

LESSON 1

Mga Talang Pangkultura Culture Notes Pagbibigay-Pangalan sa mga Katutubo Naming the Natives

Have you ever wondered about the origins of the last names of Tagalogs? Some names seem to be indigenous, others seem like Spanish surnames, and yet others seem to be Chinese or were derived from Chinese names.

A useful resource is the book *Catalogo Alfabetico de Apellidos* (Alphabetical Catalog of Surnames), originally published in Manila, on the 22nd of November 1849, and republished by the National Archives in 1973. In his Introduction, then Director of the Bureau of Records Management of the Archives Domingo Abella provided a translation of the decree issued by Spanish Governor-General Narciso Claveria y Zaldúa who ordered the natives of the Philippine islands to have surnames. The decree was accompanied by a catalogue which listed surnames which were to be either assigned or chosen from.

Claveria explained his decision in the first paragraph of the decree originally written in Spanish (translation by Abella, *Catalogo* 1849 x):

During my visit to the majority of the provinces of these islands, I observed that the natives in general lack individual surnames which distinguished them by families. They arbitrarily adopt the names of saints, and this results in the existence of thousands of individuals having the same surname. Likewise I saw the resultant confusion with regard to the administration of justice, government, finance, and public order, and the far-reaching moral, civil, and religious consequences to which this might lead, because the family names are not transmitted from the parents to their children, so that it is sometimes impossible to prove the degrees of consanguinity for purposes of marriage, rendering useless the parochial books which in Catholic countries are used for all kinds of transactions.

Here are articles 1–4 and 8–9 (listed here as 5–6),* contained in the decree (translation by Abella Domingo; *Catalogo* 1849 x–xi):

1. A copy of the printed catalogue of surnames, previously prepared for this purpose, shall be remitted to all the heads of provinces of these islands.
2. These officials shall assign to every town, in accordance with the number of families therein, the number of surnames that appear necessary, taking care that the distribution be made by letters, in the appropriate proportions.
3. Having thus formed the catalogues corresponding to each town, the head of

* I choose only six articles for lack of space. These seemed to be the most interesting 24 articles in the decree. The *Catalogo* is available in around 15 libraries all over the world according to WorldCat; check out your university library.

the province shall send these to the respective parish priests for distribution to the **cabecerias (barangays)**; this distribution shall be carried out with the help of the **gobernadorcillo**, another municipal official, and two competent and respected **principales**. Each **cabeza** shall be present with the individuals of this **cabeceria**, and the father or oldest person of each family shall choose or be assigned one of the surnames in the list, which he shall then adopt, together with his direct descendants.

4. Natives of Spanish, indigenous, or Chinese origin who already have a surname may retain it and pass it on to their descendants.
5. To avoid confusion which might result to the prejudice of those who with their surnames inherited from His Majesty certain benefits, the names of **Lacandola, Mojica, Tupas** and **Raja Matanda** shall not be adopted except by those who have a just title to possess them.
6. Families who can prove that they have kept for generations their surname, even though it may be the name of a saint, but not those like **de la Cruz, de los Santos** and some others which are so numerous that they would continue producing confusion, may pass them on to their descendants, the Reverend fathers and the heads of provinces are advised to use their judgment in the implementation of this article.

A popular misconception is that the catalogue listed only Spanish surnames. However, a closer look at the catalogue shows that it also listed indigenous names such as **Banaag** (ray; glimmer), **Dimatacot** (unafraid), **Galang** (respect), **Liuanagan** (to shed light), and **Marangal** (honorable).

Abella Domingo also gave examples on how the decree was implemented. In the **Bicol** region (which is composed of six provinces in present-day Philippines), those living in the provincial capital were given surnames starting with A; those in the towns along the coast beyond **Tabaco** and **Tiwi** were given surnames starting with the letter B and C; and in the town of **Oas**, the residents chose from a number of pages (mainly with the letter R) given by the governor.

The decree, however, was unevenly implemented in the Philippines, although Governor General Antonio Urbiztondo y Eguia, Claveria's successor ordered the Superintendent of Finance to complete the registers known as **padrones** in order to have a complete list of taxpayers. This choice of the department responsible for implementation and the real use of the name registers make us realize that the decree ultimately served the purpose of colonization: filling up the coffers of the colonial power.