Co-opting Empire at the end of the 18th and early 19th centuries: A Critique of G. William Skinner’s and Edgar Wickberg’s approach to the Chinese 
*mestizo* community in Manila

Dr. Ruth De Llobet

**CHAIRMAN**

A/P Bruce Lockhart

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**Abstract**

This seminar looks at William Skinner’s and Edgar Wickberg’s work in the light of my own ongoing research on the Chinese *mestizo* community of Manila in the 18th and early 19th centuries. By ignoring the importance of class in a colonial Hispanic setting like Manila and the nature of the early Spanish colonial state, Wickberg and Skinner misunderstood Chinese *mestizos* as an “intermediate society” that “suffered” the interference of the colonial state in their attempts to merge with indigenous society. Therefore, both authors projected an ahistorical vision of Spanish colonialism and colonial institution and a Sino-centric vision of Chinese *mestizos*. Despite the official racial/ethnic segregation along with the control of the colonial state and the inequality of rights and obligations that this entailed, as a human collective Chinese *mestizos* shaped colonial society. Even the “hegemonic” Spanish culture needed to adapt and was transformed and re-interpreted by Chinese *mestizos*, who contributed to colonial society with elements of their own culture together with their economic power, thus creating a new reality that went beyond their ethno-genesis.

**About the Speaker**

Ruth de Llobet studied her B.A. on Roman archaeology at the University of Barcelona and her MA degree on Spanish colonial history at the University Pompeu Fabra, in Barcelona, Spain. She obtained her doctoral degree on Southeast Asian History at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, under the supervision of Alfred W. McCoy with a dissertation entitled, “Orphans of Empire: Bourbon Reforms, Constitutional Impasse and the Rise of Filipino Creole Consciousness in an Age of Revolution”. She was a postdoctoral fellow at KITLV, at Leiden, the Netherlands and she is currently a FASS postdoctoral fellow, here, at the National University of Singapore.

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