the Second World War. Thus, by implication, the Philippine Chinese are denied a role in the formative martial events of Philippine history, and, indirectly, the political rights arising from these nationalist struggles."

It is indeed toward filling up the gap, documenting the role of the Chinese in the "great crucibles in which the nation's identity was forged" that I recently presented a monograph on the *Ethnic Chinese in the Philippine Revolution* documenting the active role played by the ethnic Chinese in the Filipino's struggle against the tyranny, oppression and repression of their colonizers. This book of Yung Li Yuk-wai certainly fulfills the other part, the Chinese role in the Filipino defense of freedom in World War II. It is likewise an excellent source material on the general structure and preoccupation of the Chinese community at that time.

With this book, Philippine historiography would now have a more complete picture to prove that in the most significant events in our nation's history, the ethnic Chinese never stood by as unconcerned and uninvolved bystanders.