



香港中文大學東亞研究中心

THE CHINESE UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG  
CENTRE FOR EAST ASIAN STUDIES

# Seminar

## ***Houses of Chinese Mestizos – Social History of Urban Elites in the Philippines***

BY

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**Date: 19 March 2008 (Wednesday)**

**Time: 4:30pm — 6:00pm**

**Venue: Multi-purpose Room, G/F,  
New Asia College Ch'ien Mu Library, CUHK**

### ABSTRACT

This lecture briefly introduces the history of Chinese and Chinese mestizo in the colonial Philippines, and their urban abodes.

Arrival of the Spaniards to the Philippines in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century accentuated the influx of Chinese migrants to the archipelago. For the Spanish colonial society, the Chinese played an important role in developing the trade and local economy, as merchants and artisans. At the same time, their ability threatened the government, and it led to the series of Chinese expulsion acts – for the growth of the city, they needed Chinese, but not too much. It indicates the fragile yet important existence of Chinese in the making of Philippine urban space.

Later, following the law changes, the new racial group called “Chinese *mestizo*” emerged – they were the off-spring of Chinese fathers and native (Malay) mothers, converted to Catholicism and thus had better legal mobility than pure Chinese. From the late Spanish period, and especially through the economically thriving American colonial period in early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, Chinese mestizo became the synonym of new urban elites.

One of the forms the Filipino elites expressed their social achievement was the domestic architecture. In the regional cities and poblacionés (towns built around the church), handsome wooden mansions were designed by the owner themselves, and they reflect the dramatic social changes at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The construction of the elaborate mansions was the end product of their education, career, and colonial experience. Despite the classic arguments over colonial governmental architecture, these private houses illustrate the mestizo residents' positive interpretation of the suzerain and foreign culture.

**All are welcome.**