

Unveiling the Dissonant Narratives of Mintal, Davao City As the Philippines' Little Tokyo

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Abstract

This study presents the complex heritage narrative of Mintal, Davao City, dubbed as the "Little Tokyo of the Philippines." It critically examines the dissonant heritage claim that contrasts the celebratory Japanese influence with the marginalized Filipino contributions in historical accounts. Drawing from an extensive literature review encompassing 236 sources, including works by Japanese writers in English, post-war historians, and local scholars, the paper centers on the Japanese establishment of an agro-economic community in Mintal from 1903 to the 1940s. This period saw significant local development, leading to the recognition of Ohta Kyosaburo as the 'Father of Davao Development.' Despite acknowledging some merit in this narrative, the paper argues that it is an overstated and incomplete story. It emphasizes the often-overlooked role of Filipinos, whose contributions are frequently rendered invisible or undervalued in historical discourse. The paper seeks to uncover the dissonance in these narratives, advocating for a reevaluation that acknowledges Filipino agency and fosters national self-pride. By presenting a nuanced view that elevates the Filipino perspective, the study aims to contribute to a more balanced historical understanding and raise national identity.

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Introduction

This paper presents the case of Davao City, specifically a small barangay called Mintal, situated between the Davao gulf seaports and the mountainous foothills, which claims that it is the “Little Tokyo of the Philippines”. I will argue how this moniker represents a dissonant heritage, where conflicting ideologies and inconsistent interpretations abound.

The analysis presented here stemmed from a review of 236 titles from related literature that includes books, doctoral thesis paper, research papers, journal articles, periodicals, website writings available online in English. This list represents different writers from different timeframes – Japanese who wrote in English like Hayase (1984), post-war historians like Goodman (1967), Filipino post-war historians like Sanial (1966), and local historians like Corcino (1997), Gloria (1987), and Tiu (2005). Primary sources were not gathered because surviving first and second generation eye witnesses to this Japanese period in Davao is incredibly rare.

To study the narratives of these texts, the concept of frame analysis by Erving Goffman in 1974 and as reinterpreted in many other studies (Entman, 1993; Adair, 1996; Druckman, 2001; Scheff, 2005; Yu Jose & Dacudao, 2015) was used as a tool to find perceived themes that “are selected, emphasized, and presented to show what exists, what happens, and what matters” (Gitlin, 1980) to certain groups in a particular historical era. The interpretations enumerated below attempts to accomplish the following: (1) show the dissonances of this “Little Tokyo” heritage idea, (2) the nuances in the otherwise simplistic relationship between the actors, and (3) offer reinterpretations or contradictions that give a fuller picture of this heritage story.

At the center of the idea of “Little Tokyo” is how the Japanese, from 1903-1940s, established in Mintal an agro-economic community that vastly contributed to the local development so much so that a Japanese by the name of Ohta Kyosaburo was named by local historians themselves as the ‘Father of Davao Development’. The extant texts by various scholars included in this review support this general idea. While I recognize this idea to have some merit, I argue that it is only partial and that it is somehow overstated. I also want to highlight what very few scholars (Yu Jose & Dacudao, 2015; Tiu, 2003) insist – that the role of the Filipinos was often made invisible, understated, undervalued, or its significance unrecognized.

The gaping lack, that compelled me to unravel the points of dissonance related to this heritage story, is the often negative, self-diminishing, or silent and unlearned voice of the Filipinos when telling of their role to this history and to the present. I could only hope that by presenting the conflicts or nuances in the prevailing narratives, specifically in favor of the Filipino, one can scaffold or increase the sense of nationalism and self-pride in dire shortage in literature and real life.

What Is the Geographical and Historical Context of Barrio Mintal?

Mintal is a 6 square kilometer (or 600 hectare) barangay in the third congressional district of Davao City. In the map, it is located 111 meters above sea level and situated in the suburban area of the city towards the more mountainous periphery of the city. The land area is relatively flat and traversed by several major waterways such as Tamugan and Talomo rivers.

It was once a part of a lightly dense forest which was relatively easy to clear. A fitting land use for such a geographic profile is surely agriculture.

Davao City, at present, is a chartered city that was once part of the District of Davao Moro Province. The Davao Region included not just Davao City but neighboring towns as well, such as Padada where the Awad Abaca Plantation was located.

The entire Davao Region have large tracts of land that were flat. Throughout history these lands had been used as settlements, agricultural lands, landing sites, military camps and others. Relative to Mindanao, Davao is located at a secured enclave at the South. It is seldom exposed to typhoon and surrounded by mountain ranges. A fitting location for a secure settlement among many travelers and migrants.

What Actors Should Be Considered in the Narratives?

This “Little Tokyo of the Philippines” heritage story is generally about two peoples – the Filipinos and the Japanese. I further stratify them into four: Prewar Filipino settlers of the region that is to be identified as Barrio Mintal, Prewar Japanese immigrants led by two Japanese businessmen Ohta and Furukawa, the present-day Japanese descendants also referred to as *Nikkei Jinkai*, and the present Filipino community who are current settlers in this ‘Little Tokyo’ of the Philippines.

Each actor has a different frame of reality that reflects their understanding of the past and present situations. Based on the texts reviewed, the Filipinos are often depicted as silent, compliant, or the invisible actor who were hospitable and accepting of the Japanese. The Japanese, on the other hand, is depicted as the active contributors, the planners, and the strategists who kept to themselves as a distinct community.

I suggest the possibility that the root of this difference is heavily tethered to their experiences in the preceding century. The pre-war local inhabitants were independent tribal groups that existed in small societies. However, the Spanish rule and American government subjugated them and once making the Davao Region a Moro Province. The Filipino psyche was understandably suppressed and overcome by several colonizers resulting to what is often referred to as colonial mentality – an expected result of a combined 400 years of an invading exploitative presence.

When they first met, the Japanese, on the other hand, had just come out from two centuries of tight-lid self-isolation (known as *Sakoku*) precisely to ward off colonial influence. The first actor, even with countless resistances and display of heroism, had been successfully brainwashed to own defeat and open borders to different migrants or exploiters. The second actors, on the other hand, had seemed to preserve their strong sense of nationality, albeit arguably grounded on a strong sense of fear and shame. I imagine these two people meeting, the other psychologically harassed for so long, perhaps calloused, and therefore apathetically friendly. The other, diligent, wary, but with a strong sense of self. Clashes in the interpretations of their relationship is bound to happen which was amplified by the language, cultural and political barriers at that time.

What Makes the “Little Tokyo” Heritage Dissonant?

Elsewhere in the Philippines, the memory of the Japanese presence, although brief, is mostly filled with remorse and a deep sense of traumatic loss. The picture in Davao city is claimed to be one of redeemed friendship and economic success. I point to several controversies within this grand picture and in the actors’ narratives that incite questions about the veracity of this story.

1. *A Fatherless City Development*

The ascribed status and title of Ohta Kyosaburo as the “Father of development in Davao” is an overstatement. Davao, in this sense, can cumulatively refer to the Davao Region at that time which expands wider than Davao City today. The fact that this title was attributed by Davao local historians perhaps echo the self-negating tendency and colonial mentality of Filipinos though that may not be the intention. This title, though an informal recognition, is repeated through various accounts about the city’s history. There is a crucial difference between saying ‘a Japanese contributed to Davao’s development through the following...’ and saying that ‘a Japanese is the *father* of Davao’s development’. So, why is the latter an exaggerated accolade?

What being the ‘father of development’ implies is that the progress of Davao is a single historical moment marked by a pioneering work attributed only to this foreign Japanese national. This idea of ‘the pioneer’ can be traced to other Filipino historians’ (eg. (Abinales, 1997) depiction of how the Japanese entered Davao:

*“Suffering no rivalry in terms of farm management (American settlers were leaving) or in the provision of labor (the Filipinos were still hesitant to migrate to Davao and Chinese labor was disallowed by the Americans), **the Japanese had practically a free hand to shape Davao to their liking.** The hands-on involvement of the consulate facilitated migration from the Japanese prefectures of workers and their wives (or betrothed), which sustained the early economic breakthrough.” (emphasis mine)*

In several accounts, Ohta is pointed out as the first Japanese to establish a large-scale Abaca business in the city. This description, like many others, also suggests that Davao was an empty albeit fertile land area which the Japanese had free reign to “develop”. Both are historically incorrect and erroneous descriptions.

Before Ohta came, a Japanese, named Suda Ryosaku, arrived with a few Japanese to work at Awad Plantation in 1903. Ohta accompanied the Japanese workers to Davao in 1904 from Baguio who helped build the Kennon Road. Ohta’s contribution was well recorded in the curriculum circulation among schools in Japan, relaying how he cared for these workers, fed them, and found them work in Davao. He was depicted as a ‘hero’. *But* there were other Japanese businessmen like Ohta who ventured into Davao like Furukawa Yoshizo and Akamine Saburo. He did not singlehandedly venture into Davao.

More importantly, Davao was not an empty land before the Japanese arrived. There were 15 indigenous groups residing in the vast lands namely the Ata, Bagobo, B’laan, Dibabawon, Giangan, Kalagan, Kulaman Manobo, Mandaya, Manguwangan, Mansaka, Matigsalog, Obo, Samal, Sangil, and Tagakaolo (Tiu, 2003). Davao was also once under the control of a powerful local leader named Datu Bago, who resisted the Spanish invasion of his land.

However, in 1848, a group of 70 Spanish settlers led by Don Jose Cruz de Uyanguren, who came from Vergara, Guipuzcoa, Spain, arrived to establish a Christian colony in a mangrove swamp area that is now the Bolton Riverside. They managed to defeat Datu Bago and his forces and renamed the region Nueva Guipuzcoa after Uyanguren's hometown in Spain (Eroy, 2014). Davao became District of Davao and a part of the Moro Province in 1903 as established during the American colonization (Hayase, 1985). There were also other nationalities who came to Davao to conduct business and trade even before the Japanese came. Most notable were the Chinese (Dacudao, 2010). There were also Filipino migrants from the Visayas starting in 1903 when Davao District became a Moro Province. These Filipinos reached 200,000 by the 1930's and some engaged in considerable businesses alongside the Japanese. The Filipino settlers far outnumbered the Japanese who probably reached 30,000 as the recorded maximum population (Dacudao, 2010). The old central district of Davao City (including San Pedro, Claveria, Quimpo Street) were already established and teeming of economic activities well before the Japanese came.

I argue that the development of Davao (whether as a province, region, or city) is a cumulative effect of multiple peoples, activities, and circumstances throughout a long period rather than the work of a single Japanese businessman as the father of it all. I understand the necessity in historical writing to name important figures who contributed to a unit's change. To show this honor, we name streets, buildings, monuments, or trust funds after them or we give them status awards. To be named a 'father of a city's development' like the 'father of modernism' or 'father of Filipino architecture' bears significant weight. One must singlehandedly exceed what contemporaries have done and carve an enduring legacy that persists to the present - a feat that Ohta Kyosaburo may not have accomplished sufficiently to be able to merit that historical title.

2. *Skewed Heritage of the Abaca Industry*

It is factual that a substantial increase in economic activity was observed at the height of Abaca production (Manila hemp or hemp) in Davao. I assert, however, as an alternate interpretation, that this increase may not represent one with a pioneering economic impact as often recorded in the texts *but a first variation* in business activity. After all, abaca production was the first medium-scale industrial activity done in the Davao region. However, it is important to note that there were already other existing business activities and plantations at the time the Japanese came. And perhaps the most incriminating aspect to the heritage story of the abaca industry is that it did not last even half a century and did not regain its pre-war market status mainly because it cannot compete with the quality and cost of synthetic fibers.

But it is relevant to discuss the heritage of the abaca industry because it lies at the center of the "Little Tokyo" narrative. The Davao Japanese settlement, the largest in the Philippines and Southeast Asia, revolved around this crop. Considerable text in literature describes the vibrancy of the community as they engage in this economic activity. The dominant narrative here is that the Japanese was at the forefront of this Abaca Industry which was stretched to mean city or region-wide development. However, if Davao was already populated by the time the Japanese came and were exceeded in number during that period, the critical and necessary question then is "what was the Filipino's contribution" to this industry?

To begin with, it was not the Japanese who opened the Abaca plantations, it was the Americans. When the Philippine Insular Government established the Moro Province, they gave 30 American soldiers land and the propriety rights to cultivate coconut and hemp. After

two years of cultivation, the number of plantations increased from 27 to 40 (Gleeck, 1974) inviting more Americans to come to Davao. They needed more laborers and so more migrants were invited including Filipinos, Japanese, Chinese to add to the existing laborers. I want to highlight that majority of these laborers were indigenous and migrant Filipinos.

The Japanese were initially laborers mostly recruited from Japan themselves by their government. At that time, Japan underwent a major banking crisis rendering many jobless. The prospect of work and earnings attracted as many as 20,000 – 30,000 Japanese. The produced abaca hemp was then sold to Japan (Jose, 1996). The earnings of the Japanese were often also sent back to Japan through money transfer system regulated by their government. Some laborers were able to buy pieces of land to cultivate by cohabitating with Filipino women. The Filipino common-law wife, as long as she retains her citizenship, can buy land up to sixteen hectares. Japanese corporations can buy up to 1,024 hectares. Corporations and not a single Japanese can acquire land in the Philippines. The acquisition of land was strictly regulated by the Public Land Law of 1903 (and 1919) which was then interpreted by the Japanese as an indirect strategy to curtail them. The Filipinos, mostly statesmen based in Manila, closely monitored the Japanese activities in Davao city and made sure legal boundaries of property sale were existent to preserve the nationalist idea of development.

Two major Japanese corporations were the Ohta plantation stationed in Mintal (the present-day “Little Tokyo of the Philippines” nearer to the mountain foothills) and the Furukawa Plantation stationed in Toril (nearer the seaport). The Japanese plantations were named after their owner or heads. I want to highlight at this point that there were Filipino plantation owners who owned similar land holdings as the Japanese. Names were recorded among Jose P. Laurels court folders, during the time when he and his law firm represented Japanese and Filipino landowners — this was before Atty. Jose P. Laurel became Philippine president. Most of the landed Filipino businessmen were professionals who migrated to Davao and who have ample money to invest. Among these Filipinos were Cipriano Villafuerte Sr., Casiano Salas, Juan Sarenas, and Rufina Tudtod (Yu Jose & Dacudao, 2015).

When the Americans sold their plantations and businesses, the major players became the Japanese and Filipinos. The business relationships and dynamics were varied. Both Japanese and Filipinos were hired as laborers in plantations. In some instances, Filipinos own the land and the Japanese counterpart planted, cultivated, and harvested the product. Sometimes the Filipino landowners contribute the land, the Japanese plant and harvest the product and the Filipino sells them at a local auction. In most texts, the Japanese are portrayed to have the capital, the planting and harvesting technique, and the Filipino as a laborer or as landowner who only accepts 10-15% profit. So much so, that most Filipinos were recorded as “dummy” business entities because most of the Japanese are written in accounts to move the money. I want to highlight, however, that majority of the plantations were owned by Filipinos or Americans (but by the 1940s, Filipino businesses dominated the field). Sixty percent of plantations workers were Filipinos. Filipinos entered into joint venture agreements, land-labor agreements, and investment agreements with the Japanese. The Japanese-owned companies regularly consulted Filipino lawyers to interpret the law and word contracts for them.

Notwithstanding textual accounts insinuating how poor the workmanship was or how passive the role of the Filipinos was, in contrast to how the Japanese broke their backs to reach economic success, the sheer scale of this Abaca operation cannot deny the contribution and roles of the Filipinos to this economic activity. One might ask why the Japanese needed their

accomplishments periodically written about more than the Filipinos. One explanation is that the Japanese existed with the constant need to legitimize and justify their presence in Davao. Another way to look at it, is that the height of the abaca production coincided with international rumors about the Japanese plans to conquer Asia, the Philippines included. While unproven through printed documents, the economic activity (which involved monetizing labor and important materials usable to the army) was an efficient cover to the military plans that is to unfold a few years after. Davao is also strategically located far from the center of the new Philippine government and located along a convenient route for refueling and landing military air support.

The Abaca Industry of Davao was not a Japanese creation. The success of this economic activity was a result of accumulative contributions of all actors in a business relationship. And though land and business owners are often the only ones recorded in the books, they are but representatives of a thousand nameless people, mostly and majority are Filipinos, who made the Abaca industry work for a time.

3. *Heritage of a Blurred Communal Nostalgia*

When we imagine how the “Little Tokyo of the Philippines” might have looked like from available text, we imagine a tight-knit small community composed of Filipinos and Japanese who co-existed in a self-sustaining environment planting and cultivating abaca. Today this moniker is only attributed to Barrio Mintal, the center of the Ohta plantation in located in Mintal. Even its name has Filipino and Japanese versions to its origin story. The Filipino version tells of a Bagobo *Datu Intal* as leader to the indigenous group who owned the land before the Japanese came. The Japanese version tells of how the Japanese referred to this land as “*Mintaro*” which may have meant ‘a person without a title who is governed’. Consider the contrast and derogatory inference of the latter version. I argue here that there really was *not* an inter-women community that existed in this Little Tokyo narrative as seen in 3 aspects: intermarriage, communal life, acculturation.

Intermarriage among the Japanese men and Bagobo women was a common theme in most of the available texts. This idea needs nuanced clarification. Unpopular in literature, there were two social groups of Japanese who came to Davao, the Okinawans and the non-Okinawans. Even among the Japanese there was a distinction. The non-Okinawans were known to be more learned, refined, monied, and dressed in American attire, attending formal events among like Filipinos. The Okinawans are described to be more brutish, strong muscularly, tough, and more gregarious. The Okinawans were the only ones who took local women for ‘wives’. And even this ‘marriage’ is not formally legal in the Philippine laws — because a legal marriage will mean changing citizenship which will then disempower the Filipino woman to acquire land presumably on behalf of the Japanese. The Okinawan Japanese is also highly discouraged to renounce his citizenship to become Filipino. The non-Okinawan, the more elite of the group, on the other hand, ordered brides from Japan or went to fetch Japanese wives through arranged marriages.

Marital status is an integral aspect included in the “Little Tokyo” narrative. One explanation suggested that the uniqueness of this Davao settlement among other Japanese settlements in Asia was that it was mainly led by married men, unlike the other settlements where female prostitutes presumably predominated (Abinales, 1997). However, technically, there really was no legal Filipino-Japanese intermarriage but only a cohabitation among multi-nationals acknowledged by the local indigenous group.

Second, extant texts describe several institutions built to support the communal life within the “Little Tokyo”. At least 13 Japanese schools were built. Houses were constructed. Hospitals, markets, different shops (including photography studios), entertainment venues, and a hydroelectric plant were recorded to be built by the Japanese. Records show that Filipinos were included in these institutions. Filipino doctors served at the Japanese hospital built in Mintal. Filipino laborers worked to build the hydroelectric plant. There were accounts of children attending Japanese schools learning English and calisthenics (Cody, 1959).

However, what is not explicitly described is the strict demarcation of access to these institutions. Housing for Filipinos and Japanese were separate both in the structure and zoning. The houses of the Japanese with Filipino wives were located far from the center of the settlement. The Japanese husbands had allocated housing in the group structures and seemed to be counted as single men. In school, there were separate curriculum for lessons for the Japanese and the Filipino children, although some level of integration exists. Japanese entertainment activities like plays and musicals were recorded to be attended by Filipinos, but in some accounts, there was not much to enjoy due to the language barrier. Perhaps, one significant indication of the massive effort to integrate both cultures is the creation of a new dialect called *Abaca Spanish*, now extinct but is said to be made of a few key words that pertain to major business and field transaction among the laborers (Saniel, 1963).

The type of acculturation that the Japanese exhibited was one of separation. In contrast to how the Chinese incorporated their culture into the host Filipino culture. The Japanese kept to themselves. They managed their own earnings, investments, and remittances. They solved their social disputes among them and when it involves a Filipino, the Japanese were commanded to stand down. They kept their own ceremonies, cultural traditions, and were not keen in replicating or mirroring local Filipino traditions. The “Little Tokyo” paints more of the communal life of the Japanese here in Mintal rather than one shared and integrated fully to the Filipino culture. Their relationship with the Filipinos had been marked with civility and composure but not necessarily friendship or devotion.

4. *Heritage of Abandonment*

When WWII ended and the Japanese were expatriated, many *Nikkejins* were left poor, hated, and without family. The *Nikkejins* were the children of the Japanese and Bagobo women. When the Japanese were ordered back to Japan, children 15 years old and below were ordered to stay. Those older ones were given the choice whether to join the father or remain with the mother. At this juncture, another picture of the Japanese groups is portrayed in literature — the pre-war or local Japanese and the Japanese imperial army. There were personal accounts that tell of how the wounded local Japanese were helped by Filipinos, perhaps most probably the Bagobos. Moreso, other accounts that tell of how Japanese helped Filipinos escape death from the imperial army. While all very touching and perhaps are distinct stories, one fact remained – that the Japanese were unwaveringly loyal to their Emperor. The local Japanese were not brainwashed to relinquish their nationalistic sentiments during their stay in Davao. This is engrained into them from a young age. Those who were born elsewhere were educated in Japan starting their high school years to instill these deep ideologies. The Japanese always knew they had to leave at some point.

This part of the “Little Tokyo” narrative bears the most pain and trauma. Mothers and young children unwanted by fellow Filipinos were forced to surrender their property. Some escaped to the mountains where very little sustenance were available. Some changed their names and

destroyed all proofs of familial lineage to avoid social harassment. Most were not able to see or know their fathers. For a long time, the orphans had to live in extreme poverty because of their association with the Japanese. Not until the reconciliation and reparation agreements were finalized through the Quirino's presidential clemency did the lives of these *Nikkejins* improved. The former Davao Japanese Association was one such institution that spearheaded programs that aided the *Nikkejins* specially in terms of education. When the first group of Japanese came to Davao in 1964 to pay respects to their fallen ancestors, they came giving gifts to local children and families. The *Nikkejins* who were also able to prove their ancestry were invited or sponsored to visit, work, or stay in Japan.

5. *A Lost or Unknown Heritage*

The narrative of the "Little Tokyo of the Philippines" once refer to and include the whole Davao Region where the Japanese immigrants once visited. Today, Baranggay Mintal is the only political unit specifically claiming this moniker's meaning. There are three monuments that refer to the Japanese period. The obelisk dedicated to Ohta Kyosaburo located at the Mintal Elementary school is referred to by present-day students as 'pencil'. When random local Mintal citizens who had lived at least 50 years here are asked what the Japanese legacy is — the common answer is that they had buried gold or the Yamashita treasure in their haste to leave the country. Urban legends about the mystery of these unfound valuables are many. These are the present dominant narrative of the "Little Tokyo". On the barangay hall, pictures of this period are displayed at the lobby. There are also war artifacts displayed within a locked cabinet. However, the sense of place, the streets, the layout, or the urban grain of Mintal today do not exhibit any of this memorialization of Japanese presence at the level of the daily life. A former barangay captain declared that when he went to Japan where he got the feel of what a typical small Japanese village looked like. Mintal is a far picture from that.

What is evident, though, is an institutional memorialization. One of the two Japanese schools in Davao City, though not in Mintal, hosts the Philippine-Japan Museum which showcases the Abaca heritage. There are annual Obon Festival in August when Japanese descendants (in groups of 10-15) visit the sites in Mintal to pay homage to their ancestors. There are programs and formal events usually spearheaded by the Consulate and Davao Japanese Association, held in local malls to celebrate Japanese culture. But none that permeate the daily consciousness of the present-day settlers. The dominant narrative in the present-day depiction of the "Little Tokyo of the Philippines" is one that involves friendship, cooperation, and historical relationships. What I surmise from the local barangay government's sentiment towards the Japanese seems to be one of indebtedness NOT of camaraderie among equals. When we read local features in periodicals, the echo of gratitude for the latter's contribution is often the subject. And I can understand the sentiment. Japan today is a first-world rich country where the Philippines is a major contributor of labor. The wheels have turned.

Conclusion

Were the Japanese a friend or foe to the Dabawenyos? Often the way heritage is championed to the public is by presenting a grand plot, often a summarized positive interpretation of the historical facts that appeal to one's sense of identity, pride, and ownership. However, there is always the possibility of plural interpretations that show contradictions and conflicts. I learned that heritage studies are not about the search of one grand story but more of a retelling of the many sides to a past reality. Dissonance in heritage, the kind that represent several multi-faceted ideologies, invite a richer meaning and appreciation, and sometimes

sober clarity or correction, to a communal experience. And while there is essentially no grand plot, one can choose among the many chronicles which voice to re-echo, or better yet, make personal interpretations to contribute.

The writing of this paper made me realize that the Japanese were indeed really just strangers, neither friends or foe, who briefly interluded in the local history. There are diplomatic relations existing but cultural integration on both sides experienced by both nationalities without discrimination is not the true narrative of the “Little Tokyo of the Philippines”. Not at present and not even historically. Perhaps what can be pointed as a direct influence of the Japanese are the karaoke and videoke, the manga comics, Japanese food, and electronic influences such as the camera. However, the locals may not even know this information.

The narrative of the “Little Tokyo of the Philippines” is a dissonant heritage story where the inconsistencies between what is written and what happened may have favored the Japanese more. In this narrative, the Filipino spirit is lost or silent. And while there are economic roles, the contributions of the Japanese seemed to have been overstated or exaggerated to the detriment of the advancing Filipino nationalistic ideas and diminishing the colonial mentality that pervades our consciousness. It feels like a lost heritage the Filipinos are trying to revive but is not theirs to own in the first place.

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