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2013

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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
RIVERSIDE

The Enigma of the Stranger:
The Chinese Filipino as Alien and Citizen

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

in

Southeast Asian Studies

by

Gloria G. Gonzales

December 2013

Thesis Committee:

Dr. Mariam Lam, Chairperson
Dr. Weihsin Gui
Dr. Hendrik Maier
Dr. Yenna Wu

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The Thesis of Gloria G. Gonzales is approved:

Committee Chairperson

University of California, Riverside

Acknowledgments

My gratitude to my thesis committee for their comments and critiques of my paper and for their mentorship: Professors Mariam Lam (chair), Weihsin Gui, Hendrik Maier and Yenna Wu. Many thanks also to Professors Richard Chu, Caroline Hau and Jodi Kim for their comments on earlier versions of sections of this thesis. However, I assume responsibility for any shortcomings and errors in this paper.

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

The Enigma of the Stranger:
The Chinese Filipino as Alien and Citizen

by

Gloria G. Gonzales

Master of Arts, Graduate Program in Southeast Asian Studies
University of California, Riverside, December 2013
Dr. Mariam Lam, Chairperson

This paper examines notions of the "alien" and the "citizen" or the outsider and insider based on the Chinese Filipino experience as portrayed in Charlson Ong's novel, *Banyaga: The Song of War* (2006). Although the Chinese have lived in the Philippine archipelago since the twelfth century, they have always been considered "banyaga" (alien or foreigner) by Filipino "natives." I argue that the marginalization of the Chinese has led them to specialization in trade and commerce, which in turn has steered them, paradoxically, towards exceptionalism. As such, I correlate Ong's "banyaga" with Georg Simmel's concept of the stranger and argue that "strangeness" positions the Chinese to become the "triumphant capitalist" and "flexible citizen" personified by the Chinese tycoon in *Banyaga*. Historically, the Chinese in the Philippines have been at the margins of society. The socio-political alienation of the Chinese in Philippine society is not only due to their race and their legal designation as aliens during various colonial and postcolonial regimes but also from their historic role as trader, middleman, mercantilist, and capitalist. The fictive re-construction of

the past in *Banyaga* exposes the limitations of legal and cultural citizenship premised on race, origins, nativity, territoriality, and monoculturalism. As a counterpoint to *Banyaga*, *The Embarrassment of Riches* (2000) is also examined in this paper. *Embarrassment*, which is a construction of the future based on the past, is a literary intervention that allows us to explore the multiple strands of national identity and the complex, even predatory, transnational processes that impact the nation-state due to increasing migration and global expansion of capitalism.

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Introduction

Manila was a colonial city in the early twentieth century. It was the time when colonial rule changed hands from the Spaniards to the Americans. Colonial Manila can be considered as a twentieth-century metropolis where Asian and Western peoples, cultures, and languages converged. Indios (“natives”), Spaniards, Americans, Chinese, mestizos and creoles lived in Manila. One could hear strains of Tagalog, Spanish, English, Hokkien, and creolized versions of these languages. Horse-drawn *calesas* plied the streets alongside American-made Studebakers.

The opening chapters of Charlson Ong’s *Banyaga: A Song of War* (2006) take place in Manila sometime in the 1920s when this changing of the colonial guards had taken place. The novel begins when five young Chinese boys, aged eight to twelve, meet and swear brotherhood aboard the Chungking ship that originates from Amoy (Xiamen in Mandarin) in southern China and is en route to Manila. The poor young boys navigate the “strange land” that is Manila, overcoming hurdles that come one after the other. By the time they reach adulthood, all four of them excel in their respective endeavors.

Banyaga, the title of Ong’s novel, is a Tagalog word that variably means alien, foreigner, or stranger. It is an appropriate title for a novel that narrates the story of Chinese migrants who settled and lived in Manila for decades but were often viewed as outsiders by their host society. The fictional *Banyaga* can be viewed as an articulation and reconstruction of the historical struggle of Chinese to become Filipino and to move from the margins to mainstream society by participating in both the economic and political endeavors of the country. As such, this historical re-

construction is viewed from the point of view of the Chinese. Since the novel parallels the historical trajectory of the Chinese in the Philippines from the turn of the 20th century to the early 2000s, I advocate a socio-historical reading of the novel as it traces the evolution of poor young migrants to “triumphant capitalists” and their transformation from Chinese to Filipino or from alien to citizen as framed by historical events. Doing a historical reading of this novel in the manner of Lisa Lowe’s critical reading against the grain¹ also means noting what has been missed or overlooked in the mainstream narration of Philippine history, which the novelist Ong fills in or highlights literarily by writing from the perspective of those who are in the margins of history, particularly the point of view of Chinese immigrants as personified by the five sworn brothers in the novel. As the Chinese are either invisible or vilified in the “native” or mainstream narration of history, Ong re-writes history to make the Chinese visible in various subjectivities, from coolies, artisans, artists, politicians, to merchants, traders, and tycoons.

While many mainstream Philippine novels are often read as a national allegory, such as the canonical works of F. Sionil Jose or Ninotchka Rosca, doing a socio-historical reading of *Banyaga* also means reading it as national allegory albeit narrated from the margins: from the point of view of a minoritized group of people in the Philippine community or nation who desires and struggles to be included in the mainstream, in the wider body politic, and in the national imaginary. Putting aside critiques of Fredric Jameson’s claim that all third world literatures are to be read as

¹ Lowe 97-127. Lowe’s reading against the grain may have been drawn from Edward Said’s contrapuntal reading elaborated in Said’s *Culture and Imperialism* (1994.)

“national allegories,”² I argue that *Banyaga* must indeed be read as a national allegory to the extent that it has to be unmasked to reveal the undercurrents of “political unconscious” or the traces of nation-making that on the surface seems to be a simple story of five young individuals who left their homeland to settle in another. As Jameson concludes, “the seemingly private necessarily projects a political dimension in the form of national allegory” and that “even the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public culture and society.”³ Jameson’s “political unconscious” refers to the Freudian/ Lacanian “desire” but in the context of its metaphysical variant: a “wish fulfillment” or an “utopian longing.”⁴ In fact, Jameson claims that an allegory’s master narrative is the story of “desire itself as it struggles against a repressive reality.”⁵ In *Banyaga*, this utopian longing is the desire of a group of strangers for political intimacy: to be part of the Philippine community or nation. While Jameson’s political unconscious refers to the longings of each opposing class in the classic Marxist sense,⁶ I read in *Banyaga* a similar utopian longing of the Chinese, not just as a class, but as an ethno-racial group, regardless of class, to be part of the communal or national imaginary. Indeed, *Banyaga* is charged as a historical narrative that is “a socially symbolic act” in itself because of its clear-

² Aijaz Ahmad and Neil Lazarus, among others, pointed out that Jameson’s claim reeks of “third worldism” or perpetuates first world and third world binary.

³ See Jameson’s “Third World Literature” and *The Political Unconscious*. Jameson argues that a cultural text is essentially an allegorical model of society as a whole or in parts thereof. For instance, a character can be viewed as a typification or figures of various classes and class fractions. See Jameson’s *The Political Unconscious*, 33.

⁴ Jameson, “Third World Literature” 64, 69.

⁵ Jameson, “Third World Literature” 67.

⁶ Jameson, *The Political Unconscious* 286.

cut, even overstretched, articulation of this desire of a minoritized group to be treated as part of the wider community.

While this paper is primarily a reading of *Banyaga* to examine the enigma of the stranger personified in the Chinese sojourner and how he segues seamlessly to become the triumphant capitalist in the person of the tycoon (“taipan”), I will examine an antagonist in Ong’s earlier novel *The Embarrassment of Riches* (2000) as a counterpoint to the discourse on the notion of the stranger and citizen in *Banyaga*. While we see the Chinese stranger desiring and longing to be part of the community in *Banyaga* and in some ways finds acceptance in society through economic success, we see the opposite in the Chinese rogue alien who uses his ability for flexible capital accumulation to subvert nation in the *Embarrassment*. Thus, I argue that these opposing views of the Chinese as alien or stranger portrayed by Ong in these two novels mediate, engage, and participate in the lively contemporary global discourse about the impact of migration and globalization and how these transnational processes bear on notions of identity, citizenship, and nation.

The Chinese in Philippine Society

Reading a novel about the Chinese in the Philippines socio-historically involves knowing the position of the Chinese in Philippine society. The long history of trade and cultural interaction between what we now call Chinese and Filipinos dates back to the Song dynasty (962-1279).⁷ While the Chinese traded and interacted with the peoples of the Philippine archipelago as far back as the tenth century, they have lived in the Philippines since the twelfth century. When the Spaniards arrived in Manila in 1570, they found there a settlement of 150 Chinese. By the time the

⁷ Charlson Ong, “Bridge too Far” x; Chu 53-54.

Americans arrived in Manila at the turn of the twentieth century, the time period when Ong's novel begins, there were about 40,000 Chinese in the Philippines and about 117,000 in 1939 as the end of the American regime drew near.⁸

Historically, the Chinese in the Philippines were generally considered aliens by law. During the Spanish rule in the Philippines, the Chinese were declared aliens by royal decree and by decree of Spanish governors and were thus subjected to severe taxation, deportations, segregation, and massacres depending on the threat they posed to ruling regimes and on the needs of the economy.⁹ When the Americans colonized the Philippines in 1898, the colonial subjects were categorized as either "Filipino" or "non-Filipino alien," with the Chinese regarded as aliens. Thus the Chinese identified themselves as "Chinese."¹⁰ In addition, during the early American regime in the Philippines and at the heels of the reign of the Qing dynasty in China at the beginning of twentieth century, the Chinese in the Philippines were considered subjects of the Chinese emperor under the Qing Nationality Law of 1909.¹¹ Thus, during the American period and during the early postcolonial regimes prior to the 1975 mass naturalization law, the Chinese in the Philippines were generally considered as aliens legally, with various exceptions (see page 34), such as the case with Chinese mestizos.¹²

Aside from this legal imposition on the Chinese as aliens historically which affected how they were perceived by Philippine state and society, historians Richard

⁸ Based on 1903/1904/1908 Census data and the 1939 Census, respectively, as cited in Chu, 292.

⁹ Jensen 3-18.

¹⁰ Chu 5.

¹¹ The 1909 Qing Nationality Law declared that all Chinese *everywhere* were subjects of the Chinese emperor. See Wilson, 4.

¹² Chinese mestizos are those who descended from intermarriages between Chinese men and local women who tend to identify themselves with the "indios." See Chu, 5.

Chu and Edgar Wickberg cite other reasons why the native discriminates against the Chinese in the Philippines. I will highlight four reasons for this discrimination of the Chinese which are pertinent to my reading of a novel that focuses on the Chinese as strangers and outsiders in their host society: (1) the racial and cultural difference of the Chinese from mainstream Philippine culture; (2) their dominance in the local economy; (3) their cross-border practices, such as sojourning and migration, which defy the commonly accepted fixed or rooted basis of a group identity of the natives; (4) their linkage to two communities or nations and their straddling between two cultures, those of China and the Philippines, making their political allegiance suspect.¹³ Note that the latter two factors, the cross-border practices of the Chinese and their dual linkages to two communities, nations, or cultures are inter-related.

Firstly, let me qualify my use of the term “native.” The native or indigenous peoples of the Philippines consist of highland and lowland tribes who still live in isolated mountain and lowland areas of the Philippines.¹⁴ They are the descendants of the original inhabitants of the Philippines who were able to resist centuries of Spanish and American colonization and in the process have retained, for the most part, their traditional customs and way of life to this day. However, for the purposes of this paper, I use “native” to refer to the more recent but long-settled population in the Philippines: the Malay “natives” of the Philippine archipelago who were called “indios” by the Spaniards during the Spanish regime and who were later known as

¹³ Chu 4; 283-289; 406-407 and Wickberg 175.

¹⁴ Historians E. P. Pattanne and William H. Scott consider the Negritos as the aboriginal people of the Philippines. Scott notes that the Spanish colonizers did not consider the Negritos as *indios* (“natives”). Because of the short stature and dark skin of Negritos, they were considered a different race from the *indios* who later became known as Filipinos. The Spaniards also considered the Chinese as another race. This illustrates that racialization, which is still operational or apparent in present day Philippine society, has its origins in colonialism.

“Filipinos” post-1898. Note that before 1898, the term “Filipinos” was used only to refer to “criollos,” the Philippine-born Spaniards.¹⁵

Regarding the first factor on racial and cultural difference, the cultural distance between the Chinese and the Filipino native are the basis of “othering” that we see literarily in Ong’s *Banyaga* and which Chu examines historically in his book entitled *Chinese and Chinese Mestizos of Manila* (2010). The physical, religious, and cultural differences of the Chinese from the natives are the reasons why the Chinese are mocked, ridiculed, or looked down upon by the natives. Hence, I note with interest Ong’s preference for “banyaga” as the title and subject of his novel instead of “dayuhan,” which also means foreigner, outsider, or stranger in Tagalog. The word “dayuhan” is merely used to refer to persons.¹⁶ On the other hand, “banyaga” not only applies to a person but all things foreign, such as language, religion, or culture. For the native, the Chinese do not only look foreign but their language, religion, culture, customs and traditions are also foreign and perplexing, making the Chinese “inscrutable” to the native. Thus, the word “banyaga” encapsulates in a single word the comprehensive foreignness of the Chinese to the native. It is not only race that serves as the marker of difference, but so too is the culture that accompanies race.

The second reason why the native discriminates against the Chinese is a matter of economics: the Chinese dominance in local economy from the pre-colonial to the colonial or post-colonial eras. While the Chinese were influential in the pre-colonial barter trading, they eventually dominated in the retail and wholesale trade during the colonial period and to the other aspects of trade and industry during

¹⁵ Wickberg 7, 53.

¹⁶ Rubino 106; Panganiban 125.

contemporary times. I will return to this topic for this essay since economics is central to the study of the Chinese merchant and its exceptional version, the tycoon.

On the matter of the cross-border practices of the Chinese, I highlight sojourning and migration because two of the novel's protagonists acquire their financial or social capital through sojourning to Manila and the novel highlights the migration of the five sworn brothers. Sojourning is a form of temporary migration that has often been associated with the Chinese.¹⁷ Sojourners hark back to the early days of Chinese maritime trading in East and Southeast Asia and sojourning has governed the laws of supply and demand for labor and products between China and their markets. Sojourning reached its peak during the coolie trade of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century where Chinese were contracted by foreign agents to work overseas, from the gold mines of California to the plantations of Peru.¹⁸ Staying on for long periods of time in their employment abroad, the Chinese sojourners remit the wages they earn to support families back home in China. Then they return home at the end of the contract. Depending on family needs or the beckoning of economic opportunity, they are most likely to go overseas again. Historian Chu notes that the Chinese merchants of turn-of-the twentieth century Manila are precursors of modern transnationalism.¹⁹ Their lifestyle and practices involve sojourning, border crossing, saddling between the boundaries of China and

¹⁷ Mackie xiv.

¹⁸ Wang 4-5; McKeown. Wang notes a subtle difference between coolies and sojourners: coolies belong to the labor or working class while sojourners are a trading class.

¹⁹ See Chu 91-143. By transnationalism, I refer to the processes by which migrants create and maintain multiple social relations that link together their countries of origin and settlement, hence the terms "migrant transnationalism" and "transmigrants." See Basch, et al, 7. Due to the increasing number and prominence of the overseas Chinese and the rise of the tiger economies of East and Southeast Asia in the late 1990s, Aihwa. Ong and Donald Nonini identified a specific strand of transnationalism: "Chinese transnationalism." Chinese transnationalism is a culturally distinctive domain within the strategies of capital accumulation that emerged at a time when trans-Pacific trade surpassed trans-Atlantic trade, shifting the focus of international trade to the Asia-Pacific region, ushering what is known as the Pacific Century. See Nonini and Ong, 4, 11.

the Philippines, both territorially and culturally, and engaging with other parts of Asia and even the Western world. Their migration networks based on family, clan, or ancestral village are comparable to today's transnational and globalized networks.

Chinese sojourning illustrates why the Chinese, although a stranger, is a familiar one in the Philippines. Since the tenth century, the Hokkiens from the southern Fujian province have been a seafaring people. Sojourning traders and merchants traveled to barter or trade in the port cities of maritime East and Southeast Asia, from Yushu, Ryukyu, to Manila and Batavia. Early archaeological findings indicate that the early Hokkiens were canoe-builders and Fujian was in fact the shipbuilding center in the early third century. Known for their commercial acumen and environmental adaptability, they traveled to trade hubs in pursuit of business opportunity. Since they waited for the monsoon to change course for their return voyages, the Hokkiens tended to stay overseas for long periods of time.²⁰ This travel pattern explains the presence of many sojourning communities in maritime Southeast Asia. For instance, the Chinese stranger is a familiar one in the Philippines not only because he stays for a long time, but also because he is likely to leave and return to Lu-song, the Chinese name for Manila which is located in Luzon island. One can expect this stranger to be back in the next monsoon. However, because he is absent half or most of the time and because he does not originally belong to the Philippine archipelago, he is considered "banyaga" by the natives. When the conditions were favorable, many Chinese sojourners, following the call of opportunity, decided not to

²⁰ Chin 161;193.

return home. Thus, Wang Guayu concludes that sojourning can be a prelude to eventual migration.²¹

Many Chinese in the Philippine today descended from sojourning laborers and traders who decided to stay as illegal or legal aliens. Others acquire citizenship by marrying native women or by illegally acquiring citizenship through bribery. For many others, after long-term residency in the Philippines as aliens not vested with legal citizenship, the Chinese finally had a breakthrough in 1975. At a time when the Philippines was paving the way for diplomatic recognition of the People's Republic of China in lieu of the Republic of China (Taiwan), mass naturalization was granted to the Chinese in the Philippines, allowing those who had been illegally staying in the country to be finally naturalized as citizens. As a result, 90% of the Chinese in the Philippines today are Filipino citizens.²² Though citizenship was granted belatedly after decades of residency, the Chinese "aliens" had finally become legal citizens. But even as naturalized citizens, the Chinese are still viewed as aliens by the state. In fact, during the growing Filipino nationalism in the 1950s-1960s, the Philippine government passed legislation to nationalize the economy, curtailing access of Chinese Filipinos in retail trade and commodities trading where they had been historically successful. Ironically, in the name of economic nationalism, Philippine politicians and legislators excluded the Chinese Filipinos since they were considered "aliens."²³ One of the chapters in *Banyaga* is entitled "1954" to refer to the landmark

²¹ Wang 2.

²² Ong, "Bridge" x; Chu 405.

²³ These anti-Chinese laws passed were the 1954 Retail Trade Nationalization Act (Republic Act 1180) and the 1961 Corn and Rice Industry Nationalization Act (Republic Act 3018). See Hau, 135-137.

year when the Retail Trade Nationalization Act was passed, to which I will return later.

All these sources of the native's discrimination against the Chinese are relevant to a socio-historical reading of Ong's novel because they trace the social and political configuration behind the literary narrative and allow an examination of the enigma of the Chinese as strangers: outsiders who are distant yet near, whose function and identity in society is primarily as merchants or traders, but who later stake a claim on nation and demand the rights of a citizen. From poor sojourners, they also evolve into "triumphant capitalists" and "flexible citizens." I use the terms "triumphant capitalist" and "flexible citizen" to refer to those who are successfully linked to local, regional or global networks of capital and thus possess mobility, whether financially, logistically, or spatially, as based on Aihwa Ong's concept of flexible citizenship.²⁴

"Chinese Filipino" Writing

The marginalized position of the Chinese in Philippine society discussed in the earlier section reflects the place of Chinese Filipino literature in mainstream Philippine literature. Popular anthologies of Philippine literature do not commonly include Chinese Filipino writing.²⁵ Yet, *Intsik: An Anthology of Chinese Filipino Writing* published in 2000 reveals a compilation of short stories, poems, and essays by 29 Chinese writers covering 40 years of Chinese writing English, with three pieces written in Filipino, that were written or first published between 1960-1997. Caroline

²⁴ Aihwa Ong, *Flexible Citizenship and Neoliberalism*.

²⁵ After surveying randomly various Philippine literary anthologies (excluding exclusively Chinese or Chinese Filipino anthologies), only two "Philippine" anthologies included Chinese Filipino writing: Ong's short story "Bearers of the Swords" is included in *Tribute: An Anthology of Contemporary Philippine Fiction* (2001) and Jaime An Lin's "The Liberation of Mrs. Fidela Magsilang" in *Underground Spirit: Philippine Short Stories in English 1973-1989*.

Hau remarked that the publication of *Intsik* “publicly authenticates the fact of the existence of the Chinese in the Philippines.”²⁶

Given this context, Chinese Filipino literature should be considered a “minor literature.” For Deleuze and Guattari, minor literature refers to writings of those who are “in the margins or completely outside his or her own fragile community.” It is often written not in the minor language but in a major language. It is also highly political in nature. Because minor literature is political, it assumes a collective and enunciative value.²⁷ Chinese Filipino literature is predominantly written in English, the major or “vehicular” language in Deleuze and Guattari’s classification and rarely in Filipino and Hokkien.²⁸ Deleuze and Guattari concluded that “everything in them [minor literatures] is political” since “cramped [social] space forces each individual intrigue to connect immediately to politics. The individual concern thus becomes all the more necessary, indispensable, magnified, because a whole other story is vibrating in it.”²⁹ I relate this “other story” to the story of the wider community or nation. I also correlate this “other story” that “vibrates” within an individual’s story with what Jameson calls the “political unconscious” that resonates and runs through the “third world allegory.” As such, Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of minor literature is in conversation with Jameson’s “third world allegory” in that they all agree on the inherently political and collective nature of literature.

²⁶ Hau, *Intsik* 299.

²⁷ Deleuze and Guattari, “Minor Literature” 17.

²⁸ In *The Best of Tulay* (1987) anthology, it is interesting to note that Joaquin Sy translated into Filipino some Filipino Chinese writings originally written in Hokkien.

²⁹ Deleuze and Guattari 17.

However, the Jamesonian notion of “third world national allegory” assumes a common national imaginary that often reflects the story of the majority or the mainstream. What about those who are in the margins who do not fit or are deemed not to fit in the community or nation? What about those whose story is not included in the telling and re-telling of the story of nation? This marginal juncture is where Deleuze and Guattari illuminate. They acknowledged that certain groups in a social space are minoritized or marginalized through colonization and by extension, as the case with the Chinese in the Philippines, by migration. Deleuze and Guattari identified a literary, linguistic, and cultural space for those in the margins: minor literature. Minor literature is that which a minority constructs within a major language like English, as in the case with Ong who writes in English.

Thus, I argue that reading *Banyaga* socio-historically also means viewing it as a minor literature and as a national allegory. Because both minor literature and national allegory are inherently political, then it assumes a collective value. What an individual author like Ong writes about constitutes and represents a communal action and is vested with a collective meaning. One individual character in the novel, the Chinese merchant, for instance, may be considered as representative of the plight of the Chinese Filipino collectively within the Philippine community or nation, or this individual story can embody the story of nation itself.

Charlson Ong himself coined and defined what is “Chinese Filipino” literature, highlighting the de-territorialization of language. He said that Chinese Filipino writing is:

a literature written by Filipinos primarily for Filipinos. Its practitioners are Filipinos of Chinese descent, usually natural born-citizens, whose first

language is often Filipino or Amoy – or both.... They grow up in a hodgepodge of Amoy-Filipino-English, which is often the language of their dreams and thus of their poetry. They are most likely third-generation descendants of Chinese immigrants and write mainly in English and/or Filipino... it is a new literature, a very young literature most of which is only being written at the moment.

Filipino Chinese literature is indeed a very young literature that is “being written at the moment.”³⁰ Since Chinese Filipino literary works are generally not included in the anthologies of mainstream Philippine literature, Chinese Filipino advocates of “Chinese Filipino literature” have published anthologies dedicated solely to Chinese Filipino writing, like *Intsik*. Another exclusively Chinese Filipino anthology published earlier than *Intsik* is *Best of Tulay: Anthology of Chinese Filipino Writing in English, Tagalog and Chinese* (1997), which was co-edited by Hau, Teresita Ang See and Joaquin Sy and published by Kaisa Sa Kaunlaran, a high-profile Chinese Filipino non-profit organization whose primary mission is to work towards the social, economic, and political integration of the Chinese in Philippine society. In addition to these exclusively Chinese Filipino anthologies, collections of short stories written by singular Chinese Filipino authors were also recently published, such as those written by Ong himself: *Men of the East and Other Stories* (1990), *Women of Am-kaw and Other Stories* (1993), *Conversion and other Fictions* (1996) and *A Tropical Winter’s Tale and Other Stories* (2003). In 2008, R. Kwan Laurel wrote *Ongpin Stories*, a collection of stories all written by Laurel that deals with the Chinese

³⁰ Charlson Ong, “Bridge” ix; Hau, et al *Tulay* viii.

in the Philippines and Chinese Filipinos in their own daily struggles as small business owners in Manila Chinatown's Ongpin Street before they were stereotyped as wealthy businessmen. In all these publications, the term "Chinese Filipino" has been used consistently to refer to these writings by Chinese Filipinos, commonly known as "Tsinoy," a conjoined contraction from the words "Intsik," the Tagalog word for Chinese, and "Pinoy," short for Pilipino.

From virtual anonymity prior to the 1990s, due recognition to Chinese Filipino literature finally came with the publication of these anthologies and by the granting of national awards and recognition to Chinese Filipino writers like Ong and Sy in the 2000s.³¹ As a young literature, Chinese Filipino literature "has as yet no major works to boast of, no epics or canons, masters or messiahs," says Ong. Making this comment prior to the publication of his well-acclaimed novels *The Embarrassment of Riches* (2000) and *Banyaga: Song of War* (2006), these two literary pieces written in English could very well be considered as the canonical works of Chinese Filipino literature, in addition to those of Paul Stephen Lim.³²

Although an "emerging literature," Chinese Filipino literature can actually be traced farther back to the Chinese-Philippine newspapers published more than a century ago that included literary supplements. These supplements featured the literary works of Chinese contributors mostly written in Chinese language. In the 1930s, Chinese literary magazines were published in the Philippines that were

³¹ Charlson Ong won the Centennial Literary Prize in 2002 awarded by the Philippine Centennial Commission for his novel *Embarrassment of Riches* (2000). He also won the *Gawad Balagtas* Jose Rizal Award for Excellence in Literature in 2003, with Joaquin Sy receiving the same award in 2004. The latter award is given by UMPIL, the biggest association of Filipino writers in the Philippines. Ong was also awarded the NVM Gonzalez Award for Best Published Short Story in 2001 for "Days of Darkness, White Nights."

³² Another well-known Chinese Filipino writer whose literary works have been well-acclaimed in the Chinese Filipino community is Paul Stephen Lim who now resides in the US and whom Ong considers as the "first major Philippine Chinese writer in English." See Ong (2000) xiii.

influenced by the New Culture movement of China that flourished from 1915-1925, which rejected Confucian traditions and instead advocated Western modernism.

More prolific writing in Mandarin Chinese thrived although this suffered a serious setback during the Marcos martial law regime when Chinese language newspapers, considered the main venue for literary production within the Chinese community in the Philippines, were prohibited from publishing literary contributions.³³

Ong's decision to write in English, the lingua franca or vehicular language, and not in Chinese, may be simply due to the fact that he is more proficient in English. Since canonical Philippine literatures are also written in English, then Ong may also be positioning Chinese Filipino literature alongside the canonical Philippine literature in English and thus hopes to contribute to the wide body of Philippine anglophone writing. While mainstream novels have been imagined around Filipino Malay and Christian identity and for the most part configured along Tagalog/Luzon and even Visayan culture and sensibility, Ong's literary works from the Chinese perspective or the minor position contest mainstream literary narration of nation which, according to Deleuze and Guattari, could be a "revolutionary enunciation."³⁴ To write from the margins, an ambiguous and controversial site, is a powerful vantage point from which to contest, define, and re-define notions of identity, citizenship, and national belonging.

³³ Lua; Hau, *Intsik* 299. In addition, there were other novels published in Chinese, such as those written by Du Ai (1914-), a member of the Chinese Communist Party and involved in the resistance movement in China, who sojourned in the Philippines in 1940 in line with his revolutionary work and wrote the novel *Fengyu Tapingyang* (2002) about the Wha Chi movement in the Philippines and *Zai Lusong Pingyuan* (On the Plains of Luzon), a collection of fiction written in 1947-1949. However, Hau refers to these literary works as "Philippine Chinese." Written in Chinese by a Chinese national who is merely visiting the Philippines, these works apparently do not meet the above-listed criteria for "Chinese Filipino" writing as formulated by Ong. Thus, Hau refers to these literary works as "Philippine Chinese." Du Ai's literary works are discussed in Hau (2011), 153-178.

³⁴ Deleuze and Guattari, "Minor Literature" 17.

Because Ong's novels deal with the border-crossing and transnational capitalist practices of the Chinese in the Philippines, it makes sense to write in English, the vehicular language not only in the Philippines, but also the "language of commercial exchange" and the "language of globalization."³⁵ By the 1970s, Deleuze and Guattari had already acknowledged that English had "become the worldwide vehicular language in today's world."³⁶ I conclude that Chinese Filipino writers like Ong, just like mainstream writers like F. Sionil Jose, aim to address not only the Filipino audience in the Philippines but also those in diaspora and to reach a wider global audience outside the Philippine "market" as well.

Banyaga: The Novel

Whether Ong will become be a writer of national or international significance remains to be seen. Noting that only about 2% of the Philippine population speaks Chinese,³⁷ Ong remarked candidly that any Chinese Filipino writer "aspiring to national significance will not likely consider Chinese as medium."³⁸ Thus *Banyaga: A Song of War* is unapologetically written in English. However, while *Banyaga* is written in English, the text is interrupted by frequent Hokkien interjections and creolized stringing of multiple languages (English, Hookien, Spanish, and Filipino), as if to indicate his own appropriation of the English language for the Chinese Filipino.

³⁵ Anderson 131-133.

³⁶ Deleuze and Guattari, "Minor Literature" 24. According to Deleuze and Guattari, in Franz Kafka's time, German was the vehicular language of the Prague Jews and "language of commercial exchange."

³⁷ Philippine population is projected to be 98.7 million for 2013 based on the CIA 2013 Country Report on the Philippines.

³⁸ Charlson Ong, "Bridge" xi.

Ong's novel is an interweaving of the stories of migration of five Chinese boys from different hometown villages in China and their resistance and assimilation to the native society in Manila. I now briefly narrate the plot of the novel that centers on the lives of the five sworn brothers: Ah Beng, brothers Ah Puy and Ah Kaw, and cousins Ah Sun and Ah Tin. There are various reasons for the young boys to go to Manila: For Ah Beng, he wants to find his father who sojourned to Manila but has not returned nor sent money to his family in China for some time. Ah Puy and Ah Kaw, recently orphaned, are sold by relatives to a child slave trader /coolie agent, who in turn sells them to a Chinese candlemaker in Manila. Ah Sun is sent by his family to work for his uncle, a dye maker in Manila. Ah Tin is Ah Sun's cousin who tags along to Manila. All five hail from small hometown villages and come from poor families in China.

In Manila, the sworn brothers live either with family or adoptive parents. Ah Beng finds his father who refuses to acknowledge him but nevertheless houses him. Ah Sun lives and works with his uncle, the dyemaker. Since the dyemaker refuses to take in Ah Tin, he brings Ah Tin to work as a houseboy to a Spanish couple, who later adopts the boy and treats him as their son. Ah Puy and Ah Kaw live with the Chinese candlemaker to whom they are sold, but shortly, they run away from them when the candlemaker molests Ah Kaw. Ah Kaw dies in an accident while the two are fleeing. Then, Ah Puy finds his second home with a Chinese junk trader.

Through the years, the four sworn brothers, now using their Hispanized Christian names, excel in their own respective endeavors. Ah Beng (known as Antonio Limpoco) inherits his father's store, expands the store and opens more stores, marries a Chinese woman and has two sons. Ah Puy (Hilario Ong) leaves his adoptive

parents' junk trade to diversify to commodities trading at a time when rice trading is profitable and marries the Chinese junk man's daughter with whom he has three daughters and one son. Ah Suy inherits his uncle's dye making business, expands to textile manufacturing, and shifts to import-export business when trading becomes more profitable than manufacturing. Ah Tin becomes a successful painter but abandons his art to go into politics. He marries the daughter of his Spanish adoptive parents, is elected congressman, and even has ambitions to run for senator and president, until he is forced to flee to Malaysia when Marcos declares martial law in the Philippines. Their sworn brotherhood to one another is a valuable network and reliable resource they fall back on as they face various hurdles as migrants in the strange land that is Manila. All four continue their friendship through the decades, through good times and bad, and until death parts them.

Structurally, the novel contains a total of 58 chapters, which are divided into four parts to represent distinct time periods or landmarks in Philippine history: "Part I Peace Time" (the American / pre-World War II period); "Part II Chasing the Tiger Shadows" (the war years); "Part III Ashes and Diamonds" (the post-war period up to the early Marcos years); and, "Part IV New Society" (the Marcos martial law era up to the 1986 Philippine Revolution and the Cory Aquino period). It opens with a Prologue set in the present time during the inauguration of the fifth mall of 78-year old Antonio Limpoco. Then, the novel's Chapter 1 flashbacks to when Antonio (then known as 12-year old Ah Beng) and four other Chinese young boys meet aboard a ship from Amoy bound for Manila and swore brotherhood to each other. The novel ends with Chapter 58 set once again aboard a boat, with the two remaining sworn

brothers, Antonio and Hilario, together with their children and grandchildren, cruising Manila Bay.

While the novel is organized along a linear historical time, the author uses flashbacks and fastforwards. Narrated in third person omniscient, the novel's narrator often reveals or hints at the future as it narrates the present. This play with time creates a fluid and destabilizing feel to the literary piece that is compatible with the author's discourse on the fluid, hybrid and complex nature of Chineseness, Filipinoness, and "nation-ness" that lie at the heart of Filipino or Chinese Filipino identity.

As early as the opening chapters of *Banyaga*, the social divide between the Chinese and the natives is already apparent through the pejorative names they call one another. Distrust of strangers runs both ways. For the "native," the Chinese is *banyaga*. To the Chinese, the Filipino native is *huanna*, a Hokkien term which also means foreigner or stranger, often translated as foreign barbarians.³⁹ On the other hand, the Chinese use the Hokkien term *lannang*, which means "our own people," to refer to themselves. With the novel written from the point of view of the Chinese and with the first introductory chapters setting the social divide and animosity between the *huanna* and the *lannang*, the reader anticipates that this novel will be a woeful Chinese tale of victimization and that the Chinese will be portrayed as the good guys and the Filipinos, the bad guys. But then Ong either surprises or disappoints as he sets a complex microcosm of a society in a historical time where the Chinese and Filipino live together, sometimes geographically segregated from one another, but often in social interaction with one another in daily life.

³⁹ Hau, *Subject of Nation* 275. Alternate spelling of *lannang* is *lan-lang*; for *huanna*, *hoan-a*. See Chu 2-3.

In *Banyaga*, Chinese and Filipinos alike play both villains and heroes to each other. Acts of treachery and betrayal as much as goodness and humanity emanate from both sides of this social divide. With this attempt at objectivity or even diplomacy, it becomes apparent that Ong's intended reading public is Filipinos, Chinese and native alike. This is consistent with his statement that Filipino Chinese literature is "literature written by Filipinos primarily for Filipinos." The microcosm he creates is a means by which a discourse on individual or group identity, citizenship, community and nation are fleshed out through the lives of the four sworn brothers as lead characters and through the stories of over fifty minor characters and many more background characters. A seemingly tidy microcosm demarcated by an invisible but palpable line of the Filipino-Chinese binary, this literary world is disrupted and destabilized by Ong himself to illustrate the social construction and paradoxes of identity through the phenomenon of the *banyaga*, the stranger from China navigating a strange land which eventually becomes his or her homeland.

The subject positions of the Chinese, as portrayed in *Banyaga*, run the gamut from sojourners, deportees, stowaways, political exiles, to immigrants or settlers. Whether the Chinese came to the Philippines and stayed, whether they left but will return, or stayed for good, these spatial and temporal positionalities affect notions of the stranger and their place in their new host society. This is because the natives also consider origins and residence as significant popular markers of social identity, in addition to race and culture.

Ong captures dexterously the tales and travails of the Chinese in their various subjectivities in the Philippines in his literary construction of history. In most cases, paradoxical pairings of subjectivities overlap as they relate to Chineseness or

Filipinoness which in turn often interface with class and/or nation, such as: foreigner and native (Teacher Tong, who is born and raised in Manila, is deported like a foreigner); alien and citizen (Ah Beng, though an alien, acquires Filipino citizenship when he “buys” his citizenship papers); the stranger and the familiar trader (the distant junkman who is a familiar sight as he goes around town buying and selling scrap, but dissociates himself from broader concerns of society like politics); heathen and Christian (Lan Ping, who converts to Christianity but continues the Chinese practice of ancestor worship); and, patriot and traitor (Hilario, a resistance fighter who fought alongside Filipino guerillas, is later accused as a treacherous rice hoarder). All these show the shifting positionality and subjectivity of the Chinese, in the eyes of both the Chinese and the native, and how the Chinese deploy adaptable and fluid identity as a “flexible” strategy to respond to crisis or opportunity.

Except for the brief quoted reviews on the book’s back cover by noted Filipino writers, such as F. Sionil Jose, Joaquin Sy, Gregorio Brilliantes, and Hau, the only literary study of *Banyaga* that I have seen so far, as of this writing, is that written by literary critic Cristina Pantoja Hidalgo in her book *Fabulists and Chroniclers* (2008).⁴⁰ While Hidalgo’s brief review focused on the personal and the familial, and in passing, the national, I will highlight in my analysis the convergence of race, family, market, and nation in the Chinese Filipino experience. This is because the Chinese protagonists are hindered by their race and ethnicity but in tandem with their commitments and entanglements with family, business and market, and nation. Using

⁴⁰ Hidalgo 83-90. An Internet piece by Christopher dela Cruz posted in www.Filipiniana.net titled “Pintsik and Tsinoy: A Dual Perspective on the History of Chinese as Filipinos in Charlson Ong’s *Banyaga: A Song of War*” merely juxtaposes the elements of the of the historical exhibit at Manila’s Chinese Filipino museum (Bahay Tsinoy) as Chinese Filipino history parallels the events in Ong’s novel.

collaboration and resistance or cooperation and evasion, the sworn brothers' navigation in their new home often traverses the limits of the legal, the illegal, and the paralegal. While Hidalgo highlights the alienation and estrangement within the family and between family members, I would like to highlight the political alienation of the Chinese as an ethnic group and how this socio-political alienation arises primarily from economic: from their historic role as trader, middleman, mercantilist, and capitalist in state and society. I highlight the role of the marketplace as the sworn brothers become small businessmen who navigate the intricacies of the local economy and how the market inevitably converges with the political. What happens when the distant but familiar stranger claims a stake on the community or nation and demands the rights of a citizen? *Banyaga*, as a minor literature, demands a place for those in the margins and to be part of the story of nation. It is a response to the exhortation of Deleuze and Guattari to those in the margins: "Create the opposite dream: know how to create a becoming-minor."⁴¹ As such, Ong's *Banyaga* is a "revolutionary enunciation" by mediating and re-interpreting the mainstream version of Philippine history and claiming the rightful place of the Chinese in Philippine state and society.

"Banyaga": The Stranger, Outsider

Literary writers and social scientists alike, such as Albert Camus in his fictional novel entitled *L'Étranger* (1942) and sociologist Georg Simmel in his essay "The Stranger" (1908), have explored the enigma of the familiar but distant stranger. While Mersault, Camus' stranger, is often analyzed as someone who disengages himself from society and thwarts society to illustrate the absurdity or meaninglessness of the human condition, Ong's *banyaga* seeks a communitarian and nationalist

⁴¹ Deleuze and Guattari, "Minor Literature" 27.

meaning to life but is however thwarted by society. Writing about European Jews, Simmel argues that the stranger is often a merchant, a Jewish merchant.⁴² In *Banyaga*, the stranger is the Chinese merchant whose economic activity is paradoxically the cause for both his rejection and acceptance in Philippine society.

The story of the merchant, trader, or entrepreneur is strong and recurrent in *Banyaga*. Three of the four sworn brothers have become successful businessmen. Antonio (Ah Beng) and Hilario (Ay Puy), the two surviving sworn brothers, become tycoons with progeny to the third generation. It is thus not surprising that the Chinese have a moneyed view of themselves. In the novel, we glimpse the Chinese's own view of themselves in Antonio's remarks (310):

The Chinese were storeowners, merchants, bankers, makers of detergents and textiles. They made money, saved money, laundered money, loaned out money. They were respected for their money, tolerated for their money.

Ong's *banyaga* can be illuminated by Simmel's concept of the stranger.⁴³ Simmel's stranger is not the Deleuzian nomad who comes today and goes tomorrow.⁴⁴ Rather, Simmel's stranger is the "person who comes today and stays tomorrow."⁴⁵ More importantly, the distinguishing mark of Simmel's stranger is that "he has not belonged to it from the beginning but he imports qualities into it, which do not and cannot stem from the group itself."⁴⁶ For instance, Manila's Chinatown,

⁴² The "strangeness" of the Chinese and the Jews is analyzed in *The Essential Outsiders: Chinese and Jews in the Modern Transformation of Southeast Asia and Europe* (1997), edited by Daniel Chirot and Anthony Reid, to examine their role in the transformation of Southeast Asia and Europe.

⁴³ Simmel 403-408.

⁴⁴ Deleuze and Guattari, *Nomadology* 50-51.

⁴⁵ Simmel, "The Stranger" 402.

⁴⁶ Simmel 402.

the primary setting of *Banyaga*, illustrates the Chinese culture or lifestyle that the Chinese has imported into the Philippines.

What is even more interesting is that Simmel identifies that the stranger is usually a trader: “Throughout the history of economics, the stranger everywhere appears as the trader, or the trader as stranger.”⁴⁷ Interestingly enough, the homonym of the Tagalog word “banyaga” in Sanskrit and Malay is “beniaga” which means trade or commerce.⁴⁸ If the local economy is self-sufficient, then there is no need for the trader or middleman, explains Simmel. But a trader is needed for products that originate outside a group or outside that particular local economy. As we know, trading is an economic activity that Chinese have traditionally performed in East and Southeast Asia. As to distance, Simmel notes “strangeness means that he who is far, is actually near.”⁴⁹ As a trader, the stranger is paradoxically both near and far and is inside yet outside the group. This position of proximity and distance, of being within the community but not being fully integrated into it, has been the enigma of the Chinese and the paradox of Chinese identity in the Philippines. Such is the case with Lee Tam in the novel, who one day, padlocks his store and decides to return to China, lamenting: “I am an old man. I have nowhere else to go, no education, can’t speak Tagalog or English...what’s the point of being cooped here, waiting for the huanna to loot or burn us down?” (192). Unable to assimilate in Manila and tired of the anti-Chinese sentiment that is often manifested in acts of violence, Lee Tam, the failed,

⁴⁷ Simmel, “The Stranger” 403.

⁴⁸ Panganiban 125. In Theodore Gauthier Pigeaud’s notes on Rakawi Prapanca’s *Nagarakertagama* which Pigeaud translated in *Java in the 14th Century: A Study in Cultural History - The Nagarakertagama* (1960), the Malay word “banyaga,” which means merchant, is spelled exactly as the Tagalog “banyaga.” See Pigeaud, Vol. 5, 411.

⁴⁹ Simmel 402.

un-triumphant entrepreneur, gives up and returns back to his homeland. In Lee Tam's story, we see not only the failed entrepreneur but also a hostile or inhospitable "host" society that resists and foils the "desire" of a member of minority group to live in a land where *lannang* and *huanna* can live together peacefully.

While this paradoxical position of proximity and distance situates the Chinese like Lee Tam in the margins of society, it is also one of the reasons of the success of many Chinese as trader, mercantilist, or capitalist in the Philippines and Southeast Asia. As observed by Eric Tagliacozzo and Norman Parmer, while the Chinese stranger is at once alien and uncomfortable in any given local society and tends to shun politics, he is also able to use his alien status to further economic and even occasionally political ends associated with trade.⁵⁰ Such is the case with Ong Han Kee, the junk trader, who may well be a classic example of someone who just minds his own business, literally. He focuses solely on his trade and detaches himself from the broader concerns of society, like politics, to stay out of trouble that may jeopardize his business. He withdraws from the rice trade and focuses on the junk trade for: "Rice is life, rice is death... with rice you're trading with your life all the time (209)." Fresh from the war during which people fought and killed for rice, he deems rice trading a dangerous business because one can get caught up in political entanglements. True enough, Hilario later gets in trouble with the authorities as a rice trader.

Much of the Chinese in Philippine society also originates from what Hau calls as "alienating capital." Because the Chinese excelled in business and has been associated with wealth and capital, the myth of "Chinese money" is fortified by a

⁵⁰ Tagliacozzo 432; Parmer 46-47.

history which constructs the Chinese as what Hau calls an “*Alien Nation*”: a state within a state that performs an economic function. Through varying methods and motivations, Hau claims that key actors and agents in Philippine history, from the colonizers to Filipinos alike, have contributed to carving the Chinese niche in the realm of business and the economy: the “merchant niche.”⁵¹ With other options closed, the Chinese were pushed to become traders or merchants. Denied political and economic rights affixed to citizenship, the Chinese, with the exception of the Chinese mestizos, are not allowed to own land or property. Many Chinese had to circumvent this restriction by bribing government officials and by cohabiting with native women with Filipino citizenship in order to do business in the country. In the absence of property, the Chinese were unable to engage in agricultural production or manufacturing. Thus, they tended to engage in the circulation of goods, rather than in production.

As Simmel notes: “Dispersed peoples, crowded into more or less closed cultural circles, can hardly put down roots or find a free position in production. They are therefore dependent on *intermediate trade* [italics mine] which is more elastic than primary production.”⁵² This specialization in the circulation of goods made the Chinese into successful merchants. However, this mercantile success has made the Chinese vulnerable to various forms of marginalization or victimization. In the novel, the Chinese is consistently vulnerable to extortion, such as the Customs man who solicits a bribe from Ah Sun’s uncle for clearing Ah Sun’s alien certificate. State

⁵¹ Hau, “Alien Nation.”

⁵² Simmel, *Philosophy of Money* 225; Karakalli 317.

intrusion in Ah Sun's textile manufacturing business occurs when a Marcos crony and a military official become his "silent investors" (255).

In Antonio's introspection about Chinese identity quoted earlier, we see that the Chinese's own view of one's self is to be a person of business. Can the Chinese be other than merchant or trader? Antonio opines that being other than what the Chinese has always been or known to be is going against the grain. His speculative comments and questions below indicate that the Chinese themselves contest their own view of themselves, opening up the possibility of formulation and re-formulation of Chineseness:

Yes, they (the Chinese) are certainly businessmen. Perhaps they could be doctors but certainly not artists, not poets or writers. What would they write anyway? What would they paint? Another people's history? Another people's pain? Who would listen? Who would care? (310)

Yet Fernando, one of the sworn brothers, becomes a painter and is posthumously acclaimed. Again, contrary to the stereotypical view that the Chinese is an economic opportunist who steers away from political engagement, the artist Fernando also runs for public office and is elected congressman. Through Fernando's character, Ong dislodges stereotypes. Through fictional rendering, Ong opens the door for the Chinese man to step out of the box and become someone else other than the stereotypical merchant or trader or capitalist. He also opens the door for the Chinese woman to become other than wife, mother, mistress, prostitute, or a complicit partner to patriarchy. For instance, Belinda, who later becomes the wife of Antonio, flees China to escape an arranged marriage. Later on, she becomes a member of the guerilla unit who fights the Japanese in the 1940s. In what seems to be an authorial

ploy to negate the patriarchy that often characterizes Chinese families and businesses, Ong also depicts women as successful entrepreneurs in the novel, particularly Hilario's wife and three daughters.

While the novel affirms that the Chinese tends to shun politics through the character of the junk trader, Ong likewise negates it as the sworn brothers not only become *inevitably* entangled with the politics of the times, particularly during the war period, but also *voluntarily* seek to be involved in a Philippine nationalist project and go beyond the concerns of profit and profiteering. At the behest of Fernando, the sworn brothers, initiate a political movement to bring about change in the corrupt Marcos regime. Fernando claims that the Chinese themselves need to change to bring about authentic change in a corrupt society. So, Fernando invokes them to stop unethical business practices: "No more pay-offs, no more bribes. No more contraband. Let's pay our proper dues... I want to do the right thing now... It is no longer about money (226, 227)." He beckons his sworn brothers to jumpstart this project by talking to their Chinese-Filipino chambers of commerce where they are members. That the sworn brothers chose the name Magdiwang for this movement is significant. Magdiwang is the name of the political faction of real-life revolutionary Andres Bonifacio, whose mass-based movement called the Katipunan spearheaded the revolution against Spain in 1896. This invocation of a nationalist project in the 1890s by the sworn brothers in the 1970s asserts that the Chinese are also Filipinos capable of patriotic or nationalist fervor strong enough to desire and implement a concrete program of change for the Philippine nation, one that in fact demands their own conversion into ethical or rectified Chinese.

Traitors and Patriots, Aliens and Citizens

For all the patriotic fervor of the sworn brothers, the native still distrusts the Chinese. The native's distrust may be explained by the cross-border political linkages of the Chinese, which the former fears could subvert the national project. In *Banyaga*, the sworn brothers are members not only of their family and clan associations in Manila and China-Manila hometown associations but also of various political organizations affiliated with China, such as the Kuomintang (115), the Overseas Chinese Patriotic League (83), and Gi Yong Tong, an organization of overseas Chinese youth (85), among others. They are also members of Chinese chambers of commerce which maintain close relations with China. They interface closely with the Chinese Consulate in Manila. With the kind of company the Chinese keep, the political allegiance of the Chinese is viewed as suspect by the Filipino natives: Are they loyal to China or the Philippines? For instance, Tong is the teacher in the Chinese school. Born and raised in Manila, he is a devout China nationalist. An example of Teacher Tong's rhetoric of Chinese nationalism, in conversation with the young Ah Puy, runs as follows (29):

This is why our president (Sun-Yat Sen)... led the overthrow of the Manchu dynasty to set up a republic in Nanjing. This is why we must continue to fight the warlords who want to break our country into pieces. This is why you must study hard and learn and make yourself strong and make good money. So that one day, when the time is right, when your country calls, you can go back to help build a new nation, a great nation, once again.

As a political officer of the Kuomintang Party in Manila (83), Tong supports the Nationalists in China. In this case, Teacher Tong's loyalty to the Philippines is in

question because loyalty to a Chinese cause is translated as disloyalty to the Philippines. His politics make him vulnerable to schemes of both his personal enemies and the Philippine state that resulted in his deportation. This scene in the novel is set in the 1950s when Maoism and political infighting among the Chinese themselves, especially between the Nationalists and Communists, is prevalent. As a result, Tong is deported when his personal enemy reports him to the authorities as a Communist.

During the war, Hilario is a member of Squadron 48, a Chinese guerilla group. This squadron aligned with the native Huk movement to join forces to fight the common enemy. A real-life Chinese guerilla group, the Wha Chi Squadron 48, which grew into a 1,000-strong squadron, is extracted from its overlooked and marginal place in history and embedded in a literary production as if to counter the image of Lim Ah Hong, the traitor and infidel, who looms large in mainstream Philippine history.⁵³ Through the literary use of Squadron 48, we are able to re-imagine the Chinese alien as patriot and nationalist. Chinese and natives fought side by side as Filipinos for the country's liberation against the common enemy. Every year, this historic collaboration is celebrated by both the Chinese and native Filipino communities in a province north of Manila.⁵⁴

Despite the fact that Hilario fought side-by-side with Filipinos during the war, he is still viewed as a manipulative alien or traitor by his Filipino childhood friend. To

⁵³ In 1574, Lim Ah Hong, a Chinese pirate, attacked the Philippines. He almost succeeded in dislodging the Spanish colonizers from the Philippines. The opportune arrival of Spanish reinforcements prevented the Chinese adventurer from capturing Manila. Lim came well prepared with a formidable fleet of war junks, soldiers, sailors, women and artisans on board to form the nucleus of a Chinese community. This Chinese attack made the Spanish aware of the Chinese threat to their power in the Philippine archipelago. From then on, the historical figure of Lim Ah Hong has become a caricature in the Philippine national imaginary: the Chinese as infidel, foreigner, and traitor. Further, the historical accounts of Chinese collaboration with the colonials, whether Spanish, Americans, or Japanese, for profit's sake and to advance their economic gain, has made the native doubt or question the integrity of the Chinese and their loyalty to Philippine nation. See Jensen, 5.

⁵⁴ Del Mundo, *Philippine Star*.

demonstrate, I highlight a scene from the novel's Chapter 33 titled "Rice," which takes place sometime in the 1950s during the post-war reconstruction period. It is a confrontation between Hilario and Paulo, a Chinese and native, respectively, who grew up together. Hilario, the adoptive son of the junkman, is now engaged in profitable commodities trading. Paulo, the son of a Filipino employee of the junkman, is now a lawyer who works at the City Hall as the special counsel to the mayor of Manila. Paulo accuses Hilario of hoarding rice: (212)

Paulo: Hoarding is a serious charge, Mr. Ong. We don't like hoarders in this city. We don't like aliens profiting from starving Filipinos.

Hilario: These are bullshit charges, Paulo...I had very little rice in my warehouse; those sacks were spoken for. It was mostly sugarcane that was looted.

Paulo: Not according to witnesses.

Hilario: What witnesses?

Paulo: They are under police custody but should these charges be brought to court I assure you that their testimony will be rock solid.

Hilario My warehouse guard was nearly killed by that mob. I lost my stock. I want justice. *I am a citizen...* [italics mine]

Paulo: Don't you be waving your citizenship at me. I know which judge you bribed for those papers. You people have no conscience! I hope you have made enough money to pay your

way out of hell when your time comes but don't think you can
throw your stinking money at me!

If we were to read Chapter 33 simply on the personal and familial level, this reading will likely bring up aspects of the past personal relationship between the two men that probably drives Paulo's antagonism towards Hilario, such as when Hilario chose to marry a Chinese woman instead of Paulo's sister. But doing a socio-historical reading may bring out other sources of antagonism. Underlying these accusations by the native, which are unfounded, is his resentment of Chinese money, the alienating capital. Paulo's antagonism against Hilario could also be attributed to what Neferti Tadiar calls "capital associated with the Chinese alien that cannot accrue to the Filipino."⁵⁵ Chapter 33 seems to echo this observation as the native decries the role of Chinese as power brokers. How can aliens be the power brokers, who even control the price and distribution rice, the staple food of the Filipinos so salient to their very survival? That the alien possesses assets that the native does not own is thus alienating to the latter.

This confrontation between Hilario and Paulo also brings up broader implications of citizenship. In the above exchange, Hilario evokes and demands his rights as citizen against arbitrary criminal charges. Unlike Antonio whose citizenship papers were "bought," Hilario applied legally to be a naturalized Filipino citizen.

Citizenship can be analyzed in two dimensions: legal and cultural. Simply put, legal or juridical citizenship refers to one's rights, privileges and duties as evidenced by a birth certificate, naturalization document, or passport that indicates one's affiliation with a nation-state. The basis of granting citizenship is primarily governed

⁵⁵ Tadiar 243.

by either the principle of the bloodline / parentage (“*jus sanguinis*”), country of birth (“*jus solis*”), or a combination thereof. While the specific citizenship criteria through the course of colonial and post-colonial history in the Philippines took various juridical twists and turns, simply put, one becomes a citizen if the requirements of either residency, parentage, age, location of birth, or financial status are met.⁵⁶ Although a mere piece of paper, the citizenship document determines one’s fate or agency. Because Hilario has become a naturalized Filipino citizen, he can claim his rights as a citizen against arbitrary charges by a city official. On the other hand, the absence of a citizenship document could be problematic. Earlier in the novel, Hilario, to preserve the Philippine citizenship of his Chinese bride who was baptized Catholic and thus acquired citizenship, he holds his wedding at the Chinese Consulate since his naturalization papers are still pending. Ernesto, Ah Sun’s uncle, figures that it would be better if his children were declared illegitimate to spare them from the law’s ire since he is still an illegal alien. Scenes of actual deportation or fear of being deported runs throughout the novel. In the novel, the Chinese navigate the threat of deportation through legal, illegal, or paralegal means, either using bribery to get fake citizenship papers or using “paper son” style of forged documentation similar to that employed

⁵⁶ The following details the twists and turns in Philippine citizenship laws and the Chinese citizenship law based on blood line:

In 1917, the Philippine Supreme Court adopted the territorial or *jus soli* principle, which means anyone born in the Philippines becomes a Filipino citizen automatically. Hence, offsprings of Chinese nationals can acquire Filipino citizenship even though their parents remained Chinese under the law. Offsprings of Chinese nationals can acquire Filipino citizenship even if their parents remained legally Chinese, creating a situation in which parents and children in the same family could have different citizenship. In 1920, the Philippine Legislature enacted the first naturalization law that provides for the naturalization of those “native” to the Philippines who are not Filipino citizens.

By 1935, the Constitution reversed 1917 Philippine Supreme Court ruling so that Chinese mestizos born in the Philippines did not automatically acquire Philippine citizenship but could opt for it upon reaching the age of majority. Those born in the Philippines of Chinese parentage but left the Philippines for China could no longer claim Filipino citizenship on their return. Likewise, Chinese mestizos who left the Philippines for China could only reclaim their Filipino citizenship if their mothers were Filipino citizens and if they, upon reaching the age of majority, elect Philippine citizenship.

On the other hand, with the principle of *jus sanguinis* being adopted by the Chinese government, many Chinese residents in the Philippines opted for their Chinese or Chinese mestizo children to retain their Chinese citizenship. See Chu 345-346; Jensen 162-165.

by the Chinese in the US. Through deportation, the state is able to use citizenship as a tool of exclusion premised on a bordered territoriality. By investing or divesting citizenship, the state is able to mark the insider from the outsider.

While legal citizenship could be a matter of a document, cultural citizenship, on the other hand, is an abstract and more contentious terrain. It means being part of the “cultural imaginary” of a community or nation. It refers to the “cultural meanings of belonging” and the “desire for recognition as a full member of the group.”⁵⁷

Cultural citizenship is self-bestowed or bestowed (or denied) by others in a group. Since I have earlier discussed how cultural citizenship has been denied to the Chinese by the native, I will now discuss self-identification or the self-bestowing aspect of cultural citizenship: How or when did the Chinese sworn brothers start identifying themselves as Filipino? When did the alien think of oneself as part of the Filipino cultural or national imaginary? While there is no exact formula on how this transformation occurs, the entanglements of the sworn brothers with family, market, and community are key considerations in the formulation of their identity affiliation with the Philippines. However, if there is one singular event in *Banyaga* that is pivotal in the shift in the sense of national identity from Chinese to Filipino for our young Chinese immigrants, it seems to be the war period: the Japanese occupation of Manila. As we now know, Ah Puy joins the Huks, the underground Filipino guerilla movement against the Japanese. While his heart is for the Filipino guerilla movement to succeed, Ah Beng plays the tightrope of selling Japanese products in his store while providing food and supplies to the underground Filipino guerillas. Ah Tin turns extremist, almost anarchic, in his opposition to the enemy that he throws a grenade at

⁵⁷Rosaldo 3.

Japanese officials in the Chinese opera theatre even when there are many innocent civilians present. Boklan, who later becomes Antonio's wife, turns guerilla leader during the war and does not hesitate to shoot a fellow Chinese who is collaborating with the enemy.

While these characters start out with merely having anti-Japanese sentiment because Japan is the enemy of China, the war transforms them. In the process of merely fighting for home, the territorial site of where they and their families presently reside, the war experience shifts what Hau calls a "sense of home" to a wider social identity of community or nation. In the case of Ah Puy who has fought side by side with the Filipino guerillas, he has experienced bonding with the Filipino community. Taught and politicized by Teacher Tong in his youth to be ready to fight for China when he grows up, Ah Puy, who initially fights for China through his anti-Japanese journalism in a Chinese newspaper, finds himself fighting for the Philippines in the end. For Ah Puy, "home" has indeed become his "homeland."

As Chinese migrants in the Philippines, the sworn brothers straddle two homes, two cultures, two communities or nations. A rooted, fixed, and territorial notion of migrant or diasporic identity has long been contested. As such, recent discourse has shifted from a nation-based identity to a transnational notion of belonging.⁵⁸ While the call to view identity as fluid, shifting, and not defined by territoriality is not new, I highlight how a literary work like *Banyaga* is able to convey, without openly rallying for it, a freer notion of group identification or belonging. By seeing how the sworn brothers negotiate their Chineseness and/or Filipinoness, we get a sense of the state of being commonly experienced by migrants who are linked to two or more nations: the

⁵⁸ Vertovec, *Transnationalism*.

state of being “here and there.” For first generation Chinese immigrants in the Philippines like the sworn brothers portrayed in *Banyaga*, while China recedes from memory through the years, the connection to the old country is never completely severed as it is still held by the fragile threads of nostalgia. Reminiscing, Antonio, now a successful tycoon, remarks that while he has never returned to his ancestral village in China, he feels “an aching for his old hometown which he had never visited since leaving as a ten-year old boy.” On the other hand, Samuel, who is sick and dying of cancer, visits his hometown in China even if he no longer has any family living there. As if to denote the healing powers of the homeland to one’s psyche or spirit even if it has become distant or absent, Samuel, back in Manila, is reinvigorated and healed of his physical illness. These fictive narratives of grappling with one’s sense of national belongingness indicate that the Chinese Filipino’s connection to China is not really severed and that one’s sense of home or sense of country can point in both directions: towards China and the Philippines. They indicate that one’s sense of home cannot and should not be demarcated territorially and that one can have a dual sense of cultural citizenship.

Flexible Citizens and Triumphant Capitalists

While cultural citizenship is about one’s sense of belonging to a community or nation and legal citizenship is about legal and political rights, flexible citizenship is solidly grounded on economics. The term “flexible citizenship” has been used to modify the traditional concept of legal citizenship in the light of late capitalism and increasing globalization where one’s choice of citizenship has become economically driven. Aihwa Ong’s paradigm of “flexible citizenship” is helpful in framing the lives of the paupers-turned-tycoons with their overseas investments and business

ventures and their highly mobile children and grandchildren in *Banyaga*. Flexible citizenship refers to the “cultural logics of capital accumulation, travel, and displacement that induce subjects to respond fluidly and *opportunistically* [italics mine] to changing political-economic conditions in their quest to accumulate capital and social prestige in the global arena.”⁵⁹ It is akin to a nomadic pursuit of opportunity and security characterized by “spatial mobility” and “operational flexibility” that harks back to the centuries-old Chinese tradition of sojourning and going overseas in pursuit of opportunity or fortune already discussed at the beginning of this paper.

Thus, Asian elites tend to own multiple passports to be able to pursue business leads opportunistically and as a matter of convenience and security in these times of economic globalization and political crises. This elitist neoliberal making of global citizens which seems to be privileged by Aihwa Ong is critiqued by Jodi Melamed.⁶⁰ The latter remarked that the dispensing of “privilege or stigma” merely shifts from race to class (i.e. haves or have-nots) under Ong’s notion of differentiated flexible citizenship because a person’s value is dependent on one’s position in the neoliberal capitalist circuit. As such, the state assigns certain rights and privileges to citizens depending on one’s marketable skills and flexible capital accumulation. However, Ong simply demonstrates how global capitalism has created mutations in citizenship and sovereignty which aliens, citizens, and governments alike tap to compete in the global economy. She brings up the reality that the wealthy entrepreneur, not the unskilled laborer or domestic maid, is favored by nation-states as part of the new

⁵⁹ Aihwa Ong, *Neoliberalism* 8-9.

⁶⁰ Melamed 137-178.

governmentality where one's worth is determined by market value or how steeped one is in the transnational capitalist enterprise.⁶¹ For instance, ten Chinese Filipino *taipans* with successful domestic and transnational business operations, are now positioned at the top of the 2013 Forbes' list of the fifty richest men in the Philippines and other ten more Chinese businessmen further down the list.⁶² Because of the economic success of the Chinese and their economic contribution to Philippines economy, the Chinese place in Philippine nation is being recalibrated. Thus, the Chinese can be vested with the stamp of approval by state and society based on their net worth or capitalist success.

From the narrative sketch of the novel at the start of this paper, let me more thoroughly flesh the character of Antonio Limpoco in *Banyaga* to illustrate the making of the triumphant capitalist whose economic success has made him influential in society and acceptable to nation. Antonio (earlier known as Ah Beng) is the son of Lim Hua, who years before migrated to Manila and started a store in Binondo. Lim Hua is a sojourner who in the end decides to stay in Manila for good. He has been in Manila for five years when Ah Beng follows suit, together with his mother and younger sister, since his father has stopped sending money and no longer keeps in touch with his family in China. Lim Hua, known to have Chinese and native mistresses in Manila, refuses to acknowledge his family who has just arrived in Manila. Much of Ah Beng's story in the novel is about his struggle to gain his father's recognition. When his father is killed during the Japanese occupation of Manila, Ah Beng inherits his father's store.

⁶¹ Aihwa Ong, *Neoliberalism*.

⁶² Santos, *Philippine Inquirer*.

Ah Beng's story is the centerpiece of the novel and how he transforms his father's store into a chain of stores and malls. In sum, Antonio's mercantile or capitalist success can be attributed to: (1) his upbringing by a strong-willed mother steeped in traditional Chinese values and his feisty character, toughened by his rough relationship with his father; (2) his difficult life during the war, during which he manages to keep the store operational through sheer guts and creative resourcefulness; (3) his network of alliances, from clan associations in Manila, home village associations in China, to the Filipino-Chinese Chamber of Commerce and the Chinese Consulate in Manila, among others; (4) his timely "flexible strategies" of switching identities, i.e. changing his citizenship from Chinese to Filipino through bribery before the Chinese were banned from the retail trade in the 1950s, his conversion to Christianity, and acquisition of a Hispanized Christian name (5) his ability for flexible accumulation of capital through diverse investments in several companies in East Asia; (6) his affiliation with a sworn brotherhood which proves to be a powerful connection as his sworn brothers also have gained success in the field of business and politics; (7) and most importantly, his inheritance from his father: the corner store. All these factors, which either emanate from or relate to his straddling of two cultures, that of China and the Philippines, position Antonio to be the established and respected mall tycoon that he has become in the 2000s. Above all, Antonio's success comes from hard work, a lifetime work. At 78 years of age, he is still actively involved in managing the business and his clan.

Through Antonio, Charles Ong brings to life the iconography of the tycoon or *taipan*. The *taipan* can be viewed as the embodiment of the flexible citizen and the triumphant capitalist. Listen, for instance, to Antonio as he dispenses advice to Hilario

during a political crisis in the Philippines when a leading opposition leader and fearless Marcos critic has just been assassinated and rumors are flying that Marcos is dying of illness (307):

We have to prepare for the worst so if you have money abroad keep it there, if you have foreign currency hold on to it, if you can get your hands on some, get it. I have credit lines with the banks, if you need a loan we'll get you one.

In addition to Antonio's ability to engage in "flexible strategies" like switching identity by changing citizenship, religion, and personal name in response to opportunity or crisis, the above scene with Hilario shows Antonio's skill for flexible accumulation of capital and his operational ability to access funds anytime, whenever needed. Antonio is reminiscent of real-life Henry Sy Sr. (1924-) who was born in Amoy and migrated to the Philippines. When Sy was twelve, his father owned a small corner-store in Manila. In 1958, Sy himself opened ShoeMart, a small shoe store, selling rejected and overrun shoes. Then, he branched off to selling apparel. ShoeMart (SM) later on evolved into what is now known as SM department store. There are now 42 SM department stores and malls in the Philippines. Known as the mall tycoon for being the developer of a chain of supermalls in the Philippines, he is the richest man in the Philippines with a net worth of \$12 billion and ranks 116th in the Forbes annual list of world's billionaires for 2013.⁶³

The fictional lives of the sworn brothers Antonio, Hilario, and Samuel portray the stereotypical image of Chinese in the Philippines: the entrepreneur or businessman. In a classic pauper-to-tycoon evolution, they emerged triumphant. From nothing or from something very small, like a junk business or the corner store,

⁶³ *Philippine Inquirer*, August 1, 2013; *Forbes Magazine*, July 2013.

they are able to transform a simple, modest means of livelihood to highly profitable or big-time business empires.

Antonio's children and grandchildren, who, like Antonio, have a head start with financial and social capital due to their father's business and social status, personify elite cosmopolitanism and mobility. Ensclosed in the wealth secured for them through the hard work of their parents or grandparents and through their own entrepreneurial or creative abilities, they have the privilege of being "flexible citizens." They are able to travel to anywhere in Asia, Europe, or the Americas. Money is no object; neither is a passport or visa. Their business pursuits are linked to global capitalism particularly to other Asian metropolises, like Taiwan, Seoul, and Hong Kong. Stephanie, Antonio's daughter, starts an undergarments business that requires traveling to other parts of Asia for material sourcing or marketing, benefiting from the tiger economies of the region. Richard, Antonio's grandson, is a conductor who travels and performs in Beijing, Manila, and New York. Agnes, Antonio's wife, assists in the undergarments business owned and managed by her daughters, Stephanie and Celina. When Celina leaves for Europe, Agnes takes over Celina's function of checking out new designs in various Asian cities and coming out with new lines to introduce in Manila. Antonio, aside from being the mall tycoon in the Philippines, has joint manufacturing ventures in Japan and owns shares in various Taiwan businesses.

However, all is not well for everyone. While Ong reinforces the iconography of the Chinese tycoon in the novel, he negates it as well by equally dramatizing the plight of the Chinese un-triumphant entrepreneur. In Chapter 29 titled "1954," as I mentioned earlier, we see the pitiful image of the failed entrepreneur in Lee Tam as a

result of a passage of the law that prohibits aliens from engaging in the retail trade as part of the nationalization of the Philippine economy. This is what the passage of the Retail Nationalization Act of 1954 does to the Chinese small business owner: it marginalizes him. It confines him to the edge, to the margins, or at worst, drives him out of business. The chronological positioning of this event in the novel's midpoint is critical because it is a time when the Chinese are just rebuilding their lives and businesses after the war. Lee Tam decides to close his hardware store at the heels of the passage of the Retail Act when the Filipino press is getting strident about what they perceive as Chinese domination of the economy and the fear of looting of Chinese businesses is in the air (190, 192). In the 1970s, it also did not go very well for Samuel's textile business when it is encroached by the cronies of the dictator, wishing to be "silent partners" in his company. While perhaps we can blame the decline of his business during the martial law years to his failure to counter state intrusion into his business, how can anyone, weak or strong of heart, stand up to the cronies of a powerful dictator?

The mobility of elite cosmopolitans from the families of Antonio and Hilario portrayed by Ong in the latter part of the novel is in sharp contrast to the many immobile Chinese stuck at the Customs House he writes about in his opening chapter. With fake papers, these Chinese migrants were not allowed entry to Manila. Without money for return passage, they could not go back to China, living in the liminal spaces of the state, confined to the Customs House in Manila. Through these scenes in the novel, the reader can conclude that indeed Chinese identity and subjectivity are diverse, often defined by class.

Aliens and Citizens in the 21st Century

If a literary novel helps us make sense of our literal world, then from the confines of the fictional world of *Banyaga*, a literary text that engages with the ongoing discourse on transnationalism, I now address in broader context the relevance of the notion of the stranger in the real or literal world. In light of these ever intensifying economic and cultural globalization processes of the 21st century, what is the relevance of the *banyaga*? The matter of the Chinese as “alien” does not have the same negative political charge as before. Social scientists have noted the trend towards greater flexibility manifested as “portable patriotism,” or “citizenship without daily presence.” This type of flexible citizenship allows citizens to pursue careers, businesses, and personal endeavors opportunistically anywhere in the world without giving up their rights and privileges of citizenship and without being judged as unpatriotic for being territorially absent.

However, flexible citizenship can also become a “citizenship of convenience,” with the nation-state merely regarded as a source of rights where citizens live with or without political engagement. As Steven Vertovec notes, for many migrants, homeland has become the source of identity while the new host country is the source of rights.⁶⁴ More and more people now reside in countries where they are not citizens, preferring to reside there as aliens, hence the phenomenon of “citizenship without daily presence.” “Portable patriotism” is at play, for instance, when an immigration lawyer in Toronto custom-fits his clients with whatever citizenships will help them navigate global markets. It is also at work when a retired top American official for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency ran for president of Lithuania

⁶⁴ Vertovec, *Transnationalism* 88.

and won, with his fellow Chicagoans able to vote for him.⁶⁵ Françoise Lionnet notes that there are Third world cosmopolitans and flexible citizens “who possess the wherewithal to *float* [italics mine] about national determinations of economy, politics, and culture.”⁶⁶ As the meaning and concept of citizenship has become diluted and watered down, a second or even a third passport has “become not just a link to a homeland but also a glorified travel visa, a license to do business, a stake in the second economy, and an escape hatch, even a status symbol.”⁶⁷ There has been a growing tension between the concept of nation as a geographic space where citizens still live together and the view of the nation as a mere imagined community existing socially. Due to presence of increasing numbers of diasporic populations in many parts of the world, recent discourse in the media and academia seems to favor the nation as a transnational public space in social rather than in geographical or territorial terms.⁶⁸

State officials of ruling regimes tend to advocate a form of nationality and citizenship that is well-defined and self-contained territorially because it is orderly and less messy administratively. They prefer citizens “to be born, live, work, pay taxes, draw benefits and die in the same place, travel on one passport only, and bequeath only one nationality to offspring” as a way to make citizenship the “glue keeping individual and state together.”⁶⁹ With over 200 million people who now live and work outside their countries of birth, opening up the old notion of one-person, one-state legal citizenship and widening the imaginary of cultural citizenship assumes

⁶⁵ Fritz, “Pledging Multiple Allegiances.”

⁶⁶ Lionnet 13.

⁶⁷ Vertovec, *Transnationalism* 92; Fritz.

⁶⁸ Fritz.

⁶⁹ *The Economist*, “Multiple Citizenship.”

currency and salience. In the Philippine experience, this constricted notion of citizenship that underpins public policy has led to the marginalization of a minority group.

Banyaga mediates by gesturing towards a re-examination of the old notion of one-person, one-nation legal citizenship. I view Ong's novel as a fictive intervention of history in *Banyaga* to open and challenge the rigidity of territorial and bordered notions of nation and Filipino identity that made possible the marginalization of a minority group in Philippine society. A more fluid view of nation and citizenship will allow Chinese Filipinos more room to navigate and maneuver their Chinese Filipino identity while maintaining dual or multiple national and transnational linkages.

While dual or multiple citizenship has long existed, it has gained currency in the light of transnationalism and globalization. In 2008, the Migration Policy Institute revealed that almost half the world's countries allow dual nationality or dual citizenship in some form.⁷⁰ As recently as 2003, the Philippines itself passed Republic Act 9189 which allows dual citizenship. By inviting Filipinos abroad who have already become citizens of countries of their current residence to become citizens of their homeland, the Philippines is in a way "nationalizing," so to speak, the diasporic Filipinos in an attempt to suture them legally into Philippine nation-state. China, through its nationality law of 1909 has long "nationalized" the overseas Chinese by implementing the bloodline rule to citizenship, a convenient way of being a citizen of China even if one is absent from the nation-state. Under this ruling, many Chinese residents in the Philippines opted for their Chinese or Chinese mestizo children to retain their Chinese citizenship. While dual citizenship would have been the perfect

⁷⁰ *The Economist*, "Multiple Citizenship."

solution to the troubling Chinese dual national linkages that stir questions of loyalty and political allegiance in the Philippines, China's Nationality Law of 1980 does not allow dual citizenship. If a Chinese takes a foreign citizenship, he automatically loses his Chinese citizenship.⁷¹ The equation of political allegiance to singular citizenship underpins China's preference for exclusive legal citizenship.

Conclusion

With heightened migration and diasporic movements as a response to global capitalism, the likelihood that the person next to you is a stranger is high. Since many citizens around the world are no longer residing in their countries of birth or citizenship, strangers in nation-states are increasing. These strangers may come as refugees, political exiles, legal and illegal migrants, or modern-day sojourners and flexible citizens. Since the transnational or cross-cultural encounter is likely to be characterized by contact with the "other" and with difference, how do we incorporate strangers into our midst? Adopting a cosmopolitan stance, while utopian, is instructive. Cosmopolitanism is premised on universalist values, not on ethnicity, race, sex, gender, or national affiliations. As Ulrich Beck notes: "In a borderless society of strangers, the distinction between local and strangers, locals and cosmopolitans, friends and enemies, civilization and barbarism, the West and the rest is abolished."⁷² Kwame Appiah likewise argues that differences are abolished if we premise our relationships on the basis of our humanity, not on race, class, nationalism, ethnicity and all those bordered and territorialized axes of identity. He queries: "What do we owe strangers by virtue of our humanity? While he agrees that "the

⁷¹ 1980 Nationality Law of the People's Republic of China as posted in the PRC Supreme People's Court website: <http://en.chinacourt.org/public/detail.php?id=2706>.

⁷² Fine 135-136.

foreignness of foreigners, the strangeness of strangers” is real, we have been encouraged to exaggerate their significance. While it is normal, he argues, that we care for those dearest and nearest to us or with whom we share a common identity, be it familial, ethnic, national or religious, these affiliations get their “psychological energy” by the fact that it creates an in-group and an out-group. If we premise our relationships on the basis of our shared humanity, he explains that there is no out-group to generate the binding energy that every in-group needs.⁷³

So, Ong surprises or disappoints the reader when after setting up the racist tone of the novel by opening it with the pejorative name calling of the Chinese and Filipinos towards one another and by starting the novel with a scene where a native Customs officer solicits a bribe from a Chinaman at the Customs house, he also reveals fine moments of humanity when the Chinese and the Filipinos alike, total strangers to one another, cross the often hostile *huanna-lannang* divide to commiserate or help each other. Even the *huanna* agents of the state respect the sanctity of the Chinese enclave and cease their tax collection or policing when a Chinese is in despair or undergoing a personal tragedy, such as when Ah Beng was mourning the death of his sister: “To this day, the lannang say that wild birds and pigeons gathered about the mourners as the boy [Ah Beng] played his flute, that some of the old folk wept while the huanna tax collector and police all went away upon hearing the music (21). Felipe, a *huanna*, helps a wealthy Chinese businessman who was being assaulted and robbed by a Filipino gang when the former could have profited by collaborating with the gang. Instead, Felipe disperses the gang and brings home the helpless Chinese man. Sebastian, a *huanna* employee of the Chinese junk

⁷³ Appiah xxi.

man, rushes to persuade Lan Ping, Antonio's mother, who is most distrustful of the *huanna*, to evacuate Manila when it is being bombed during the liberation of Manila by the Americans. In turn, Lan Ping finally welcomes the *huanna* woman whom his grandson married and her half-breed granddaughter. In these fine moments of humanity, the Jamesonian "wish-fulfilment" and "utopian longings" are satiated briefly in *Banyaga*.

While we witness these cosmopolitan moments in the novel, Ong portrays just as many instances of the Chinese suffering from the hands of the Chinese, from their own kind, from their own people, giving a different spin to "lannang" (our own people) and the "othering" that this type of name-calling creates. A Chinese molests Ah Kaw. A Chinese is the mastermind of the kidnapping of Antonio's grandson. A Chinese snitched on Hilario that led to him being falsely accused of hoarding. A Chinese betrays Tong so the latter will be deported. A Chinese gang extorts bribes from Chinese businesses. That the Chinese alien can be a threat to his own people and just as well to the native "other" is further explored in Ong's earlier novel *The Embarrassment of Riches* (2000).

Thus, I conclude with an ominous note by bringing up the potential dangers of the Chinese self-declared alien in *Embarrassment*. I have earlier discussed the plight of the alien or foreigner who is marginalized, denied political rights, and seeks to be part of the community or nation. But what happens if the foreigner is a self-declared or self-bestowed alien who does not desire to be part of the cultural or national imaginary and who disregards whether you are *huanna* or *lannang*? *Embarrassment* is about the futuristic, though not improbable, imagining of a parallel nation-state where the Chinese are no longer the marginalized or subordinate group but are now in power

both economically and politically. This novel is another illustration of the power of minor literature: A minority writer like Ong, who writes about a group of people in the margins of Philippine society, can imagine and create an alternate (even parallel) community literarily. As Deleuze and Guattari argue: “If the writer is in the margins or completely outside his or her fragile community, this situation allows the writer all the more possibility to express another possible community and to forge the means of another sensibility.”⁷⁴ In *Embarrassment*, Ong imagines and creates a nation-state called the Victorianas located in the Pacific, not faraway from the Philippines. In the recent election, Victorianas has elected a Chinese woman president, the heiress to her father’s mall empire, and who maintains her presidential offices at Megalomalla, a futuristic, huge, self-contained, and self-sufficient mall complex.

However, the new Chinese government in Victorianas is threatened by various machinations of power and capital, from powerful individual businessmen to political parties and religious groups. Corollary to the concept of flexible citizenship is the weakening of state power due to inroads made by capital, migration and cultural inflows that infringe on state sovereignty.⁷⁵ Carried to the extreme, there are dangers to a weak state. Just as the state can exercise its sovereignty to advance its political goals, unscrupulous individuals can violate state sovereignty to advance their personal interests. While *Banyaga* merely alludes to Chinese border-crossing activities like the smuggling of laborers, prostitutes, and opium, *Embarrassment*, on the other hand, dramatizes a state besieged by a more complex and sophisticated form of predatory transnational capitalism. Alfonso Ong, a wealthy and powerful Victoriano tycoon

⁷⁴ Deleuze and Guattari, “Minor Literature” 17.

⁷⁵ Aihwa Ong, *Neoliberalism*, 5-7.

buys an island called Burias in the Victorianas. He purchases the island for one million American dollars from a crony of the now deposed dictator. He transforms the island into a prototype of 21st century city. It is a tropical paradise with all the modern amenities, from a hotel and golf course to an animal reserve, where rare species threatened by extinction are given a natural habitat.

Burias can be viewed as a fictional re-crafting of what Hau calls the state-within-the state discussed earlier; however, it is an ominous one as it is beyond the reach of the state's discipline and policing. Alfonso, referred to as the “,” is wealthy, powerful and untouchable, the epitome of capital accumulation. It is said that whoever has Ong's political backing wins a presidential election. Ong is also accused of relocating indigenous tribes to his island to give way for companies to mine the ancestral lands, quarry the mountains, and log the forests. Later in the novel, it is also revealed that Ong maintains armed troops to protect his various business operations. He has his own pier where shipments of various “commodities,” from products to people, are received. He smuggles in prostitutes and illegal aliens, including prisoners from China, to work in the island, even commissioning a Chinese military officer from mainland China to oversee his business in weapons and armaments. Seemingly untouched by and unmoored from nation, the concept of “alienating capital” assumes a new dimension as Alfonso alienates and isolates himself from the rest. He isolates himself from the nation territorially by living on his own island subject only to his own rules, and detaches himself culturally from Victorianas, bringing himself closer to China. He revels in Chinese mythology, cuisine, mahjong and other facets of Chinese lifestyle and populates his island with Chinese people from mainland China and Taiwan.

Charlson Ong's literary mediation allows us to view the fictive character of Alfonso to stretch the limits of flexible citizenship, expose the predatory nature of global capitalism, and project the extensive power of capital to infringe upon individual rights and state sovereignty and to thus unravel the already fragile, tenuous nation-state. The novelistic imagining of this state-within-a-state makes palpable the power that lies in capital accumulation that can lead to unbridled, dangerous terrains: the subversion of the nation-state.

In a fictionalized act of intervention, Ong puts an end to the power orchestrations of the new version of the Chinese "alien" (Alfonso) who is outside the realm of state policing by making him physically vulnerable despite all his power. Apparently seriously ill, Alfonso faces an imminent death (373). Nevertheless, these futuristic renderings of the post-national world bring up the dangers of intensified global capitalism that could turn the flexible citizen into a "rogue alien" as a response to opportunity and the beckoning of profit and power.

In closing, *Banyaga: The Song of War* can be viewed as a fictional reconstruction of the socio-political history of the Chinese in the Philippines and their navigation in a new homeland as alien and citizen, outsider and insider, national and transnational. It is also a persuasive literary discourse on race and racism, alienation, citizenship, and nationalism, which lie at the crux of Chinese Filipino identity. More than anything else, the novel is a literary mediation on the usual approach of viewing the story and history of the nation from the perspective of the dominant group. The re-narrativization of history in the novel from the point of view of those in the margins of society allows us to see what is overlooked, omitted, or embellished in the mainstream version of Philippine history. Viewed from the perspective of the

marginalized or the minoritized, the novel allows us to explore the paradoxical connection between marginalization and exceptionalism in the Chinese Filipino experience, particularly among Chinese merchants, traders, and tycoons. Despite many obstacles encountered by the Chinese through the centuries, the Chinese Filipinos, as portrayed by the sworn brothers and their progeny in the novel, have indeed triumphed. Their historical transformation is a phenomenal tale of what I call the “majoritization of a minority” through acquisition of financial and economic power, which is inevitably tied to political clout. Hau observed that the Chinese place in the Philippine nation and in the national imaginary is now being reconfigured due to their mercantile or capitalist success: “Chinese affluence has revalued the Chinese before the eyes of nation.”⁷⁶ As for Charlson Ong and his position in mainstream Philippine literature, one Filipino scholar notes that although there are now quite a number of Chinese writers in English, no one has achieved the status attained by Ong and acknowledges that he has entered the mainstream Philippine literature: “Ong’s entry into the mainstream Philippine Literature has forced the critics to acknowledge the presence of a dynamic and growing body of writings by the Chinese.”⁷⁷

Finally, while the specter of “alien” persists, the Chinese Filipinos have become power brokers and nation-makers in the Philippines. But as *Embarrassment* reveals, capital can infringe on individual rights and state sovereignty due to heightened globalization in this century where the “alien” once again haunts the citizen, particularly the flexible citizen. Armed with huge capital and passports, the

⁷⁶ Hau, in a paper presented at the Association of Asian Studies annual conference held in San Diego, CA on March 23, 2013 that I attended.

⁷⁷ Comments by Prof. Ronald Baytan of the De La Salle University and University of the Philippines on the back cover review of Charlson Ong’s *A Tropical Winter’s Tale and Other Stories* (2003) published by the University of the Philippines Press.

flexible Chinese citizen can be viewed as an alien again but this time one who has the ability to “float” over nation-states and violate human rights and state sovereignty for profit or power. The futuristic imagination of the nation-state in *Embarrassment*, where the nation-state is besieged by the transnational capitalist ventures of aliens and citizens, reveals the rich but sometimes dangerous possibilities of flexible citizenship.

Charlson Ong’s opposing views of the “alien,” one who claims a stake on community or nation, and the other who repudiates it, help to unravel the enigma of the Chinese *banyaga* in the Philippines and have timely relevance in the ongoing animated global discourse about the onslaught of increasing migration and global expansion of capitalism.

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