

# Clavería's Catalogue

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Filipino surnames can be confusing for people who are not familiar with Filipino culture and history. While there are many indigenous names in many native languages as well as Chinese-derived names, the prevalence of Spanish family names leads many to believe that Filipinos are Hispanic – as though they were Mexicans who just happen to live in Asia.

Before Spain occupied the Philippines in the 1500s, most Filipinos had just one name. Some were descriptive while others had obscure, or unknown meanings like most of our names today. Most of the old names that appear in history books belonged to rulers such as the datu Matanda, Lakandula, Lapu-lapu and Humabon. Some Filipinos had a second name that described a family relationship but unlike the old European custom in which a man was referred to as “the son of so-and-so” (Johnson, Peterson etc.), in the Philippines, people were identified through their children, as in “the mother or father of so-and-so.”

## Filipino names – anything goes

When Filipinos began to convert to Christianity, they took on the names of Catholic saints, symbols, sacraments, feasts and even popes. When it came to naming a child or choosing one's own Catholic name it was “anything goes” – not much different from today except that Hollywood was not an available source of names yet. Many Filipinos back then took two or three names and changed them whenever they wanted. Surnames were not strictly applied to whole families and often each family member would choose a Spanish surname that was different from the rest of the family. The resulting confusion drove Spanish bureaucrats crazy because, without clear family lineages, legitimate births and inheritances were often hard to prove and the clergy worried that Filipinos might be marrying their own cousins or other family mem-



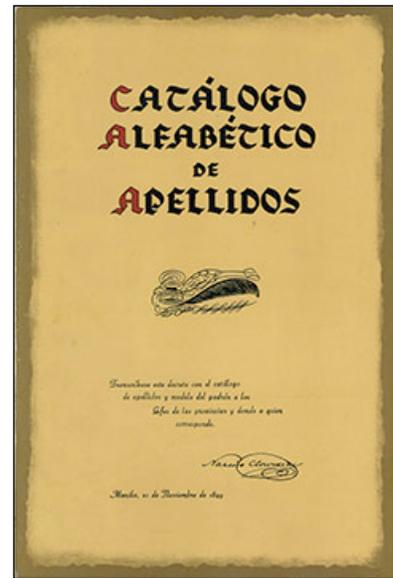
*Governor and Captain General of the Philippines from 1844 to 1849, Narciso Clavería y Zaldúa made surnames mandatory for Filipinos*

bers. Also, with so many Filipinos choosing the same popular surnames like de los Santos and de la Cruz, it was not easy for the government to track the movements of Filipinos – making tax collection and law enforcement difficult.

## A catalogue of surnames

So, after about 300 years of this confusion, the government decided to take action. In 1849, Governor Narciso Clavería began the process of making a civil register of the entire population. The first step was to sort out the names that people already had and then to make rules so that Filipino families would all have consistent surnames.

Clavería released the *Catálogo alfabético de apellidos* or the Alphabetical catalogue of surnames, which contained 60,662 surnames, both Spanish and indigenous, that had been collected by parish priests throughout the country. The catalogue was distributed to the head of each province who was required to figure out how many surnames each town would need and then assign them alphabetically. A list of the allotted surnames for each town was given to its parish priest who instructed the *barangay* (neighbourhood) officials to summon the oldest



*The book that gave many Filipino families their names: the Alphabetical Catalogue of Surnames, 1849*

male member of every family to choose a family name and have it entered into the new civil register.

Filipinos who already had surnames could keep them as long as they were not on a list of banned names. To avoid any false claims to special rights, taking the names of ancient Filipino nobles like, Tupas, Lakandula or Rajah Matanda was not allowed. However, families that already had a restricted surname could keep it if they could prove that they had been using it for at least four generations.

Overused names like Cruz, Reyes, Santos and others were supposed to be banned, too, but Governor Clavería did allow provincial officials and priests to use their own discretion in the matter. Judging by the huge numbers of these common surnames that are still around today, it seems that most officials let it slide. In some areas, though, such as Quezon and Albay, the whole law, including the alphabetical distribution of names, was so strictly enforced that in some towns almost everybody's surname started with the same letter.

Filipinos who changed their names after being registered faced at least eight days in jail or a fine of three pesos. School teachers were instructed to keep a register of all

their students' surnames and to make sure that they matched their parents' surnames. They also had to make sure that the students used only their registered names. If the rules were not enforced, provincial officials were allowed to punish the teacher.

### Modern myths

Clavería's decree is at the root of some myths and misunderstandings that we have today about Filipino names. Some people believe that the Spaniards forced Filipinos to give up their own names and assume Spanish names, but this is not true. Clavería's catalogue listed all kinds of names that were collected from all over the Philippines. The purpose of the catalogue was not to get rid of native names but to set up a civil register so that the government could keep track of the Filipino population for tax collecting, law enforcement and church records. To do that, Clavería needed Filipino families to have a surname. The origin of a surname did not matter as long as each family member had the same one.

Another myth that some Filipinos believe is that having a Spanish surname means having some Spanish ancestry. They assume, and in some cases they even claim, that one of their great-great grandmothers married a Spaniard, or came to have children from a Spaniard through some sordid incident. The truth of the matter is that for most of the Spanish era, there were very few Spaniards in the Philippines. In most provincial towns, the only Spaniard was the local friar. According to the 2000 census, 95% of the population in the Philippines has an unmixed Malay heritage. Although mestisos (people of mixed race) are extremely influential in Filipino society, most estimates put the combined number of all types of mestisos at no more than 2% or 3% of the entire population and only about half of those are Spanish mestisos, who are based mainly in Manila and Cebu. Chinese-mestisos and full Chinese combined are estimated at only around 3%.

A 2001 Stanford University study showed a slightly higher percentage of Filipinos carrying European genetic material (3.6%), but the sample size was only 28 people, which

meant that only one of the 28 had any European ancestry. Also, the samples were all taken from around Manila where the mestiso population is concentrated.

The reason that so many Filipinos have Hispanic last names is mainly because their ancestors changed their names when they became Catholics or when they had to choose a surname for Governor Clavería's civil register in 1849. Taking a new name when a person became a Christian was customary, just like it is for people today who convert to Islam. Often a priest would choose the name, but for many Filipinos it was the "cool" thing to do, anyway. The Spaniards had the power, so taking a Spanish surname gave the illusion of having a little prestige and style. Old parish records show that some Filipinos added their new Hispanic names to their old native names but after a few years, they would eventually drop the native part.

### Indigenous names survive

Fortunately hundreds of native Filipino names did survive. Some of these were high status names that belonged to important families that kept them even when they converted, while other names belonged to those Filipinos who had eluded Spanish rule.

Some indigenous names have obvious meanings while others have been obscured by time and the evolution of languages. Many families have original Filipino names that may not look Filipino because they have retained the old Spanish spelling – names such as Bondoc for bundok (mountain) or the Ilokano name, Agcaoili (to hold on to), which would be spelled Agkawili in modern Filipino.

Some names are not flattering to their owners but, for obvious reasons, most of the native names that have survived are those that express the positive or powerful qualities of people. There is strength and fierceness in names like, Macaraeg (maka+daig, able to win), Catacutan (fear), Panganiban (aware of danger), Agbayani (Ilokano, to be heroic) and Mangubat (Cebuano, to fight). There is defiance in Tagalog names like: Dimaapi ("cannot be oppressed"), Dimayuga

(unshakeable). A favourite of mine is Lacanilao (Lakan+ilaw) or "noble light."

Native Filipino first names gained a measure of popularity in the 20th century with some nationalistic parents giving their children Tagalog names such as Bayani (Hero), Magtanggol (Protector), Makisig (Handsome) and Diwa (Spirit) for boys, or Ligaya (Joy), Malaya (Free), Luwalhati (Glory), Mayumi (Modest) and Luningning (Brilliance) for girls.

### Chinese names

There are many Filipino surnames that look Hispanic but are really Chinese. Today most Chinese surnames have only one syllable, but until the 1800s, Chinese-Filipino families usually had three syllables in their names because they used the complete name of their patriarch. Other families may have come from northern China where two-syllable names are not uncommon. These names became more Spanish sounding when they were written in the Spanish alphabet.

One of the most famous of these is former president Corazon Aquino's maiden name, Cojuangco. The head of the Cojuangco family at one time was Ko Chi Kuan, who was respectfully addressed by adding Ko to the end of his name and dropping his given name, Chi. Thus, Ko Chi Kuan was known as, Ko Kuan Ko, which eventually became Cojuangco in the Spanish spelling.

Some other hispanized Chinese names are Locsin (Xin Luk), Joson (Ho Sun), Lantin, Dizon, Quison, Vinzon, Licuanan, Landicho, Guingcanco, Lauchengco and Quisumbing. These names were once Chinese, but today they are uniquely Filipino and not found in China.

Whatever the origin – Hispanic, Chinese or native – most Filipinos today possess family names that only date back to 1849; and for that, they can thank (or blame) Clavería's catalogue.

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