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Pangasinan, Pinablin Dalin: History, Culture, Development

Edited by Virginia J. Pasalo and Fe B. Mangahas

2015. Lingayen: Pangasinan Historical and Cultural Commission, 808 pp.

Review by Erwin S. Fernandez
Abung na Panagbasay Pangasinan

Edited by Virginia J. Pasalo and Fe B. Mangahas, then Commissioner of the National Historical Commission of the Philippines, the book was a product of Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between the provincial government and the Pangasinan Historical and Cultural Commission (PHCC) in 2011, which led to a formation of a research team headed by Dr. Perla Legaspi. In August 2012, the last draft was submitted to the PHCC editorial board, which, then, decided to commission six new authors – myself included – to revise and add new chapters to the manuscript. Thus, in January 2013 I signed a contract to write two chapters for the “new” book. In the summary for Parts II and III, the

editors agreed to my assessment, which I wrote in my letter to the governor decrying the quality of the research, that the narrative mainly relied on secondary sources, on the three-volume history of Pangasinan by the late Prof. Rosario Mendoza Cortes (1974, 1990a, 1990b). As an attempt toward self-reflexivity, I will also point out some necessary clarifications in my work based on the additional research and readings that I did.

The book is divided in six parts and twenty chapters. For Part I, consisting of two chapters, which I wrote, begins with a discussion of the geologic origins of Pangasinan from the late Cretaceous period to the arrival of early humans in the Philippine archipelago tackling the flora and fauna, the formation of indigenous knowledge in astronomy, land and water resources, climate and temperature, typhoon, earthquakes, agriculture, fish and marine resources, forest and mangroves, wild fauna, plants, herbs and fruit trees, and gold and minerals, origins of villages, towns and province and finally origin and development of industries. One egregious editorial mistake is apparent in the following: "Spanish chronicles, like Fr. Lorenzo Cosgaya (1865) also diligently recorded these terms in Pangasinan-Spanish dictionaries" (32). I utilised Cosgaya's Pangasinan dictionary but I never stated that Cosgaya was a Spanish chronicler. He was not. The original text ran: "Terms in Pangasinan language have preserved this ancient knowledge. Early dictionary by Fr. Lorenzo Cosgaya (1865) recorded these terms." Unfortunately, personal names have been deleted such as my grandfather's name, Mariano Sison Soriano, when I referred to the case of nipa, an old industry, which he can still buy at a local village store in the 1990s. The personal anecdote was reduced to an anonymous, inert statement. In the second chapter, I traced the ethnohistorical development of Pangasinan nation from the various theories regarding their origins as well as my own to its participation in the international trade in the fifteenth century AD. There are assumptions here that I need to clarify or even delete given my exposure to an informed review by another scholar. Also, I was inconsistent with my use of Pinyin and Wade Giles style for the transliteration of Chinese texts.

Part II comprised of three chapters dealing with Pangasinan at the point of Spanish contact, Spanish colonialism and Philippine revolution. Part III, comprising of two chapters, tackled American rule and Japanese occupation. Part IV, consisting of three chapters, discussed contemporary history from the postwar to 1986. These are the main parts of the book that deserve further scrutiny as they deal with history.

The main weakness of these chapters as noted earlier is that they mostly did not consult primary sources. They mainly relied on secondary sources preventing the authors to verify whether the previous assertions about Pangasinan were true or not. They also perpetuated major errors such that Pangasinan came from *Panag-asinan*. This again is a recent invention for in the primary contact period accounts, which I was able to consult from the *Archivo General de Indias*, Pangasinan was really Pangasinan with one clerical error referring to the place as Pagasinan. In that document, Pangasinan was the name of a river, most probably Agno, the major river in the province (Anonymous 1572). Also, in the same dictionary by Cosgaya (1865:101), saltworks or saltbeds was given as 'Pangaasinan', and not 'Panag-asinan', which in a linguistic process called elision later evolved into Pangasinan. The references to a Luyag ed Dapit-Ilog as Caboloan and Luyag ed Dapit-Baybay as Pangasinan were based on a 1920 account in the Census of the Philippine Islands whose data can be questioned since it does not indicate sources.

Relying on secondary sources that dealt with Tagalog society, Fe de la Luna A. Andico, Shiela Marie M. Dasig and Ma. Cristina B. Daligcon in Chapter 3 "Ancient Pangasinan at Point of Contact" conflated Pangasinan society with Tagalog society flattening their differences by citing their similarities. They kept alive the story of Urduja, the so-called Amazon princess who ruled ancient Pangasinan, who was not from Pangasinan but a foreign historical figure (Cortes 1995). They maintained the assertion that early Pangasinans only practiced animism and nature worship when it was possible that Hindu-Buddhist practices must have filtered through their early beliefs before the arrival of Islam and the Catholicism in the Philippines (Fernandez 2014). They were ignorant of the existence of an extant manuscript bearing Pangasinan indigenous scripts in the *Archivo de General Indias* when they wrote: "samples of artifacts utilizing the Pangasinan language have yet to be discovered" (177) despite in 1599 a petition by the Mangaldan elite recorded signatures in that script (Villaruel 2008). Chau Ju-kua (Zhao Rugua), a Chinese commissioner of foreign trade, did not mention any polity called Ling-ya-mon as a reference to Lingayen as Andico *et al.* indicated. Encomienda was tackled in the later part of the chapter which could have been relocated to the earlier sections of the same chapter.

In many sections of Chapter 4 (191-235), written by Dasig, Daligcon and Legaspi, are generalisations not supported by primary sources on *reducción*, hispanisation, low status of women, the

confrontation between indigenous religion and Catholicism, education, the decline of precolonial economy because they based their assumptions on what is written in traditional historical textbooks such as those written by Agoncillo and Alfonso (1967), Agoncillo and Guerrero (1977), Constantino (1975), and Agoncillo (1990). Primary sources can be found in the Archivo General Indias and UST archives among others. The assumption that “there was no real Filipino participation and no representation in municipal governments” (230) during the Spanish period is, I believe, baseless. It lacked local examples on the interference of the friar on local affairs that can only be known if they consulted primary sources. In Urdaneta, for example, a teacher was removed from service due to the influence of a friar (Fernandez 2013).

Discussion on the Philippine revolution of 1898 by Legaspi in Chapter 5 is miserably short for there was no effort to use the many accounts on Pangasinan from the Philippine Revolutionary Records (see Fernandez 2013 for the primary sources used from the said records).

In Chapter 6, Dasig, Daligcon and Legaspi including the editors seemed to have been afflicted by the black legend, which demonised the Spanish contribution to Philippine civilisation by stating that “Americans started the modernization of Pangasinan” (269). It was Spain, which brought modernisation with the coming of reforms in education and the development of Manila-Dagupan railway (Cortes 1990a). The discussion on the Japanese occupation by Dasig and Legaspi has no introduction and no context focusing only on some towns. The insertion of Ferdinand E. Marcos in the narrative is suspicious (297). Although he was a guerrilla officer before the fall of Bataan, he was not a guerrilla leader during the Japanese occupation – he contrived he was the head of his fake Maharlika unit – but, in fact, he was a Japanese collaborator and a black market dealer (McDougald 1987).

Human interest was lacking in Chapters 8 and 9 written by Dasig, Daligcon and Legaspi and Andico and Dasig, respectively, for statistical tables supplied the data while in Chapters 10 and 13, both written by Legaspi, one cannot fail to notice that there are two styles, one written by Legaspi characterised by a periodisation based on national events and national laws as highlights that are somewhat irrelevant to the topic and the inclusion of provincial details that should be the meat of the narrative, which must be the intervention made by the editors.

The chapter that is the most problematic of the lot is Chapter 11 "Groundings and Expressions of Pangasinan Culture" by Celestino Cesar D. Joven which tackled Pangasinan language and literature, architecture, graphic arts, clothing and ornaments, and finally performing arts. It suffered from a surfeit of errors, typographical and factual, as well as unsubstantiated assumptions. Obviously Joven did not know anything about his subject while the editors who should know better as they are tasked to correct errors did not remove these. The highest god in Pangasinan pantheon is not Apoguley but Apolaki and no tribe is called Malasiqui (357), except a town, which had that name. The writing style is rather stilted and many times ungrammatically constructed.

Most disconcerting are the numerous unsupported assertions: the language was brought by people through waves of migration (359), the language is syntactically different from the rest of the Philippine languages when each language has its own syntax different from other languages (359), no pre-colonial oral tradition (361); the development of Pangasinan vocabulary stopped during the Spanish period (365) and Jose Palma was a Pangasinan who should have written *Filipinas* in Pangasinan rather than in Spanish (366) when Palma was a Tagalog born in Tondo. In the discussion on architecture (374-398), the focus was on the *bahay kubo* instead of *abung a nipa* or the *abung a bato*.

There must be distinction and difference between the two and it is up to the researcher to know and understand the Pangasinan *abung*. For example, what is a oanán, olóy abung, lusec, panocóng, panocsolán, silongay abung, sipi (Cosgaya 1865)? How different is an abung a simpóc from tinapin abung (Ibid.)? Again there are questionable statements such as that housing in early Pangasinan did not show architectural differences in design either through class or wealth (378), that there was no prehispanic religious architecture (379) when an early religious shrine called *anitoan* existed (Aduarte 1640/1690). No significant research was made on graphic arts, clothing and ornaments and performing arts throughout the different periods in Pangasinan history so that any assumption made is tentative, unwarranted and superfluous.

The only exception to the dull presentation of the preceding chapters is Chapter 12 by Ma. Crisanta Nelmidia-Flores. It discusses Pangasinan thematically dealing with *Kabayawasan* tradition of indigenous educational practice under the guava tree for youngsters, Our Lady of Manaoag and the *manag-anito* tradition, the connection between

indigenous priestess or shaman and the worship of the Virgin of Manaoag, Princess Urduja, cattle caravans, *anacbanua*, the local term for the indigenous elite, and Pangasinan literature and the arts. A number of these subjects, however, already appeared in the author's articles (Flores 1999, 2004, 2005, 2007), which actually came from her doctoral dissertation (Flores 2002).

In Part V, four essays by Florangel Rosario Braid, Anabelle E. Plantilla, Rodolfo Vicerra and Virginia J. Pasalo tackled education, environment, economic development and the future of Pangasinan respectively. While no doubt these essays were written by experts in their own fields, a significant opportunity was lost to have the views and perspectives of those who are working in the provincial government of Pangasinan. For example, the head of DENR Pangasinan, the provincial health, or the provincial administrator could have provided an insightful long-term programme they plan to do or leave behind with the facts and data they have at hand and the hands-on experience they knew from the grassroots.

Part VI gathered miscellaneous data on the province in three chapters. Chapter 18 by Cynthia P. Lopez and Irene A. De Vera basically repeats data discussed in the preceding chapters. Chapter 19 by the research team is a list of tables on various political, social and economic statistics regarding Pangasinan. Chapter 20 by Virginia J. Pasalo shallowly deals with Pangasinan women working as Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) through a listing of statistical tables. An index at the end of the book is provided.

The most controversial, however, was the book cover, which highlighted at the centre a bare-breasted warrior woman in the act of brandishing a sword who was no other than Urduja. As I have said earlier, Urduja was not a Pangasinan historical figure. She was already the subject of a national conference in 1990 (as cited in Magno 1992) in which the foremost lady historian of Pangasinan, Prof. Cortes (1995) has pronounced her as somebody who was not a real Pangasinan figure seconding her mentor, Prof. Nicolas Zafra (1952), on the issue. But the editors who were advocates of women's rights, short of being called feminists, wanted to maintain the falsehood because it jibed with their politics and advocacy. Also circumstances forced them to do so since the princess was named after the residence of the governor in the capital. Yet, if they are looking for a Pangasinan female historical character who must

have the same prowess if not greater than Urduja, it does not take time for her to be discovered, which this book could have done only if they did their job.

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