

The Chinese in the Philippines during the Japanese Occupation: A Story of Courage, Struggle and Survival

TERESITA ANG SEE

ABSTRACT

This article examines the situation of the Chinese in the Philippines during the Japanese occupation (1941–1945) which is considered one of the darkest periods in history. Untold human suffering, torture, hunger, and death were visited on the Filipino people and the Chinese in the Philippines were not spared. In fact, because of their early support to the anti-Japanese war in China as early as 1931, the Chinese suffered the greatest punishment. As soon as the Japanese landed in Leyte, Davao, and Sulu in December 1941, they immediately rounded up all Chinese leaders of the anti-Japanese movement

TERESITA ANG SEE is executive trustee of Kaisa Heritage Center and founding president of Kaisa para sa Kaunlaran, Manila, Philippines.

and executed them. They did the same upon the occupation of Manila on 2 January 1942 and arrested community leaders, including Gen. Kwangson Young, the Chinese consul general, and his staff who were tortured and executed on 17 April 1942. The Chinese community organized active resistance against the Japanese, especially through the six Chinese guerrilla units that fought side-by-side and shoulder-to-shoulder with their Filipino comrades in their common defense for freedom. This period helped bind the two people together in a shared misery and destiny. The rampant massacre of civilians in Manila and the environs just before the Japanese surrendered in 1945 cost nearly 100,000 lives. It was estimated that 10,000 of the 130,000 Chinese were slaughtered by the Japanese and their economic losses amounted to ₱220 million, representing their entire investments in the Philippines.

KEYWORDS

ethnic Chinese, Japanese occupation, anti-Japanese resistance, guerrilla movement, Boycott Japanese Goods Movement, National Salvation Movement

INTRODUCTION

All through the centuries of relations between the Philippines and China, history has shown time and again that their destinies and fate have often been intertwined. Events that affect one country have significant impact on the other. The ethnic Chinese have played a significant part

in the events that have shaped the Philippines as a nation. One example was during the Japanese occupation when they organized guerrillas that fought with their brother Filipino guerrillas in the resistance movement and defense for freedom.

The Chinese role and participation in the resistance have been gratefully recognized and remembered by both Filipino and American freedom fighters. The sufferings endured, sacrifices made, and blood poured by the ethnic Chinese during the period of anti-Japanese resistance (1941–1945) cemented the bonds of kinship and friendship with their Filipino brothers.

While commemorative activities for the victory in World War II are observed annually all over the country, it is most important to instill in humankind that war is never an answer to conflict and peace is more than just the absence of war. Heroes must be honored and history of the war must be remembered, especially the atrocities and tragedies it spawned so that these will never again be visited by future generations.

PRELUDE TO JAPANESE OCCUPATION OF THE PHILIPPINES

The Sino-Japanese War broke out in China on 7 July 1937, in what is popularly known in Chinese history as the Marco Polo Bridge incident.¹ The Chinese throughout Southeast Asia, including those in the Philippines, sympathized with the war efforts in China and the local community was mobilized to send aid to China, launch

propaganda campaigns, and organize the National Salvation Movement and the Boycott Japanese Goods Movement.

At the time, factional strife within the Chinese community, mainly between the pro-Kuomintang and pro-left leaning groups, intensified following developments in China. However, this factionalism was temporarily set aside in the face of Japanese aggression. The local community leaders likewise encouraged China leaders at the seat of government in Chongqing (Chungking) to avoid any form of schism and establish a united and common front to fight the Japanese.²

With a more united effort, the Philippine Chinese community was able to form one of the staunchest overseas units supporting China's war against Japan. New planes were bought in support of the Chinese air force; and funds were raised for the relief and aid of refugees and wounded soldiers. Some enlisted as volunteers in the Nationalist Army, among them truck drivers, laborers, teachers, and students. The women, not to be outdone, raised funds for relief, especially for soldiers on the war front.

HARASSMENTS VS. JAPANESE

In addition to active propaganda, mass meetings, and fund campaigns, the consuming hatred against the Japanese led to assault and harassment of the Japanese in many parts of the Philippines. Local dailies warned against bringing the war to the Philippines. Violent incidents in the streets against the Japanese were frequent.³ One incident was described as follows:⁴

On November 21, 1931, the famous battle of Nomi bridge was re-enacted in Pangasinan province. A Japanese driving a car attempted to overtake three Chinese riding in a truck from Manaoag, a municipality of Pangasinan. Irrked by the refusal of the Chinese to give way, the Japanese tried to steal his way ahead again and again and he succeeded. But as he passes by the Chinese, he waved his hand at them, uttering a few angry words. This the Chinese construed as a challenge and an "invitation to settle the Manchurian question" in Pangasinan. The three Chinese drove faster toward Dagupan and as soon as they got there, they located the Japanese driver, mauled him and wrecked his car.

In view of the strained relations between China and Japan, the Japanese Consul General Atsuki Nimura advised his countrymen to keep away from any possible trouble or altercation with the Chinese. On the other hand, Vice Consul H. Okamoto requested metropolitan police protection for Japanese residents in Manila.

The president of the Japanese association in Cebu City reported that about 50 Chinese were going around the city rigidly enforcing the boycott movement. They imposed fines on Chinese merchants who were found importing Japanese goods. There were also reports of drastic actions. A Chinese smashed an aluminum percolator right in front of the Japanese bazaar where his Filipina wife bought it. A Chinese student at the Cebu Sun Yat-sen School stained the shirt of a classmate because it was bought from a Japanese store. The appeal to boycott Japanese goods started in

1931. It was reiterated by the Chinese National Salvation Association during its second annual convention where it challenged the Chinese businessmen and owners of commercial establishments to support the boycott. It was also decided at the convention that Chinese firms selling Japanese merchandise would be branded as traitors to the national cause, and their names blacklisted and published in the Chinese newspapers for the information of the Chinese community.⁵

These harassments were not lost on the Japanese and they bided their time to retaliate as soon as the war was finally brought to the Philippines. Filipinos, however, ignored the repeated warnings from the Chinese that the Japanese presence in the country was deliberate and that a shopkeeper could be a potential spy. Japanese foothold was strongest in Davao. They had gradually dominated local commerce, hemp, coconut and coffee plantations, and even mining concessions. Davao looked like a Japanese town with Japanese signs on the streets and its own special schools and hospitals.⁶

SALVATION MOVEMENTS AND FUND-RAISING

Before the war, the Chinese in the Philippines have formed organizations without difficulty because of the liberal policy of the American Commonwealth Government. They followed the tradition that the Chinese form organizations in foreign lands where they are a minority and where the environment could be hostile to them. It was their way to support each other and to protect their interests. History had proven that this traditional Chinese community was

at its strongest and most unified when faced with external threat. The hierarchy made it easier for the Chinese to be mobilized easily in times of crisis.⁷

The social organizations became the basis of the anti-Japanese salvation movement in the 1930s, just before the outbreak of the second Sino-Japanese War. To a certain extent, these organizations constituted the main Chinese resistance forces when the Japanese threat to China escalated during the Japanese occupation. These salvation movements and organizations were also at the forefront of fund-raising campaigns against the Japanese.

When Chinese provinces fell into Japanese hands one after another, the leader of the Chinese community in the Philippines, Dee C. Chuan, urged Singapore community leader Tan Kah Kee on 13 May 1938 to convene all over Southeast Asia a salvation movement to help China. His proposal got the support of Indonesia's Tjong See Gan (Zhuang Xi Yan 莊西言) who also urged Tan. Together, Dee and Gan petitioned the Nanjing government to support them in establishing the general association. On 30 July 1938, the Nanjing administrative branch head cabled Tan and all other consulates in Southeast Asia to send representatives to Singapore to plan the organization of the General Association of Relief Organizations. The same notice was published in Chinese papers in Malaya, Burma, Borneo, Java, Sumatra, Celebes, Philippines, Annam, and Siam asking all Chinese organizations, charitable institutions, and chambers of commerce to send representatives to the urgent meeting on 10 October 1938 in Singapore.⁸

All recipients of the notice enthusiastically responded to the call. On 10 October 1938, about 150 representatives from Malaya, the Dutch East Indies, the Philippines, Indo-China, and other Southeast Asian territories held a conference in Singapore and formed the Nanyang Relief General Association to encourage cooperation among the Chinese in Southeast Asia and coordinate the collection of funds. The conference elected Tan Kah Kee of Singapore as chairman of the association, with Tjong See Gan of the Dutch Indies and Dee C. Chuan (李清泉) of the Philippines as vice-chairmen.⁹

In keeping with the popular slogan, “Those who have money give money and those who have strength give their strength,” cash donations poured into China from Southeast Asia, most particularly from the Philippines. Funds were raised for the war chest, for the soldiers on the war front, for the wounded, and for the care of war refugees, widows, and orphans. A war chest was also raised to improve the capability of China’s air force and strengthen its air defense. Fund-raising continued as the war intensified.

ECONOMIC REPERCUSSIONS OF ANTI-JAPANESE RESISTANCE

The Boycott Japanese Goods Movement was effective in mobilizing patriotic sentiments but inflicted minimal long-term damage to Japanese commerce. Japanese merchants moved in to replace Chinese retailers. Due to the controlled economy, the Japanese retailers teamed up with exporters, importers, shippers, and bankers to break

up the Chinese monopoly on retail business. The controlled and concerted move to ease out the Chinese enabled the Japanese to sell commodities even cheaper than what the Chinese offered.¹⁰

Between 1931 and 1935, the Japanese share in retail trade increased from five to 35 percent. In 1918, there were about 7,000 Japanese residents. In 1932, these residents grew to 25,000. The Chinese brandished the specter of Japanese menace—a covetous Japanese nation with imperialistic design in the Orient. The Chinese needed to team up with the Filipinos to face Japanese economic assault and political threat. Unfortunately, the Filipinos ignored the warnings made by the Chinese that the Japanese presence in the country was deliberate and that each shopkeeper was potentially a spy.¹¹

Philippine historian Teodoro Agoncillo reported that as a consequence of large Japanese holdings in Davao, the number of Japanese increased considerably. From 10,000 in 1918, the number jumped to 12,000 in 1933. The number of Japanese corporations also increased. To circumvent the Public Land Act of 1936 that limited foreign land ownership to just 40 percent, the Japanese subleased tracts of land from Filipinos or they married Filipino women. In 1934, Japanese-owned and controlled corporations held 25,000 hectares of agricultural land. At the same time, the number of Japanese settlers increased from 14,000 in 1935 to 18,000 in 1939.¹²

Filipinos started worrying when they learned about Japanese activities in Manchuria and Shanghai and the

repression of the Chinese people in China. In Davao, Japanese foothold was strongest. Shortly after the Commonwealth inauguration, the secretary of commerce cancelled 120 subleases obtained by the Japanese from the Bagobo tribe. Japan just ignored the order. The Chinese faced Japanese competition as well as Filipino economic nationalism.

THE WAR IN THE PHILIPPINES

When the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor on 8 December 1941, the war was brought to the Philippines, then an American territory. Both the Chinese and the Filipinos were to pay a high price for allowing Japanese inroads into Philippine society. The Japanese who were in the country before the war became informants and identified anti-Japanese resistance leaders in the Chinese community.

On the first day of the war, all the Japanese in the Philippines were sent to internment camps. Their stores were also closed on that fateful day. Chinese storeowners displayed “Chinese store” signs on their windows to avoid being mistaken for Japanese establishments and being stoned by the people. The Chinese in the Philippines sent businessman Alfonso Sycip as an envoy to the U.S. Army in the Philippines to offer all necessary services to strengthen the war efforts. The Chinese volunteers, who were originally formed to engage in nationwide anti-Japanese campaigns and civil defense before the war, were now organized into a military unit. However, things changed as soon as the Japanese landed in the Philippines.

ANTI-JAPANESE CHINESE LEADERS PAID A PRICE

On 2 January 1942, the Japanese occupied Manila. One of the first acts of the Japanese invasion army was to conduct a terrible purge of the Chinese in Manila. Four categories of Chinese were shortlisted in the Japanese action: leaders of the Philippine Chinese Anti-Japanese Association, active leaders of the Anti-Japanese Boycott Committee, prominent members of the Kuomintang, and active Chinese communist members.¹³

On January 8, China's Consul General Kwangson Young and all his staff were detained in a camp set up at the University of the Philippines compound on Padre Faura Street in Malate, Manila. The Japanese demanded ₱24,000,000 from the Chinese community. The amount, according to the Japanese, was twice the ₱12,000,000 the Chinese in the Philippines supposedly donated to China.¹⁴ This was proof that, indeed, the Japanese residents in the Philippines before the war were keeping track of Chinese activities and reporting the same to their government. Consul General Young, however, refused to pay.

Also arrested and detained at U.P. were 42 prominent Chinese community leaders. Among them were Yu Khe Tai, Alfonso Sycip, Sy Kok Chuan, and Tan Bunliong. They were imprisoned, interrogated, and their properties were confiscated. On 15 April 1942, nine local Chinese were executed. Five of them were officers of the sub-committee of the Philippine Chinese Anti-Japanese Association: Tan Bok Teng, Uy Lian Teng, Chua Phai Kiong, Dee Lian

Tiao, and Sy Kao Chin. The rest of the victims included Yuyitung, publisher of the *Chinese Commercial News*; Gan Bon Cho, principal of the Anglo-Chinese School; Go Co Lay, a prominent local Kuomintang leader; and Ang Ching Ki, allegedly a communist.

Consul General Young and his consular staff were transferred on 28 March 1942 to Fort Santiago in Intramuros where they were all tortured before being executed a few days after, on April 17, in flagrant violation of international law on diplomatic immunity. Executed with Consul General Young were consuls Kai Yan Mok and P.K. Chu, deputy consuls Tek Siu Yao, Tong Ming Siao, Ching Sio Young, Chancellor Y.H. Loo, and an intern, T.W. Wang (their remains were later exhumed and identified on 14 June 1945). The execution of the consular staff members, shortly after that of the nine leaders of the Chinese community was meant to scare people that retribution and death await those who would be uncooperative to the Japanese.¹⁵

Two active leaders of the Boycott Japanese Goods Movement, who surrendered when their families were taken hostages, were likewise executed. The execution of the nine local Chinese on April 15 and the eight members of the Chinese consular staff on April 17 were given a certain symbolic significance by the Japanese: the consular staff represented the Chiang Kai-shek government's anti-Japanese activity in the Philippines; the five officers of the sub-committee of the Anti-Japanese Association, the Philippine Chinese anti-Japanese residents in general; Yuyitung, the anti-Japanese Chinese media; Gan Bon Cho,

anti-Japanese Chinese cultural and educational circles; Go Co Lay, the anti-Japanese Chinese Kuomintang element, and Ang Ching Ki, the local Chinese communists.¹⁶

When Japanese troops landed in Leyte, Davao, and Sulu, they likewise rounded up all Chinese male adults and executed them. This scenario was repeated throughout the country. The Japanese had substantial knowledge of anti-Japanese activities among the local Chinese and knew whom to arrest. As the Chinese had feared, intelligence agents had been collecting data for years before the war. The Kempeitai even had copies of local Chinese publications like the *Chinese Commercial News*, *Fookien Times*, *Kong Li Po*, and *New China Daily*.¹⁷

The issue of the *Tribune* on 22 July 1942 reported the execution of yet 18 others who were found guilty of acts against the Imperial Japanese Forces—17 Filipinos, including a 17-year-old boy, and a “pro-Chung-king” Chinese. The Japanese military headquarters announced:

It must be clearly understood that sentiments of sympathy to the enemy, even though not manifested outwardly, are clearly an act of hostility against the Imperial Japanese Forces, taking into account the present wartime situation.¹⁸

It was not possible for all Chinese involved in anti-Japanese activities to evade the enemy. The majority went through the nightmare of arrest and torture by the Kempeitai, the dreaded Japanese military police. Some of the most wanted leaders of the Chinese community,

however, were able to escape and go into hiding. Most anti-Japanese elements went underground to carry on the resistance movement. They were students, teachers, workers or laborers, storeowners, and professionals. They either cooperated with Filipinos and Americans or operated independently by themselves against the Japanese forces.¹⁹

The Japanese put up rewards for some important leaders. A ₱100,000 reward was issued for *Fookien Times* publisher Go Puan Seng, who went into hiding. His pictures were sent to provinces so that he could be shot on sight. Wee Siuyen, president of the Davao Chinese Anti-Japanese Association, was on a business trip in Manila when the war broke out. As the Japanese put up a ₱100,000 reward in Davao for his capture, he joined a Chinese guerrilla unit in Luzon instead of returning to Davao.²⁰

At first, the Japanese wanted to place all Chinese in concentration camps, but the plan was scrapped because of space and food limitations for prisoners. Moreover, they found that supplies of goods were curtailed since the Chinese were engaged in wholesale and retail trade. In the end, some of the prominent leaders were detained as “hostages” to ensure the good conduct of the entire community.²¹

EXTORTIONS FROM THE CHINESE

After the fall of Bataan and Corregidor in 1942, a *modus vivendi* for co-existence was adopted. The Japanese controlled material resources while the Chinese were tasked to produce and distribute food.

The Japanese tried every means to turn popular feelings against the Chinese. They forced the Chinese residents to join the Philippine-Chinese Association with the mission to show cooperation with Japanese authorities and promote the prosperity of the Philippines as a member of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. It was the Japanese instrument for placing all activities of the Chinese under surveillance and forcing them to cooperate in establishing what they claimed to be a new Philippines. The Philippine-Chinese Association was accountable to the Japanese military administration and had jurisdiction over the Chinese in Greater Manila area and in Central Luzon. It was also responsible for extorting large contributions for the Japanese war treasury by squeezing every cent out of Chinese residents. In effect, the Chinese were buying their protection. They were also forced to volunteer service to bolster war effort and food production campaign.²²

Early in June 1942, the Chinese in Manila were reported to have formed the Chinese Merchants' Association for the purpose of "cooperating" with Japan in promoting the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. A few days later, on June 10, the *Tribune* published a *Domei* dispatch from Manila, dated June 8:

The Chinese Merchants' Association yesterday contributed ₱2,000,000 to the Philippines as an expression of full support of the Chinese in the construction of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. It will be recalled that the Association recently began a campaign to collect ₱20,000,000 for donation to the Japanese military.²³

The 5 November 1943 issue of the *Tribune* reported about the Central Administrative Organization having its financial difficulties as follows:

The Army, however, in addition to being able at any time to throw more script into circulation, could always raise a penny or two among the Chinese. In November, for instance, it was reported that the Chinese Association of the Philippines had voluntarily donated ₱3,000,000 to the army and that this was regarded as a sign of true cooperation. The association would raise another ₱2,000,000 by the end of November and an additional ₱1,000,000 by the end of January. The February 16, 1943 issue of the *Tribune* carried a picture showing a prominent Chinese merchant of Manila handing Colonel Utunomiya, director of the Department of General Affairs of the Military Administration, a check for ₱2,500,000. The picture showed the Chinese bowing and holding out the check with two hands, the colonel accepting it with both hands extended, according to the best Japanese etiquette.²⁴

On May 3, in accordance with the amnesty decree issued on April 29, during Emperor Tentyo-setu's birthday, 15 imprisoned Chinese were freed. The director-general said to them:

Bear in mind that the authorities concerned have placed faith in the apparent signs of repentance on your part, which was one of the important factors in giving you this unexpected freedom, and do not

deviate from the path of righteousness and from the promised cooperation toward the construction of the New Philippines and the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere.²⁵

However, the disastrous economic effects of Japanese rule resulted in greatly reduced consumption, shortage of raw materials, and a black market that favored the rich. As the Japanese continued to extort huge amounts of money, the traditionally patient and tolerant Chinese simply closed their shops. Many used their businesses as fronts to the anti-Japanese resistance by secretly supplying the needs of guerrilla units. As the Japanese took over businesses, factories became idle and the economy suffered severe financial strain.

ASSASSINATION OF PRO-JAPANESE LEADERS

Manila was swept by waves of assassinations of pro-Japanese leaders by Chinese guerrillas. Tan Tian Hong, secretary of the Chinese Association, was the first to be assassinated on 16 June 1943. Chinese residents in Manila expressed great relief because Tan caused them a lot of hardships. He was a collector of the Chinese Association, forcing the members to contribute or donate for the Japanese Army. He was shot at broad daylight by some unknown assailant at the corner of Gandara and Nueva Streets.²⁶ On June 23, Dr. Tee Han Kee, president of the Chinese Association, was ambushed with his son. Dr. Tee Han Kee did not make it but his son survived. His assassination elicited mixed reactions as many believed that he had always been loyal and he only wished to protect

his countrymen from the savagery of the Japanese. Many recalled that he was one of those who raised funds for the National Salvation Movement. Others believed that his cooperation with the Japanese in the Chinese Association was his means to divert Japanese attention away so he could help his compatriots more. Some cited how he secretly extended help and donated medicines, as owner of a drugstore in Manila, to camp prisoners in the University of Santo Tomas.²⁷

Another leader of the Chinese Association, Go Co Lay, was likewise ambushed and killed allegedly by Chinese guerrillas who insisted that cooperation with the enemy meant the weakening of resistance. But many viewed Go's death as a calamity. His magnanimity was an effective shield between the Chinese and the vindictive Japanese. Go's assassination increased the bitterness of the Japanese against the Chinese in general and the enemy became more abusive against the common Chinese people.²⁸

Assassination of suspected collaborators continued even after the liberation. Lin Tian Teng of Cebu and Ang Liong To of Davao were assassinated, to the bitterness of their families who claimed they were misunderstood and falsely accused.

The issue of cooperating or collaborating became a bitter dilemma. To many community leaders, outright refusal to cooperate meant torture or death. Many like Justo Cabochan, Yu Khe Thai, and Chua Kip See were forced to collaborate as a means to protect, to some degree, the Chinese from Japanese ruthlessness.²⁹

THE CHINESE OUTSIDE MANILA

Many Chinese in the cities migrated to the rural areas. The Chinese in Manila, which numbered 47,000, was reduced to 26,000 by 1944. They lived with Filipinos who were kind and hospitable, helped them adjust to rural surroundings, and protected or concealed them in their own homes. The Chinese who stayed in the rural areas produced a little food for themselves and were better off than those who remained in the cities. But they were not spared from the atrocities of the Japanese whenever they were found out.

The following are examples of the atrocities that occurred outside of the capital city:

- In Tacloban, some 20 prominent Chinese businessmen were briefly detained. Three of them had to pretend as the president, treasurer, and secretary of the Association in order to protect the real ones. They remained in detention with American civilians for three months. Other Chinese in Samar and Leyte reportedly paid ₱500,000 to the Japanese, a compromise from the ₱1,000,000 “tax” imposed on them.³⁰
- In November 1943, in Calatcava, Romblon, the Japanese squeezed the neck of a crying 6-month-old baby and threw her outside the window, and beheaded the other members of the family, including two young girls.³¹

- In May 1945, at Tungkulen, Davao, five Chinese civilians were executed for no reason other than having American books in their house.³²
- In August 1943, the Japanese saturated Buenavista, Guimaras Island and killed 47 people in one barrio; the Chinese in the group were all beheaded.³³
- In a small barrio in Ranao, Palayan, Cotabato, where about 90 Chinese evacuated and became self-sufficient for producing their own food by farming, surrendered to the Japanese instead of imperling the community. Thirty Chinese men, women, and children remained in the barrio but they were accused of providing food and information to guerrillas. They were rounded up and bayoneted. The houses were set on fire with young children inside. Only one was said to have escaped.³⁴
- In September 1943, about 60 Chinese in Barrio Samponongbolo, Sara, Iloilo province were massacred.³⁵
- In Fuga Island in Luzon, 35 people sought refuge including Alfonso Sycip who was recently released from Fort Santiago as a gesture of amnesty on the Japanese Emperor's birthday. However, 15 of them were killed. The remaining 20 were later rescued by American and Filipino guerrillas.³⁶

- In Barrio Tubog, Magamila, Cebu, four truckloads of Japanese soldiers bayoneted 31 Chinese who were suspected of giving aid to guerrillas.³⁷
- On March 6, in Los Baños, Laguna, Japanese soldiers bayoneted 27 Chinese suspected of supporting guerrillas and being pro-Americans.³⁸
- In February, a Japanese force moved through Bontoc and Ifugao, spreading destruction, but they met considerable resistance and were forced to retreat. Among their encounters was at Kilometer 52 with a force of some 200 Chinese from Baguio.³⁹
- In the “Death March,” atrocities were committed against the prisoners by Col. Masanobu Tsuji, a racist who viewed the Philippine conflict as fundamentally a race war that required extreme measures and absolute ruthlessness. He was reportedly responsible for the death of 5,000 Chinese.⁴⁰

The most infamous of these massacres was carried out on 24 February 1945 in San Pablo, Laguna. Around 6,000 Filipino and Chinese males between 15 and 50 years old were gathered together, and the Chinese, 650 in all, were picked out. All were bayoneted and thrown into the trenches that they were made to dig. Several wounded survivors were taken to a local hospital only to be killed the following day. Some of the badly wounded crawled to

their homes with the help of Filipinos. In Los Baños, all of the Chinese were executed because of increased guerrilla activities in Laguna, and the escape of American war prisoners in the Los Baños internment camp.⁴¹

CHINESE GUERRILLAS—UNDERGROUND RESISTANCE MOVEMENT

Most anti-Japanese individuals, from all classes and levels in the Chinese community, went underground to carry on the resistance movement. They either cooperated with Filipinos and Americans or operated independently against Japanese forces.

Like their Filipino counterparts, Chinese guerrillas conducted sabotage, gathered military intelligence; and helped prisoners escape. They published several propaganda materials on the war efforts; gave information on the actual war situation; and exploited news on Japanese atrocities to promote patriotism. They earned the respect and gratitude of the Filipinos when they showed their readiness to sacrifice their lives for freedom from Japanese rule. Some of the guerrilla units also helped in the orderly and peaceful evacuation of the residents whenever news of Japanese army round-ups were received.⁴²

The Chinese in the Philippines had formed a predominantly merchant community. The 1901 Chinese Exclusion Law in the Philippines during the American occupation resulted in the absence of a significant working class. The lower stratum of the community was made up of those employed as shopkeepers, store clerks, and various

kinds of laborers, such as porters and helpers. Without a significant business capital at stake, these people were less hesitant in their resistance of the Japanese. They were also easier to accept communist influence than those who were in other occupational groups. Thus, during the Japanese occupation, they formed the backbone of the Chinese leftist resistance force—the Wha Chi guerrilla group, one of the most active among the underground Chinese resistance forces. Wha Chi was also the only Chinese guerrilla team that existed outside the cities and engaged in military activities throughout the whole period of occupation.⁴³

The six major guerrilla groups were as follows:⁴⁴

1. Chinese Overseas Wartime Hsuekan Militia (COWHM 菲律濱戰地民主血幹團). Founded in 1938 with Captain Yu Wee as first commander, the nucleus was formed by 88 Philippine trainees who went to Fujian province for military training. In September 1942, they published the underground paper, *Fuse*, that provided information on actual war situation and exploited news on Japanese atrocities to promote Chinese patriotism.
2. Chinese Volunteers of the Philippines (CVP 菲律濱華僑抗日義勇軍). It was organized by members of the anti-Japanese Salvation Movement in the 1930s. Col. Shih I-sheng, graduate of the Central Political and Military Academy in Chungking in 1939, served as overall commander. The volunteers engaged in civilian

defense working side-by-side with the Civil Emergency Administration of the Philippine government at the outbreak of war in 1941. They moved their operational base to Arayat, Pampanga in February 1942. They ambushed Japanese convoys and fought against them in hit-and-run tactics in the swamps of Pampanga and Bulacan. They had an underground paper called *Tai Han Hun (Soul of Great China)*.

3. Wha Chi Anti-Japanese Guerrilla Force (菲律賓華僑抗日游擊支隊[華支]). Also known as the 48th Squadron after the Fourth and Eighth Route armies of the Chinese Communist Armed Forces in China, the Wha Chi was the most active guerrilla unit with recruits mostly from the laboring class. It was organized by Huang Chieh who was trained under the Fourth Route Army in Jiangsu province.
4. The Philippine Chinese Youth Wartime Special Services Group (菲華青年戰時特工總隊). This group was an offshoot of the San Min Chu I Youth Corps organized by Chiang Kai-shek in Hankow in 1938. In January 1940, a branch was set up in the Philippines. Following the Fall of Bataan on 9 April 1942, it became an underground guerrilla unit with Lin Tso Mei as commander. It provided information to the USAFFE (United States Army Forces in the Far East); procured food, medicine and supplies

for remnants of the army from Bataan and Corregidor; and maintained peace and order.

5. United States-Chinese Volunteers in the Philippines (US-CVP). This group was organized by Lee Pak Chay (Christian name: Vicente Lopez) in the Baguio-La Union area upon authorization of Col. James A. Green of the USAFFE and Maj. Maximo Nocete, provincial commander of La Union. The volunteers were inducted into the USAFFE. From 150 men initially, the members grew to 800 in 1942 and kept growing that by 1944, it had two regiments. Thus, Lopez was promoted to full colonel on 1 January 1943. Employing guerrilla tactics, the group exacted a heavy toll on the Japanese forces.⁴⁵

6. Pekek Squadron (北擊團). The Pekek Squadron was made up mainly of young students and refugees. They were originally part of the COWHM but due to policy differences they formed their independent group. The key leaders were killed by Japanese troops in 1944 and the remnants joined the U.S. and Filipino forces. Some joined the leftist Wha Chi guerrilla groups to continue to fight mainly in the mountains of Luzon. They were later integrated into the U.S. forces as the 399th squadron.

In addition to the regular Chinese guerrilla groups, individuals joined the Philippine Army and other guerrilla units spread throughout the islands.

CONCLUSION

The story of the ethnic Chinese during the Japanese occupation is actually a life drama that saw China, Japan, the United States, and the Philippines as players. The contention that the Philippines' fate or destiny has been intertwined with these countries throughout history is showcased during this dark period. Japan and China had been at loggerheads since 1931. Japan needed the Chinese market and raw materials for its burgeoning population. The United States ordered an embargo of oil, metals, and other strategic materials which Japan needed badly. The pressure for procuring these materials prodded Japan's ambitions to expand in Asia. Starting with China, the East Indies, and later provoked by American policy, Japan warred against the U.S. and the war was brought to the Philippines.⁴⁶

Like the rest of the people in Southeast Asia, the Filipinos suffered from Japanese atrocities, tortures, and massacres especially those who resisted them and the innocent civilians. Japan's treatment of the prisoners of war was brutal and inhuman as evidenced by the concentration camps and the infamous Death March where 80,000 prisoners of war from Bataan weakened by disease and malnutrition were forced to march to a prison camp 105 kilometers to the north. About 20,000 of them died before reaching their destination.

In the month-long battle for the liberation of Manila (3 February to 3 March 1945), the American and Japanese bombardments inflicted worse destruction on Manila than

the German Luftwaffe exacted on London. The death toll was comparable to that of Hiroshima. One hundred thousand noncombatants and innocent civilians—men, women, and children—were killed in an orgy of killing as the Japanese retreated. Manila was bombarded and flattened, suffering the biggest loss next only to the city of Warsaw. Few battles in the closing months of World War II surpassed the destruction and the brutality of the massacres and savagery of the fighting than in Manila. Historical buildings, churches, and cultural and historical treasures were virtually wiped out in the resulting carnage and devastation of Manila.⁴⁷ The entire Chinatown and huge sections of Manila were set on fire and those who were trapped inside buildings and houses were shot as they tried to escape. The Chinese suffered the most; their losses amounted to ₱220 million representing their entire investments in the Philippines and about 10,000 or 10% of the 130,000 local Chinese were slaughtered by the Japanese.⁴⁸ For the entire country, “an estimated ₱16 billion (or US\$8 billion) were lost and an estimated one million died or were killed during the war. Industries were wrecked; half the carabao population was decimated; cities were in ruins; and the economy was in shambles.”⁴⁹

In 2015, the anniversary of World War II was marked with commemorative activities and exhibits. The lessons of the atrocities inflicted by the war, the reminiscences of friendship and mutual support between the Filipinos and the Chinese, and the sacrifices made and the sufferings endured should forever be remembered so that these wars should not be repeated by future generations.

NOTES

- 1 Richard Cavendish, "The Marco Polo Bridge Incident," last modified 7 July 2012. <https://www.historytoday.com/richard-cavendish/marco-polo-bridge-incident>
- 2 Antonio Tan, *The Chinese in the Philippines during the Japanese Occupation 1942–1945* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 1981), 41–42.
- 3 Tan, 5.
- 4 Tan, 5–6.
- 5 Yung Li Yuk-wai, *The Huaqiao Warriors: Chinese Resistance Movement in the Philippines, 1942–1945* (Quezon City: Ateneo De Manila University Press, 1996), 42.
- 6 Tan, 14.
- 7 Chingben See, "Chinese Organizations and Ethnic Identity in the Philippines" in *The Chinese Immigrants: Selected Writings of Prof. Chinben See*, ed., Teresita Ang See (Manila: Kaisa Para Sa Kaunlaran Inc. and De La Salle University, 1992), 164.
- 8 Li (李锐). 李清泉傳. (Li Rui, Dee C. Chuan Biography), 114–115.
- 9 Tan, 26–27.
- 10 Lydia N. Yu-Jose, *Japan Views the Philippines, 1900–1944* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1999), 68.
- 11 Tan, 16.
- 12 Teodoro A. Agoncillo, *The Fateful Years: Japan's Adventure in the Philippines, 1941–1945*. (Quezon City: UP Press, 1965. Reprinted 2001), 47–48.
- 13 Yung Li, 30.

14 Tan, 35.

15 Hartendorp, A.V.H. *The Japanese Occupation of the Philippines* (Manila: Bookmark, 1967), 1:192.

16 Tan, 45.

17 Tan, 44.

18 Hartendorp, 1:195.

19 Tan, 35.

20 Tan, 51.

21 Yung Li, 30.

22 Hartendorp, 1:192.

23 Hartendorp, 1:192.

24 Hartendorp, 1:490.

25 Hartendorp, 1:491.

26 Tan, 62.

27 Hartendorp, 1:491.

28 Tan, 97.

29 Tan, 68.

30 Hartendorp, 1:388.

31 Tan, 52.

32 Tan, 52.

33 Tan, 75.

34 Tan, 76.

35 Tan, 76.

- 36 Tan, 76.
- 37 Tan, 76.
- 38 Tan, 79.
- 39 Hartendorp, 2:300.
- 40 Ang, Armando A. “The Bataan March,” in *The Brutal Holocaust: Japan’s World War II Atrocities and their Aftermath* (Mandaluyong City: A1 Publishing, 2005), 119.
- 41 Tan, 89.
- 42 Tan, 81.
- 43 Yung Li, 13.
- 44 Tan, 82.
- 45 Eduardo C. Nocete, “The Chinese Hero of La Union,” in *Chinese Participation in Philippine Culture and Economy*, ed. Schubert Liao (Manila: Bookman, 1964), 138–139.
- 46 Yu-Jose, 156–157.
- 47 Ang, “Rape of Manila,” in *The Brutal Holocaust*. 164–165.
- 48 Tan, 95.
- 49 Ricardo Trota Jose and Lydia Yu-Jose, *Japanese Occupation of the Philippines: A Pictorial History* (Makati City: Ayala Foundation, 1997), 12.

REFERENCES

- Agoncillo, Teodoro A. *The Fateful Years: Japan’s Adventure in the Philippines, 1941–1945*. Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 1965 (Reprinted 2001).

Ang, Armando A. *The Brutal Holocaust: Japan's World War II Atrocities and their Aftermath*. Mandaluyong City: A1 Publishing, 2005.

Ang See, Teresita. "The Chinese in the Philippines: Continuity and Change." *The Chinese in the Philippines: Problems and Perspectives*, vol. 2, Kaisa Para Sa Kaunlaran Inc., 1997, 105–121.

Ang See, Teresita, et al., *Tulay Fortnightly*, Chinese-Filipino Digest, Kaisa Para Sa Kaunlaran Inc. and World News Publications, vol. 29, nos. 1–2, 19 May–15 June 2015, 8–11.

Cavendish, Richard. "The Marco Polo Bridge Incident" last modified 7 July 2012. <https://www.historytoday.com/richard-cavendish/marco-polo-bridge-incident>

Hartendorp, Abraham Van Heyningen. *The Japanese Occupation of the Philippines (2 Volumes)*. Manila: Bookmark, 1967.

Huang Zhi Seng (黃滋生). 菲華問題論辯. Kaisa Para Sa Kaunlaran Inc., 1998, 105–121.

Li Rui (李銳). 李清泉傳. Yuyitung Publications, 2000.

Li Tan Shi (李天錫). 晉江華僑軼事. Xiamen University Press, 2002.

Jose, Ricardo Trote and Lydia Yu-Jose. *The Japanese Occupation of the Philippines: A Pictorial History*. Makati City: Ayala Foundation, 1997.

Nocete, Eduardo C. "The Chinese Hero of La Union." In *Chinese Participation in Philippine Culture and Economy*, edited by Schubert Liao. Manila: Bookman, 1964.

Overseas Chinese Economic Year Book, 1958.

See, Chinben. "Chinese Organizations and Ethnic Identity in the Philippines." In *The Chinese Immigrants: Selected Writings of Prof. Chinben See*, edited by Teresita Ang See. Manila: Kaisa Para sa Kaunlaran Inc. and De La Salle University, 1992.

Tan, Antonio. *The Chinese in the Philippines during the Japanese Occupation, 1942–1945*. Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 1981.

Yu-Jose, Lydia N. *Japan Views the Philippines, 1900–1904*. Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1999.

Yung Wai, Yung Li. *The Huaquiao Warriors: Chinese Resistance Movement in the Philippines, 1942–1945*. Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1996.