

# Prosperity from a Cultural Palimpsest: the Rise and Regulation of “Korea Town” in Angeles City, the Philippines



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かつて米空軍クラーク基地(フィリピン)の城下町として栄えたエンジェルズ・シティ。基地撤退後、その歓楽街に韓国人が進出し、コリアタウンができた。その発展、地域との共生プロセスに東南アジアならではの都市のダイナミズムを見る。

## Abstract

In the 1990s South Korean entrepreneurs began to buy up inexpensive land in the former entertainment district of Angeles City in the province of Pampanga, the Philippines. The relative success they generated is due to a rare, advantageous confluence of geospatial and sociocultural factors: strategic location in the fertile Central Luzon region, presence of the former United States' Clark Airbase, and a tradition among local *Kapampangans* of accommodating and adapting foreign influences to strengthen their own culture. This research describes the physical manifestation of Angeles' latest phenomenon: “Korea Town”, which shows the unfolding of an enclave inside an urban community that maintains its own identity. It is shown that governance at different levels has become an enabler, and that despite their initial reticence, Korean settlers have gradually opened up to local clientele, through restaurants and bakeries, which have changed the landscape near the Clark International Airport. By highlighting how guardedness and rapprochement alternate to create a unique neighborhood where other foreigners once dominated, this study contributes to literature on cultural dynamics in Southeast Asian cities and concludes that the Korea Town is no fluke, but a logical result of the interplay of location, culture and institutions, and is still likely to evolve in the future.

## Keywords

Korean, Filipino, urban culture, governance, legacy infrastructure

## Introduction and Significance of the Study

Where American soldiers on furlough once roamed the red-light district at the intersection of Fields and Mitchell avenues outside the gate of their largest airbase in Southeast Asia, now one can find groups of South Korean businessmen and their families establishing shops and restoring old residences. This is happening in Angeles City, Pampanga province, a major urban melting pot in the Central Luzon region of the Philippines, as it is being swept by *Hallyu*, the so-called Korean Wave in Asia, which the locals agree has contributed much to the city. In particular, Korean money has helped the financial and material

recovery of the city since it was partly devastated by the eruption of Pinatubo Volcano in June 1991. Coincidentally, the *Kapampangan* (also known as *Pampangano*) people are not strangers to cultural influences: they played a major historical role in Philippine nation-building, in no small measure by absorbing and transforming in succession Spanish, American and other local Filipino influences into their own native milieu. Often they accomplished this through political engagement, intermarriage and commerce, yet always retaining a relatively distinct *Kapampangan* identity among other Filipino ethnolinguistic groups, as well as in the face of globalization. What happens then when two strong cultures meet, and the urban palimpsest

that is Angeles City once again is written over in *Hangul* by Korean settlers? It seems that despite occasional friction, the local Kapampangans continue in turns to entice investors and tolerate migrants while governing with a firm hand.

This research concentrates on “*Korea Town*”, a representative and iconic district running for about 1 kilometer on the Filipino-American Friendship Highway in Angeles City, Pampanga Province, as the spatial manifestation of (South) Korean presence in a progressive urban area. By describing its spatial growth and the institutional framework that enables it, this research tries to theorize on the mixing of cultures by answering the question: “How do two disparate cultures mix in urban space as a result of (or despite of) the administrative role of government?” Patterns of interaction were sought, in order to generalize from what the obvious rapid changes in physicality have demonstrated.

This study also contributes to the growing literature on poly- or multi-cultural cities around the world, and describes for posterity a vibrant Southeast Asian example of ethnocentric urban growth. However, beyond the physical aspect, the author also scrutinizes governance and administrative structures behind the scenes that support the Korean influx, even magnify it. The research concludes with a recognition of the inherent legacy infrastructure and experiences left by past colonizers, migrants, and transients, as well as the balancing force of cross- and counter-cultural activities throughout the city’s expanse pushed by the *Kapampangan* leadership and elite that sustain the bedrock of a local culture, and probably prepare Angeles City to handle such cultural impositions, more than other local government units (LGUs).

## **Methodology, Scope, Limitations of the Study**

The overall methodology was qualitative-spatial investigation. The researcher undertook at least two transect-walks and windshield surveys with photography in the neighborhood. Key informant interviews were also conducted throughout the length of study. For purposes of research, the site was visited intermittently from 2012 through 2017.

The data was analyzed spatially by looking for key infrastructure and patterns of building throughout the years that the site

was visited. Public records, especially the land use and development plans, were then compared to identify any specific strategies to respond to Korean investment. The study was limited to the province of Pampanga, in Central Luzon, and as a qualitative-cum-spatial study, did not make any mathematically-derived conclusions, but rather probed social meanings and perceptions of both sides, Korean and Filipino (specifically, Kapampangan), as drivers of social and anti-social behavior, and as drivers of investment in urban space.

## **Review of Related Literature**

### ***Globalization and Cosmopolitan Cities***

Due to the increasing globalization of production, especially in the mega-urban regions of Pacific-Asia (Douglass 2000), cities in different states are becoming increasingly linked and constitutive of global circuits, for which the regulatory role of the state is shrinking in the face of global processes that have embedded themselves in national territories (Sassen 2002). With commerce comes more frequent and rapid interchange of ideas, as well as learning, which has allowed cities (through the individuals and groups that enliven them) to claim to be cosmopolitan, in the sense of being knowledgeable and comfortable with the diversity and dynamism of the world. Cosmopolitanism, however has been everywhere a frail achievement historically, in so far as cities are places that welcome and absorb strangers, at least for a time, even as residents in parts of the same cities may remain out of touch or intolerant of migrants, exiles, and sojourners, with whom they might coexist with varying degrees of acceptance, for generations (Werbner 2014). This mixing that may lead to more cosmopolitan cities has become more prominent in Asia, as evidenced by the increasing sociopolitical connections between states, and an unprecedented demand for travel that has risen in conjunction with economic development since the 1980s (Dissayanake, Kurauchi, Morikawa and Ohashi, 2012).

### ***Diversity and the Cultural Turn in Today’s Cities***

Given the increasing chances of a cosmopolitan-shift in Asia’s major cities, those who study and plan for cities have to consider the relatively new guiding principle of “diversity” as against the old orthodoxy of homogeneous segregation in planning of cities, at least since racial-ethnic and other types of heterogeneity were

advocated by Jane Jacobs since the 1960s. And yet leading planning scholar S. Fainstein (2004) reminds us of the important modernist critique of communities planned for diversity that tend to be labeled as inauthentic, even as she asserts that claims for real diversity are important in as much as these underlie the appeal of the urban, promote tolerance, and foster creativity. All the while, the same author notes that in such diverse urban settings, there is a constant trading off of values (e.g. broad-based democracy vs. small-group loyalty), as well as a mutual reinforcement of other values (e.g. courtesy and sociability).

Such diversity may or may not lead to a healthy multiculturalism as a de facto mode of existence, or as a part of state policy, as the latter has been often discussed, using Canada as an example. This multiculturalism envisages a society as a mosaic of beliefs and ways-of-doing, as defined by two principles: (1) the right to practice and preserve one's original heritage, and (2) equality of rights and freedoms, all of which are contained in the regulatory frames of the state and daily social life of the host country (Qadeer 1997). The same author goes on to explain that multiculturalism affects urban planning in at least two ways: 1. it holds planning policies and standards up to the light of social values and public goals; and 2. it recognizes the legitimacy of ethnic neighborhoods and enclaves, and therefore precipitates questions about balancing homogeneity with openness. This would stand in contradistinction to states which take a more assimilationist stance, where in-migrants and their children are expected by government to be absorbed sooner or later into the mainstream culture. The operative concept of culture however, continues to play a central role in cities, as present-day cities locate culture in central business districts (CBD), as well as in older symbolic pre-industrial sites of administration, as they have been doing in the past millennium, whether in an orthogenetic (*unidirectional evolutionary growth*) or heterogenetic (*dialectical, alternating growth*) form and manner (Redfield & Singer, 1954).

### ***Urban Renewal Through (Multi-) Cultural Growth***

At some point in time, usually coincident with, but sometimes lagging behind the incipient social diversity of growing cities comes their spatial growth and reconfiguration. This will often hinge upon international growth economics which in turn

is based on specialization, human capital improvement, and institutional refinement, and translates most commonly into employment generation and its corresponding spillover effects (Storper 2010). This then translates into infused capital into the city so that new construction follows, as will be shown in this case study, where certain neighborhoods of Angeles City have been rebuilt with Korean funds. In planning terms, this might manifest into what is called urban revitalization policy, taking for example Business Improvement Districts (in the United States) which aspire to be safe, delightful and clean (Hoyt 2006). Although it must be remembered that urban renewal and redevelopment have deep roots, going as far back as the 19th century in Europe, where slum clearance and other forms of reconstruction were more government-initiated and funded, rather than market-driven (Zipp 2012). In due time, such development will call for, or impinge upon, the urban design process. If left to itself, natural but non-conscious processes will continue to shape and re-shape the experience of place, although again, rarely is urban space left entirely alone, but rather is managed or regulated by government or neighborhood associations (Carmona 2013), which are both manifested in this research.

### ***Deeper Politics of Cultural Emphasis in Urbanism***

In the actual day-to-day life of cities however, the meeting and mixing of cultures is not always a smooth process to which residents are receptive. Urban conflicts abound, not least because politicians and planners miss out on—or intentionally meddle in the social consequences of predation and control (Sevilla-Buitrago, 2013) that may take place when groups with different values and customs oppose one another in neighborhood spaces. Situations and events that exemplify cultural frictions in the city provide basis for those who are critical about what is called the “myth” of multiculturalism, or at least its excessive optimism, for intergroup conflicts in urban places need to be analyzed more carefully in order to understand the problematic of identity and difference, as well as the limits of tolerance (Fruchter and Harris 2010). The same authors go on to assert that culture does not emerge from shared experience but rather is rooted in shared ideals, which has to be worked out pragmatically in cities that are experiencing an influx of different and politically or economically powerful settlers. Hence, it has been said that the

cultural turn in urban studies may need to pay attention to sites and social relations occasioned by human relations arising out of mingling, specifically because older Marxist perspectives have been too reductive, tending to see localisms and regionalisms as capital-labor relations, when there is a more varied totality of cultural factors at play (Soja 1999).

### ***Koreans in the Philippines, Filipinos in Korea***

In recent years, there has been a rise in the scholarly literature on the particular social and cultural interaction between Koreans and Filipinos, based on abundant empirical evidence of interactions of these people, especially in the cities of both South Korea and the Philippines. One of the acknowledged driving forces for the presence of Koreans in the Philippines and certain Western countries like the United States and Australia is *yeonggeokyooyuk*, or “English Education”, which is part of a longer 20th-century “Education Fever” that on the one hand has done well to bring Korean literacy to nearly 100% but on the other hand has caused emotional and psychosocial development problems for children sent to cram schools and compelled to learn English abroad from a very young age (Park 2009, Bok-Rae 2015). In an earlier study on the Korean influx into Philippine cities this researcher deduced from interviews with various Koreans that the Philippines is probably considered to be a good alternative site for learning English (specifically American English) for Korean families somewhat lower on the socioeconomic ladder who cannot or will not send their children to the faraway United States (Gomez 2013).

On Philippine ground, the results of the Korean Wave are visible in the proliferation of ethnic restaurants, bakeries, and a few other iconic facilities like small churches and dentists. The Filipinos in various cities themselves have taken positively to *Hansik*, or Korean cuisine, which was initially served to Koreans who could not quite stomach local food, and later to curious and adventurous groups who had acquired a taste for *kimchi*, *samgyupsal*, *bibimbap*, and *japchae*, among others (Joven 2014). The demand is apparently sufficient so that the Korean Cultural Center in Metro Manila has offered Korean cooking courses, a decidedly state-sponsored inter-cultural program. At the same time, Filipino-dubbed Korean-inspired television dramas have been attracting a young local audience, just as Korean investors

have been attracted in equal measure to large markets and the leisure life of golf course and gambling—this latter sometimes becoming a problem, along with the occasional recorded mistreatment of blue-collar Filipino workers by Korean entrepreneurs (Igno & Cenidoza 2016). Nevertheless, Philippine cities continue to be receptive to Korean investors and settlers, because of the latter’s substantial cash infusions into the local economy. In many cases, Koreans can and do enjoy comparatively higher living standards while they live among Filipinos.

The same cannot be said about the conditions of many Filipinos in Korea, given that the latter country changed from being a labor-exporter to an importer in the 1990s, with labor policy adapting in the early 2000s such that Korean employers’ needs and wishes are emphasized, while exploitation of foreign labor occurs to maximize Korea’s economic benefit; foreign workers may stay briefly with no chance of work-permit extension and virtually no means to become permanent residents, but instead work for at most three (3) years under any of four permit regimes: professionals, industrial training, employment management system, and employment permit system (Kim 2005). The Filipinos themselves, majority of whom are paid between \$2,000 to \$2,500 a month tend to live in *yollips*, which are small, low-storey apartment buildings in Korea, where they can occupy the ground floors and basements for a minimal rent. They are not generally received warmly in mainstream Korean society, although they do find solace and comparatively strong communities in the Korean Catholic churches that abound (Lee 2007). Hence while researchers like Shafray & Seiyong (2016) might assert that South Korea is generally more open and tolerant towards foreigners than before, they hold that there is also a belief that foreign culture and capital will compete with local business and Korean traditions, hence the cultural resistance.

### **The Setting: Crucial Infrastructure in Pampanga**

Measuring roughly 3,200 meters of military-grade asphalt-concrete length, the twin runways of Diosdado Macapagal International Airport<sup>1</sup> and the latter’s proximate

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<sup>1</sup> Also known as Clark International Airport or formerly, Clark Airbase, of the U.S. Airforce, now of the Philippine Airforce. It was established as a 7,700 acre (31.16 square kms.) cavalry station called Fort

31,000-hectare surroundings plus a 32,000 hectare expanse of hilly hinterlands to the north, used to be the largest U.S. airbase in Southeast Asia, which straddles the border between Angeles City and Mabalacat municipality. Except for the contiguous municipalities of Mabalacat and Bamban (the latter in adjacent Tarlac province), no other Local Government Unit (LGU) in the Philippines can boast of this asset, and it is only urbanized Angeles City that controls the major access points to the airport/airbase, even as Mabalacat and to a lesser extent, Bamban hold the remainder of the open space and jungle that made up the original American military reservation. Second in terms of major infrastructure advantages, Angeles City is also traversed by the renovated eight lane North Luzon Expressway (NLEX), and the newer four lane Subic-Clark-Tarlac Expressway (SCTEX), from which it derives excellent interregional accessibility from the rest of Luzon. Third, due in part to its lineage of commercially-astute *Kapampangan* families, Angeles City has for a long time been the leading educational center of the province, as it possesses superior educational infrastructure in the form of two competitive private colleges: the Holy Angel University, and the Angeles University Foundation, as well as the public extension campus of the University of the Philippines, located within the Clark Freeport Zone (or “CFZ”, in the airbase complex) itself. Again, no other LGU within a 50 kilometer radius can offer this same concentration of travel, employment, and training facilities.

## Fieldwork Results: Of Mixing & Governance

### *Urban History and Diversification of Buildings*

Having visited Angeles City for professional and personal purposes throughout the last two decades, the author has become familiar with the evolution of the urban landscape since the 1991 eruption of the Pinatubo volcano that effectively turned back large swathes of Angeles City into flatlands covered with whitish ash and lahar deposits. Onto this quasi-*tabula rasa*, risk-taking local speculators gradually bought up land in the late 1990s, in the wake of mass departure of resident American servicemen and the turnover of the airbase to the Philippine government in 1992. In

those early years, many buildings which were not otherwise used (and quickly reopened) as nightclubs and motels around the perimeter of the airbase remained decrepit, as exemplified by the occasional roof still caved-in from the weight of volcanic debris.

Table I. Foreign Elements of Cultural Landscape in Angeles

Non-Filipino/ Foreign Settlers	Period	Estimated Spatial Extent (hectares)
Spanish Colonial	1796-1898	~3,865.37
American Colonial	1898-1946	< 6,217.37 (100%)
American Airbase*	c.1912-1992	224.39+
Korean (mostly business)	c.2002-present	62 (~1%)
Others: Chinese, Japanese, etc.	c.1800-present	31 (<1%)

\*Notes: (1) shifting size during colonial periods reflects formal enlargement of the town (Spanish Colonial figure: D.David 2017 Powerpoint Presentation); (2) while concentration of airbase operations may have been limited to the fenced 225 hectare area, clearly the +500 hectare ring of commercial establishments now surrounding the base emerged organically to cater to U.S. Servicemen, hence the “+” on the spatial extent.

By early 2002, when the author had begun visiting the area with intent to do descriptive and explanatory research of the cityscape, the stretch of road of barangay<sup>2</sup> Balibago, Amsic, and Anunas on the southern perimeter of the airbase had begun to show a thin scattering of Korean establishments, usually small-scale English language schools, a restaurant or two, and a taekwondo gym.

A decade later, in 2012, there was an unmistakable Korean presence in Angeles City, concentrated commercially for about 500 meters on both sides of the Fil-Am Friendship Highway, which runs some 8.5 kilometers south and west of the city. In that area, barangay Anunas, two pagoda-like, burnt-red marble monuments which proclaimed “Korea Town” had been erected, with one close to where the airbase gate disgorges traffic to the now Korean-dominated strip, the other where the bridge over the Abacan river began. Signs in *Hangul* dominated both sides of the streets, and there were many more Korean restaurants and bakeries—10 to 12 on both sides of the street, and at every nearby neighborhood corner; it could thus be inferred that these had begun to cater to local *Kapampangans*, and not the relatively small number of Korean clientele.

Stotsenberg in 1903. - <http://www.clarkab.org/history/> retrieved 05 July 2017.

2 *Barangay* [ba-rang-ga-i] – the smallest spatio-political unit under Philippine law; essentially a village.



Fig. 1. This monument marks both ends of the Korean enclave. Photograph by the author.

By 2017, practically the entire 1-kilometer strip from the Friendship Gate of the Clark Freeport Zone to the Abacan bridge had been claimed by Korean businesses, and the LGU was upgrading and expanding that section of the highway. There was a diversification of Korean establishments themselves, what urban scholars call the development of a “fine grain” (Kostof 1993). Korean groceries and churches were now in abundance. Notably however, the series was punctuated by other cuisines: a Japanese restaurant, a Spanish restaurant, and an Italian restaurant for example, but with signs in Korean plastered on the windows and headboard.

Despite the interspersed presence of some Filipino establishments and residences, the overall visual effect of Korea Town is astounding to those who were had known the area as an American enclave. This is because of the former’s mono-cultural façade on both sides of the four-lane corridor formed by the highway. Even the cars parked in front of the different establishments, if they belong to the owners, tend to be of Korean manufacture.

### ***Larger Context: Kapampangan Primacy in Angeles***

The people of Pampanga have a long history of taking advantage of colonizing influences, as their ancestors were desired by Spanish superiors because the early Kapampangans were proven to be loyal and dependable soldiers (De Viana 2005), and later lieutenants and petty officials. In time Spanish settlers and Chinese traders intermarried with *Kapampangans*, thereby producing the generations of fair-skinned people who are populous in this part of the archipelago. This sociocultural origin is the foundation of development of the urban core.

Since its founding around 1796 as the barrio of *Culiat*<sup>3</sup>, and separated from territory that originally belonged to the town of San Fernando to the south, Angeles City has been a bastion of Kapampangan culture, in so far as it has successfully blended and absorbed Spanish and American influences into the ways-of-doing of the average resident. Physical manifestations of the strong social fabric include the religious devotion to the *Apung Mamacalulu* (Merciful Lord) in the shrine of the Holy Sepulcher, as well as the numerous heritage houses in the old plaza, some of which used to belong to prominent citizens, and are now used also for heritage tourism.

Aside from local pride, and in response to the erosive forces of globalization, there have been recent moves, likely to be adopted soon by the local legislative council, to make the Kapampangan language official and mandatory within the city, according to the author’s interview with the tourism and planning officers. This would then have implication for public signage and would promote learning of the indigenous speech by all residents. Because the city itself is booming<sup>4</sup> in contrast to other Philippine LGUs, with locals engaged both in manufacturing inside the CFZ and agro-industrial development of the surrounding rural lands, it is expected that local income will sustain such initiatives to promote this indigenous culture.

### ***Comprehensive Land Use Plan & Other Frames***

But apart from the sociological and market-based realities

3 *Culiat* (genus *Gnetum*) or *Kuliat* is the local name of a vine that used to grow abundantly in the townsite.

4 Angeles City, like the capital region Metro Manila, generates its own surplus income, and does not rely heavily on tax transfers from national government.

visible on the streets, it is important to inquire: is there any rationality behind the rapid development of Angeles City? The Comprehensive Land Use Plan 2010-2020 (CLUP) of the city seems to recognize that the relatively central location of Angeles in the province is a magnet for trade and exchange of ideas.

Table II. Land Use: Angeles City (Source: CLUP 2010-2020)

Land Use	Area (Hectares)	Percentage Share
Built-up and roads	2,762.08	44.43%
Agricultural Land	1,543.51	24.83%
Agricultural/Tropical Grass	843.75	13.57%
Bush/ Forest Cover	698.42	11.23%
DMIA Complex	224.39	3.61%
Abacan River	145.22	2.34%
Total	6,217.37	100.00%

Specifically, 3 of 9 identified growth nodes are within a kilometer of the CFZ perimeter fence: the Abacan River Special Development Corridor, the Balibago Growth Center, and the Anunas Growth Center—this latter being precisely the location of Korea Town. As designated, these areas shall have few government restrictions on commercial and industrial investment. In particular, the banks of the small and shallow Abacan River, which runs roughly west to east, are slated for development.

Other plans, like the national Philippine Development Plan (2017-2022) and its subordinate Regional Plan for Central Luzon, identify Angeles City as a regional international gateway, and recognize that on the whole, it is part of an area of rapid population growth and economic activity.

### ***Official Reactions: City Hall vs. Barangay Hall***

Interestingly, when the author conducted an interview in February 2017 with the City Hall planning and tourism officials, it was learned that the priority was on strengthening local culture, rather than providing any special accommodation to Koreans, or any other group, like Japanese and Chinese, who are also active in the city's commerce. In spatial terms, the old Spanish-era plaza in the center of town had been cleared and improved, and local festivals were being promoted rather than Korean neighborhoods.

The same officials however, gratefully recognized that the Koreans, some 20,000 of whom are residents in Angeles, had been contributing at least 25-30% of the entire annual income,

through business permits, taxes, and other fees, for the decade of the 2000s. There were in fact at least 150 thriving Korean business establishments in Angeles as of 2015, and at least 96 industrial locators in the CFZ (Buan 2017). Given that the latest official gross income reported is P1,614,109,000 (U.S.\$31,882,423.81) in 2016, then the portion attributable to Korean investment and daily spending could amount to P538,036,333.33 (U.S.\$10,628,768.91), which is enough to build several buildings. This latter figure is credible, given the hundreds of small Korean commercial establishments that now lie scattered across the landscape of the city, and not even taking into account forward and backward linkages with peer establishments owned by both locals and other Korean investors.



Fig. 2. Note the pictures taken in 2012 (above) and 2017 respectively: even the Spanish and Japanese restaurants have Korean signs. All photographs by the author.

As far as the bureaucrats could recount, Korean businessmen started coming when they realized that it was cheaper to fly in and play golf in the CFZ over the weekend than in South

Korea. Eventually such businessmen eventually explored opening up businesses, or enrolled their children in weekend or summer courses in local schools, where the latter learned English, and in time made friends, as did their parents. In the ordinary neighborhoods of Angeles City, the Korean investors are subject to the standard regulations for construction and location of business, although they are given additional incentives when they make substantial investments within the CFZ area.

At the barangay level however, there was a marked difference in receptivity; a more positive and non-discriminating one. The barangay has continued to welcome the influx of Koreans, particularly in the mid-2000s, as recalled by one officer, A.G., who said that Korean speculators would arrive almost every month in 2007, to buy up the real estate that had still remained cheap close to one decade after the volcanic eruption. The barangay captain then, L.G. made it a condition that such entrepreneurs hire locals. The same respondent added that Koreans started coming over a decade ago, during the term of the former mayor C.Lazatin; although under the present mayor, E.Pamintuan, there seems to have been another barangay captain recently elected. In any case, the barangay officials have practiced a *laissez-faire* approach, letting Koreans do as they wish, but stepping in only when there are reports of abuse of laborers, for which a stern warning is issued to the Koreans, who will face deportation if they continue to verbally abuse, underpay, or illegally withhold pay to wage-laborers and salaried blue-collar workers.

It should be remarked as well that in the same neighborhood one can find the “Shinyang Korea-Philippines Cultural Center”, a good-sized building erected by the Korean Community Association of Central Luzon, Inc. Although due to the language barrier, the officer who received the author during a visit in July 2017 declined to be interviewed, it may be said that this institutional presence alone in Angeles City is a substantial investment not found in other cities in the Philippines.

## **Analysis and Discussion of Findings**

In addition to over 1,000,000 Korean tourists who visit annually, the Korean presence in Angeles City is visible and substantial in comparison to other major provincial urban areas. While accessibility through the airport is the most apparent

enabler for Korean sojourners, it does not fully explain their eventual settlement. For this latter, the open attitude of the LGU should be recognized, especially barangay Anunas, which sits right outside the airbase complex.

Even the City Hall officials, who are notably more detached and impartial, nevertheless took concrete measures to protect Korean investors after a spate of killings and extortions—the latest being the kidnapping and killing of Jee Ick Joo in 2016 (Orejas 2017). These included the establishment of a “tourist-friendly” police outpost at the entrance to Korea Town (visited by the author, who observed at least three on-duty policemen), which paralleled the much higher-level action on the part of governor Pineda, who signed an Provincial Executive Order last February 2017 establishing the Korean Assistance Office of Pampanga. It is clear then, that at least three (3) levels of local government officials are responding to the needs of the Korean community, as a form of diplomatic reciprocation to good international relations, and in recognition of the income that is being poured into the economy of Pampanga, and Central Luzon as a whole. This institutional support is crucial, and it should be emphasized, is historically consistent with the Kapampangan’s own willingness to engage in fair trade and exchange of ideas with foreigners, as long as there are direct or indirect economic and sociopolitical gains, not least for the established network of local clans of the genteel upper class.

## **Implications for Theory**

From a theoretical perspective then, Angeles City has become a relatively successful urban cultural palimpsest—a storied site where other cultures have inscribed their own scripts, effacing in parts, yet also augmenting and embellishing what has come before. The city is both unique and representative of other cities that are experiencing a substantial in-migration of Koreans in the Philippines. It is unique physically because of its American-legacy infrastructure that other Philippine cities lack, and because of its association with a strong material and politico-literary culture that shaped Filipino history. But it is also commonplace, or representative, because its urban spaces are exemplars of how Korean settlers and transients have aggressively transformed neighborhoods to suit their lifestyles.

Moreover, from a spatial point of view, Angeles City appears



to demonstrate an inherent resilience in its urban fabric, which refers to a system's capacity to maintain structural and functional integrity in the face of disturbance, whether planned or unplanned (Bessey 2002), such that has not become entirely overwhelmed by the waves of foreign influence that have washed over it, but has retained a solid historical urban core (centered on the twin belltowers of the Holy Rosary Church), with a fresh satellite area (the Marquee Mall rotunda and the new City Hall complex), and the long-standing entertainment district near CFZ, of which Korea Town is an important part.

It is a de facto multiculturalism that has emerged as a result of the Koreans' initial preference in the early 2000s to keep to themselves and provide commercial services to their fellow countrymen, for safety purposes and because of the language barrier. This is a pattern observed by the author in his earlier research done in Metro Manila. But after a decade of colorful interaction, it seems that some mutually-beneficial mingling has evolved, in the form of Korean restaurants catering to locals, which of necessity have had to convert their signages from purely Hangul script to English lettering. In these places, Filipinos, and foreign nationalities like Americans, Chinese, and Japanese dine, sometimes in mixed groups. This social phenomenon is consistent the literature on geographies of food, and constitutive of cosmopolitan eating where fuzzy interactions between diverse groups allow for deepening of familiarity with other cultures (Duruz 2011). The restaurant dynamic is therefore particularly *apropos* to Pampanga province, which is known throughout the Philippines for its own distinct culinary traditions—so that if the discriminating palate of the Kapampangan gourmet can be piqued, if not impressed by Korean cuisine, then mutual cultural respect can somehow develop. This is precisely what Zafari et al. (2015) try to explain when they show that ethnic cuisine consumed in usually complex social situations is allows the eaters to observe and learn social norms for quantity and manner of food consumption, and instrumentally allows association with others who are not necessarily akin or alike one's self.

Hence, even as the segregation dissolves slowly, one can affirm that intercultural and sociopolitical efforts are making inroads, leading towards what the literature has generally recognized to be the delicate, valuable balance of ethnolinguistic

and racial groups in successful cities. Apart from the natural formation of relationships in Korean-Filipino neighborhoods, three additional factors appear to be determinative of engagement, which are noteworthy of theory-related commentary:

First, the loose, but nevertheless persistent regulatory frame of the LGU (at city and barangay levels) ensures that the Korean population must interact with the Kapampangan administrators. This defines in subtle ways, the minimum of cross-cultural engagement that prevents formation of quasi-colonial enclaves, and that militates against any apartheid-like situation. It may be hypothesized therefore, that a supportive institutional presence is *sine qua non* for the conditions that lead to cultural rapprochement.

Second, education of Korean children of expatriate businessmen in English, which is an official but **not** a *native* language, ironically allows them access to other countries and cultures (particularly the United States as a desired later destination), yet also allows them also to interact meaningfully with their bilingual Filipino classmates and literate ordinary persons in the wider urban environment. Linguistic facility in a language foreign to both cultures does become a bridge for cultural exchange, where in the process, Korean youngsters learn both Kapampangan and Filipino, while the natives pick up some Korean phrases, as do the sun-burnt native tricycle drivers who ferry passengers through Korea Town everyday.

Lastly, to the credit of the Koreans themselves, it appears that the lure of commercial profits and the concomitant relaxed lifestyle in a tropical country has been adequate to keep many of them rooted in Angeles City, despite the occasional harassment, altercations with some locals, misunderstandings, or victimization by crime. Commercial success resulting in the creation of an attractive lifestyle is arguably the major and most visible reason why Korean families have continued to settle in Angeles City. In doing so, the spill-over effects of their spending not only benefits the local economy, but also inevitably leads to interaction and intermarriage with the locals.

An additional note must be mentioned here that the success of Korea Town has taken place even if the political climate was not entirely conducive to its fruition; as there appears to remain a discrepancy between the degree of support of City Hall and Barangay Hall, the latter being flush with Korean investment that generates jobs for the less well-off neighborhood to the



Fig. 3. Korean-Filipino Associations like this one provide a stabilizing institutional presence for investors. Photograph by author.

west. Barangay leaders therefore have been politically pragmatic in allowing the Koreanization of that strip of neighborhood, even while City leaders, in contrast, have to think about balancing population and employment for the rest of the urban area, and are also mandated to promote local culture through festivals and official activities that celebrate the Kapampangan identity.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

The case of Angeles City contributes to the literature on noteworthy urban cultural phenomena, at least in Southeast Asia, because it presents a unique confluence of infrastructure-enabled access, a persistent and prosperous stream of in-migration (Korean), and long history of successful absorption and adaptation of foreign ideas by a cultured native population. Moreover, it may be remarked, the physical and social legacies of the past groups have been co-opted and used *cumulatively* to great effect by the native leadership: the airport

brings in a steady stream of Korean and other investors into a city that has built up its landscape to reflect a relaxed blending of Hispanic-Filipino in the urban core, as defined by the old plaza, and American-Filipino in the commercialized periphery surrounding the former military reservation that has turned into an industrial zone and airport. Onto this urban landscape, the Koreans have attached themselves, taking advantage of depressed real estate prices in the 1990s and early 2000s, and by doing so have, through aggregate action, revitalized several parts of Angeles City, with the most obvious concentration in Korea Town, which lies in Barangay Anunas. At the same time, a nascent conviviality in the urban fabric is spreading, albeit slowly, in those places where Korean and Kapampangan become part of each other's daily routine.

Looking ahead, the physical growth of Korea Town is expected to proceed apace, possibly to follow the Filipino-American Friendship Highway across the Abacan river. As a policy follow-up, it may be forward-thinking and wise for city officials to require more intercultural engagement, and to coordinate efforts with the barangay administration regarding the placement of Korean businesses and residences. A healthy mixture is, in the long-run, more desirable to any externally-enforced or self-imposed segregation. Other institutions also need to be involved, such as the management of the Clark Freeport Zone and the Diosdado Macapagal Airport, in order to ensure warm reception, smooth transitions and culturally-sensitive behavior for all incoming tourists and business investors.

For further studies, Angeles City and adjacent LGUs like Mabalacat, Porac and Bamban, will continue to serve as excellent urban laboratories, especially because Angeles City continues to be an economic and sociocultural magnet in the province beyond its built-up and legal borders. This is in part because as a "workforce city", it draws its labor from far beyond its borders (Parr 2007). Pursuant to this research, the author would thus recommend that other scholars undertake longitudinal and spatial studies to follow the continuing changes in the cityscape, especially its Korean component, as well as those neighborhoods that have been, or shall be changed by economic growth caused by the arrival of other groups of people from beyond the borders of the Philippines.

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