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## UNDERSTANDING *TSINOY* FAMILIES: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE AND MORE

*Tsinoy*, an abbreviation for *Tsinong Pinoy* or *Tsinong Filipino*, was a newly coined term representing a group of Filipinos of Chinese descent. Born in the Philippines after the Pacific War, the *Tsinoy*s (or Chinese Filipinos) belong to a relatively younger generation who are Filipinos by birth and by heart. The *Tsinoy*s identify with the concerns of the country, while simultaneously taking pride in the richness of their Chinese heritage. *Tsinoy*s occupy a large part of the heterogeneous Chinese community in contemporary Philippine society.

Approximately 10 percent of present day ethnic Chinese community are the first-generation Chinese immigrants who hailed from Southern China, immigrated and settled in the Philippines in search of greener pastures due to poverty then. Most of them were born before the war, use Chinese names, speak Chinese as their first language, are active in family associations, socialize mostly with Chinese, practice traditional Chinese customs and traditions, and still maintain linkages with and invest in their hometowns. For them, China is their Mother country. The remaining 90 percent are Philippine-born (even fourth- or fifth-generation *Tsinoy*s). They are less than 60 years of age, have Christian names, speak Filipino or English as their first language, socialize with both Chinese and Filipinos, are active in religious and civic organizations, attended Filipino schools, quite Westernized in thoughts and deeds, and have no memories of or affiliation towards China. The only country that they have known is the Philippines. These are the *Tsinoy*s. Thus, between the first-generation Chinese and the *Tsinoy*s lie vast differences in terms of socio-cultural and politico-civic orientations. In addition to these two groups are approximately 40,000 new immigrants.

Why, then, a paper on the *Tsinoy* families?



I believe that when we begin to understand what *Tsinoy* families are, we will learn to veer from the often-simplistic notion perceived of the study of families. It is delimiting to discuss about the Chinese family in the Philippines, in the same manner as it is about the Filipino family. The nature of families, the dynamism involved, and the constantly changing contexts families find themselves in should lend a pluralistic view in our understanding of them.

Secondly, when we begin to understand its dynamics, we will also learn to appreciate their uniqueness that comes from multifaceted interactions with the Philippine environment and the Chinese heritage. Families, as semi-closed systems, transact with the larger society and affect the roles of family members; the roles performed are also brought back to the various systems the family interacts with.

As such, this paper attempts to describe *Tsinoy* families and the dynamics that happen within it and with other social units.

In the process, some comparisons and contrasts are made between *Tsinoy* and Chinese or other Filipino families. In this process, too, I would like to commence, through this paper, with my own possession of experiences, observations, and knowledge about *Tsinoy* families. Raised in one, having one, and being a part of several others, I would like to bring to the fore my own consciousness of this social phenomenon, reflect on it, and integrate it into a more holistic picture of who and what *Tsinoy* families are. To start with one's self is not an easy task; after all, we are most often ignorant about ourselves than others. In this process, a phenomenological perspective is presented: intuitive insights and interpretations abound, and, in some cases, confirmed by what others say or think. In the end, too, this paper aims to open doors towards further empirical research regarding *Tsinoy* families.

### Preservation of the Family as the Basic Social Unit

*Tsinoy*s, like their forefathers, believe that the family still is the nucleus of all relationships, and still is the basic and most important structure or unit of society. I believe this is an influence of the teachings of Kong Zi, Chinese folk beliefs and customary practices. Equally influential are the very own family-centered orientation of the Filipino culture and the normative standards of Philippine society.

Although most *Tsinoy*s may not be aware of philosophical and cultural bases to this value, the importance that they give to the family can very well be observed in the interactions that happen in the home. Role expectations of *Tsinoy* parents for their children illustrate this: sons, to continue the "legacy" of the family, are trained to take the role of a father and to manage their father's business; on the other hand, daughters are trained to do household chores, take the role of a mother, care for her younger siblings, and to find herself a good partner to begin her own family. Other institutions in our society, like the kinship system and the schools, perpetuate the same ideals in the socialization of Filipino children. Thus, *Tsinoy* children are reared to value family life and to preserve its integrity.

The *Tsinoy* family is viewed as a support system in itself, an economic unit, but also a socio-emotional one as a sense of togetherness prevails and serves as common ground of what the family is — "loving, laughing, living in harmony, sharing, caring." The traditional Chinese family then functioned primarily on the bases of the duties of its members to each other. Relationships were highly structured so that a daughter-in-law knew exactly what are expected of her by her mother-in-law. Priority was given to the in-laws' relationship, and not the groom's, with the bride. However, the affective domain of family life is elevated now on a different ground in *Tsinoy* families. In the urban areas, married children and their families living with their parents are still commonplace. As much as possible, harmony is maintained among all members. When conflicts arise among in-laws, though, much effort is now expanded to preserve the nuclear family. Some young *Tsinoy* wives also expect their husbands not to be the head of the family or a breadwinner alone, but also to be a guidance counselor, a "pillar of strength," and a supporter of the wife and her goals in life. The growing sense of autonomy among most urban *Tsinoy* families, as well as other Filipino families, is a common observation. Our exposure to Western values is definitely a significant factor operating here.

### Love of Children

The birth of a child to a *Tsinoy* couple means parenthood, although they do not necessarily assume, or deliberately desire for, a new status in the family as is the usual perspective among the Chinese whose consciousness for one's roles and duties or obligations is attached to the position one occupies in the social circle of familial relationships. In the latter, we find Chinese parents who express concern that their children must get married and settle down as soon as they can. Implicitly, there is the desire to step up the social ladder as grandparents.

Nevertheless, *Tsinoy* parents, like most Filipino parents, view the presence of children as an essential for the couple-unit to become a family-unit, "to make family a reality." Children are still believed to be the natural offshoots; thus, the family is considered "defective" or "incomplete" without them. Some would even view children as sources of strength upon which the foundations of marriage can be built.

Most often, *Tsinoy*s plan for parenthood. More are cognizant of the need to space their children. Education and media contribute significantly to this growing awareness, and sometimes overly anxious desire to become the "perfect parents and to raise the intelligent superkid." The extended family members continue to provide the much-needed support system for the young *Tsinoy* parents. Although the value of children remains positive, there is a trend towards lesser number of children in *Tsinoy* families. The ideal, it seems, is three children, from the picturesque 10-children families 50 years ago. The physical, emotional, and financial demands of raising families and children in the Philippines (and perhaps globally) nowadays is the single dominant factor given for this decreasing family size.



It is not clear, however, whether *Tsinoy* parents still prefer sons over daughters. The basis of kinship in traditional China was patriliney and the most important relationship then was that of a father and son. In local usage (Hsu, 1944), "this is to insure the continuation of the smoke from the incense at ancestral shrines...to perpetuate this smoke insures the continuation of the family line." This way of life ruled the cultural mindsets of the Chinese migrants who came to our country. As such, these familial relationships were passed on from one generation to the next.

At face value, the ideal proportion of sex distribution of children given by some *Tsinoy* parents is 50-50, that is, equal number of boys and girls. Sons preserve the family name and pass this on to the next generation; they are groomed to take on the family business or to build a successful career, as this will also garner laurels and praises for the family name and reputation. Daughters, especially if they are the eldest, are depended upon to take care of the siblings and the parents in their old age; to act as mediators and counselors during difficult times for the family; and to bind the members towards the family of orientation throughout the life cycle. As more and more young *Tsinoy* women join the labor force, there is no denying that their participation in the income-earning activities of *Tsinoy* families are deemed valuable for survival.

However, it has also been observed that *Tsinoy*s still pay particular notice of the absence or presence of a son in families. A common advice given to *Tsinoy* mothers who have borne daughters is "*ko pia'n tsi ge tapo!*" or literally, "fight for a son!" To bear a son was the chief responsibility of our great-grandmothers. To fail to do so is to fail as a wife and as a person. Chinese herbal medicines and concoctions which "prepare" the uterine and vaginal environments for a greater possibility of conceiving sons or daughters abound. It has been observed that the herbal medicines "for sons" are more famous and shared around the social circles of Chinese and *Tsinoy* women intergenerationally.

It is difficult to conclude at this time whether this seeming preference is a natural desire among parents to have both sons and daughters, for in some cases, *Tsinoy* couples remain in the child-bearing stage until they have at least a son or a daughter. Others would remark that the observed growing female populace be sufficient motivation that couples must bear more sons than daughters. I tend to believe the seeming preference is still culturally and socially influenced.

## Filial Piety

Filial piety encompasses the absolute subordination of a child to the wishes of the parents. The Confucian virtues *yi* and *li* ensure that one is aware of his/her duties and to concretely express these in all social, habitual, and customary practices. Kong Zi said:

*While parents live, serve them with Li. When they are dead, bury them with Li and sacrifice to them with Li (Co, 1992).*

Respect for and obedience to one's elders are forms of filial piety and are obligations instilled among *Tsinoy* children in their early childhood life. The socialization process in the *Tsinoy* home is rich in admonitions to greet elders whenever the child sees or visits one, to control one's anger, to offer something with two hands, to sacrifice one's self for the comfort of the older person. The curriculum in schools offering Chinese language education abound in examples or illustrations of how children can exercise filial piety through the stories of historically great Chinese persons, folktales, and other forms of literature discussed in class. A vividly remembered story was about a peasant boy, who, out of great love or piety for his father, lies down in his father's mosquito-filled room every night before his father goes to bed, allows the insects to feed on him, and spares his father from the satisfied mosquitoes.

The growing *Tsinoy* adolescent and young adult are constantly exposed by their parents to the intricacies of their business and occupation, with the expectation that one among the siblings will take over the family business (most often, the eldest son), or, at least, venture into one in the future. Importance is given to "building one's own" and not to "*thue lang than tsi,*" or "earn profits for others." Most Chinese and *Tsinoy* parents are businessmen and encourage their children to become one, not necessarily because the Chinese control the economy or that they are inherently adept at doing business, but because this was the most natural consequence of a Philippine historical experience where "trading was the only venue of livelihood opened to them during colonial times" (Ang-See, 1990). Dutifully, a considerable number of *Tsinoy* young adults take up commerce — or engineering-related programs in our universities. Majority joins their parents in the world of trade and industry.

A slowly growing number of *Tsinoy* young adults have been observed to enter professions other than commerce. It would be a justified observation to say that in the process of doing so, various family discussions would have ensued before this is finally decided upon. This scenario does not imply disrespect for one's elders, for, very much similar to other Filipino children, *Tsinoy* children still seek their parents' blessings before any undertaking is pursued. The concerns of the family, and its coherent functioning, remain high among priorities. However, as the parents come more and more from the younger generation, the absolutism in parental rule diminishes and children are given more room to make their own decisions.

## Kinship Ties

*Tsinoy* families continue to be patrilineal in its kinship system. Between two family affairs, for example, *Tsinoy*s are obliged and expected to attend the affairs of families on the father's side. *Tsinoy* parents become more lenient of their married daughter's participation, but expect their married son and his family to do so. Special occasions are celebrated first with paternal relatives — this is also a form of expression of one's filial piety. After all, the father-son relationship is the cornerstone of all other relationships in the family and society according to Confu-



cian philosophy. As such, the paternal clan and the father's family or orientations are important. *Tsinoy* couples aspire for their own dwelling, but if need be, they live most often with the husband's parents. It is a rare sight for the husband to be living with his in-laws. Various extended family arrangements remain patrilineal.

However, *Tsinoy* families are gradually becoming more bilateral in terms of forming affective ties with one's kin. More and more *Tsinoy*s are observed to be equally close with both sides of kinsmen. This direction may be attributed to the rapidly increasing number of *Tsinoy* women with tertiary-level education. A more egalitarian atmosphere is perhaps provided in the educational and work environments. Exposed to more varied concepts and ideas in school and in the workplace. *Tsinoy* women make use of the support available from their families of orientation. A *Tsinoy* working mother can easily utilize her parents' home as halfway house for the children after school. Maternal uncles and aunts are more depended upon to baby-sit in times of need. Leisure can also be easily spent with cousins from both sides. With modernization, more venues of interactions among families are available.

### Transitional-Traditional Roles

As pointed out in the earlier sections, the role of the *Tsinoy* woman is changing from one of a pure housewife to a working woman who still straddles between work and home environments. This transitional role encompasses the housewife, worker, and mother subroles also found among Filipino women nowadays (Illo, 1977).

The commitment to the improvement of a family life and, thus, the need to augment its income is still the dominant incentive for participating in the labor force than the commitment to build a career. A *Tsinoy* mother can very well advise her daughter to pursue a college degree program, excel in her studies, graduate with flying colors, and work in the family business or in a reputable company, but not so much as to build a career that it will be difficult for her "to find a suitable husband" who might be threatened by her accomplishments. After all, the locus of these endeavors is to enhance her traditional role as homemaker, with the extras of equipping herself with knowledge and skills as a competent worker if need be. This viewpoint is distinct even among young single female *Tsinoy*s.

Nevertheless, schools and workplaces open more doors to *Tsinoy* women (than were available to our grandmothers) for self-improvement in terms of knowledge, attitudes, values, and skills she gains from her participation in these areas. These also provide her with more choices or options to weigh or evaluate in decision-making processes in family and community life.

Most *Tsinoy* women who work still manage the household (husband, children, helpers, relatives, and resources) when they come home. Others get part-time jobs, e.g., teaching half-day classes, direct selling children's books, rendering tutorial services, bookkeeping, which will facilitate their tasks in the home. Assisting their husbands in an enterprise, which is an expectation set "for the

good of the family," also provides flexible time for responding to more immediate domestic concerns.

It is worth mentioning here that in addition to the number of *Tsinoy* working women there is also a steady increase in *Tsinoy* overseas contract workers. For example, 60 percent of Taiwan OCWs are *Tsinoy*s. The plight of these OCWs is also propelled by the need to contribute to the needs of their families. Some of these are even mothers themselves. Proficiency in both the English and Mandarin languages is an advantage used to the fullest during their stay in Taiwan or Singapore. Many of them come back after having saved up for their children or to respond to a family concern. As such, the family, once again, stands at the center of *Tsinoy* OCWs' priorities.

*Tsinoy* fathers, on the other hand, are becoming more actively involved in child-rearing activities, e.g., in the areas of play and leisure or in making decisions concerning children. Fathers contribute to their daughters' social development, especially for the eldest or the youngest, as much as to their sons'. Fond memories of childhood with fathers are narrated by *Tsinoy* daughters.

This phenomenological perspective presented what *Tsinoy* families are and its family dynamics as these systematically transact with its Chinese heritage and with the larger Philippine environment. Changes have occurred from the families of the first-generation Chinese immigrants to the present-day families of Chinese Filipinos. Philippine realities yielded adaptive and reactive changes from *Tsinoy*s families which are very similar with other Filipino families. The cultural traditions of our forefathers have diffused into the mainstream society. As such, the reality of integration is embedded in the dynamics of family life of *Tsinoy*s as seen above.

The study, therefore, of Filipino families as a contribution to the development should not exclude an understanding of *Tsinoy* or Chinese-Filipino families; similarly, the family life of cultural groups like the Mangyans, Badjaos, and the Ifugaos form an integral picture of "Filipino families." The identity of *Tsinoy* families is rooted in Philippine soil and simultaneously takes pride in its Chinese ancestry. The richness of this experience is a treasure of wealth for all.

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## ISANG LUMANG LARAWAN

Kapag napag-uusapan ang ugnayan ng mga mamamayan ng Pilipinas at Tsina, ang larawang agad nabubuo'y ang larawan ng mga *sampan* o barkong pangalakal na nagtungo dito mula sa Tsina, puno ng mga seda at porselana at iba pang produktong Tsino, at sa pagbabalik ay naglululan naman ng mga produkto mula sa kapuluan.

Madalas ding gawing kongkretong halimbawa ng malapit na ugnayang Pilipino-Tsino ang pagdalaw sa Tsina ng delegasyong pinamunuan ni Sultan Paduka Batara ng Sulu noong 1417. Palibhasa'y romantiko at maalamat, paboritong pag-usapan ng mga mahiligin sa kasaysayan ang kuwento hinggil sa kung papaanong ang sultan ay nagkasakit at nasawi sa panahaon ng pagbibisita sa Tsina, kung kaya naman inilibing na lamang siya sa lupain ng maalamat na dragon at minabuti rin ng dalawa niyang anak na manatili sa banyagang lupain upang bantayan ang libingan ng ama. Sinasabi na hanggang ngayoy nasa Tsina pa ang ilang inapo ng sultan.

Bukod sa mga nabanggit sa itaas, kahit paano'y nababanggit din bilang kongkretong halimbawa ng ugnayan ng mga mamamayan ng dalawang bansa ang pagtutulungan ng mga rebolusyonaryong Pilipino at Tsino sa pagpapalit ng siglo. Kahit paano'y naisasama sa ilang libro ng kasaysayan ang larawan nina Dr. Sun Yat Sen at ang kinatawan ng mga Pilipinong rebolusyonaryo sa Hapon na si Mariano Ponce. Sa larawan ay nakaupo at nakasuot ng Amerikana si Sun, na siyang lider ng mga Tsinong rebolusyonaryo, samantalang nakatayo at nakasuot naman ng kimono si Ponce.

Pero di gaya ng ugnayang pangkomersiyo ng dalawang bansa na karaniwang pinag-uusapan at pinagtutuunan ng pansin, at ng maalamat na pagdalaw ng sultan sa Tsina na ginawa pang pelikula, maliban sa manaka-nakang paglalathala sa larawan nina Sun at Ponce na kapwa bigotilyo ay lubhang limitado ang naging pagtalakay sa mga popular na libro ng kasaysayan hinggil sa ugnayan at pagtutulungan ng mga rebolusyonaryong Pilipino at Tsino, kung kaya naman limitado rin ang ating kaalaman hinggil dito.