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**MANILA – the CAPITAL
and the VISION of the PHILIPPINES
(Part 2.)**

Chinatown – Binondo City

Binondo (Chinese: 岷倫洛區; pinyin: Mín lún luò qū; Pèh-ōe-jī: Mìn-lû-lo-ke) is a district in Manila and is referred to as the city's Chinatown and is the world's oldest Chinatown¹. Its influence extends beyond to the places of Quiapo, Santa Cruz, San Nicolas and Tondo. It is the oldest Chinatown in the world, established in 1594² by the Spaniards as a settlement near Intramuros but across the Pasig River for Catholic Chinese, it was positioned so that colonial rulers could keep a close eye on their migrant subjects³. It was already a hub of Chinese commerce even before the Spanish colonial period. Binondo is the center of commerce and trade of Manila, where all types of business run by Filipino-Chinese thrive. What was interesting to note concerning those businesses, they do not look too posh or luxurious, and that first of all counts for the buildings the businesses are kept in, be it a bank or a business centre. Nevertheless, it cannot be said that lack of luxury and grandeur means also lack of finance, as far as most of the best banks in Manila have their place in Chinatown, and statistically all those banks have quite high positions among commercial banks of the Philippines. It does not really matter, whether they have headquarters or just branches in Binondo, the fact about modest appearance preserves.

Another symbolic thing about Chinatown is the Arch that meets you at the entrance to the district itself. The following photo shows the symbolism better than any words:

Friendship written in words and both historical and modern relationship between the Filipino and the Chinese is worth preparing a separate paper as it is as deep as contradictory. Here I would like only to mention that the basic truth



about the Filipino and the Chinese I saw through during my stay can be as following: Most Filipino people nowadays think ill of China and its policy towards the Philippines, and at the same time most Filipino people have either relatives or friends among the Chinese and live side by side every day.

Speaking a few more words of the Chinatown district, it is probably as any other Chinatown in the world: bright, crowded, full of trade, street-food vendors everywhere, buildings crumbling one on another and quite a lot of noise from all directions. That was exactly the place where



In the streets of Binondo

I saw as many exotic fruits in one place as possible. A very Asian thing also, which is well seen in the second photo in particular is about wires hanging above your head in the city streets.

Circling the Chinatown in a horse-carried cab we finally returned to the place our small excursion started from. And that is where stands one

of the cheapest malls in Manila, called Chinatown Walk. It is a big several-stored building with all possible kinds of Chinese goods sold at rather democratic prices. Unfortunately, photos from inside there came out to be too blurred, but those readers who do remember the Cherkizovsky market in Moscow in the 90-s can imagine how it looked inside this mall. Speaking of the quality of the goods, judging by the charger and wire set I bought there for my cell phone, it is quite good.

Malls

As for malls in general, they are worth writing a separate passage about them. The first and the outmost thing about malls in Manila (and I presume – in any big Asian city) – they are not just large, they are huge. Comparing to them our Russian hypermarkets are a mere child's play in sizes. I believe, it is safe to say that even a whole day won't be enough to go through the biggest Manila malls, especially if you are going to visit some shops and spend time on choosing goods as well.

While in Manila I visited two of the biggest malls – the SM Megamall and the Mall of Asia. SM Megamall is the second largest shopping mall in the Philippines and the ninth largest in the world, developed and operated by SM Prime Holdings⁴. It is located in Ortigas Center, Mandaluyong, Philippines. The mall occupies a land area of approximately 10 hectares (25 acres) and has a total floor area of 474,000 square metres (5,100,000 sq ft)⁵. The mall has a maximum capacity of 4 million people⁶. SM Mall of Asia, also abbreviated as SM MoA or simply MoA, is a large shopping mall in Bay City, Pasay, Philippines, near the SM Central Business Park, the Manila Bay, and the southern end of Epifanio de los Santos Avenue (EDSA).

Owned and developed by SM Prime Holdings, the largest mall chain owner and developer in the Philippines, it has a land area of 42 hectares, a gross floor area of approximately 406,962 square meters (4.38050×10⁶ sq ft)⁷, and attracts a daily average foot traffic of about 200,000 people⁸.

It is currently the fourth largest shopping mall in the Philippines and the fourteenth in the world⁹. When it opened in 2006 it was the largest shopping mall in the Philippines until SM City North EDSA was redeveloped in 2008¹⁰, and was relegated to third place by the expansion of SM Megamall from 2011 to 2015 when SM Seaside City Cebu opened to the public before returning to this spot in 2017¹¹.

New Era. Iglesia ni Cristo. Interview with Net25

This work will not be complete without many grateful words to people from New Era university, who made it possible for me to see so much and meet so many professors and researchers from different universities in Manila. New Era university itself represents an institution started and maintained by Iglesia ni Cristo church.

As the church official website says: The Iglesia Ni Cristo (Church of Christ) is a Christian religion whose primary purpose is to serve and worship the Almighty God based on His teachings recorded in the Bible. It is not a denomination or sect. It is neither affiliated to any federation or religious bodies nor itself an assembly of smaller churches or religious organizations¹². The Iglesia Ni Cristo was preached by Brother Felix Y. Manalo, God's Messenger in these last days, and was registered in the Philippines on July 27, 1914. Nowadays the Iglesia Ni Cristo has an international membership comprising 147 racial and ethnic backgrounds. It maintains nearly 7,000 congregations and missions grouped into more

than 160 ecclesiastical districts in 151 countries and territories in the six inhabited continents of the world.

The church has lots of facilities and provides numerous religious activities, mostly worships, services and prayers. Thus, on July 21, 2014, the Iglesia Ni Cristo inaugurated the Philippine Arena, currently the world's "largest mixed-use indoor theatre." This megastructure that sits in Ciudad de Victoria, Bocaue, Bulacan was the venue of the Church's



centennial celebration held on July 27, 2014, which was attended by millions of its members from all over the world¹³.

On the very first day I was shown around these facilities including the famous Arena. It is huge both inside and outside and also includes a stadium for sport events. Here are some pho-

tos of the facilities and local Iglesia ni Cristo church.



The church inside looks unusual and beautiful, but it is prohibited to take photos, so I did not try to break this rule, respecting the worshipers.

New Era university also has rather big territory with several buildings, dormitories and sport facilities in different districts in Metro Manila and even outside the capital, too. Main campus is situated in Quezon City, and that is where I was invited to visit NEU ASEAN Centre. Here I would like to express my gratitude to all the people from ASEAN Centre for their hospitality, help, and also for them inviting me to come and work with them as a teacher of Russian language for students in NEU. Unfortunately, my work in Russia and Filipino climate, that appeared to be too hard for me to live in, stopped me from coming. Still, I am mostly grateful to NEU ASEAN Centre seniors, including Dr. Carlos C. Tabunda Jr., Director, Host for ASEAN in Focus & ASEAN Hour (Eagle Broadcasting), Director of the ASEAN Studies Centre in NEU, people who met me and took around Manila, namely Jasmin Miniang, Angeli Michelle Tandez Mendoza and Neil, all of them working for the ASEAN Studies Centre, and also to all the students I happened to meet at the Centre.



At ASEAN Studies Centre

Except for the arrangement of my whole stay in Manila I need to say my thanks to New Era for inviting me to the interview for Net25 channel, maintained also by Iglesia ni Cristo. Due to New Era university I got an opportunity to give a half an hour interview in *ASEAN in Focus* programme, answering a wide range of questions about the Philippines, their relations with the US and China and potential cooperation with Russia in different spheres including culture and education¹⁴.

At Filipino home. Filipino people. Filipino Food

Even before I first came to the Philippines, I used to read other people's impressions on the Filipinos, their hospitality and friendly nature. During my trip I happened to visit Filipino home and I am most grateful for that opportunity to the hostess and the mother of the family – Jasmin Miniang, who actually took me everywhere interesting in Manila and what was even more – invited me and my colleague Viktor Sumsky to her house for the family dinner. It was a pity Viktor, who had also helped me quite a lot with arranging things and meeting people in the Philippines, and who had actually first introduced me to New Era, for what I am most grateful, had to leave the country before the party.

That is true that Filipino people are most helpful and friendly and if you are their guest you really feel at home. Jasmin met me at her house together with her daughters, her grandson and her mother. They all showed warm hospitality, made friends and talked to me so that we could get to know one another better. Jasmin took me around her house to show how they live and I should say it was a charming, bright house full of light. It was even decorated for the Christmas very beautifully despite the month being only September at that moment. However, I can say that it didn't seem strange to me as it gave the house a holiday-like feeling and was just wonderful. We spent almost whole day at Jasmin's home and there was a grand dinner made of many dishes – fish and meat, and vegetable dishes – everything just delicious. We sang in karaoke one by one; it was really nice to listen to Jasmin's daughters' singing as all of them have clear beautiful voices.

I also should mention that the whole thing was about Pia's birthday. Pia, one of Jasmin's daughters became 19. And the fact that I, still a stranger, was invited to a family day like that, was even more touching for me. I see it as hospitality at the highest level. I was



With Jasmin and her family

really sorry that I didn't know about Pia's birthday beforehand, otherwise I would have brought something authentically Russian as a present.

After dinner we went upstairs where Jasmin has kind of a terrace. We sat there under a tent drinking coffee and eating traditional Filipino dessert made of white boiled beans and then covered with either sweet condensed milk or something salty. It is unusual but really tasty. Another traditional Filipino dessert I happened to try in New Era university were fried bananas – sweet and delicious!

Speaking of Filipino people in general, it was clear that even when caught without prior notice, they behave in a really polite manner and consent to spend on you their private time as it happened with one of the professors in Ateneo de Manila university we visited. She was also the one who shared with me her then not-yet-published paper, most interesting because of its theme and methods of analyses. I was much impressed to find out about the author's concept combining mathematical methods of analyses with studying authentic ornamental weather works made by some Filipino peoples and tribes in different regions of the country. Basing on this study Louise Antonette N. De Las Penas, PhD and Associate Dean for Research and Creative Work and her students are on their way to create new system of teaching Science to those people who tend to have more humanitarian, creative type of mind.

What I would like to summarize here is that Filipino people as they are and in individual cases give you very friendly, warm feeling no matter what they do for you or where you meet them.

Transport in Manila

Even as a tourist and more – as a person on a business trip, one thinks about convenience or inconvenience of travelling around the place, whether it is a big city or even some region in the country. For those who drive, traffic and the quality of roads can be essential, whereas for those who, as I myself, do not drive, public transport comes to the front.

In that matter, Manila has a big problem as far as both the traffic is horrible (except for Sundays) and the public transport cannot be called comfortable. As for now you can use the following means of public transport in Manila: 1) light rail lines (3 of them, the 4-th is under construction) which cover only the very centre of the city; 2) jeepneys; 3) tuc-tuc vehicles and 4) taxis. Among these 4 means of public transport the most popular, wide-spread and actually the cheapest one is jeepney. Unfortunately, I do not have a clear photo of what jeepney is but basical-

ly it is a former American military jeep which was reorganized so that to have some cover (roof), still not having the back door. Jeepneys mostly have metal covers, can be of all possible colours and designs and represent private property driven by drivers with licenses, but not controlled by the government. They have no air conditioning, are hot and not comfortable even in appearances but are really cheap and so widely used by Filipino people who cannot afford taxis.

Tuc-tucs and cabs are, as far as I can judge, mostly for tourists and do not go far but usually somewhere around Chinatown, Intramuros or other central districts of Manila. It is necessary to say that tuc-tucs can



Manufactured tuc-tucs

be very different – from motorbikes and bukes rearranged into something with a cab on them to specifically manufactured ones (see photo).

Cabs driven by live horses are used by guides who would also give you an excursion around Intramuros and Chinatown and tell some information on the basic sights, So, it is not public transport at all.

Finally, taxis, which are of 2 types and by all means are the most comfortable kind of public transport, though also the most expensive. First, there are private taxis, provided by drivers who have licenses but do not answer to any kind of company or organization. These taxis are said to be irregular in prices and not really safe, especially for tourists who do not know the city and local peculiarities. Second, there is a taxi system much like Yandex or Uber, where you can call for a taxi via special app and have it to particular place and at a particular time. They even deliver goods like that, if necessary.

Still, whatever the transport is, another big problem in Manila, essential for practically everyone, is traffic. In Moscow we have traffic jams at some time on some days and generally in certain places. In Manila the whole city makes one traffic jam throughout a day 6 days a week. Sunday is an exception as on that day people do not usually go anywhere and stay at home. As I was told at New Era university, in recent years more and more people get an opportunity to buy their own

cars and prefer to do so as cars remain the most comfortable way to travel around Manila and the country. Add here almost 13 million population of Metro Manila as of 2015¹⁵, lack of modern roads and you will get the current result: to drive 20 kilometers from one part of Manila to another you will have to spend around 2 hours.

The light rail lines which function in the centre of Manila were to become an alternative means of transport to taxis and jeepneys – excessive, affordable and comfortable. However, when they were first opened, prices tended to be quite high and not so many people would commute using these trains. Like that light rail became rather convenient, not-crowded. Nevertheless, in time, working class representatives together with students – meaning all those who could not afford the trains – have fought for the prices to go down and the government obliged. That basically meant that more people appeared to be able to use the light rail but it also led to long lines to the stations and crowds and crowds inside the trains making the whole system less and less comfortable at once.

To sum it all up I should say that even nowadays, and especially as a constantly growing city, Manila still needs new roads, new means of transport, as well as the way to regulate jeepney drivers' activity, the amount of them on the roads.

Typhoon effects

As a country in the region of South-East Asia Philippines are subject to all sorts of disasters including typhoons. They are most often during typhoon season which usually takes place in August-September. When one reads about the effects of typhoons even in all the details it is not, of course, the same as when one happens to feel these effects himself.

I am not sure whether to call myself lucky or not but during my stay in Manila I happened to learn what typhoon is through my own experience. Practically, typhoon means that life stops, even if this typhoon is not really strong in your place of living (as was the case with Manila and typhoon Mangkhut at that time). So, despite the fact that it was 4-th level of danger and the typhoon itself went through the island of Luzon in the north and then went further to the southern coasts of China, it resulted in much more inconveniences than I could have imagined.

First of all, though in Manila itself it was just rainy for a number of days, people did not go out, studies in colleges and universities stopped for some time and even some organizations, institutions and services stopped working. Secondly, and for me that was the worst part, flights

were cancelled again and again, at least those flights which had to land on the southern coast of China. That practically meant that I had to stay in my hotel for about 3 days in a row, going nowhere, doing nothing and trying to leave the country twice – and loosing against the power of nature. Not a pleasant experience at all as it took a lot of my nerves and money, but I should say that it is a useful experience for me as a researcher. Let us say, the Philippines showed themselves at the most.

Philippines and other SEA countries

While analyzing and compelling my own emotions and impressions on the Philippines, I came up with the idea that comparing them with the impressions some of my friends got from other SEA countries can be rather interesting and educating. I asked some of the people I know personally to share their emotions from travelling to such countries as Thailand, Indonesia, Viet Nam, Cambodia, Malasia. People speaking are from professionally different spheres, lead different mode of life and have different social and geographical background, what makes their impressions even more valuable, I presume.

Aleksandrova Nadezhda Alekseevna, freelancer, webmaster, hiker and traveler. (<https://travelmonster.ru/obo-mne/>) She is a fan of travelling, comes from Ryazan. Her work via the Internet allows her to travel a lot. In winter 2018 together with her husband she visited such countries as Viet Nam, Cambodia, Malasia and Thailand and it was her first time there. Here is a short comment with her impressions on all the countries visited.

During 3 weeks we travelled through 5 countries, from poor, living only on tourists Cambodia, to the huge modern metropolis in Malaysia. Very interesting, unusual, very vivid impressions, the most important of which is VERY hot. It feels best to live in Kuala Lumpur - a modern city with high-rises, shops, clean streets, parks and cafes with European cuisine. But as for the weather - the most comfortable place is Hanoi with its +20, nice for walking. Still, it is overcast, hazy and noisy on the streets from a lot of bibicking motorcycles.

Saltykova Irina Andreevna, leading specialist of the IT Development Company told several stories singing praises to the Indonesians hospitality and this people's helpful nature. I chose one of them for the article. Irina is a psychologist and an adventurous young woman. She comes from Podolsk which is basically Moscow nowadays. She travelled to Indonesia with her friend and spent there two weeks. Here goes her tale about Indonesian people.

Indonesians are very friendly and incredibly helpful people. They are always ready to come to the rescue, just out of their good nature. Once we were in the town of Labuan Bajo on Flores Island. The next morning we had to float away to Sumbawa, and I, very unluckily, got grave trouble with digestion and felt not just unwell, but awful. We could not stay there longer because the route was complex and pre-planned literally by day, there were no pharmacies in the port area, nobody spoke English, it was three hours before the ferry, and I felt like lying down and dying. What to do was not clear at all. Noticing that I feel bad, a crowd of young Indonesians immediately gathered around us.

The almost complete lack of English did not prevent them from finding out what had happened, and one of them immediately rushed to his pharmacy at his scooter and brought me some local medicines (and, without taking money for it), the second rather professionally walked his fingers along some active points on my hands and face, which greatly alleviated my condition, the third one found somewhere the port director, who offered to change tickets for tomorrow (despite the fact that this is not usually done and the tickets are valid only on the day and are not refundable), the fourth brought me some folk remedy, of which composition I don't even want to think. And during all this time someone of them was always by my side. After all these, we were still loaded onto the ferry, asked with gestures that if I didn't get better, we would definitely go to the doctor and get to Jakarta alive.

Lapshina Anna Sergeevna, specialist for ALRUD Co and Rush Alisa Aleksandrovna, specialist for Samsung Co told a story about Thailand, where they travelled three times: in years 2013, 2017 and 2019. It is important to mention that all their trips were strictly tourist tours, so that they stayed in and visited mostly tourist places and communicated with those Thais who serve tourist business. Both travelers are from Moscow, had experience of going to Europe before Asia and thus found numerous new and unusual facts while visiting Thailand.

Very high level of humidity throughout the year (around 95% in summer and 75% in winter) plus 28-32 degrees Celsius above zero make it into sauna almost constantly, except for winter sometimes.

*Speaking of Thai living one of the things impossible to miss is the amount of rubbish everywhere, for instance in Pattaya which is one of the regions in Thailand most popular among tourists. Another thing – **sabai** – can well describe Thais' character and mode of life in general. It practically means "don't worry, be happy" and symbolizes something*

comfortable, relaxed, nice and cosy. It is widely used in Thai language in many cases¹⁶.

*A story of being given service in Thailand well illustrates how *sabai* works in everyday life. Thus, you can buy some furniture and order for it to be delivered and set, and Thai workers will most likely set it in anyhow manner, so that the handles on your new wardrobe will be applied sideways. Moreover, the same Thai workers are for sure to be very much surprised if you get angry because of something so minor. One exception here is cooking, which Thais love and take very seriously. Otherwise, all other everyday parts of life, including basic comfort seem to be absolutely unimportant for Thai people.*

As for Thais' personality, they appear to be kind and friendly, ready to help just for nothing even if they do not speak English, especially if you behave in the same manner and do not try to show superiority or be arrogant. Here I can remember a case when our friend got hurt on the beach while climbing rocks in the sea, and got her leg bleeding. A local Thai old man, though not speaking English, managed to clear her leg with pure bottled water and wrap it in some seaweed. It is worth saying, by the way, that Thai English – even if Thais are rather fluent in it (only young ones are) – is almost incomprehensible due to their very strange pronunciation, which turns “apple” into “epn”.

As for infrastructure and social services in Thailand (here – Pattaya) it is all very contradictive. Luxurious condominiums with sport facilities, parking lots and what not can stand side by side with shacks, and by shacks here we mean just tents and hammocks, not even buildings. And at the same time, for instance medical service in Thailand even in local hospitals is much-much better than what we have in Russia, even in Moscow.

Last but not the least thing to say is about roads and transport in Thailand. Roads with all those motorbikes, mopeds, taxis, buses, tuc-tucs going around chaotically and drivers breaking all possible rules make you feel horrified. Still, despite all that surprisingly cases of car accidents are very few among Thai drivers. Speaking of traffic jams, though, there are some long ones but usually at particular hours and somewhere in the periphery of the city.

What makes big difference from Russia, for example, is the variety of taxis which are represented by car taxis, motorbike taxis, moped taxis and even tuc-tuc taxis. They are all official and that is the most shocking part, especially about moped taxis which look and feel really dangerous to use. On the contrary, not so many busses are present, and none you

will find in Pattaya. Bangkok has its own metro system, but as we didn't use it at all, we cannot say anything about it.

Medvedeva Elena Vasilievna, producer at ANO "TV-News" shared a few words about her impressions on Thailand from a trip in year 2012. Elena is a Moscovite, is originally a linguist and a teacher of English, but has tried herself in different spheres so far. Her visit to Thailand was also her first visit to Asia or SEA in general.

Thailand strikes with the amount of temples and the heat which crushes you the moment the airport terminal doors slide open. My route through daytime Bangkok was short runs between 7/11s, with brief gazing at some marvelously blooming bush or piece of modern art. When I visited, Bangkok's subway – which also runs above the city – already had station announcements translated into English, Moscow joined the practice only several years later. All in all, the skyscraper city with its busy malls and ever lingering smell of street food was a sharp contrast to the north coast, a smaller and cosier place where motorbikes are king and no one knows the meaning of the phrase "to be in a hurry."

Summarizing all these impressions I can find some general characteristics, which probably very well describe all the SEA countries: hot, bright, colorful, wild nature, mixture of ancient and modern and extremely friendly people. Speaking of the Philippines if I may compare them with other SEA countries basing on my friends' thoughts, I would say that though still authentic, the Filipino people and Filipino lifestyle show more American-like features than other SEA states. Understandable, taking in mind that the Philippines used to be US dependent territory, almost a colony for 100 years and even after that the two countries have remained very close political and economic partners for decades.

Speaking of Manila itself, which was basically the topic of this work, I can make a conclusion, that the capital of the Philippines represents a wide mixture of architecture, lifestyles, cultures and sometimes even epochs. This city is a living organism, rapidly changing nowadays and still preserving its memories of historical events and people in Filipino society. It is also a melting pot where people of different races and nations live and co-exist side by side despite possible political disputes between their native countries and add to one another's culture and image. In Manila you will find both Asian and European features, but what is a constant here is the people's most peaceful and happy nature despite all the hardships. So, I am sure, that in the future Manila will become just more beautiful, comfortable for living and even more friendly to those who come to work, study or just have some rest in the Philippines.

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- ¹³ Our History / Iglesia ni Cristo. URL: <https://iglesianicristo.net/eng/about/history>
- ¹⁴ ASEAN in Focus / Eagle News. September 10, 2018. URL: https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=283411192266906&id=484952421611640
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- ¹⁶ Read more about what sabai is: Thaizer. Thailand Travel Guide. URL: <https://www.thaizer.com/language/sabai-sabai/>