

A Glimpse into the Anatomy of the Tribulations and Successes of the Chinese-Filipino in Lanao del Norte, Philippines

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Abstract

This research provides a closer look at the lives and times of a Chinese-Filipino community in the province of Lanao del Norte, Philippines as they encountered various challenges in the “new community” since leaving their homes in China. As one of the overseas migrants who settled in the Philippines, they have been viewed differently by the colonial government and the society. However, their role and contributions in the province has been considerably of significance when it comes to the development of the commercial trading activities. Although considered a minority in their “new community”, the methods, attitudes and skills these Chinese-Filipino have in their entrepreneurial activity have propelled them to dominate the commercial activities in the province. By exploring on the lives of a Chinese-Filipino community in the province, this paper will give an insight to the following: 1) how the Chinese-Filipino were able to adjust and adapt to their “new community”, 2) what were the challenges they faced in a foreign society, and 3) how they were able to overcome and established their foothold in the community. For this research, personal interviews were conducted together with the data and documents gathered to provide a substantial narrative to the study. However, the scope of this paper focuses only on the Chinese-Filipino community in the province of Lanao del Norte and does not reflect the general conditions of the Chinese-Filipino communities in the Philippines.

Keywords: Chinese-Filipino community, tribulations, successes, Lanao del Norte

Introduction

When it comes to the economic development of the Philippines, the discussion would not be complete without mentioning the role of the Chinese in its context. Since the early years of Spanish colonization, the Chinese has played a significant role in the growth of commercial trading in the country. Goods from other regions of the world have been brought and introduced in the Philippines by means of commercial trading, even before the Europeans “discovered” the region. And since then, the Chinese have been influential in the transformation of the economic activities in most of the provinces in the Philippines, especially in large urbanized areas.

However, most of the Chinese began as peddlers, vendors, skilled laborers and small-time traders along the streets in various provinces of the country. The policies and laws by the government have been formulated to curtail the economic control of the Chinese, who later would become business tycoons and owners of large companies in various industries. In fact, from the list of Forbes 2015 Richest Filipinos, 16 out of the top 25 are Chinese or of Chinese descent. But despite the economic dominance, the Chinese were still a minority as they only constitute 1.3%¹ of the total population. Their rate of success in the world of entrepreneurship along with their refusal to assimilate to the local society, have been contributory to the development of anti-Chinese attitudes and behaviors.

During the Spanish colonial period, the Chinese have been labeled and depicted as disloyal, coward, selfish and cunning. First, the socio-cultural resistance displayed by the Chinese towards the attempt of the Spanish colonial government to convert them as their subjects or “little Spaniards” have been the basis for questioning the loyalty of the Chinese. Policies and laws were drafted and implemented to either force the Chinese to assimilate or to segregate them away from the “Filipino” society. Because of such policies, most of the Chinese succumbed to the colonial government for the fear of being the targets of expulsion and deportation from the country. Secondly, the entrepreneurial skills of the Chinese as to how they engage themselves in doing business have given them the image as cunning and selfish. The “way” they operate and run a business have been at times misunderstood especially by the locals. One of the reason for this concept was the emergence of a class distinction, wherein it portrays the natives as poor and rural, and the Chinese as rich and urban (Weightman, 1967, p. 277).

Such hostilities and attitudes against the overseas Chinese and the Chinese-Filipino were prevalent especially in larger urbanized areas in the Philippines like Manila, Iloilo, Cebu and Davao. The economic potentials in these areas were mainly the reason why the Chinese engage themselves in commercial trading, resulting to an increase in population. And since the area possess commercial opportunities, this also attracts other Chinese to established their commercial trading activities in these areas.

But despite such attitudes and hostilities against them, it did not prevent the Chinese (which later became Chinese-Filipino) from establishing footholds in their “new community”.

¹ From the 2005 census conducted in the Philippines, out of 87, 857, 470 from the total population, there are only 1,146,250 Chinese in the country.

The setting

The locale of this paper sets its scope within the province of Lanao del Norte, Philippines. Lanao del Norte is situated in Northern Mindanao, along the northwest and southwest coast of the island of Mindanao. It has a total land area of around 3,346.57 square kilometers (1,292.12 square miles)², which comprises almost around 19% of the land area in Region 10. Lanao del Norte is bounded in the north by Iligan Bay, in the east by the provinces of Lanao del Sur and Bukidnon, in the south and southwest by the Celebes Sea, and in the west by the province of Zamboanga del Sur and Pangil Bay. Its geographical location makes the province as the bridge that connects Western Mindanao to Central and Eastern Mindanao.

Methodology

In providing the narratives on the lives and times of a Chinese-Filipino community in the province of Lanao del Norte, a qualitative approach was employed. The information about the tribulations and successes were shared and personally narrated by the Chinese-Filipino along with the information from the locals in the province. Personal interviews were conducted with key informants and respondents to incorporate oral history to this paper that would give more substance to the data collected. In addition, personal immersion and observation was also made since both the researchers are from the province.

Literature survey

After browsing through books, academic journals, undergraduate and Master's theses, memoirs and online sources, the data and information gathered were then carefully examined and reviewed. In this study, a list of key terms was made and were surveyed from various sources of data such as the Mindanao State University-Iligan Institute of Technology Libraries, the National Library in the Philippines, Iligan City Government Offices and the personal archives from the Filipino-Chinese Community.

The overseas Chinese and the Philippines

Although several studies and researches have been conducted regarding the earliest contacts between the Filipinos and the Chinese, there has not been a definite date yet determined. Records would tell that as early as the 10th century, regular trade was conducted between the two. This claim was supported by (1) the texts from the *Song Shi*,³ (2) the chronicles from the *Zhu Fan Zhi*⁴ and (3) the account from *Wenxian Tongkao*⁵ (Miclait, 2000). Moreover, the trade contacts between the Chinese and the Filipinos can also be affirmed to the geographical distance between Philippines and Taiwan. The two countries are not just Asian neighbors in the region but are the closest of neighbors with only 52.8 kilometers of waters that separates

² Data taken from the PSGC Interactive. National Statistical Coordination Board. Makati City, Philippines. Retrieved 10 November 2014.

³ Translated as the *History of the Song Dynasty* which was published around 1343-1374. This document is also considered as one of the official Chinese historical works that records the history of the Song Dynasty.

⁴ *Zhu Fan Zhi* (A Description of Barbarous People) or also known as *Chu Fan Chi* is the first detailed account describing the trade relations between China and the Philippines in the 13th century. This account was written by a Song Official named *Chau Ju-Kua*, who was appointed as Commissioner on Foreign Trade in the 12th century.

⁵ Translated as "A General Investigation of Chinese Cultural Sources", this 14th-century account was written by a Chinese historical writer, *Ma Duanlin*. The 348-volume work was published in 1317 which refers to the Philippines as *Ma-i*.

them. (Hsiao, 1998) The discovery of Oriental ceramics⁶ in several places in the Philippines have also further proved the presence of trade between Asian communities (Miclait, 2000).

Records indicate that there has been contact between the Chinese and the Filipinos as early as the 10th century. Before the coming of the Europeans, the Chinese were conducting trade almost everywhere in the country with goods such as silk, porcelain, spices, furniture and jewelry with the natives. However, it was the discovery and the colonization by the Spaniards of the Philippines in the 16th century that provided lucrative economic opportunity for many male Chinese. It stimulated the migration of Chinese in the country in larger numbers than ever before (Wickberg, 1962). And since the Spaniards were setting their focus on maritime commercial trading with Mexico, it gave the Chinese the opportunity to engage in retail trade. Thus, the Chinese gradually began to dominate the commercial trading in the country. The Spaniards later became dependent to the Chinese traders or the “Sangleys”⁷ and saw its economic importance (Wickberg, 1962). The Spanish colonial government encouraged and tolerated the Chinese traders for the goods that they brought to the communities. Its significance was in fact chronicled in 1571 as the *Parian de Aroceros*, famous for the rice grains sold.

However, despite being considered as economically significant by the Spaniards, the increasing number of Chinese in the Philippines later became a potential threat. The Spanish colonial government then formulated alternating policies and attitudes towards the Chinese. Such policies and attitudes were manifested in several Spanish attempts to: (1) convert the Chinese to Catholicism, (2) stage several massacres, (3) deport those who were suspected as threats to other provinces in the country and (4) expel the Chinese from the Philippines (See, 1997).

The socio-cultural resistance demonstrated by the Chinese in their refusal to assimilate to the society under Spanish rule has raised suspicion that question their loyalty. Moreover, the fear that another uprising might occur similar to the 1574 so-called invasion of Limahong, the Spanish colonial government was keeping its guard to the growing number of Chinese in the country. In 1593, tension between the Chinese and the Spanish colonial government escalated when Governor-General Gomez Perez Dasmariñas was assassinated by the Chinese rowers in the flag ship that was set to invade Moluccas. As a retaliation, the son of the murdered Governor-General sought the assistance from the Chinese authorities in Fujian to capture the assailants. However, the tension did not end there. A series of massacres towards the Chinese were recorded in 1602⁸ and 1603⁹ wherein more than 50,000 Chinese were killed by the Spaniards.

⁶ As further stated by Miclait (2000), traditional Chinese ceramics that were discovered in the Philippines display symbols of Imperial power such as the dragon and the phoenix; fishes, pearls and blossoms; the Eight Precious Things/Treasures (Ba Bao) namely jewel or pearl, cash coin, open lozenge, pair of books, mirror, musical jade stone, pair of Rhino horns and the Artemisia Leaf; and the Magic Weapons of the Eight Taoist saints, namely He Xiang (Bamboo Stick), Cao Guojiu (Castanets), Li Tiegua (Gourd), Lan Caihe (Flower Basket), Lu Dongbin (Sword), Han Xiangzi (Flute), Zhang Guolao (Fish Drum) and Zhongli Quan (Fan).

⁷ From the Hokkien term which means business or trade. The Spaniards used the term to refer the Christianized Chinese as “travelling merchants”.

⁸ There were at least 30,000 Chinese (merchants, officials and civilians) killed in Luzon in what was known in Chinese History as the Luzon Tragedy. The survivors of the massacre fled to Wawa (Guagua) for safety.

⁹ As discussed by Borao (1998) At least 24,000 Chinese were killed by the Spaniards when Three Ming Mandarins arrived in Manila on a strange mission. This sparked fear to the Spanish government, who were already familiar to some sporadic threats of conquest. The so-called strange mission by the three Mandarins was to reconnoiter a “tree that bears gold”, in which the Spaniards suspected as an advance party for a possible invasion of Manila.

In Manila, the Spanish colonial government promulgated the policy of isolation to the Chinese. This was the establishment of a separate area exclusively for the confinement of the Chinese (both Christianized and un-Christianized). Located outside the Walled City of Intramuros, the exclusive area known as the Parian¹⁰ became the “home” of the Chinese. (Madrid, 2012) It was now their residence, trading area and shops for artisans and was a destination of trade and commerce. Yet, the Parian was kept under the watchful eye of the Spanish colonial government.

In 1754, the concern towards the increasing number of Chinese in the country has prompted the Spanish colonial government to expel and deport the non-Christianized Chinese from the country. Because of the action by the government, several overseas Chinese were forced to embrace and assimilate to the society by allowing themselves to be converted to Catholicism. The fear of expulsion and deportation was the primary reason on why several Chinese began to assimilate themselves in the society. In addition, those Chinese who still refused to be Christianized were deported to far flung provinces of the country to lessen the concentration of Chinese in Luzon. Those deported individuals were known as *deportados* or “forcibly deported people” as a form of punishment against the Chinese.

However, under American rule, the living conditions of the Chinese began to have a more liberated atmosphere. It was described that the Chinese benefited most during the American colonial rule even though the Chinese were not given equal rights compared to the Filipinos and the Americans especially when it came to the utilization of the country’s natural resources. Still, the Chinese managed to become influential to the economic life of the country since the Americans imposed less restrictions during their regime (Tan, 1993).

The birth of the Chinese-Filipino

Despite the passage of policies and laws towards the Chinese, the economic opportunities of the country have greatly attracted them to continue to engage in the commercial activities. Assisted by a kin-based migration network, the Chinese in the Philippines used any means to the immigration policy to allow their friends, relatives and family members to enter the country. Thus, the number of Chinese in the Philippines has greatly increased between the years 1899 and 1939.¹¹

¹⁰ An exclusive area where Chinese were confined, specifically those unbaptized Chinese. It is like a Chinese Ghetto. The establishment of the *Parian* was a product of institutionalized racial segregation under Spanish rule. It was during the rule of Spanish Governor-General Gomez Perez Dasmariñas that the *Parian* in Manila was established in 1582. The purpose was to keep the Chinese away from the natives to prevent a possible collaboration that may challenge their rule. Randy Madrid (2012) described that in 1636, Governor-General Sebastian Hurtado de Corquera made the first reference to its Chinese origin when he stated that the Chinese should live in a place which has been built for them near the walls of Manila in the language of the Chinese, the Parian. The term Parian or “Padian” was from the old Malay word “Puntahan” or “Pariyan”, which means “Town Square or Plaza” that later evolved into a trading area or Market. According to Madrid (2012), the term originated from the word “Chien-nei” which also means “Trading Area”.

¹¹ The 1899 figure was a semiofficial figure on the estimated population of the Chinese in the Philippines as the Schurman Commission has relied on the testimony of a Chinese Capitan, Don Carlos Palanca Tan Quien Sien; 1903 was the first comprehensive census conducted using the criteria of country of birth; in 1904, the archipelago-wide registration of Chinese residents; the 1918 census used the criterion of citizenship; the 1921 was from the Wood-Forbes Commission Report; 1933 was from the unpublished report of the Philippine Bureau of Health; in 1935, from the Chinese Economic Bulletin; and 1939 was from the registry of the Chinese consulate in Manila.

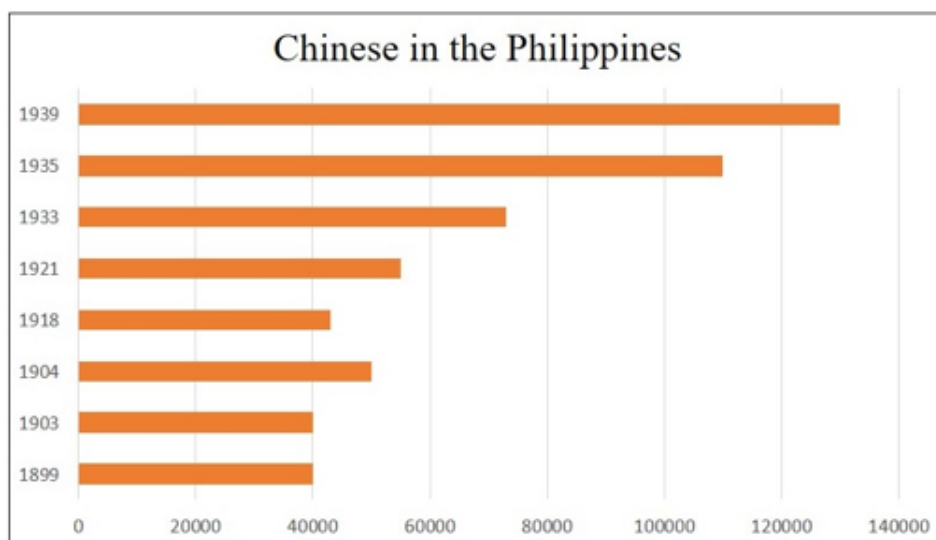


Figure 1: Number of Chinese in the Philippines from 1899 to 1939

Source: Wong (1999, p. 5)

After the post-war period from 1946 to 1975, the Philippine Government did not have a consistent policy towards the 600,000 Chinese that were accounted in 1972. It has been stated that the Chinese in the Philippines were the most legally undigested group in all Southeast Asia (Tan, 1993). The emergence of the growing Filipino Nationalism has also contributed to the formulation of anti-Chinese policies. However, compared to Indonesia and Malaysia, anti-Chinese movement in the Philippines was mostly limited to the control of the Chinese to the economic activities. Over the years, the anti-Chinese sentiments grew and were becoming increasingly stronger. The result was the acquisition of Philippine Citizenship by the Chinese in the following legal venues: (1) the Congress under the American regime passed the Philippine Act of July 1902,¹² (2) Philippine-born offspring of Chinese fathers and Filipina mothers¹³, and (3) the naturalization of the overseas Chinese through the Letter of Instruction No 270¹⁴ (Wong, 1990). The venues stated above were now the means for the overseas Chinese to fully exercise their legal rights as Citizens of the Philippines, thus giving birth to the emerging class, the Chinese-Filipino class.

¹² Stating in Section 4 that all inhabitants of the Philippines who were Spanish subjects on the 11th day of April 1899 shall be deemed and held citizens of the Philippine Island.

¹³ Whose parents were not legally married, as based from the Philippine Supreme Court ruling that the nationality of the child should follow that of the mother.

¹⁴ Naturalization of deserving aliens by decree under the regime of President Ferdinand Marcos which was signed on 11 April 1975.

<i>Nationality</i>	1970		1971		1972		1973		1974		1975	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Chinese	94,963	86.2	96,090	85.9	98,305	86.8	119,062	86.1	105,453	86.1	90,401	83.0
American	9,554	8.7	9,951	8.9	9,377	8.3	11,537	8.3	9,947	8.1	11,601	10.7
Spanish	1,114	1.0	904	0.8	779	0.7	1,062	0.8	780	0.6	757	0.7
Indian	1,392	1.3	1,333	1.2	1,364	1.2	1,625	1.2	1,469	1.2	1,482	1.4
British	499	0.4	595	0.5	528	0.5	956	0.7	843	0.7	975	0.9
German	462	0.4	487	0.4	462	0.4	548	0.4	441	0.4	417	0.4
Belgian	274	0.2	289	0.3	307	0.3	307	0.2	277	0.2	243	0.2
Mixed												
Nationalities	1,939	1.8	2,135	1.9	2,094	1.8	3,169	2.3	3,191	2.6	2,932	2.7
Stateless	29	—	27	—	26	—	46	—	34	—	52	—
TOTAL	110,226	100	111,811	100	113,243	100	138,311	100	122,435	100	108,860	100

Figure 2: List of nationalities who became naturalized Philippine citizens

Source: Cortes (1997, p. 363)

Lanao del Norte and the opportunity

In the quite agricultural province of Lanao del Norte, it was in the late 1850s that Chinese began to settle in the area, either as *deportados* or of their own free will. In the then pueblo of Iligan,¹⁵ the first group of Chinese migrants arrived in 1885. Moreover, the residential and travel restrictions towards the Chinese were not that strict unlike in Luzon, resulting to the formation of Chinese communities in other provinces. Anti-Chinese sentiments were harsh and prevalent in the society in urbanized areas in Luzon and in Visayas. The settlement of the Chinese in the provinces, especially in Lanao del Norte, can be attributed to the following reasons: (1) to seek better opportunities and lucrative locations for commercial trading, (2) to search for a better atmosphere away from the unjust prejudices they experienced from other areas, and (3) several Chinese were part of the *deportados*, who were sent by the colonial government to the provinces in Mindanao.

Since most of the locals in Iligan, which at that time was still a pueblo, were in the labor sectors such as farming, fishing, constructions and government workers, the Chinese have position themselves in the commercial arena as merchants and middlemen without facing such competitions from the locals. They began to open their retail stores or simply known in the country as “sari-sari store” while others became sidewalk peddlers and laborers. In the 1918 census conducted by the Philippine Commission in Iligan, there were only 65 Chinese, 55 males and 10 females, out of the total population of 4,635. Comprising only around 0.1% of the population, the Chinese were confined in a Parian located near the Spanish fort named Fort Victoria. Here, the Spanish government gave the Chinese freedom to merge with the locals. Despite such freedom from the colonial government, the Chinese were not permitted to move in and out of the area not until a great flood destroyed the fort in 1917 (Ngo, 2009).

Tribulations and successes in the province

A social distance emerged between the migrants and the locals because of the differences in language, customs, traditions and culture. The locals seem to have developed distrust towards the Chinese Filipinos and on the other hand, the Chinese Filipinos had anxiety towards the

¹⁵ Previously spelled as Yligan during the Spanish period.

locals (Omohundro, 1975). Such trials faced by the Chinese Filipinos in the province are categorized as: Social Exclusion, Economic Dominance and Educational Challenges.

Social exclusion

Despite becoming a Philippine citizen by naturalization, the locals in the province display an apparent suspicion and distrust towards the Chinese Filipino. These suspicions and distrusts manifested by the locals towards the Chinese Filipinos points to the following issues: the question of their loyalty, the possibility being used as tools for the spread of communism and their choice of isolation to the majority society (Langbid, 2014).

Such issues emerge from the perception of the locals that these Chinese were a dangerous group. Although the Chinese were often viewed as less than dirt as an individual, however, as a collective group, they were perceived as a precursor of communism (Weightman, 1967). For the locals, the reservations towards the Chinese Filipino can be summed up on the notion of bringing a different culture in the province and their refusal to adopt the local culture. This action by the Chinese Filipinos raise suspicion to the locals as to why they should bring and exercise their culture in the country. One of the issues that was highlighted was the question of their loyalty, by this statement:

These Chinese should not be trusted for they are cunning and are not truly a Filipino. Why would they bring their culture in the province and refuse to adapt to our culture? Is it because their loyalty and allegiances remains with China? They are probably here to spread Communist ideas.¹⁶

The refusal of the Chinese to assimilate to Filipino society was one of the reason why they were deliberately segregated from the majority of society. This action towards the Chinese left a lasting effect that made the Chinese to isolate themselves from the Filipino society by choice (Weightman, 1967). This can be observed in the practices, language, customs and traditions they have which basically were foreign in the Philippines. With such observations, the locals in the province justifies their impression towards the loyalty of these Chinese Filipinos:

Coming to our province, they should have adapted the customs and practices as a form of respect. Instead, they brought with them their culture and even established their own cemetery and school. This just shows their strong connection with China than the Philippines.¹⁷

Furthermore, in the mid-20th century, the Chinese Filipinos were almost excluded from various socio-cultural activities in the province. This was the result of the Nationalization and Filipinization by the Philippine government to develop that Filipino Nationalism (Langbid, 2014). For this attempt, policies and laws were passed by the government to restrict and curtail the involvement of “aliens” and to encourage the Filipinos to take control of society. These policies prohibit the Chinese Filipinos from owning land and were strongly encouraged to assimilate to the Filipino society (Ngo, 2009). As a response, some of the Chinese Filipinos have taken local women as their “common-law wife” who will then purchase land under her name. Such moves often led to the impression that local women were just used to legally acquire land property. On the other hand, it was the only way for the Chinese Filipinos to start

¹⁶ Personal interview with a 67-year-old local businessman who requested to keep his identity unknown.

¹⁷ Personal interview with a 77-year-old local housewife who grew up in the province.

their business by acquiring lands legally. Moreover, the Chinese Filipinos were also the targets of “corrupt” officials who tried to extort money by using deportation and expulsion as threats (Ngo, 2009).

There were officials who extorts money every time a Chinese renews his Alien Certificate of Registration (ACR). If they refuse, these officials will then submit a deportation report against the Chinese. Because of fear, most of the Chinese had to comply with the demands from the officials. Others no longer renewed their ACR and had to change his name to a Filipino name.¹⁸

The restrictions from the laws imposed by the Philippine government and the actions of “corrupt” officials towards the Chinese Filipino have provided realization that the only way their community could survive and further develop was to unite. Thus, they created an elaborate network of social and economic relationships based on lineage, hometown, surname, commerce, trade and cultural and political associations. Such associations have boosted and maintained a sense of communal identity and cohesiveness in an environment that is sometimes hostile to them (Wong, 1999).

In 1930, the Lanao Filipino-Chinese Chamber of Commerce Inc.¹⁹ was founded and became the biggest and most important defense association of the Chinese Filipinos in the province (Legaspi and Vergara, 1996). The association later spearheaded the establishment of the Chinese Language School and the Chinese Cemetery in the province to preserve the Chinese culture and practices for their children.

Economic dominance

The economic position the Chinese Filipino have in the province greatly contributes to some hostilities from the locals. From rice milling business to retail stores, the Chinese Filipinos have been dominant when it comes to entrepreneurship. Their “way of doing business” combines with frugality, makes them more successful businessmen than the locals. Their frugality has been the reason why they were described by the locals as *tihik* or *kuripot*, which are local terms for being very thrifty (Langbid, 2014). However, their “way of doing business” seems to have an impression on the locals.

These Chinese would usually resort to have an under the table transaction to allow them to continue with their business despite of clearly violating some rules when it comes to conducting trade.²⁰

When the Philippine government amended its policy to nationalized retail trade through the passage of the Retail Trade Nationalization Law and the Rice and Corn Trade Nationalization Law,²¹ the Chinese were hit the hardest (Tan, 1993). This is because retail trading was their main income generating activities. The severity of the restrictions towards the Chinese have resulted to the practice of bribery to allow them to continue with their business. Such actions

¹⁸ Personal interview with Mr. Roger Suminggit, whose father was a pure Chinese.

¹⁹ Founded by Mr Sy Seng Tiok, who became its first president, as a merchant association for the Chinese businessmen in the province.

²⁰ Personal interview with a 54-year-old local businessman who owns a hardware store.

²¹ These laws were attempts by the Philippine Government to curtail and exclude all foreigners from the business, allowing only companies owned by Filipinos to operate.

have been cited by the locals as proofs that the Chinese were dishonest when it comes to business (Weightman, 1967).

The strict restrictions that have been imposed to us (the Chinese) in doing business greatly affected our family. My parents had to do something for us to have something to earn, otherwise, we won't have anything to eat. Our family were just simply doing what we had to do to survive.²²

For the Chinese in Lanao del Norte, such laws did not prevent them from engaging in trade with the locals. Several Chinese transferred the ownership of the business to the members of their family who were naturalized. For others, they had no other option but to close their business resorting to alternative ways to earn money.

My father decides to sell hotcakes and pancit (cooked noodles) along the streets of Iligan just to earn some money. Others were into shoe shining, scrap collectors, and farmers. While some of his friends even became household helpers and street vendors in other municipalities to make ends meet.²³

The letter of Instruction No. 270 under President Ferdinand Marcos rejuvenated the Chinese (now Chinese Filipinos) as they became naturalized citizens of the Philippines (Langbid, 2014). The commerce and trade in the province soon became their playground again as they were now able to renewed the business they operated. Retail stores, hardware, restaurants, rice mills, bakeries were almost controlled by the Chinese Filipinos. This economic dominance of the Chinese Filipinos when it comes to commerce and trade, came into clash with the rising Filipino middle class, who in turn, regards the Chinese Filipinos as business rivals and an obstacle. (Weightman, 1967) To some locals, they accused the Chinese Filipinos of cheating when it comes to business. Although the locals admit that the presence of the Chinese Filipinos have been very significant, there were still some speculations and suspicions against them.

From the time the Chinese opened their store, I noticed that they were selling their goods at a cheaper price than the average price value in the market. Sometimes they even had this buy one take one offer, and still gained profit from it.²⁴

The Chinese “way of doing business” requires one to have patience and the perseverance in dealing with customers. Most of the time, their business is a family-operated type wherein every member of the family was expected to help. Such attitudes and practice contributes to the higher rate of success of the Chinese Filipinos in business. Despite being ridiculed or verbally abused by the locals, the stores of the Chinese Filipinos were still patronized by the locals compared to other stores.

My parents taught me everything when it comes to business transactions, especially in dealing with people. Our business is operated by the whole family to inject to our mind the value of how hard it is to earn at an early age. My father always reminds me with the idea that no matter how small our profit in a day will be, if it is continuous, it is much better than earning bigger profit but seldom.²⁵

²² Personal interview with Mr. Santiago Ong, an upholstery owner, whose parents were both Chinese.

²³ Personal interview with Prof. Rodolfo Yu, a retired professor from MSU-IIT.

²⁴ Personal interview with a 63-year-old Filipino businessman who owns a retail store.

²⁵ Personal interview with a 55-year-old Chinese Filipino businessman who manages a grocery store.

Educational challenges

The aspiration of the overseas Chinese to educate their children and to rear them as true-blooded Chinese paved way for the conceptualization of establishing a Chinese school in the country. However, establishing a private Chinese education was prohibited during the Spanish rule. The Anglo-Chinese School, which was first Chinese school in the Philippines, was only established in 1898 (Sussman, 1976).

With some anti-Chinese attitudes and feelings in the province, it was never easy for the Chinese to establish a Chinese Language School in the area. The suspicions from the locals have made it difficult for them, especially for their children, who were sometimes targets of ridicule from the society. The popular phrase *Intsik wakang, baboy tikangkang*²⁶ was commonly used to mock and ridicule the Chinese.

During our younger years, my brother and I were sometimes the targets of jokes from our neighbor. They call us “Intsik waking”, and in that time, we don’t even know what that means. We didn’t mind them since they were our playmates. But sometimes other kids also tried to call us such names.²⁷

On 12 November 1938, the Chinese in Lanao del Norte had concentrated their efforts for the establishment of a Chinese school. This move was then spearheaded by the association with the support of the Chinese community in the province. Since there were only a few Chinese at that time, the school started with only a little more than ten students and operates in the same building with the association. Before the outbreak of the war, the Chinese educational system was patterned with China’s educational system. However, in 1951, when the school was re-opened, it adopted Taiwan’s educational system.

In 1947, the Chinese were given favorable news regarding the operation of schools. The Treaty of Amity between the Philippine Government and the Kuomintang gave the two countries the liberty to establish schools for the education of their children. During this period, the majority of the Chinese Schools were registered, financed and controlled by the Taiwan Government with the assistance of local Chinese businessmen (Sussman, 1976). This eventually lessened the perception of the locals connecting them to Communism but still there were those who distrusted them.

Chinese education was introduced to spread the idea of Communism. By using the Chinese language as the medium of instruction in school, they do not want other people to understand what they were discussing. Chinese have strong connections with China, and that’s the reason why they wanted to bring the Chinese education and culture here in the province.²⁸

With the attempt of the Philippine Government for the Nationalization on all aspects of the country, the Chinese school was not exempted. In 1972, the Philippine government amended its policy concerning schools which Filipinized all private schools in the country. The policy would Filipinize the administration, supervision, instruction (that includes textbook control)

²⁶ Literally means “Bow-legged Chinese, overturned pig”, the pig representing a piggy bank that states the Chinese is already poor since his piggy bank is overturned.

²⁷ Personal interview with a 46-year-old Chinese businessman.

²⁸ Personal interview with a 54-year-old local businessman who owns a hardware store.

and service staff of all schools run by foreign nationals. This was just the start because by January 1973, when the new constitution was ratified, it states in Article XV, section 8 (7):

Educational institutions other than those established by religious orders, mission boards and charitable organizations shall be solely owned by citizens of the Philippines, or corporations or associations' sixty per centum of the capital of which is owned by such citizen.

The Lanao Chinese School (renamed Lanao Community School) had to impose new regulations. Despite being considered a Chinese language school; the medium of instruction was restricted to English and Tagalog. Chinese language studies were limited to around 12 – 15 periods only per week. Even the choice of textbooks had to be approved by the Department of Education (Quimbo, 1987). However, for the Chinese, regardless of the new regulations imposed, still had to encourage their children to carry on with their Chinese education by means of tutorials and private lessons (Ngo, 2010).

The need for the next generation to continue to use and value the language and culture of the Chinese is still very important. My parents would always tell me to always be proud of our culture and by that, I also need to impart to my children the value of the Chinese language and culture for them to also understand their grandparents. Although now, it may be difficult, but still, I am encouraging my children to speak in Chinese especially inside the house.²⁹

For the non-Chinese locals in the province, the establishment of the Chinese School will only eventually result in the separation of Filipino and Chinese youth (Sussman, 1967). This concept also holds true in the province since the locals perceived the Chinese school as an exclusive institution for the Chinese. And, the propagation of the Chinese language will just create this Chinese identity that separates itself from the community.

Concluding notes

As Chester Hunt (1956) stated that this behavior was the result of the three hundred years of Spanish rule and a half century of American regime that creates a Filipino attitude which is oriented away from the culture of which it is in territorial proximity and towards the standards of the West. Forced to leave their homes because of dire conditions, the Chinese Filipinos seek greener pastures in the Philippines for economic opportunity and stability. Although they had no intentions at first of making the country as their permanent home, regulations and restrictions have prompted some of them to obtain Philippine citizenship to avoid deportation and expulsion from the government. The geographical proximity of the country to South China attracts many immigrants, especially to places where economic opportunities are abundant. This led to the increasing influx of the Chinese in the Philippines who then were seeking economic opportunities to various places in the country.

The policies and the attitudes of the community towards the Chinese Filipinos clearly varies depending on the society they are in. the Chinese Filipinos in large urban places experience harsher anti-Chinese attitudes compared to those who are in small urban areas such as in Lanao del Norte. The years of colonization under the Spaniards, Americans and even a short era of the Japanese have contributed to the emergence of a Sino phobic attitude. Despite becoming a

²⁹ Personal interview with a 61-year-old Chinese businessman who is a member of the association.

Philippine citizen, the Chinese Filipino in Lanao del Norte still experience distrust from the locals by bringing and practicing their culture into their new society. Also, the entrepreneur skills and their “way of doing business” have been the reasons why they became the targets by the locals. Policies and laws were passed to curtail their involvement in the business activity. Despite being blamed or used as scapegoats by the society, the Chinese Filipinos remains dominant when it comes to the economic control in the country. And lastly, their objective of teaching their children with the language and education from their homeland was also restricted but it does not prevent them from introducing a Chinese education in the country. Despite such attitudes and feelings against the Chinese Filipinos in Lanao del Norte, they could overcome such challenges and remains a vital member of the society until at present.

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