

volvement, is their humility. They do not flaunt their acquisition of cultural properties or announce their humanitarian endeavors. In the arts, their magnanimous spirit pervade in the support given to the creative impetus of the artists who they recognize. Martino Abellana, a well-known Cebuano artist who is unsurpassed in his greatness, is one artist who had enjoyed such patronage of the Chinese collectors in his lifetime.

Likewise, in our personal experience of holding mobile "Exhibitions of Paintings of Tribal Mindanao" through the years, businessmen like Teng Hoa Lim, Jaime Sy, the Kings, Gaisanos, Ngo Chuas, Angs, Chiongbians, Cams, among others, were the very first to pick out paintings of social, historical, or ecological significance or even of the genre type to the abstract expressionist and the experimental directions. When they choose paintings at exhibitions, they prefer previewing and buying them before the exhibition opens.

The most touching experience just happened very recently. Four months ago, the historical paintings of my husband Manuel Pañares, "*Sugbu Sa Karaang Panahon*," currently on-line at <cebu-online.com/cai> was acquired as a collection of Global Foundation for International Education. Its founder, Nelia Cruz-Sarcol, married to William Sarcol Dy, is pure Chinese. In the Board of Directors, two are pure Chinese, "carageenan king" Benson Dakay and William Sarcol Dy. Its administrators have a strong Chinese connection, either by affinity or by blood. They dare to use the paintings as a springboard towards their innovative techniques of understanding history — be it in art, in multi-media or even through the age-old story-telling technique.

Children relate the history of Cebu as one walks through a painting exhibition or before the presentation of the dance play "*Makisig*," which is inspired by the paintings, the short story of Gemma Cruz-Araneta, and Pigafetta's Diaries.

I wrote a review of "*Makisig: The Little Hero of Mactan*," a play based on Gemma Cruz Araneta's short story and the story of "*Sugbo sa Karaang Panahon*." Its playbill emphasizes my assumption of a Chinese-Filipino synergy. *Makisig* is played by Kenichi Uang, a Chinese mestizo. Of a cast of 73, there are 24 Chinese participants. Its major sponsors are Chinese. Lucio Tan recently offered to finance the making of the script of Lapu-Lapu, the first freedom fighter of Mactan.

Most of the outstanding testimonies and valuable experiences presented here support my basic assumption of the Chinese-Filipino synergy. The evolution of the Filipino character, and the molding of the Filipino nation would not be complete without the active and meaningful participation and involvement of our Chinese-Filipino brothers and sisters. Being a part of this evolution is a source of pride.

Violeta Lopez-Gonzaga  
University of St. La Salle

## THE CHINESE IN BACOLOD: SKETCHES OF THREE KEY ACTORS

No extant historical document recounts when or where the Chinese first ventured into Negros Island. Interestingly, the account by Esteban Rodriguez, chief pilot of the first reconnaissance team sent from Cebu by the Spanish conquistador Miguel Lopez de Legaspi, who landed in the island by chance, mentioned how they tried to pass themselves off as "people from China who had come to barter," but the natives with whom they had a chance encounter told them they were lying "because the Chinese did not have ships of the kind we had we seemed to them impostors who had come to rob..." (*cf. Collection de Documentos Ineditos de Ultramar, Tomo 1, 1969:427ff.*). This reference, though brief, implies the existence of trade contact between the natives and the Chinese even prior to the coming of the Spaniards.

Aside from such evidence of trade, the presence of the Chinese in Negros seem to have gone into eclipse for years prior to 1840. It was only in the mid-1800s when it was again noted how the increased influence of the Chinese in Negros coincided with the phenomenal growth of the sugar industry in the province. Previous to their arrival in Negros, the Chinese presence was singularly felt in Iloilo where they "dominated the local textile industry with their control of the raw materials..." (Varona, 1938:VIII,2). In addition, they engaged in inter-island trade. Every Friday in Negros, for example, was market day when various items like hats, bags, shoes and fans were sold to eager matrons and gentlemen (Echaz, 1896).

Apart from being uncannily shrewd businessmen, the Chinese also served as "financiers" and "brokers" for cash-strapped agriculturists in the province. Their integrity was held in such high esteem that they were adjudged to be the "arbiters in price-fixing" (Varona, *loc. cit.*). There was also a subtle allusion to their industry and hard work when the Spanish chronicler of Negros called them the "Philippine ants" (Echaz, *op. cit.*, 79).

It was also during this period when "the Chinese were encouraged to settle both as merchants and artisans..." (Forbes, 1945:25). "Immigration was encouraged... [but] the constant tendency of the coolie to develop into a merchant or a landowner created serious problems..." (*ibid.*). In fact, the ethnocentric attitude of both Spaniards and Filipinos led them to a jaundiced view of the Chinese. In certain instances, this wary and doubtless, fearful outlook resulted in discriminatory treatment and even brutal extermination (cf. Forbes, 1945).

During the transition period from the short-lived Negros Republic and the establishment of the U.S. military government, military records disclose that Chinese traders contributed actively to the resistance movement in Negros by supplying the insurgents with rice (U.S. National Archives and Records Service, RG 395, E5290). Straddling both sides of the political fence, some Chinese traders like Go Toco and Tan Tianco of Victorias were reported to have provided military garrisons, presumably of the colonizers, with basic supplies (*ibid.*).

Their rapid ascent to the top of the economic ladder was particularly manifest during this period. They, together with other foreigners, were able to acquire lands in the Philippines by organizing corporations (Forbes, *op.cit.*, 153). It is perhaps significant that a number of the prominent families in Negros were descended from the Chinese mestizos of Molo and Jaro who acquired lands and *haciendas* at the turn of the century from the profits generated from their textile trade in Iloilo. Though the names of the Chinese mestizo immigrants at the turn of the century remain prominent to this day, the descendants of such families like the Kilayko, Yusay, Locsin, Tanpinco, are hardly conscious of their Chinese origin. As Varona observed, "the racial division disappeared under the smelting fire of increasingly ardent labor," and "there was in fact more fusion of races in Negros than in any other part of the Philippines."

**A**mong the few second-generation Chinese who remain conscious of their Chinese origins is Andres Go Hee, more popularly known as Andres Valencia, a pioneer Chinese entrepreneur in Bacolod.

As Andres Valencia remembers it, his father, Ty Hon Hee, was seven years old when he first stepped foot in the Philippines in 1904. Ty had come over from Amoy in Fujian, a province in China, with his Chinese patron. Upon his arrival in the islands, Ty settled directly in Silay and left only when he was 25 years old to go back to China to marry a Chinese girl.

Upon his return from China, Ty proceeded to Silay where he had left a *sari-sari* store. Valencia, Ty Hon Hee's second son, was born in that town in 1933. Recalling his childhood, Valencia declares that as a young boy growing up, he would often accompany his father on his rounds where the latter sold *tela*, rice, and other *sari-sari* goods. Apparently, the family enterprise was successful enough to enable Valencia's father to purchase a passenger car which he used for "limousine-type" service. In addition to owning one of the few gas stations in Silay (selling petrol and alcohol) located near what is now Ideal Bakery, Ty also went into the *viaje* business, having his vehicles travel outside of the regular route in

Silay.

Valencia's childhood was spent accompanying his father as an ambulant vendor to Sagay on Saturdays and Sundays, where vendors and buyers converge. He and his father peddled their wares, most of the time sleeping overnight inside their truck. For him, this was the main source of contact with the Filipinos, otherwise, there was none.

When World War II erupted nine years later, the family was not unaffected, eventually, they moved to Bacolod. Bacolod, after the devastation wrought by the Japanese in 1946, was, remembers Valencia, a city with very few businesses, a reduced population, and practically without a school. At the time, he recalls, "I was the errand boy of my father, doing the marketing for the family and serving as *bantay* of our store."

Yet, it was a city waiting to be rebuilt and with foresight, Valencia's family went into the hardware business. The construction business boomed after the war. His father went into the hardware business in partnership with Co Hing (another Chinese who later took the name Gamboa). Thus, the Bacolod Victory Hardware came about near Luzuriaga in 1946. Ty also added a glassware business to his many other businesses.

Obviously forced to work at an early age, Valencia barely spent the compulsory years in school to finish his high school at Tay Tung. He studied for two years at La Salle, and finally took up a vocational course. He was unable to finish a four-year degree because he was made to stop and help out in the family business. He did the marketing for their cook who fed the employees of Victory Hardware. On Saturdays, he went out to collect account receivables of their store. It was his elder brother who was sent to Manila to study and get a diploma. He was in his early 20s when he officially took over the family business from his father in 1955, a particularly memorable year because of the great fire that razed almost the entire business center of Bacolod.

Andres became a naturalized Filipino in 1961 taking the name of Dr. Valencia of Silay, his brother's *maninoy*. Valencia, together with his brothers, went on to enlarge the family holdings.

From overseeing the family hardware and buy-and-sell businesses, Valencia decided to go into the movie business. Selling the idea to a friend, he and four other partners decided to form a corporation and put up a moviehouse. The idea was very appealing, he declares, because unlike either the hardware or the general merchandise industry, running a moviehouse involved "cash" transactions, not *utang*.

To the Bacolod cityscape then was added two theatres, Ever and Era, in 1975. Valencia reveals that in the early days, it was relatively easy to establish a good working relationship with the film distributors. "Working through a 'booker,' running the cinema business then was much like a young man courting a lady. Nowadays, things are more difficult because distributors demand a deposit," he says. The mushrooming of videotape rental business has affected their earnings because films can often be seen way ahead of the big screen. "But," he added

stoically explaining why he is still in business, "as they say, you get wet, you take a bath."

In 1978, Valencia leased Real Theatre on Araneta Street from Luisa Lacson, and converted it into a commercial complex in 1992, which is now called ERAMALL. He further reveals that when the crisis of the 70s stringing on into the 80s struck the province, he never entertained the thought of leaving the city. In spite of the obvious hardships resulting from the reduced purchasing power of the peso, he was optimistic that Bacolod would be able to weather the trials. "Crisis," he says, "is never permanent anyway."

In fact, when business picked up starting the late 1980s, Valencia was one of the first who took advantage of the optimistic economic climate. He constructed the Cineplex, a movie and commercial complex along Araneta Street, which, he declares, "is one way of helping Negros." As he sees it, the only problem for the continued progress of the country is the Filipinos' penchant for "politicking" and their lack of discipline.

Valencia considers himself foremost a Filipino. Queries as to his nationality, whether he is travelling abroad or within the country, produce the same reply: He is a Filipino. Yet, he retains most of the work ethics of his forebears. Asked as to the secret of his success, he replies in the terse Confucian idioms that have guided Chinese business practices for centuries. "I try to be always honest, make a little profit, and mingle with people," he concluded.

In the 1930s, a new wave of Chinese immigrants reached the shores of Negros. These were mostly Chinese seeking refuge from the social turmoil and economic deprivation in mainland China. Among such Chinese immigrants are Ben Lopue Sr. and Monsignor John Liu.

A model of the spirit of true entrepreneurship, Ben Lopue Sr. was 14 when he left the Chinese province of Amoy for the Philippines in 1936. Employment opportunities were almost non-existent in the Chinese mainland, decent work being very difficult to find. Provinces like Fujian were also subject to widespread social unrest, and armed struggle brought problems to a boil. As his brother was already here, he decided to follow. The boat had barely berthed in Manila when he proceeded to Bacolod, where his brother had a small *sari-sari* store. He recalls with fondness those early years of enculturation, facilitated by fellow Filipino teenagers who worked like him as store hands. Those first few Filipino friends who played basketball with him every afternoon have remained close to him even up to this day.

Lopue Sr. narrates how, when the war broke out in the Pacific, he decided to enlist in the United States Armed Forces of the Far East [USAFFE] under Capt. Abaygar. He did not see active combat, however, because he was assigned to G-2, the intelligence section of the Army. By this time, he was already a "veteran" of the business of sundry selling, though only 17 years of age. He set up a small store at the central market as front for his "intelligence" activities. While he would go around selling "*kalamay, asin, kag ginamos* (sugar, salt, and shrimp paste)," he

says, messages (from such resistance leaders as Alfredo Montelibano Sr.) hidden inside his basket of goods would be secretly dropped off in town. He discloses that when the Japanese would stop and question him about his meandering in the upland, he would give the standard reply of a trader "doing his rounds."

After Liberation, Lopue Sr. decided to venture into the very profitable pursuit of "buy-and-sell." He would go as far as Leyte, Cebu, and Manila bringing sugar, the prevailing rate in Bacolod of which was P42. Peddling his sugar at nearly twice the price at P72, he would then buy army rations in Leyte which he would then resell in Bacolod. In this painstaking way, he was able to acquire a modest capital to start his own business.

Thus on August 15, 1945, with an initial capital of P15,000, Lopue Sr. was able to put up a bazaar. Five years later, he received his Filipino citizenship. This was to be a real turning point for him, and it was then that he decided to "live, age, and die" in Bacolod.

A self-educated man who only reached second grade, Lopue Sr. narrates that in the very early days, he and his wife would stay up to midnight in their store cleaning the shelves, dusting, and arranging the stocks. This was in preparation for the next day's business whence, unlike other stores which still cleaned up the morning after, they would just "sell and sell" the whole day, no matter if they had only six hours of sleep the night before.

During those early days of merchandise trading, Bacolod was still in the economic doldrums. Lopue Sr. recounts that when he was inevitably asked about where he operated from while transacting with Chinese businessmen in Manila and he would answer "Bacolod," they would invariably ask where Bacolod was. One had to answer "Iloilo-Bacolod" for the Manila traders to know the place in question. In fact, Silay was better known. Interestingly enough, he adds that goods from Iloilo in those days docked in Silay and not in Bacolod.

In the 1950s, Lopue Sr. recalls how he decided to go into the fishpond business. Finding the prevailing fishpond system unproductive with its once-a-year *bangus* (milkfish) production, and recalling how fishponds in mainland China had semi-annual harvests, he went to Taipei and stayed there for three days studying their methods. When he came back, he put into practice what he had learned. The result was a record harvest of *bangus* twice a year, unlike the typical fishponds in Negros which harvested only once.

The peasant stock running thick in his blood, Lopue Sr. could not resist the call of the fields he so often passed in his trip around the province. He simply found the bucolic setting invigorating. In the 1960s, he decided to go into rice and sugar farming as well. Initially, he literally had to work the soil to reorient his tenants from their customary rice-culture practices. His teaching by example paid off in the end, his rice fields yielding as much as 193 cavans per hectare when the standard harvest then was only 75 cavans per hectare. Instead of the traditional once-a-year rice production, his farm went into the no-dead-season cycle. However, the workers eventually gave up, finding the workload too heavy. "They just did not want to stretch themselves out," he observes.

Hard work, resourcefulness, and willingness to deviate from normative trading practices in Bacolod paved the way for the unprecedented take-off of Lopue Sr.'s merchandise store during the sugar boom from 1960 through 1970. Business was so good at the time that he even had the widow of President Sergio Osmeña flying in from Cebu to buy her favorite toiletries at his department store. Another customer, he remembers, was the late statesman Jose Yulo. By that time, the original three-man staff of the store had grown to more than a hundred.

It was early in the 70s when Lopue Sr. decided to put up a Mandalagan branch. Though warned that he faced certain bankruptcy, he could not be dissuaded from his plans. His daring move not only expanded his business but also eased the way for the decongestion of Bacolod. Other entrepreneurs followed his lead, and Bacolod's "suburbia" — the Mandalagan area — grew. As he points out, "*sang nagsugod ko sa Mandalagan, walo lang ka roundtrip and nagkaadto sa Bata, Sta. Clara, kag Mountain View... karon ya guinatos* (When I started out at Mandalagan, there were only eight jeepney roundtrip rides going to Bata, Sta. Clara, and Mountain View... now there are hundreds)." In the 1980s, given his intrepidity in forging ahead despite the gloomy state of the economy, he found himself in the top 500 corporations of the Philippines commanding a character loan of up to P10 million.

Unlike other companies, which are constantly bothered by strikes, Lopue Sr. is proud to say that there has only been one strike in the whole history of Lopue's Department Store. He developed a wholesome image for sound and caring management. His employees are provided a company-housing plan located on Camingawan and Airport Subdivision.

Under his active management, Lopue Sr. had an 800-personnel support, and close to 7,000 persons if his farm and fishpond workers and their families are included. With this large number of people dependent on his business, he could very well have had the wherewithals to run for public office. But he avows a distaste and discourages his sons from going into politics. "It is enough that I play my part as a good businessman," he says. True to his belief, The Lopue Group is one of the top 100 taxpayers in Bacolod City.

Lopue Sr.'s honesty and integrity, as well as his philanthropy, may be traced to his conversion to the Christian faith shortly after the war. His sponsors during his baptism into the Catholic faith were Daniel Lacson, father of former Negros Occidental Governor Daniel "Bitay" Lacson, and Salvador Lacson, father of Congressman "Kako" Lacson. Most Chinese who had just been baptized, a priest once told Lopue Sr., were guilty of being nominal Christians taking part only in Church functions when they are baptized, wed, or buried. It was in response to this observation that Lopue Sr. decided in 1953-1954 to organize the Chinese Catholic Association with the end view of encouraging Chinese Catholics to become closely involved with the church. In fact, he has been an active member of the Knights of Columbus and the Cursillo. He has also been a recipient of the Pontifical Award of St. Sylvester. As well as being a member of Lions Club, he has also been a board member of St. John's Institute, a school which was put up also with his initiative.

Similarly, he was responsible for the construction of the Queen of Peace Church which took only three months to build. This was in compliance to the condition set by "To Peding (Montelibano) that the church be built within that time, or else he will withdraw his land donation," he recalls.

Lopue Sr. has also involved himself in philanthropic activities. For instance, he sends a scholar to La Salle every year. In memory of his late wife, Soledad Dacles, he also set up a scholarship for poor but deserving students for schooling at Hua Ming or St. John's Institute. But his lasting contribution to the *Tsinoy* community in Bacolod is his endowment fund which established the Chinese Studies Program at the University of St. La Salle.

A man with a professed love of Filipinos and his adopted country, Lopue Sr. represents the model Chinese immigrant, and typify the ideal type of racial integration into the mainstreams of our culture and society. To promote the mutual understanding and exchange between the Chinese and Filipinos, he endowed the University of St. La Salle with a grant for the establishment of a Chinese Studies Program. He is also a true picture of a real entrepreneur — willing to take risks — pound it out through the rise and fall of the financial fortunes of Bacolod and ploughed it back to build not only a large enterprise, but also the economy of the city as well. He avows that since he has established himself as one of the leading businessmen of Bacolod, he never diverted his capital outside the province, "not even to Manila; much less, outside the country." Through the crest and nadir of Bacolod's fortunes since its founding as a charter city, he has been the faithful son of his chosen home city.

It is in recognition of his "inherent and life-learned gifts of business entrepreneurship and management evidenced by his founding a successful business chain based on core values of honesty and hard work... thereby making a singular contribution to the socio-economic growth and development of the City of Bacolod and the Province of Negros Occidental" that Benjamin K. Lopue Sr. was awarded the degree of Doctor of Laws, *honoris causa*, by the University of St. La Salle on January 28, 1995.

An important pillar of Bacolod's community is Monsignor John Liu, one of the city's foremost educators. He was naturalized a Filipino in the 1980s.

Born in 1926 in Hebei province, 200 kilometers south of Beijing, John B. Liu's family belonged to the traditional peasantry — his parents both being farmers. He recalls that he was 22 years old when the Communists took over the whole of China, four years after the World War II. He was, by then, a seminarian at St. Joseph Regional Seminary in Beijing. He decided to join the priesthood after having finished Philosophy at the Fu Jen Catholic University. Doubtless, he would have stayed in the mainland and helped in the propagation of the faith. Political events, however, dictated otherwise such that he was to find himself destined for the Philippines.

The take-over of Beijing by the Communists forced the regional seminary community to move. A stopover was made in Shanghai, then Hong Kong before

the community finally reached the Philippines. This was made possible when President Elpidio Quirino approved their petition to set foot in the archipelago. The seminary eventually set up house in what used to be an army camp in Mandaluyong beside Highway 54 (now EDSA).

Usually, after the ordination of seminarians to the priesthood, they are assigned to the different dioceses in the country. Bacolod Bishop Manuel Yap requested for two Chinese priests to come. Frs. Joseph Wang and Peter Tsang came over. When these two priests were recalled, Frs. John Liu and James Liu followed the footsteps of their predecessors. This event took place a year later on May 5, 1955. The date was especially significant for Liu because a few days earlier, the heart of Bacolod City was razed by the great fire.

Liu's first assignment was to serve as coadjutor to Bishop Antonio Y. Fortich at the San Sebastian Cathedral, with a specific task of attending to the Chinese-Filipino Catholics. He then organized the Bacolod Chinese Association with Benjamin Lopue Sr. as its first president. He went on to organize the Chinese Catholic youths harnessing their initiatives and talents for the welfare and development of the *Tsinoy* community. He humorously recalls that when he first arrived in the Philippines, the Filipinos were invariably surprised upon finding out that he and his co-seminarians were Catholics. *Pinoy*s had long believed the Chinese to be "pagans," and to find out otherwise was a big surprise for them.

Liu admits that prior to the establishment of Chinese Catholic churches and schools, the Chinese community continued to maintain a separate identity from that of their host country. This often resulted to discrimination and misunderstanding between both parties. Thus, the more important purpose for establishing Chinese schools, he says, is to enable the Chinese to involve themselves and therefore be absorbed into the mainstream of Filipino culture. By 1953, Chinese priests had started to build Catholic centers in the major cities of the archipelago. After these centers came the schools and then the churches.

Equally important, education was the key to evangelization. Simply convincing the Chinese to join the Catholic fold was extremely difficult. Education, added Liu, would pave the way and facilitate this process. He also said that inasmuch as the Chinese had established themselves in the Philippines, they had a moral obligation to participate in the dynamics of Philippine society. Thus, as well as animating the Chinese to the uniqueness of their culture, the Chinese Catholic schools had the greater responsibility of "breaking the wall" between the Chinese and Filipinos, bringing about the blurring of original ethnic lines.

Dubbed as a "Master Builder," Liu built many institutions and edifices in Bacolod, noteworthy among them the Hua Ming Catholic School (now St. John's Institute) which had its humble beginning in a market place. He was behind the construction of the Bishop's Palace, the Diocesan Cultural Center, and the landmark Queen of Peace Church. He built people, their love and confidence, and a stronger, integrated Chinese community in Bacolod. More than two decades after he settled in Bacolod City, the University of St. La Salle conferred to him the title of Doctor of Humanities, *honoris causa*, in recognition of his labor and accom-

plishments in the Chinese-Filipino apostolate not only in Bacolod but also in the whole province of Negros Occidental.

These three sketches are hopefully the beginning of a compilation of life histories leading to the construct of the typology and evolving identity of *Tsinoy*s in Bacolod, and a more graphic delineation of their role in local history.

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