The System of Sponsorship for Processional Images and the Traditions Associated with them in Cabiao, Nueva Ecija, the Philippines

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ABSTRACT
In the town of Cabiao, as in other towns in the Philippines, Holy Week culminates in the commemoration of the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus. Tableaux of the images of Christ, Mary, the disciples and other saints - called santos - are borne in procession through the main streets of the town. Members of the town ‘élite’ commissioned the images and now stage the processions. To better understand their role, this paper analyses the dynamics of this form of sponsorship, including the systems, structures and practices of santo patronage, using the older images to help identify sponsors in the Spanish period. I used documents to find out more about the background of members of this élite – the estates and properties they owned and the political posts they held. The manuscripts also gave some clues about how and why the sponsorship of santos developed as it did in the mid-19th century.

NB. ‘Élite’ is used here to refer to a particular strata of Philippine rural society. It does not have the negative connotations (uncaring wealth and privilege) that the term suggests in many other parts of the English-speaking world.

Keywords
religious images, traditions, processions, élite, santo sponsorship, lands, festivals, Holy Week, chants, colonial art, Cabiao, Philippines

Introduction
The agricultural towns of Central Luzon still possess a number of old processional images which are popularly known as santos. Comparatively few studies have analysed the system of patronage surrounding these images, although it is widely acknowledged that the ancestors of their present-day owners belonged to the most prominent families of the various towns. There are
even fewer studies that have examined the political achievements and financial backgrounds of these people. This study seeks to understand the dynamics of this form of sponsorship by focusing on the town of Cabiao and its old processional santos and their owners.

This study has not only investigated the backgrounds of the people who own the santos and maintain the traditions, but also the possible origins of this form of sponsorship. I have examined the forces that helped to form the municipal élites and the position they assumed during the latter half of the 19th century. I have also identified the resources they used to support these activities - the houses and estates they owned. This paper seeks to show how, in the context of 19th century Spanish-period Cabiao, the town’s élite managed to commission the images and finance the processions and pabasa [chants that extol the life and passion of Jesus].

The term ‘élite’, as used in this paper, is defined as those individuals who occupy positions of formal authority at the head of a social organisation or institution. [Turner 1989, p.284, quoting Giddens]. I used two approaches to gather the data. First, an interview identified what santo owners knew about their ancestors. Using this information as a springboard, I searched archives to find and examine documents which listed positions held by these people as well as the properties they owned. Whenever possible, I tried to check the information I was given in interviews against the documentary evidence.

Due to the limited time available to devote to this study, I was unable to search for documents that would have provided important data about the santo owners’ ethnicity and their relationships with the other élites within the town - interesting information that would have given a clearer picture of Cabiao. I can therefore only provide sketches rather than complete profiles of the individuals concerned.

The santos and their accoutrements such as vestments and carrazas [the wheeled platforms or floats used during processions] were analysed as art objects by examining form and style in the same way one would use these characteristics to evaluate a work of art. This enabled me to distinguish older images from recent ones and to corroborate the information I was given. This is helpful since there is a common belief that anything that is more than fifty years old is ‘ancient’. In fact I was able to use art historical methods to estimate the approximate dates when the various images were commissioned.

The significance of the traditions that the élites’ sponsorship fostered can be gauged by the importance of the festivities, those celebratory aspects of life whose main form of expression involves religious images. Traditions are an important part of people’s lives, and, according to UNESCO’s Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage [2003],...social practices, rituals and festive events are areas where intangible cultural heritage is expressed. The main aim of this study was to stress the importance of those unique activities that distinguish Cabiao from other towns, something that is particularly interesting in our increasingly globalised and homogeneous world.

Uniqueness is apparent only if parallel examples are identified. Fernandez lists various festivities that took place in Manila during the Spanish period, quoting contemporary sources to explain in detail how the celebrations were enacted, defining the hierarchy of people within the processions, and describing the decorations in the streets in an effort to show the beginnings of native theatre [Fernandez: 1988]. The Holy Week processions in Manila contained all the usual elements, although they were grander in scale than the ones in Cabiao, including the jewels, rich fabrics and precious metal trimmings that appear in the descriptions of the Maundy Thursday and Good Friday processions [Fernandez: 1988].

The vital components of all these traditions - and this article only discusses the pabasa and the processions - are the religious images. Certain groups of religious images that were sent to Mexico and Spain are extremely fine and exhibit unique characteristics, enabling connoisseurs and art historians to identify them as originating in the Philippines. Today these are known as ‘Hispano-Filipino’ pieces [Marcos: 1997]. The aesthetics of the ivory pieces reveal much about the people who carved them; for example, Chinese influences - in the almond-shaped eyes, fine noses and candle-shaped fingers of the female saints - are clearly discernible in the older images [Gabonton: 1983, Jose: 1990, Marcos: 1997, Galende & Jose: 2000]. Although most articles on santos deal extensively with the small, ivory figurines, a few also mention and describe notable processional
images. For example, the magnificent head of Our Lady of Sorrow, now in a private collection in Mexico, demonstrates superb technical skill as well as being a powerfully emotional image [Marcos: 1997, p.142].

Authors regard 19th-century images as artistically inferior since they lack the originality and expressiveness of images of earlier times. In addition, the forms were standardised and the heads lack individuality [Paramio: 1997]. Nonetheless, a few authors have written about the wooden religious statues.

Victor S. Venida discussed religious images in connection with their owners, who he regarded as members of the ‘rural aristocracy’. In his 1996 article, he explains his ideas by analysing the aristocracy and the feudal system in Europe, particularly in England and the Italian city-states [Venida: 1996]. Taking these systems as models, my study analyses that section of the rural aristocracy who were the sponsors or ‘patron-owners’ of the santos and of the traditions associated with them. It focuses solely on the town of Cabiao, identifying the owners of the older images, establishing their political status and tracing their family lineage through interviews with their descendants and archival research to corroborate local knowledge. My preliminary investigations have also provided a possible origin for the way the santos are sponsored – and this is one area where Venida felt additional research was needed.

In this paper, I discuss the dynamics of santo sponsorship by analysing the old santos of Cabiao, the lineages and political influence of the families involved, as well as the resources which enabled them to patronise the workshops of Manila, renowned for the fine quality of their work. I also trace the origins of santo sponsorship in the mid-19th century.

The town of Cabiao

The town of Cabiao, located in the southwestern part of the province of Nueva Ecija, was formerly a part of Pampanga before it was transferred to Nueva Ecija, together with Aliaga, San Isidro and Gapan, in 1848 [Ereccion Nueva Ecija, Vol. 1779-1898]. Lying near the banks of the Pampanga River, a number of streams -
also referred to as sapa or esteros - such as the Campana, Palapala, Pinaglumuan, Sinipit, Macababac, and Bancabancan - criss-cross the town (Borja: 1898). In Memoria, Rojas [1887] tells us that the surrounding fields were mostly planted with rice, corn, tobacco and sugar cane. In 1887, the town’s urban fabric consisted almost entirely of structures made of nipa (a species of palm whose fronds are used as a building material); only the church and convent were built of stone [Rojas: 1887].

There were two overland routes into the town. One was the main road that crosses Bulacan and passes through the town of San Isidro, the other was the Manila-Dagupan railway to San Fernando station. It was also possible to reach Cabiao by water, along the Pampanga River from San Fernando through Arayat [Monet: 1892].

Shaping traditions: the municipal élites and the sponsorship of the santos

So far, the only known reference to the sponsorship of santos in Nueva Ecija relates to the town of San Isidro. The town was founded in 1840, when land was allocated for the public buildings, such as the casa tribunal [court house], the school, the church and the convent [Ereccion Nueva Ecija, Vol. 1837-1897]. The parish was created at the same time as the town, and consequently plans were also made for the religious celebrations that would take place there:

The community of principales [the town élite consisting of cabezas de barangay [village heads] and former gobernadorcillos, the equivalent of the present-day mayors] have also arranged whatever is necessary for a decent celebration of the festivities of the Corpus [Christi] and patron saint, and some residents have already committed to furnish the images and andas [shoulder-borne processional platforms] so that the coming year’s Holy Week could be decently celebrated (Ereccion Nueva Ecija, Vol. 1837-1897, p. 61).

Although only the commissioning of the Holy Week images is mentioned in this passage, it can be inferred that when the parish was established, all of the images needed for the most important celebrations, including the town fiesta, would have been ordered at much the same time. In the case of San Isidro, the image of the patron saint is not mentioned because the village of San Isidro, which was to be the centre of the new town, already had a chapel and an image of the saint [Ereccion Nueva Ecija, Vol. 1837-1897].

Images were expensive. Sponsoring a santo entailed considerable capital outlay: the sponsor had to pay for carving the sculpture, dressing it, decorating it with halos and other attributes and transporting it from Manila to Cabiao. The likely cost can be gauged from the fine workmanship of the images in Cabiao which show all the characteristics of sculptures carved in reputable Manila workshops. In the Agony in the Garden the sculptural tableau, a replacement for an earlier image that was lost when the owner’s residence burnt down, is unique in that it is dated and signed: it was carved in 1958 by Adrian Cristobal. The workshop of one of the last great sculptors in Quiapo, Ireneo M. Cristobal [Gatbonton: 1983], was one of the most famous during the American period (early 20th century). Ireneo Cristobal’s son, Adrian, continued the family workshop.

Additional expenditure was needed each year for the processions and pabasas. This came from various sources. Some families, like that of the owner of the Agony in the Garden, covered the expenses of their pabasa and procession out of income. Other families, like those of the owners of the Santo Entierro and the Medalla Milagrosa used the income from lands allocated to the santo. The Tercera Caida’s [Third Fall of Jesus on the Road to Calvary] expenses are paid for by two months rent on a four-room apartment in the university area of Manila. The owner of the Dolorosa and San Juan subsidises his expenses from mudish caught at the pusawon, or ponds, allocated for the purpose.

The owners of the santos were able to acquire and maintain the statues, and finance their participation in the processions, because they were landowners. The forebears of the owners of the Tercera Caida had parcels of land planted with tobacco and rice in the vicinity of Poldio and Planas Creek [Borja: 1898], the proceeds from which could be used to fund these activities. Further research is needed to check whether their ancestors also owned lands near Quemaligan and Sinipit Creeks. The forebears of the owners of the Dolorosa and San Juan, on the other hand, had estates in Pinaglumuan,
Guyongguyong, Cambabalo and Macabaclay (Borja).

The santo owners were not only landowners - they also held positions of power as gobernadorcillos or cabezas de barangay. We know that an ancestor of the owner of the Tercera Caida was a member of the principalia because of his title - 'Don' - which was conferred when someone was elected to the post of the cabeza de barangay (Asuntos: 1880). The political career of the ancestor of the owner of the Dolorosa and San Juan is well documented. His tenure spanned much of the second half of the 19th century and he initially assumed the position of cabeza de barangay in cabecera 6 [village 6] in the town of Cabiao in 1857 [Relacion, n.d.]. Later, he was elected as gobernadorcillo for the biennale 1889-1891 [Ortiz-Luis:1891-1893].

During the first half of the 1980s there were only eleven carrozas in the Holy Thursday procession. The leading image was the old San Pedro [Saint Peter, the disciple to whom Jesus entrusted His church and whose attributes include the keys of the Kingdom and the rooster, the symbol for his denial of Christ]. A new image, which is in the annual procession today, was commissioned by the Lumbang Garcia family. This is followed by the Panalangin sa Halamanan [Agony in the Garden] a representation of the first 'sorrowful mystery' of the rosary. The image was carved in 1958 after the original, initially owned by the Galang line of the Relucio family (maternal line of the Duque family), was burnt. The Duque family also owns the image of the Samaritana [Samaritan Woman with Jesus], a biblical scene, dating from 1969. The tableau of the Huling Hazunan [Last Supper], which is owned by Rosario Lucero Viuda de San Agustin and family, follows it.

A series of images of Jesus follow: Ang Kristong Nakagapos sa Halging Bato [The Scourging at the Pillar] depicts the second 'sorrowful mystery' of the rosary, which is owned by the Lapus clan. There is also a representation of the first time Jesus fell on the road to

The aesthetic quality of the santos

The processions in Cabiao that focus on the passion of Jesus were traditionally celebrated on Holy Thursday and Good Friday. Another procession, which commemorates the meeting of Mary and Jesus, takes place at dawn on Easter Sunday.

Plate 2
The carroza of the Santo Entierro is decorated with sampagutta garlands in preparation for the Good Friday procession, 2011.
Photo: Romeo B. Balang, Jr.
Calvary, known as the Nazareno (The Nazarene) because Jesus was from Nazareth. This is the fourth 'sorrowful mystery' of the rosary and it is owned by Francisco Abes and his family. A tableau of five figures, Ang Ikatlong Pagkarapa (Tercera Caida or the Third Fall of Christ on the Road to Calvary), belongs to the Galang family. The scene where Jesus lies in His mother's arms after He was taken down from the cross is known as the Pieta. The Duque family's Pieta was destroyed when their house burnt down and a new one was subsequently commissioned by the Briones family.

The single images that come near the end of the procession are commonly referred to as the libing or 'funeral entourage', and they consist of the three Marys who followed Jesus on the way to Calvary - Santa Maria Salome (Saint Mary Salome), Santa Maria Jacobel (Saint Mary, wife of Clopas), and Santa Maria Magdalena (Saint Mary Magdalene) who, according to tradition, was the one who poured expensive perfume on Jesus' feet, hence her attribute is a bottle of perfume. The statue of Santa Maria Salome, owned by Dr. Benedicto Gungon, Sr. holds a censer as her attribute. The original head of the figure of Santa Maria Jacobel was stolen in the late 1980s. It was replaced and the statue is now cared for by Ricardo Mesina. The figure of Santa Maria Magdalena is now owned by the heirs of Rufino Parungao. The images of San Juan (Saint John the Beloved or Saint John the Evangelist, the disciple to whom Jesus entrusted His mother) and Dolorosa (Mary as Our Lady of Sorrows), which have been owned by the Ortiz-Luiz family since time immemorial, complete the Holy Thursday procession. On Good Friday the procession is the same but with the addition of the Santo Entierro (Christ at the Sepulchre), which was inherited from Fernandez de Leon and is now being kept by the heirs of Beatriz Talens-Romero.

The older images are characterised by fine, detailed craftsmanship. In the images of Jesus and the bearded saints, workshops that adhered to the old traditions gave their figures very realistic beards and moustaches - every strand of hair was carved individually (Galbonta: 1983, Jose: 1990, Estella Marcos: 1997, Paramio: 1997). This meticulous work can be seen in the images of the Tercera Caida and, to some extent, in both the processional and non-processional versions of Santo Entierro. Since the images in the Holy Week processions display intense
emotions, the figures were usually depicted with half-open mouths, showing parts of their top teeth as well as their tongues - characteristics that are also evident in the old images (Estella Marcos, Paramio). The most expressive examples are the Dolorosa, San Juan, Santa Maria Magdalena, the Scourging at the Pillar and the Tercera Caida. The images have classical proportions. In two of the images - the Dolorosa and San Juan - the images are rendered in contrapposto (counterpoise), their bodies twisted slightly to one side.

Symbols and motifs: east meets west

The companion statues of San Juan and Dolorosa, which always follow each other during processions, give an insight into the workshop where they were carved. The silver work shows vestiges of Buddhist influence as the lotus (Paramio: 1997) - a symbol of purity - adorns not only the panels of the two carrozas but also the baroque pen of San Juan. Both the carrozas are octagonal (ochavado) in shape. On the carroza of San Juan the lotus flower is the central motif of each of the eight panels and it is encircled by a band surmounted by acanthus leaves at each of the cardinal points. On the corner panels the same design is oriented vertically. The pendulant design consists of the same central figure which hangs from an acanthus leaf motif. Beneath the central figure hang three heart-shaped lotus leaves. In contrast, this design is depicted horizontally on the main panels of the carroza. To emphasise the horizontal layout a large acanthus leaf sprouts from each of the lateral abutments of the central figure and is attached to it by C-scrolls.

The carroza of the Dolorosa differs in a number of ways. First, the corner panels are concave in shape, typical of the curved lines of the baroque. Secondly, the main panels have a triangular apex instead of being flat. The silver repoussé design is also different. In the concave corner panels the central figure of the main panels of the carroza of San Juan is repeated, although it now has a vertical orientation. The main panels have a central escutcheon in the middle of which is a flaming heart pierced by seven daggers, symbolising the seven sorrows of the Virgin. Acanthus leaf motifs decorate the top and bottom. The central figure of the concave panels is repeated on a smaller scale on either side of it, but without the C-scroll motif. The band beneath the panels is decorated with lotus leaf motifs. The flaring inferior band is decorated with foliate patterns. The band atop
the main panels is decorated with a pattern of grapes on the corner panels and by the lotus flower motif with fused, flanking lotus leaves over the top of the side panels.

Family traditions

Generally, all of the santo owners maintain the same sorts of family tradition in relation to their santos. Mostly enacted during Holy Week are the pabasa - the chanting of the story of the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus in the native languages of the town of Cabiao which are called Tagalog and Pampango. This ritual can take between sixteen and twenty-four hours. The mambabasa - the chanters - can extend or reduce the time depending on how long the owners want the ritual to last. The pabasa can be lengthened by using a slow tune with plenty of repetitions of words and verses. The longest form of repetition is achieved by interweaving into the pabasa a form known as habi, which means humming stanzas or even entire songs just by uttering the word ‘ha’. The time can be reduced either by using a fast, lively tune or by simply reciting the verses.

For some santo-owners, the pabasa is performed to ensure continuity between one ritual and the next. In the case of the Santo Entierro, the pabasa used to be timed so that it would end in time for the Good Friday procession. In the case of the Tercera Caida, the pabasa used to take place on Holy Wednesday and when it finished the Nazareno was taken out of its urna (wood and glass cabinet) and placed on its carroza for the old Holy Thursday procession. In the case of other images, the pabasas coincide with important occasions - like the pabasa on Palm Sunday for the images of the Dolorosa and San Juan. For the Agony in the Garden, the pabasa takes place on ‘Maundy Monday’, the Monday before Easter.

In most cases, the santo owners can no longer remember the reason or significance of having the pabasa on a particular day. Those reasons are no longer part of the present owners’ collective memory and we can only say that these traditions have been handed down from their forebears. In the case of the Scourging at the Pillar, the heirs of the original owner used to take turns to sponsor the pabasa. This meant that every other year the image was brought to the barrio [village] of Sta. Rita, where members of one of the branches of the family lived. Realising how much damage was being done to the figure by moving it about, the family decided to build a chapel on land belonging to one of their relatives whose house lay within the town proper. The image remains enshrined in the chapel, and is only brought out for the
annual Holy Week procession. The traditional *pabasa* is still held in that chapel, however the family members from Sta. Rita no longer take an active part in the ceremony.

The *pabasa* for the *Tercera Caida* has also been held for many years. The family made a *panata*, or vow, to hold the *pabasa* in the hope that it would put an end to a series of conflagrations at the houses of members of the family. Before they made that vow at least three family homes had burnt down. The focus of the *pabasa*, however, are the figures of the *Santo Entierro* (which is different from the town’s processional image of the *Santo Entierro*) and the *Nazareno*. Before the Second World War, the *Nazareno* of the *Tercera Caida* existed only as a head. During the *pabasa*, this head was propped up on a clay pot at the front of the *Santo Entierro*’s *urna* or showcase. When the *pabasa* was still being held on Holy Wednesday, the members of the family from the matriarchal line used to borrow the image of the *Santo Entierro* for their own *pabasa* which was held on Holy Thursday. Unfortunately this tradition was discontinued some time ago.

The really important traditions for the *santo*-owners are the processions. In the past, Holy Week processions took place on Holy Thursdays and Good Fridays. Many changes have happened over the years to this part of the tradition; some have been brought about by happenstance while some were the result of the priest’s intervention.

The preparation of the statues for the procession starts with the dressing of the images. In the case of the *Tercera Caida*, *Dolorosa* and *San Juan*, this takes place on the day before the *pabasa*. The dressing of the *Dolorosa* is a particular sort of ritual because only the female members of the family are allowed to participate.

Colour is symbolic. In Catholic imagery the saints are identified by the colour of their vestments. This symbolism is closely connected with biblical stories or with the lives of the saints. As an illustration, red, which symbolises martyrdom, is also associated with faith. Hence Mary is usually clad in a red tunic (the symbol of her enduring faith in her Son) and a blue mantle (the symbol for celestial royalty as she is the Mother of God). The *Dolorosa* usually wears garments of these colours for the Holy Thursday procession, however, on Good Fridays the vestments are changed to mourning clothes - a white tunic and a black robe.
The image of San Juan wears a green tunic (green being the symbol for hope) and a red cape or mantle (the symbol for his great faith in Jesus). These were the colours of the garments in which the image was dressed for the Holy Thursday processions. Unlike that of the other single figures, San Juan’s attire never used to be changed for mourning clothes. However, the red mantle is changed for a green one because red is never worn at funerals in the Philippines as it is a colour that is usually associated with happiness and gaiety.

The vestments are never changed on the images of Jesus. The most prevalent colours for these are maroon, red and white, the latter two being the ecclesiastical colours for the great feast days. In the tableaux of the Agony in the Garden and The Woman of Samaria Jesus wears a white tunic and a red mantle. In the passion tableaux, like The First Fall on the Road to Calvary or the one commonly known as Nazareno, and in the Tercera Caida, maroon, the more subdued shade of red, is used. The Santo Entierro also once had a maroon blanket and a red pillow until the parish priest persuaded the owners to use white vestments instead.

The carrozas are prepared after the images are dressed. The more technical aspects of the mechanisms are usually checked a couple of days before the procession, like the wiring of the electrical fittings (see Plate 6). The system of lighting the carrozas has changed over the years. Candles inside the glass virinas – the crystal covers – were probably the main form of lighting in the past. They may then have used calburo, or lime (calcium oxide). The calburo gave off a bright glow but it had serious drawbacks in the form of its offensive smell and its tendency to explode. This lighting system also entailed having a virina that was open at the top. The floral virinas of the carroza of San Juan date back to the era of calburo lighting. In other towns, the heavy, frosted-glass kalabasa (squash) shaped virinas were also used for calburo.

The carroza itself is a relatively recent development of a processional platform for the santos. Most accounts of processions in the Spanish era (1571–1898) describe the use of platforms known as andas that had to be carried. None of the present owners have any recollection of their carrozas once being andas, although the carrozas of the Dolorosa and San Juan show signs that they could well have been used in that way.

The carroza, the wheeled form of the andas, may have become more common when chariot-type carrozas
were commissioned during the American period. In Cabiao there is only one chariot carroza; this was once used by the Virgen de la Medalla Milagrosa during the Flores de Mayo [the May flower festival]. It is now used during the Holy Week processions for the recently-commissioned image of the Paciencia, a seated figure of Jesus in deep contemplation.

Food for the ceremonies

Food is an important part of all celebrations in the Philippines, even during Lent. For the Tercera Caida, part of the vow the family made was to refrain from serving meat during the pabasa. So they served fish. Soup was made from the eggs of mudfish taken from the pusawan, or ponds, at Nabao. From Pampanga and Manila came fishes like apahap [sea bass], which was steamed and garnished with diced pickles, carrots and slices of boiled eggs in mayonnaise. Other fish like labahita [surgeon fish] were cooked and served as afrita da, sweet-and-sour fish, fish fillet and cardillo – fried fish sautéed with garlic, onions and tomatoes, a bit of water and beaten eggs are then added, becoming a sort of soup or broth. There was also steamed ulang, a freshwater crayfish, and alimango, a species of mud crab. For dessert there were leche flan [custard cake], pastillas [made from milk], ube [yam] and sweetened kundol [wax gourd].

After the Good Friday procession, there is a caridad or charity event at the house where the Tercera Caida is kept to celebrate the pahalik [kissing of the feet] of the version of the Santo Entierro which is not carried in the procession. Everyone partakes of delicacies specially prepared for the occasion, which include sumang inantala [glutinous rice stick wrapped in newly-sprouted coconut leaves and boiled in coconut milk] with kalamay silangan [a concoction of coconut milk, galapong [ground rice] and a little sugar], biko latik [sweetened steamed rice and glutinous rice with fried coconut milk topping], kalamay lanson with latik and suman sa lhiya [glutinous rice stick, wrapped in banana leaves and boiled in lhiya [lye water]]. The owners of the Dolorosa and San Juan also serve an Easter Sunday breakfast after the procession.
The owners’ tenants take part in the celebrations, helping prepare the food and doing some of the work of getting the images ready for the procession. They also help pull the carrozas in the processions.

Breaks in family traditions

The traditions surrounding the religious processions of Cabiao have changed over the years. From time to time fires broke out in the town, burning houses and, in some cases, the religious images. Some of the images that have been affected in one way or another are the Tercera Caida, the non-processional Santo Entierro and the Agony in the Garden, which was totally destroyed by fire in the 1950s. The most recent casualty was the image of the Pieta. The Virgin in this Pieta had two heads, the one used on Holy Thursdays was a finely carved wooden version modelled after Michelangelo’s work, while the other one, used on Good Friday, looked up imploringly to the heavens.

In other cases it was the carrozas that were damaged and so the images they carried could not be used in the processions for a number of years, as was the case with the image of Sta. Maria Magdalena. In the case of the original San Pedro the image was no longer carried in the procession, and although the heirs of the original owners signified their intention of joining in the annual processions again, a new image had already been commissioned by new owners so the old image could no longer take part. Other images whose fates are unknown include Doña María’s Paciencia.

Intervention by the parish priest

Other changes were initiated by various parish priests. Although some of the new mandates were welcomed, others had consequences that became the talk of the town. During the last decades of the 20th century, for example, the priest discontinued the tradition of leaving the carrozas inside the church after the Holy Thursday procession, without any consultation with the santo owners. Hence all the carrozas had to be pulled all the way back to the owners’ homes when the Thursday procession was over. The owner of the images of the Dolorosa and San Juan was particularly affected because his family residence lay well outside the town. The next day the Good Friday procession had to be celebrated without those two images. News of their absence spread through the town and there was speculation about the possibility of an Easter Sunday Salubang [the term means ‘encounter’ or ‘meeting’ and is the name of the Sunday morning procession] taking place without the image of the Virgin. In the end, the owner was prevailed upon to bring the images back to join in the Easter Sunday procession. Thereafter, those images were allotted a space in the church so that they could be left there overnight.

The shifting of the procession from Holy Thursday to Holy Wednesday may seem like a minor change, but as far as some of the owners of the images were concerned the shift made a big difference to their family traditions. For the Tercera Caida, the traditional Holy Wednesday pabasa had to be moved to Holy Tuesday since the focal points of this tradition are the images of the Santo Entierro and the Nazareno of the Tercera Caida. For a time some visitors stopped coming to the pabasa, thinking that it had been discontinued because the family house was closed on Holy Wednesdays.

Conclusion

The origins of the way the santos are sponsored may be traced back to the foundation of the town. The information we have from San Isidro sheds light on the process. It began with the establishment of the town. The image of the town’s patron saint and the tableaux and figures for the Holy Week processions were needed to enable the town to celebrate the traditional religious festivals. The parish priest relied upon the principipia, as well as on some of the prominent residents of the town, for help in acquiring these. The members of the town élite were in a position to purchase the images. First, they held political office as cabezas de barangay or gobernadorcillos and their social position meant they were in constant communication with the parish priest and knew what he needed. Secondly, they could afford to commission the images and to establish and maintain related family traditions. They also had land from which to raise enough income to pay the costs of maintaining the santos and the associated processions and events.

The quality of the images and the materials used in the carrozas show that the élite patronised well-known workshops in Manila. A handful of the images borne in the Holy Week procession in Cabiao today display the fine craftsmanship of statues from the workshops of Quiapo.
and Sta. Cruz. A close scrutiny of the old vestments worn by the images point to colours that are traditionally associated with the iconography and attributes of the saints. During the Spanish period the images’ accoutrements may have been commissioned from the same sculptors as the figures themselves. The symbolism, however, is not limited to Christian iconography but includes Buddhist influences like the lotus flower and leaf motifs on the carrozas of the Dolorosa and San Juan. This shows that the particular workshop that made them had a long enough tradition in the art of sculpture for elements from other religions to have become part of their repertoire. It is well known in Philippine art history that the first carvers of religious images were the Chinese, or Sangleys as they are called in old documents (Jose: 1990).

The images are the focus of family traditions. Again, the means and the capacity of the owner to maintain them stem from the family’s holdings of land, as well as from the contributions of the people who work for them. The activities that are needed to carry out the traditions are labour-intensive, and additional manpower was provided by the owners’ tenants. The system shows the power the owners wielded, not only on their estates but in the town itself. The special place the owners once occupied in the town’s social structure was evident even during the mid-20th century from the way they dressed as well as from their role in the processions. People who took part in the processions used to wear their Sunday best - americana cerrada or suits for the men and baro at saya (blouses and skirts) or native dress for the women. People who did not wear those sorts of clothes had to walk in a separate line. Even in religious celebrations, wealth, power and prestige determined one’s place.

Documents in the archives show that the owners of santos not only had the means, as shown by their estates and their stone houses (at a time when houses built of stone were heavily taxed) but they were also the most important people in the town politically. My initial research shows that the ancestors of today’s santo owners were elected as cabezas de barangay or even as gobernadorcillos, which was the highest position available to Filipinos at that time. From documents relating to the election of the gobernadorcillos, I learned that the principala was composed of past gobernadorcillos, serving gobernadorcillos and the cabezas de barangay
NOTES

1. Also known as Santa Maria Cleofe

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