

The Exploration of Social and Cultural Challenges of Chinese-Filipino in Philippine Society in the Mano Po Film Series

MA. RITA R. ARANDA
National University, Philippines
mrraranda@national-u.edu.ph

ABSTRACT

The Mano Po film series (2002-2016) presents an intriguing and developing representation of Chinese-Filipino culture in the Philippines. Through its captivating plot and characters, this second longest-running film series in the Philippines sheds light on the challenges Chinese Filipinos continue to confront as they seek their social and cultural identity in Filipino culture. The present study seeks to investigate the extent to which the seven Mano Po films attempt, via filmic representation, to preserve and enrich the Chinese culture and traditions within the Filipino community. It investigates the activities, rituals, ceremonies, culture, and traditions depicted in the film using cultural studies as a tool for inquiry. The study's findings are that while Chinese Filipinos make concerted efforts to embrace and assimilate into Filipino culture, they do so while maintaining their rich cultural heritage and traditions. They may experience cultural dislocation within Philippine society. Yet, they strive to overcome these challenges by openly acknowledging their hybrid identity and liminal status to establish a peaceful relationship with both cultures. The study aims to cultivate a more profound understanding of Chinese Filipinos' endeavours to embrace Filipino culture while conserving their rich traditions. This understanding can foster greater cultural acceptance and harmony between the two communities as they seek social and cultural identity.

Keywords: Chinese-Filipino; Chinese culture; cultural dislocation; representation; cultural studies

INTRODUCTION

"Chinese-Filipino" refers to individuals of Chinese descent born, raised, or residing in the Philippines, reflecting a mix of Chinese heritage and Filipino culture. The term "Tsinoy" merges "Tsino" (Chinese) and "Pinoy" (Filipino) to specifically denote those of Chinese ancestry born and raised in the Philippines, often resulting from intermarriages between Chinese men and Filipino women. Both terms signify a blend of Chinese and Filipino identities. This identity marker applies to recent immigrants and those with Chinese ancestry spanning multiple generations, recognising their unique cultural heritage and contributions to the Filipino community (Lizada, 2020). In this way, Tsinoy uphold their Chinese culture while assimilating into Filipino society (Chu, 2011, p. 382).

Additionally, these individuals participate in economic traditions that influence power dynamics in Philippine society. Over different periods in Philippine history, being Chinese has been associated with business, wealth, and political issues, one of which is the ongoing maritime tension between China and the Philippines, including the West Philippine Sea dispute, which highlights the potential for military confrontation in the South China Sea, causing threats to global trade and affecting several countries relationships with the Filipino community. Historically, Chinese Filipinos have faced exploitation due to cultural dislocation as they integrate into the political system, balancing being both foreign and local. Likewise, they have endured marginalisation, economic discrimination, social exclusion, citizenship, and political participation limitations, hindering their full integration into Philippine society (Hau, 2005, p. 522).

This cultural dislocation is a central theme in films exploring Chinese-Filipino issues, such as *Crying Ladies* (2003) and the *Mano Po* film series (2002-2016). These films portray "Chineseness" in connection with developing and transforming the Chinese-Filipino identity in the Philippines. However, there has also been dissatisfaction with how Tsinoys were represented in the aforementioned films. Members of Kaisa Para Sa Kaunlaran (Kaisa), an organisation of Chinese-Filipinos that advocates commitment to Philippine society and works to preserve their ethnic heritage for example, objected to what they asserted were inaccurate portrayals, which they saw as potentially harmful to national unity. According to them, these films suggested that all Tsinoys are affluent and, consequently, are frequent kidnapping victims. In reality, many Tsinoys come from middle-class families and hold low-salary jobs, contrasting with the affluent image in the films. The stereotyping by the film industry of Chinese Filipinos as wealthy, aloof business owners can lead to negative public perceptions and unfair judgments, which, therefore, highlights the need for more research into their film representations (Chu, 2011). In response, Philippine filmmakers have created movies exploring diverse Filipino culture and addressing issues like poverty, identity, and societal challenges, serving as tools for cultural preservation and social commentary. Recognising the importance of film for communication and self-expression, the Philippine Film Commission promotes local films that authentically represent Filipino society (Bautista, 2015). Similarly, the study by Rosidi and Khotimah (2020, p. 240) shows that young Muslims watching Korean dramas selectively adopt values aligning with their cultural experiences and Islamic identity.

This study examines Chinese-Filipino representation in a well-known local film series to provide insights into the Tsinoys stereotype in Philippine cinema and raise social awareness among Filipino and Chinese-Filipino communities. It encourages a deeper understanding of this identity, promoting critical analysis of film-based perceptions and discouraging judgments based solely on cinematic portrayals. This research highlights how film depictions can distort perceptions of Chinese-Filipino beliefs and traditions, emphasising the need for balanced representation. Using concepts of liminality and hybridity, the study analyses Chinese-Filipino identity in the *Mano Po* film series, focusing on the cultural dislocation experienced by characters in a different cultural environment, leading to disorientation, confusion, and a loss of identity. The study will answer the following questions: (1) How are Chinese culture and traditions represented in the film series? (2) How do Chinese Filipinos (Tsinoys) maintain their culture while assimilating into Filipino society? (3) What cultural dislocations and conflicts have they encountered in Philippine society?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Chinese presence in the Philippines dates back to the Song Dynasty (962-1279), with increased settlement during Spanish colonisation in 1565. This period involved control measures like massacres, immigration restrictions, and segregating non-baptised Chinese in 1603 and 1639. Despite initial distrust, the Spanish recognised the economic value of the Chinese, allowing some to reside with incentives for conversion and loyalty (Ang See, 2020, pp. 144-145; Chu, 2011, p. 367). The American conquest led to mass naturalisation, integrating Chinese individuals into Filipino citizenship and enabling their socio-economic advancement (Ang See, 1990; Chu, 2011; Gonzales, 2015; Hau, 2005). During Ferdinand Marcos's administration (1965–1986), policy changes allowed Chinese residents to apply for naturalisation, resulting in over 90 per cent of Tsinoys becoming Filipino citizens (See, 2018). Despite political and economic turmoil from the 1970s to 1990s, many Chinese residents thrived and dominated various industries, contributing

significantly to the country's wholesale distribution network. However, this success also coincided with a widening wealth gap among Filipinos (Chu, 2011, p. 367).

Historically, Filipinos used the term "Intsik" to refer to Chinese people. However, during the Spanish colonial era, it developed negative connotations and was used in a discriminatory context. In response, there have been efforts to reclaim and redefine the term, such as by compiling Filipino-Chinese writings titled "Intsik." In response to the exclusionary nature of "Intsik," young socially conscious Chinese-Filipinos from Kaisa Para Sa Kaunlaran introduced the term "Tsinoy" in 1987, combining "Tsino" (Chinese) and "Pinoy" (Filipino) with "Tsinoy" as an alternative spelling. According to Kaisa, being identified as Tsinoy emphasises Chinese and Filipino ethnicity, promoting understanding and collaboration by highlighting Chinese contributions to Philippine society. Caroline Hau noted that the term "Tsinoy" strategically places Chinese Filipinos on equal footing with "authentic" or "truly Filipino" individuals, implying a blending of intricate Chinese and Filipino identities that are inseparable. This positioning of Tsinoy means they are equally legitimate members of Philippine society; adopting a Tsinoy identity validates individuals of Chinese descent by embracing and embodying Filipino cultural heritage and identity (Chu, 2021). Despite holding Filipino citizenship, Chinese Filipinos often face suspicion. They are viewed as outsiders due to historical and geopolitical tensions, such as the territorial and maritime dispute in the West Philippine Sea and the 2024 Alice Guo controversy. These suspicions can lead to a questioning of Chinese Filipinos' loyalty to the Philippines and discrimination against them as "outsiders" (Hau, 2005, pp. 509-510). This outsider portrayal is evident in the *Mano Po* film series, where Tsinoy navigate dual identities and maintain Chinese traditions, sometimes facing ridicule.

Importantly for this study, the film effectively communicates information, beliefs, culture, and tradition through audio, visuals, and motion (Darshan & Prasad, 2020). It constructs meanings and symbols reflective of its era by creating narratives illustrating specific lifestyles, practices, and prevailing ideologies (Ancheta, 2016, p. 771; Sherak, 2011). Similarly, the study by Kubrak (2020) revealed that films influence people's beliefs, opinions, stereotypes, and attitudes. Consequently, movies can significantly impact gender and ethnic stereotypes, alter attitudes towards certain groups, and shape newly formed opinions on various issues. According to Tom Sherak, the film is a narrative platform for cultures to recount their past and present, anticipate the future, and reflect on the shared human experience (Lumbera, 2000; Sherak, 2011). Since the early 1980s, Filipino films have consistently attracted around 2.5 million viewers due to their compelling narratives and themes deeply rooted in Filipino culture, seamlessly incorporating social realities and relevant issues (Lumbera, 2000). Notably, many films represent Chinese-Filipinos in Philippine cinema, such as *Feng Shui* (2004), *Crying Ladies* (2003), *My Binondo Girl* (2011), and *Babaeng Hampaslupa/The Poor Heiress* (2011) (Tabanera, 2019) to name a few. For example, in a study by Hau (2005, p. 517) on *Crying Ladies*, the plot centres on the stereotype of associating the "Chinese" with money or wealth. This film shows how Chinese Filipinos can create valuable connections with wealthy East Asian neighbours, offering opportunities for Filipinos. Additionally, Lizada's (2020, p. 128). study describes the Chinese-Filipino identity as "liminal," shaped by the country's political and economic history, reflecting their literature and popular culture portrayal as entirely foreign and fully local.

The *Mano Po* film series, recognised as a significant classic in contemporary Philippine cinema and a historically significant work of popular culture, creatively documents the Chinese-Filipino community's acculturation challenges and domestic issues (Lizada, 2020, p. 111). The film series includes *Mano Po 1: My Family* (2002), *Mano Po 2: My Home* (2003), *Mano Po 3: My*

Love (2004), *Mano Po 4: Ako Legal Wife* (2005), *Mano Po 5: Gua Ai Di (I Love You)* (2006), *Mano Po 6: A Mother's Love* (2009), and *Mano Po 7: Chinoy* (2016). Joel Lamangan directed all except *Mano Po 2*, directed by Eric Matti, and *Mano Po 7*, directed by Ian Loreños. The seven films in the series explore gender dynamics within the Chinese-Filipino community, showcasing complex relationships and the increasing empowerment of women in a traditionally patriarchal society, with women challenging norms and gaining control over their lives (Lizada, 2020) and often portray Chinese Filipinos as affluent, reflecting their significant business ownership and economic success.

The *Mano Po* film series had a positive reception in the Philippines, evidenced by its numerous sequels and widespread viewership because it captures the unique narratives about family relationships (including family values, conflicts, and reconciliation), customs, cultural heritage, and societal dynamics, captivating audiences with compelling stories and cultural significance. By addressing the complexities of cultural identity and blending Chinese and Filipino traditions, the films resonated emotionally with viewers and reflected the experiences of Filipinos navigating multiple cultural influences.

FRAMEWORK

Utilising a cultural studies framework in this research offers a lens to examine the interplay of cultural, social, and historical elements portrayed in the *Mano Po* film series, allowing for a comprehensive analysis of social and cultural challenges (Hall, 1997). Cultural Studies is an interdisciplinary field that critically examines everyday life, cultural practices, power dynamics, and social structures. It emphasises critical concepts such as globalisation, media, identity, race, and gender. Also, it explores the production and construction of cultural meanings, the role of power in social relationships, and how cultural texts and practices influence identity and societal structures (Barker & Jane, 2016). This approach emphasises everyday cultural practices, beliefs, and values that shape our lives (Fiske, 1991, pp. 166-167), which is crucial in understanding the Chinese-Filipino community's identities, power dynamics, and societal reception. Employing concepts like "liminality" and "hybridity," the research evaluates the seven *Mano Po* films, providing valuable tools for analysing Chinese-Filipino identity and broader cultural dynamics.

CULTURAL REPRESENTATION

Cultural representation significantly influences our perceptions, shaping stereotypes and biases about cultural groups. Glotov's study (2023) highlights how stereotypes persist in audio-visual media worldwide due to constraints like time, space, and limited understanding of foreign cultures, emphasising the need for critical awareness to address nationalism and racism. Accurate and positive cultural representation can increase understanding, empathy, and appreciation for different cultures, fostering inclusivity. In contrast, negative representations can perpetuate stereotypes and cultural biases, affecting societal perceptions and individual self-esteem (Hall, 1997). Representation is subjective and influenced by personal cultural backgrounds, beliefs, and experiences; therefore, it should be diverse, inclusive, and authentic to avoid harmful stereotypes and misrepresentations.

CULTURAL HYBRIDITY

Cultural hybridity involves diverse identity experiences and boundary-crossing styles from migration, diaspora, and intercultural communication, blending new technologies with traditional practices and values. Different cultures interpret hybridity uniquely, and it varies based on its origins; for example, Asia sees it as a fusion of Western technology and Eastern values, while in sub-Saharan Africa, it emphasises the importance of African heritage and community-oriented values to shape a modern identity that respects and incorporates its rich cultural heritage (Pieterse, 2001, pp. 17-18). Similarly, this study uses cultural hybridity to explore how Chinese Filipinos blend Chinese and Filipino cultures. It highlights the importance of understanding their unique experiences to enhance knowledge of multicultural interactions, acculturation, and cultural integration.

CULTURAL DISLOCATION

Lastly, cultural dislocation involves feeling disconnected or lacking a sense of belonging in a familiar environment due to exposure to a different cultural context, leading to alienation and identity loss (De Vries, 2015, p. 22; Ishiyama, 1995, p. 263). This dislocation faced by diasporic individuals causes psychological issues and a loss of social identity, emphasising cultural rootlessness (Jaleel, 2017, p. 337). The concept of liminality, or being "in-between" cultures, challenges individuals to establish belonging and form social connections, profoundly impacting their identity as they integrate into new cultural settings (Lizada, 2020, p. 128). In this study, liminality is seen as a position of transition and transformation, creatively engaging Chinese Filipinos as they integrate into the Filipino community.

METHODOLOGY

This study analysed scenes in the *Mano Po* film series to explore Chinese Filipinos' social interactions and culture as they blended into Philippine society. The notion of "liminality" examined Chinese-Filipino characters' transitional and transformative experiences, offering a deeper insight into their cultural identity and social interactions within Philippine society. This concept explores how characters embody both Chinese and Filipino traditions and values in a liminal space between two cultures, and "hybridity" serves as a literary lens, providing a tool for inquiry. It examined how the films depict Chinese-Filipino characters, focusing on scenes, characterisation, and plot points in which stereotypes, cultural hybridity, and identity negotiation in a multicultural society were clearly visible. It investigated the films' efforts to preserve and enrich Chinese culture within the Filipino community. This research employed a systematic approach to achieve an unbiased and detailed analysis, which identified Chinese actions, traditions, and beliefs depicted through signs and symbols and examined their preservation in contemporary times. Likewise, it explored the experiences of cultural dislocation among Chinese Filipinos and their integration within the Filipino community. These methods provided a nuanced understanding of the complexities and dynamics of Chinese-Filipino identity within Filipino society, highlighting the cultural richness and importance of the film series.

DATA: THE MANO PO FILM SERIES

This section provides a synopsis of each film in the *Mano Po* series. As mentioned earlier, Joel Lamangan directed films 1, 3,4,5, and 6. Erik Matti and Ian Loreños directed films 2 and 7.

Mano Po 1: My Family (2002)

In this first film, Luis Go and Elisa, his Filipina spouse, succeed through hard work and determination, though they long for a grandson to complete their family despite having three loving granddaughters. Despite facing challenges in the Filipino community and being victims of kidnap-for-ransom incidents, the family holds steadfastly to their cultural traditions and values, which strengthen their bond.

Mano Po 2: My Home (2003)

The second film centres on Antonio, a successful businessman, and his relationships with three women, Sol, LuShui, and Belinda, exploring the complexities of family dynamics and traditional customs that influence their lives. Tragedy strikes when Antonio is tragically murdered, intensifying emotions during his funeral and highlighting Belinda and Sol's deep connection to him as they vie for a role in the traditional funeral rites.

Mano Po 3: My Love (2004)

My Love follows Lilia Chiong Yang's fight against kidnapping for ransom in the Chinese community, challenging cultural norms and stereotypes through her activism and emphasising the importance of valuing every family member regardless of gender. Lilia's reunion with her former lover introduces dilemmas surrounding filial piety and in-law interference.

Mano Po 4: Ako Legal Wife (I'm the Legal Wife) (2005)

This film portrays a businessman's relationships with his three wives, Chona, Patty, and Gloria. Focusing on the legal wife's quest to win back her husband's love and rebuild her life. The film emphasises themes of strength, determination, love, and loyalty while incorporating rich cultural elements like feng shui beliefs and the complexities of arranged marriage.

Mano Po 5: Gua Ai Di (I Love You) (2006)

The fifth *Mano Po* film, *Gua Ai Di*, which means "I Love You," tells the story of Charity, a Chinese-Filipino woman torn between her love for Nathan, a Filipino man, and her deep commitment to preserving her Chinese culture and traditions. The film weaves the complexities of love and cultural identity, presenting aspects of Chinese traditions, including visually stunning celebrations like arranged marriages, temple prayers, and mesmerising dragon dances.

Mano Po 6: A Mother's Love (2009)

A Mother's Love tells the story of Melinda Uy as she confronts discrimination within the Chinese community while striving to establish a business and reunite with her children despite interference

from her in-laws. Despite facing numerous challenges, Melinda's determination and hard work lead to her remarkable rise to billionaire status and a joyful reunion with her children, showcasing the profound depth of a mother's love.

Mano Po 7: Chinoy (2016)

The last film depicts poverty as a pathway to wealth. Wilson Wong, not born wealthy, achieves success through hard work. Despite focusing on expanding his real estate business, he neglects his family, leading to their suffering and a dysfunctional household.

ANALYSIS

The *Mano Po* film series reflects the intertwining of Chinese culture and history with the everyday lives of Filipinos, focusing on the development of Chinese-Filipino identity. Each film in the anthology emphasises the cultural and traditional values cherished by Chinese and Filipino communities, exploring the experiences and challenges Chinese Filipinos face in preserving their cultural identity while adapting to a diverse Filipino society. The stories frequently explore family sagas, generational conflicts, and cultural clashes, touching on themes such as love, sacrifice, ambition, and reconciliation.

REPRESENTATION OF CHINESE CULTURE AND TRADITIONS

The *Mano Po* film series highlights the traditional Chinese cultural value of prioritising male offspring, reflecting beliefs about family succession and the importance of sons in bringing fortune and prosperity. Sons are highly valued and given preferential treatment, seen in such practices as being given the role of managing the business, making decisions, and even leading the funeral honours, as depicted in *Mano Po 1*. Daughters, meanwhile, are often seen as burdens and are given the role of bearing domestic responsibilities. Female children are considered second-class citizens and may even be given up for adoption, as seen in *Mano Po 3*, where Lilia's mother chooses to give her to a neighbour for adoption.

However, gender roles and representations are not static, as the films show. All the films in the *Mano Po* series feature the tradition in Chinese families of married women helping their husbands both at home and in business. For example, Gina and Juliet Go in *Mano Po 1*, Belinda in *Mano Po 2*, Patty in *Mano Po 4*, Yolanda and Ama in *Mano Po 5*, and Debbie in *Mano Po 7* actively support their husbands. Some female characters also challenge traditional roles. For example, Lilia Chiong in *Mano Po 3* is a very active anti-crime crusader dedicated to helping the Chinese community eradicate the kidnap-for-ransom problem. The youngest generation of women in the Tsinoy families is often portrayed as strong and responsible women who stand up for themselves and find their worth in their family and community, such as Vera in *Mano Po 1*, who, at an early age, becomes the chief executive of the Go Group of Companies and is called the 'Dragon Lady' because of her iron-fisted attitude. Another example is Sol, who leaves Antonio with her son because her husband decided to have another woman in addition to his two other families. Likewise, Melinda Uy in *Mano Po 6* becomes a billionaire despite facing numerous hardships and triumphs as a half-Chinese, half-Filipino woman. She endures discrimination from her in-laws and the broader Chinese community yet perseveres to achieve great success. Many female characters in the film series are shown as capable of handling financial resources and good

decision-makers in the family. They challenge the traditional narrative of Chinese women as passive victims of patriarchy, highlighting their significant contributions to business enterprises and their role in shaping the Philippine economy.

The film series also represents marriage within their culture as very important for the Tsinoy community. The "Pinoy" element disappears, as the notion of "Chinese is for Chinese only" prevails, reflecting the deep-rooted tradition of those with Chinese ancestry to marry within their community. Through marriage, this cultural practice encourages the preservation of Chinese cultural identity and wealth. Traditionally, the foundation of marriage was for the benefit of the family and not necessarily for love, though love could develop after marriage. Often, the parents arrange these marriages, as in the case of LuShui and Antonio and Chona and Elton in *Mano Po 2* and *Mano Po 4*, where both sets of parents arrange the wedding. The films depict characters embracing arranged marriages, prompting reflection on the delicate balance between tradition and individual desires in modern times. These characters sacrifice their happiness to gain family and social acceptance from the community. The film series features characters who embrace the custom of arranged marriages, such as Daniel and Gina, Juliet Go and Joseph Co in *Mano Po 1*, Antonio and LuShui in *Mano Po 2*, and Elton and Chona in *Mano Po 4*. The women in these films demonstrate extraordinary degrees of submission and readiness to sacrifice in their search for love, attention, and approval from their husbands. Even Charity in *Mano Po 5* unthinkingly follows family customs around marriage despite her intense feelings for her Filipino boyfriend. Her obedience to her parents prompts charity to reject her feelings for Nathan. Charity's family's unshakable dedication to Chinese culture and tradition is beautifully depicted in the film. These films highlight individuals' strong social expectations and pressures to adhere to this tradition, reflecting how community norms can influence personal choices. Also, the film explores how this tradition can unite and divide families, depending on how rigidly it is enforced.

Intriguingly, the films feature both positive and negative views of those who break with tradition and marry outside the Chinese community despite parental disapproval. In *Mano Po 1*, Richelle marries a Filipino cop; in *Mano Po 2*, Antonio Chan marries the non-Chinese Sol; in *Mano Po 5*, Charity falls in love with Nathan, a Filipino veterinarian; and in *Mano Po 6*, Melinda Uy marries Alfonso. In the first two films, the parents disown their children for going against their wishes. Similarly, in *Mano Po 6* and *Mano Po 1*, parental disapproval causes significant suffering in the marriages of Melinda and Elisa as they struggle to be accepted into their husbands' families. For instance, Melinda's in-laws say to her husband, "Why did you marry a Filipina? If you do not leave her, I will disinherit you." Similarly, rather than welcoming her with open arms, Elisa's in-laws scold her husband for bringing a stranger into their home, a foreigner, another mouth to feed.

However, some couples make their marriages work, even when arranged. They do their best to sustain and keep their family together. Examining the responses of both parents and couples to arranged marriages in today's world prompts a review of how cultural practices have changed over time and how tradition balances with personal wishes. For example, LuShui from *Mano Po 2* and Chona from *Mano Po 4* share a similar situation: their husbands love other women, but still, the wives defend and preserve their families despite the circumstances. The wives become very submissive, martyr-like, and willing to sacrifice everything for their families. In contrast, Richelle in *Mano Po 1* asserts her decision to marry Raf: "For me, I will just stay here. I plan to marry Raf in two years. I will live here, grow old here, die here, and be buried here beside Ama."

Moreover, Chinese-Filipino women in the film series are often represented as highly valuing and protecting their families, even when these families are formed through arranged marriages. In a traditional Chinese family, if the daughter gets married, she goes with her husband

to take care of the household and assist him in the business, like in all the films in the *Mano Po* series. The women support their husbands in business, as Gina and Juliet Go in *Mano Po 1*, Belinda in *Mano Po 2*, Patty in *Mano Po 4*, Debbie in *Mano Po 7*, and Yolanda and Ama in *Mano Po 5*. These women prioritise their family obligations over personal aspirations. For example, in *Mano Po 3*, when Lilia, the "Tiger Lady," is widowed, she decides to remain unmarried and remain in the Philippines instead of moving to the United States with Michael, her former boyfriend. When she faces the dilemma of choosing between her past love and her commitment to her culture and tradition, she chooses the latter for the sake of her family.

In the film series, though Chinese parents value and protect their family, they may be willing to disown their children if they disobey cultural traditions, demonstrating how rigidly traditional Chinese people can adhere to their beliefs. On the other hand, if children cannot stand their domineering parents, they may leave home or even commit suicide. For instance, in *Mano Po 2*, Belinda's daughter Ingrid moves out because her boyfriend impregnated her and leaves their home. Her brother Erickson, who faces disapproval from their parents over his relationship with his Filipino girlfriend Yna, commits suicide. Similarly, in *Mano Po 1*, Richelle is disowned by her family because she does not conform to Chinese traditions and has a Filipino boyfriend. This suggests that the younger generation of Tsinoys are brave and willing to fight for their love, regardless of the consequences. They believe they have their own lives to live and that marrying someone who is not Chinese will not diminish their gratitude and love for their culture.

The emphasis on the value of family and community is a consistent theme in the series. The culture of strong family ties is what parents and elders strive to instil in their children and grandchildren. For instance, Chona and Patty in *Mano Po 4* and Sol and LuShui in *Mano Po 2* are portrayed as martyrs who make sacrifices to protect their children, give them a better life, and avoid destroying their families despite the presence of another mistress. In contrast, in *Mano Po 3*, the elders of Paul's clan visit Lilia and tell her they are hurt when they learn that Lilia is seeing Michael, as she is a married woman. Her in-laws ask her to leave her husband for the sake of the family because they consider it a disgrace. However, her mother-in-law insists that she must leave her lover, saying, "I do not like broken families. I do not like it." Similarly, in *Mano Po 7*, when Wilson discovers that Debbie has fallen in love with a customer, he asks her to leave because it is a disgrace to their children, asking her, "Don't you feel ashamed for our children, for me, and for our family?" These situations show that the Chinese-Filipino family aim to build a strong foundation, protecting them from the pain of broken relationships.

Highlighted also is the culture of respect and obedience towards parents. In *Mano Po 2*, Tony obeys his sick mother's wish to marry LuShui despite already having a family. In *Mano Po 5*, Charity follows her parents' wishes to marry within the Chinese community, even though she loves a Filipino boyfriend. In *Mano Po 2*, Erickson, stressed out by a family conflict and disapproving of his Filipino girlfriend Yna, eventually shoots himself. However, some young Chinese Filipinos, like Richelle in *Mano Po 1*, challenge this tradition until her family accepts her Filipino boyfriend, just as Charity's family eventually accepts Nathan as her boyfriend.

Engagement and weddings are two of many prominent and valued traditions described in the film series. The engagement holds significant importance preceding the wedding ceremony. The engagements of Vera and Emerson in *Mano Po 1*, LuShui and Antonio in *Mano Po 2*, Stephanie and Daniel in *Mano Po 6*, and Charity and Timothy in *Mano Po 5* were all extravagant affairs, with an exchange of rings and jewels and monetary gifts symbolising prosperity and blessings for the couple, and providing financial support to help them prepare for the future. Once the decision to unite the families in marriage is made, they will schedule the engagement party

and observe customs and traditions. Usually, the couple wears traditional Chinese dress during the engagement ceremony. In a wedding ceremony, the celebration is more festive; Chinese lanterns hang around, fireworks display, a dragon dance, and overflowing food.

Consequently, Chinese-Filipino parents prioritise educating their children in their language, often sending them to Chinese schools and speaking Chinese at home. Even in their households, they speak in Chinese to ensure the children become fluent. For instance, in *Mano Po 1*, Juliet's children attend a Chinese school and cannot speak Filipino at home. Similarly, in *Mano Po 4*, Patty insists Hamilton learn Mandarin to gain his father's attention and assimilate into the Chinese community. This effort to preserve cultural heritage is evident in parents' dedication to teaching their children the Chinese language within family conversations. This conscious effort to protect cultural heritage is evident in parents consistently teaching their children the Chinese language within family conversations.

In addition, colourful celebrations are integral to the lives of Chinese Filipinos, helping them stay connected to their roots and home country. They celebrate various cultural, familial, and communal activities yearly, including Chinese New Year, mooncake festivals, engagement parties, weddings, birthdays, and anniversaries, often featuring dragon dances, cultural songs, and dances. In *Mano Po 1*, the Go family celebrates Don Luis Go's birthday and Vera's engagement lavishly.

Furthermore, many Chinese Filipinos are baptised into the Catholic faith while also practising the Chinese religion, blending their cultural heritage with Filipino traditions. This shows that many are now immersed in Filipino culture, practising their faith in Catholic faith. For example, Richelle and Raf in *Mano Po 1* and Sol and Antonio in *Mano Po 2* are married in a Catholic Church. Also, sitting inside the church, Elisa and Richelle are conversing about their family. In *Mano Po 2*, LuShui calls for a monk to bless Antonio during his wake, Belinda calls for a priest, and Lilia Chiong visits Quiapo in the middle of the night to pray and ask for guidance in *Mano Po 3*. Meanwhile, in *Mano Po 4*, Hamilton and Trixia's wedding was planned to include Catholic rites. Though many Chinese Filipinos practice the Catholic faith, they also visit temples to offer candles, fruits, incense, and prayer, as seen in *Mano Po 5* with Yolanda's family. This blending of faith highlights Chinese Filipinos' integration into Filipino culture while maintaining their Chinese faith. Practising Chinese and Filipino faith can foster a sense of harmony and mutual respect between Chinese Filipinos and the broader Filipino community. However, despite practising both faiths, they still adhere to their notion that "Chinese is for Chinese only" due to cultural preservation. Consequently, losing the "Pinoy" element in marriage practices reflects a broader cultural integration and preservation challenge. Moreover, balancing these cultures can lead to identity confusion, loss of unique practices, and family conflicts, especially among younger generations. They may need help reconciling the differing values and practices of each culture.

PRESERVATION OF CHINESE CULTURE AND TRADITIONS

Preserving Chinese culture and traditions is a central theme in the film series. The series consistently emphasises the value placed on family and community in Chinese culture. Strong family ties are a central focus, with parents and elders striving to instil these values in their children and grandchildren, thereby ensuring the transmission of Chinese culture to new generations of Chinese Filipinos. One of the fundamental cultural values the Chinese seek to preserve is building and maintaining a solid family foundation, protecting it from the pain of broken relationships. When marital problems arise, parents prioritise their children's well-being and the family's reputation, even if it means making personal sacrifices.

Another fundamental value is maintaining a culture of respect and obedience toward parents, where children are expected to comply with their parent's wishes to avoid causing them distress. This adherence to tradition is evident in encouraging children to marry within the Chinese community to preserve cultural values and customs. A good example of this is Tony in *Mano Po 2*. Subsequently, Chinese Filipinos have faithfully celebrated various festivals for generations, with colourful celebrations being an integral part of their lives; in this way, they ensure that their culture is always kept in their hearts.

Lastly, Chinese Filipinos integrate their Chinese religious practices into their Christian faith, demonstrating a dual religiosity that helps them maintain their cultural identity while adapting to their new environment. Although many practice the Catholic faith, they ensure they do not abandon their Chinese religious traditions, reflecting their commitment to preserving their cultural heritage while balancing both faiths.

CULTURAL DISLOCATIONS AND CONFLICTS

Language is one of the many issues that causes dislocation in the film series. In *Mano Po 1*, Richelle struggles with Mandarin and feels her family is upset with her because she speaks the least Mandarin among her siblings. She attributes this to being cared for by a nanny, which made her proficient in Tagalog instead. Her sister calls her the "black sheep" for not behaving like a typical Chinese person and not speaking Mandarin fluently. Additionally, Juliet, her sibling, imposes a strict rule on her children to always speak Chinese at home, even instructing Richelle to avoid Tagalog inside the house. Juliet often reminds her: "How many times have I told you, while you are inside the house, do not speak to them in Tagalog." Juliet believes it is a disgrace for Richelle not to be fluent in Fukien or Mandarin. However, Richelle finds this rule unreasonable because the children always use Tagalog outside the home. This reflects why many Chinese-Filipino parents send their children to Chinese schools—to learn the language, connect with their community, and gain advantages in business and life in the Philippines.

This also happens in *Mano Po 4*, when Patty enrolls her son Nixon in a Chinese school to learn the language, but he struggles and fails in Mandarin class. Nixon felt inadequate, saying: "I cannot do something because I am not good in Mandarin; I am not pure Chinese." Patty reminds him that their father favours his other children, who are pure Chinese and can speak Mandarin. Family rivalry emerges as parents impose high expectations on their children, including those from other wives. Patty questions her son: "Dong, will you give up on your half-brothers and half-sisters? How will father love you, and how can he give you a business after you graduate?"

However, Nixon does not want to compete with his half-siblings and feels no pressure to learn Chinese. Tsinoy children, like Richelle and Nixon, often attend Chinese schools to overcome language barriers while maintaining friendships with Filipino classmates. This dedication to the Chinese language can divide families, leaving Tsinoy children feeling misunderstood and unsupported. Some Filipinos, like Patty in *Mano Po 4*, attempt to fit into the Chinese community by learning the language. This cultural dislocation frequently leads to poor relationships with family and friends, especially if they are more inclined to embrace Filipino traditions. Like Richelle in *Mano Po 1*, Nixon in *Mano Po 4*, Ericson and Ingrid in *Mano Po 2*, and Wilson in *Mano Po 7*, they are all victims of cultural dislocation because they wanted to be associated with the Filipino community, but their families did not permit it.

Moreover, the films represent the unique challenges due to cultural differences that Chinese and Filipino individuals face when marrying. The first challenge is parental disapproval, as Chinese parents do not want their children to marry Filipinos, and Filipino parents do not want

their daughters to marry Chinese men. In *Mano Po 1*, Daniel and Don Luis disapprove of their daughters, Richelle and Linda, marrying their Filipino boyfriends. Likewise, Filipino parents view them negatively, as seen with Sol's mother in *Mano Po 2*; she believes that Chinese men look down on Filipinos and marry Filipinas only to stay longer in the Philippines. Her mother tells her father that Sol's husband will not give her money to spend and her husband will treat her as a housekeeper. She adds a threat by saying: "I will leave the house if you accept that person."

The films also show how raising children becomes a significant concern, as couples must choose between Filipino and Chinese values. This is evident in all the *Mano Po* films, where children are torn between two cultures, especially in Sol and Melinda's situation, as their children were brought up by in-laws who did not accept their mothers. This inner struggle complicates Chinese-Filipino marriages. However, children from one father with different mothers often develop a close bond, seeing themselves as siblings and friends. In *Mano Po 2*, LuShui's daughters, Belinda and Sol, become friends and accept their situation, as do Patty and Chona's children, who also get along well with each other.

Lastly, the films represent money as crucial in establishing Chinese connections with Filipinos, particularly with state officials. In many of the films in the series, Tsinoys use their financial resources to influence and bribe high-ranking government officials. This is depicted in cases involving characters like Don Luis Juliet, Vera, Emerson, Grace, Johnson, and Stephen in *Mano Po 1*, *Mano Po 2*, and *Mano Po 3*. They believe securing protection from these officials will safeguard them from harassment, but this strategy often leaves them more vulnerable. When Juliet and Richelle are kidnapped, Vera remarks: "It is only money. For all the problems in the Chinese community, money is the solution." This highlights the Chinese Filipinos' reliance on financial connections for police protection, showing the intricate relationships within the Chinese community in the Philippines, where connections are often forged through financial means.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND SYNTHESIS

REPRESENTATION OF CHINESE CULTURE AND TRADITIONS IN THE FILM SERIES

The *Mano Po* film series uniquely portrays Chinese-Filipino culture, emphasising traditional values and evolving family dynamics. It highlights the prioritisation of male offspring for family succession while depicting a liminal phase where traditional gender roles are questioned and transformed, showing a shift towards gender equality. Female characters move between the traditional roles of domestic responsibility and the emerging roles of leadership and business management, representing a cultural shift towards gender equality. This transitional space explores evolving identities and roles within the family and society. The series explores the cultural significance of family, arranged marriage, and community ties, illustrating the tension between cultural expectations and personal desires. Often portraying the complexities of living between Chinese traditions and Filipino influences, this fusion creates a unique cultural landscape where characters negotiate their identities and choices within tradition and modernity, reflecting the hybrid nature of their lived experiences. Challenges arise from marrying Chinese partners, using the Chinese language, raising children, and using money to influence or bribe high-ranking government officials within the Chinese-Filipino family and community. Additionally, Chinese Filipinos strongly emphasise family and community values, highlighting respect and obedience towards parents. These help them stay connected to their ancestral roots. Lastly, practices such as speaking Chinese at home and celebrating traditional festivals such as Chinese New Year,

mooncake festivals, and various parties, together with adopting Filipino cultural elements like Catholic faith practices, highlight this transitional phase. The series captures the fluid and dynamic cultural adaptation process, where identities are continuously reshaped and redefined.

MAINTAINING CHINESE-FILIPINO CULTURE WHILE ASSIMILATING INTO FILIPINO SOCIETY

The characters' experiences navigating traditional Chinese values and the realities of their lives in the Philippines show how challenging their life is. This is evident in prioritising family reputation and unity, even at personal costs, such as leaving their homes for the greater good of their families or tolerating the husbands' infidelities. These actions highlight the characters' position in an in-between state, where they are neither fully adhering to modern individualistic values nor completely rejecting traditional collectivist ones. The integration of Chinese traditions with Filipino culture and Christian practices is seen in celebrating Chinese festivals with the Filipino community, the adherence to Chinese customs such as children marrying within the community, and the dual religiosity where Chinese Filipinos practice Catholicism while engaging in traditional Chinese religious rituals. Using the Chinese language at home and in schools further emphasises this cultural hybridity, as children are encouraged to maintain their linguistic heritage while living in a predominantly Filipino-speaking environment.

CULTURAL DISLOCATIONS AND CONFLICTS ENCOUNTERED BY CHINESE-FILIPINOS IN PHILIPPINE SOCIETY

The film series illustrates the cultural dislocation experienced by Chinese Filipinos as they integrate into Filipino society. Characters face strained relationships with family and friends as they navigate their hybrid identities, often feeling torn between their Chinese heritage and Filipino surroundings. This struggle to reconcile Chinese and Filipino values reflects the broader challenges of cultural integration, leading to internal conflicts and identity issues.

The series highlights the dislocation caused by marriages between Chinese and Filipino individuals, which face significant disapproval from both cultural groups, causing deep-seated conflicts. The opposing views of Chinese and Filipinos on marriage lead to strained relationships and difficulty in navigating dual cultural expectations. Raising children in a bicultural environment presents unique challenges, as children are often caught between Chinese and Filipino values, leading to internal conflicts and struggles with identity. The liminal space is further emphasised by language differences within Chinese-Filipino families, where characters struggle with Mandarin, leading to feelings of inadequacy and being labelled as outsiders within their own families. This creates tension as some family members impose strict language rules, exacerbating the sense of cultural and familial disconnect. Moreover, the reliance of Chinese Filipinos on financial resources to secure connections with high-ranking government officials, often through bribery, highlights the complex social dynamics within the community and underscores the vulnerability that can result from such practices. This reliance on financial resources represents a hybrid strategy, blending traditional Chinese practices with the realities of Filipino society.

CONCLUSION

The Mano Po film series thus offers a valuable way to gain a profound understanding of Chinese-Filipino culture in the Philippines. It also provides insights into the changing perceptions of "Chineseness" in the Philippines and how it is portrayed in popular media. By immersing themselves in these cinematic narratives, Filipinos can expand their cultural awareness, fostering greater inclusivity and warmth, where cultural diversity is seen as a strength rather than a barrier within society. With its vivid portrayal of cultural practices, family dynamics, and community interactions, the series can bridge gaps and build stronger connections between different cultural groups. By highlighting their rich heritage and how they integrate it into their daily lives, the films encourage Chinese Filipinos to take pride in their roots. This cultural embrace strengthens their community bonds and promotes harmony and respect within the broader Filipino society. Significantly, the film series illustrates how Chinese-Filipino communities can find common ground and share goals with other cultural groups in the Philippines. It performs the important cultural work of highlighting universal cultural themes, such as family unity, respect for elders, and community cooperation, a shared understanding of which can lead to a more unified society where diverse cultural backgrounds are not just accepted but celebrated.

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