

REGIONAL CULTURE AS PART OF PHILIPPINE NATIONAL CULTURE

MARCELINO A. FORONDA JR.
De La Salle University
Manila

INTRODUCTION

In my way of thinking, regional culture refers to the language, the folk traditions, the literature, the arts and the lifestyle of people living in the various regions of the country.

These regions are mainly defined by geographical boundaries, although, as in the case of Ilocano culture, the boundaries are defined not merely by geographical limits but also equally important by linguistic considerations.

Ilocano regional culture, for instance, was originally limited to the culture of the Ilocos region in the *original* Ilocano provinces of Ilocos Norte, Ilocos Sur and La Union. Lately, however, Ilocano regional culture has since been expanded to include the culture of Ilocano-speaking inhabitants living in the province of Abra, which was originally a Tinguian territory, or to that of the formerly non-Ilocano speaking provinces of Pangasinan, Tarlac, Nueva Ecija, Cagayan, Isabela, Nueva Vizcaya, Benguet, Bontok, Ifugao, Kalinga-Apayao and Zambales – what some Ilocanos proudly call the "Ilocanized" provinces. In fact, Ilocano culture has even been extended beyond the Philippines, in some parts of California, Hawaii and Guam.

In this paper, therefore, I would like to use the Ilocano regional cultural experience as basic frame of reference in my discussion of a regional culture which has since become part of Philippine national culture. Not that it is the best regional model possible (although partial Ilocanos might be inclined to think so), but that it is the regional cultural experience with which I am best familiar.

I would also like to pinpoint certain areas of a regional culture which are now a part of national culture, and point out certain directions which a regional culture might take in its efforts to preserve and disseminate itself at the same time that it enriches Philippine national culture.

I would like to begin by saying that regional culture, far from being divisive, complements, even enriches the broader fabric of Philippine national culture. Indeed, national culture is nothing but the sum total of all the local or regional cultures taken together.

I also hasten to add that he who loves his regional culture is no less nationalistic, nor less patriotic for doing so.

As I have had occasion to say elsewhere, love "of a country or nation does not obviate nor does it obliterate love of a town, province or region. On the contrary, one who does not love his own town, province, or region – or the traditions intimately intertwined with the historical developments of that town, province or region will find it extremely difficult, if not impossible, to love a larger – and even more mythical – body politic known as a nation" [Marcelino A. Foronda Jr. *Some Notes on Philippine Historiography* (Manila: United Publishing Co., 1972), p. 12].

Certainly, if we are to have a more perceptive, a more complete and, therefore, a much more genuine love of Philippine national culture, it is inescapable that we should first of all love the culture of our town, province or region. One complements the other. Far from fostering regionalism, we may say that if one is to understand, and consequently appreciate the complex entity that is Philippine culture, it is inevitable that people should first know the culture of their own town, not to say their province, or region, that forms part, as it were, of the much larger mosaic that we now call the Philippine national cultural experience (An adaptation of *loc. cit.*).

In truth, we may never achieve a fuller understanding of the Philippines and the culture of its people if we fail to study the culture of our towns, our provinces and our regions. And it is this culture of our towns, provinces and regions that we call regional culture, to distinguish it from general, national or universal culture.

To be sure, the Ilocanos share many cultural traits with their countrymen of whatever regional grouping: close familial ties, hospitality, respect for elders and a sense of fatalism.

But the Ilocanos also have some typical characteristics, which may indeed contribute to the stereotype of the Ilocanos, as they appear in their literary works or as they live in actual fact, the virtue of thrift and of hardwork, a sense of adventure and a pioneering spirit, ingenuity and an extraordinary persistence in eking out a living from their barren soil.

To be sure, such traits are expressed in their own culture. Their language, for instance, is characterized by a certain hardness and bluntness thus reflecting the harsh life of the Ilocanos; a definite contrast to the declamatory tone of the Tagalogs, or the wistful, somewhat effete intonation of the Ilongos, which, for their part, somewhat manifest the easy life of both Tagalogs and Ilongos. The Ilocanos' song, the **Pammulinawen**, which has almost become the national anthem of the Ilocano nation, has a sprightly, martial spirit, a direct contrast to the soulful and sentimental kundiman of the Tagalogs, or the equally sentimental balitaw of the Visayans.

The same vigorous Ilocano spirit is reflected in their pre-Hispanic epic, the **Biag ni Lam-ang**, although the version as handed down to us was only written down in the latter part of the nineteenth century and thus inevitably carries some Spanish influences and, therefore, certain refinements so typical of the Spanish colonial period.

But possibly an effective medium in Ilocano literature to show these influences – an intense love of the Catholic faith, the refinements of the effete upper class, Chinese mestizo Vigan society, thus somewhat lacking the sturdy Ilocano regional spirit – was Leona Florentino. She was, according to Gregorio F. Zaide, "the first poetess of the Philippines" [For a study of her poetry, see my work, *Dallang: An Introduction to Philippine Literature in Ilokano and Other Essays*. Belinda A. Aquino, Ed. (Honolulu, Philippine Studies, Asian Studies Program, University of Hawaii, 1978), pp. 36-42].

If one were to look for the earthy, down-to-earth spirit of the Ilocanos, one has to read the stories of Manuel Arguilla written, strangely enough, not in his native Ilocano but in English [See his *How My Brother Leon Brought Home a Wife and other Stories*. with an *Introduction* by A. V. H. Hartendorp. (Manila: Philippine Book Guild, 1940), 245 p.]. And if one were to seek the middle class values of Ilocano families living beyond the confines of the original Ilocos, one has to read the stories of Gregorio Brillantes, also written in English and set against a Tarlac background [See his *The Distance of Andromeda and Other Stories*. (Manila: Benipayo, 1960, 265p.).

And while the Ilocano experience in communities beyond the seas has been depicted lately in short stories written by Ilocano authors writing in Ilocano in Hawaii [See Pacita Cabulera Saludes and Mario A. Albalos, Eds. *Bullalayaw: Antologia dagiti Nangahak iti Salip iti Sarita iti 1976-1977*. (Honolulu: Gumil-Hawaii, 1978), XIV, 187p.], it is, I think, the Ilocano writer Carlos Bulosan who has best depicted the tribulations of the early Ilocano immigrants to the United States in his book in English, **America is in the Heart** [Earlier published in New York by Harcourt (c1946); later reissued in Manila by Alberto S. Florentino (1973) and in Seattle and London by the University of Washington Press (1973 and 1975)].

No less significant writing has been done in the Ilocano language to depict the Ilocano experience; in fact, a considerable body of significant literature has been produced and still continues to be produced in that language for the past many years.

The Ilocano experience during the revolution against Spain has been described by Marcelino Peña Crisolago in his novel **Mining, wenno Ayat ti Cararua** [*Mining wenno Ayat ti Cararua*. (Vigan 1932), 450p.], while Ilocano immigration to Cagayan and to the United States has been depicted in novels written by Arsenio T. Ramel [See his *Ti Maingel ti Kabambantayan*, a novel serialized in *Bannawag*, XVI, 27 (February 7, 1955) to XVII, 31 (May 5, 1956)] and Marcelino A. Foronda Jr. [See my novel *Ramut iti Gangannaet* serialized in *Bannawag*, XXV, 1 (August 19, 1963) to XXV, 40 (May 18, 1964), respectively].

The most ambitious literary work on Ilocano immigration, however, has been undertaken by the well-known fictionist Francisco Sionil Jose, whose tetralogy of generations of Ilocano immigration to Pangasinan has been published [See his *The Pretenders and Eight Short Stories* (Manila: Benipayo, c1960), 328.; *My Brother, My Executioner* (Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1973), xi, 187p.; *Tree* (Manila:

Solidaridad Publishing House, c1978), v, 133p.; *Po-on, A Filipino Novel* (Manila: Solidaridad Publishing house, 1984), 204p.; and *Mass, A Filipino Novel* (Manila: Solidaridad Publishing House, c1979), 232p.] While written in English, Jose's novels will, for many years to come, remain as practically a definitive study in Philippine fiction of what happens to an Ilocano immigrant – whether to Pangasinan or to Pobres (Forbes? Park) – and to his descendants.

But Ilocano regional culture is also expressed in painting and sculpture, in folk and practical arts like embroidery and the Ilocano cuisine, as well as in religious institutions.

Filipino art connoisseurs always think of the Ilocano painter Juan Luna when they refer to Philippine painting. But the ordinary viewers may find it difficult to call his art "typically" Ilocano, or typically Filipino, whatever that means. For Luna followed the prevailing international style of his times, in much the same way that Ilocano painter Lamarrosa and the late Ilocano printmaker Ray Albano follow the international style of today.

What would pass for typically Ilocano art could well be the intricately embroidered satin robes of religious statues – the *santos* – done in gold or in silver thread, which were the handiwork of anonymous Ilocano embroiderers during the Spanish colonial period.

Embroidery was cultivated as a utilitarian art form even in our very own times, although in more recent years it has become patently secular, as evidenced in the richly colorful table cloths, bed spreads, napkins and window curtains many of which found their way into foreign markets, mainly in the United States where adventuresome Ilocano immigrants had settled down.

This art form is all but wiped out now, with the advent of cheap machine embroidered materials.

Sculpture has up to more recent times been cultivated in the Ilocos (sculptors from San Vicente, Ilocos have a regional reputation). Today, many of those so-called tourist "Igorot" art are actually done by Ilocano artisans in the Ilocos. During the Spanish colonial period, however, anonymous Ilocano sculptors decorated the altars of their churches with their own works, a good example of which is the flat statue of San Vicente Ferrer done in silver by an Ilocos Sur artisan. But most Ilocano sculptors used softwood and hardwood as medium for their work, a good example of which is an angel's statue, which is polychromed, done in La Union

All the sculptors are not known by name, but a rare exception was Juan Nepomuceno Tolentino from Magsingal, Ilocos Sur who did an interesting retable for the main altar of his hometown church, where it was installed.

Painting was cultivated in Ilocos during the Spanish colonial times, although, as in the case of the nameless Ilocano sculptors, Ilocano painters of the times also remained anonymous. Most of their work have not survived the ravages of time, or if they did, they still have to be brought to the attention of art and cultural historians. Lately, however, the 14 paintings commemorating the Basi revolt by Esteban Villanueva of Vigan have been publicized. These primitive paintings, done in the

second half of the nineteenth century, are characterized by vivid style and a charm typically their own, and are among the very few surviving examples of paintings during the period. Other paintings by Esteban Villanueva, who was a businessman and a self-taught painter, have still to be discovered.

Ilocano dishes, on the other hand, do not generally have the refined embellishments of the Pampango kitchen, for instance, again possibly reflecting the harsh life in the Ilocos. The ordinary Ilocano peasant, for instance, relishes practically raw or near raw dishes. The kilawen, half-cooked goat's or cow's meat sliced thin, raw fish in vinegar, raw tomatoes eaten with bagoong, are favorites in his kitchen. The folkloric pinakbet (eggplants, ampalaya and other vegetables cooked with bagoong and few slices of pork) is a runaway favorite of Ilocanos and, has in effect, become to the Ilocano table what Pamulinawen is to Ilocano music.

Another Ilocano favorite is the papait or pinapaitan, made up of chopped innards of either cow, carabao or goat, with small slices of meat thrown in for good measure, and cooked with vinegar soup and with papait, which is the predigested grass in goat's, carabao's or cow's bile.

Ilocano culinary ingenuity might be evidenced in the fact, as a Tagalog writer once put it, that the Ilocano can actually turn one medium-sized goat, slaughtered, into a complete feast; the hump as roast, the shoulders as stew the innards as pickled aperitif.

But the Ilocano, like his other brothers of the other regions of the country, does not live by rice and fish, or for that matter, pinakbet or papait alone. He is, like the Bicolano, deeply religious after his own fashion. By a process of adaptation, the Ilocano has significantly welded together Hispanic Christianity and some of his pre-Spanish folk beliefs. He has, for instance, held on to what is believed to be pre-colonial rituals meant to propitiate angered spirits and has given these rituals a Christian coloring, as in the *kuskusip* (a corruption of St. Joseph) and the *atang*, during which ritual food is offered as gifts to propitiate angered spirits.

These religious practices indicate the Ilocano reaction to the imposition of institutionalized Christianity. This reaction would be institutionalized in the many revolts in the Ilocos during the Spanish era and colorum movement among the Ilocanos of Pangasinan, if not in some Rizalist cults of today, many of whose members are actually Ilocanos.

But a more formal reaction to the Catholic faith was the establishment of the Philippine Independent Church by Aglipay and his fellow Ilocanos, notably the writer and nationalist Isabelo de los Reyes in 1902.

Other Ilocanos, however, like the University of the Philippines president and Supreme Court Justice Jorge Bocobo, and the senator, statesman and educator Camilo Osias joined the Methodist and other Protestant churches earlier established by the American ministers in the Ilocos, and to this day many of the leaders and members of these non-Roman Catholic churches including President Fidel V. Ramos are Ilocanos.

Most Ilocanos, however, opted to remain in the church of their forefathers, and today many Catholic archbishops, bishops, priests and religious sisters work not only in the Ilocos but also in other parts of the country and even abroad.

One can, indeed, speak on and on about the multifaceted aspects of Ilocano regional culture, which have richly contributed to the rich mosaic that is Philippine national culture in general. But Filipinos living in the other regions of the country can also do the same thing with respect to their equally rich and variegated cultures, and which have, needless to state, also enriched and continue to enrich the multicolored tapestry that is the culture of our country.

To be sure, there are many other manifestations of Ilocano culture, but which could not be mentioned here for lack of time. But the above-mentioned manifestations of Ilocano culture have transcended the limited confines of the region, and have since become part of the rich granary of what we call Philippine national cultures. That these manifestations of Ilocano regional culture have enriched Philippine national culture goes without saying, and in their own way will help define the limits and boundaries of Philippine national culture.

Still, it might be necessary to mention here that the Ilocano is fiercely in love with his own language, and takes pride in speaking it and in writing his own literature in it. It is, thus, that Ilocano is spoken not only in Ilocos but in many parts of the country and beyond, and the language has become the lingua franca of certain non-Ilocano areas. As noted above, Ilocano literature is being written by Ilocanos living in the Ilocos, in the Ilocanized provinces and even in Hawaii, Guam and California. Far from fragmenting the Filipino linguistic experience, the love of a regional language like Ilocano enriches what is hoped to become the Filipino national language, and can significantly contribute to the creation of an eventual Filipino national literature, both of which are necessary concomitants to the emergence of a truly Filipino national culture.

The creation of a Filipino national language, and, hence, a Filipino national literature is inevitable, although this will take some time. After all, the evolution of the English or for that matter the Spanish (as distinguished from Castilian) languages and the creation of their literatures were not done in a day, so to speak, but in hundreds of years. And I venture to say that something similar to this, although of a much shorter time, is going to happen to Filipino. Already, much more inter-regional travel and more widespread mass media like comics, movies, radio and TV are helping bring this about. While loving his own regional language, and considering it as his own priceless heritage, the Ilocano, and for that matter, the Cebuano, the Ilongo or Pampango, will eventually pick up Filipino, and contribute his own share in its emergence evolution and development.

Nevertheless, the culture – and this includes the language and literature – of the various regions will have to be preserved. Ilocano culture and those of the other regions were developed at some given place and at some given point in our history, as, indeed, they are still being developed, and as such they are not expected to conform to a certain, rigid pattern favoring one linguistic group at the expense of

others, which would be, as Leopoldo Y. Yabes once said, some kind of cultural imperialism.

To be sure, the development of these regional cultures should not be dismissed unfairly as being regionalistic; on the contrary, they should be encouraged to develop, for in their own development will consist their very contribution to the emergence and development of a truly Filipino national culture.

Understandably, the non-verbal expressions of the spirit of these regions like music, the folk or ethnic dances and the works of regional painters and sculptors, by their very nature and through the use of modern mass media techniques shall be easy to disseminate, and shall, thus, be more readily available to other Filipinos not belonging to their linguistic groups, than say, for instance, the regional literatures. The problem is intelligibility, i.e., a novel in Ilocano is not intelligible to a Visayan or Pampangueno, and vice versa. There is thus the need to have the outstanding literary works in the various regions translated into English or Tagalog (Tagalog, however, in spite of the mass media, is still a foreign language to many non-Tagalogs, like the Cebuanos, for instance.) if they are to be made available to a much wider audience. While at first blush, this might seem to be such a gigantic task, it is not so if scholars and students of literature are ready to dedicate their efforts to this task, as it is already being done at De La Salle University and other universities.

Indeed, the task of translation and dissemination of vernacular literatures from the different regions shall demand the dedication of scholars [See my work *Kutibeng: Philippine Poetry in Iloko, 1621-1971* (Manila: De La Salle University, 1976), viii, 153p. and Elena G. Maquiso, *Ulahingan: An Epic of the Southern Philippines*. (Dumaguete City: Silliman University, c1977), x, 315p.] as it shall be the task of graduate students and of institutions of higher learning. Fortunately such work has been undertaken by graduate students of the country's universities [Much work has been done along these lines, some of which might be mentioned here. The late Jose Resurreccion Calip's Ph.D. dissertation, *The Ilocano epic Lam'ang: A Critico-Anthropological Analysis* (Manila: University of Santo Tomas, 1957), Angel A. Cacio's M.A. thesis, *Pagsasalin sa Pilipino ng 'Biag ni Lam-ang' at Pag-aaral ng Matandang Kalinangang Iloko na Inilarawan ng Epiko* (Manila: Dalubhasaang Norinal ng Pilipinas, 1969) and Pilar G. Encarnacion's M.A. thesis *The Novels in Iloko of Marcelino Peña Crisologo: A Critical Study with Special Emphasis on Mining wanno Ayat ti Cararua* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines, 1957) are among the efforts of doctoral and masteral students to study, and thus make better known to others, aspects of Ilocano literature.

Other studies of other vernacular and regional literatures like Juan S. Aguas' M.A. thesis *A Study of the Life of Juan Crisostomo Soto with Special Reference to Alang Dios* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines, 1995), which is a study of the outstanding Pampango dramatist, and Gaudiosa M. Ochotorena's Ph.D. dissertation *Ag Tubig nog Keboklagan (The Kingdom of Keboklagan): A Subanon Epic* (Manila: University of Santo Tomas, 1972), to name just two, are among the earlier and later attempts to study Philippine vernacular literatures.

All the above-mentioned doctoral and masteral theses, except Aguas' and Ochotorena's works, remain unpublished. But by and large the results of these efforts have remained in manuscript form gathering dust in dark unfrequented corners of some graduate school library. What is equally important is to publish them, in popular versions, if necessary, as what has been started by the Cebuano Studies Center at the University of San Carlos.

This leads us to the regional centers for the study of the various regional cultures such as the Cebuano Studies Center of the University of San Carlos, the Samar-Leyte Studies Center of the Divine Word University in Tacloban, Bicol Studies Center of the University of Nueva Caceres in Naga and the Van Vactor Research Center specializing in Filipino-Muslim studies attached to Dansalan College in Marawi, among others. It is interesting to note that these centers are attached to private institutions, although state-run institutions like the Mindanao State University, also in Marawi, and the U.P. Iloilo Ilongo Studies Center and the Mariano Marcos State University Ilocano Study Center in Batac are also engaged in activities analogous to those of these centers.

It will be the task of these centers and others which hopefully will be established in other regions, to help preserve our regional cultures, not only to preserve, but also to develop and disseminate them. In so doing, these centers, rather than fragment the Philippine cultural experience, shall contribute significantly to the development of the multi-colored mosaic that is Philippine national culture.

SYMPOSIUM VI

Symposium Title :	Regional Culture as Part of Philippine National Culture
Moderator :	Academician Rafael D. Guerrero III
Rapporteur :	Academician Leopoldo S. Castillo
Speaker :	Dr. Marcelino A. Foronda Jr.

SUMMARY

Regional culture considering geographical limits and linguistic considerations includes: language, folk traditions, literature, arts and life style. The Ilocano region is an example of regional culture being a part of the national culture. He avers that the Ilocanos share many cultural traits such as close familial ties, hospitality, respect for elders and a sense of fatalism with those from the other Philippine regions.

One question raised was "What is it in the Ilocano that makes him successful in his migratory activities?" The large population in the area limited by Caraballo/Cordillera mountains made the Ilocanos migrate to other areas (provinces) where they worked very hard to support themselves. Moreover, Ilocanos have an operational sense of thrift, "matipid or kuripot", which makes them rich.

Dr. Foronda suggested that regional centers for the study of the various regional cultures such as those in Cebu, Tacloban, Naga, Marawi and others be created and those already operational be expanded to preserve, develop and disseminate the regional cultures as part of the Philippine national culture.

