



## **ANDRES BONIFACIO AND THE 1896 REVOLUTION**

**The transformation of the Katipunan on 24 August 1896 into a democratic national government signaled the start of the revolution**

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On 24 August 1896, Andres Bonifacio convened the Kataastaasang Kapulungan or National Assembly of the Katipunan in Melchora Aquino's barn in barrio Banlat, then part of Kalookan. Assembled were the members of the *Kataastaasang Kapulungan* (Supreme Council), as well as the *pangulo* (heads) of the *sangunian* (supra-municipal) and *balangay* (chapter) units. There they made three major decisions. First, they declared a nationwide armed revolution to win freedom from Spain. Second, they established a national government. And third, they elected officials who would lead the nation and the army.

### **Katipunan Founding**

The ilustrado-initiated propaganda movement had failed to persuade the Madrid government to effect urgent reforms distant Asian colony. The Filipino activists in Europe eventually realized the change had to come about from within the archipelago itself.

With this in mind, Jose Rizal came home to the Philippines on 26 June 1892. After meetings with local activists, Rizal established a civic society called the Liga Filipina. On 3 July, a week after he arrived in Manila, Rizal launched the organization in Doroteo Ongjunco's house on Ilaya Street, Tondo. The aims of the society were national unity, mutual aid, common defense, the

encouragement of education, agriculture and commerce, and the study and application of reforms.

The Liga Filipina was short-lived. On 6 July, Rizal was arrested and detained upon the orders of the Governor-General Eulogio Despujol. Two weeks later, he was sent to Dapitan, Mindanao, where he lived in exile for four years.

One of the founding members of the league was Andres Bonifacio. On 6 and 7 July, when it had become apparent that an openly pro-Filipino organization like the Liga Filipina would be suppressed by the colonial government, Bonifacio and some friends formed a secret society. Among them were Deodato Arellano, Ladislao Diwa, Valentin Diaz, Jose Dizon, and Teodoro plata. The organization was called the Kataastaasan Kagalang-galang na Katipunan ng mga Anak ng Bayan. The aims of the Katipunan were to unite the country and to win independence from Spain by means of revolution.

Bonifacio, however, continued to work with the Liga, which its other prominent members had resurrected in April 1893 because of his personality and communication skills, the Supreme Council of the Liga appointed him chief of propaganda. Bonifacio's success in recruiting members unnerved the more conservative elements of the Liga, who did not agree with his revolutionary ideas. The Liga ceased to exist as October 1894.

Bonifacio did not become president of the Katipunan until 1895, although he had always been an officer. Under his guidance, the Katipunan prepared for revolution. Emilio Jacinto, Bonifacio's trusted friend and adviser, wrote the *Cartilla* or primer, which embodied the teachings of the organization. The Katipunan operated a clandestine printing press and published a newspaper, *Kalayaan*. By 1896, on the eve of the revolution, the membership of the society had expanded dramatically. Estimates vary from 30,000 to 400,000.

The Spanish *secreta* or secret police knew of the existence of a dangerous clandestine organization by early 1896. The Governor-General believed the government was still on top of the situation, but there was no let-up in the surveillance of suspect personalities. By April 1896, the rebels were reported to have cut railroad lines in Kalookan and environs. By May, the general assembly of *pangulo* and representatives from all the *balangay* (chapters) of the Katipunan were locked in heated discussions on the timing of the revolution. To many, the time had come; but some, like Rizal, balked at the idea.

By April or May 1896, the existence of the Katipunan was already known to the Guardia Civil Veterana. In August, the confession of Teodoro Patino's sister to Fray Mariano Gil, the Augustinian curate of Tondo, merely confirmed what the government already knew. The priest persuaded the authorities of the grave danger the society posed to the Spanish community. Reacting to the ensuing hysteria and acting on information collated over a long period of time, the government had numerous prominent residents arrested and detained; houses were raided and searched. Governor-General Ramon Blanco was urged to apply the "juez de cuchillo" or total annihilation of the Filipino population in a prescribed zone within the areas of uprising.

There was no holding back the revolution.



*Andres Bonifacio, cited as president of the Tagalog Republic. This engraving accompanied an article on the Philippine Revolution in the La Ilustracion Española y Americana, 8 February 1897. The journal referred to Aguinaldo as a generalissimo, not the head of government. Bonifacio had 60,000 troops at his command, 20,000 of them armed.*

### **A nation is born**

The Spanish historian Manuel Sastron describes the revolution as a “rebellion of the Tagalogs against Spanish domination;” he also refers to the Tagalog rebels.” But it is clear that the 1896 revolution was a national endeavor.

Written and published in 1896, the Katipunan’s *Cartilla* defined its major objectives:

*Ang kabagayan pinaguusig ng katipunang ito ay lubos at dakila at mahalaga; papagisahin ang loob at kapisan ang lahat ng tagalog.\* Sa pamamagitan ng isang mahigpit na panunumpa, upang sa pagkakaisang ito’y magkalakas na iwasak ang masinsing tabing na nakakabulag sa kaisipan at matuklasan ang tunay na landas ng Katuiran at Kaliwanagan.*

*\*Sa salitang tagalog katutura’y ang lahat nang tumubo sa Sangkapuluang ito; sa makatuid, bisaya man, iloko man, kapangpangan man, etc., ay tagalog din.*

(The objective pursued by this association is noble and worthy; to unite the inner being and thoughts of the tagalogs\* through binding pledge, so that through this unity they may gain the strength to destroy the dense shroud that benights the mind and to discover the Path of the mind and to discover the Path of Reason and Enlightenment.

\*The word tagalog means all those born in this archipelago; therefore, though visayan, ilocano, pampango, etc. they are all tagalogs.)

The term “Tagalog” defined all persons born in the archipelago, whether Bisayan, Ilocano, Pampango, etc. Therefore the Tagalog nation or Katagalugan consisted not only of Tagalog speakers but included all those who grew up (*tumubo*) in the Philippines, regardless of ethnolinguistic classification and ancestry. At the time, the term “Filipino” applied solely to Spaniards born in the archipelago. Bonifacio and Jacinto made “Tagalog” a term applicable to all indios or natives.

In his unpublished memoir, “*Paghihimagsik Nang 1896-1897*” (The Revolution of 1896-1897), Caviteño revolutionary and Aguinaldo’s secretary Carlos V. Ronquillo explains the concept further:

*Ito ang dapat unawain ng mga bumabasa: sa tawag naming tagalog na makikita sa bawat dahon halos ng kasaysayang ito, ay di ang ibig naming sabihi’y ang paris ng palagay ng iba, a inuukol lamang sa tubong Maynla, Kabite at Bulakan, at iba pa, hinde kundi ang ibig naming tukuyin ay Filipinas...sapagka’t sa palagay naming ay ganito ang talagang nararapat ikapit sa tanang anak ng kapilipinuhan. Ang tagalog o lalong malinaw, ang tawag na “tagalog” ay walang ibang kahulugan kundi ‘tagailog’ na sa tuwirang paghuhulo ay taong maibigang manira sa tabing ilog, bagay na di maikakaila na siyang talagang hilig ng tanang anak ng Pilipinas, saa’t saan mang pulo at bayan.*

(This is what the readers must understand: by what we refer to as tagalog, a term which may be found on almost every page of this account, we do not mean, as some believe, those who were born in Manila, Cavite and Balacan, etc. no, we wish to refer to the Philippines...because, in our opinion, this term should apply to all the children of the Filipino nation. Tagalog, or stated more clearly, the name “tagalog” has no other meaning but “tagailog” (from the river) which, traced

directly to its root, refers to those who prefer to settle along rivers, truly a trait, it cannot be denied, of all those born in the Philippines, in whatever island or town.)

In his patriotic writings, Bonifacio expressed his concept of nationhood. In *K.K.K Katungkulang Gagawin ng mga Z.Li.B., Pagibig sa Tinubuaang Bayan, Hibik ng Filipinas sa Ynang España* and *Ang Dapat Mabatid ng mga Tagalog*, he referred to the Philippine islands as sangkapaluan or Katagalugan. In a revolutionary leaflet printed in Cavite during the first quarter of 1897, Bonifacio wrote: “*Mabuhay ang Haring Bayang Katagalugan.*”

It was clear to Bonifacio and the members of the Katipunan that theirs was a national struggle.



A Class 7 Cedula issued to Vicente Mariño of Taal, Batangas, on 18 December 1896. This was the type of tax receipt torn up by members of the Katipunan in Balintawak. (Emmanuel N. Encanacion [ENE] Collection)

### First Filipino government

From 24 August 1896, the Katipunan became an open de facto government. The society had been organized as a secret organization with its own laws, bureaucratic structure and an elective leadership. But a working government was imperative once the August 1896 revolution had begun.

Bonifacio, when questioned at Tejeros, Cavite, defined the letter “K” in the flag to mean “*kalayaan*” or freedom and explained:

*...na mula sa Ktt. Pamunuan ng Katipunan, hanggan sa kababa-babaan, ay nagkakaisang gumagalang sa pagkakapatiran at pagkakapantay-pantay; namumuhunan ng dugo at buhay laban sa Hari, upang makapagtatag ng sarili at malayang Pamahalaan, na samakatwid, ay mamahala ang Bayan sa Bayan, at hindi ang isa o dalawang tao lamang.*

(...that from the Highest Officials of the Katipunan to the lowest members, all are one in their respect for brotherhood and equality; they risk blood and life in the

struggle against the King, in order to institute our own free Government, so that, in short, the People, and not only one or two people, shall govern the Country.)

Jacinto Lumberas stated:

*Ang Kapuluan ay pinamamahalaan na ng K.K.K. ng mga anak Anak ng Bayan, na siyang nagbukas ng Paghihimagsik; may Batas at Alintuntuning pinaiiral; sinusunod at iginagalang ng lahat sa pagtatanggol ng Kalayaan, pag-ibig sa kapatid, pag-aayos at pamamalakas ng mga Pamunuan.*

(The Archipelago is governed by the K.K.K. ng mga Anak ng Bayan, which initiated the Revolution: with Laws and Regulations which enforces; followed and respected by all for defending Freedom, fraternal love, constituting and consolidating the Leadership.)

Santiago Alvarez also said:

Kaming mga Katipunan...ay mga tunay na Manghihimagsik sa pagtatanggol ng Kalayaan sa Bayang tinubuan.

(We of the Katipunan...are true Revolutionaries in defending the Freedom of our Nation.)

While Bonifacio, Lumberas and Alvares defined the moral, democratic and nationalist bases of the government, some elements were more explicitly republican. One captured official seal, illustrated in the 30 March 1897 issue of *La Ilustracion Español y Americana*, bore the term "Republika ng Katagalugan."

John R.M. Taylor, the American military historian and custodian of the Philippine Insurgent Records, concluded that Bonifacio established the first Filipino national government. Taylor interpreted the documents he saw as follows:

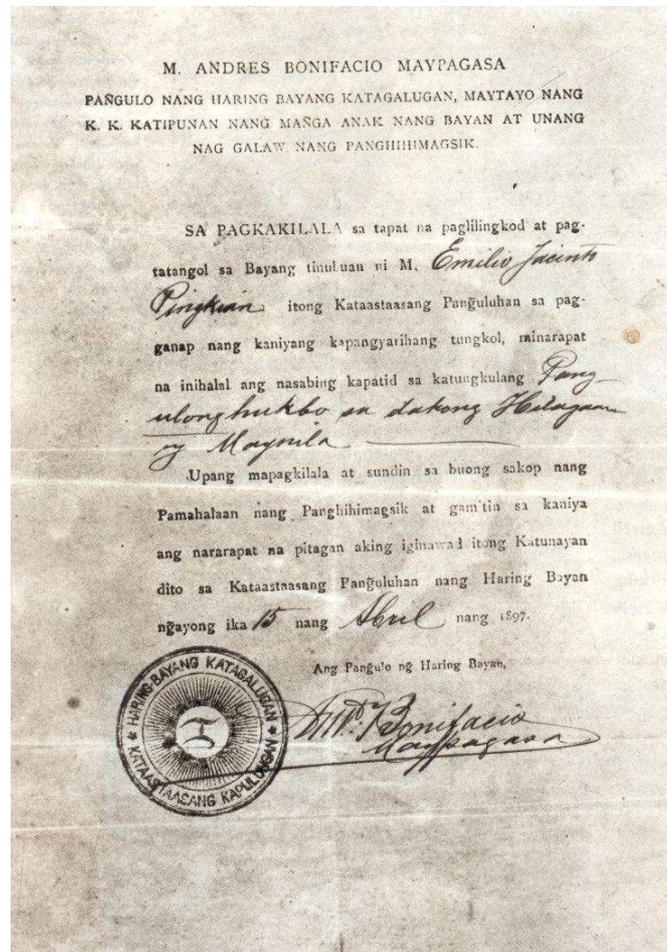
The Katipunan came out from the cover of secret designs, threw off the cloak of any other purpose, and stood openly for the independence of the Philippines. Bonifacio turned his lodges into battalions, his grandmasters into captains, and the supreme council of the Katipunan into the insurgent of the Philippines.

Gregorio F. Zaide, who wrote a history of the Katipunan, acknowledged Bonifacio's revolutionary government:

The Katipunan was more than a secret revolutionary society; it was, withal, a Government. It was the intention of Bonifacio to have the Katipunan govern the whole Philippines after the overthrow of Spanish rule.

Even Teodoro Agoncillo had to concede that:

Immediately before the outbreak of the revolution, therefore, Bonifacio organized the Katipunan into a government revolving around a ‘cabinet’ composed of men of his confidence.



*The appointment paper of Emilio Jacinto as commander-in-chief of the revolutionary forces north of Manila, signed by Andres Bonifacio as “Pangulo ng Haring Bayang Katagalugan.” The letterhead cites Bonifacio as having founded the Katipunan and initiated the revolution. (ENE Collection)*

### First president

A far clearer idea of Bonifacio’s Katagalugan government emerged in the late 1980s when letters and other important document signed by Bonifacio—part of the collection of noted historian and former director of the prewar Philippine Library and Museum, Epifanio de los Santos—became accessible.

Three letters and one appointment paper, written by Bonifacio on printed letterheads dated from 8 March to 24 April 1897, and all addressed to Emilio Jacinto, prove that Bonifacio was the first president of a national government. These letters contained the following titles and designations:

*Pangulo ng Kataastaasang Kapulungan*  
(President of the Supreme Council)  
*Ang Kataastaasang Pangulo*  
(The Supreme President)  
*Pangulo nang Haring Bayang Katagalugan*  
(President of the Sovereign Nation of Katagalugan)  
Note: “Bayan” means both “people” and “country”  
*Ang Pangulo ng Haring Bayan*  
*May tayo nang K.K. Katipunan nang mga Anak ng Bayan,*  
*Unang nag galaw nang Panghihimagsik*  
(The President Sovereign Nation Founder of the Katipunan,  
Initiator of the Revolution)  
*Kataastaasang Panguluhan,*  
*Pamahalaang Panghihimagsik*  
(Office of the Supreme President,  
Government of the Revolution)

The prewar scholar Jose P. BAntug referred to Bonifacio as the “*Kataastaasang Pangulo*” and “General’ No. 1.” Jose P. Santos in 1933, and Zaide in 1939, came to the same conclusion and recognized the Bonifacio presidency.

However, both men misread the phrase *Ang Haring Bayan*—found in the Minutes of Tejeros Assembly (23 March 1897), the Jacinto Appointment Paper (15 April 1897), as well as the undated Bonifacio Manifesto entitled *Katipunan Marahas ng mga Anak ng Bayan*—as *Ang Hari ng Bayan*. The first phrase refers to Bonifacio’s adaptation of the Western concept of republic—from *res publica*, literally public thing or common wealth—to the Filipino concept of “sovereign people.”

Thus, the government headed by Bonifacio *prior* to 22 March 1897 was democratic in nature and national in scope, contrary to some postwar historians’ contention that Bonifacio attempted to establish a government separate from Aguinaldo’s only *after* the Tejeros Assembly, and was therefore guilty of treason.

An article on the Philippine revolution appeared in then 8 February 1897 issue of the *La Ilustracion Español y Americana*. It was accompanied by an engraved portrait of Bonifacio wearing a black suit and white tie, with the caption “Andres Bonifacio, Titulado “Presidente’ de la Republica Tagala” and described him as the head of the native government. The reporter, GA. Reparaz, referred to Aguinaldo only as a generalissimo. The key officers in the Bonifacio government, according to Reparaz, were as follows : Teodoro Plata, Secretary of war; Emilio Jacinto, Secretary of State; Aguedo del Rosario, Secretary of Interior; Briccio Pantas, Secretary of Justice; and Enrique Pacheco as Secretary of Finance.

In his 1897 work, “*El Katipunan o El Filibusterismo en Filipinas*,” the Spanish historian Jose M.del Castillo reiterated the results of what was, in effect, the first Philippine national elections and listed the same names as *La Ilustracion*.

The August 1896 transformation of the Katipunan into a revolutionary government and Bonifacio's election to the presidency were confirmed by Pio Valenzuela in his testimony before the Spanish authorities. Del Rosario, who was captured, was described as "one of those designated by the Katipunan to form the Revolutionary Government of the Philippines and to carry out the function of local government administration."



*The earliest dated and only known 1892 Katipunan document, authorizing the establishment of a Katipunan Sangunian balangay or chapter council, in Mindanao. Sworn statement of Restituto Javier dated 2 September 1892, with Andres Bonifacio signing as the society's Secretary for Deodato Arellano, President, among others. (ENE Collection)*

### **Katipunan democracy**

Bonifacio set in place mechanisms for popular participation from the national to the local levels. The government established by the Katipunan was run by consensus.

The Supreme Council was called the *Kataastaasang Kapulungan* as can be noted from the letterhead and seal used by Bonifacio. Baldomero Aguinaldo, *Pangulo* (President) of *Sangunian Bayan Magdalo* (Magdalo Council), in a letter dated 21 March 1897 and addressed to Felix Cuenca and Mariano Noriel refers to a memorandum from Bonifacio as "*isang Kalatas ng G. Presidente*" (a message from Mr. President) and recognizes the national government led by Bonifacio as "*Kgg na pulungan ng hihimacsic (Gobierno revolucionario)*" (Honorable revolutionary council (Revolutionary government)).

In each province, the Kataastaasang Sangunian coordinated the Sangunian Bayan, which saw to public administration and military affairs on the supra-municipal or quasi-provincial level. In the province of Manila, there were many Sangunian Bayan, such as in Tondo, Kalookan, Mandaluyong, San Juan del Monte, Marikina, Pasig and Pateros, San Mateo, etc. There were Sangunian Bayan in the province of Batangas, Bulacan, Laguna, Nueva Ecija and Tayabas, etc. There were at least three Sangunian Bayan under unified military commands to facilitate strategic planning and tactical moves.

At the founding assembly in Kalookan on 24 August 1896, the revolutionary government made the following decisions: 1) the revolution would begin with attack on Manila at midnight of Saturday, 29 August; 2) a revolutionary government was established with the appointment of Aguinaldo del Rosario, Vicente Fernandez, Ramon Bernardo and Gregorio Coronel as brigadiers general; 3) the four generals were tasked with strategic planning for the occupation of Manila; 4) the military situation was to be constantly appraised so that an uprising could be started earlier than 29 August; 5) assigned routes for three commanders were laid out through Tondo, San Marcelino and the Sampaloc rotunda (now part of Sta. Mesa).

The revolutionary troops were more enthusiastic than effective, however, and the Katipunan was unable to wrest state power from the well-entrenched Spanish forces.

Later, Bonifacio and more than ten generals commanded a rebel army assembled by Sanggunian Bayan of various towns within and around present Metro Manila. They engaged mostly in attack-and-withdraw operations: they seized town halls, capture food, arms, and ammunition supplies, and neutralized enemy outposts.

The rebel forces were divided into north and south sectors by the Pasig River. To the north lay Bonifacio's guerilla forces in Manila and suburbs, with fortified camps in Balara, San Mateo, Pantayanin and Montalban; the armed Katipunan groups in Bulacan and Mariano Llanera's forces based in Nueva Ecija were constantly on the move through The Sierra Madre the patron (landed gentry and rural elite) leaders. Governor Ramon Blanco reported to the Spanish Cortes the reinforcements were necessary to destroy both sectors and end the insurrection.

The Cavite rebel groups evolved into two supramunicipal governments with military commands. One was called Magdiwang, covering the territory from Noveleta and San Francisco de Malabon up to Batangas. The other was called Magdalo, which extended its sphere of influence from Kawit, Cavite, to the southern parts of the province of Manila, now Rizal. It soon became apparent that in order to hold on to captured territory, the rebels had to conform unified intra-provincial administrative units. The perimeter was then secured with forts and trenches.

The Katipunan army in Cavite was big, but it has been estimated that the army north of the Pasig River was much bigger. In other parts of the archipelago, the rebels were organized into squads and commands smaller than those in Central Luzon.

The original Katipunan sub-organizations of Sangunian Bayan on the supra-municipal level,

and the Panguluhang Bayan (local council) on the district or barrio level constituted the civilian component of the Katagalugan government. As the government was a revolutionary one, many civilian leaders were concurrently military officials. At the same time, generals and key officers in the revolutionary army exercised power over government structures. Bonifacio, as president was effectively the commander-in-chief. Aguinaldo was one of his captains general.

The Spanish military writer Federico de Monteverde gives details of the military organization instituted by Bonifacio. Monteverde fully illustrates the different revolutionary insignas corresponding to each rank, such as colonel, brigadier general, major general, lieutenant general and captain general. Various military insignas are also discussed by Taylor, and described by Generals Alvarez and Artemio Ricarte in their memoirs.

As the revolution progressed, Bonifacio had to formalize the army. In an order dated 16 December 1896, the revolutionary president redefined the hierarchy of the Katipunan military organization. Each battalion unit—called Katipon—was to be composed of 203 men.

As commander-in-chief, Bonifacio supervised the planning of military strategies and the preparation of orders, manifests and decrees, adjudicated offenses against the nation, as well as mediated in political disputes. He directed generals and positioned troops in the fronts. On the basis of command responsibility, all victories and defeats all over the archipelago during his term of office should be attributed to Bonifacio.

The claim by some historians that “Bonifacio lost all his battles” is ridiculous.

### **Foreign Affairs**

Prior to the outbreak of the revolution, some Filipinos based in Hong Kong acted on behalf of the nationalist movement in the Philippines. Led by Doroteo Cortes, they solicited funds from various sources, especially from wealthy businessmen and companies. They sent the donations to Jose Maria Basa, who was also based in Hong Kong and served as disbursing officer.

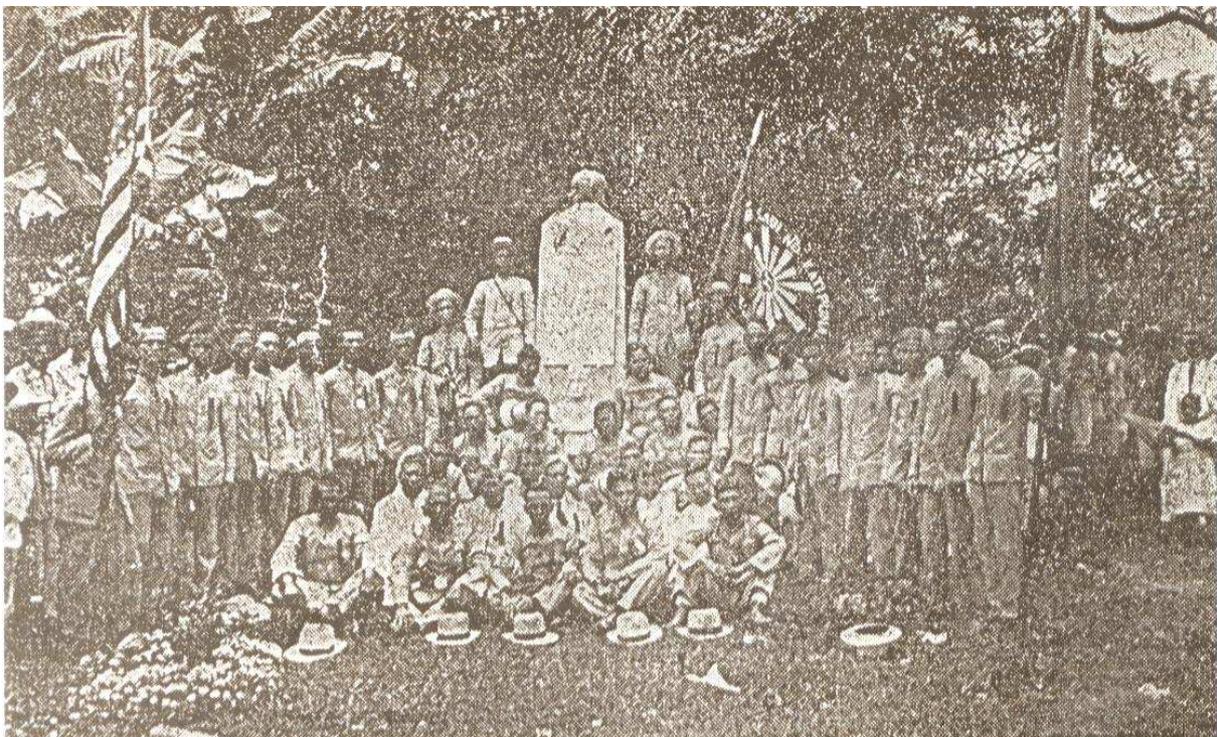
A large portion of the funds was used to send a commission to Japan to negotiate for political, military and financial aid for the anticipated uprising towards the end of 1896. With Cortes were Isabelo Artacho and Jose A. Ramos, who arranged with Japanese politicians to acquire 100,000 rifles and an unspecified amount of ammunition. The weapons were partly paid for in advance while the balance was to be amortized over a number of years. The commission also petitioned Japan to send a military squadron to aid the revolutionary forces and, after independence was won, to recognize the Filipino state. Investigations by the Spanish authorities revealed, "The plan was that while Andres Bonifacio was busy recruiting people for the general uprising, Doroteo Cortes should carry on the necessary negotiations with Japan..."

Although Japan was not at war in 1896, she looked at her Asian neighbours with a keen expansionary eye. However, most Asian countries then were under European colonial dominion. Around the middle of May 1896, the Japanese cruiser *Kongo* visited Manila.

Bonifacio and some Katipunan members immediately sought a meeting with Japanese Admiral Kanimura, while Jacinto drafted a message addressed to the Emperor of Japan. It read: "The Filipino people greet the Emperor of Japan and the entire Japanese nation, with the hope that the light of liberty in Japan will also shed its rays in the Philippines..." Japan was not disposed to go to war against Spain in 1896-1897 just to uphold the rights of Filipinos. Nevertheless, Bonifacio expected the arrival of arms and ammunition from Japan in August 1896.

Cortes continued to represent the revolutionaries before foreign entities. Together with Basa and A.G. Medina, Cortes sent a petition to the Consul of the United States of America in Hong Kong on 29 January 1897. The request implored the "Gefe Supremo desu Nacion" for protection of the Filipinos and recognition of their right to self-government. But the petition was ill-timed. Grover Cleveland lost the presidential elections; his successor, William McKinley, declared a national policy focused on "domestic business conditions and economic recovery from the continuing depression of 1893 and therefore (he tried) to avoid conflict with Spain."

In January 1897, The Philippine Commission in Hong Kong addressed a petition to Henry Hannoteaux, the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, which enumerated 50 grievances of the Philippines against Spain and called for assistance. However, France remained strictly neutral because she feared that such anticolonialism would contaminate neighbouring French Indochina, and also because France had no means for practicable intervention.



*1917 marker of the 23 August Cry at Kangkong, installed by the veterans of the revolution.*

### **Significance of 1896 Revolution**

In July 1892, Bonifacio founded the Katipunan which launched the first anticolonial revolution in Asia in August 1896. He formed the first national governments established by Aguinaldo from 1897 to 1899.

The Katagalugan government carried over the symbols and teachings of the Katipunan, which the people accepted as the revolutionary authority. This government was democratic in principle, orientation and form. At its inception, it was formed by representatives from the provinces where the Katipunan had a mass-based membership. It adopted as its national standard the Katipunan's red flag with a white sun with the Tagalog letter "Ka" in the center and commissioned Julio Nakpil to compose the national anthem, "*Marangal na Dalit ng Katagalugan*."

In defining "Tagalog" as the term for all Filipinos, and "Katagalugan" as the country's name in lieu of "Filipinas" which had colonial origins, Bonifacio and the Katipunan sought to define a national identity.

The Katagalugan government commanded the loyalty of a significant portion of the population. It held territory, where it exercised the functions of a state. It had armed forces which fought for, and defended its existence. It had diplomatic component, which attempted to gain international recognition for the new nation.

The governments that succeeded Bonifacio's essentially republican Katagalugan government could only proceed from it. The 24 August 1896 government certainly had a large mass-based following than the 24 August 1897 entity that deposed it. But as a result of the power struggle in Cavite, Emilio Aguinaldo, although only one of many revolutionary generals, usurped President Andres Bonifacio's authority. Aguinaldo reorganized Bonifacio's Republika ng Katagalugan and renamed it Republica Filipina.

The first Filipino national government was established on 24 August 1896. Filipinos should observe the date as National Day, if the 1896 Philippine Revolution and the Katipunan are to have any worth at all. And Filipinos should recognize Andres Bonifacio not only the founder of the Katipunan and leader of the revolution of 1896, but as the first Filipino president: the father of the nation and founder of our democracy.

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