

THE SOCIAL SCENE IN DAVAO, 1900-1945

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Introduction

The years 1900-1945 saw the coming to Davao of more and more foreign migrants, from far away lands, and domestic migrants, from other parts of the Philippine Archipelago, seeking wealth, freedom, and a better life. The population of Davao increased with the influx of these migrants. Such a situation made Davao a society of immigrants, who dared explore new frontiers.

By the time the Americans came to Davao as a new colonial power at the turn of the 19th century, Davao was already peopled by the indigenous ethnic tribes found in the interior or hinterland; by the Muslim settlers, found along the coasts; and by Christian Filipinos (the descendants of Davao's first Filipino Christian settlers of 1818 and the Christian Filipino migrants from Luzon and the Visayas, who migrated to Davao to escape political persecution in their provinces), army deserters, a few fugitives, and the foreign migrants (Chinese, Indonesians, Hindus, Bombays, Syrians, Lebanese) who inhabited the **cabacera** or town proper.

Davao is a province of many ethnic tribes. Ethnic division among the local population in the community arose as

a matter of historical development. The different ethnic tribes had already formed their own communities. Each tribe is different from the other tribes. There was cultural interaction among tribal communities. Their activities were determined by the social practices within their communities. They retained their own languages and their traditional way of life.

The indigenous ethnic tribes are the Atas, Bagobos, Guiangans, Tagakaolos, Bilaan, Manobos, Mandayas, Mansakas, and others who live in the interior or hinterland.

The Muslim inhabitants of Davao came from Maguindanao, Cotabato and other parts of Mindanao and Sulu. The Davao Muslims were observed to have the same customs as the other ethnic tribes except that they abstain from eating pork. They were not feared, because of their isolation and their small number. They inhabited the coasts of navigable rivers because their homes were small boats. Davao Muslims were nomadic and scattered themselves along both sides of the river and did not form villages, unlike the other ethnic tribes. Their occupations were fishing and trading. Among the Muslims, the effects of public and private education were slowly felt. Although these Muslims regard the Southern Islands as their ancestral homeland, they are now a minority in the area because of Christian migration, wherein they somehow suffered systematic social disadvantage.

Both the indigenous ethnic tribes and the Davao Muslims are now exposed to Western culture. Most of the indigenous tribes now dress like other Christian Filipinos and only wear their elaborate traditional clothing during rare occasions like fiestas. But the Davao Muslims, like those in other parts of

Mindanao, remained faithful to their Islamic religion and native traditions, as well as to their native costume, the *malong*. They are no longer polygamous and slaveholders. There are no more *juraamentados* among them. Even in their language, the indigenous tribes and the Muslims are now conversant in Tagalog, Visayan and English.

To promote community life among the nomadic indigenous tribes and the Muslims and to break their migratory habits, the newly arrived Americans, who were able to settle and acquire undeveloped lands, encouraged these tribes to settle in fixed communities. Those who were in the highlands were transferred to the coasts and provided labor to the newly opened plantations of the Americans. But the natives, especially the Bagobos, did not like living in the plantations. The Chinese were far more numerous than the Americans and other migrants.

Established Communities and their Social Organizations

It is said that people are the greatest assets of a community. Without them there can be no society and without society no community can exist.

The early American community in Davao was composed of former soldiers-turned-settlers/planters, school teachers, Protestant missionaries, engineers who built bridges and roads, government officials and their families. They took active part in the different social activities in the community.

The socio-cultural influences of the Americans were the

democratic way of life, public education and the Protestant religion. In 1903, Rev. and Mrs. Robert Black were sent by their home church in the United States to Davao upon the request of the pioneer American planters and congregational missionaries in the primitive and pestilential Davao Gulf area.

More and more pioneer settlers acquired undeveloped lands. They developed the land into plantations that started the plantation economy in Davao. Most of these plantations were located around the Davao Gulf area.

The Americans settled in their coastal plantations. The wives of some planters described life in the frontier community as joyful, despite hardships and deprivations. Every so often, they would board launches, which plied the Davao Gulf, to make business with the native inhabitants in the interior. They bought abaca and sold things that they had.

Clubs were organized in the community to keep alive a vital and invigorating community spirit. In the town proper or *cabecera*, an American Club was organized where, on weekends, it served as the gathering place for lonely planters and their families coming from the coast plantations. The club became the center of social activities and a place for Americans to relax and share experiences with one another. People in the *poblacion* lived simply, with no hotels and no recreation centers, except one cinema house, owned by Jerry Roscom, an American settler.

The town proper had for its inhabitants mostly the Visayan Christians, who were recruited by the American and Filipino migrant planters from the Visayas to work on their

newly-opened plantations, and the third generation descendants of the first Christian settlers of 1848. The other inhabitants were the foreign migrants like the Chinese, Hindus, Bombays, Syrians, a few Americans, and some Japanese.

American cultural policies were heavily concentrated on public education. Public schools were established and opened on both on the elementary and secondary levels in the town proper and outskirts. In the beginning, school officials and teachers were Americans, but later, the Filipinos took over after they were trained to teach. But most of the indigenous ethnic tribes resisted education. School officials and teachers exerted efforts to reach them for the education of their children. Extension classes were opened in the interior to reach the most isolated tribes.

During the period, there was only one public elementary school and one public secondary school, the Davao High School, in the *poblacion* proper. Both schools were first located at Magallanes Street. The only elementary school in the *poblacion* proper, the Davao Central School, was opened in the early 1920s. In the outskirts, the first school was put up in Daliao, being the center of development in 1918. When the Sta. Ana area in the *poblacion* was developed, another elementary school was established which was the Sta. Ana Elementary School.

The first private schools at the time were: the Immaculate Conception Institute (now University) for girls, founded by the RVM Sisters; St. Peter's school for boys (first handled by the Jesuits and later by the P.M.E. priests); and the Davao Institute which was established by Mr. Godofredo Duremdes. Now at Claveria Street in the vicinity of the Awad Building.

The Immaculate Conception College was a Catholic school originally established for girls. It was managed by the Religious of the Virgin Mary (RVM), a congregation founded by a Filipina, Mother Ignacia del Espiritu Santo. The ICC was founded by three pioneering RVM Sisters in 1905. These Sisters laid the foundation for a Mission school here in Mindanao. A year after they arrived, a formal school, St. Peter's Parochial School, was opened.

As the population grew, more schools were opened. Fresh high school graduates were hired to teach elementary school pupils because of the shortage of teachers. The schools' Division Superintendent then, Mr. John Stumbo, even recruited fresh graduates of the Zamboanga Normal High School, Class 1937, to teach in Davao.

During the period of the 1920's the Japanese community grew and developed in Davao. Ohta Kyosaburu became one of the leaders of the Japanese community. It was also during this period that the Japanese colony in Davao continued to prosper. A self-contained community had developed. There was the Japanese school, built on one of the main streets (present site of the University of Mindanao along Bolton St.); clinics and hospitals (like the Mintal Hospital), staffed by Japanese doctors and nurses, were opened; newspapers came direct from Japan; Japanese shops and banks were opened and Japanese-style houses were built and also Japanese entertainment parlors were opened. In March 1920, an annex of the Manila Consulate of Japan was opened in Davao and housed in the site where the present University of Mindanao Gymnasium is located.

The Japanese community was well-organized and self-contained. The Japanese settlers were observed by other inhabitants as industrious, cooperative, thrifty, and obedient to laws. The Japanese community established the Japanese Davao Association, which served as the center of their activities. The association coordinated the social interests of the Japanese settlers. It was organized to assure better living conditions for the members and their families. It also provided financial and medical assistance to those in need of help and extended educational benefits to the members' children. Primary and secondary schools were built and maintained by the Japanese Davao Association in the town proper and on the outskirts, patterned after the prevailing system in Japan, with Nipongo as the medium of instruction.

Michael E. Dakudao, a Doctor of Architecture by profession (he finished his Masteral and Doctoral degree in Architecture at Tokyo University in Japan), had this to say about the Japanese in Davao...;

While in Davao, the Japanese adhered to the whole fabric of Japanese customs and traditions and they introduced dominant institutions towards maintaining a high consciousness of the Japanese way of life. The Nippon Jin Kai (Japanese Association), which functioned as the governing body of the Japanese nationals, was founded on May 1, 1916. The first Japanese Consulate building was constructed in 1920. By 1936, a total of 12 Japanese Primary Schools were established. Regarding the Japanese religion,

shrines and several temples were built on the areas where the Japanese settled. The first modern hospital in Davao, the Ohta Development Company Hospital in Mintal, was built by the Japanese.

Mintal was known then as "little Nagasaki" because there were more Japanese residents there than Filipinos. Japanese schools were opened where only Japanese children were enrolled. The Mintal Hospital was opened, with Japanese doctors and Japanese nurses employed. Only a few Filipino doctors were hired, like Dr. Santiago P. Dakudao, Sr. and Dr. Juan Santos Cuyugan, to name a few.

The Japanese community also constructed and maintained private roads which were also opened to the public without charge. The number of Japanese residents in Davao, as recorded in 1937, totalled 15, 150.

There was communal exclusiveness among the Japanese settlers that prevented their integration into the mainstream of Davao society. Only a few married native women.

During the late 1920s and the middle of the 1930s, the town population was small. The Dabawenyos then active in social life were the third generation descendants of Davao's first Filipino Christian settlers of 1848, who came with Oyanguren in the latter's "conquest" of Davao. These Dabawenyos, aware of the social role they had to play, put up organizations to embrace the natives of Davao, as well as the migrants who decided to make Davao their home. They organized the "Hijos de Mindanao", which was later changed

to "Hijos de Mindanao y Sulu", to include the Sulu Muslims in Davao under the leadership of Datu Kanapia with whom the "Hijos" developed a strong brotherhood. These Dabawenyos had their annual affairs, usually held as picnics. These affairs were sort of big family gatherings of Dabawenyos, attended by families and their children, including household helps and friends. They sang Dabaw folk songs under the talisay trees and coconut groves by the beach (as recalled by Noning Lizada, a Dabawenyo historian, in a write-up). The young Dabawenyos studying in Manila organized the "Davao Club". Whenever the Governor of Davao, Sebastian Generoso, was in Manila he made visits to the Davao Club members.

In the 1930s and early 1940s, as groups of adventurous Filipinos from Luzon, Visayas and other parts of Mindanao came to Davao, after hearing of the good fortune Davao offered, the teen-aged children of the "Hijos de Mindanao y Sulu" formed the "Tayo-Tayo" Club in the town and took as members other children of their ages, regardless of regional origins. This club became the social group of the young and was regarded as the youth club of the time.

In the late 1940s (1945-1946), when World War II ended, the Dabawenyos who pursued their studies in Manila thought of organizing themselves and formed the Club Dabawenyo. Yearly, the members of the club celebrated in Manila the June 29 feast of St. Peter.

The late Atty. Manuel G. Cabaguio, a prominent Dabawenyo, who enrolled in the year 1915 at the San Pedro convent **PARVOLITO** class, had this to say about the San Pedro Parish, said to be the biggest parish then in Mindanao:

The San Pedro Parish included the present area of the City of Davao, Davao del Sur, the sea coast portion of Davao Oriental of what is now Lupon and Governor Generoso and of Davao del Norte up to the boundary of Agusan. And this parish was served by two and, at times, by three priests and two brothers, whose duties were to take care of the church and the convent.

Every year one priest, usually it was the associate priest, went out to evangelize the natives. These visits usually lasted for ten days because of the inadequacy of the transportation. There were no vehicles and the roads were only trails through forest and ravines.

During fiestas, the priest said masses and baptized natives even without the benefit of religious instruction as required now. In the baptism it was the practice to use the surnames of the **padrinos** who were selected from the prominent people of the community. The trips of the priest to the coastal towns and the hinterlands were dangerous and tiresome. Of course food preparation was excellent and delicious but the priest and his inseparable sacristan had to sleep on bamboo floors. Marriages and baptisms were mostly free unless the **padrino** happened to be very influential in the community.

The town plaza in the **cabecera** called the Plaza Oyanguren, now known as Osmeña Park, was a part of the church property until the year 1917 when the first Civil Governor, the late Eulalio Causing from Cebu, requested Fr. Rebull to relinquish church claims on the said portion.

The random recollection of many events during the early Davao days narrated by old-time migrants helps one learn about Davao's past. One such old-time migrant is Elena Iñigo, known as Aling Nena to the Dabawenyos and the mother of the present Dean of the College of Law of the Ateneo de Davao University, Atty. Hildegardo Iñigo. Aling Nena comes from a Tagalog family that migrated to Davao in the year 1905. She recalls that during the early 1900s there was peace everywhere in Davao. One could sleep soundly at night. People all over Davao seemingly knew one another. She talked of migrants from Luzon who permanently established residence hereabouts. She not only talked of people but also of activities like the arrival of ships from Manila once a month that gave Dabawenyos happiness.

The Cebuanos, Tagalogs, Boholanos, Ilocanos, and other domestic migrants put up their own social organizations. To quote former Judge Pedro C. Quitain, a Batangueño and a Davao old timer, in a written interview he stated that...

On or before 1927 life in Davao was rather dry in that there was not much social intermingling among the people. This could have been due to the diversity of the social outlook among people who come from various sectors of the country. The Visayans obviously socialized among themselves — the Cebuanos, Boholanos, Capizeños, Ilocanos and Antiqueños did the same. They kept themselves in a rather clannish way. Among those from Luzon, the Ilocanos displayed a more prominent clannish disposition compared to the Tagalogs, the Bicolanos, and

the Kapampangans who appeared to have developed a certain degree of oneness in more ways than one.

As early as 1924 the Caviteño migrants from Cavite in Luzon formed their social organization which was called the *Buklod ng Cavite*. The organization was established in order to help them intermingle among themselves during their free time and also to help fellow Caviteños who came to Davao for the first time. After the day's or week's work, attending to their business of selling meat, fish, and vegetables in the market attending to their transportation business, they gathered in the residence of the Angeleses in Claveria street (one of the three oldest streets in Davao) to socialize. The residence was not along the main street but in the "*looban*" (interior) which served as the liason of all adventurous Caviteños then coming to Davao to try their luck. The older Caviteños, who are the grandparents and parents of the younger Caviteños now, imbued in their children the value of education and discipline. Parents sent their children to school for formal education. By 1926 up to the 1930s, according to surveys, there were already more or less 20,000 Caviteño residents in Davao.

The migrants from the Visayas also formed their social organizations, the purpose of which were also the same as those of the other migrant organizations. The Waray Waray Association was organized by the Leyteños and Samareños who speak the Waray dialect. Like the other migrants' associations they met and had social affairs.

Masonic ideas and practices were introduced in the province of Davao during the early part of the American regime

when Frank Carpenter, an American Mason, was Civil Governor and Celestino Chavez, a Filipino Mason, was Deputy Governor for Davao. It was in 1918 when a group of Masons met for the first time to discuss the idea of forming a Masonic Lodge in Davao. With proper dispensation from the Grand Lodge of the Philippine Lodge of the Philippine Islands, the Sarangani Lodge No.50 was organized in 1919 in the town of Davao.

The members of the Masonic group (Sarangani Lodge No.50) indulged themselves in charitable and humanitarian activities. The influence of Masonry in the Davao society became predominant and noticeable. Their annual installation of officers had always been a significant social affair, attended not only by Masons but also by non-Masons with respect. They say Masons contributed much to the social and cultural development of Davao.

Another social activity of great significance was the establishment of the Davao Mason's Women's Auxillary composed of wives of Davao Masons. This organization sponsored wholesome social gatherings such as grand balls, picnics, excursions or birthday parties that promoted goodwill, unity and fellowship among Davao Masons and Non-Masons. Through this organization, the Davao Puericulture center and the Davao Women's Club were organized to promote and advance the interest and welfare of mothers and babies.

Festivals were social affairs involving the community. The more popular festivals were religious in nature. The Catholics celebrated yearly the feast of St. Peter every 29th of June. When Fiesta time came people from the outskirts trooped to the town proper to hear Mass in the morning at San Pedro

Church and stayed up to late in the afternoon for the procession in honor of the patron saint, St. Peter. Other religious festivals were held on New Year, Christmas, and other holy days of obligation. The majority of the Filipino Christian migrants in Davao were Roman Catholics and only a few were Protestants. The foreign migrants also had their festivals. The Muslims also observed their religious obligations.

The organizer of the Protestant church in Davao, related to the United Church of Christ in the Philippines (UCCP), was Rev. Robert Black, the Evangelical Church, who was sent here in 1903 by the Board of Commissioners for Foreign Mission, now the United Church Board for World Ministries.

The Chinese migrated to Davao, earlier than the Japanese. They had already traded with the native tribes long before the Spaniards came to Davao. They first came as traders bringing with them goods in exchange for Davao Products. But later, when they found great opportunities for a better life and business, they settled here permanently at the turn of the 20th century—the early years of the American regime. These migrants from China intermingled with the other inhabitants of the town proper or **cabacera**.

The Chinese established their community in the capital town. They organized the Davao Chinese Educational Association with the aim of giving their group the opportunity to be educated. They also established and opened the Davao Chinese High School which was open to both rich and poor. Filipino children were also accepted as students.

By 1923, the Chinese in Davao increased to over a thousand in number, coming from the provinces of Fookien and Kwangton (Canton), China in search of better opportunities and good life. On June 2, 1923, the Consul General of the Republic of China to the Philippines, Hon. Chao Kuo Shian, arrived in Davao for the first time on an observation tour. Upon seeing the big number of Chinese, school for the children. The proposal was welcomed by the populace. On June 6, a meeting of the Chinese residents was called by the Honorary Consul. During the meeting, the Chinese Educational Association was organized, with Mr. Chua Chin San elected as the first Board Chairman over a board membership of twelve persons. Later, both Mr. Te and Mr. Chua worked for the recruitment of funds and teachers and government approval for the school. On June 3, 1924, the school opened in a rented house on San Pedro Street, with two classrooms to thirty pupils. Because of the dire need for a school site to put up a school building, the Board approached Mr. Juan Lim Villa Abrille who immediately donated a one hectare lot in Sta. Ana Avenue which became the site of the Davao Chinese High School.

Davao is a cosmopolitan community where ethnic groups have preserved their languages and customs. The foreign and the Christian Filipino migrants in the town proper/**cabecera** maintained a social existence wholly different and distinct from that of the native indigenous tribes and Muslims. Many of the indigenous tribes encountered discrimination and suffered social disadvantages. The gap between the groups was caused by the differences in education, social background, wealth, and social standards. The native indigenous tribes lagged behind the Christian Filipinos and foreign migrants in matters of educational attainment. The Davao Muslims were in an intermediate

position culturally between Christian Filipino migrants and the indigenous ethnic tribes.

As an immigrant society, Davao still attracted people from other parts of the Philippines and other lands until the later part of 1945. The people of Davao had proven that people of many different backgrounds could live together in peace and harmony.