

LESSON 4

Mga Talang Pangkultura: Ang Mesang Filipino

The Filipino Table*

Have you eaten Filipino food? Do you like it?

At the Filipino dinner table, you may find **pansit** (noodles), chicken **adobo**, **pork sinigang** (sour soup), and **soda**. These dishes show not only the indigenous cuisine of the Filipino people but also the influences of trade (China and other Asian countries) and colonization (Spanish and American).

The Filipino **adobo**, according to Fernandez, is derived from the word **adobado**, a Mexican stewed meat dish, something unsurprising considering that Spain ruled the Philippines from the 16th to the 19th centuries through Mexico. Although most Filipinos trace the **adobo** roots to Spain, the Spanish word **adobo** refers to a pickling sauce made of cooking olive oil, vinegar, thyme, laurel, oregano, garlic, and paprika.

Pansit (sometimes spelled **pancit**) comes from Hokkien **pian** + **e** + **sit**, although according to Gloria Chan-Yap, Fernandez's informant, the word did not originally refer to "noodles," but meant "something that is conveniently cooked." There are several kinds of noodles used in the Philippines and the dish is named using the kind of noodle used; among them, **pansit bihon** (thin noodles), **pansit canton** (lo mein and chow mein), **pansit miki** (round egg noodles), and **pansit sotanghon** (glass noodles). Other varieties of **pansit** are named using the place it originated from, for example **Pansit Malabon**, which uses a lot of seafood because Malabon is a fishing town. There are two ways of cooking noodles in the Philippines, sauteing (dry kind), such as **canton** and **bihon**, and boiling (for soup), such as **pansit mami** (using round egg noodles) or **pansit molo** (a kind of wonton soup).

Also part of the indigenization process is the use of the **sawsawan** or dipping sauce, such as **patis** (fish sauce), **toyo** (soy sauce), **suka** (vinegar), **bagoong** (salty anchovies or shrimp). To these we add **calamansi** (native lemons), **chilis** (added to vinegar makes it sinumak), onions, or garlic. Taste thus becomes as flexible as time (in a country where 2:00 can mean somewhere between 2:00–3:00) and location (the word **bayan** means both "town" and "country").

Finally, Fernandez also points out another interesting journey that foreign food undertakes as it is adapted in local cuisine is its change in social position. While it is everyday fare in Spain, it is fiesta fare in the Philippines, cooked only during special occasions, and made not just with the more traditional rabbit or chicken in Spain, but also with the most expensive ingredients in the Philippines—crabs, and prawns, and imported Spanish sausages. The colonizers' food has therefore become an indicator of social status in the Filipino table.

* Most of the data from this culture note comes from Doreen Fernandez's article "Culture Ingested: Notes on the Indigenization of Philippine Food." New York University website. <http://www.nyu.edu/classes/bkg/web/fernandez.pdf>. Accessed July 2012.