

Salakot and Other Headgear

COUNTRYWIDE. *The use of headgear like hats, casques and other forms of headwear with formal shapes are in use generally in areas where the head cloth does not prevail, or is no longer the traditional bearer of status in local cultures.*



Collection Marivic Picache

Little girl, "Chony," in a Tagalog dress, with a salakot.



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Balanced on the stern of a dugout boat, a T'boli fisherman wears the s'long naf.



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Plowing his field in a drizzle, this farmer wears a simpler version of a salakot, and a raincape of leaves.



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Teofilo Garcia, a National Living Treasure, wears the Ilocano tabungaw of his own make.

THE MOST UBIQUITOUS of Philippine hats was, and possibly still is, the *salakot*, a wide-brimmed conical casque, present not only in the Philippines but also in other parts of Asia, particularly China, Japan, Korea, Indonesia and Vietnam. Pigafetta wrote after his 1521 voyage to the Philippines as Magellan's chronicler of a "queen who wore a large hat of palm leaves."

There are various Philippine salakot shapes: helmet-shaped, some pointed and others rounded like a mushroom. Jean Mallat, a French visitor to the Philippines in the mid-1880s, described it as "shaped like a small umbrella". It was well-formed, held its shape and was kept in place atop a head with an inner headband (*baat*) and a chinstrap. It is a hat that had been used for centuries by farmers, fishermen and common folk, but during the Spanish colonial period, especially during the 19th century, "wealthy and powerful Filipinos wore the salakot as status symbols meticulously made of the best and rarest materials – the finest fibers, carabao horn and turtle shell – lavishly

decorated with precious silver melted from coins." (Villegas, 2012).

The salakot has been made in most parts of the country. In the South, the Maguindanao *tapisan* was twilled soft strip bamboo, decorated with nito (*Lygodium circinatum*) or smoked bamboo, and the Samal version, plaited rattan (*Calamus sp.*), nito and cotton. For the T'boli, who continue to use their traditional dress, adornments and accoutrements, the *s'laong* is gender specific – for men, a conical but low-pitched bamboo *s'laong naf* is decorated with simple geometric designs in black and white and lined with woven rattan. For women, it is the wide-brimmed *s'laong kinibang*, a construction of bamboo strips and cotton cloth as overlay with a lining that hangs down the side and back. Visayans call their salakot, *sarok*, cognate to the Mandaya *sadok*.

In Luzon, the Tagalog made some of the finest specimens of the salakot existing today. One is made of fine bamboo with a pointed

tip but with a shallow-pitch, its rim woven with rattan. Another Tagalog style features a cone-shaped crown and gentle brim; the entire salakot of bamboo and rattan.

Up north, the Ilocano utilized *anabaw* leaves (*Livistona rotundifolia* Lam. Mart.) and *nipa* leaflets (*Nypa fruticans* Wurmb) pressed between web-like weaves of bamboo and nito or rattan for their *kattukong*.

Although the salakot was fabricated throughout the islands, those from the Cordilleras and Ilocos provinces were exceptional and duly noted. The Kalinga *kalungung* of rattan and nito or of light wood, are roundly bulbous or gently sloped but impeccable in symmetry, tightness and evenness in plaiting. The Ifugao *ballidung*, a man's sun or rain hat from the collection of the Fowler Museum, UCLA and featured in the book *Basketry of the Luzon Cordillera, Philippines*, was given a layer of resin to make it waterproof. A number of stunning Tinguian examples, accessioned to the Museum Volkenkunde in Leiden, the Netherlands, were collected in the early and mid-1880s. They are testaments to

some of the finest weavers the Philippines ever had. The Tinguian and Ilocano share the use of the gourd (*Lagenaria leucantha* synonym *Lagenaria siceraria*, or *upo* in Tagalog and *tabungaw* in Ilocano), hollowed out and dried, then transformed into a kattukong or what in Abra is referred to simply as *tabungaw*. In the holdings of the Museum Volkenkunde is an exquisitely crafted Philippine hat made of split gourd or upo, reinforced with nito woven onto the rim. It has been dated to before 1891, the year that Alexander Schadenberg presumably collected it in Abra.

The making of gourd into tabungaw continues to this day. Teofilo Garcia of Abra province forms gourds into elegant casques as his vocation. In 2012, he was awarded with a *Gawad sa Manlilikha ng Bayan* (National Living Treasures Award). It is a commitment to his culture, a display of quiet pride in his art and the discipline it requires. It is also a constancy that manifests a sustainable relationship with his environment, most specially his tabungaw garden. All these repose in each tabungaw that Teofilo Garcia creates.