

## Culture



**Peter S. Li, *Ethnic Inequality in a Class Society*. Toronto: Wall & Thompson, 1988. 165 pages, \$16.50 (paper)**

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philosophiques. C'est une mise en scène qui permet à la société de se penser elle-même en posant des alternatives, que l'on joue dans un premier temps pour mieux les rejeter par la suite. On retrouve ici l'interprétation structuraliste chère à l'auteur, mais aussi aux Rukuba...

Une autre piste théorique intéressante, mais qui n'a pas donné lieu ici à une analyse approfondie, est celle qui concerne l'importance du visuel (mais aussi du toucher..) par rapport au dire dans ces initiations<sup>3</sup>. Dans quelle mesure l'impact en est-il différent, et qu'est-ce que ceci révèle de la société rukuba? On reste un peu sur sa faim de ce côté...

Il est deux débats pour lesquels les données rukuba n'apporteront aucune réponse ce dont l'auteur avertit honnêtement ses lecteurs: Pourquoi certaines sociétés ont-elles des initiations et d'autres pas? et pourquoi, dans le cas rukuba, alors que les femmes sont aussi concernées que les hommes par la chefferie, ne font-elles pas partie des rituels<sup>4</sup>?

Ce livre intéressera, outre les anthropologues, les spécialistes de l'éducation. Maintenant que les initiations deviennent interdites un peu partout en Afrique, on a peu de chances d'obtenir dans le futur d'aussi bonnes descriptions exhaustives de ces rituels.

#### NOTES

1. *Parenté et mariage chez les Rukuba (Etat Benue-Plateau, Nigéria)*, Paris-La Haye, Mouton, 1976.

2. *Le roi bouc émissaire. Pouvoir et rituel chez les Rukuba du Nigéria Central*. Paris, L'Harmattan, 1980.

3. A propos du visuel, soulignons que la couverture du livre porte à équivoque. Le titre, *La calebasse sacrée; Initiations rukuba*, ne nous dit pas s'il s'agit d'initiations masculines ou féminines, et la photo de couverture est une photo de femmes...

4. Dans le deuxième cas on peut suggérer que la réponse ne se trouve de toute façon pas dans les seuls rituels d'initiation...

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Peter S. Li, *Ethnic Inequality in a Class Society*. Toronto: Wall & Thompson, 1988. 165 pages, \$16.50 (paper).

By Yuen-fong Woon  
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Peter Li's *Ethnic Inequality in a Class Society* is clearly written and consistent. However, it suffers from two major flaws: limited sources and the one-track mind of the author.

First the sources. The author relies solely on the 1981 Census material for his comparison of the educational and occupational performance of 17 "ethnic groups" in Canada. These so-called "ethnic groups" are in fact categories of people lumped together under convenient labels, sometimes defined by nationality, sometimes by the geographical location of their country of origin, sometimes by their religious-cultural characteristics, and sometimes by their physical characteristics. In addition, the Census data contains no indication as to the period of entrance or the entrance status of each group or subgroup. This is a serious omission, as these variables very often affect the subsequent performance of members of the group and, to a lesser extent, that of their descendants in Canada.

These problems with sources are compounded by the one track mind of the author. For example, by carrying his world

system and neo-Marxian approach to the extreme, the author misleads his readers. He suggests that cultural differences among ethnic groups in Canada are non-existent because the penetration of Western capitalism in the Third World countries has homogenized the cultures of the immigrants even before their entry into Canada. Li also emphatically rejects any cultural explanation of the differential education and occupational performance of the ethnic groups in Canada. By denying the possibility of unique cultural responses among different ethnic groups to similar structural constraints in Canada, he leaves unanswered such important questions as: Why do the Jews, and not charter groups such as the British and the French, turn out to be the most successful group in Li's analysis of the Canadian Census material? Why are the Chinese still maintaining a consistently high level of education despite the fact that their parents (according to Li) have not been reaping the appropriate socioeconomic rewards in Canada? Why do the Portuguese have a below average level of educational performance despite the lack of job discrimination against them? Despite the use of a wider range of source materials and a clear writing style, Peter Li's case study, *The Chinese in Canada*, published in the same year, is also plagued by numerous omissions and problems. I shall concentrate on three major points here. Firstly, by completely ignoring cultural explanations, Li provides no adequate alternative hypothesis as to why the early Chinese immigrants, as compared to the early Japanese, tended predominantly to be single male or married bachelors instead of family migrants. Neither can he adequately explain why the contemporary Chinese, 40 years

after the lifting of the Chinese Exclusion Act, still maintain a distinctive family type, association life, friendship network, and residential pattern in Canadian cities.

Secondly, given the significance of the period of entrance and the entrance status in the performance of various immigrant groups in Canada, (a point repeatedly stressed by Li himself), one is disappointed that Li has made no attempt to deal with his supposedly detailed case study in those terms. Certainly the family type, educational aspirations, and occupational performance of the Chinese who migrated from mainland China to Canada as contract labourers before 1923 must be different from those who came from mainland China in the post-1947 period for family re-unification. These in turn would surely be different from those who came from Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Southeast Asia as independent immigrants in the post-1967 period, or those who were accepted into Canada as Indo-Chinese refugees in the late 1970's. All Chinese in Canada are not alike, even though they are subsumed under the same ethnic category in Canadian official statistics.

One final point. It is erroneous to argue, as Li does that the structural imperative of capitalism is solely responsible for the extreme form of institutional racism and exclusion directed against the Chinese in the 1920's. Capitalists in Canada had, in fact, a lot to lose and very little to gain by these extreme measures. When a large versatile pool of Chinese reserve labour, both within Canada and from China, was excluded from the Canadian labour market in the 1920's, employers had little choice but to hire white labour at a higher rate. To my mind, therefore, the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1923 in fact represented the triumph of irrational racist ideology, opportunistic politicians, and national white labour unions over the interests of white capitalists in Canada.

In conclusion, ethnic relations, like all inter-group relations, is a complex sociological phenomenon. It cannot be adequately studied by using one single perspective or theory. Any attempt to do so is bound to grossly simplify or distort reality, as Li has done in the two books under review.

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Patricia MARCHAK, Neil GUPPY and John MCMULLAN (eds), *Uncommon Property: The Fishing and Fish Processing Industries in British Columbia*, Toronto: Methuen, 1987. 402 pages, \$24.95 (paper).

By Yvan D. Breton  
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This book is the result of a research project undertaken by a group of anthropologists and sociologists at the University of British Columbia. It describes Canadian West Coast fisheries in the 1980s, focusing on the social and economic structure of the industry. Divided into three parts, it first examines the history of B.C. fishing, pinpointing the macro economic and political factors influencing its evolution; secondly, it deals with the labor process, looking at the various elements molding the organization of work; finally, it questions the viability of fishing communities in an increasingly negative and pressured context linked to environmental deterioration and economic competition.

I will not comment here the dozen or so individual contributions, many of them providing the reader with a thorough analysis of specific aspects of fishing in B.C. I will rather center my remarks on the overall impact and originality of this book within the Canadian socio-anthropological literature on maritime communities. In this regard, this book represents a significant contribution to the understanding of fishing industry in Canada and several of its qualities deserved to be mentioned:

1. It is the result of a team effort, an orientation that is strongly reflected in the organization of the book. Unlike many readers which consist of a collection of essays, the presentation of which is ordered according to highly general criteria, this book is organized by strong logical guidelines, thus facilitating a comprehensive view of the fishing industry. In addition, it starts with an introduction which discusses the main conceptual issues upon which individual contributions rely and includes a conclusion that seeks to identify the overall practical impacts of the situation previously described.
2. It provides the reader with an integrated approach for understanding the dynamics of fishing in B.C., constantly aiming at identifying structural elements and their counter-effects at the individual and local levels. For those of us wishing to better identify the impact of national