



Perry Diaz

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By Perry Diaz
Sacramento, California

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The Cojuangco Wars

SACRAMENTO, CALIF., Sept. 23 (PinoyGlobal) - For the past three generations, the Cojuangcos have been at war among themselves. First the sons, then their grandchildren, and now their great grandchildren. It all started about money and now it's all about power and the ultimate political plum -- the nation's presidency.

It all began when Ko Guiok Huang, an ethnic Hakka from Fukien, China, emigrated to the Philippines in 1871. He converted to Catholicism and Hispanized his name to "Cojuangco" adopting Jose as his first name. The newly minted Jose I Cojuangco then moved to Paniqui, Tarlac where he started his businesses. He prospered as a rice merchant, sugar mills owner, and money lender.

He married Antera Estrella from a wealthy family in Malolos, Bulacan. They had three children: Ysidra, Melecio (Melencio), and Trinidad. Ysidra and Trinidad were spinsters; however, Ysidra had a love child, Felicidad, reputedly with the revolutionary Gen. Antonio Luna.

Melecio Cojuangco

Melecio entered politics and became town president of Paniqui and was eventually elected as a representative in the National Assembly in 1907. He was married to Tecla Chichico and they had four children: Jose "Pepe" Sr, Juan, Antonio, and Eduardo "Endeng" Sr. Melecio died in 1909.

Melecio's four sons went into business with their aunt Ysidra and established the Paniqui Sugar Mills in 1928. A few years

later, they ventured into stock brokering and established the Finance and Mining Investments Corp., in partnership with the Jacinto and Rufino families. By the 1930s, the Cojuangcos were the biggest land-owners -- tens of thousands of hectares -- in Central Luzon. In 1938, the Cojuangco, Jacinto, and Rufino families founded the Philippine Bank of Commerce, the first bank in the country wholly owned by Filipinos.

Jose "Pepe" Cojuangco Sr.

Pepe entered politics and was elected to the Philippine Commonwealth Legislature. In 1958, he bought the 6,453-hectare Hacienda Luisita, a sugar plantation and golf course complex, from the Spanish company Tabacalera. The vast hacienda -- second largest in Central Luzon -- encompasses 11 barrios in three towns in Tarlac. Pepe was married to Demetria Sumulong, daughter of Sen. Juan Marquez Sumulong. They had eight children: Ceferino, Pedro, Josephine, Teresita, Carmen, Corazon "Cory," Jose "Peping" Jr, and Maria Paz.

Cory was married to Sen. Benigno "Ninoy" Aquino Jr who was the son of Sen. Benigno Aquino Sr from Concepcion, Tarlac. In 1983, Ninoy was murdered by military assassins as he stepped down from an airplane at the Manila International Airport upon his arrival from self-exile in the U.S. Cory went home to pick up the pieces and led the opposition against Marcos. She was elected president in a "snap election" against Marcos but was denied the presidency. In

1986, a “people power” revolution erupted, the Marcos dictatorship was toppled, and Cory was installed president.

Cory passed away on August 1, 2009. Her passing ignited the people’s desire for change and a clamor for her son Benigno “Noynoy” Aquino III to run for president engulfed the nation. Noynoy accepted the call and is now the Liberal Party’s presidential candidate in the 2010 elections.

Cory’s younger brother Peping also entered politics and was elected mayor of Paniqui in 1959. In 1961, he was elected to Congress and served until 1969. After Marcos was ousted, he ran again in 1987 and served until 1998. He is currently the President of the Philippine Olympic Committee. In 1992, his wife Margarita “Tingting” de los Reyes Cojuangco was elected governor of Tarlac. She served until 1998.

Eduardo “Endeng” Cojuangco Sr.

Melecio’s fourth and youngest son Endeng was married to Josephine Murphy. They had six children: Eduardo “Danding” Jr, Mercedes, Aurora, Isabel, Enrique “Henry,” and Manuel. Danding entered politics and became congressman and governor of Tarlac.

Danding was nicknamed “Pacman” and “King of Cronies” because of his ability for gobbling up companies. During the Marcos regime, he controlled \$1.5 billion in corporate assets which was estimated to equal 25% of the Philippines’ GNP.

When Marcos fled to the U.S. after his ouster, Danding went with him and settled in Los Angeles. Eventually, he went back to the Philippines. In 1992, he founded the Nationalist People’s Coalition and used it as his vehicle to run for president. He lost. He is now the Chairman of the San Miguel Corporation.

Danding’s sister Mercedes was married to Gilberto Teodoro Sr. He served as Social Security Administrator from 1966 to 1986. In 1978, during the Marcos dictatorship, she was elected member of the Interim Batasang Pambansa (National Legislature). Their only son Gilbert “Gibo” Teodoro Jr, a bar topnotcher, is now the Lakas-Kampi-CMD’s presidential candidate in the 2010 elections.

The rivalry among the Cojuangcos started between Melecio’s sons, Jose “Pepe” Sr and Eduardo “Endeng” Sr. Pepe was successful in politics as well as in business. Endeng was said to be resentful of his brother’s success and felt that he was ill-treated.

Political Rivalry

Their political rivalry reached fever pitch in the 1960s when Pepe’s son, “Peping,” ran for Congress against his first cousin Danding, Eduardo’s son. Peping beat Danding twice, in 1965 and 1969. In 1987, when Cory came to power, Peping defeated Mercedes Cojuangco Teodoro, Danding’s sister, for a congressional seat and Peping’s wife Tingting defeated Henry, Danding’s brother, for governor of Tarlac.

In the 1990s, the rivalry continued. In 1998, Gibo Teodoro succeeded Peping who was termed out of his congressional seat in Tarlac’s 1st district. In 2007, Gibo termed out also and was succeeded by his wife Monica Prieto-Teodoro. Consequently, Gibo left his Uncle Danding’s Nationalist People’s Coalition and accepted an appointment by President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo as Secretary of Defense.

In 1998, Noynoy ran for the congressional seat in Tarlac’s 2nd district and won. He was reelected in 2001 and again in 2004. He served the House as Deputy Speaker from 2004 to 2006. In 2007, Noynoy was elected to the Senate for a six-year term. Noynoy held several leadership positions with the Liberal Party. He served the party as Secretary General from 1999 to 2002, Vice-President of the Luzon Liberal Party from 2002 to 2004, Secretary General again from 2004 to 2006, and Vice Chairman of the party from 2006 to the present.

Battle Royale

Now, a battle royale looms between the Cojuangcos -- Benigno “Noynoy” Aquino III vs. Gilbert “Gibo” Teodoro Jr -- for the highest position in the land, the presidency. While there are other candidates in the 2010 presidential race, Noynoy and Gibo represent not only their feuding families but also rival political forces as well as competing economic interests. The stakes are high.

Never before in the history of Philippine politics had two presidential candidates attracted worldwide attention. The United States and China take close tab on the forthcoming elections. The 10-million strong global Filipinos in more than 200 countries are watching the two fifth-generation cousins, Noynoy and Gibo, slug it out in the largest -- and possibly, final -- battle of the Cojuangco wars.