

A Study of the Philippine Chinese in Cebu City: Then and Now*

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The Chinese in Cebu During the Spanish Period

Cebu has been the center of trading activities in the Visayan region of the Philippines. Trade between foreigners all over the world and the natives of Cebu began as early as the first century AD. Following merchants, Moslem missionaries reached the Visayas Islands and many of them settled in Cebu. Magellan landed in Cebu in 1521 and was killed by King Lapulapu in the battle of Mactan. In 1565, Legaspi landed in Cebu and built Fort San Pedro. Chinese traders had come to Cebu before this time, but it was only in the 1590s, when Cebu briefly participated in the lucrative galleon trade, that they had reason to settle down in Cebu. The Chinese settled in Parian, which evolved into a distinct settlement and a market and trading center. A famous chronicler and a superior of the Jesuit residence in Cebu, Pedro Chirino, wrote in 1600 that the newly-arrived Jesuits preached in the "Chinese quarter of the city" which had "more than two hundred souls and only one Christian." He also said that the Chinese had come in their trading junks and had

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set up quarters with their Chinese, Japanese, Moluccan, and Visayan wives and servants (Briones, 1983). In 1863, Spain declared that the port of Cebu be opened again to foreign trade to show to the world their claim that they have "discovered us" (Quimat, 1980). In the commercial boom of the nineteenth century, the Chinese *mestizos* of Parian were the most active entrepreneurs in agriculture and commerce. Responding to the demand for agricultural crops in the world market, they fanned out to the hinterlands of Cebu and the neighboring southern provinces to acquire lands, advance capital to farmers, and broker in the delivery of sugar, hemp and tobacco to the British, Spanish and American firms in the Cebu port area (Briones, 1983).

Although Cebu was adversely affected by the removal of the seat of the Spanish colonial government to Manila, it still had many inhabitants, particularly *Sangleys* (Echevarria, 1974). The Chinese community in Cebu was formed during the period of Spanish occupation, whose origins or roots are Southern Fujian. Over 80 percent of Philippine Chinese were from four counties in Southern Fujian: Chin-chiang, T'ung-an (including Amoy or Xiamen), Lung-ch'i, and Nan-an during the period of 1850-1890 (Wickberg, 1965). Of the total passengers bound for the Philippines in the late nineteenth century, about 13 per cent of those embarked at Amoy. In Cebu, Tung-an/Amoy migrants formed the largest group (Doeppers, 1986). As a result, the Chinese from Xiamen played a very important role in the economic life of Cebu in the late 19th century. The following are two examples. In Cebu, one important Chinese exporter, Lucio Herrera Uy Mayan, had as many as 45 employees – some worked in Cebu City, others were based in the smaller communities of that province. Uy Mayan was a *cabecilla*, in the sense of being the "head of a firm" or an "employer." In addition, a *cabecilla* was usually a large wholesaler of imported goods and export produce (Wickberg, 1965). The other merchant-businessman from Xiamen, Dy Yangco, operated two stores in 1891 in the commercial district of Cebu, two in the municipality of Samboan, and one each in Ginatilan and Malabuyoc, all on the southwestern coast of the island-province. Most of these stores were licensed to sell European textiles, hardware, hats, toys, and native footwear. Dy was also licensed to speculate in "products of the country"

including sugar, coffee, and maize, as well as in petroleum products (Doeppers, 1986). Due to the prominent economic position of the Xiamen group relative to other Chinese groups, they also had more political clout compared to others. Before the end of the Spanish period, Uy Mayan was appointed as *Capitan* of the Chinese in Cebu by the Spanish colonial government (Keh Kong Hooy, 1949). To sum up, as a foreign resident society, the Chinese society in Cebu City began to take shape during the period of Spanish occupation.

The Chinese in Cebu During the American Period

The Philippine Chinese society in Cebu City fared well during the period of American rule in the Philippines. The population of Chinese in Cebu City increased sharply during the period of 1918-1939 (Table 3.1).

Table 3.1 The Population of Chinese in Cebu, 1918-1939

Year	Population	Percent Change
1918	1,662	-
1933	2,697	62.3
1939	6,117	126.8

Source: Purcell (1965)

As a result, the population of the Chinese in Cebu surpassed that in Iloilo, and Cebu became the second largest region of Philippine Chinese next to Manila. Both commerce and industry thrived in the Chinese community in Cebu during this period. Some Chinese enterprises were successfully established. Uy Matiao & Company, Inc. was established in 1914. It had an authorized capital of P400,000 and paid up capital of P300,000. It had a per share value of P1,000, with annual turnover of P5,000,000. Its business included importing, exporting, and shipping (The Commercial and Industrial Manual of the Philippines, 1940). Another enterprise, Uy Pek Tang & Company, Inc., was established in 1936, with P24,000 of capital stock which was divided into 2,400 shares (or a per share value of P10). It had P6,310 of subscribed and paid up capital. Its business included the

manufacture and sale of umbrellas, hats, handkerchiefs and neckties (The Commercial and Industrial Manual of the Philippines, 1940). These two enterprises indicate that besides commerce, the Cebu Chinese were actively engaged in industry as well.

As regards social organization, the Cebu Chinese Association was established in 1912. Several rich businessmen were its founders, including Tan Unchuan, Alfonso Sycip, Manuel Gotianuy, and Tomas Liao Lamco among others. Most of them were from Xiamen. In 1923, the Cebu Chinese Association was reorganized and became the Cebu Chinese Chamber of Commerce (Keh Kong Hooy, 1949). In the middle of the 1930s, there were 18 members of the council of this organization, among them nine were from Xiamen, eight were from Jinjiang (Chin-chiang), and one was from Nanan (The Philippine-Chinese Annual, 1935). Although the group from Jinjiang seemed to grow fast, the group from Xiamen continued to dominate Cebu Chinese society. The Cebu Chinese Chamber of Commerce was a leading organization of the Chinese society of Cebu, and served as their voice and that of the Cebu Chinese population as a whole to the outside world. Predating the Cebu Chinese Association was the Cebu Chinese Charitable Association, Inc., which was founded in 1909. Under this were two organizations: Chong It Wa Hospital and the Cebu Chinese Cemetery (Keh Kong Hooy, 1949). Other major Chinese associations in Cebu were the Cebu Cantonese Association (1924), Cebu Long Se Temple, Inc. (Lee's Association, 1934), and Cebu Tai Guan Temple, Inc. (Ong's Association, 1936) (See Chinben, 1976).

With respect to cultural and educational undertakings, the Cebu Chinese succeeded in setting up several schools during the American period. One of the most important schools was the Cebu Chinese High School which was founded in 1915. Not only did Chinese businessmen in Cebu City contribute money to this school, but also Chinese merchants in other cities and towns as well. This school became one of the earliest Chinese schools in the Philippines (Keh Kong Hooy, 1949). The first principal of Cebu Chinese High School, Chun-tse Liu, and most of the teachers and staff members in the school came from Xiamen. Considering these activities and achievements, it can be said that the Cebu Chinese society was being consolidated during the American Period.

The Development of Cebu Chinese Society After World War II

The First Period, 1946-1965

During this period, some essential changes began to take place in Cebu Chinese society. For one, the population of the Cebu Chinese during the period of 1948-1965 increased sharply, especially after 1953 (Table 3.2).

Table 3.2 The Population of Chinese in Cebu, 1948-1965

Year	Population	Percent Change
1948	5,062	-
1953	8,731	72.5
1965	25,000	186.3

Source: Chen Yande (1998:42)

Up until now, Cebu City continues to be the second largest region of Philippine Chinese next to Manila. The Chinese played a most important role in rebuilding Cebu City after the war. Most of the buildings were constructed by Chinese businessmen during the period of 1945-1948, as shown in Table 3.3.

Table 3.3 Construction in Cebu City, 1945-1948

Year	Reinforced Concrete Buildings	Value (Peso)	Other Buildings	Value (Peso)
1945-46	200	1,160,370	1,623	1,107,766
1946-47	537	5,857,715	902	653,626
1947-48	771	10,308,403	942	598,550
Total	1,058	17,326,488	3,467	2,353,942

Source: Tirso Uy Tengsu, *Contribution to the Rebuilding of Cebu City by the Chinese*.

Without the participation of the Chinese, the economy of Cebu City would not have recovered as quickly. We can also see that Chinese participation has become an indispensable part of Cebu's local economy. On the other hand, since the beginning of the 1950s, new immigrants from Mainland China had ceased to come to Cebu, and it became difficult for the Cebu Chinese to keep in touch with their communities of origin. The Cebu Chinese were forced to reconsider their future and the character of Cebu Chinese society began to change as they pondered settlement in Cebu. Furthermore, most exporting and importing activities were promoted by Chinese merchants during the period of 1947-1948 (Table 3.4).

Table 3.4 Export and Import Transactions in Cebu Port, 1947-1948

Year	Importing (Peso)	% Change	Exporting (Peso)	% Change	Surplus (Peso)	% Change
1947	28,309,166	-	133,194,130	-	104,884,964	-
1948	66,176,909	134	194,875,085	45	128,698,176	23

Source: Tirso Uy Tengsu, *Contribution to the Rebuilding of Cebu City by the Chinese*.

The Second Period, 1965-1975

During the period between the 1950s and the 1970s, the growth of the Philippine Chinese population was mostly due to natural increase (Wickberg, 1992). However, many Chinese from other cities and towns in the Philippine archipelago, especially those from the Visayas and Mindanao, migrated to Cebu City and settled there (Chen Yande, 1993). As a result, the population of the Cebu Chinese further increased. Although it is difficult to know the population of Cebu Chinese during this period, some estimates have been attempted. According to some documents, seven per cent of the total population in Cebu City was Chinese during the period of 1960s to 1970s. There were about 450,000 people in Cebu City by the end of the 1960s and the Chinese population of Cebu was about 31,500 during this period (Cebu Eastern School Golden Anniversary Souvenir Book, 1965).

The Chinese economy in Cebu became more active than before. Many enterprises were founded during this period, such as Sulpicio Lines, Sulpicio Marketing Corp., White Gold Inc., White Gold House, and Cenapro Chemical Corp. Meanwhile, the old enterprises also expanded. For instance, Lu Do & Lu Yun Corp., which owned and operated the world's biggest copra crushing plant, was cited in 1965 for "Outstanding performance in the crushing of coconut for oil, in the export of coconut products, and in the production and processing of corn" in the world (A Brief Story of Lu Do and Lu Yun Corporation, 1992:6). Another example was William Lines, Inc., which in 1966 sold P10.9 million on an asset base of P12.8 million without a single centavo in outstanding loans (The Story of William Lines, Inc., 1992: 16).

During this period, the population of the group from Jinjiang and Nanan grew, even surpassing the group from Xiamen (Table 3.5). Eventually, the Jinjiang group became the biggest and dominated Cebu Chinese society.

Table 3.5 The Origin of Chinese Groups in Cebu, 1965

Origin	Percent
Jinjiang	56.86
Nanan	21.57
Xiamen	9.80
Others from Fujian	7.85
Guangdong	3.92
Total	100.00

Source: Chen Yande (1998: 45).

The Third Period, 1975-present

In 1975, the Philippine government recognized the People's Republic of China, and diplomatic relations between the two countries were established. Then President Ferdinand Marcos

relaxed the terms of acquiring Philippine nationality. From then on, most Chinese in Cebu became Chinese Filipinos. In the beginning of 1990s, there were about 60,000 Chinese in Cebu City, or almost 10 percent of Cebu's total population (Chen Yande, 1998: 42).

The economic contributions of Chinese Filipinos is one of the important pillars of Cebu's economy. In 1992, Governor Emilio Osmeña Jr. said: "There is no Chinatown in Cebu, because the whole town is Chinatown" (*Forbes*, 1992). Today, Cebu City is the country's busiest center of interisland shipping, busier even than Manila, a fact which may be attributed to Chinese business. For example, based on gross revenues in 1990, William Lines, Inc. ranked 103rd among the country's top 1,000 corporations and ranked first in the shipping industry, serving 24 domestic ports (The Story of William Lines, Inc. p. 24). Also today, Cebu City is the biggest industrial and commercial center in Visayas and Mindanao, which may be due to Chinese business. Since the 1990s, many Chinese companies have developed faster than before such as Shemberg Marketing Corp., Benedicto & Sons Group, and Lim Tian Teng Son & Co., i.e., in addition to the companies mentioned earlier.

After 1975, the Cebu Chinese Chamber of Commerce changed its name to the Cebu Filipino-Chinese Chamber of Commerce. Since the late 1970s, other associations were established. For instance, the Southern Philippines Ha Ho Fraternity, Inc. was founded in 1979 by a group from Xiamen. Perhaps they thought that they did not need to found their hometown association when they dominated Cebu Chinese society, but had felt the need to do so when other groups came into the picture (Interview transcript, January 1993). The organization serves both Chinese and Filipinos and have programs such as helping poor children go to school and helping disaster victims. Other Filipino-Chinese organizations also emerged.

Worship is one of the important aspects of Chinese social life in Cebu City. The Cebu Taoist Temple - Teng Kong Po Tian - is the biggest and most important Chinese temple in Cebu. It was formally organized in 1959 at Leon Kilat Street, and was moved to Beverly Hills in 1972. It was constructed to include various temples such as Pront Temple, Temple of the Supreme Deity, the Temple of Ma

Zu Goddess and the Temple of Land Deity. Many people, including Chinese and Filipinos, go to the Cebu Taoist Temple to worship deities nowadays. Moreover, the temple is concerned with various humanitarian causes such as providing assistance to victims of calamities, the hungry, the sick, and the welfare of the community as a whole (Cebu Taoist Temple, 1992:1).

Education is also one of the prominent features of the Chinese presence in Cebu. The former Cebu Chinese High School changed and expanded to become Cebu Eastern College. In accordance with the order by President Ferdinand Marcos, all Chinese schools became Filipino-Chinese schools after 1976, and the Cebu Chinese High School followed suit. Cebu Eastern College now offers nursery school, primary school, middle school, high school and college. Even before 1970, English was already a major teaching and learning language in the college. Students include not only Chinese but Filipinos as well. The Cebu Eastern College was awarded as the most outstanding institution of learning during the golden celebration of Cebu City Charter Day on February 24, 1987 (Cebu Eastern College Diamond Anniversary Souvenir Book, 1990:7).

Moreover, the Cebu Chinese have taken an active part in political activities since the early 1980s. A good example is that of Augusto Gotianuy, a famous Chinese businessman who was voted as Vice Mayor of Cebu City in the mid-1980s. In addition, the Cebu Chinese also promoted relations between China and the Philippines. In 1984, Xiamen City and Cebu City forged a sister-cities agreement, a favorable development for the Cebu Chinese, especially for the Southern Philippines Ha Ho Fraternity, Inc. (Interview transcript, January 1993).

Thus, the character of Cebu Chinese society has changed since the 1950s. Compared with Chinese communities in other Philippine cities, the Cebu Chinese are distinct in several respects. First, the history of the Cebu Chinese community is longer than Chinese communities elsewhere in the Philippines. Second, the share of the Chinese population in Cebu is larger than in other cities. Third, the relationship between the Chinese and the local population in Cebu is better than that in other cities. Fourth, one particular group,

the Xiamen group had dominated the Cebu Chinese society for a long time, a phenomenon not found in other cities. The present society is a national minority society while the historical one was a foreign resident society.

Conclusion

There are hundreds of thousands of Chinese communities all over the world. In Southeast Asia, many Chinese urban communities played very significant roles historically and in present times. Although they are different from one another, they have something in common in that they contributed towards national and regional development. Nowadays, they have become inseparable parts of native society and some aspects of their culture had been integrated with the culture of the host society. However, these communities such as the Cebu Chinese have not completely given up their Chinese tradition.

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