

A Bond Across Time and Space: The Evolution and Reshaping of the "Homeland" Concept among Filipino Chinese from 1945 to 2025

Chunyang Lin

School of Foreign Languages, Huaiyin Institute of Technology, Huaian City, Jiangsu Province, China

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the evolution of the "homeland" concept among Filipino Chinese from 1945 to 2025, exploring its transformation from a one-way identification with their ancestral homeland in the early post-war period ("returning to one's roots") to a fusion of "dual homeland and dual nation" identity after the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and the Philippines. The study finds that this transformation went through three stages: arduous survival, initial integration, and full integration, gradually achieved through deep economic cultivation, political participation, and cultural inheritance and integration. This transformation was driven by multiple factors, including adjustments in Philippine policy, changes in Sino-Philippine relations, the binding of economic interests, and socio-cultural integration. It reflects both the adherence to Chinese cultural genes and the adaptation to the host country. The reshaping of the "homeland" concept among Filipino Chinese not only constructed a dual identity but also became an important bond for people-to-people exchanges between China and the Philippines, providing a typical case and theoretical reference for overseas Chinese studies and cross-cultural communication.

Keywords

Filipino Chinese; policy adjustment; economic integration; cultural symbiosis

1. Introduction

Since the end of World War II in 1945, the world order has undergone profound changes, globalization has accelerated, and international exchanges have become increasingly frequent. Against this backdrop, the Filipino Chinese community has also experienced tremendous transformations. As one of the most important Chinese groups in Southeast Asia, Filipino Chinese play a vital role in the political, economic, and cultural spheres of the Philippines. Their concept of "homeland" carries the traditional cultural genes of the Chinese nation while also being influenced by Philippine local culture and changes in the international situation, presenting a

unique development trajectory.

From a historical perspective, the immigration history of Filipino Chinese can be traced back to ancient times. In different historical periods, due to the influence of various political, economic, and social factors, Chinese people have continuously poured into the Philippines. The period from 1945 to 2025 encompasses important historical stages such as the post-war reconstruction and development of the Philippines, the acceleration of globalization, and the ups and downs of Sino-Philippine relations. These factors have all had a profound impact on the Filipino Chinese concept of "homeland." Studying the evolution of the "nation-family" concept among Filipino Chinese during this period helps us gain a deeper understanding of the inheritance and innovation of overseas Chinese culture, as well as the challenges and opportunities they face in integrating into local societies.

The "nation-family" concept among Filipino Chinese not only concerns their own identity and cultural heritage but also has a significant impact on the development of Sino-Philippine relations. As an important bridge for exchanges between China and the Philippines, the Chinese community's concepts and behaviors influence political, economic, and cultural exchanges between the two countries to a certain extent. Studying the "nation-family" concept among Filipino Chinese can provide a better understanding of people-to-people exchanges between China and the Philippines, offering valuable insights for promoting the healthy development of Sino-Philippine relations. Furthermore, research on the "nation-family" concept among Filipino Chinese also helps enrich and expand the field of overseas Chinese studies, providing new perspectives and case studies for cross-cultural research. In the context of globalization, exploring the exchange, integration, and conflict between different cultures has significant theoretical and practical implications.

2. Post-War Development and Cultural Perseverance of the Philippine Chinese Community (1945-2025)

The post-war Philippine Chinese community went through three stages: arduous survival, initial integration, and full integration. It overcame difficulties through deep economic development, adapted to policy changes, and consistently upheld its cultural roots while achieving diversified development.

From 1945 to the early post-war period (1975), the Chinese community achieved economic recovery through resilience and wisdom. In agriculture, in 1948, eight overseas Chinese, including Huang Youtu in Minki province of Northern Luzon, established a joint vegetable garden, cultivating potatoes, cabbage, and other vegetables on a large scale. This spurred the development of vegetable gardens in surrounding provinces, making the region a core vegetable supply base for the Philippines and ending the reliance on imports for these vegetables. In commerce, Manila's Chinatown became a core hub, with Chinese shops covering retail, import/export trade, and other sectors, meeting diverse needs. However, the Chinese community

faced severe challenges: the Philippine government's "Filipinoization" policy restricted the development of Chinese businesses, and social discrimination and exclusion made it difficult for them to succeed in employment, education, and other areas. To this end, the Chinese community has upheld their diasporic memories through Chinese language education and cultural heritage preservation. Schools like Nengren Middle School were established, and associations and other organizations set up scholarships and grants to ensure the continuation of education. Festivals such as the Spring Festival and Mid-Autumn Festival, along with the construction of ancestral halls and genealogies, strengthened cultural identity.

The period of integration and development from 1975 to 1990 saw the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and the Philippines as a turning point. The Marcos administration relaxed citizenship restrictions, leading to a large number of overseas Chinese becoming citizens and driving profound political, economic, and cultural transformation. Politically, the Chinese began participating in party activities and public office elections, with some elites entering core government departments. Economically, Chinese businesses were freed from some policy constraints; companies like the SM Group, founded by Henry Sy, have deepened their involvement in retail, real estate, and other sectors, growing into well-known Asian enterprises. Culturally, language exhibits a fusion of Hokkien, Filipino, and English; religious beliefs have evolved into a coexistence of Buddhism, Taoism, and Catholicism; and Chinese language education has shifted towards "cultivating Filipino citizens with Chinese cultural literacy," introducing innovative teaching models.

The period of comprehensive integration from 1990 to 2025 will see globalization driving the diversified development of the Chinese community. Economically, the dominance of Chinese-owned businesses has become increasingly prominent. Lucio Tan's LT Group has expanded into aviation and tobacco, while Jollibee has become a fast-food giant and entered the international market. Politically, Chinese participation has reached unprecedented levels, with presidents of Chinese descent such as Corazon Aquino and Rodrigo Duterte in office, and Chinese communities deeply involved in social affairs. Culturally, Chinese-language media such as the *World Journal* have become vehicles for Sino-Philippine cultural exchange, and cultural activities have expanded from traditional festivals to exhibitions and academic exchanges, gaining recognition from the local community. In education, Chinese language courses have entered both public and private schools, and universities have established related majors to cultivate exchange talents, forming a comprehensive cultural heritage system.

3. Diaspora Memory: The Upholding of Early "Homeland" Concepts by Filipino Chinese

In the early post-war period, although Filipino Chinese lived in a diaspora context, they upheld their "homeland" concepts through emotional attachment to their roots,

the inheritance of diverse cultures, and community cohesion, laying the foundation for the reconstruction of memories and cultural identity for subsequent generations of immigrants.

3.1. Returning to One's Roots: A steadfast commitment to one's ancestral homeland through both emotion and action

"Returning to one's roots" is the core expression of Chinese people's identification with their ancestral homeland during this period. This sentiment is not only a spiritual sustenance but also translates into concrete actions. Economically, in the 1950s and 60s, Filipino Chinese remitted huge sums of money to their ancestral homeland annually, both to support relatives and to contribute to economic development. In the investment field, Jinjiang is a prime example, with overseas Chinese returning to their hometowns to establish textile factories, food processing plants, etc., introducing technology and management experience, creating numerous jobs, and directly promoting the economic prosperity of their ancestral homeland.

Efforts in social welfare demonstrate even greater responsibility. Overseas Chinese generously funded education in their hometowns, building schools, libraries, and other facilities. In infrastructure construction, their funds were used to build roads, bridges, and water conservancy projects throughout rural Fujian, significantly improving local living and production conditions. These actions embodied "spiritual homeland," becoming core material for the "connection to the ancestral homeland" in the memories of those separated from their ancestral homeland.

3.2. Cultural Heritage: Intergenerational Maintenance of Ethnic Identity

Chinese culture is key to the maintenance of ethnic identity for overseas Chinese, with Chinese language education and the inheritance of traditional customs forming a dual support. Chinese schools have sprung up like mushrooms after rain, offering courses covering Chinese reading and writing, Chinese history, culture, and geography. They strengthen language skills through reciting classical poetry and trace the nation's lineage through history from the Xia, Shang, and Zhou dynasties to modern times, systematically transmitting core cultural connotations such as Confucianism and traditional arts. Even amidst hardship, Chinese families fully support their children's education, regarding "cultural inheritance" as a core responsibility.

Traditional festivals have become a living vehicle for cultural transmission. During the Spring Festival, Chinese communities are decorated with lanterns and colorful decorations, and customs such as pasting Spring Festival couplets, dragon and lion dances, and family reunion dinners convey the concept of "harmony and reunion." During the Mid-Autumn Festival, moon gazing, eating mooncakes, and telling the legend of Chang'e flying to the moon concretize the values of "homesickness and remembrance of family." These ritualistic practices embed cultural genes into daily

life, becoming important markers of ethnic identity in the context of diasporic communities.

3.3. Community Cohesion: The Organized Bearing of Diasporic Memories

Clan associations, hometown associations, and chambers of commerce, using "blood ties," "geographical ties," and "professional ties" as bonds, construct the core of cohesion within diasporic communities. Clan associations commemorate ancestors through ancestral worship ceremonies and compile genealogies to record migrations and family history, strengthening their sense of blood ties. When members face difficulties such as illness or unemployment, the organization quickly raises funds to provide assistance, achieving "family mutual aid."

Hometown associations, linked by ancestral origins, regularly hold gatherings for dialect exchanges and hometown food tastings, allowing Chinese people to rediscover the atmosphere of home in a foreign land. More importantly, they serve a rights protection function, negotiating with local governments to safeguard their legal rights when Chinese people encounter discrimination or injustice. Comprehensive organizations such as the Philippine Chinese Chamber of Commerce balance economic and cultural functions, coordinating business cooperation, organizing trade fairs to enhance competitiveness, and holding cultural exhibitions and art performances to spread Chinese culture to Philippine society and elevate the social status of the Chinese community. The "mutual aid and symbiotic" memories formed by these organizations have become historical templates for the subsequent reconstruction of community memories.

4. The Emergence and Development of Integrated Memories: The Transformation of the "Nation-Homeland" Concept among Filipino Chinese

Since the 1970s, with the adjustment of Philippine policies and the process of globalization, the Filipino Chinese have transformed their "nation-homeland" concept from a "one-way identification with their ancestral homeland" to a "dual identification with both their ancestral homeland and their country of residence" through political identity transformation, deep economic integration, and cultural pluralism. Integrated memories have become the core carrier of this transformation.

4.1. Political Identity Transformation: From Expatriate to Citizen

After the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and the Philippines in 1975, the Marcos government relaxed citizenship restrictions, granting Philippine citizenship to a large number of overseas Chinese. This marked a qualitative change in the identity of the Filipino Chinese from "expatriates" to "citizens," and their political identity shifted from "dependence on their ancestral homeland" to "belonging

to their country of residence." The granting of citizenship fostered a strong sense of political participation, with voter turnout among the Filipino Chinese increasing year by year. They participated in political affairs through joining political parties and offering policy suggestions, and prominent Filipino-Chinese political figures such as Corazon Aquino emerged. Corazon Aquino (whose ancestral home is Zhangzhou, Fujian) promoted political and land reforms during her presidency from 1986 to 1992. She also maintained Sino-Philippine friendship through actions such as "returning to her ancestral home to pay respects to her ancestors," demonstrating both her responsibility in governing the Philippines and preserving emotional ties to her ancestral homeland. Furthermore, many people of Chinese descent hold important positions in legislative and executive branches, participating in legislation and policy implementation, fully integrating into the Philippine political system and forming a political identity of "the Philippines as a national community and Chinese culture as its spiritual root."

4.2. Economic Integration: A Symbiotic and Prosperous Development Pattern

The Chinese economy has shifted from "ethnic self-circulation" to "symbiotic development with the local economy," forming a comprehensive integration model. In traditional commerce, Henry Sy's SM Group has built a nationwide retail network, directly or indirectly creating hundreds of thousands of jobs and driving the development of related industries such as logistics and catering. In manufacturing, Chinese enterprises are involved in electronics, food processing, and other fields. Their electronics exports have enhanced the international competitiveness of Philippine manufacturing, and modified Chinese food has become mainstream in the local market. In the financial and real estate sectors, institutions such as the Bank of China Manila Branch provide financing for local businesses, while Chinese developers participate in urban infrastructure construction, improving living and transportation environments. More importantly, there is the "local collaboration" model. For example, the San Miguel Group, controlled by Chinese-Filipino businessman Cai Qiwen, collaborates with local agricultural enterprises to ensure raw material supply and jointly builds projects with energy companies, achieving a win-win situation of "self-development - local empowerment - national economic improvement." Chinese enterprises are deeply involved in infrastructure projects such as roads and ports, closely linking their own development with the economic lifeline of the Philippines through technology export and industrial collaboration.

4.3. Cultural Integration: A Diverse and Symbiotic Expression of Identity

The deep integration of language, cuisine, religion, and education has shaped a memory form with "dual cultural genes." Linguistically, Filipino has absorbed a large

number of Hokkien words, with "taho" (tofu pudding) and "petsay" (cabbage) becoming common expressions across ethnic groups. The most representative example is culinary integration, with modified dishes such as "pancit" (fried noodles) and "Filipino spring rolls" retaining the core of Chinese cooking while adapting to local tastes, becoming popular dishes for everyone. In the religious sphere, a phenomenon of "faith overlap" is evident, with the deity in Batangas province being simultaneously regarded as the Virgin Mary, Guanyin, and Mazu, reflecting the inclusiveness of diverse faiths. Chinese language education has completed a transformation towards "dual identity cultivation," incorporating Philippine history and culture into the curriculum and integrating local concepts into teaching methods, cultivating descendants who are "bilingual and bilingual." This integration allows the Chinese community's concept of "homeland" to transcend a binary opposition: they see the Philippines as their "homeland," strengthening their sense of belonging to their adopted country; yet, they take Chinese culture as their "spiritual foundation," maintaining emotional ties to their ancestral home, forming a new type of identity characterized by "dual family structure and shared national sentiment," providing a "fusion resource bank" for the reconstruction of memories for the descendants of immigrants.

5. Factors Influencing the Evolution of the "Nation-Homeland" Concept among Filipino Chinese

The transformation of the "nation-homeland" concept among Filipino Chinese from a "one-way identification with the ancestral country" to a "dual-family, dual-nation integrated identification" is the result of the synergistic effect of multiple factors, including political policy adjustments, economic incentives, and socio-cultural integration. These three factors, from the perspectives of institutional guarantees, material foundations, and emotional cognition, respectively, have driven the Chinese to reconstruct their sense of identity within a diaspora context, forming a conceptual system that combines ethnic characteristics with local adaptation.

5.1. Political Factors: The Dual Driving Force of Policy Regulation and Sino-Philippine

Relations Philippine domestic policies and Sino-Philippine bilateral relations constitute the core institutional framework for the transformation of the "nation-homeland" concept. In the early post-war period, the "Filipinoization" policy, by restricting economic access and compressing social space for the Chinese, objectively strengthened the "overseas Chinese mentality"—under political exclusion, the Chinese could only rely on their ancestral country for spiritual support, and diaspora memories became their identity anchor. Following the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and the Philippines in 1975, the "Simplified Law on Citizenship for Overseas Chinese" facilitated a policy shift, granting Philippine citi-

zenship to a large number of Chinese immigrants and legally transforming them from "overseas residents" to "citizens." This transformation broke down political barriers: Chinese immigrants could participate in political parties and run for public office, entering the core of the political arena. For example, during the presidency of Corazon Aquino, a Chinese-Philippine president, the promotion of Sino-Philippine friendship and local reforms demonstrated both a sense of responsibility for governing the Philippines and a connection to their ancestral homeland, becoming a symbolic representation of this shift in political identity. The sense of belonging granted by citizenship significantly increased the weight of the "Philippines as a country of residence" in the concept of "nation."

Sino-Philippine relations have profoundly influenced this shift in perceptions across political, economic, and cultural dimensions. Politically, frequent high-level visits and deepening cooperation between the two countries have increased Philippine society's acceptance of Chinese immigrants, strengthening their role as a "cultural bridge." However, when disagreements arise, such as those concerning the South China Sea, Chinese immigrants need to carefully balance their dual identities, forcing a shift in their concept of "nation" towards a more pragmatic and inclusive one. Economically, bilateral trade between China and the Philippines reached US\$87.72 billion in 2023, with Chinese-owned businesses accounting for 45% of the trade share. This close economic connection has led the Chinese community to view the Philippines as a "community for economic development," with economic identity reinforcing political identity. Culturally, increased activities such as the China-Philippines Cultural Year and intangible cultural heritage exchanges have encouraged the Chinese community to actively incorporate local elements while preserving Chinese culture, providing fertile ground for a "fusion-based sense of national identity."

5.2. Economic Factors: Material Driven by Interest Binding and Social Status Improvement

The localization of economic interests is the core driving force behind the shift in the concept of "national identity." The Chinese community reconstructs its identity through a path of "economic integration - status improvement - emotional belonging." In the early post-war period, the Chinese community established itself through vegetable cultivation and retail in Chinatown. For example, the Northern Luzon United Vegetable Garden in 1948 changed the pattern of vegetable imports to the Philippines, laying the initial foundation for their economic contribution. After the 1970s, Chinese businesses broke through the limitations of "Filipinoization" and diversified. Henry Sy's SM Group grew from a shoe store to Asia's largest shopping mall operator, directly or indirectly creating hundreds of thousands of jobs. Lucio Tan's LT Group ventured into key sectors such as aviation and tobacco, becoming a pillar of the Philippine economy. Chinese control over 60% of the nation's private

economic assets, forming a symbiotic relationship between the "Chinese economy" and the "Philippine economy."

Economic success led to a leap in social status and lifestyle integration, further solidifying local identity. As the economic power of the Chinese increased, their growing influence drove improvements in rights protection, and business cooperation and intermarriage with local residents became increasingly common. Surveys show that among third-generation Chinese, 68% use Filipino daily, and 45% participate in traditional Philippine festivals. This localization of lifestyle makes the perception of "the Philippines as home" more tangible. Simultaneously, the Chinese give back to society through philanthropy, such as donating to build schools and participating in infrastructure projects, enhancing their ethnic image and strengthening their sense of "community." Economic stability has also weakened the material dependence on the ancestral homeland. Early Chinese immigrants supported their hometowns through remittances, while contemporary Chinese immigrants tend to favor two-way investment between China and the Philippines. For example, the SM Group's construction of commercial complexes in Fujian reflects a "dual-market linkage" economic concept, echoing the identity of "dual families and dual nations."

5.3. Socio-cultural Factors: Cognitive Shaping Through Ethnic Interaction and Diverse Integration

Ethnic interaction and cultural integration reshape the concept of "family and nation" at the cognitive level, forming a logic of "diverse coexistence." Cross-ethnic interactions are ubiquitous in daily life: in the business world, Chinese immigrants and local businessmen form joint ventures, sharing market resources; at the community level, they participate in cultural festivals and sporting events together, breaking down ethnic barriers; in education, Chinese schools exchange with local schools, and Chinese students learn from each other, cultivating cross-cultural awareness. This high-frequency interaction dissolves "cultural heterogeneity," gradually leading Chinese immigrants to view the Philippines as a "community of life."

Cultural integration fosters "dual cultural genes," providing cognitive support for the concept of "family and nation." Linguistically, Filipino has absorbed Hokkien words such as "taho" (tofu pudding), and Chinese families use a blend of Hokkien and Filipino in their expressions, forming a cross-cultural communication medium. In terms of cuisine, fusion dishes like "pancit" (fried noodles) and "Filipino spring rolls" have become shared symbols within the community. Religiously, the deities of Batangas province are simultaneously regarded as the Virgin Mary, Guanyin, and Mazu, reflecting inclusive faith. The transformation of Chinese language education is even more representative; schools like Neng Ren High School have added courses on Filipino history and culture, cultivating bilingual and bilingual descendants, shifting cultural identity from "one-way transmission" to "two-way integration."

Globalization further expands the boundaries of perception. Young Chinese Americans access diverse cultures through the internet, forming a triple identity of "global-ethnic-local." Among Chinese Americans under 35, 72% follow bilingual (Chinese and Filipino) new media accounts, and 58% participate in transnational cultural exchanges. They identify as Chinese, Filipino citizens, and possess a global perspective. Descendants of intermarried families exhibit more typical characteristics of integration. For example, respondents whose parents were Chinese and Filipino stated, "We put up Spring Festival couplets and celebrate the Philippine Diwali Festival. Fujian is our root, and the Philippines is our home." This perception is the ultimate product of socio-cultural integration, enabling the concept of "family and country" to transcend binary opposition and move towards pluralistic unity.

6. Conclusion

6.1. Research Summary

This study delves into the transformation of the "family and country" concept among Filipino Chinese from 1945 to 2025, from a dispersed memory to an integrated memory. In the early post-war period, Filipino Chinese, enduring a difficult living environment, maintained their dispersed memory and deep attachment to their ancestral homeland. They maintained close ties with their ancestral homeland through economic support and cultural transmission. Clan associations and hometown associations played a crucial cohesive role during this period, strengthening the Chinese's identification with their ethnic identity and their sense of belonging to their ancestral homeland.

As time passed, especially after the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and the Philippines in 1975, the "family and country" concept of Filipino Chinese began to change, and an integrated memory gradually emerged and developed. Politically, the Chinese community in the Philippines has gained citizenship, shifting its political identity from expatriate to citizen, actively participating in Philippine political affairs, and continuously increasing its political influence. Economically, Chinese businesses have diversified, cooperating closely with local Filipino enterprises, forming a symbiotic development model. Economic interests and development opportunities have become a significant driving force for the integration of the Chinese community into Philippine society. Culturally, the Chinese community in the Philippines has deeply integrated with local Filipino culture in terms of language, cuisine, and religion, creating a diverse and symbiotic cultural landscape. This cultural integration has promoted a shift in the Chinese community's sense of "nation and family," continuously strengthening their sense of identity with the Philippines. This shift in perception is influenced by a combination of factors. Politically, the Philippines' nationality and ethnic policies, as well as the development and changes in Sino-Philippine relations, have played a crucial role in shaping the political and emotional identity of the Chinese community. Economically, the economic interests

and development opportunities of the Chinese community in the Philippines influence their social status and lifestyle, further promoting a shift in their sense of "nation and family." Socio-culturally, the interaction between mainstream Philippine society and the Chinese community, as well as multicultural exchanges in the context of globalization, have promoted cultural integration, making the Chinese community's cultural concepts more diverse and inclusive, further influencing their sense of "nation and family."

The evolution of the "nation-family" concept among Filipino Chinese has had a profound impact on both the Filipino Chinese community and Sino-Philippine relations. Within the Filipino Chinese community, this shift in perspective has promoted social diversification, driven cultural inheritance and innovation, and fostered a dual identity among the Chinese, encompassing both Chinese and Filipino cultural characteristics. In Sino-Philippine relations, the Chinese have played a bridging role in economic exchanges, promoting trade and investment between the two countries; and in cultural exchanges, they have enhanced mutual understanding and friendship between the people of China and the Philippines through various cultural activities.

6.2. Limitations and Future Prospects

This study has certain limitations in data collection. Although relevant literature was reviewed as extensively as possible, the lack of some historical materials and the incomplete publication of some archives may have resulted in a less comprehensive and in-depth study of certain historical periods and events. In researching the early Filipino Chinese adherence to the "nation-family" concept, the availability of primary sources such as private letters and diaries from early Chinese immigrants is limited, which to some extent affects the accurate understanding of their inner world and emotional changes.

Regarding research perspectives, despite employing a multidisciplinary approach, there may still be issues with a comprehensive viewpoint. For example, in analyzing the influencing factors of the transformation of the "nation-family" concept among Filipino Chinese, the study of some micro-level factors, such as the impact of individual family background and educational experience on the transformation of these concepts, has not been detailed enough. Future research could further expand the research at the micro-level, delving deeper into the role of individual factors in the transformation of these concepts.

Focusing on new immigrant groups is also an important direction for future research. With the development of globalization, new Chinese immigrants continue to pour into the Philippines. Their "nation-family" concepts differ from those of traditional Filipino Chinese. Studying the characteristics of the concepts of new immigrant groups and their formation mechanisms will help to more comprehensively understand the dynamic development of the "nation-family" concept among Filipino Chinese. Furthermore, comparative studies of the interactions between Filipino

Chinese and other ethnic groups can be strengthened, analyzing the patterns of cultural exchange and integration between different ethnic groups, and the unique impact of this interaction on the "nation-family" concept of Filipino Chinese, providing richer theoretical and practical evidence for overseas Chinese studies.

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