
Over the centuries, different waves of Chinese have come and left the Philippines. Some of those who chose to remain and their offspring born of marital unions with the locals (indios) were Christianized to become Chinese mestizo during the late Spanish colonial era. By the turn of the 20th century, this group of mix-blood Chinese, by virtue of their cultural assimilation and historical contributions, had become more the founders of the Philippine nation than fellowmen of the many thousands of Chinese residing in the ghetto-like enclave known as the Parian. The latter group of pure-blood Chinese were soon joined by many more countrymen from China who stayed in the islands as huaqiao, a politicized term denoting their sojourning mentality and China-oriented aspirations. But as circumstances changed over time, especially after the Pacific War and the Communist victory in China, most of the huaqiao became permanent residents, and in the late 1970s were naturalized to become Chinese-Filipinos. From some of these have come the Tsinoy, a new generation of local-born Chinese-Filipinos who, though proud of their Chinese descent, have found their homeland and future in the Philippines.

Through the efforts of Kaisa Para Sa Kaunlaran in publishing Tsinoy: The Story of the Chinese in Philippine Life, we have a book that covers the broad history of the Chinese in the Philippines. The main text of six chapters and a number of feature articles are illustrated by hundreds of photos, dioramas and maps. The main objective is to enhance the readers’ understanding of the Philippine Chinese in an effort to promote the integration of the Chinese Filipinos (especially the Tsinoy) into mainstream society. The editors try to attain this by emphasizing two themes. First, they argue that the various groups of Chinese mentioned above have made important contributions to the Philippines historically. Second, they depict the overall relations between the Chinese and the locals in a largely positive light. The English (and Chinese) titles of the six chapters clearly tell us their optimistic underlying message.

Chapter One, “Shared beginnings – prehistoric and pre-Hispanic times,” covers centuries of cultural contacts and trade between the Chinese and the locals, with special emphasis on their peaceful and friendly relations. Chapter Two, “Shared life – the Spanish occupation,” recounts the miserable sufferings of the tens of thousands of Philippine Chinese at the hands of the Spaniards after the latter’s colonization of the islands in the early 16th century. Despite their usefulness to the Spanish authorities as traders and craftsmen, the Chinese who stayed on were
restricted to the Parian, subjected to heavy taxation and suffered from periodic massacres. At the turn of the 20th century, the Chinese went on to help the Filipinos in fighting for independence from both the Spaniards and the Americans. To highlight the Chinese contributions, the editors not only invite feature articles written on the roles of mixed-blood Chinese *mestizo as ilustrados* (enlightened intellectuals) in the creation of a new Philippine nation, but also include stories of pure-blood Chinese as fighters (such as General Paua) and as financial and material donors during the wars of independence lasting for years.

While emphasizing the Chinese contributions and the bond between the Chinese and Filipinos in the latter’s fight for independence, the editors would surely have found it difficult to explain the unsettled relationship between the two communities during the American colonial period, which is the subject of Chapter Three, “Shared destiny: the American occupation.” There were Filipino riots against the Philippine Chinese, as well as discriminatory measures against Chinese business interests. The editors point to the American “divide and rule” policy as the cause for such conflicts. This explanation, while plausible, is simplistic, and overlooks the more important factor of the impact of nationalism on the overseas Chinese who regarded themselves as Chinese nationals residing temporarily in the Philippines. Their efforts made in institution building and community mobilization, also discussed in this chapter, only served to strengthen that sojourning mentality which did not endear them to the Filipinos.

In the assessment of the editors, the period of “Shared misery – the Japanese occupation” (Chapter Four), was too short to bring on a lasting effect in closing the divide between the Chinese and Filipino communities, even though they had joined hands to fight guerrilla battles against the Japanese invaders.

Chapter Five, “Shared responsibility – postwar economy and reconstruction,” thus begins with the difficulties confronting the Chinese in the 1950s through the early 1970s against the backdrop of the rising tide of Filipino nationalism. As the chapter unfolds, these alien Chinese turned the Filipino politicians’ threats of economic discrimination in the retail trade and other activities into opportunities by venturing into import-substitution industries and other business pursuits. They later seized the opportunity of mass naturalization as decreed by President Marcos in 1975 to become Philippine nationals. Over time, these Chinese-Filipinos and their offspring have been involved in nearly every aspect of Philippine life. Though the editors also take note of the proliferation of ethnic Chinese organizations of late, they caution the readers that these are but false representations giving deceptive impressions of Chinese community unity. A main argument is then advanced, that a younger generation of local-born Chinese Filipinos, or Tsinoy, has emerged.

Chapter Six, “A past linked, a future shared,” summarizes the shared technology, culture, history, economy and concerns of the Chinese and the Filipinos over