

# The Troubled Dual Construction of Ethnicity of Recent Chinese Migrants and Third Generation Chinese-Filipinos in Binondo, Manila

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## **abstract**

The paper examines literatures written by Chinese-Filipino migrants that were published between 1980s to 2010s. It tries to explore the genealogy and development of Chinese-Filipino community in Binondo and the factors that caused the troubled dual construction of ethnicity of recent Chinese migrants and third generation Chinese-Filipinos in the area. Consequently, the paper determines the extent of stereotyping experienced by recent migrants and the third generation Chinese-Filipino families in the cosmopolitan district.

**Keywords:** Third Generation Chinese-Filipino Migrants, Chinese Stereotyping, Ethnicity

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**Introduction**

In Henri Lefebvre's "Right to the City," he emphasizes the of the city's space "that is of its streets and squares, edifices, and monuments and how the city preserves the character of the community." (Lefebvre 1996, p. 67) The district of Binondo, since its establishment in 1594, as a settlement for the Chinese Catholics, its cultural space has different layers and stories to tell particularly its people who lived and preserved its history and traditions. The City of Manila itself has numerous accounts on how its population grew but the stories of migration is of particular interest especially for a city that has become a melting pot of different cultures. Popularly known as Manila's "Chinatown" as depicted by mainstream media, film, and literature, the former suburbs of Intramuros, the island of Binondo, surrounded by esteros, is one of the most densely populated areas in the city. With about 18,000 residents (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2015), its narrow streets and alleys are occupied by people from different ethnic backgrounds although most of the residents are referred to as Chinese-Filipino.

Who are the Chinese-Filipinos? Philippine history would state that Chinese and Filipino relations can be traced as early as the Sung period from 960 to 1279 (Wickberg 2000), from this direct contact was the emergence of a Chinese community in the banks of the Pasig river right across Maynila, the wooden palisade of

King Soliman. This precolonial contact tells a lot about the harmonious exchange between the early Filipinos and the Chinese through the barter of goods and eventually, culture and traditions. The arrival of the Spaniards in Manila in 1571 has made significant changes in terms of interpersonal relations particularly among the Filipinos and the Chinese.(Chu 2016) The Spaniards who took over King Soliman's palisade built a stone wall that was supposed to protect the people living within the walls but it had also become a visible and invisible divide. The Filipinos, or *indios* as the Spaniards called them, and the Chinese or the *sangleys*, which means a person with pure Chinese ancestry, were living in the peripheries of Intramuros or the walled city of Manila.

This separation set by the Spaniards from the rest of the community triggered the tension between the Spaniards and the Chinese. Staggering taxes and forced labor had prompted the Chinese to stage several uprisings against the Spaniards, only to lose in the end and receive more maltreatment and injustice. To reduce the tension and seek the loyalty of the Chinese, the Spaniards have decided to allot a piece of land across the river from the walled city to the Chinese on the condition that they will convert to Catholicism. Hence, Binondo of the Chinese was born, and with the intermarriage of the Chinese with Filipinos came the Chinese Mestizo that evolved into Chinese-Filipino.

All these references to the Chinese living in Manila as Chinese-Filipinos and Chinese mestizo were called *Instik*. This Tagalog term may have been originally used to introduce a Chinese newcomer (Chu 2010). However, its Filipino usage came to acquire negative

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connotation (Hau 2014). From *Sangley* to *Instik*, the Chinese-Filipinos were given derogatory names almost similar to Filipinos being called an *Indio*.

From the 19<sup>th</sup> century until the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, the Chinese-Filipinos of Binondo have attempted to assimilate themselves to prove to the rest of the Manila community that their district may have its own distinction, but is still uniquely Filipino even if the “Filipino” concept was still a work in progress and the concept of nationalism was still being re-introduced by the Americans in the 1930s. However, despite the efforts of the Chinese-Filipinos to integrate with the community, several laws from previous decades such as the Chinese Exclusion Act on the 1920s and even the Filipino First Policy of the 1950s has alienated the Chinese-Filipinos who were doing business with Filipinos and whose supplies were coming from their homeland in China(Chu 2016).

All these exclusions have caused two negative effects. First was the reaction of the Chinese-Filipinos toward Filipinos. Despite the attempts to assimilate and enculturate, the lowly *Instik* was still regarded as an outsider because of their ethnicity. Second was the perception of the Filipinos influenced by laws that oppresses the Chinese. The concept of a hybrid culture of community was unfamiliar and was never taught in schools hence Chinese-Filipinos were sometimes teased and discriminated. As a result, the Chinese-Filipinos would create their own groups and associations thus separating themselves all the more from the rest of the Binondo community.

In this regard, this paper would like to know if the troubled assimilation of the Chinese-Filipino community in Binondo with the rest of the population living in the same district is grounded on questioning their own status in the community.

To understand the plight of the Chinese-Filipinos, the paper will discuss a number of Chinese-Filipino literatures written by recent migrants and third generation migrants that was published in the late 1980s to 2010s. These periods were the height of the awareness campaign of Chinese-Filipino advocates to refer to the Chinese-Filipinos as “Tsinoy,” a contraction of *Tsino* meaning Chinese and *Noy* from the term *Pinoy*, the colloquial term for Filipino.

Qualitative research was done and data were collected from a number of recent Chinese migrants and third generation Chinese-Filipinos living in Binondo. Online questionnaires and face-to-face interviews were conducted to determine if the recent Chinese migrants and third generation Chinese-Filipinos still face difficulty in garnering the acceptance of the Filipino community and experience insecurity derived from being “outsiders” despite their active community involvement with the Filipinos from the past up to present. As Chinese-Filipinos question their status in the community, we will look into how they form their own “exclusive” groups, and how this form of exclusivity in some ways, deters the growth and improvement in interaction with communities inside and outside of Binondo.

The paper also examine the origin and development of the Chinese-Filipino community in Binondo from the time that it was conceived as a land

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devoted to the conversion of the native Chinese to Catholicism and their settlement in 1628, with particular focus on the Spanish, American, Japanese, and postwar periods. In addition, the particular role/s of the Chinese-Filipino community in Binondo during the Spanish/American/Japanese colonial/Postwar era and if there were significant changes in their role/s in the community will be studied. With these, the paper will be able to determine the types and extent of stereotyping that recent migrants (2000s to present) and third generation Chinese-Filipino families in Binondo receive from the Binondo community.

By tracing the past and present interactions of Chinese-Filipinos with fellow Filipinos, the paper will be able to determine if there were instances of their attempt to assimilate with the Binondo community and if such attempt garnered an acceptance or otherwise.

### **The Chinese-Filipino Community of Binondo and their literature**

The *Kaisa Para sa Kaunlaran, Inc.* a non-governmental organization that advocates “the active participation of the Tsinoy community in the local and national development” (Kaisa 2017) along with Society of Contemporary Arts and Literature published a number of books written by third generation Chinese-Filipinos that were mostly based in Binondo and nearby districts. For more than twenty years, from the late 1980s to late 2000s, the books were sold to the general public with the

intention to promote integration and acceptance of the Chinese-Filipino in the community. The books were simultaneously published with *Tulay: the Chinese-Filipino Digest*. The Filipino word *Tulay* in English is *Bridge* and *Tulay* that was published fortnightly had a similar intent of “bridging the gap” towards acceptance.

*Discovering New Horizon*, published in 1989, features short stories, poems, and essays by Chinese-Filipino writers that explore different issues on the Chinese-Filipino experience. The anthology is divided into three sections: The Self, Relationships, and Society.

A prominent theme that runs through the collection is the alienation experience by Chinese-Filipinos. Jane Que Tiu’s *Life in This Country: Through a Pair of Chinkey Eyes* narrates the author’s personal experiences of stereotyping and isolation and her resolve nonetheless to show her sentiments to the Philippines where her ancestors migrated:

How does it feel to live among  
one’s people? I don’t know really for I  
have always lived otherwise. Are you  
asking me if I am living in a foreign land?  
To tell you frankly, I don’t know which is  
which already...How could someone with  
chinky eyes and yellow complexion be  
part of the Filipino race? Yes, yes I know.  
I know that I am not a Filipino.”

“‘Chang chang cheng chung cheng  
chang chang.’ When I was small, I used to  
hear these words from the smirking,  
laughing ‘Kanto Boys’ whenever I walked

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past them. I'd always ask my grandmother  
 and my 'yaya' what those boys were  
 saying. My 'yaya' never answered me.  
 Grandma, however, told me that those  
 boys were imitating the way the Chinese  
 talk. (Tiu 1989)

Tiu reasserts this resolve in her short story *Double Happiness*, which tells the troubled intermarriage between a Chinese woman and a Filipino man.

Transplantation and the construction of ethnic identity also figure prominently in the anthology. Lao Bi Eng's vignette *Soliloquy of a Gardener* uses the roots of a tree as a metaphor for how established the Chinese identity is within the Filipino social landscape. Returning to China as the motherland is also expressed in Eddie Choa's poem *Home*.

It's a summer morning in China  
 Where once my roots began  
 Where shadows of my ancestors  
 Are cast by the rising sun

And though I've to leave this land of mine  
 My head shall look behind  
 For one day I shall return  
 And wrinkled smiles again I'll find (Choa 1989)

The other essays focus on the relationship between the Chinese-Filipino community and the broader ethnic Filipino society as well as on the development of Filipino and Chinese-Filipino literature. Mario Miclat's

“=*China Impressions and Other Stories*”= discusses the extensive history and the richly diverse culture of China, which in turn yields a wealth of impressions about the country. Albert Lim’s *Filipino-Chinese: Are We or Are We Not?* points out that the alienation of Chinese-Filipinos is due to the differences, misunderstandings, and the mutual distrust between the two groups. In *Cradle of a Long Discord*, Lim traces the origin of the tension between Chinese Filipinos and Filipinos to Spain’s attempt to divide the country and preserve supremacy. In the two essays, Lim encourages unity and the observance of statesmanship.

In “=*Tsapsuy: Mga sanaysay, tula, salin, at iba pa*”= (Tsapsuy: essays, poems, translations, etc.) being a Chinese-Filipino, as presented in this anthology, is a struggle to overcome the perception of being an outsider and to be part of Philippine society that is equally challenged by its own “narrow nationalism.”

Beginning with *Nationalismo, uso pa ba?* (Nationalism, is it still trendy?), author Joaquin Sy describes how difficult it is for the Chinese-Filipino to be part of Philippine society whose own citizens do not love and respect their country. Sy further explains that the stigma, negative perception, and discrimination that the Chinese-Filipino experience hamper their desire to be rightfully identified as Filipinos. *Ayyy...Nasyonalismo* likewise echo the sentiments of Sy of how important it is for the Chinese-Filipinos to have a well-grounded cultural identity in the Philippines to feel secure and worthy in a place that they can also call their own.

The succeeding essays by Sy such as *Sanlibo’t isang dabilan* (One thousand and one reasons), *Sintomas ng*

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*panabong darating?* (Symptoms of things to come?), *Tigre na tayo?* (Are we tigers?) describe the sentiments of most Chinese-Filipinos on how Filipinos' devaluation and disrespect of their own culture and history result in the discrimination and lack of understanding of the Chinese-Filipino community's good intentions and efforts at integration.

Go Bon Juan's essays *Sapagkat siya'y mahal pa rin natin* (Because we still love her), *Sapagkat ito'y karapatan natin* (Because it's our right), and *Mahigpit na pagkakaugnay* (A tight connection) assert that a Chinese born and raised in the Philippines can be as nationalistic as an ethnic Filipino as he considers himself a Filipino citizen whose dual cultural background contributes to the enrichment of Philippine culture and tradition.

Juan also calls for understanding of the circumstance of the Chinese-Filipino particularly the perception that they are rich and powerful hence they are abusive. Juan highlights that the Chinese-Filipino has a long history of good relations with Filipinos even before the Spanish colonization. Furthermore, Juan stresses that the Chinese experienced the same oppression Filipinos endured under Spanish rule and that they support Filipinos' effort towards solidifying nationalism.

The theme of nationalism continues in James Na's *Niyebe* (Ice) and *Kalesa* (Horse-drawn carriage), wherein he uses themes of diaspora and understanding one's ethnic roots and cultures. Charlie Go's *Bakas* (Imprint) and *Kalawanging Bakal* (Rusty steel) briefly relinquishes themes of struggles specific to being Filipino-

Chinese; rather, themes of love and life struggles prevail in his poems.

Lyonel Ty's *Ang bulag* remains consistent with the collection's theme of Chinese-Filipino experience as problems of alienation are depicted through metaphors like leaping blindly through a cliff just like when the ethnic Chinese migrated to the Philippines. Ty continues with *Pader* (Wall), which symbolizes the social divide that the Filipino-Chinese experience as they continue to understand the Philippine way of life.

Sze Man Chi's *Panunuluyan* (Transience) describes how migration created a rootless generation that longs for acceptance and understanding. Likewise, Ivan Tsang's *Istasyon sa munting bayan* (A station in a small town) retells the alienation of the Chinese-Filipino. Tsang describes the lingering sense of alienation, which winds through the initial struggle with linguistic or cultural differences and the perennial pursuit of dual construction of ethnicity.

Go Bon Juan concludes with the poetry section as well as the discussion on acceptance through the piece *Patulang kasaysayan ng mga Tsinoy* (A poem on the history of the Chinese-Filipino), which allegorizes the Chinese and Filipinos like fish and water, constantly needing each other, working hand in hand, and helping each other such as during the Philippine revolution and the Second World War. Juan concludes with the assertion that the Chinese-Filipino's full integration into Philippine society can only come through mutual study and understanding of a centuries-long cultural exchange that yielded shared old and contemporary cultures, beliefs, and traditions.

*Voices – Mga Tinig* is a collection of short stories, poems, and essays that were originally published in

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*Tulay*, the newsletter of Kaisa. Questions about the nation and identity are raised by the Chinese-Filipino writers, who write not from an outsider's point of view but from that of someone immersed in the Philippine way of life.

Harriet Ann Dy's essay, "Living Precariously in Dangerous Times," describes the effect of the abduction of Chinese Filipinos in their community, particularly those living in Binondo.. Dy explains that the perception that most Chinese-Filipinos are wealthy is the cause of these abductions and clarifies that there are also working class Tsinoy that struggle to make both ends meet.. On the other hand, in another essay, *Face to Face with Rural Living*, Dy celebrates the undaunted spirit of the Filipino people and her shared heritage with them as she witnesses village people in La Union rebuilding their lives in the wake of a tragedy.

Doreen Yu's *Singkit Nga Naman* (Oh, the Slant Eyed) and Audrey Lim Tan's *Ang Tsinoy Ay Pinoy Rin!* (The Chinese Filipino Is Filipino Too!) tell of the disadvantages of having slanted eyes in the Philippines. Chinese Filipinos must endure the fear of being kidnapped for ransom and being taunted for being *singkit*. Yu and Tan argue that Chinese-Filipinos, being a minority group, naturally want to belong, but they must constantly prove themselves more Filipino than the average Filipino.

The theme of connection to one's roots is evident in Caroline Hau's *Stories* presents a father's stories of his life before and after migrating to the Philippines from the T'ang Mountains in China. *The True Story of Ab To*, also by Hau, tells of the narrator's communist father who leaves China to escape the war. Despite his integration into

Philippine culture, he is disinterested in the social and political events in his adopted country because of his sense of alienation.

Taken together, the selections in these anthologies may seem pessimistic because of their disappointments. However, one should consider that these written works presents the truth in the hopes of influencing the community hence it is still optimistic about the Chinese-Filipino relations without denying areas of tension.

### **A personal understanding of the Chinese-Filipinos in Binondo**

All these stories, poems, and essays written by the Chinese-Filipino residents of Binondo and other places in Metro Manila with a huge concentration of Chinese-Filipinos reflects how the long-time dwellers feel and perceive the place that they call their home in the literal sense, as most of them are Filipinos by citizenship and in a figurative sense, a place where its people call it home but still have reservations because of the perception of Filipinos who also live in the area.

Binondo, prior to becoming “Manila’s Chinatown” as branded by the media was a hilly terrain where its former inhabitants tilted its land for farming. It was also a fishing village because of its proximity to the Pasig river and the Manila bay. For centuries, Binondo or Binondoc, as it was originally called, was left untouched, as Chinese traders and Filipino traded in the nearby town of Baybay, now called San Nicolas, which was not originally part of Binondo but was eventually integrated with the district. The Chinese traded their silk, porcelain,

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and jade up to the arrival of the Spaniards and conquered Maynila, which is now called Intramuros. The Chinese went on with their lives, trading goods and slowly integrated with the community and had their place called the Parian, or the marketplace. It was in this Chinese ghetto where they made a living selling goods and servicing the needs of their fellowmen, the Filipinos, and the Spaniards.

The Chinese migration in the Philippines from the 16<sup>th</sup> to the early 19<sup>th</sup> century was intermittent but frequent. Coming from the Fujian province in China, the inequality and overpopulation forced its inhabitants to look for a place to make a decent living as traders (Chan 2015). Hence the Chinese population in Manila grew through the centuries and this alarmed the Spaniards. While it is only trading that the Chinese intended in Manila, the Spaniards assumed that the increase in their population was a threat to their turf and security. After being “attacked” by the Chinese Limahong in 1574, there was no room to trust the Chinese. However, recent researches would present that Limahong arrived with women and children and came to Manila as refugees, not as a conqueror (Ang See 2014).

The discrimination against the Chinese was frequent and consistent despite their contribution to the community as traders and artisans. The native Chinese were treated unfairly as they were forced to pay higher taxes and work in building stone walls and churches, day in, day out. After the British occupation of Manila in 1764, the Spaniards considered them as traitors for siding the British during their two-year occupation. The native Chinese thought that the British was going to help them

and considered them as allies. This disloyalty to the Spaniards resulted to their periodic expulsion from the Philippines. The Chinese readmission to the Philippines after 1772 was due to the dire need of the Spaniards for their goods and services. It was the Chinese after all who were the original market sellers and craftsmen. (Escoto 2015)

The island of Binondo during these tumultuous period was already a place where the Chinese-Christians converts and trade and live freely. After being bought from Dona Sebastina del Valle and Don Antonio Velades in 1594 and the Dominican mission was also established, Binondo became an arrabal of Manila (De Viana 2001). However, it seemed that an assurance of a place to “live and work freely” was thwarted with some shady intent, as the town was just a canon shot away from the walled city of Intramuros.

The passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1902 during the American occupation in the Philippines aggravated the already dwindling relations of the Chinese with Filipinos (Chu 2016). The Filipinos in particular were already hostile to the Chinese for the reason that the Chinese were more successful in trading and were taking over most of the businesses, jobs, and services that were initially meant for them. The Americans eventually supported the slogan “Philippines for Filipinos” and passed a law excluding the Chinese skilled workers and kept them out of the Philippines until about 1939 (Alejandrino 2015). However, the act had loopholes and still allowed merchants to enter the Philippine, hence there was still a significant increase of Chinese working

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and living in the Philippines despite the enactment of the law.

Postwar Manila in the 1950s was recovering from the destruction of the Second World War brought about by the fighting between the Japanese and the Americans. The Chinese community in Binondo supported the Americans and Filipinos who were fighting the Japanese by forming their own armed group.

However, despite the support of the Chinese to the Americans and Filipinos during and after the war, the Retail Nationalization Act of 1954 restricted ownership in retail trade to Filipinos. In addition, President Carlos P. Garcia, created the “Filipino First Policy” in 1958 to assert the economic rights of the Filipinos over the dominance of free trade by promoting Filipino-owned establishments (Abinales 2005).

Even if majority of the Chinese-Filipinos were involved in the political and social issues within their community, their ethnicity was still a disadvantage. During that period, the Chinese-Filipinos had difficulty sustaining their small businesses and the closing of China’s borders in 1949 had left the Chinese in the Philippines stuck and nowhere else to go. They were forced to transfer their business names to their Filipino wife or husbands, or marrying a Filipino to sustain their business. Most of them also took the risk of shifting to mid-scale businesses such as hardware and construction that were not covered by the existing laws and policies. Whether these Chinese-Filipinos succeeded or failed, the next decades thereafter aggravated the “clash” of the Chinese and Filipinos particularly in trading and business (Dannhaeuser 2004).

“It is not our fault if we are successful businessmen, merchants, and artisans. We were forced by the circumstance to this profession,” said by Sy\* (\*name withheld upon request)<sup>1</sup> one of the residents and old-timers of Binondo whose family belonged to the first generation migrants from Fujian in the 1930s that escaped the economic turmoil in their native land but only to experience several challenges while staying in the Philippines.

“It is not just the ethnic difference that causes the hostility of some Filipinos already living in Binondo, but the growing business culture of Binondo dominated by Chinese-Filipinos involved in various businesses from retail to wholesale (Sy 2016).”

The tension caused by the dominance in business by the Chinese-Filipino was extended to the social space that the Filipinos and Chinese-Filipinos occupy. From the streets and alleys, it has been observed by third generation Chinese-Filipinos that they were teased by Filipino workers and bystanders as *mayamang instik* (a rich Chinese) or public spaces such as malls and restaurants, they would learn from fellow Chinese-Filipinos that some Filipinos think that all the Chinese in Binondo are “abusive Chinese employers as seen on television.”

It is for a fact that these stereotypes against the Chinese-Filipinos are all said in passing and sometimes told behind their back. Such perception was becoming ingrained and worsened by mainstream media’s depiction of the Chinese merchant in films, television series, and

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<sup>1</sup> Name withheld upon request. Interviewed in February 2017, Binondo, Manila

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news that merely focuses on the crimes committed by a Chinese national and not necessarily by a Chinese-Filipino. Sy added that one cannot deny that there are unscrupulous and abusive Chinese businessmen. However, he also said that there are “unscrupulous and abusive Filipino businessmen” in Binondo that “are twice deceitful as their fellow Filipino staff.”

As narrated by a first generation Chinese migrant who has been living in Binondo for the past 20 years, Mrs. So\* (\*complete name withheld upon request<sup>2</sup>) said that she is not yet a naturalized Filipino because she found the process of naturalization “tedious and full of red tape.” Further, “it was expensive and takes a long time.” In addition to the discrimination and corruption that Mrs. So wanted to avoid, she felt that there was no need to naturalize for the reason that she has been living in Binondo for the past two decades and being referred to as “Filipino” “does not have a real bearing.”

Mrs. So admitted that she felt that she has somewhat assimilated with the Filipinos particularly with her staff of about five Filipinos working for her small retail store of Chinese trinkets. She said that in the late 1990s, she migrated from Hunan, China with her Chinese husband and put up four commercial establishments in Binondo. However, one of her Filipino staff stole money from the cash box and she eventually lost her trust in Filipinos. To determine if it was only an isolated incident, Mrs. So mentioned that this incident happened twice when her other staff left without a word and also stole

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<sup>2</sup> Name withheld upon request. Interviewed in January 2017, Sta. Cruz, Manila

the shops' earnings from the cash box. In Jacques Amoyot's "Manila Chinese," the tension caused by trust issues affects the Chinese and Filipino relations. "To a Chinese, majority of Filipinos are out to take advantage of him. Any non-authorized foreigner who becomes curious about him is suspected of being a spy of some sort for Filipino officialdom which is considered to be ever seeking new ways of exploiting the Chinese." Mrs. So added that she did not intend to lose her trust in Filipinos. However, she said that she felt that Filipinos' general perception of Chinese business owners as abusive is only a scapegoat. "We came here to conduct business and live harmoniously with Filipinos. I hope that they (Filipinos) do not take out their frustrations to us because not all of us are bad people."

On the other hand, Mr. Ivan Man Dy, who is involved in cultural tours focusing on the culinary history and built heritage of Binondo, said that the integration of Chinese-Filipinos into the community was gradual and natural. He was aware that when he was growing up that he was different because of his ethnicity, but also knew that he was a Filipino by political identity. Studying in Chinese schools in Manila made him feel part of the Chinese-Filipino community and was able to preserve much of the culture and tradition of his first-generation grandparents. As one of the members of the third-generation families in Binondo, he sees Chinese-Filipinos as one of the many ethnic groups in the Philippines. "We are not as foreign as you think we are. We just as local as everyone else. Our ethnicity is Chinese, but we are Filipino citizens especially the third generation who were born and raised in Manila."

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Mr. Dy's observation of the difference between the first generation/ recent migrants and the third generation Chinese-Filipino is that the first generation/ recent migrants value their being merchants. The motivation for migrating to Manila was to make a living, to put up business. "They are more industrious while us, third generation are already in different fields and have more freedom in terms of choosing what career or profession best suits us."

This brings us to question if the first generation recent migrants had more difficulty assimilating with Filipinos than the third generation Chinese-Filipinos. The cultural traits of the first generation recent migrants are more traditional, as they still practice most of the Chinese beliefs and practices at home compared to the third generation Chinese-Filipinos wherein some of them could no longer speak Chinese. In an interview with about fifteen (15) third generation Chinese-Filipinos for this paper, eleven (11) of them said that they did not encounter difficulty assimilating with the Filipinos because they were born and raised in Manila and knew how to speak English and Filipino. Despite studying in Chinese schools, interaction with Filipinos whether in work and other public spaces, was "not at all problematic except for the usual stereotyping and perception that they are either rich Chinese or abusive Chinese business owners."

Whether it was difficult or not for the first generation and third generation Chinese-Filipinos to assimilate themselves with Filipinos in Binondo, it is still apparent that stereotyping is present in both generations up to this day. This brings us to explore the Chinese

home communities in Binondo to understand their struggles.

In the case of Mr. Stephen Pamorada, a cultural worker and a third generation Chinese-Filipino living Binondo, his growing up years in the district was relatively peaceful. His grandparents were living in central Binondo near the market place since the 1940s and owned a building with a grocery in the ground floor and their residence is in the upper floors. Since most of his family members still lives in the building, it can be considered as a clan house. By definition, a clan house is a place where a group of people of common descent lives. Since they have established a business and a place of residence in the area, people in the area have a high respect for them. This proves Amoyot's research in "The Manila Chinese" that "there is a regional association called t'ung hsiang hui or home hsiang association where it groups people according to origin. Same as a small village with members having the same surname. Mr. Pamorada's family clan house in Binondo may be due to circumstance. Nevertheless, the elements of clan house are evident in the intent of the family to maintain kinship and unity.

However, respect for a clan in a community does not necessarily equate to assimilation because stereotyping still needs to be addressed. The common remark that the Chinese are rich or in a higher social status is a stigma that does not go away according to Mr. Pamorada.

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### Tsinoy 'bridging the gap' towards acceptance

The word “acceptance” especially for the Chinese-Filipinos is part of the process towards integration and assimilation with the rest of the Binondo community. The district is composed of recent Chinese migrants, Chinese-Filipinos and Filipinos, and while the exact number of “Tsinoy,” Chinese migrants and Filipinos are unknown and the Philippine Statistics Authority only has the total population of 18,000 as of 2016, the Chinese-Filipino community in particular, are making an effort to “bridge the gap” between the Chinese and Filipinos towards understanding and acceptance of their ethnicity.

The *Kaisa Para sa Kaunlaran* (Unity for Progress) is non-government, non-profit organization founded in 1987 with an objective to “integrate ethnic Chinese into mainstream Philippines society.” (Kaisa 2017). By being involved in cultural, educational, and social work, Kaisa has put itself in the map of social development. The present Kaisa headquarters in Intramuros (a place where the native Chinese was not allowed to live) has a museum of the Chinese history in the Philippines and a library collection of books on Chinese studies. In 1992, Kaisa also became popular for coining the term *Tsinoy*, a contraction of *Tsino* (for Chinese) and *Pinoy* (for Filipino). It is an attempt not only to popularize the term itself but to re-introduce the Chinese-Filipino as Filipinos.

In the museum of Kaisa called *Babay Tsinoy*, there is a particular wing dedicated to prominent figures in Philippine history and society. Names like Jose Rizal, the national hero and Corazon Aquino, the former Philippine

president offer visitors an understanding that Philippines is diverse and only through an understanding and acceptance that the Philippines has been diverse from the very beginning and no race or ethnic can claim exclusivity to a particular place. It is only through this awareness and acceptance of diversity that the Filipinos can move forward to becoming more educated and tolerant of other groups of a different ethnic backgrounds.

However, the ‘gap’ may still remain for most Filipinos, as stigma towards the Chinese-Filipino remains. A long-time Chinese-Filipino resident explained that due to the influx of Chinese from the mainland in the recent years, “there has been an increase in the negative perception of the Chinese in Binondo in general and since almost all Chinese in the district look the same despite being a resident, Filipinos, especially those working for the recent migrants as store helper or house helper, perceive all Chinese as abusive for “paying them a pittance for working more than 12 hours.”

This generalization of the Chinese affects Filipino and Chinese relations especially with the rise of the Chinese tycoons as presented in the Philippine mass media. The richest man in the Philippines is a Chinese-Filipino who reportedly hires a huge number of employees on a contractual basis. In the small businesses owned by Chinese-Filipino families and recent Chinese migrants, all store helpers are Filipino except for the person attending the cash register who is either the son or daughter of the owner or the owner himself/ herself. The divide is even more evident in the district and as one of the Filipinos employed by the Chinese-Filipino said, “*Ang tagal na namin dito. Halos isang dekada na pero minimum pa rin*

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*ang sinasabod namin! Ang yaman na ng instik na yan!"* (We've been here for almost a decade but we are still minimum wage earners! That Chinese is already rich!).

We return to the problem of this clash between the Chinese and Filipinos as more sociological in origin. Tracing the history of repression and persecution of the ethnic Chinese in Manila and other parts of the Philippines, it is undeniable that the Chinese thrive wherever they go. This cultural trait of successfully making a living in a foreign land may not be entirely exclusive to them. However, centuries of diaspora and oppression made an impact on their race and culture hence the lowly Chinese coolie carrying two baskets of goods and selling them on the streets of Manila from morning until evening has more advantage to a Filipino or Spanish closing shop in the afternoon to take a nap.

The trait of diligence is ingrained but what is criticized is the monopoly of work and business run by the Chinese. Their dominance is a threat, as mentioned in previous historical accounts hence laws were passed to restrict them from entering and/or leaving the Philippines. With all these exclusions of Chinese into Manila society, they were left to adjust or improvise to survive. The 1954 retail trade nationalization law gravely affected small retail business of Chinese-Filipinos hence they resorted to selling wholesale thus forcing them to change their line or business or increasing their purchase and ballooning their deficit. The insensitivity of the laws enacted resulted to either the fall of the Chinese business owners forcing them to close shop or the rise of the new tycoons who succeeded in the wholesale business (Chu 2016).

Rupert Hooder in his analysis of the economic power of the Chinese mentioned that “the economic strength attributed to the Chinese in the Philippines is no less remarkable than in other countries in the Southeast Asia. It is commonly said that, although the Chinese constitute only one to two percent of the population, their share of market capital is between 50 to 55 percent.”

Hooder may have only focused on the recent rise of the economic power of the Chinese in the Philippines, however, such figures is similar to 300 years ago when the Chinese monopolized the galleon trade that spanned 250 years. It is easy to assume that the Chinese may have taken advantage of the circumstance, but their entrepreneurial nature cannot be denied. Nevertheless, recent call for the Chinese in the Philippines by non-governmental organizations to take part in political and social development has somehow diverted the community into focusing on helping the district and nearby communities’ living conditions, as the Chinese are always perceived to be only focused on earning money. This may not be the case for other sectors of the Chinese community, as diverse as they are in their backgrounds and interest. Literary and cultural groups in Binondo has thrived especially with the help of the social media. The third generation of Chinese-Filipinos in particular are no longer mere store cashiers or owners but are working professionals in various fields and they have also advocated for the rest of the community to be civic leaders and volunteers as well.

Historically, the ethnic Chinese are sensitive to other people in their community. In a research by Jacques Amoyot (1973), he mentioned that “the Chinese have

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tried to avoid commercial activities that would have placed them in open competition with wealthy Filipino groups and big American and Spanish interests in order not to arouse the antagonism of groups that could command political hearing.” This means that other Chinese who are interested in small-scale businesses became empathic to the needs of the rest of the community. This attempt is evident in the rise of small Chinese stores in Filipino colloquial term the sari sari store, which simply means a shop where one could buy various goods by retail. The Chinese even gave credit to Filipinos buying from their store. However, the laws passed as previously mentioned restricted the Chinese who have been restricted to even work as laborers or in other professions such as the Filipinos. This gave them limited choices to pursue a career in business/ entrepreneurship or corporate work.

Adding insult to this oppression is the unfair perception that all of the Chinese-Filipinos in Binondo belong to the upper middle class. Little did the people know that Chinese-Filipinos are from different classes and a number of them belong to the lower middle class. This stereotyping has caused tremendous harm to the Binondo community as robbers and kidnap for ransom syndicates targeted Chinese-Filipinos. From the late 1980s to mid-1990s, several Chinese-Filipinos were abducted in exchange for money. This resulted to a wider divide between the Chinese and Filipinos. The Chinese have lost their trust in the Philippine national police and the Philippine government especially when some Chinese-Filipinos who have been kidnapped were killed (Ang See 1997).

However, the anger of the Chinese community in Binondo against the apathy of the police and the government was pacified by the support of Filipino groups and community that supported the Chinese. Pressure from both the Chinese and Filipino community has helped decrease the number of kidnappings in the district. It would take a tragedy to unite Chinese and Filipinos to understand and accept each other to gradually remove the stigma and centuries-long oppression and discrimination of the ethnic Chinese and Chinese Filipinos, not just in Binondo but in the entire Philippines.

## Conclusion

The rise of the third generation Chinese-Filipinos working in multinational companies and business processing outsourcing companies at present is a good indication that the acceptance and complete assimilation of the Chinese into the community has taken the first step. Assimilation is not just by having the citizenship and residence as other Filipinos but becoming part of the community in all aspects particularly in cultural and social development. Various non-government and special interest groups formed by Chinese-Filipinos in social media are taking the lead in different cultural activities to raise awareness in the relevance of Philippine history. Aside from Kaisa that has become one of the official voices of the Chinese-Filipino community through its publications and media mileage, groups such as *Tsinoy Chinoy Life* and *Escolta Youth* headed by the younger Chinese-Filipinos in Binondo are slowly integrating into

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the mainstream Philippine society. Their regular events in the district and nearby cities bring together various groups of people from different sectors of the society. Indeed, the “troubled assimilation” may be a thing of the past if said advocacies through events and activities will be sustained in the years to come.

There are a number of limitations in this paper that the writer looks forward to seeing being addressed in future papers. A thorough research on the current demographics of ethnic Chinese and Chinese-Filipino will be helpful and relevant especially to researchers who intend to continue what this paper has started that is to know if the Chinese-Filipino community in Binondo, Manila no longer feels oppressed or discriminated. Another subject worthy of discussion in the future is the “beleaguered” relations between the recent Chinese migrants and the long-time Chinese-Filipino residents of Binondo. It has been observed through the course of this research that some Chinese-Filipinos have resentments toward the recent Chinese migrants for being “crass” and “lacking in etiquette and decency.” This divide among the Chinese may be one of the reasons why total assimilation may take a longer time. The constant migration of the ethnic Chinese in the Philippines calls for a continuous adjustment both of the Chinese-Filipino community and the Filipinos. Several groups based in Binondo such as the one in Liberty Hall on Benavidez Street may address this “silent tension” in order to improve the current efforts of the rest of community towards complete assimilation and acceptance. Moreover, the call for unity among recent Chinese migrants and Chinese-Filipino community is stronger than ever. The Binondo

community is encouraged especially by Ms. Teresita Ang See, founder of Kaisa not to be “mere bystanders and fence sitters.” Instead, they should take part in the activities to fully integrate themselves to the community.

This paper concludes that much effort is still needed for the Chinese-Filipino community to feel less insecure of their place in the community. The efforts of the community towards acceptance should not be one sided because the full support of the Filipino community as well as various Chinese-Filipino groups to come together and have one aim which is for the Chinese-Filipinos not to question their place in the community. We all look forward to a time when Binondo would still be referred to as “Chinatown” but populated by Filipinos. Eventually, Chinese-Filipinos will simply be called Filipinos and the term *Tsinoy* will become *Pinoy*.

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