

**LOCAL HISTORY OF CAVITE: THE CASE OF YOSHIAKI MUTO (KA MUTO)
OF INDANG, CAVITE**

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ABSTRACT

This historical and oral accounts of Yoshiaki Muto (Ka Muto) of Fukushima-ken, Japan attempt to trace back his beginnings as a resident of Indang, Cavite, as a Filipino family man, as a photographer and a businessman before the Japanese occupation in the Philippines, as a clergyman, and as a civilian officer of the Japanese Imperial Army. Using descriptive-analytical or oral historical method in gathering data, the researcher informally interviewed Ka Muto's son and relatives, some church members, and old residents of Indang, Cavite. It was found that due to very limited accounts of Ka Muto, the need to address the question, "Did Ka Muto come to the Philippines by accident, by choice, or by order of the Japanese Imperial Army?" Further, it was found that there are many fallacies about Ka Muto in Indang, Cavite. He was always mistaken to be the Colonel, but it was his eldest son who was once an officer of the Philippine Constabulary. Owing to these findings, it was recommended that further studies on the socio-political history of Indang, Cavite before the Japanese Period be conducted especially among those leading characters who played important roles in the life of Ka Muto, and whose unsung stories have not been well documented as part of the history of the locality of Indang, Cavite.

Keywords: *oral history, local history of Cavite, historical research, local studies*

INTRODUCTION

Yndang or Indang now is an upland town located at the center of the upland region. Early settlements in this region date back to the Old Stone Age. Many articles made by the townsfolk were discovered in the more ancient upland sites of Tagaytay and Indang consisting mainly of tools made of hard stone. It was in 1655 when Indang was formally made a town separated from Mendez and Alfonso with the first Gobernadorcillo, Juan Dimabiling. A part of Silang for about 70 years, the municipality of Indang was organized in 1655 with a prominent native, Juan Dimabiling, as the first gobernadorcillo. The distance between the barrio of Indang and the poblacion of Silang caused the residents of the former great difficulty in transacting officials business and attending religious services. This led the people of Indang to petition higher authorities for the conversion of the barrio into a separate municipality. The petition was granted, and Indang became full-fledged town in 1655 (Saulo & De Ocampo, 1985).

The name "Indang" was derived from indang or inrang, a tree which abounded in that locality in the early days. 'Inrang', according to Medina (1996) as cited in Anciano (2007) was derived from a plant, 'hernandia ovigera' and Merrill (1906) 'artocarpus ovatus' and 'artocarpus cuminiaga', or widely known in other provinces as "anobing". Indang's revolutionary name of Walang Tinag (Immovable) was part of the revolutionists' objective to wipe out all vestiges of the country's colonial past. The town of Indang played a crucial role in the Philippine Revolution. It was in barrio Limbon, Indang, where Andres Bonifacio, defeated in the Tejeros Convention, arrested and prevented from pursuing his counter-revolutionary plan to set up a separate government and army. He and his follower were brought back to Naik, tried by a military court, finally convicted of sedition and treason against the Revolutionary Government headed by General Emilio Aguinaldo.

Indang has churches and chapels run by three religious denominations: the Catholic St. Gregory Church, the Protestant Church, and the Iglesia ni Cristo. Moreover, it was learned from the United Church of Christ in the Philippines that it maintains the Indang Evangelical Church and the Kayquit Evangelical Church.

In the 1880s, Indang was the center of trade in upland Cavite since other three towns like Amadeo, Bailen and Mendez as well as one lowland town (Dasmariñas) did not have markets. During this time, tiangues were held every Monday in Silang, Thursday in Naic, Saturday in Indang, and Sunday in Maragondon. Fish vendors from the coastal towns sold their sea products and other wares on Saturdays in Indang (Medina, 1994). Indang was also known for coffee, black pepper, abaca, Sinamay Indang, cacao, kapok, kalamay Indang and sukan irok. Sinamay Indang was woven and served as a well-known commercial product for Manila markets during the 19th century.

Although a poor municipality in terms of annual income, Indang compares favorably with many towns in the Philippines in the number of outstanding revolutionary figures. Some of them are Severino de las Alas (member of Emilio Aguinaldo's revolutionary cabinet); Raymundo Jeciel (who was with Aguinaldo during his retreat to northern Luzon and former governor of Cavite); General Ambrosio Mojica (politico-military governor of the First Philippine Republic in Samar and Leyte; Hugo Ilagan, and Jose Coronel (both delegates to the Revolutionary Congress in Tarlac, Tarlac.

Based on historical accounts on the distinguished sons of Indang, Cavite, the foregoing revolutionary figures had their own stories of success and failures at the same time. however, oral historical recounts take into account how a certain Japanese man came into contact with the early people of Indang, named Yoshiaki Muto or Ka Muto as fondly called and known by many.

It is in this light that this oral history of Yoshiaki Muto of Indang, Cavite was pursued. It specifically attempted to trace back his beginnings as a resident of Indang, Cavite, as a Filipino family man, as a photographer and a businessman before the Japanese occupation in the Philippines, as a clergyman, and as a civilian officer of the Japanese Imperial Army. Using descriptive-analytical or oral historical method in gathering data, the researcher informally interviewed Ka Muto's son and relatives, some church members, and old residents of Indang, Cavite.

Yoshiaki Muto as a Resident of Indang, Cavite

Yoshiaki Muto was born on November 23, 1891 in Fukushima-ken, Japan. He first landed on Philippine soil accidentally when he and his brother (name unknown) got stranded in Manila aboard a ship sailing for the United States. His original plan was to go to the States to study, but instead of heading to America, the money he had for his studies was used in the purchase of goods for a small business.



MR. YOSHIAKI MUTO

Figure 1. Yoshiaki Muto of Indang, Cavite

When he decided to stay long in the Philippines, he put up a bazaar in Libertad, Pasay City where he met his first wife (name unknown) who died in giving birth to his first daughter named Bonifacia Muto. After sometime, he met Felicidad de Borja Obo, a native of Barrio Cuyab, San Pedro, Laguna, whom he had seven children. Figure 2 shows the photo of Felicidad Obo Muto.



Figure 2. Felicidad Obo-Muto

Ka Muto got married with Felicidad on May 25, 1925 in Sta. Rosa, Laguna. His children were Col. Juanito de Borja, Fidela de Borja, Avelina Muto, Roberto Muto, Victor Muto, Rosita Muto, and Ligaya Muto. De Borja was taken from the surname of Felicidad's mother. Figure 6 shows the children of Ka Muto during the wake of Bonifacia, his first daughter.



Figure 3. The Muto Children - Standing from left to right: Col. Juanito de Borja, Victor Muto, and Roberto Muto; Rosita Muto, Ligaya Muto, Avelina Muto and Fidela de Borja (seated)

While their business was starting to grow, they decided to put up another business in Binan, Laguna where they had a photo studio called "Japanese Studio". After Binan, they moved to Alaminos, Laguna. Then by the late 30s, they transferred again to Indang, Cavite where his first two children were born- Victor and Rosita. They put up various business establishments like the "Japanese Studio", a bazaar, and a small restaurant. They rented the house of Juana Diokno, the daughter-in-law of Don Severino de las Alas along Mabini Street corner San Miguel Street in Indang, Cavite before the invasion of the Japanese Imperial Army.



Figure 4. The former residence and business location of the Muto family

Yoshiaki Muto as a Family Man

As a father and a family man, Ka Muto was a good provider to his family. He was a disciplinarian and hardworking. He was a loving husband and father to his children. He was kind and generous to his neighbors.

Yoshiaki Muto as a Photographer and a Businessman

Ka Muto became famous in Indang as a photographer because his styles, techniques and chemicals used in photography are advanced during his time. His cliché whenever he takes pictures of his customers goes like this: “*Tingin sa barabas*” (Look at my mustache). According to the respondents, he was such a hardworking person who would travel round Cavite on foot with his tripod and camera. Due to the fact that he had his own photo studio, he had been allegedly successful in mapping out the province of Cavite that led to a faster mobility of the Japanese Imperial Army because they are already familiar of the place with the help of Ka Muto. That he was a colonel in the Japanese Army was a common knowledge among the folks of Indang. In 1939, Ka Muto was captured by the officials of Indang for questioning of his being a Japanese, but was later released. Upon his release, he headed back to San Pedro, Laguna where he left his children. He and his wife decided to settle down in Tondo, Manila.

Yoshiaki Muto as a Clergyman

Ka Muto was baptized and became an active member of the Iglesia ni Cristo in September 1937. He initiated the purchase of a house and lot which served as the first chapel of the Iglesia ni Cristo in Indang, Cavite. The money he used to buy the house and lot came from the savings of Felicidad, his wife, with the amount of two hundred pesos. His life story was

once issued in the 1958 Pasugo Magazine, showing his contributions to the Iglesia ni Cristo. He was once a deacon of the Iglesia ni Cristo.

His being a member of the Iglesia ni Cristo was a great help to all his church mates during the Japanese occupation. As quoted by Meimban (1995):

“The war was not without its pleasant times for the church, however. The problem of mobility of the ministers was resolved, partly, with the help of a pre-war converted Japanese national, Brother Yoshiaki Muto, Of Fukushima-ken, Japan. It is not easy to measure in words the critical role Played by Brother Muto. But the assistance he extended to the church, through his influence upon his countrymen can easily be described. He was responsible for the ministers’ passes that enabled them to pass through the Japanese sentries without being frisked or questioned by the guards. The passes, in Muto’s own calligraphy, bore the following words:“ *Watashi-wa shenshi Kiokay no Cristo.*” (I am a teacher of the Church of Christ.)

Yoshiaki Muto as a Civilian Officer of the Japanese Imperial Army

Ka Muto served as an interpreter for General Masaharo Homma, as a judge in the Mesiec in Tondo, Manila wherein he was able to save many Filipinos’ lives from the atrocities brought about by his fellow Japanese. He was the person in the movie, “Camerino”, who released the Filipino prisoners of the Japanese Imperial Army in Cavite. He was the Japanese adviser to the Governor of Cavite during the time of Dominador Camerino.

In 1945, at the age of 54, Yoshiaki Muto went back to Japan. According to Victor Muto (2007) twelve years later, Ka Muto came back to the Philippines not because of his family but to be with the Iglesia ni Cristo. He even reiterated that he was not able to serve the church for twelve years.



Figure 5. Ka Muto at the age of 66

Ka Muto came back to the Philippines in 1957, but died five years later at the age of 71. He was given the honor to have his wake in the Iglesia ni Cristo chapel, a rare honor given to a church member.



Figure 6. The researcher and Mr. Victor Muto during the interview

CONCLUSION

The history of Indang, specifically during the Japanese occupation, has yet to be studied further; for now, it has limited well-documented historical facts. A need to conduct further studies on Yoshiaki Muto's coming to Indang, Cavite is felt to answer the question: "Did Muto come here by accident, by choice, or by order of the Japanese Imperial Army?"

A further study is needed in response to the urgent call for the unsung stories of Indang, Cavite during the Japanese Period. Many leading characters who played important roles during the Japanese occupation are continuously making their exit from life, hence, a study should be conducted the soonest time. There are many fallacies about Ka Muto in Indang, Cavite. He was always mistaken to be the Colonel, but it was his eldest son, Col. Juanito de Borja who was once an officer of the Philippine Constabulary.

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