

Famous Caviteño Dressmakers from 1946 – 1998*

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Abstract: *This study presented and described the history of famous dressmakers in Imus, Rosario and Cavite City in the province of Cavite, Philippines from 1946-2000. This qualitative research utilized a historical method in tracing the evolution of fashion in the places mentioned. The researcher interviewed people who are knowledgeable about the topic using purposive sampling based on a set standard. The results revealed the following: 1. There were more men than women who became dressmakers. 2. Among the seven dressmakers, three had formal education on fashion. 3. Each has his own talent and skill which made them famous as creative artists. The study proposes the following: first, give importance to being a dressmaker as an occupation. Second, the establishment of fashion schools in Cavite to prepare those who desire to venture into the fashion world. Third, the re-organization of an association of Cavite dressmakers to help in the development of the fashion industry in Cavite.*

Keywords: *history of fashion, history of fashion designers, culture of fashion, material culture, semiotics*

I. Introduction

Dressing up is the fourth body ceremony. One of our body's primary pleasures is to be clothed or dressed up, apart from breathing, eating, and sleeping...[1]. This statement tells the important role of clothes in man's life. As time passed by, dressing up underwent a long process of evolution from the ancient designs to the present styles. Gershman (1999) posited that Fashion is, and always has been, a very sincere statement about the times and the culture for which it is created. Fashion is a living history [2]. What Gershman stated simply proves that history is reflected in fashion alongside the lives of the people in the society.

But what really is fashion? According to Remaury in Kawamura (2011), fashion is a collective way of dressing up [3]. Therefore, fashion is the style of dress that is in vogue and which is followed by people in the society or in most parts of the world. This adherence to fashion's process of change has become a part of the culture of the people of a particular place and of the world. This can be compared to the study of Grabski (2009) which discussed dressmaking in the city of Dakar, Senegal [4]. Bartlett (2011) studied Moscow's state of fashion perspective and the styles that influenced other famous designers [5], while Kawamura (2004) looked into the effects of the apparels created by Japanese designers in Paris, the fashion capital of the world [6]. The studies of Grabski, Bartlett, and Kawamura reveal that fashion has a direct relationship with the places studied.

These developments would not have materialized if not for a group of people who spearheaded the fashion scene and established the style for a particular time. These people are called dressmakers, seamstresses, fashion designers and couturiers. According to Musni (n.d.), 'dressmaker' comes from the words 'dress' and 'make', and which means someone who makes dresses. The word 'dressmaker' is a general term for men and women who earn a living from preparing and making dresses [7]. Kennedy and Stoehrer (2013) added that a female dressmaker is also called a mantua maker or a modiste and a male dressmaker is called a tailor [8]. In this study, the researcher used the term 'designers' to refer to people who make dresses. Eventually, tailors started making clothes for women and were likewise called dressmakers or couturiers [9].

In the 20th century, a dressmaker or fashion designer can either be female, male, or gay. Some of those who became famous fashion designers during that period were Christian Dior, Gabrielle "Coco" Chanel, Yves Saint Laurent, Givenchy, Christian Lacroix, Donna Karan, John Galliano and Alexander McQueen. In the Philippines, the talents of Ramon Valera, Salvacion Lim Higgins, Pito Moreno, Ben Farrales, Aureo Alonzo, Auggie Cordero, Joe Salazar and Inno Sotto did not go unnoticed. It is important to know the history of fashion designers who became famous both here and abroad and relate them and their creations with those in this study who hail from some chosen places in Cavite.

According to Boucher in Mackrell's (1997) book, the fashion designer was a veritable artist in fashion, decorating dresses creatively with all manner of trimmings [10]. This goes to show that designers use their imagination to achieve their goals in helping people wear clothes in fashion at that time. One can discover in Vogue in 1913 that every designer is a super human...that direct the trend of fashion [1]. This gave notice to the

importance of the designer in the society because they are the ones who conceptualize and serve as guides on the latest trends as well as emerging styles of a particular time.

This study is an introductory research as well as a support concerning fashion and the famous fashion designers in the academic perspective. This is due to the lack of studies related to this topic in the Philippines and particularly in places like Imus, Rosario, and Cavite City. This research aims to spread the stories of the seven well-known Caviteño dressmakers, to recognize their innate talent in creating clothes and to give value to their contributions to the society. The various creations of the designers in this study immensely contributed not only to the preservation and propagation of such cultural activities as Santacruzán, Flores de Mayo and other festivals where both people and images of saints are garbed with the designers' creations but also to the joy and success of weddings and similar social gatherings as these outstanding works invariably showcased the designer's great skill and talent. Their creations helped the people in their community keep abreast with the latest in fashion of a particular time. In the field of historical and cultural studies, the study of fashion and their designers significantly contribute to the study of the development of the society in how people perceive appearances or looks or simply how they care about what society follows. It could possibly help a particular group of people become more interested in their own culture and history as a people, which would then translate to their collective heightened interest of other peoples' cultures. By appreciating how other people make dresses and how these dresses are worn in a multitude of occasions – religious or otherwise – people are cultivating in themselves a characteristic fashion sense. This fashion sense, in turn, would ultimately dictate what clothes particular group of people would choose to express their individuality non-verbally. It is likewise the aim of this research to make the designers in this study serve as inspiration to those who desire to follow their footsteps to make these people realize that being a designer is not just a job but is likewise an artistic endeavor.

II. Methodology

2.1 Research Design:

This study is a qualitative research which was explained by Fraenkel and Wallen (2006) as one which pertains to determining the relationship, task, situation, or material of a phenomenon [11]. On the other hand, the historical method was explained by Berg in Burke and Christiensen (2000) as a process of systematic analyses of past phenomena or a combination of phenomena to find out what transpired in the past [12]. This is also a qualitative research because it described the lives of the famous fashion designers and utilized a historical process to list down and explain the important details pertaining to the experiences of these designers from Imus, Rosario and Cavite City.

2.2 Participants of the Study

The study discussed the history of the famous fashion designers living or dead. Apart from the designers, people who had their dresses sewn by the designers as well as people who are knowledgeable about fashion were also interviewed. In the case of the designers who have passed away, their former employees or their relatives who knew about their work were also asked. In choosing which designers would be considered for this study, the researcher utilized purposive sampling which was explained by Fraenkel and Wallen (2006) as a non-random way of selecting the participants of a study because of the knowledge they possess and because the selected participants have knowledge about the needed information for the research [11]. This was used in selecting the designers based on the standards to follow and these people have the ability to answer the questions which provided the details and clarifications on the topic researched on.

The fashion designers who became famous because of their talent and skills in fashion were chosen using the following criteria: a. started out as a fashion designer during 1946-2000; b. had his/her own dress shop in the place where he/she came from; c. was recognized even outside his/her hometown; d. may have been a member of any fashion designers association.

2.3 Data Gathering

The data for the study were gathered by the researcher from the people he interviewed using a questionnaire. The questions prepared for the interview served as the communication flow. Among the people interviewed, four designers are still living, two are relatives of the deceased designer, two became employees of the deceased designer, nine had their dresses sewn by the seven designers in the study, and three personalities who have knowledge about fashion. The people who were interviewed gave their permission (in writing) to have their names published in this research.

III. Results And Discussions

The following are the seven chosen fashion designers from the selected places in Cavite according to:

A. Gender

Table 1. Gender of the Fashion Designers

| Gender | Name | Hometown |
|--------|-----------------------------------|-------------|
| Female | Teodora Sapinoso or Adorable's | Imus |
| Male | Ruben Samson | Imus |
| Male | Ramon Santiago | Imus |
| Male | Roseller Morabe or Ole' | Rosario |
| Male | Adrian Rios | Rosario |
| Male | Victoriano Caimol, Jr. or Beedzee | Cavite City |
| Male | Michaelangelo Afable or Milo | Cavite City |

Based on research, the male designers outnumbered the females. Six are males while there is only one female. The lone female designer is Teodora Sapinoso or Adorable's. She was the first to enter the fashion scene in 1934 [13]. It was ordinary that women sew dresses for fellow women and some of the famous designers that time were Pacita Longos and Mina Roa [14].

But this trend was broken by Ramon Valera when he entered the world of fashion in 1931. Valera was recognized as the first male designer for women [15]. This phenomenon had long been transpiring in Paris, the center of fashion. This was initiated by Charles Worth in 1858 (Garland, 1962 [16]; San Martin, 2009 [17]; Palomo-Lovinski, 2010 [18]; Stevenson, 2011 [19]). Therefore, Valera paved the way for fellow males to be accepted as designers for ladies' wear. Proof of his talent was his being awarded as National Artist for Fashion in 2006.

During the 1950s, the number of male designers increased. They even formed an organization, the Philippine Couture Association, which included ten male designers in 1958 [20]. Similar to what was happening in Paris, London, New York, and Milan which were called the fashion capitals (Kawamura, 2004 [6]; Grabski, 2009 [4]; Bartlett, 2011 [5]) as well as in Manila (Silvestre, 2013 [20]), male Caviteños who were making clothes for women increased.

It was in the mid-1950s when Ruben Samson of Imus soared into the fashion world [21]. Meanwhile, Beedzee Caimol started out in the late 60's (1968) in Cavite City [22], followed by Ole' Morabe in the town of Rosario (1986) [23]. Milo Afable of Cavite City (1990) [24], Ramon Santiago of Imus (1995) [25] and Adrian Rios of Rosario (1998) [26] almost simultaneously came into the scene. The last three mentioned became the prime movers of the Cavite Designers' Group, an association of Caviteño designers whose members were almost all males [25].

Meanwhile, the Fashion Designers Association of the Philippines (FDAP), which was established in 1981, was dominated by male designers. Some of its members were Caviteños Ole' Morabe, Milo Afable, and Adrian Rios [27]. The results of the research are similar to those of the study of Kawamura (2004) among Japanese designers who became known in Paris, wherein among the five subjects of the study, three were men and two were women [6]. In the study of Bartlett (2011) on Moscow's fashion, among the three subjects of his study, two were men and one was a woman [5]. The same was achieved in the study of Grabski (2009) on Dakar's designers, where six were males while two were females [4].

B. Formal Fashion Studies

The researcher further studied if the fashion designers had formal studies on fashion.

Table 2. Based on fashion studies

| Designer | Formal Fashion Studies |
|----------------|--|
| Adorable's | No |
| Ruben Samson | No |
| Beedzee Caimol | No |
| Milo Afable | No |
| Ole' Morabe | Yes – SLIM's |
| Ramon Santiago | Yes – Le Roche, New York |
| Adrian Rios | Yes – SLIM's, Golden Hands, Asian Center of Fashion Dynamics, and Fashion Institute of the Philippines |

It can be clearly seen in the table that only three of the seven designers had the opportunity to acquire formal fashion studies in fashion schools. Nevertheless, never having acquired formal fashion studies did not deter them from becoming good and recognized in the world they entered into. They are very much like the

famous European designers Christian Dior, Pierre Balmain and Andre Courreges who, despite the fact that they never had formal fashion studies, were recognized for their innate talent [28].

Among the Filipino designers, Aureo Alonzo should be given recognition for winning in the Camel Awards in February 1975 in Italy although he did not study in fashion schools [29]. This simply goes to show that formal education is not a requisite to become a good designer (Kawamura, 2004 [6]; San Juan, 2014 [29]). It is true that attending fashion schools is a big help just like what designers Ole' Morabe [23], Ramon Santiago [25], and Adrian Rios [26] proved, but this did not seem to be an obstacle at all for Adorable's [13], Ruben Samson [21], Beedzee Caimol [22], and Milo Afable [24] to be recognized as talented designers. Their interest and inclination toward fashion served as their passport to be enshrined in the fashion world in their hometown as well as in neighboring places.

C. Road to Fame

The fashion designers in this study have their respective talents in fashion. Their skills in creating clothes served as their weapon to be known as talented designers. These fashion designers are described in the following characteristics:

It was learned that Adorable's never had to use a tape measure to get a customer's measurements. Proof of her talent are her three dress shops along Taft Avenue, Manila, and another one right in their Imus abode [13]. Whenever Ruben Samson designs a dress, he would seem like just rubbing his pencil onto a pad and then something magical comes out of it [30]. Ramon Santiago, meanwhile, is known as a talented commercial designer who can immediately conceptualize a style that would suit his client [25].

Ole' Morabe's talent as a fashion designer was proven when he was voted as President of the Fashion Designers Association of the Philippines (FDAP) in 2002-2004, and apart from this was his bagging the La Flor de Manila Award for his terno in the Flores de Mayo 2002 organized by the group Congregacion del Santisimo Nombre del Niño Jesus [27]. His townmate, Adrian Rios, served as Assistant Secretary of the FDAP 2006-2007 [27] and he became a finalist in the International Young Designers' Competition in Paris, France in 1992 [26].

Beedzee Caimol can sew a dress even without using a pattern [22]. One of his evening gowns was worn by Caviteña Elaine Calva who was named as one of the semi-finalists in the 1994 Binibining Pilipinas Beauty Pageant [23]. Milo Afable likewise became a member of the FDAP [27]. He was just barely starting his career when one of his creations won in a contest sponsored by Air France [23]. He is also known for avant-garde outfits. Milo initiated different competitions like Bodyshots Cavite as well as cultural activities like the Sunduanin Cavite City [24].

Proof of the talents of the designers in this study are their respective prominent clienteles who ardently sought their expertise in their creations.

Some of those who sought Adorable's for their dresses were Mrs. Lydia Villegas, wife of Antonio Villegas, former Mayor of Manila. Then there were actress Charito Solis, opera singer Conching Rosal, and Mrs. Leonor Aguinaldo-Virata, mother of Cesar Virata who became a Prime Minister of the Philippines and who was a fellow Caviteña [13].

Ruben Samson's faithful clients were Mrs. Segundina C. Vizcarra, owner of S.C. Vizcarra [21] and Mrs. Purificacion Lopa of Manila who was a member of the Abad Family of Imus [31].

Ramon Santiago is a favorite of politicians and their wives for their fashion needs. One of them is Mayor Jenny Barzaga of Dasmariñas. Aside from this, he also provides models and beauty contest winners in and outside of Imus with his creations [25].

Among the prominent clients of Ole' Morabe is Carmen Tan, wife of business tycoon Lucio Tan. There is also socialite Vilma Valera, wife of Ismael Mathay, former mayor of Quezon City. Another one is Dr. Ma. Carolisa Pontanilla, a member of the prominent Gutierrez and Pontanilla families of Rosario [23].

One of Adrian Rios' famous clients is Ditas Remulla, wife of Juanito Remulla, former Governor of Cavite province. Betty Celestial and Christy Gutierrez were also some of those notable personalities who had sought the services of Rios, who hails from Rosario [26].

Among the affluent clients of Beedzee are the rich families of Cavite City including prominent businesswomen Mrs. Baron and Mrs. Yap who owns a furniture store. His clientele is not confined within Cavite City, as he also has as client Mrs. Ricafrente, wife of Rosario's town mayor [22].

Milo Afable used to create the outfits of celebrities Alma Concepcion, Roxanne Guinoo and Kris Aquino. Likewise, he also sponsored models and beauty contest winners in and outside of Cavite City to make his creations known [24].

The prominent ladies who became the fashion designers' clients play a pivotal role in the society simply because they are virtual mannequins who get to don the latest in fashion of a particular time. These clients are as follows: the lady politicians and wives of politicians; artists like celebrities and singers; proprietors of big businesses; fashion models; beauty contest winners; and scions of affluent families of certain places. Ordinary citizens were taught and were made to understand about fashion by these high profile personalities.

The details discussed prove that the fashion designers in the study have their own talents in fashion. The names of their prominent clients from various sectors of the society were presented, as this proves their popularity as designers. Their qualities and success as designers propelled them to fame not only in their hometown but in other places as well.

IV. Conclusions And Recommendations

The research discussed the lives of the famous fashion designers from Imus, Rosario and Cavite City in the province of Cavite. The study revealed that male designers outnumbered their female counterparts. It was likewise learned that among the designers in this study, there were more who never attended fashion school. It was also discovered that each has his own talent and skill in creating clothes and that all of them have gained recognition not just for themselves but also for their respective hometowns.

Based on the conclusions drawn, the researcher recommends that knowledge about being a fashion designer as an occupation be fortified. Being a fashion designer is a decent job where people can derive income from. It is also hereby recommended to establish fashion schools to better prepare those who would like to venture into the world of fashion. It is likewise recommended to resurrect the Cavite Designers' Group so that exchange of ideas and knowledge for the advancement of fashion in Cavite will be further enhanced.

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