

Iloilo and Its Trade When Loney Came

by

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ILOILO, at the time of Nicholas Loney's arrival, was not really a "forgotten dot of the universe,"¹ as he thought it was. Of all the Philippine provinces, it was the biggest in population and one of the most developed by Philippine standards. It had more people than the then province of Manila. The census of 1855 gave the population of Iloilo at 527,570 while Manila had only 276,059. Third placer was Pangasinan with 272,427.² Nor was Iloilo the biggest only in population. It was also the "largest in agricultural production, the most active

in manufacturing, and one of the best instructed among the provinces."³

With an area of 532,397 hectares, Iloilo covered (as it still does) the southeastern portion of Panay, the whole of Guimaras, and numerous other islands and islets between Panay and Negros. Since the time of Spanish contact, Iloilo had been relatively more developed and more thickly populated than the neighboring provinces. For example, in 1845, the whole island of Negros had a population of only 55,896. Of this number, only 17,953 lived

¹A *Britisher in the Philippines or The Letters of Nicholas Loney* (Manila: The National Library, 1964), p. 76.

²John Bowring, *A Visit to the Philippine Islands* (Manila: Filipiniana Book Guild, 1963), p. 67.

³*Ibid.*, p. 227.

in the western part which later became Negros Occidental and the rest lived in what is now Negros Oriental.⁴

Miguel de Loarca recorded that Panay, referring mainly to Iloilo, was "the most fertile and well provisioned of all the islands discovered, except the island of Luzon, for it is exceedingly fertile, and abounds in rice, swine, fowls, wax and honey; it produces also a great quantity of cotton and *madrinaque*. Its villages stand very close together and the people are healthful and well-provided, so that the Spaniards who are stricken with sickness in other islands go thither to recover their health."⁵

Miguel Lopez de Legaspi noted that Panay was "an island abounding in rice and all kinds of provisions."⁶ For centuries between the coming of the Spaniards and the opening of its port to foreign commerce, Iloilo had been active in

coastwise shipping and trade. Loarca also related that as "the island contains great abundance of timber and provisions, it has almost continuously had a shipyard on it, as is the case now at the location of Arevalo, for galleys and frigates."⁷

The Spaniards first touched Iloilo at Jalaud (now apart of the town of Dumangas) in 1565 where they put up the first Christian chapel and purchased 1,000 cavans of rice which they took back to their settlement in Cebu.⁸

The first Ilongo town founded by the Spaniards was Oton, in 1570⁹ where the seat of the government for Panay was established. In 1581, Arevalo was founded by Governor Gonzalo Ronquillo de Pañalosa and the seat of government was transferred there. Ronquillo gave the town the name "La Villa Rica de Arevalo" because according to him "the land is very fertile and the inhabitants are rich."¹⁰ Later, in

⁴Manuel Buzeta and Felipe Bravo, *Diccionario Geografico, Estadistico, Historico de las Islas Filipinas* (Madrid: J.C. de la Peña, 1850-51), p. 558.

⁵"Relacion de las Islas Filipinas," in Blair, Emma and Robertson, Alexander, *The Philippine Islands: 1493 - to 1898* (Cleveland: A. J. Clark, 1903-1909), V. XXI, p. 194.

⁶"Trata de la Isla de Panay y de su Jurisdiccion," in Blair and Robertson, V. V, p. 57.

⁷*Ibid.*, p. 71.

⁸Juan Fernandes, "Monografias de los Pueblos de la Isla de Panay en las Bisayas," *Archivo Historico Hispano-Agustino y Boletin Oficial XVII* (Enero-junio, 1922), pp. 287-291.

⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 196-202.

¹⁰"Trata de la Isla de Panay y de su Jurisdiccion," *op. cit.*, V. V, p. 26.

1616, as a protection against the incursions of the Moslems from Mindanao and the Dutch from the East Indies, a stone fort was built at Punta Iloilo, and the provincial capital was also moved thither.

The original town of Iloilo was a finger of land between the sea and the Iloilo River at the end of which stood the fort of the Real Fuerza de Iloilo, later known as Fort San Pedro.¹¹ Although it was the seat of the provincial government, it was the second smallest town in the province at the time of Loney's coming. In 1845, it had only 3,875 residents while the neighboring town of Jaro, which was the biggest, had 25,457.¹² There were 909 houses of generally simple construction, a parish house served by a secular priest, and a *casa real* where the provincial governor lived.¹³ In 1857, Loney stated that

the town of Iloilo had at most 7,500 inhabitants, while Jaro had 33,000; Molo, 15,000; and Oton, 20,000.⁴ Iloilo's small population was due to the limited space available for habitation since most of what is now Iloilo City was swamp-land then.

The extent of the development of Iloilo province by mid-19th century may be gauged by the number of organized municipalities within its jurisdiction. In 1845, there were thirty-one municipalities, plus the Comandancia de Concepcion which had two towns and eight *visitas*.¹⁵ In comparison, Negros Occidental had only eight municipalities, and except for Bacolod which had 9,154, all of them had less than 3,000 inhabitants.¹⁶

The main industries of the people in Iloilo were farming, fishing, and weaving. In agriculture, the

¹¹The original fort made of earthwork and wooden palisades in 1602 by Pedro Bravo was placed too close to the sea. This was later replaced with a 4-bastion stone fort, square in shape measuring 30 meters on each side. The government of Iloilo requested for the repair of this fort in 1862. See "Expediente relative para las obras de defensa de la Costa de Yloilo en la parte en que se encuentra establecida la Real Fuerza llamada Cota." The National Archives, Manila, 107 pp. When the name Fort San Pedro started to be applied to the fort has not yet been ascertained yet.

¹²Buzeta and Bravo, *op. cit.*, p. 101.

¹³*Ibid.*

¹⁴Loney to William Farren, Iloilo, April 12, 1857, PRO/FO 72/927.

¹⁵Buzeta and Bravo, *op. cit.* A *visita* was a center of population that did not have a regular curate but was just visited by a priest from a nearby parish.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, p. 558.

principal products were rice, corn, sugar, abaca, tobacco, livestock, cacao, and coffee.¹⁷ Sibukaw or spanenod (dyewood) was also produced in big quantity. As of 1860, 132,853 hectares of land were under cultivation, perhaps the widest cultivated area among the provinces. Farming methods, however, were still primitive. Tilling was done by carabao-drawn wooden plows that hardly made a scratch on the soil.

Iloilo was the leading weaving province. In fact, it was referred to as "the textile center" of the country. Loney said that there were 50,000 weaving looms in the province. Of the industry, he wrote:¹⁸

Considering that the Philippines (is) essentially an agricultural rather than a manufacturing region, the textile productions of Iloilo may be said to have reached a remarkable degree of development. Nothing strikes the attention at the weekly fairs held at the different towns more than the attendance of native-made goods offered for sale; and number of looms

at work in most of the towns and villages also offers matter for surprise. Almost every family possesses one or two of these primitive-looking machines with a simple apparatus formed of pieces of bamboo. In the majority of the houses of the mestizos and the more well-to-do Bisayans, from six to a dozen looms are kept at work.

The products of the looms were **jusi** or **sinamay**, made of pineapple (**piña**) fibers, either pure or mixed with Chinese silk; and courser fabrics woven from abaca, maguey or cotton fibers. In 1854, the woven goods of all kinds exported from Iloilo to Manila were valued at \$400,000 and the other provinces at from \$30,000 to \$40,000.¹⁹ The quantity exported to Europe, through Manila, was estimated to be worth \$20,000 annually.²⁰ Together with Ambos Camarines, Iloilo was considered as the best producer of **jusi**.²¹

The Ilongo's commercial intercourse with Manila, other Visayan provinces, and the Bicol Region was quite brisk. In the town of Iloilo

¹⁷ *Memorias de Panay* (1870), a manuscript of 88 pages. The National Archives, Manila.

¹⁸ Loney to Farren. Iloilo, April 12, 1857, PRO FO 72/927.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Antonio de Morga, "Events in the Philippines Islands", Annotated by José Rizal, in Blair and Robertson, op. cit., V, V. p. 179.

²¹ Robert MacMicking, *Recollections of Manila and the Philippines* (Manila: Filipiniana Book Guild, 1967), p. 132.

were established four Spanish firms that owned sailing vessels.²² Aside from the Spanish firms, there was a considerable number of mestizos, mostly of Chinese origin,²³ in the neighboring towns of Molo and Jaro, who were also engaged in trade and several of whom were owners of trading ships.²⁴ In addition, there were about thirty Chinese merchants permanently established in Molo and two or three in Jaro.

Because of the large production in agriculture and manufacturing, the harbor of Iloilo was the most notable in the Visayas and to it "converged ships from all the provinces of the colony in search for rice and other products." As a matter of fact, the port had already been visited by foreign boats even before it was formally opened to foreign trade in 1855. The earliest recorded exportation from Iloilo took place on April 28, 1816. It

consisted of 500 piculs of *sibukaw* (dyewood) which was loaded on the Portuguese brigantine *Ulises* for Macao.²⁷ The first recorded direct importation came on December 6, 1819 from the Mollucas, on board the brigantine *San Vicente*.²⁷

The harbor was a natural one, formed by the Iloilo Strait, two and half miles to six miles wide, between Iloilo and Guimaras; and by the winding Iloilo River, one-half to three-quarters of a mile wide, whose muddy banks provided anchorage for the ships.

In his first letter to Consul Farren after reaching Iloilo, Loney reported, "The port... seems to realize all the accounts given of it relative to its security of anchorage, and capabilities of containing a large number of ships."²⁹ One day shortly after his arrival, Loney counted "some fifteen to twenty coasting vessels (brigs, brigantines, schooners, and lorchas) on the cir-

²² Loney in different letters, mentioned the following Spanish businessmen in Iloilo at the time of his arrival: Joaquin Ortiz, Jose Coscolluela, V. Ulzurrum, and one Aldeguer.

²³ It is not surprising that there were many Chinese mestizos in Iloilo. As early as the 16th century, Fr. Juan de Medina reported that there were "more than one hundred Chinese married to native women in Iloilo and their number was increasing daily." See "History of the Augustinian Order," in Blair and Robertson, v. XXIII, p. 216.

²⁴ Loney to Farren. Iloilo, April 12, 1857, PRO FO 72/927.

²⁷ *Ereccion del Pueblo*. Legajo 86, Vol. 2, No. 59, p. 7. The National Archives, Manila.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, No. 60, pp. 8-9.

²⁹ Loney to Farren, *loc. cit.*

cular creek which may be said to unite Iloilo with the two larger towns of Jaro and Molo. Several of the vessels are discharging or receiving cargoes at wharves close to which the depth of water allowed them to approach, an advantage which obviates the trouble and risk of employing lighters for ships of moderate tonnage."³⁰

With the river affording anchorage and the island of Guimaras serving as a natural shield from the wind and large waves, the port of Iloilo was among the safest in the country. Militarily, the port was guarded by the Real Fuerza de Iloilo (Fort San Pedro). In addition, a company of marines was stationed at the port. The marines manned one steam gunboat and five tenders (*faluas*) equipped with five cannons.³¹

The port had some disadvantages, however. One of these was the formation of a mud bar at the entrance of the river that prevented the getting in of the larger class of vessels. The port also lacked modern facilities like warehouses, buoys, lights, and a good road. Among the first official efforts of Loney

were directed towards the elimination of these obstacles.

The volume of trade handled by the port at the time may be seen from figures submitted by Loney, based on the *Estadística de Filipinas*. For 1854, the goods exported from the port of Iloilo to Manila consisted of the following, with their corresponding volumes:³²

Piña, silk, hempen & other manufactures	— \$400,000
Tobacco, 30,000 quintals, averaging \$3.50 per picul	— 105,000
Paddy (rice), 30,000 cavans at \$1.00	— 30,000
Sugar, 20,000 piculs at \$3.00	— 60,000
Sapanwood, 33,000 lbs. at \$1.00	— 33,000
Hemp, 5,000 piculs at \$3.50	— 27,000
Hides, 2,050 piculs	— 19,000
All others (including wheat, dried beans, cacao, etc.)	— 45,000
Total	\$720,300

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Guía de Forasteros*, (Manila, 1856), p. 349.

³² Loney to Farren, *loc. cit.*

³³ *Ibid.*

On the import side, the biggest single item brought in from Manila to Iloilo was Chinese silk, for use in weaving. As much as \$400,000 worth of silk was shipped from Manila to Iloilo annually. Yet, despite this large quantity of raw materials that went into local woven manufactures, the importation in clothing goods, especially European fabricated, was still large. Loney estimated the value at about \$480,000 annually. These goods brought in by the Chinese and *mestizo* traders were subsequently disposed of at the larger markets of Jaro, Molo, Oton, Mandurriao, Sta. Barbara, and Pototan from whence a portion gradually found its way into the interior towns and villages.

Aside from clothing, the bulk of imports from Manila consisted of hardware, glassware, earthenware, and other household articles.

Trading was done principally by the "*mestizo* dealers of Molo and Jaro who, on completing their purchases of native made goods (woven products), embark with them in numbers from six, ten, fif-

teen, and sometimes twenty, in the coasting vessels leaving for the capital."³³ With the proceeds from these products, the dealers bought foreign articles at cheap rates from the large Chinese stores in Manila to be sold in Iloilo.

The retailing of the merchandise in Iloilo was done by conveying them from place to place on certain fixed market days: Thursdays in Jaro; Tuesdays in Pototan; Fridays in Sta. Barbara, etc. They were carried to and from the different towns in cumbersome, solid-wheeled vehicles, drawn by buffaloes and oxen, a mode of conveyance which, during the wet season, was attended with a great deal of delay and risk.

With the opening of the port to foreign commerce, and especially after Loney had established Loney & Co. in Iloilo, a number of Chinese and Spanish merchants, following his example, also put up their own permanent shops, thus forming the nucleus of a business center which was to grow into the biggest commercial hub in Southern Philippines.