

And a Review of Matthew Sutherland's "A Rhose, by Any Other Name"

By Roberto Reyes Mercado

Several friends and kin sent to me by e-mail Matthew Sutherland's article that appeared in a Manila newspaper last year. They wanted me to comment on it. I write slowly – due to my so many extra-curricular and community activities – but I promised them this article as an April Fool's Day gift. (It's good that I could finish it in 2000 because I did not tell the year of completion – I said only that I would finish it by April 1st.)

While Matthew Sutherland's article indeed touched on the uniqueness of Filipino names and nicknames, he did not really discuss the topic exhaustively and historically.

I have written the draft of an article called, "How Bicolanos Name Names," which might be published in the reprint of the University of Nueva Caceres (UNC) 1972 booklet called "Readings on Bicol Culture." (The reprinting is still to be made.) Readers and I can simply expand the coverage to make it "How Filipinos Name Names." I will now, therefore, review Mr. Sutherland's article by mentioning passages in my article prepared for the UNC reprint project. In order for readers to be able to compare notes, I am reprinting Mr. Sutherland's article at the end of this review.

{xtypo_quote} Editor's Note: This was originally published in January 2000 in the yimby.com, the forerunner of this website. {/xtypo_quote}

How Bicolanos (and Filipinos) Name Names - MabuhayRadio

Written by Bobby M. Reyes

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To begin with, Mr. Sutherland does not realize apparently that Filipinos live in what historians consider to be the only real world-class melting pot in Asia. When individuals in a country can have cocktail drinks called "Mixi-mixi," as found at one time and perhaps even now in the Empire Hotel in Manila, one can really expect "Mixi-mixi" names and nicknames. By the way the "Mixi-mixi" is a concoction of rum, gin, scotch whiskey, vodka and fruit juices. Why people order it at the Empire Hotel is beyond my comprehension.

Pre-Hispanic Names

Before foreigners migrated to, or conquered, the Philippines, its indigenous people probably called themselves in the manner that the Native American Indians did. They named probably themselves after animals, places or events. An example is the Kalaw (hornbill) family, as exemplified by the venerable and much-respected stateswoman, (former) Sen. Eva Estrada Kalaw. We have in the Philippines and here in Southern California the Batongmalaki clan, which is spelled also by another family as Batongmalaqui, meaning "big stone". Some Filipinos belong to a clan called the "Biglangyaman" (meaning, instant richness, or now because of these popular television shows probably and more appropriately translated better as "instant millionaires").

Another clan from the Visayan Region of the Philippines called itself the "Dayangdayang" after "dayan," the Leyte dialect term for road (dalan in Cebu and Sorsogon Province in the Bicol Region). This was probably coined after the Filipino version of the American "road runners," a species of birds, and from which mannerisms the "Tinikling" folk dance (called of course the Dayangdayang) was named after.

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A very prominent clan in Camarines Norte, a province in the Bicol Region, is the Lukban (spelled also as Lucban), which was probably derived from a Filipino fruit (similar to the grapefruit) of the same name. A town in the adjacent Quezon Province is named after the Lukbans (Lucbans) that produced a famous Philippine revolutionary hero in the War for Independence against Spain (1898) and in the Christian Filipino-American War of 1899-1902 and a mayor of Manila.

Then immigrants from Borneo landed in the Panay Island sometime in the 12th century. According to legends the settlers were composed of 10 datus or chieftains and their clans. Borneo is now divided into the Indonesian Kalimantan, Malaysia and the Sultanate of Brunei and nobody knows where in Borneo the settlers came from. The new settlers carried with them their Malay names, more or less based in turn on Islamic surnames, as still found in the Muslim-Filipino communities and used by some Filipino clans who have refused to adopt Hispanic, Chinese, Indian or Anglo-Saxon surnames.

Per my high-school history mentors from the Decano Family of Magallanes town of Sorsogon Province, one of the 10 Bornean datus allegedly settled, according to anecdotal sources, in the Bicol Region, and thus Bicolanos to date call their friends, "Padi," an indigenous Bornean term for brother. (How the people of Bicolandia got to be named Bicolanos is another story. I opined that the conquering American soldiers in 1900-1901 must have started calling it the "Be Cool Region," as the place was indeed cool and relaxing due to the presence of virgin forests, rivers and the breezes from both the China Sea and the Pacific Ocean. (Editor's Note: Please refer to this article that was also originally published in the yimby.com in 1998: [How American Soldiers Named the Bicol Region in 1900?](#))

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How Filipinos Got to Have Hispanic Names

After the Spaniards conquered through the Cross and the Sword the archipelago that was to be called later as the "Islas Filipinas," many of the Filipinos were forced to adopt Hispanic names.

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According to history books and even the Wikipedia, then-Governor General Narciso [Clavería y Zaldúa](#)

issued on November 21, 1849, a Spanish colonial decree establishing the systematic distribution of family names and the imposition of a Spanish naming method on the inhabitants of the colony that was the Philippines. This was in response to the inconsistencies in the way Filipinos arbitrarily chose surnames.

Let us take for instance the history of the Reyes Family of Sorsogon. My grandfather, then named Lim Guia, migrated as a small boy from Amoy Province in China to Bulusan town, Sorsogon Province, the Philippines, in the early 19th century. He had a brother with him who also settled in the adjacent town of Irosin, Sorsogon. After my grandfather courted and won the heart of my grandmother, Baldomera Sesbreño, a Filipina of Malayan ancestry, he asked her family for her hand in marriage. But my grandmother's family wanted the wedding to be held in a Catholic church. The parish priest of Bulusan said that in order to be married to a Catholic like Baldomera, my grandfather had to be baptized first. And no Chinese names were allowed. Ergo, my grandfather was baptized as "Alfonso Reyes," the names that he chose from a list of first and last names at the parish registry. My Chinese grandfather then became an instant Filipino Hispanic. On the other hand his brother chose to remain as a Lim and his descendants continue to carry to date the Lim surname.

And speaking of baptismal names, many Filipino families follow the Church calendar. For instance often than not baby boys born on the feast day of Saint Joseph are named Jose or Joseph while baby girls are named Josefa or Josefina.

When Names Are Like Chips Off the Old Block

But there are some Filipino fathers who name their sons after them. Take for instance Dr. Conrado Pascual, Sr. He named his three sons as Conrado, Jr., Conrado III and Conrado IV. Conrado III in turn named his only son, Conrado V. By the way it was the late Dr. Pascual, Sr., who taught me the motto, "Give until it hurts," which is actually a way of life that embodies all

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that is Christian. (Editor's Note: To read more of Dr. Pascual, please click on this link, [Reinventing the Overseas-Filipino Diet](#) .)

There are some Filipino fathers who use part of their names as prefix to the names given to their sons. This was the case of my uncle-in-law, Teodosio Diño (who was a governor of Sorsogon Province and an undersecretary of National Defense under President Elpidio Quirino). All of the Diño sons had "Teo" as prefix: Teodoro, Teodosio, Jr., Teodulo, Teodorico and Teodolfito.

Then there are Filipino fathers like Godofredo "Fred" Burce Bunao, the Los Angeles-based poet-pundit (now deceased). He used his nickname (and now as his American legal first name) as suffix in naming his sons Alfred, Manfred, Wilfred . . . And when I met Manfred Bunao, I told him that he was lucky that his father opted to use "Fred" as suffix. I said what if Mr. Bunao used the first three letters of his original baptismal name as suffix? Then Manfred would have been named as "Mangod." (Editor's Note: To read more about Mr. Bunao, please just type in "Bunao" in the search box of this website.)

Then there are Filipino fathers who name their sons after heroes and Filipino terms for sunrise or flowers. Another uncle-in-law of mine, Isabelo Ortego, of Allen, Northern Samar, named his sons as Lapu-lapu, Bayani and Sumoroy, and a daughter was named Liwayway. I know of several Filipino women named "Sampaguita," after the national flower of the Philippines.

And did you know that the most common (first) name in the Philippines among women is "Maria"? This is due to the fact that the Catholic Church allows for instance baby girls to be christened as "Sampaguita" or "Liwayway" only if "Maria" - after the Virgin Mary - is added as the first of two names, i.e., "Maria Sampaguita," or in the case of my daughter, "Maria Liza."

And speaking of church-given names, let me relate to you how my father-in-law, Estanislao "Vigan" de los Reyes, was actually baptized twice. His father, Isabelo (Don Belong) de los Reyes, allowed him to be baptized as "Estanislao" in the Catholic Church, following the wishes of his wife. Then Don Belong had him baptized in the Philippine Independent Church (PIC), which he founded on Aug. 2, 1902, as part of the Philippine independence movement. Estanislao was baptized again in the PIC as "Vigan," after Don Belong's hometown of Vigan, Ilocos Sur. The brother of Estanislao (AKA "Vigan") was christened in the Catholic Church as "Enrique" and was baptized in the PIC as "Yaman," the Filipino term for "wealth."

The spitfire of a community leader in Southern California, Lee de Guzman Cummings (now deceased), was baptized also in the PIC as "Luningning." When she became an American

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citizen, she changed her first name to "Lee." It was not only two syllables and seven letters shorter but also convenient as a name in the field of entertainment. (Lee Cummings sings at and emcees many Filipino-American events.)

Naming Names During the American Regime

After the Americans took over the Philippines as a result of the Spanish-American conflict and the Filipino-American War, Filipinos started to name babies after American heroes and characters. The Spanish name "Jorge" became "George" and most people pronounced the former with the one-syllable less "George."

And speaking of Americanized names, there is a good anecdote in the Bicol Region. The story says that after several years of education under Thomasite teachers, many Bicolnons started naming children the American way. The story says that a boy and a girl were born as twins to a woman whose husband was working in Manila. An uncle happened to be at the hospital when a nurse asked for the names of the twin babies that would be recorded in the civil registry form. Since the mother was still asleep due to the anesthesia given during the caesarean-section delivery, the uncle named the baby girl as "Denise" and the baby boy as "Denephew."

And speaking of nicknames, many Filipino families call as "JR" a son who is named as the Junior of his father. Many Filipinos like to have acronyms for nicknames.

My daughter, Maria Liza, wanted also "JR" as nickname for her son and so she and her husband named the boy as "Jose Rafael." But her mother-in-law wanted to call the baby as "Angelo." So they compromised; "Angelo" became the baby's nickname. Now everybody calls Jose Rafael as "Gelo."

And talking of acronyms, I wanted to keep alive the memory of Supreme Court Justice Jose Benedicto Luna (JBL) Reyes. He was not related to my family but I considered him to be one of the finest and bravest (against the imposition of martial law in 1972) members of the Philippine Supreme Court. So I named my first-born son, Jose Benigno Lawrence, so that I could call him by the nickname of "JBL." And not only did I attribute "Jose" to Justice JBL Reyes but also to

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the late Sen. Jose Diokno and my uncle, former Executive and Education Secretary Jose S. Reyes, who was also a pensionado to the United States and a former dean at the University of the Philippines in Cebu. The "B" in "JBL" was taken after Sen. Benigno Aquino, Jr., and the "L" after Sen. Lorenzo Tañada, spelled the Portuguese way. My son was born in January 1973, at the height of the martial-law days in the Philippines. I wanted his name and the acronym of a nickname to serve in one way as some kind of protest against the imposition of martial law. There was only one flaw in naming my son as "Jose Benigno Lawrencio Reyes y de los Reyes." My son complained that he was always the last to finish test papers at the La Salle Greenhills elementary school, as it took him nearly forever to write down his full name.

I named my second son after Dean Jose S. Reyes, after also my first employer, Dean Van Lines, and the various exemplary deans that I admired at San Beda College and the Ateneo de Manila College of Law, where I studied journalism and law, respectively. So I came up with four names for my second son, "Dan Eugene André Norman" with "Dean" as the acronym. Unfortunately the child died after 40 days. My son, JBL R. Reyes, named in turn his first-born Dean, in memory of his late brother. JBL's son, Dean M. Reyes, is the first fifth-generation Reyes.

How Filipino Americans Are Adopting American Names

Now Filipinos in the United States are being forced to adopt the American way of having a first name and a second name, aside from the surname. My son, JBL R. Reyes, appears simply in his California driver's license and immigration papers as Jose B. Reyes.

And Filipinos can of course change their names when they become American citizens. The poet-pundit, Godofredo B. Bunao, simply became Fred B. Bunao. Remember the Dayangdayangs of Leyte? One of its scions, Angel Dayangdayang, immigrated to the United States. When Angel became an American citizen, he changed his family name to "Dayan" and he is often mistaken now for a nephew of Israel's Moshe Dayan.

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There are humorous stories about Filipinos changing their names when they become citizens of the United States. One Filipino by the name of Juan Carpentero became John Carpenter and an instant relative of the famous American astronaut. Another by the name of Mariano Baranda became Marlon Branda and who now perhaps aims to become a Filipino-American godfather.

What Is in a Name?

So, what's in a name? A lot. For example when I write, I prefer to use my Hispanic name, as arranged the Mexican and South-American way. I prefer to be known – as a writer – as Roberto Reyes Mercado. (The Spaniards would arrange my name as Roberto Reyes y Mercado. The Mexicans and the South Americans dropped off the "y.") Many Filipinos, who are not familiar with the Hispanic style, call me Mr. Mercado and often ask if I were related to Jose Rizal y Mercado, the national hero of the Philippines. I am not sure if indeed I am a grandnephew of Rizal although my maternal relatives said that our Mercado ancestors migrated from Laguna, Jose Rizal's original province, to Albay sometime in the 1800s. Some of my supporters label me, ahem, as the 21st-century version of Jose Rizal, the activist writer, although I do not want to be shot at the Luneta (now Rizal) Park in Manila.

I tried to tell readers to know the difference between Roberto Reyes Mercado, the political writer and media activist, and Bobby M. Reyes, the apolitical community leader and advocate of socioeconomic causes. I thought that I made the distinction clear but I was wrong. Because of Roberto Reyes Mercado's crusade to seek transparency in, and accounting for the fundraising of, the Philippine-US Tourism Council of Los Angeles, Bobby M. Reyes was charged with libel at the Superior Court of Los Angeles. The name did not really matter, as I was charged as "Bobby M. Reyes, AKA Roberto Reyes Mercado."

Editor's Notes: The Manila Bulletin was the first to publish on Sept. 25, 2000, the story about the libel suit, which is still pending as of April 1, 2001. Joseph G. Lariosa, the Chicago-based correspondent of the Manila Bulletin, wrote the story that landed on the Philippine publication's front-page. The Manila Bulletin also placed the libel story in its web site, with the address: <http://www.mb.com.ph/MAIN/2000-09/MN092508.asp>

So indeed, a rhose, ops, a rose by any other name smells just as sweet.

* * * *

A Rhose, by Any Other Name

By Matthew Sutherland

(As published in the Sunday Inquirer Magazine, Nov. 28, 1999, issue. To read the article in its entirety, please go to: http://www.inquirer.net/mags/nov99wk4/mag_7.htm .)

QUOTE.

W HEN I arrived in the Philippines from the UK six years ago, one of the first cultural differences to strike me was names (sic). The subject has provided a continuing source of amazement and amusement ever since. The first unusual thing, from an English perspective, is that everyone here has a nickname. In the staid and boring United Kingdom, we have nicknames in kindergarten, but when we move into adulthood we tend, I am glad to say, to lose them.

The second thing that struck me is that Philippine names for both girls and boys tend to be what we in the UK would regard as overbearingly cutesy for anyone over about five.

"Fifty-five-year-olds with names that sound like five-year-olds", as one colleague put it. Where I come from, a boy with a nickname like Boy Blue or Honey Boy would be beaten to death at school by pre-adolescent bullies, and never make it to adulthood. So, probably, would girls with names like Babes, Lovely, Precious, Peachy or Apples. Yuk, etc., etc. Here, however, no one bats an eyelid. Then I noticed how many people have what I have come to call "door-bell names". These are nicknames that sound like - well, doorbells. There are millions of them. Bing, Bong, Ding, and Dong are some of the more common. They can be, and frequently are, used in even more doorbell-like combinations such as Bing-Bong, Ding-Dong, Ting-Ting, and so on. Even our newly-appointed chief of police has a doorbell name – Ping.

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None of these doorbell names exist where I come from, and hence sound unusually amusing to my untutored foreign ear. Someone once told me that one of the Bings, when asked why he was called Bing, replied "because my brother is called Bong". Faultless logic. Dong, of course, is a particularly funny one for me, as where I come from "dong" is a slang word for ... well, perhaps "talong" is the best Tagalog equivalent. Repeating names was another novelty to me, having never before encountered people with names like Len-Len, Let-Let, Mai-Mai, or Ning-Ning. The secretary I inherited on my arrival had an unusual one: Leck-Leck. Such names are then frequently further refined by using the "squared" symbol, as in Len² or Mai². This had me very confused for a while.

Then there is the trend for parents to stick to a theme when naming their children. This can be as simple as making them all begin with the same letter, as in Jun, Jimmy, Janice, and Joy.

More imaginative parents shoot for more sophisticated forms of assonance or rhyme, as in Biboy, Boboy, Buboy, Baboy (notice the names get worse the more kids there are -- best to be born early or you could end up being a Baboy). Even better, parents can create whole families of, say, desserts (Apple Pie, Cherry Pie, Honey Pie) or flowers (Rose, Daffodil, Tulip). The main advantage of such combinations is that they look great painted across your trunk if you're a cab driver. That's another thing I'd never seen before coming to Manila - taxis with the driver's kids' names on the trunk.

Another whole eye-opening field for the foreign visitor is the phenomenon of the "composite" name. This includes names like Jejomar (for Jesus, Joseph and Mary), and the remarkable Luzviminda (for Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao, believe it or not). That's a bit like me being called something like "Engscowani" (for England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland). Between you and me, I'm glad I'm not.

And how could I forget to mention the fabulous concept of the randomly-inserted letter 'h'. Quite what this device is supposed to achieve, I have not yet figured out, but I think it is designed to give a touch of class to an otherwise only averagely weird name. It results in creations like Jhun, Lhenn, Ghemma, and Jhimmy. Or how about Jhun-Jhun (Jhun²)?

There is also a whole separate field of name games - those where the parents have exhibited a creative sense of humor on purpose. I once had my house in London painted by a Czechoslovakian decorator by the name of Peter Peter. I could never figure out if his parents had a fantastic sense of humor or no imagination at all – it had to be one or the other.

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But here in the Philippines, wonderful imagination and humor is often applied to the naming process, particularly, it seems, in the Chinese community.

My favourites include Bach Johann Sebastian; Edgar Allan Pe; Jonathan Livingston Sy; Magic Chiongson, Chica Go, and my girlfriend's very own sister, Van Go. I am assured these are real people, although I've only met two of them. I hope they don't mind being mentioned here.

How boring to come from a country like the UK full of people with names like John Smith. How wonderful to come from a country where imagination and exoticism rule the world of names. Even the towns here have weird names; my favorite is the unbelievably-named town of Sexmoan (ironically close to Olongapo and Angeles). Where else in the world could that really be true? Where else in the world could the head of the Church really be called Cardinal Sin? Where else in the world could Angel, Gigi and Mandy be grown-up men? Where else could you go through adult life unembarrassed and unassailed with a name like Mosquito, or Pepper, or Honey Boy? Where else but the Philippines!

UNQUOTE. # # #

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