

THE FERRER CLAN OF PANGASINAN

PANGASINENSE HISTORY AND CULTURE

by: Kristine Sanchez (Source: CCP Encyclopedia)

"Pangasinan" comes from the word asin meaning salt, and translates into "a place where salt is made." It refers to a province at the northern end of the Central Luzon plain. Its shores form a lap for Lingayen Gulf and its borders extend west-southwest to Zambales, south to Tarlac, southeast to Nueva Ecija, and northeast to Nueva Viscaya, Benguet, and La Union.

"Pangasinan" also refers to the language, which is spoken along the central part in such towns as Alaminos, Mabini, Sual, Labrador, Lingayen, Bugallon, Aguilar, Managtarem, Urbiztondo, Binmaley, Dagupan, Calasiao, Santa Barbara, Basista, Bayambang, Malasiqui, San Fabian, Mangaldan, San Jacinto, Pozorrubio, and Mapandan. Ilocano is the predominant language in the western towns of Anda, Bani, Agno, Burgos, Dasol, and Infanta.

"Pangasinense" or the "Oangasinan" refers to the people of Pangasinan. In the Census of 1980, their number stood at 1,636,057. The same census reveals that there are 158,666 households which speak Pangasinan, 60,085 of which, or roughly 40%, are urban.

HISTORY

There are no conclusive data about the origins of the Pangasinense. One theory hints Java as a possible point of origin as the techniques of salt making in the northern coast of Java closely resemble those of the Pangasinense. These techniques were to make Pangasinan the source of the finest salt in the Philippines (Cortes 1974: 24-25).

Other similarities with Java are seen in the tools and methods of cultivation, such as the use of the bamboo harrow and the peculiarly shaped scythe for reaping rice. The manner of venerating the dead finds parallels in Java. The burial sites in Calatagan were evidently refurbished regularly. In Java, a yearly festival is celebrated by the living to honor the dead; the day is passed in devotion on the burial grounds, which are strewn with flowers (Cortes 1974: 38).

There is no doubt that Pangasinan had contact with ancient travellers, most especially the Chinese, and it remains for some ancient manuscript to surface to describe the relations Pangasinan had with the peoples inhabiting the shores lapped by the South China Sea. In Agoo, now La Union but formerly Pangasinan, evidence of extensive commercial intercourse with the Chinese and the Japanese abound.

Pangasinan is one of the biggest provinces in the Philippines and accounts for more than half the population of the Ilocos region. It is also one of the oldest and, during Spanish times, was called "Caboloan" which derives from bolo, a type of bamboo, and literally means "a place where bolo grows."

RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND PRACTICES

The ancient pangasinense had an animistic religion which had Ama-Gaoley as the chief deity. Lesser spirits or anito were responsible for a host of phenomena relating to the weather, plant growth, and good health, as well as protection of rivers, trees, and other sites. Illness was deemed as punishment for offending the anito. These spirits were held in respect and deference.

There was extensive use of charms for varied purposes, from warding off evil spirits to bringing good luck. Rituals were presided over by managanito, priestesses who invoke oracles and idols, interpreted dreams and omens, and divine propitious times for endeavors.

Despite initial difficulties in evangelizing the pangasinense, the dominicans eventually secured a tool hold for catholicism in the province. Today, pangasinan is a bastion of catholicism in the country. Revolts against spanish authorities invariably spared the priests and other religious, proof of the religiosity of the pangasinense. Other sects such as the Philippine Independent church, the Iglesia ni Kristo, and the various protestant denominations have their adherence among residence of Ilokano descent, but rarely among those of Pangasinense descent.

An important Marian image is the Virgin Dolorosa of Mangatarem, which is housed in a private home. The virgin is believed to have protected the townspeople from the vicissitudes of war. The sash of the Virgin is also borrowed from time to time by pregnant women who wear it on their last week of pregnancy to ensure safe delivery.

VISUAL ARTS AND CRAFTS

Pangasinan abounds in handicrafts and is famous for bamboo and rattan artifacts. There are also handicrafts made of marsh grasses. A familiar sight down Central Luzon after harvest time are the bullock caravans originating from Pangasinan laden with bamboo, rattan, and grass crafts, including chairs, tables, hampers, baskets, lamps, mats, and household bric-a-brac. Binalatongan (now San Carlos City) and Calasiao are known for bamboocraft that have been exported abroad.

Village artists have also made six murals in the Manaoag Cathedral depicting the legend of the Virgin of Manaoag, from her first appearance to a farmer to various miraculous events that followed the visitation, such as the time when the Manaoag Church burned down and the image remained unscathed.

Pangasinan had its share of prominent visual artists, the most accomplished of whom is the late Victorio C. Edades, who was instrumental in pioneering modernism in Philippine art. In 1976 Edades became a National Artist for having changed the direction of Philippine painting (Cortes 1990b: 165-166).