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Maneuvering between Resistance and Collaboration: Wartime Violence and the Informal Economy at the Margins during the Japanese Occupation of the Philippines

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This study explores one of the untold histories at the margins in Philippine society during the Japanese occupation, focusing on the informal economic activities of marginalized people. Most works on the social history of the Philippines during the Japanese occupation tend to highlight the sufferings that Filipinos went through due to the wartime violence inflicted by Japanese soldiers. But it is important to point out that some people at the margins accumulated their wealth navigating between resistance and collaboration. Their activities in the informal wartime economy have long been ignored in Philippine historiography even though these activities contributed to transformations in local society after the war. Although many works of broader economic history have been published on the wartime economy in Japanese-occupied Southeast Asia, analysis of the activities of minor players in the microeconomic sphere—such as the black market, buy-and-sell activities, local gambling, and outlaw activities (including the organization of gangs)—remains fragmented and underexplored. The present study examines two cases during the Japanese occupation to show how marginalized individuals rose to prominence in local society, often through violent means—whether by collaborating with the Japanese or through contacts with guerrilla forces.

Keywords: resistance, collaboration, informal economy, wartime violence, Japanese occupation of the Philippines, gangster

Introduction

World War II is typically regarded as one of the darkest chapters in Philippine history, marked by immense casualties caused by the Japanese occupation. Numerous studies have documented the brutality of Japanese occupation policies. Similarly, the "heroic

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deeds" of the Filipino resistance against Japanese forces have been extensively chronicled in Philippine historiography. Mostly exploring the nature of wartime violence, there have been several studies on the ways in which such violence brought about social divisions between elites and the lower strata of Philippine society (McCoy 1980; Ara 2022; 2023).

In addition to violence, the issue of collaboration has also been explored, notably by David Steinberg (1967) and Teodoro Agoncillo (1984), whose works primarily address political dimensions without fully examining the multilayered social consequences of collaboration, including its role in exacerbating wartime violence and social fragmentation. It is reasonable to argue that the Philippines' suffering during the occupation was shaped by both resistance and collaboration—strategies through which individuals sought to survive. Some Filipinos navigated the space between these two poles, aligning themselves at times with the Japanese, at other times with fellow Filipinos, or with both simultaneously.

Although much of the literature examines Filipino suffering within the context of social history during the Japanese occupation (Ingles 1992; Henson 1996; Karganilla 2001; Mendoza 2001; Orendain 2001; Kintanar *et al.* 2006), relatively few studies have investigated the lives of marginalized groups, particularly their roles in informal economic activities. It is important to examine and interpret the actions of marginalized individuals. As Alfred McCoy emphasizes in his study on Filipino biographies, "through the close study of ordinary lives and second-tier figures obscured within the vastness of the Philippine past, it allows us a fuller view of the processes of change in Philippine society" (McCoy 2000, 1–2). In this study, the term "margins" refers not only to geographical peripheries but also to social and political exclusion from dominant narratives of wartime history. Drawing on McCoy's framework, margins are conceptualized as spaces where individuals—often labeled as bandits, collaborators, or informal actors—operated outside formal institutions yet played pivotal roles in shaping wartime and postwar transformations. This framework allows us to challenge the binary of resistance and collaboration by focusing on those who navigated in-between spaces of survival, agency, and opportunism (McCoy 2000, 2, 21).

In this sense, McCoy treats such ordinary Filipinos as analytical subjects who emerged from the social and geographical margins of Philippine society. The present study adopts McCoy's analytical framework to examine marginalized people in Philippine society, particularly those who endured hardship and suffering during the Japanese occupation of the Philippines. Agoncillo (1965) has revealed that the masses at the margins of Philippine society endured immense hardship, struggling daily to survive the violence of war. Understanding how these individuals navigated survival

—politically and economically—remains a critical area for historians to investigate further.

To address this gap in the study of the Japanese occupation of the Philippines, the current research examines the actions of marginalized Filipinos who engaged in informal economic activities, often in collaboration with the Japanese. A.V. H. Hartendorp (1953), Paul Kratoska (1998; 2018), Ikehata Setsuho (1999), Ricardo Jose (1999), Nagano Yoshiko (1999), and Gregg Huff (2020) have conducted extensive studies on the wartime economy in Japanese-occupied Southeast Asia as well as the Philippines. Although their works provide valuable insights into the broader economic history of the wartime-controlled economy set up by the Imperial Japanese Army—and its eventual failure—their scope centers primarily on macroeconomic policies and their impact on the occupied regions. Their analysis of the role of minor players in the microeconomic sphere, such as the black market, buy-and-sell activities, local gambling, and outlaw activities—including the organization of gangs—remains fragmented and underexplored.

Aside from a few biographical accounts of informal economic activities in the Philippines (see, for example, De la Rama 1957), the historical roles of individuals involved in such activities have largely been overlooked in Philippine historiography.[1)] Nonetheless, studying these individuals is crucial, as they amassed wealth that allowed them to gain prominence in local society. Agoncillo (1975, 239–240) highlighted that some of them emerged as a newly formed bourgeoisie, potentially reshaping the elite-dominated Philippine society. This transformation was marked by the proliferation of graft and corruption in the newly established Philippine government after 1946. In the postwar period numerous outlaw groups and gangs were organized, engaging in crimes such as extortion, bank robbery, and summary killings of rivals. How did these criminal elements emerge after the Japanese occupation? Could their methods of survival during the war have laid the groundwork for the crimes they committed in postwar Philippine society? To understand the roots of these postwar crimes, it is essential to examine the actions of the masses in the marginalized settings of Philippine society during the Japanese occupation, when they leveraged the informal economy—and at times resorted to violence, either in collaboration with the Japanese or against fellow Filipinos—to accumulate wealth and power.

In colonial Philippines, social bandits and outlaw elements emerged during the period when both the Philippine Revolution against Spain and the Philippine-American War had been suppressed at the turn of the twentieth century. Several marginalized Filipinos, such as the group led by Macario Sakay, sought national freedom by engaging in guerrilla warfare. The American authorities labeled these groups as “bandits.”

During the American colonial period, some anti-regime elements—many of whom were impoverished—formed groups that pursued millenarian movements. These movements were not recognized as part of the formal Catholic Church and were instead considered heretical (Ileto 1979).

When it comes to the issue of bandits in general, we can conceptualize it in the context of the discussion by Eric Hobsbawm (1969). Hobsbawm argued that social bandits were created from actual and imaginary interactions between the masses and outlaws during the rapid changes brought about by modernization in the eighteenth century. The development and emergence of capitalism threatened the lives of the masses, destroying the traditional paternal moral economy. In colonial Philippines, until the outbreak of World War II the country's economy deepened social divisions, with a small elite class predominantly controlling politics and the economy.

Hobsbawm's concept of the "social bandit" can be applied to the current study on the emergence of a new bourgeoisie during the Japanese occupation of the Philippines, as this wartime period was marked by rapid and profound social changes. We can safely say that if the Japanese occupation had not taken place in colonial Philippines, "social bandits" would not have emerged during the postwar period; they would not have engaged in the informal economic activities that brought them economic prosperity, and they would not have helped in alleviating the suffering of those in need during that time. As McCoy emphasized in his study on the significance of research on the margins in Philippine society:

> . . . most (at the margins) have acted as self-conscious agents of change, leading their constituents in a struggle for social justice; almost all are now largely forgotten, but by looking through the prism of their lives, we can view worlds now obscured at the margins of the Philippine state and its history; and through these biographies of the ordinary and obscured we can begin to reexamine received wisdom about the character of the Philippine polity. (McCoy 2000, 2)

This study examines two cases of Filipinos in the margins of society during the Japanese occupation: Timoteo Evangelista in Manila, a colonial capital; and Alfonso Peñalosa in Leyte Province. Evangelista committed criminal offenses during the prewar American colonial period and accumulated substantial wealth during the occupation. The second case focuses on an ordinary citizen from rural Leyte who profited significantly through business dealings either with the Japanese or with Filipino resistance fighters. By juxtaposing the cases of Evangelista in urban Manila and Peñalosa in rural Leyte, this study aims to reveal how informal economic actors operated under different spatial and political conditions during the Japanese occupation. While Evangelista's

activities were embedded in the urban black market and gangster networks, Peñalosa's collaboration and resistance were shaped by rural logistics and guerrilla dynamics. This comparative lens allows us to understand how marginal figures adapted to wartime pressures and contributed to postwar transformations, thereby offering a nuanced view of wartime agency beyond the resistance-collaboration dichotomy.

This research is based upon many primary sources, mostly derived from the People's Court Papers stored at the main library of the University of the Philippines—legal documents and reports of the Counter Intelligence Corps (CIC) of the US Army, which investigated cases of collaboration—and several Japanese war documents. It must be noted that the outcome of the CIC investigations, for example, may not be a definitive statement about the collaboration activities that will be discussed in the following sections. Some records from the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) in the United States are also utilized in the discussion. Field interviews with relevant people add to the information obtained from these historical records. It is hoped that this article will help to fill the gap in the very few attempts that have been made to examine marginal actors in wartime Philippine society.

1 Prewar Crime and Wartime Collaboration (Timoteo Evangelista)

1.1 *Prewar Criminal Records of Evangelista*

First, let us examine the case of Timoteo Evangelista during the Japanese occupation of Manila. Evangelista appears to have been one of the most obscure figures in Philippine history during the Japanese occupation. According to records from the People's Court, he was from Manila; but his date and place of birth remain unknown. He was reportedly a criminal, having committed two crimes: usurpation of an official function in Laguna and robbery with homicide in Bulacan, sometime in 1927. Given the first criminal offense, the usurpation of an official function, it is possible that he was a public employee under the colonial government in Laguna. In addition, military records from the CIC related to Evangelista's treason case, filed shortly after the "liberation of Manila" in 1945, reveal that he worked as a fireman in the Manila Fire Department. Details of his crime in Laguna remain unclear.[2)]

On June 27, 1928, Evangelista was convicted by the Court of First Instance of Laguna for the crime of usurpation of an official function and sentenced to one year, eight months, and twenty days of imprisonment. This judgment was upheld by the Supreme Court in Manila on February 11, 1929, following an appeal. Nonetheless,

before the decision was rendered, Evangelista committed additional crimes, including robbery with homicide and impersonating a public officer. Consequently, he was convicted again, by the Court of First Instance of Manila on November 6, 1928. The sentences for these cases were not carried out, as Evangelista jumped bail and absconded to Hong Kong. Later he was found in the British colony, and extradition proceedings were instituted to have him returned to Manila to face charges of robbery and homicide. The British government extradited Evangelista to Manila in June 1933, and he was detained at the Bilibid Prison in July 1933.

While imprisoned in Manila, Evangelista filed a motion for appeal with the Supreme Court through the provincial fiscal office of Bulacan on August 15, 1933. In his motion, he provided information against the petitioner in a case before the Court of First Instance of Bulacan, where he was accused of stealing 733 Philippine pesos from one Dy Buncio in Baliuag, Bulacan, on or around December 3, 1927. When the case was called for trial on September 4, 1933, Evangelista promptly invoked the jurisdiction of the court to prosecute the case on the grounds that he had been brought in from Hong Kong against his will under an extradition order. Additionally, he contended that he could only be tried for the offense(s) specified in the extradition request, not for any other crimes committed prior to his extradition. The Court of First Instance of Bulacan overruled his objection to the court's jurisdiction and scheduled the case for trial on September 18, 1933.[3)]

Given the ample documentation from the police and courts regarding his case, it can be concluded that Evangelista had already served his sentence before the outbreak of World War II in the Philippines. Nevertheless, his prewar crimes had consequences on the treason charge he faced in the postwar People's Court. In the following discussion, I will analyze Evangelista's conduct, the way he accumulated his wealth, and how he assisted his fellowmen in Manila during the Japanese occupation.

1.2 *Evangelista at the Onset of the Japanese Occupation of Manila*

It is challenging to determine exactly what Evangelista did at the onset of the Japanese occupation of Manila. Sporadic information appears in several affidavits executed by the witnesses interviewed by agents from the CIC, from which some previously hidden facts can be uncovered. As mentioned earlier, Evangelista may have worked as a fireman for the Manila Fire Department before the Japanese invasion, although the exact time he stopped working there is unclear. In July 1940, when the war loomed over Manila, Haig Assadourian, an Egyptian national and owner of the Jai Alai Corporation in Manila, hired Evangelista as a general supervisor for the company's casino.[4)] After the war broke out on December 8, 1941, the Jai Alai building

was occupied by the United States Medical Corps and converted into a hospital center under Colonel Carrol and Colonel Duckworth. Evangelista was retained by the American officers as the general overseer until the United States Army evacuated Manila on December 31, 1941.[5)]

On January 2, 1942, the Japanese army arrived in Manila and quickly occupied the Jai Alai building, where Evangelista and his family—his wife and children—had sought refuge. On January 4, Assadourian, Evangelista, and 21 others were arrested by the Japanese military police (Kempeitai) and detained in one of the building's rooms. The arrest was prompted by the suspicion that Assadourian had hidden a radio transmitter in the building. Although it was true that he had, no evidence to support the claim was found by the Japanese. After a prolonged investigation, Col. Ohta Seiichi, the first commander-in-chief of the Kempeitai in Manila, delivered a lecture to the people of Manila warning that violation of martial law could lead to public execution.[6)]

The Jai Alai building was designated as the No. 6 Substation of the Kempeitai detachment based in Ermita, Manila.[7)] After January 14 all the detainees except for Evangelista and Assadourian were transferred to Fort Santiago, which had been converted into a prison for holding suspects. The reason Evangelista and Assadourian were not taken to Fort Santiago was possibly that they were released because the Japanese needed some local personnel to manage the Jai Alai building, or perhaps Evangelista had promised to collaborate by supplying war materials to the Japanese. Some affidavits executed by witnesses after the war suggest that Evangelista provided various war materials and goods to the Japanese, leading the latter to conclude that he could be useful for their war efforts.[8)]

According to Magno Gatmaitan, the special prosecutor for the People's Court who indicted Evangelista for treason in 1946, Evangelista allegedly furnished and sold a wide range of materials and equipment to the Japanese—hardware, air compressors, nuts and bolts, blocks and tackles, carpenter tools, pig lead, asbestos packing lathe machines, lead plates, motors, trucks, automobiles, and other materials necessary for military operations. The total value of the sales and purchases made for the Japanese authorities amounted to over seven million Philippine pesos. Evangelista leveraged his knowledge of managing the Jai Alai Corporation and allegedly facilitated the confiscation of medications and safes left behind in the building by the United States Army Forces.[9)]

According to Gatmaitan's information, Evangelista appeared to have profited significantly from his business dealings and espionage activities for the Japanese. He also utilized some of his resources to assist prisoners, including those held without food at the Santo Tomas Internment Camp. Evangelista, along with his employer at the Jai

Alai Corporation, Assadourian, devised a plan to provide these prisoners with sufficient food, clothing, and sanitary napkins for the women. Risking his life, Evangelista smuggled supplies into the camp. According to an affidavit executed by Ah Chan, a Chinese Filipino restaurant manager in Manila during the Japanese occupation, Evangelista became a frequent customer at his establishment, where he sold gold nuggets reportedly sourced from a mine in Baguio. By selling gold to businesspeople at the restaurant, Evangelista secured sufficient funds to support several internees at Santo Tomas Internment Camp.[10)]

At the end of November 1942, the Japanese authorities in Manila allowed the reopening of the Jai Alai. Assadourian resumed his role as general manager and Evangelista his position as supervisor. Although the Jai Alai was allowed to operate, it remained under Japanese surveillance due to the involvement of several foreigners in its management. While some employees pledged allegiance to the Japanese government and agreed to collaborate with them, Evangelista expressed his desire to resign, citing the new management's hostility toward those sympathetic to the Americans. However, Assadourian persuaded Evangelista to remain in his role, arguing that it would enable him to gather information about Japanese activities and attitudes toward the government, which would allow Assadourian to counteract Japanese actions to the best of his abilities.[11)]

As anticipated, in March 1943 Assadourian was summoned by the authorities to report to the Japanese commander at the Santo Tomas Internment Camp. Before his internment, Assadourian entrusted Evangelista with the responsibility of caring for his family, particularly his ailing wife. Following Assadourian's confinement, Evangelista started delivering daily meals to Assadourian's family and certain detainees he knew. After Assadourian's departure from the Jai Alai, Evangelista likely accrued substantial profits from its gambling operations.[12)] After its reopening in November 1942, the establishment drew large crowds of laborers, clerks, and buy-and-sell traders who found an outlet for their gambling passions. This gambling fervor could be attributed to the war and runaway inflation, which sparked a frenzy of black-market speculation at the onset of the Japanese occupation of Manila (Agoncillo 1965, 519–520; McCoy 2009, 369).

1.3 *Evangelista's Efforts to Assist Those in Need*

According to affidavits related to Evangelista's collaboration case, he extended aid to numerous people in need of food, clothing, and medical aid, including detainees at Fort Santiago and Santo Tomas. But extending aid to the detainees was no simple task. Evangelista faced significant challenges, as he lacked close personal connections with

Japanese officials. Particularly as the war turned against Japan, the Kempeitai imposed increasingly strict rules at the detention centers. Evangelista had the idea of contacting individuals who had previously been detained at either Fort Santiago or Santo Tomas, and in this connection he approached George Litton, a Filipino who had been held at Fort Santiago from October 22, 1942, to April 24, 1943.[13)]

Evangelista asked Litton about possible ways to send food, clothing, and medical supplies to American detainees in Fort Santiago. Initially Litton was wary of Evangelista, as they had known each other only briefly, and he avoided answering any questions. However, after several weeks of regular interaction, Litton began to trust Evangelista, believing his intentions to be genuine. Eventually Litton introduced Evangelista to a Filipino houseboy at Fort Santiago, explaining that the boy could smuggle supplies to detainees. With the boy's help, Evangelista managed to smuggle food and other supplies to both American and Filipino detainees at Fort Santiago. He did this despite the heightened vigilance of the Japanese sentries due to the presence of detainees such as Colonel Thorpe, Major Barker, and several detainees transferred from the Santo Tomas Internment Camp.[14)]

Evangelista's activities went beyond the procurement of food and other supplies for internees at Fort Santiago and Santo Tomas. We learn from several affidavits executed by doctors practicing in Manila that Evangelista helped many individuals in need, including patients, doctors, and other staff at the Philippine General Hospital (PGH). Salvador Trinidad, then the assistant resident physician at the PGH, testified in his affidavit that Evangelista gave invaluable assistance to the needy and indigent in the hospital by offering donations, paying blood donors, and securing morphine ampoules for use in surgical wards.[15)]

During the Christmas season of 1944, Evangelista donated more than twenty thousand Philippine pesos in cash to the PGH, along with rice and medical supplies. He instructed that the rice and funds be used to provide Christmas luncheons for the patients. His generous contributions were deeply appreciated by the director and staff of the hospital.[16)] Carlos Yambao, then the senior resident physician at the PGH, testified in his affidavit about the material assistance Evangelista offered to the hospital during the first American bombardment of Manila at the beginning of February 1945. Yambao recalled that the hospital was overwhelmed with casualties and unable to provide morphine injections to ease the patients' pain. Observing this, Evangelista utilized his own funds to purchase over fifty thousand Philippine pesos worth of morphine injections, which he donated to the hospital or administered directly to patients. Yambao also mentioned that Evangelista offered medical supplies and blood transfusions free of charge to several American and British internees who had been released

from Fort Santiago and brought to the PGH for medical treatment.[17)]

1.4 *Evangelista's Involvement in Organizing a Gang in Manila*

Evangelista provided countless individuals in need with free favors. Many recipients expressed their appreciation in affidavits. But we must note that while demonstrating his goodness to his fellowmen and collaborating with the Kempeitai, he also led a double life as the head of a gang in Manila. An affidavit supporting Evangelista's case states that he was possibly involved in organizing a gang. An affidavit executed by Servando Ray Lara, a businessman from Manila, reveals that Evangelista organized—or at least was associated with—a gangster in Manila during the Japanese occupation.

According to Lara, sometime in October or November 1944 he narrowly avoided becoming a robbery victim at his home on Calle Churruca in the Ermita district of Manila. Three individuals came to his door, one of whom Lara recognized as a known gangster. When Lara opened the door and asked their purpose, one of them handed him an envelope containing a threatening letter demanding money. The men claimed to be members of a guerrilla unit, but Lara knew that they were part of a local gang operating in Ermita. While the group was attempting to extort money from Lara, Evangelista showed up with another man. One of the gang members gave Evangelista a similar envelope containing the same type of threat and demand. After reading the letter aloud in front of Lara, Evangelista angrily confronted the man, shouting that Lara had no money to give. When the gangsters had left, Evangelista explained to Lara that they lived next to his residence on San Luis Street and that he was aware of their identities and motives. According to Lara's affidavit, although the gangsters were occasionally seen near his home afterward, they never approached him again.[18)]

The affidavit is quite revealing. Lara must have thought that Evangelista was the one who saved him from the gang. Nonetheless, it was strange that when the three alleged gangsters were trying to extort money from Lara, Evangelista suddenly appeared at Lara's residence accompanied by another man. Evangelista then read the letter aloud before telling the gang members that Lara had no money. The actions of Evangelista and his companion were puzzling and difficult to interpret. Nevertheless, because the gang never harassed Lara again, it can be assumed that they were under Evangelista's control. Ostensibly, Evangelista happened to pass by Lara's residence, effectively protecting him from further harassment. While he appeared to be a good neighbor to Lara, Evangelista also seemed intent on hiding the gang's existence from the Japanese authorities. We must note that this incident coincided with the time—November 1944—when Evangelista collaborated with the Kempeitai for their guerrilla hunting by setting traps for suspicious individuals to arrest them. It is very clear

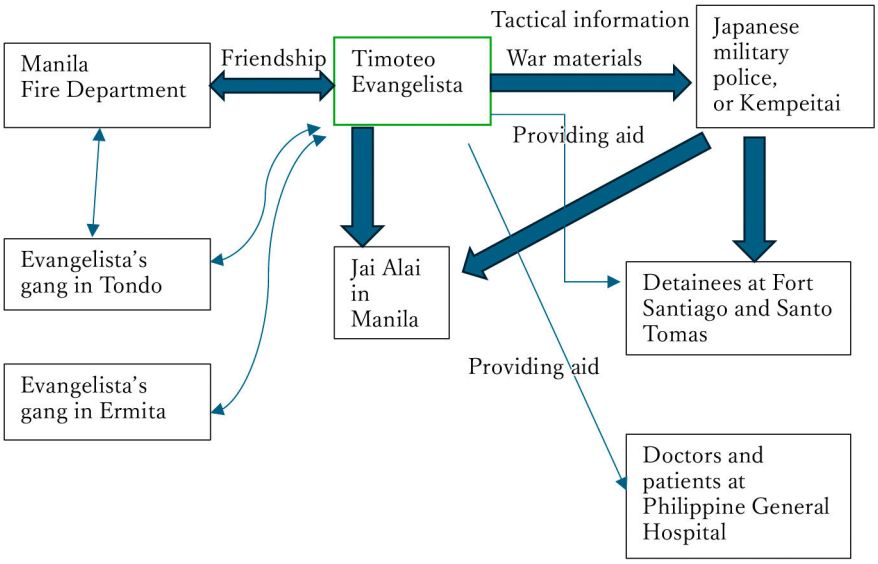

Fig. 1 Relationship Chart of Timoteo Evangelista in Manila
Source: Prepared by Ara Satoshi

that Evangelista had long organized the gang in Manila, and they might have assisted the Kempeitai in guerrilla hunting.

1.5 *Aftermath of the War and Evangelista as Leader of a Gang in Tondo, Manila*

Evangelista was arrested by CIC agents of the US Army on April 9, 1945, nearly two months after the liberation of Manila.[19] During the investigation, while Evangelista was under the custody of the CIC in Manila, he filed a bail application for his provisional release in September or October 1945. However, on October 8, 1945, Solicitor-General Magario Peralta affirmed that

> in view of the gravity of the felony charges against the petitioner (Timoteo Evangelista), which may justify the imposition of the death penalty on him, and the evidence of guilt against him being strong, the undersigned (Solicitor-General) is constrained to recommend that petitioner be not admitted to bail.[20]

Although Evangelista hired a prestigious Manila lawyer and offered a substantial amount for legal services, he was charged with treason by the People's Court on April 24, 1946. Numerous affidavits were submitted in his favor, highlighting his alleged efforts to assist people in need, but most of them failed to mitigate the treason charge.

A prosecutor from the Special Prosecutor's Office argued that Evangelista's prewar crimes constituted an aggravating circumstance in the treason case.

The judicial outcome of Evangelista's treason case remains unclear to historians due to the scarcity of court records from Manila's postwar rehabilitation period. Nonetheless, some historical accounts reveal his role as a gang leader in Tondo, Manila. A police report forwarded to Col. J.P. Holland, then provost marshal of the US Army, reported that Evangelista maintained a gang on R.A. Reyes Street in Tondo while in the custody of the CIC. The report revealed that this gang, organized by Evangelista himself, consisted of roughly 12 members who dressed in expensive clothes and shoes and many of whom carried pistols and revolvers. The gang was reportedly supported by Jose Chico, a former member of the Bureau of Constabulary, and Nicasio Salonga, a legendary gangster in Tondo.[21] Even after the war, Evangelista remained involved in gambling operations at the Jai Alai and continued to wield significant influence as a gang leader in Tondo.[22]

2 Violence in Business in Rural Philippines (Alfonso Peñalosa)

Following is another example of economic collaboration with the Japanese, this time focused on an individual—Alfonso Peñalosa, a merchant in Ormoc, Leyte—who helped with the procurement of nonfood supplies by Japanese troops in Leyte while serving as a spy for the military police. What differentiates this case from that of Evangelista in Manila is that Peñalosa was indirectly involved in the severe torture and violence inflicted by the Japanese upon his business partners while he made money through the business from the Japanese as well as anti-Japanese guerrilla groups.

Peñalosa grew up in a simple landowning family in Ormoc. During the Commonwealth period, he was mainly involved in the shipping business of the Insular Navigation Company, an operator of ships between Cebu and Ormoc. This shipping business was part of the business run by the Aboitiz family, who were well-known owners of a sugar plantation in Ormoc. Peñalosa actively contributed as a ship's mate, earning substantial profits. He also had a younger brother, Victor, who served as the police chief of Ormoc at the time.[23]

After the Japanese invasion of Ormoc, this shipping business was forced to pivot to support Japanese military logistics, particularly transporting munitions. In May 1942 the Matsunaga Unit platoon led by Lieutenant Hirayama was stationed in Ormoc. Shortly after the Japanese troops arrived, Peñalosa evacuated with his family to Barrio Rizal, a small mountainous area in Ormoc, where they lived as evacuees for

a time. By August 1942, the Hirayama platoon had ordered all non-combatants who sought refuge in the mountains to return to the town proper and resume their prewar way of life. Peñalosa remained in Ormoc until around February 1943, when he shifted his focus to a buy-and-sell business trading food and goods between Ormoc and Tacloban.

After October the Abe Company from the Omori Unit, which had stationed itself in Ormoc, approached Peñalosa and requested his assistance with local collaboration for logistics activities to meet military needs. Subsequently, Peñalosa began working with the Japanese, supplementing the shipping operations of Daido Kabushiki Kaisha (now Marubeni Corporation in Japan). Daido was a relatively small-scale transport business, and the Abe Company forces sought to utilize Peñalosa for a larger shipping operation capable of transporting individuals and goods. Late one night in mid-February 1943, several Abe Company soldiers, accompanied by a Filipino intermediary, visited Peñalosa's residence in Ormoc. Peñalosa was effectively coerced into accepting the task of transporting Japanese soldiers between Ormoc and Tacloban. He agreed to cooperate with the Japanese under threat to his family from the troops stationed in Ormoc. At the same time, he had to provide intelligence to the Japanese military police stationed there. Peñalosa was given the intelligence code number X-331 and asked to provide information on anti-Japanese activities in the area.[24)]

2.1 *Providing Aid to Guerrillas*

While collaborating with the Japanese, Peñalosa actively maintained ties with anti-Japanese guerrillas. Even before his collaboration with the Japanese, he had been supplying the guerrillas with necessary resources. In April 1942 Higino Cabiling, an old friend of Peñalosa from before the war, discussed the battles between the Japanese army and the United States Army Forces in the Far East (USAFFE) in Bataan and Corregidor. Cabiling informed Peñalosa that should the USAFFE surrender to the Japanese army, they would organize anti-Japanese guerrillas in the mountain areas. Cabiling was a counterpart of Peñalosa in Ormoc and a member of the USAFFE in Cebu, on the opposite side of Leyte. However, he fled to Ormoc when Nagano's troops invaded Cebu. With the help of Peñalosa, he and his family found refuge in the mountains. In June of the same year, Cabiling organized the Villaba Roughneck guerrilla group in Villaba, where his wife's family lived. This group later merged with the Northwestern Leyte Guerrilla Warfare Forces, led by Felix Pamanian, a prominent guerrilla leader in northern Leyte. Cabiling became involved in keeping track of the movements of Japanese troops stationed in Ormoc. To this end, Cabiling communicated with Peñalosa, who supplied the anti-Japanese guerrillas with detailed informa-

tion about the movements of Japanese troops in Ormoc, particularly those traveling by sea. Additionally, he provided Cabiling with information regarding Ormoc, which was necessary to keep an eye on the Japanese forces.[25)]

Peñalosa also provided extensive supplies and financial support to members of the Miranda-led Western Leyte Guerrilla Warfare Forces (WLGWF), which held power in the Ormoc neighborhood. Agapito Villasin, a WLGWF member who later became the chief of police in Ormoc, obtained food and other supplies from the Peñalosa family's land in Palompon, courtesy of Peñalosa, in late 1942.[26)] Antonio Cataag, a former sergeant in the WLGWF, also received supplies of tobacco, weapons, and ammunition such as .38, .32, .22, and .45 caliber bullets from Peñalosa for the guerrillas in late 1942, along with detailed reports on the movements of Abe's troops stationed in Ormoc.[27)]

2.2 *Peñalosa's Business in Tacloban and Blackmail Charge*

While providing arms and war supplies to the anti-Japanese guerrilla group, Peñalosa offered confidential information to the Japanese military police in Ormoc and Tacloban. The Japanese military police gained a detailed understanding of the movements of the Miranda group based on information offered by Peñalosa, who had been assigned the code number X-331. Peñalosa's role as a spy was indispensable for the Japanese, though his efforts were hampered by the anti-Japanese guerrilla movement. For instance, Nievez Ruiz, a woman from the town of Palo near Tacloban and a public elementary school teacher before the war, was threatened by Peñalosa during a certain goods transaction. In response, she filed a complaint with the Leyte Provincial Prosecutor's Office in Tacloban.[28)]

Around April 1944, Peñalosa met Nievez during a business meeting. At the time, Nievez, like many others, was struggling with wartime poverty. She and her husband, Marcelo Ruiz, a high school teacher in Palo before the war, engaged in a buy-and-sell business to secure daily food and other necessities. During her meeting with Peñalosa at El Nido, a store Peñalosa was operating in Tacloban, Nievez proposed that Peñalosa purchase American-made jeans and khaki clothing. The prices were quoted as 12 pesos per yard in old Philippine pesos, 25 pesos in Cebu emergency bills, and 45 pesos in Japanese military bills. The simultaneous use of these three currencies in business transactions was strictly forbidden by the Japanese military authorities, and Peñalosa had previously been caught engaging in similar dealings. Peñalosa felt that this might be a trap set by the Kempeitai for him and that he and his family would be in danger if it was discovered that he had traded Japanese military vouchers at a low value. Hence, he decided it would be better to draft a letter to the Kempeitai detailing

this business transaction before Nievez acted on the matter. Peñalosa then wrote a letter to the Kempeitai, which he secretly deposited in the mailbox at the front entrance of the military police station. However, before the letter could reach the Kempeitai it was intercepted by Gregorio Makabasag, a known Kempeitai spy who also had ties to Peñalosa. Possibly acting under Peñalosa's orders, Makabasag used the information in the letter as leverage to blackmail Nievez, exploiting the details of the transaction for his own gain.

This threat was made around May 6 or 7, 1944. On one of these days, Makabasag visited the Ruiz residence in Palo and presented a letter written by Peñalosa. The letter was signed by X-331, a member of the Kempeitai intelligence service. This serves as evidence that Peñalosa authored the letter. It is unclear to what extent Makabasag and Peñalosa were working together on this matter. However, judging from Peñalosa's subsequent actions, it is believed that he intended to keep Nievez quiet about the matter through Makabasag by threatening her before the Kempeitai saw the letter he had written. Makabasag told Nievez that he would not be a witness to the letter. He demanded two hundred pesos from Nievez or he would send the letter to the Kempeitai. Nievez replied that she was unable to pay that amount immediately and paid only fifty pesos for the time being. After this, on May 8, Nievez went to the Leyte Provincial Prosecutor's Office in Tacloban to file a blackmail complaint against Peñalosa and Makabasag. Upon obtaining the complaint, a provincial prosecutor informed the Tacloban Kempeitai of the details. The provincial prosecutor issued an arrest warrant against Peñalosa based on the complaint, and Peñalosa and Makabasag were detained that afternoon by the Leyte Provincial Police Force. On May 10, 1944, a Japanese interpreter associated with the Tacloban Kempeitai, Katsura Sohei, who had been alerted regarding this incident, visited the Ruiz residence and brought the couple to the Tacloban Kempeitai station to inquire about the circumstances of Peñalosa's arrest.

2.3 *Severe Torture of Ruizes by the Tacloban Kempeitai, Who Sided with Peñalosa*

Katsura Sohei, the Kempeitai's civilian interpreter, confirmed that Nievez and her husband had been brought to the Kempeitai's interrogation room that afternoon, marking the beginning of the investigation into one of the blackmail complaints against Peñalosa. The interrogation was led by Sgt. Kasahara Nobuyoshi, a Kempeitai officer. As they were acting on a notice from the provincial prosecutor, the Tacloban Kempeitai took a keen interest in the case—especially since it involved one of their own operatives, X-331. The Kempeitai likely feared that Peñalosa's arrest could expose sensitive intelligence regarding their operations to the Philippine government.

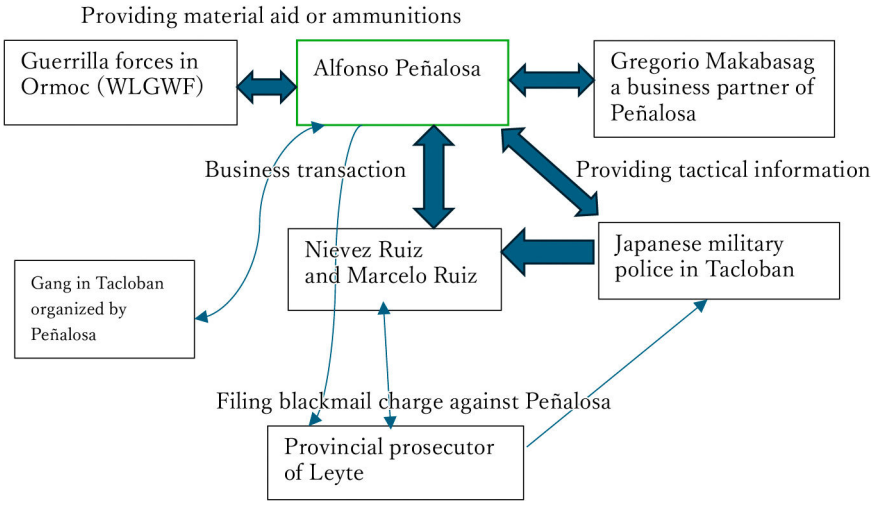

Fig. 2 Relationship Chart of Alfonso Peñalosa in Leyte
Source: Prepared by Ara Satoshi

The Kempeitai's interrogation of Nievez and Marcelo Ruiz centered on whether the letter had really been written by X-331. When Nievez did not give the expected answer, Sergeant Kasahara subjected her to severe torture. According to records from the war crime trial conducted by the US Military Commission against Katsura, the US military investigated the torture and abuse inflicted by the Kempeitai. During questioning, Makabasag claimed that the letter had been forged by Nievez and that Peñalosa's involvement in the case was fabricated. The Kempeitai were not satisfied with Makabasag's statement and denied that Nievez's complaint against Peñalosa was false. Hence, it is believed that the Kempeitai subjected Nievez and Marcelo Ruiz to severe torture to safeguard Peñalosa from the official complaint filed by Nievez. After the war the CIC, which sought to build a treason case against Peñalosa, recognized his collaboration with the anti-Japanese guerrillas. Nonetheless, they concluded that Peñalosa's intelligence work for the Japanese military authorities was highly significant since the Kempeitai tortured and abused Nievez and Marcelo Ruiz to shield him from Nievez's complaint. The CIC report dated May 28, 1945, concludes that "the Kempeitai made every effort to exonerate from a blackmail charge, even imprisoning and torturing the witnesses against Peñalosa because he was too valuable an agent to lose by their own account."[29)]

2.4 *Treason Charge against Peñalosa during the Postwar Period*

The complaint against Peñalosa and Makabasag filed by Nievez with the Leyte Provincial Prosecutor's Office in early May 1944 was formally accepted. After the release of Nievez and Marcelo Ruiz from the Kempeitai station, the trial was scheduled to start at the Court of First Instance of Tacloban around mid-October of 1944. But the trial was postponed due to the war as ground battles were being waged in Tacloban and other areas after the landing of the US Army on October 20. Sometime after the landing of US troops, the CIC initiated an investigation into Peñalosa's alleged collaboration with the Japanese. In May 1945, Peñalosa was arrested and detained. Thereafter, Peñalosa was transferred from the US military to the Philippine Commonwealth government, which had just been restored in Tacloban after the US military landings. While it was decided that Peñalosa's treason case would be held at the People's Court, Peñalosa's bail application was granted. Peñalosa was temporarily released on January 3, 1946.[30)]

Nevertheless, the special prosecutor in Manila decided to prosecute Peñalosa before the People's Court and filed an indictment for treason on January 30, 1946. The indictment outlined some counts of collaboration with the Japanese: providing supplies as well as tactical information to the Japanese military and being involved in the torture inflicted on Nievez and Marcelo Ruiz to safeguard himself from the blackmail charge.[31)]

2.5 *Personal Networks that Helped Peñalosa Escape the Treason Charge*

During the second half of 1946, the treason case against Peñalosa remained pending due to clever legal maneuvering by Peñalosa's lawyer, who filed several motions for reinvestigation. The case's suspension was triggered by the fact that two influential figures in Ormoc submitted affidavits in favor of the defendant. One was Victorino Teleron, who had served as a "guerrilla judge" in the Miranda-led WLGWF during the war and practiced law in Ormoc after the war. The other was Bonifacio Capuyan, a former major in the WLGWF and a congressional candidate from Leyte's second electoral district after the war. In an affidavit dated March 18, 1946, both men stated that Peñalosa had collaborated with the Japanese and at the same time had offered the WLGWF detailed information about Japanese troops stationed in Leyte. In addition, former anti-Japanese guerrilla members, including Manuel O. Nolasco[32)] and Cabiling, prepared a series of affidavits in support of Peñalosa. These affidavits were submitted to the Special Prosecutor's Office.[33)] On October 10, 1949, more than three years after the indictment, Peñalosa sent a letter to Luis Panaguiton, then the special prosecutor of the People's Court in Baybay, Leyte, requesting that the case be reopened

and claiming that there was insufficient evidence to verify the three charges against him (supplying the Japanese with war materials, espionage, and involvement in the torture of the Ruizes).[34] Through such due process, the treason case against Peñalosa was eventually dismissed based on President Roxas's amnesty proclamation of January 1948. Nonetheless, there remained the issue of the blackmail Peñalosa himself had allegedly used against Nievez Ruiz. The prosecutors who brought Peñalosa to the People's Court for the prosecution of this case appeared to have had a certain degree of certainty.

2.6 *Blackmail Charge Absolved by His Alleged Bribery*

Despite the degree of certainty that the Special Prosecutor's Office had, nothing came of the blackmail charge against Peñalosa. Tan Tiya Suya, a Chinese resident of Tacloban whom the author interviewed, testified that Peñalosa offered large sums of money to the Tacloban prosecutor's office, police officials, and former anti-Japanese guerrilla members to clear his "stigma" as a collaborator for the Japanese.[35] Estrella Ruiz, a granddaughter of Nievez Ruiz who was interviewed by the author at her residence in Palo, affirmed that her grandmother had held a grudge against Peñalosa and Makabasag for some time after the war. Nonetheless, around Christmas of 1946, when Philippine authorities were investigating the case, Peñalosa sent her a substantial sum of money and Christmas presents, asking her to refrain from any further involvement in the matter.[36] It is difficult to confirm the authenticity of this statement, but one can sense the overwhelming financial power of Peñalosa, who did not waver even after he was interrogated and imprisoned by the CIC as a collaborator for the Japanese after the war. Peñalosa appeared to have succeeded in maintaining his own economic interests through financial means or by intimidation to conceal the various "crimes" he had committed. Another interviewee the author contacted in Tacloban City in 2015 shared that there were rumors suggesting that Peñalosa had organized a gang in the town, where he controlled several black markets during the rehabilitation period in Leyte.[37]

Meanwhile, the blackmail charge against Peñalosa and Makabasag, which was examined by the Court of First Instance of Tacloban, probably resulted in convictions for both men. Peñalosa might have later filed a suit in the Court of Appeals in Manila to have the case examined there. However, the author could not find any court record concerning Peñalosa's case.

Conclusion

The common feature of the two cases discussed above is that both men came from simple families that were at the margins of Philippine society. They both gained considerable wealth by engaging in business transactions with the Japanese. After a thorough investigation by the CIC in 1945, both Peñalosa and Makabasag were also charged with treason by the newly established Philippine government in 1946. Although the men's collaboration with the Japanese was evident, very few of the individuals concerned denounced them for their treasonous acts.

Evangelista was a convicted criminal before the war, but he helped individuals and saved many lives, including those of former colleagues in the Manila Fire Department, detainees in Fort Santiago, and prisoners at the Santo Tomas Internment Camp. His prewar crimes and offenses included bank robbery, homicide, and embezzlement of public funds. During the American colonial years, he might have learned how to accumulate wealth through criminal means. Why he was hired at the Jai Alai Corporation in Manila remains unclear. His personal connections with the underground world might have been the reason he obtained a job in gambling. We have also learned from the discussion that Evangelista organized a gang in Tondo, Manila, through which he earned substantial profits. Some of the profits must have been utilized to help individuals in need in Manila during the Japanese occupation.[38)]

Evangelista's criminal records reveal his sins, but numerous individuals would no doubt thank him for his favors. As many of the affidavits validate, very few of them accused Evangelista of collaboration with the Japanese. Nevertheless, their favorable sentiments toward him did not yield any positive results for the judicial process in his postwar treason trial. Even his petition for bail was turned down by the People's Court. The special prosecutor insisted that the crimes committed by Evangelista during the American colonial years constituted an aggravating circumstance in the treason case. Considering the dearth of records regarding the case, we cannot trace the entire sequence of Evangelista's activities after the war. Nonetheless, we can track to some degree what he did as a gang leader in Tondo, Manila. The historical records I came across in the archives show that the gangster groups under his influence existed in Tondo even after the war, with the coordination of influential local gangsters such as Nicasio Salonga, also known by the nickname Asiong Salonga. Many Chinese Filipinos collaborated covertly with the Japanese in wartime Manila.[39)] Judging from the records mentioned above, Evangelista's gang was able to infiltrate territories controlled by influential Chinese criminal elements who predominantly controlled money and weapons, thereby causing bloodshed in their internal gang conflicts.[40)]

Alfonso Peñalosa in Tacloban, Leyte, also garnered substantial profits from his business activities related to the Japanese and resistance groups. He was born in Ormoc, Leyte, before the war and was said to have a small navigation business. At the onset of the Japanese occupation of Leyte, he was approached by the occupying forces, who asked him for logistical navigation assistance. Peñalosa worked with the Japanese as well as Miranda's guerrilla group, from both of whom he was able to gain substantial profits. During the second half of the Japanese occupation, he started a business in Tacloban while working as a spy for the Japanese authorities to engage in intelligence activities. When he and his business partner, Makabasag, were charged with blackmail by the local civilians Nievez and Marcelo Ruiz, the Japanese protected them by torturing the complainants. Peñalosa accumulated valuable property during the Japanese occupation by developing deep personal contacts with both the Japanese and guerrillas.

His guerrilla contacts eventually helped him escape the treason charge that was brought against him in the People's Court after the war. Many affidavits favorable to him were executed by the guerrilla leaders. Peñalosa even used his financial resources to bribe legal officials. Like Evangelista, Peñalosa appeared to have organized a gang in Tacloban, where he allegedly managed black markets.[41] However, he did not win as much support as Evangelista did for helping those in need in Manila.

What we can learn from the two cases discussed above is that certain Filipinos in the margins of society elicited favorable sentiments among the masses as "heroic outlaws" in the elite-dominated society. As John Sidel (1999, 70–94) mentioned in his study, bandits and gangsters appear to have been local heroes for the poor. In this sense, both Evangelista and Peñalosa, through their collaboration with the Japanese military, gained riches in their business through fair means or fool.

The comparative analysis between Evangelista in urban Manila and Peñalosa in rural Leyte reveals how informal economic actors adapted to unique spatial and political conditions during the Japanese occupation. Evangelista's activities were embedded in urban networks of gambling and gangsterism, while Peñalosa's operations were shaped by rural logistics and guerrilla dynamics. Despite these differences, both cases exemplify how marginalized individuals leveraged wartime disorder to accumulate wealth and influence. Their trajectories underscore the importance of examining margins not only as sites of exclusion but also as arenas of agency and transformation. This urban-rural comparison contributes to a more nuanced understanding of wartime Philippine society and its postwar legacies of violence and informal power.

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Notes

1) Agoncillo (1965, 572–575) and Renato Constantino and Letizia Constantino (1978, 125) mention De la Rama's wealth, some of which was utilized to extend financial or medical assistance to fellow Filipinos in need and to several guerrilla groups. During the Japanese occupation of the Philippines, some people like De la Rama gained profits by unlawful means that were often considered crimes breaching the laws of the Japanese military.
2) This information is derived from various affidavits executed by people concerned with the treason case of Timoteo Evangelista (PCP Timoteo Evangelista, folder no. 112–15, Special Collection Section, University Main Library, University of the Philippines, Quezon City, Philippines).
3) Supreme Court Decision, GR. No. 40450 (1934); G.R. No. L.-40492 (1933).
4) The Jai Alai opened for business in Manila on October 17, 1940 (*Philippines Free Press*, October 12, 1940).
5) Affidavit of Haig Assadourian, n.d., PCP Evangelista.
6) Affidavit of Haig Assadourian, n.d., PCP Evangelista.
7) Filipiniana Online (2015).
8) Affidavit of Haig Assadourian, n.d., PCP Evangelista.
9) Information, April 24, 1946, PCP Evangelista.
10) Affidavit of Ah Chan, December 1, 1945, PCP Evangelista.
11) Affidavit of Haig Assadourian, n.d., PCP Evangelista.
12) Affidavit of Haig Assadourian, n.d., PCP Evangelista.
13) Affidavit of George Litton, October 16, 1945, PCP Evangelista.
14) Affidavit of George Litton, October 16, 1945, PCP Evangelista.
15) Affidavit of Salvador Trinidad and Enrique Garcia, October 4, 1945, PCP Evangelista.
16) Affidavit of Salvador Trinidad and Enrique Garcia, October 4, 1945, PCP Evangelista.
17) Affidavit of Carlos Yambao, October 4, 1945, PCP Evangelista.
18) Affidavit of Servando Ray Lara, December 1, 1945, PCP Evangelista.
19) Affidavit of Purita Medalle, Amparo Medalle, and Bob Medalle, n.d., PCP Evangelista.
20) Magario Peralta, Recommendation, October 8, 1945, PCP Evangelista.
21) Report from certain private to Col. Holland, Provost Marshal in Manila, June 8, 1945. RG496, Records of General Headquarters, Southwest Pacific Area and the United States Army Forces, Pacific, Civil Affairs Section, Box 2282, NARA Archives 2, College Park, Maryland, USA.
22) Interview with Romy Salonga, a nephew of Nicasio Salonga, at R.A. Reyes Street, Tondo, Manila, March 28, 2025. He was 89 years old when interviewed.
23) Affidavit of Higino M. Cabiling, January 12, 1947; interview with Vicente Tomada, April 26, 1946, in PCP People of the Philippines vs. Alfonso Peñalosa, folder no. 221–4.
24) Interview with Alfonso Peñalosa, April 20, 1945, in CIC Case Report, PCP Peñalosa.
25) Affidavit of Higino M. Cabiling, January 12, 1947, PCP Peñalosa.
26) Affidavit of Agapito Villasin, May 28, 1945, PCP Peñalosa.
27) Affidavit of Antonio Cataag, June 1, 1945, PCP Peñalosa.
28) The following information is based on the personal memoir titled "The Blackmailer and the

Spy" by Nievez Ruiz, in PCP Deogracias Avila, folder no. 32–2.

29) Letter from 459th CIC Detachment to the Provost Marshall, Base K, APO 72, May 28, 1945, PCP Peñalosa.
30) Petition for the Provisional Release of Alfonso Peñalosa on December 26, 1945, PCP Peñalosa; Recommendation Regarding the Petition for the Provisional Release of Alfonso Peñalosa signed by Macario Peralta, Special Prosecutor, January 3, 1946, PCP Peñalosa.
31) Information, January 30,1946, PCP Peñalosa.
32) Nolasco was the executive officer of the Leyte Provincial Regiment, USAFFE, during the war, with the rank of lieutenant colonel (Affidavit of Manuel O. Nolasco, March 8, 1947, PCP Alfonso Peñalosa).
33) Affidavit of Victorino C. Teleron, March 18, 1946; affidavit of Bonifacio Capuyan, March 18, 1946, PCP Peñalosa.
34) Alfonso Peñalosa to Luis Panaguiton, October 10, 1949, PCP Peñalosa.
35) Author's interview with Tan Tiya Suya, Star Asia Hotel, Tacloban City, Leyte, June 1, 1995.
36) Author's interview with Estrella Ruiz at her home in Palo, Leyte, February 28, 2013. Estrella is a granddaughter of Nievez Ruiz, who was tortured by the Kempeitai. Nievez died in September 2000 in Palo. Her husband, Marcelo, emigrated to the United States after retiring from the public school system in the 1970s, after which they lived separately.
37) Author's interview with eighty-year-old Blas Bayani, Restaurant Otso-Otso, Tacloban City, Leyte, January 15, 2015. Bayani was a medical doctor who remembered many incidents from the Japanese occupation of Tacloban.
38) Interview with Romy Salonga, Manila, March 28, 2025.
39) English version of Koh Chi Fei's Extortion Letter to Tan Eng Tuen, September 12, 1945. Koh was said to be the head of the Philippine Chinese Anti-Japanese Collaborators Corps. RG495, Records of the Headquarters, United States Army Forces, Western Pacific, Provost Marshal. Letters to and from Col. J.P. Holland, Provost Marshal of Manila, 1945–46, Box 1330.
40) See the collaboration case of the Chinese Filipino Lim Chuan Chong (also known as Francisco Guevara), PCP folder no. 177–10. Some CIC records show that he was managing a gambling business in Manila and providing financial aid to the Kempeitai. Obtaining firearms from the Japanese authorities, he organized gangs in Binondo, Manila, with the help of Evangelista. As for the complex issue of Chinese collaboration in the Philippines, Jose Angliongto (1969), Antonio Tan (1981), and Kung Chien-wen (2022) have discussed the actions of Chinese Filipinos, some of whom were involved in gang activities during and after the Japanese occupation.
41) Interview with Estrella Ruiz, Palo, February 28, 2013.

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