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# THE MAKING OF A SUPRANATIONAL STEREOTYPE: WESTERN LITERARY CONSTRUCTIONS OF THE CHINESE IN MANILA AND BEYOND

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**Asian studies**  
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*This essay critiques Orientalist constructions of Chinese-Filipinos in British and American fiction, travel writing and reportage over four centuries. The Chinese as skinflint entrepreneur is perhaps the oldest stereotype in this repertoire, reaching back to Daniel Defoe in 1725, and bearing common attributes with the anti-Semitic modelling of Jews in Europe. A century later, travel writers Charles Wilkes and William Henry Thoms conflate concerns about Chinese migration to the UK and US with disquiet about Chinese economic activity in Manila. While these authors revere the enterprising spirit of the Chinese, they are also anxious that the Chinese are depriving other ethnic groups of jobs and opportunities to prosper. Another paradox came into play towards the end of the century when an ascendant middle class of mixed race Chinese *mestizos* produced both the wealthy businesspeople who shored up the socioeconomic status quo and the leading personalities of the Philippine independence movement that sought to overturn that status quo. Western writers of the time invest this ambiguity in Chinese characters who are outwardly respectable yet*

*ultimately untrustworthy when dealing with westerners. Although such patent Sinophobia lulled as the twentieth century wore on, geopolitical events intervened to ensure that innuendos about Chinese elitism and money-grabbing survived in the work of Raymond Nelson and Timothy Mo. These texts respond to the rise of the People’s Republic of China to regional superpower status and the consequences of this new multilateral world order for the Philippines. By the election of President Rodrigo Duterte in 2016, anti-Chinese sentiment reignited, hypocrisy a crucial part of the kindling. At the same time as overlooking or vindicating the exercising of American “hard” and “soft” power over the Philippines, Jonathan Miller and other liberal Orientalists exaggerate China’s military and economic threat to Manila, Southeast Asia and the West.*

The momentous origin story of the Chinese in the Philippines has commonalities with those of other diasporas around the world. It is a narrative of adaptation and reinvention, negotiation and integration; and, more disturbingly, of the community’s ridicule, ruthless interpellation and frequently lethal oppression at the hands of the “host” regime. Chinese emigration to the Philippines dates back to at least the tenth century, when merchants from Fujian and neighbouring regions flocked to the archipelago to trade cotton, textiles and other profitable commodities (Yap 1998, 53). When the Spanish established their colonial government in Manila in 1571, they were keenly aware of the economic value of the capital city’s *sangle* – as the Spanish now dubbed the Chinese – traders, craftspeople, artisans and goldsmiths. To ensure the loyalty of their new subjects, the Spanish launched a campaign of religious conversions and encouraged intermarriage with *indios* (Christianized native Malay Filipinos). Those who complied were placed in the ghetto of Binondo, which is now thought to be the oldest “Chinatown” district of any city in the world. Those who did not comply were semi-imprisoned in a worse ghetto called Parián, where they had to observe strict curfews and could not leave the district without formal permission from the Spanish (Yap 1998, 53).

Throughout the seventeenth century, the mistreatment of the Chinese along with further “Chinese immigration would periodically contribute to rising tensions between the Spanish settlers and the growing numbers of Chinese labourers and artisans”, argues the Filipino historian Luis H. Francia (2014, 62). In 1603, 1639 and 1662, these tensions led to Spanish massacres of over fifty thousand Chinese in total (Clodfelter 2017, 61). As is conventional of racist violence in other historical contexts, these atrocities were justified ideologically by slandering and stereotyping the victims. Under the Spanish colonial gaze, the Chinese were variously but often concurrently homosexual (Garcia 2008, 387), disease-carrying, unhygienic, untrustworthy, seditious,

parochial, irreligious and – most significantly for the focus of this essay – economically successful enough to destabilize the status quo. As with other cultural and racial stereotypes, these can be contested and deconstructed in various ways, and that is partly the objective of this article, especially when we start to explore western literary adumbrations of the Chinese. For example, the homosexuality allegation is a classic case of “victim-blaming”, given that, according to Edgar Wickberg, it was produced by the Spanish creation of the Parián ghetto in which there was a predominance of male *sangleys*, as few Chinese women were permitted to settle in the Philippines at that time (Wickberg 1997, 157).

While the western literary texts on the Philippines that I consider in this here do not repeat this particular slur, they nonetheless appropriate other Spanish anxieties about Chinese Filipino professional activities and class positionality. In addition, these western constructions are inflected to different degrees by western metropolitan concerns about the Chinese in China, and their presence in other parts of Asia and in western societies themselves. The result is a supranational stereotype of the Chinese patterned by western assumptions about the characteristics of Chinese populations in at least three continents. (By the late nineteenth century, argues the historian Richard Chu, this supranational framing of the Chinese was beginning to influence ideologically the Malay-origin majority in the Philippines because the western “discourse on the Chinese in other parts of the world no doubt affected the views of those in the Philippines”) (2010, 75). As is the wont of classic Orientalist generalization and homogenization, the stereotype therefore is not especially alert to the unique traits of the Chinese in Manila.

A brief passage from Daniel Defoe’s *A New Voyage Around the World by a Course Never Sailed Before* (1725), a fictionalized travelogue which was “designed to enlist the sympathy of its readers for a serious scheme of colonization” (Jack 1961, 324), inaugurates the main coordinates of this supranational stereotype that will beget later Orientalist writing on the Philippines:

Our ship was now an open fair; for, two or three days after, came the vessel back which went away in the night, and with them a Chinese junk, and seven or eight Chinese or Japanners; strange, ugly, ill-looking fellows they were, but brought a Spaniard to be their interpreter, and they came to trade also, bringing with them seventy great chests of China ware exceeding fine, twelve chests of China silks of several sorts, and some lackered cabinets, very fine. We dealt with them for all those, for our supercargo left nothing, he took everything they brought. Our traders were more difficult to please than we: for as for baize and druggets, and such goods, they would not meddle with them; but our fine cloths and some bales of linen they bought very freely. So we unloaded their vessel and put our goods on board. We took a good sum of money of them besides; but whither

they went we knew not, for they both came and went in the night too, as the other did. (Defoe 1725, 268)

These merchants are Chinese nationals encountered off the coast of Luzon and not residents of Manila, but this does not matter to the supranational stereotype Defoe is helping to hatch. The merchants are, according to Defoe, clearly good at their jobs, for their wares are “very fine”, although they have a fastidious, “difficult to please” business mindset. Such emphasis on “the Chinese ... association with money” has since Defoe become a “pervasive truism” in Philippines-related discourses, according to the Chinese Filipina literary historian Caroline S. Hau (2000, 152). For Defoe, these men are inscrutable – are they in fact Chinese “or Japanners”? – and unpredictable creatures of the night whose onward destination is an enigma. This “othering” of the Chinese as estranged and displaced would not be out of step with official Spanish attitudes of the era, given that the colonial state had issued a decree in 1686 “calling for the mass deportation of the Chinese” and would do so again in 1744 (Chu 2010, 55). As far as Defoe is concerned, the mysterious actions of these seaborne Chinese fit with their “strange” appearances. As we will see, subsequent Orientalists will go much further and reduce Chinese conduct, customs and habits to biological attributes, conforming to the classic racist worldview in which “group differences in physical traits are considered a determinant of social behaviour and moral or intellectual qualities” (Van Den Berghe 1970, 87).

Problematic as it is, Defoe’s portrait of the Chinese is more lenient than those of succeeding Orientalists; more Sino-suspicious than Sinophobic, as it were. We might impute this to the fact that, while the “Yellow Peril” bogeyman of China as a territorial and civilizational threat to the “Occident” had been a staple of Western European political rhetoric since the reign of Genghis Khan, by Defoe’s time the “First British Empire” was not yet in competition with China and British public sentiments towards the Chinese were generally favourable (Frayling 2014). But around the same time *A New Voyage* was published, European settlers in North America were seized by a “Chinamania” for imported Chinese tea, porcelain and fabrics, a societal craze that solidified the notion in the fledgling US that the Chinese were shrewd entrepreneurs (Lee 2016, 29). After the Declaration of Independence in 1776, American businessmen were eager to compete with Europe for gainful Chinese trade, a venture that began in November 1783 when the first ever US cargo ship (filled with ginseng) set sail for Beijing (29).

In the mid-to-late nineteenth century, European and American political elites had changed their stance, now fearing Chinese encroachment into the Dutch colony in Java and the prospect of a Chinese invasion of Australia as grave challenges to western hegemony in the region (Lyman 2000, 689). While such apprehension certainly instructed Orientalist attitudes, their

imaging of the Chinese was motivated more by anxieties about a double Chinese threat to capitalism in the Philippines and in the West. In both these locations, Chinese entrepreneurs were allegedly siphoning business away from other ethnic communities, while lower-level Chinese workers were seen to be obtaining jobs that rightfully belonged to “native” groups. In the case of the Philippines, after the Spanish relaxed immigration laws in the early 1800s and the Chinese population mushroomed from 8,000 to 100,000 (Wickberg 1997), Chinese Filipino business clans came to dominate the country’s lucrative cash crop industries (the products of which were often processed in and always exported from Manila), to the detriment of foreign companies’ profits (Constantino 2010, 118). At the same time, there was a sharp increase in the number of Chinese employed in more proletarian retail and “coolie” roles (Wickberg 1997), which chipped away at *mestizo* and Filipino dominance of “urban provision”, amongst other sectors (Arensmeier 1980, 190). Inside the West – or more specifically the US – there was establishmentarian envy towards Chinese immigrant ownership of laundry, horticulture, retail and catering operations that were thought to require “enterprising acumen” (Kwong and Dušanka 2007, 10–20), while the big American labour unions, purporting to defend the interests of the white proletariat, blamed poorer Chinese labourers for “[driving] down wages, [taking] away jobs” and supinely volunteering to become “pawns of factory owners and greedy capitalists” (35). The doubleness of this monetary based alarm about the Chinese in both the East and West is captured in numerous Orientalist texts of the period. Before settling in the Philippines as a Presbyterian activist who would occasionally intervene in public debates about politics and religion, the Scottish merchant Robert MacMicking spent three years in Manila, an experience he recorded in his 1851 travel memoir *Recollections of Manilla and the Philippines During 1848, 1849 and 1850*. In the book – something of a patchwork of narratives about notable people and places; polemical screeds on geopolitics and economics; and catalogues of information on media, etiquette, transport, food, drink and accommodation – MacMicking observes, “These China shopkeepers have nearly driven all competition, except with each other out of the market, – very few *Mestizos* or Spaniards being able to live on the small profits which the competition amongst themselves has reduced them to” (23). Writing a little before MacMicking, the American adventurer Charles Wilkes, who commanded the United States Exploring Expedition (1838–42) to investigate opportunities for global resource exploitation, avers that “the Chinese ... have almost monopolized all the lucrative employments among the lower orders” (1849, 462). But Wilkes’ wariness here is mitigated by his praise elsewhere in his account for the Chinese as “all activity” (17) thanks to their enthusiasm for trade. This further double, even contradictory gaze was echoed in a late Victorian edition of the London *Times* which

intersowed warnings about the influx of Chinese jobseekers to England with admiration for their “hard-working, patient and economical” disposition. Similarly, in the 1840s and 1850s, the stance of US newspapers on Chinese miners in the American West alternated between admiration for their work ethic and disdain of their “servile”, “clannish, deceitful” ways (Kwong and Dušanka 2007, 44–45). It is probable that Orientalist Sinophobia was also determined by formal and informal restrictions placed on the types of work Chinese could carry out in both the US and in the Philippines. In the US, out of fear of competition for their livelihoods, Irish and French immigrant miners – and later on, American trades unionists – physically intimidated many Chinese migrants into taking up alternative employment in the laundry, restaurant and other sectors stated above. In the Philippines, the existence of a Chinese bourgeoisie in the nineteenth century was partly the long-term consequence of an early Spanish colonial policy of prohibiting the Chinese from farming, leaving them little choice but to indulge in mercantile activities. Therefore, the complaints Wilkes, MacMicking and others make about Chinese over-representation in certain economic areas lack historical understanding and constitutes a form of victim-blaming in which the Chinese are to be held accountable for conditions not of their own making.

Such victim-blaming along the lines of labour and capital bears a parallel with European anti-Semitism which, according to David Nirenberg, grew out of medieval laws “[barring] Jews from many economic activities”, which had the knock-on effect of “[channelling] Jews into specific financial institutions such as money lending and tax collecting” (2013, 196–97). Coterminous with Victorian/Edwardian Orientalist unease about lower- and upper-class Chinese, British novelists from Benjamin Disraeli to G. K. Chesterton to Hilaire Belloc variously sketched Jews as, “skilful accumulators of property” (Cheyette 1995, 67), poor, insular, submissive (181–82) and guilty of financial crimes such as the 1912 Marconi insider trading scandal (151). Of course, the Jewish and Chinese diasporas are not the only subaltern ethnic groups ever to have been vilified as economic parasites, but the comparison seems appropriate to the time and place under scrutiny in this essay. As Chu observes, “Spanish historical experiences with non-Christians such as the Jews and the Muslims may have influenced Spanish policy toward the Chinese” in the early colonial epoch discussed above, when Spanish endeavours to either Christianize the Chinese or ban them from the Philippines replicated Spain’s campaign a century earlier to convert the Jewish population of Iberia on pain of expulsion (2010, 56). By the nineteenth century these aggressive policies were no more, but conflation between the Spanish maltreatment of the Jews in Iberia and the Chinese in Manila survived in residual hegemonic attitudes towards the Chinese as a “national minority” (81) and as “economic scapegoats” for an array of capitalist crises in the colony (83). It is likely that Wilkes and MacMicking, as learned men

who diligently researched the destinations they wrote about, would have been aware of such Spanish anti-Sinicism, if not its exact affiliations with Spanish anti-Semitism.

A good proportion of the British novels mentioned above, along with much visual media of the same period, feature the stereotypical physiognomy of the Jew, the most infamous aspect of which is an exaggeratedly large nose. As the cultural historian Sara Lipton (2014b) argues, this characteristic probably originated in mid-medieval art as a derogatory emblem of the Jews' "misdirected gaze" away from Christ, implying an heretical "materialism" inimical to Christian spiritualism. Later, the proboscis trope came to symbolize a form of "materialism" that is much closer to our modern understanding of the word: when money lending had become a leading enterprise in Europe, Jewish "'worldliness' and 'fleshiness' was underscored by luxurious clothing and exaggerated facial features, especially large, hooked noses" (2014b). Although redrawn slightly by subsequent calumnies such as the "international Jewish banking conspiracy" peddled by fascists (and some leftists) in the 1930s and 1940s, the stereotype has survived more or less intact to the present day. (The modelling of the Jews as a global clique somewhat immune to local peculiarities is an additional congruity with the supranational stereotype of the Chinese in or around Manila.)

Similarly, in the second half of the nineteenth century when Social Darwinism was *à la mode* and the US was enacting a series of eugenic laws that effectively banned Chinese immigration, Orientalist texts present certain biological attributes as the outward expression of their Chinese characters' mean, parsimonious and/or enterprising dispositions. As with the most prominent western supporters of eugenics in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (including economist John Maynard Keynes, writer H. G. Wells and Fabian intellectual Sidney Webb), these Orientalists were politically liberal or leftist, at least by the standards of their time. During his governorship of British-ruled Hong Kong in the mid-to-late 1850s, John Bowring was known as a progressive reformist who increased native representation in the colony's legislative council and lifted the ban on Hongkongers from serving as jurors and lawyers (Kyshe and William 1898, 42). But making such concessions to the Chinese did not dampen Bowring's attitude of racial essentialism, as is apparent from the claims he makes in his 1859 travelogue *A Visit to the Philippine Islands*. "The Chinese physiognomy, and the Chinese character", he writes, "had left their unmistakable traces in the whole population" of a district of Panay Island, south of Manila (99). He goes on to append a description of "The slanting position of the [Chinese mens'] eyes, forming an angle over the nose, the beardless chin, the long and delicate fingers" with the assertion, "the Indians [Malay-Filipinos] ... believe them [the Chinese] to be masters of the art of money-getting" (116). Implicit in Bowring's almost abutting juxtapositions of Chinese facial lineaments and personality traits is the close

association between the two phenomena. But to understand the full implications of those menacing “slanting eyes” and “delicate fingers” for the unpleasant demeanour of the Chinese, we must read on fifty or so pages:

the Chinaman makes his profit, buying the labour of the indebted and extorting its maximum with coarse and often cruel tyranny. The Chinese have a proverb that the Indian must be led with rice in the left hand of his master and a bamboo in the right. (163)

Gait and posture could also be signifiers of a penny-pinching worldview, as in the case of the American whaler, gold digger and seafarer William Henry Thomes’ novel *Life in the East Indies* (1875), which depicts an “awkward China man ... appearing courteous to all, while in his heart he despises the throng for its waste of money in riding in carriages as long as feet are able to support the body” (10). The Victorian Orientalist preoccupation with the semiotics of the Chinese body may have originated from the case of Afong Moy who, in 1834, was the first recorded Chinese woman to immigrate to the US. The Carne Brothers impresarios took her to New York City and placed her on public display in a “Chinese Saloon” simulacrum replete with red lanterns, satin curtains and Chinese *objets d’art* (Lee 2016, 32). In Lee’s view,

Afong Moy’s exhibit sent out a clear message: China and the Chinese were exotic, different, and as Moy’s bound feet further illustrated, degraded and inferior. By relegating her to an exotic curiosity, the Carne Brothers and all who came to gawk at her reaffirmed the West’s superiority as well as the great differences between the United States and China. (33)

Orientalist constructions of Chinese Manileños took a very different tack during the political upheavals of the 1890s. The new, rising bourgeoisie of Chinese *méstizos* (people of mixed Chinese and Spanish or Malay heritage) would have provoked an ambiguous reaction among outsiders with a political and commercial stake in Manila. While western firms were dependent on the goodwill of the Chinese *méstizos* because they were prominent in the domestic cash crop trade, the centrality of the group to the burgeoning independence movement – not to say its vital intellectual role in defining Filipino national identity – would have given western imperialists cause to label them as subversive (Tan 1987, 141–42). Archibald Clavering Gunter’s popular adventure novel *Jack Curzon* (1898), about a British shipping clerk who is drawn into political intrigue when he travels to the Philippines in pursuit of a beautiful Spanish-American *méstiza* named Mazie Gordon, illuminates the dialectical positioning of the Chinese in the racial-social-political configuration of Manila at that time. Early in the story, we are introduced to

Ah Khy, a “Chinese dandy” who has supposedly benefited from contact with western civilization, having studied at Yale University, learned upper-crust American slang and assumed a dapper, metropolitan style of dress. On the boat trip from Hong Kong to Manila, Ah Khy impresses the eponymous hero of the novel as a member of a pan-Asian dominant caste whose father owns a multinational shipping company. While Ah Khy’s wealth and high breeding allows Curzon to accept him as a gentleman and near-equal, the Briton has misgivings about the hybridity of the “Chinaman’s” Oriental physiognomy and the authenticity of his “Fifth Avenue swell” (40). Moreover, when Ah Khy invites Curzon to conspire with him against the shady German arms dealer Adolph Ludenbaum, Curzon inwardly reflects, “Ah Khy is by no means a safe partner in anything that may bring us under the suspicion of the Spanish Government”. Curzon then urges Ah Khy to avoid entanglement in “the insurgent business”, for the Spanish are now shooting Chinese dissenters on the street, at which point Ah Khy turns pale (124). Despite his commendable western airs, Ah Khy is a coward and cannot be trusted now Chinese like him are enemies of the state. Indeed, a contemporary reviewer of *Jack Curzon* for the *Glasgow Herald* newspaper hints at these alarmingly contradictory aims and motives when he refers to the “rather funny conception” of Ah Khy as a “Europeanised Chinaman” (“Jack Curzon” 1899). The word “funny” in this context has a “relational value”, to use the terminology of the critical linguist Norman Fairclough (2013, 97), closer to words such as “strange”, “eerie” or “disturbing” rather than “droll” or “amusing”.

The Philippine-American War did nothing to alter the fetish of the Chinese as “[artful] salesmen”, as the American author H. Irving Hancock put it in his 1912 adventure yarn *Uncle Sam’s Boys in the Philippines*. But, in this same story, Hancock, who had reported from the Philippines during the Spanish-American War of 1898 and afterwards made a remunerative career out of writing pro-imperialist “dime” novels (“H. Irving Hancock” 1922), uses one such salesman to make an ideological point about the fundamental righteousness of American expansionism in the Philippines and how this is to be negotiated with subject populations. In an early scene from the book, a conspicuously soigné Malay-Filipino man follows Sergeant Hal Overton of the Thirty-fourth United States Infantry into a Chinese-owned shop on the opulent Calle de Escolta street. When the “smiling yellow heathen” of a proprietor tries to cheat Hal over the price of a teak and sandalwood chest, the Malay-Filipino intervenes and offers to pay for it himself. “I have been permitted to do a courtesy to an Americano”, he glows. “I am not a poor man”, he continues, “not since the Americanos came to these islands and gave us the blessings of liberty and just government” (Hancock 1912, 19). When the Malay-Filipino informs Hal that he is a “silent partner” (20) of the Chinese shopkeeper, Hal nobly refuses the gift and the dispute is

settled. This encounter could be read as a colonial allegory: any threats that Chinese prosperity may pose to US authority in Manila can be delicately mollified by the comprador class of Malay-Filipinos – “little brown brothers”, as the discourse of “benevolent assimilation” (Miller 1984, 134), the new American liberal brand of imperialism, had it – and the Chinese will accept their proper place within the new power hierarchy of Manila. However, this process of interpellation may not be as straightforward as all that because, soon enough, the Malay-Filipino, whose name we learn is Vicente Tomba, becomes a “little brown monster” (70) when he and his insurgent comrades abduct Hal as part of a “plot against the American Government” (74). When Hal’s unit is dispatched out of peaceful, Americanized Manila to crush the last of the Moro Muslim rebels in Mindanao in the southern Philippines, Tomba reappears in this theatre of war as “right-hand man to the datto [enemy chieftain]” (218) – a metaphorical reminder that, even by 1912, a decade after the official end of the Philippine-American War, US control over the territory and its social/ethnic groups had not yet been cemented and the Chinese population were not to be trusted for at least two reasons. According to Chu, the Chinese-Filipinos took a pragmatic, “wait-and-see attitude” to the Spanish-American and Philippine-American Wars that presaged the US occupation and were willing to cooperate for the sake of self-survival with both the “local rebels and the imperial powers” (2010, 86) (in Hancock’s narrative, the shopkeeper’s sneaky compact with Tomba makes sense in these terms). Neither these acts nor their attempts to petition mainland China for protection during the hostilities (87) would have inspired American confidence in Chinese loyalty to the new colonial set-up.

After the conflict, Orientalist writers came to see the Chinese in increasingly genderized and sexualized terms. Again, this perception was as likely shaped by public affairs in the West as in the East. In the latter 1800s, labour legislation in the US compelled Chinese men to take up work that was traditionally the preserve of American women, such as washing, cleaning and cooking. By the 1910s, Hollywood films were stocked with effeminate Chinese caricatures engaged in such activities (Kwong and Dušanka 2007, 128). Although the Chinese in Manila were not in reality subject to the same divisions of labour, it is telling that the Orientalist gaze at this time rests upon a “waiter, pigtail flying” (Boyce 1914, 43), a dry goods (foodstuffs and sewing equipment) trader (Robb 1926, 191) and other images of Chinese employed in servile and arguably feminine lines of work. If the Chinese were belittled for being domesticated like western women, they were also accused of being a threat to western women. Perhaps mindful of the mass-popular *Fu Manchu* novels by Sax Rohmer, whose eponymous antagonist abducted and mesmerized respectable Caucasian ladies and of the American eugenics lobby’s moral panic over the Chinese influx weakening the white race through miscegenation (Kwong and Dušanka 2007, 117–22), the American Associated Press foreign

correspondent Walter Robb (“Books and Authors” 1927), in his travel chronicle *The Khaki Cabinet and Old Manila* (1926), reports on a Manileño Chinese dry goods trader who victimizes white females specifically: “every American woman who comes to Manila gets cheated in her first encounter with the wily heathen” (238). In an unusually caustic – even for that time – feature article in the *Atlanta Constitution* newspaper, journalist Muriel Bailey is more explicit about the sexual menace of Chinese-Filipinos. That these men have a monopoly over Manila’s “places of vice” and “their own women are not allowed in the country” suggests that they are prone to promiscuity and miscegenation. Indeed, the warning sign for Bailey is that many Chinese have already married into and dominated the “lower class of native women [who] prefer them as lords and masters to their own countrymen”. If Bailey is disturbed that “traces of Chinese blood are very noticeable in the general population”, we can only imagine how she might feel about Chinese pollution of the white, Anglo-Saxon race that is now settling in the archipelago. Intriguingly, Bailey also openly admits the supranational frame of her dislike of the Chinese “plague” that “can live anywhere” and whose faults – moral, sexual or otherwise – are congenital to a Chinese man wherever he may be on the planet because “He is rarely troubled by conscientious scruples either in these islands or in his own country”.

Nor are Robb and Bailey’s adumbrations *sui generis* to Chinese-Filipinos in other important ways, as students of racist depictions of African-American or Afro-Caribbean men will be aware. Frantz Fanon’s seminal problematizing of interracial relationships in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) can, in a broad sense, shed more light on this iteration of anti-Sinicism. According to Fanon – by way of a quotation from the French novelist René Maran – when a black man realizes his “desire for that white flesh that has been forbidden to us Negroes as long as white men have ruled the world” (89), it is a subversive political act that blurs a racial binary dependent on assumptions about the superiority of whites and the inferiority of blacks. When a black man marries a white woman, avers Fanon, he “[marries] white culture” and his “restless hands [grasp] white civilization and dignity and make them [his]” (84). Moreover, he is able to “prove to the others [white people] that he is a man, their equal” (87). Whether in Fanon’s postwar Francophone world or in Bailey’s American colonial Manila, white supremacist (and indeed patriarchal) regimes cannot tolerate such transgressions, for they may persuade subaltern subjects that they ought to be treated with a measure of humanity, respect and, as Fanon puts it, the feeling that “I am worthy of white love” (84).

It is worth noting that, like the liberal eugenicists above, Robb’s racist demonization of the Chinese predator coexists with a relatively progressive – though not anticolonial – critique later in his book of the American political class’s dubious rhetoric about the Philippines being “a United States

possession, colony or what not” when in fact “these islands are territory of the United States” (1926, 118). William D. Boyce was another American liberal – again, by the criteria of his day – commentator on Philippine matters, who opposed media monopolization (“Weekly Papers” 1906) and supported labour unions while proprietor of a newspaper publishing company (“Boyce Takes Stand” 1902). Boyce’s liberalism is less blatantly derogatory to Chinese-Filipinos than Robb’s, although it remains beholden to the same imperialist, racial-reductionist ideology. Interbreeding between Chinese and Malay-Filipinos, Boyce writes, is not only acceptable but welcome, for it yields “the best native type, more intelligent than the Malay, stronger physically than the Chinese” (17). Whereas, for Gunter and other Orientalists of the 1890s, such hybridity was a cause for concern because many of the *illustrado* revolutionaries were Chinese *mestizos*, by 1914 these same men are now “foremost Filipinos” (112), to use Boyce’s terminology, and include Emilio Aguinaldo, once leader of the anticolonial revolution against first the Spanish and then the Americans, but now a sworn ally of the latter.

After the Philippines attained limited independence from the US in 1946, western Sinophobia came to echo the anxieties of Filipino nationalist discourses. Caroline S. Hau holds that these discourses situated the Chinese as “objects of distrust and censure” because they “[hitched] their desire to acquire citizenship to their desire to protect or enhance their business interests” (2000, 138). The anxiety about Chinese wealth accumulation was borne from a double standard: the “nationalization” laws of the 1950s and 1960s restricted Chinese participation in retail and other industries while “[extending] equal treatment to American investors in all areas of the economy” (136). The discrepancy is replicated in texts such as the American author Raymond Nelson’s narrative-discursive work of non-fiction *The Philippines* (1968) which, largely myopic about the enormous scale of US economic involvement in the Philippines, casts vague aspersions about the prosperity, insularity and cronyism of the “the Chinese minority ... [that] remains loyal to its cultural heritage” (116). Also noteworthy about Nelson is that his depiction of the Chinese as a disquietingly discrete community marks a departure from the often individualized, sometimes biologized *ad hominem*s of previous Orientalists. Put in another way, Nelson is a product of western hegemonic discourse’s turn away from race-based value judgements to those of a “culturalist” tenor, as Tzvetan Todorov regards it (1975, 137). “What will remain unchanged” between racism and culturalism, Todorov contends, “is the rigidity of determinism (cultural rather than physical now) and the discontinuity of humanity, compartmentalized into cultures that cannot and must not communicate with one another effectively”. Furthermore, “‘Culturalism’ ... replaces physical race with linguistic, historical or psychological race” (138). While Timothy Mo’s culturalism is not

exactly clear in his 2000 novel *Renegade or Halo*<sup>2</sup> (a minor character, Danton, has a “positively Chinese talent” for the property acquisition board game *Monopoly*) (134), it is rather clearer in an interview Mo gave to the British *Independent* newspaper:

It seems to me absolutely demonstrable that cultures are different ... And if they're different, they will by definition be unequal ... A society where you're taken off in the middle of the night for torture, or your kids fail an exam at school because you don't pay a bribe to the teacher: they are inferior societies. (quoted in Tonkin 1999)

While Mo is himself a member of the British Chinese diaspora and has won critical accolades for addressing the intricacies of cultural identity, in the final analysis he is a *démodé* essentialist: in *Renegade or Halo*<sup>2</sup> he writes of “The immutability of our natures” (2000, 20) and elsewhere in that *Independent* interview claims, “Stereotype has got a negative connotation, in ordinary life and for a novelist. But I've never found it a bad word ... Stereotypes are more likely to be correct than anything else” (Tonkin 1999). As we can see, while Sinophobia hinging on “economic function” (Hau 2000, 157) was articulated more subtly than before in Orientalist texts, relevant paratexts (such as Mo's interview) reveal the same old crudely homogenizing attitudes towards race and ethnicity.

Another material development that may have patterned these attitudes was the Manila kidnapping “crisis” (Turner 1995, 1) of the 1990s, during which at least \$11 million was paid in ransoms (Mydans 1996). As the commerce scholar Mark Turner explains, the families of Chinese-Filipinos, as well as mainland Chinese and Taiwanese, were disproportionately targeted because they were “widely perceived to be successful in business” (1995, 2). Turner further asserts that these crimes produced public and official concerns about the security of the Philippine economy, given the risks of “loss of investment opportunities and the withdrawal of funds” to “safer locations” (2). This is a central theme of Seth Mydans' 1996 *New York Times* feature, which quotes with approval then-President Ramos' warning that “the current wave of kidnappings has begun to have a dampening effect on the overseas Chinese investment that has been an important part of the country's recent growth”. There is arguably a very subtle form of victim-blaming at play here, since the implication is that foreign-based Chinese withdrawal from business activities in Manila – an understandably self-preservational response to the threat of kidnapping – is making them a liability to continued Philippine prosperity. This perception takes on a supranational dimension when we consider that, coterminous with fears of non-Filipino Chinese capital flight, was a relaxation of nationalization legislation that prompted “the rise of largescale retailing ... concentrated in the hands of a small group of upper-stratum ‘Chinese Filipino’ individuals” (Hau 2000, 167).

Additionally, commentators such as Mydans might have been party to a popular sentiment in the US at the time that American “national identity” was being eroded by Chinese “direct foreign investment” in New York City (Kwong and Dušanka 2007, 324).

The latest incarnation of Sinophobia in the Philippine context can be mapped on to a momentous change in China itself rather than any in the US, UK or the Philippines. Deng Xiaoping’s market reforms beginning in 1979 triggered a period of extraordinary growth and production which was to culminate in China becoming the second largest economy in the world in 2011, a position that it has retained ever since. Over this period, western media significations of China went through several stages, argues Zengjun Peng, beginning with optimism about China’s embrace of capitalist policies. But after the Tiananmen Square massacre of 1989, the media focused on China’s authoritarian politics and internal repression. In the 1990s and early 2000s, the picture became more nuanced, with China “regarded both as a strategic partner and a potential rival”, given the strengthening economic bonds between the US and China (2004, 60). By the 2010s, the *New York Times*, the leading establishmentarian US newspaper, was deprecating “vulgar displays of newfound [Chinese] wealth” (Ban, Sastry, and Dutta 2013, 286) and other hegemonic media were expressing a “concern” about “China’s economic achievements” (Jonquières 2012, 9). The Scotland-born, Australia-based nurse and memoirist Duncan Alexander McKenzie’s book *The Unlucky Country* (2012) emerged from this ideological vortex, even if its hetero-stereotypes are so retrograde they could have been lifted from the pages of an Orientalist text published a hundred years before. McKenzie animalizes Filipinos (“innocently sensual creatures”) (438), condemns their culture as so much “nonsensical superficiality” that “offers no future for the Philippine nation” (3997) and accuses them of preferring “sociability as opposed to a strong work ethic” (1319). McKenzie’s construction of Filipinos as animal-like, unsophisticated and lackadaisical is perhaps a corollary to his warning that, in this new millennial world of western decline and eastern growth, the Philippines is lagging behind its neighbours economically, and this could have gloomy consequences for western regional hegemony, and the Philippines’ supporting role in it: “Look to the Chinese and the Taiwanese and the populace of Hong Kong. They have a lifelong drive to academic achievement and economic success, and that is why they will rule the region, and perhaps the world” (3999–4001). There is a note of lament for the old days of western regnancy in McKenzie’s bogus distinction between the Philippines’ current “problematic” dealings with China and its historically “straightforward and uncomplicated” relationship with the US (4002–4003). Moreover, McKenzie cautions melodramatically, “China is a tiger, and it is hungrily pacing back and forth eyeing its prey. It is unashamedly hegemonistic. Nothing will shake its resolve”

(3990). In his restricted view, such errant aggression bulks large with “the friendly big brother, the good old US of A” (4016), a description which, coming from an author with even a vague grasp of the history of American (neo)imperial intervention in the Philippines, would surely be ironic. Rather, what is blindingly evident here is that the myth of US magnanimity towards the Philippines continues to thrive in Orientalism, despite having been long discredited by more accurate analyses.

Since President Rodrigo Duterte’s courting of financial investment and political goodwill from Beijing which began in 2016, western liberal commentators have been more assertive than McKenzie in their animus towards China. Tom Smith, the *Guardian* pundit and academic at the Royal Air Force College in Cranwell, UK, laments that surging Chinese investment in the Philippines and an apparent climbdown by Duterte in a dispute with Beijing over territories in the South China Sea is tantamount to a “surrender of the US alliance ... [not] in the better interests of the Filipino people” (2016). But his case is far from watertight. While it is true that Beijing has pledged to invest \$24 billion in the Philippine infrastructure, this does not mean Duterte has turned his back on the US, however anti-American his rhetoric can be. The US is the Philippines’ chief trading partner with regard to “countries that imported the most Filipino shipments by dollar value during 2019” (China is third on this list) (Workman 2020) and the US is erecting new military facilities in the archipelago (Robson 2019). At any rate, Duterte is not the first Philippine leader to play a “cat-and-mouse game” (Sevastopolu and Peel 2017) of maintaining good relations with the US while improving relations with China. In 1975 Ferdinand Marcos signed a joint agreement with the communist government in Beijing which included the statement “there is but one China and that Taiwan is an integral part of Chinese territory” (“Joint Communiqué” 2017). In 1997 Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo allowed a Chinese naval ship to enter Manila (Cook 2017).

Even supposing western fears about realignment with Beijing are well founded, they are nonetheless driven by a hypocritical assumption that China is a unique threat to Asian peace. *Duterte Harry: Fire and Fury in the Philippines* (2018), the *Channel 4 News* (UK) correspondent Jonathan Miller’s blend of biography and reportage, is an intensively researched and multi-fronted critique of Duterte’s gruesome necropolitics and sociopathic personality. But Miller’s grasp of international relations is less convincing, given that he bemoans “Beijing’s remorseless militarization of the South China Sea” (294) while saying nothing about the bigger-scale and far more aggressive cordon of four hundred American bases in nations surrounding China, some with long-range missile capacities (Pilger 2018). Moreover, Miller does not acknowledge the fact that, unlike China, US armed forces are currently operating in seventeen Asian countries, including the Philippines, in the name of the so-called War on Terror (Engelhardt 2018). But

behind the fig leaf of this alleged campaign to uphold global peace, stability and democracy is a violent, destabilizing and undemocratic neo-imperialism in which the US “arrogates a right to global interference in almost everything”, argues M. G. E. Kelly (2015, 93). The damage done to the world by American power stands in contrast to China’s when we compare the two nations’ track records as imperialists in Asia since World War II. China invaded Tibet in 1950 and continues viciously to repress separatist movements there and in other regions such as Xinjiang Uyghur, while America has fought devastating wars of choice in the Korean and Indochinese peninsulars; Afghanistan, Kuwait and Iraq; and pursued lethal covert operations in China (on behalf of the anti-communist Guomindang nationalists in the late 1940s); the Philippines, Iran, Lebanon, Syria and Yemen. Apparently, it is not militarization of Southeast Asia *per se* that bothers Smith and Miller et al., just the Chinese militarization of Southeast Asia. There are geo-economic as well as geopolitical reasons to doubt that the new “Yellow Peril” have the strength, resources or inclination to rampage across the Philippines and Southeast Asia. “Far from being an imperialist power”, Kelly writes, “China remains, in effect, a victim of imperialism (particularly in the form of unequal exchange)”. On pitiful wages and in perilous conditions, Chinese workers make cheap goods for western consumption, and most of the profits generated in China from trade with the West end up being reinvested in the West (2015, 96).

This new continental military- and economics-based Sinophobia has redrawn the textual map of Manila. A May 2018 *Bloomberg News* article offers a snapshot of the daily realities of Duterte’s Faustian pact with China. “Restaurants serving Chinese hotpots and dumplings” and “Mandarin broadcasts at the Mall of Asia” are catering for 100,000 recent Chinese immigrants, whose arrival in Manila has profited several local corporations (“Chinese Money” 2018). However, in keeping with the hoary cliché about Chinese avarice, this human “deluge” has also contributed to soaring house prices, which is a source of worry for one Filipino resident, at least. “I hope they become an asset to the community”, he says, “and not just out to make money”. The article’s framing of the Chinese as at once useful to and alien to Philippine society is consonant with Caroline S. Hau’s claim that Philippine nationalism has construed the Chinese-Filipinos as “a foreign presence, but they are a familiar foreign presence” (2000, 134). “Nationalist thinking about money”, she continues, “was articulated with the idea of the ‘foreigner’” (166), despite a grudging acceptance of the Chinese-Filipinos’ “contribution to national development” (175). In a further signifier of problematic cupidity, the *Bloomberg* piece states that dozens of Chinese gambling companies are setting up shop in the city, producing a boom that “[won’t] last forever”. It is instructive to compare this foreboding coverage of Chinese investment with the celebratory tone of an earlier

BBC report on how “innovative technology” is driving Manila’s “amazing” (so the Filipino head of the Contact Centre of the Philippines puts it) call centres and BPOs (Business Process Outsourcing concerns) that are contracted to British and American corporations (McGeown 2012). Rather than, as per the *Bloomberg* story, highlighting the risks of this burgeoning sector, call centres are presented as an unalloyed “success” that are fully sustainable thanks to government “tax breaks, fast-tracked permits and other perks”. Whereas *Bloomberg News* paints the expatriate Chinese workers and businesspeople as a “deluge” that is culturally reshaping Manila and stoking anxiety amongst its indigenes, no such concerns are raised by several recent media accounts of western retail chains opening branches in Manila, for example (Sayson 2019; Goldberg 2019; Hotel Resource 2019). This “one rule for the West, another rule for China” discrepancy is conspicuous in Jonathan Miller’s work, too. Swift to admonish Duterte’s spending programme for leaving the Philippines in “Debt bondage to China” (2018, 296), Miller has nothing to say about how, in the 1980s and 1990s, western-led international financial organizations beggared the Philippine economy with crippling loans and destructive free market “reforms” (Bello 2018, ix). Ironically, a legacy of these policies was the popular discontent that swept Duterte – whom Miller accuses of bringing unprecedented “chaos and disequilibrium to the Philippines” (2018, 288) – to power in 2016.

In the age of Duterte’s campaign of extra-judicial killings (EJKs) of drug dealers and abusers, Triad gangsters and other Chinese involved in the narcotics trade are a malevolent presence in contemporary Orientalist narratives. Unsurprisingly, this presence is not immune to the now age-old suspicions of greed, criminality, otherness and foreignness. According to “Duterte’s War”, a 2016 item of investigative journalism by John Chalmers, an illicit Chinese facility north of Manila is capable of producing a stunning \$24 million worth of methamphetamine per day. The “Chinese-looking men”, as locals identify them, running the operation are a synecdoche for the disproportionately high representation of Chinese nationals in the Philippine drugs scene. The trope of yet another malignant Chinese infiltration of Philippine society is reinforced by Chalmers’ claim that the “cooks” and “chemists” needed for such labs are flown in from mainland China and are liable for a national “problem” that is “made in China”. In Miller’s book there is also a going native-style theme of Filipinos being morally compromised after they have been bodily besmirched by unscrupulous Chinese. In an echo of the Filipino villains forcing “the indelible mark of the Katipunan” (54) secret society on Jack Curzon’s body in Archibald Clavering Gunter’s 1899 novel discussed above, Miller recounts the infamous anecdote of Duterte’s son Paolo who refused to remove his clothes and show a Senate inquiry a Triad tattoo he was alleged to possess (2018, 96). At first glance,

whereas previous models of the Chinese rested on shaky empirical foundations – Rupert Hodder has identified long-standing epistemological obstacles to ascertaining the “degrees of Chineseness” within a historically hybridic Chinese-Filipino population and therefore the true ethnic composition of Philippine business ownership (2007, 90–91) – the contemporary Orientalist focus on Chinese traffickers would appear to be more firmly grounded in objective truth. After all, China is “the biggest source of the meth and of the precursor chemicals used to produce the synthetic drug that are being smuggled into the Philippines”, reports Chalmers. Moreover, between January 2015 and August 2016, “Of 77 foreign nationals arrested for meth-related drug offenses ... 49 were Chinese ... , Taiwanese or Hong Kong residents”. However, while these facts are hard to dispute, the ideological slant of the writers who deploy them is betrayed by the omission of other relevant facts that cast doubt on the notion of Chinese omnipotence in the narcotics realm. In just one month (July–August) 2016, reports the Philippine news website *Rappler*, “12,923 individuals [were] arrested and 626,556 voluntarily surrendered” (Gavilan 2016), which somewhat dwarves the figure of 49 arrests of Chinese over the much longer nineteen-month period Chalmers cites. As the social psychologists Bordalo, Coffman, Gennaioli and Shleifer have discovered, “stereotypes are often inaccurate. The vast majority of Florida residents are not elderly, the vast majority of the Irish are not red-headed, and flying is really pretty safe”. But this does not stop “Social groups that have been historically mistreated” falling prey to “bad stereotyping, perhaps because the groups in power want to perpetuate false beliefs about them” (2016, 1754). According to this theory, Orientalist “false beliefs” about Chinese crime have more to do with anti-Chinese sentiment – both historic and modern-day – than with real contemporary statistics. And the singling out of one group for ills that other groups also bear responsibility for is as ethically odious as it is intellectually sloppy. It is therefore worth noting Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency spokesman Derrick Carreon’s assertion that it is not just Chinese crime syndicates that are responsible for methamphetamine supply to the Philippines; gangs from Mexico and several African nations are complicit too (Kyodo 2018).

For the sake of clarity, it is important to assert that criticisms made above of western media and literary distortions of current Chinese-Philippines relations do not and should not produce a contraposition that in any way exonerates Chinese state-corporate exploitation of the Philippines. While there are elements of truth to western commentators’ allegations that Duterte has “sold out” his country to Chinese interests, the rhetorical validity of such allegations is somewhat undermined by their selective excision of other factors that point to western myopia towards, or even complicity in, the current problems. We should not be unduly surprised about such

selectivity given that it is a *sine qua non* of regressive cultural stereotypes of all varieties. As the social psychologists Kooman and Djiker have found,

It is generally accepted that in processing information people are guided by relevant cognitive representations or schemas [supporting perceptions of ‘outgroup’ stereotypes]. There is also agreement that information relevant to an activated schema is preferentially encoded, whereas irrelevant information is more or less neglected. (Koomen 1997, 598)

To be sure, the making of the supranational Chinese stereotype over the last four centuries has involved a good deal of such “selective processing”, to borrow further from Kooman and Djiker’s lexicon, about the Chinese in Manila, China, the United States and Europe. The supranationality of this symbolic order means that it necessarily resonates with a broader debate about representation that has major material ramifications. The utterances of western hegemonic media are often in line with the versions of anti-Sinicism we have explored in this essay: Chinese enterprise must be simultaneously envied, feared and grudgingly admired (Roh, Huang, and Nui 2015, 12). However, such attitudes are underpinned by a potentially existential threat to the world: the trade war between the US and China, which many commentators fear could escalate into a shooting war, given mounting tensions in the South China Sea (Klare 2018).

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