

# Spanish Colonial Manila in Transition: Trade and Society at the Turn of the Nineteenth Century

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## Introduction

Life in Spanish colonial Manila revolved around the Manila-Acapulco galleon trade and its supply line, Chinese junks from Fujian, for about two hundred years from 1571, when Manila became the Spanish colonial capital. Spanish Manila was firmly established as a predominant entrepôt in Asia, in which American silver was exchanged for Asian luxuries such as silk and porcelain from China, as well as Indian piece goods from the Coromandel Coast. On the other hand, the right to participate in the Manila galleon trade had officially been limited to the Spanish citizens of Manila, as it was part of the Spanish Empire's mercantile Indies trade. However, this picture began to change after the middle of the eighteenth century, when the Spanish colonial government took initiatives to diversify trade, to develop the country's agricultural and natural resources, and to encourage direct voyages to Spain.

This paper describes some aspects of the socio-economic processes experienced by Spanish colonial Manila in transition at the turn of the nineteenth century. It draws upon some relevant cases from Spanish archival sources, such as the records of the Manila Customs House, or *Aduana*, and the registries of notarial records, or *Protocolos*, of Manila preserved in the National Archives of the Philippines (NAP). Changing patterns in the Manila trade of the day are reflected in these documents. In

them, the Dutch, Americans, and other nationalities whom the Spanish authorities referred to as *extranjeros*, or foreigners, began to appear as the contractors of notarial deeds. In contrast, the Chinese junk traders who used to draw contracts to get funds from Spaniards or religious organizations for their Fujian trade practically disappeared (Sugaya 1989). On the other hand, the Chinese merchants in Manila, as we can gather from the Spanish records, increasingly procured their merchandise from Europeans in Manila, Macao, or Canton, rather than from their countrymen.

### **Changing Patterns of Trade**

One of the reasons behind the trade diversification policy of the Spanish government was the fact that the state-supported Indies trade, including the Manila Galleon trade, had become so costly for the Spanish crown to maintain. The naval activities of the British and other European nations had expanded to an extent that made it difficult to keep the galleon routes clear. The Spanish Philippines in particular could no longer afford to depend upon the Mexican vice-regal government for its survival, as there was an increasing possibility of isolation should the galleon traffic be cut off by British forces (Fry 1985, 3-21; Bauzon 1981, 75-76).

As part of the diversification, European vessels carrying Asian goods were officially allowed to enter Manila from 1785. Then a decree in 1789 allowed European vessels to enter Manila from 1790 onward. This decree was particularly important, as it virtually made Manila an open port for foreign trade. European and American merchants, including English “country traders,” took this opportunity for expanding their Asian trade, in which buying Philippine agricultural exports, such as sugar, coffee, indigo, and abaca, was a component (Legarda 1999, 71-88).

Their activity, having effectively connected Canton with Manila, curtailed the volume and value of Chinese junk trade from Fujian, as they also came to assume the role of suppliers of Chinese merchandise. As a result, the Chinese junk trade from

Fujian gradually diminished. Accordingly, as we shall see, Chinese merchants in Manila increasingly withdrew from the Fujian trade and shifted to wholesaling, or found new fields of activity such as involvement in the Sulu trade. Nevertheless, the transpacific galleon trade was still the single most important viable trade in Manila during the period under consideration, i.e., the turn of the nineteenth century. Thus, Spanish merchants largely clung to it until they incurred huge losses in 1820 as a result of the Mexican independence movements (Lagarda 1999, 94–99; Kishitani 2008, 82–84).

In sum, during the period under consideration, the new rules of the game would play a major role for the next decades, particularly the 1820's onward. At the same time, the old transpacific trade — the Manila Galleon trade and its supporting line, the Chinese junk trade — was still viable as long as it could still bring profits to the investors. The new rules were particularly important, as they led in the laying of a foundation that still serves, more or less, for the present socio-economic framework of Southeast Asian nations in general, and of the Philippines in particular.

### **Manila's Foreign Trade at the Turn of the Nineteenth Century**

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the importance of Canton and other destinations for Manila's commerce was growing, while the Fujian trade was still viable for the Chinese carrying traders who continued to uphold the old system of Manila's trade.

The Manila Customs House, or *Aduana*, records of 1 June 1803 to 31 May 1804, show that during this period, there were 10 Chinese junks, or *champanes*, which departed from Manila laden with Philippine products. Five ships were destined for Lanquin (漳州府龍溪),<sup>1)</sup> four for Chancheo (漳州/泉州), and one for Emuy (廈門/Amoy/Xiamen). They carried 14 kinds of Philippine products, all of which were traditional exports of the archipelago, evaluated at 107,117 pesos and 4 reales.<sup>2)</sup> The

three most important products were *balate*, or sea cucumber; ebony; and *sibucao*, or sappanwood. They comprised 84.4 percent of the total value of the 14 products.

During the same period, eight Chinese junks entered Manila — two ships from Limpo (寧波/双嶼),<sup>3)</sup> four from Lanquin, and one each from Chancheo and Emuy. They brought various textiles, jars, ceramics, utensils, gray paper, preserves and pickles, as well as those items specially meant for the Chinese in the archipelago, such as clothes, shoes, tools, and accounting books. Their appraised value was 151,436 pesos and 4 reales. When this figure is compared with that of exportation, one finds that the latter is smaller. The gap in value between exports and imports must have been filled with American silver. Currency exports are not included in the customs document here cited, the title of which reads “...salieron....con efectos del Pais para sus destinos,” or “left with Philippine products for their destinations.”

In order to grasp the picture of Manila’s trade at the time, it should be meaningful to compare these figures with those of foreign or non-Spanish western ships, such as American, Portuguese, Danish, English, French, and Joloan (from capital of the Sulu Sultanate) ships, departed with Philippine products during the same period. Among 29 ships that entered Manila, 23 of them were loaded with Philippine products with an appraised value amounting to 248,568 pesos and 6 reales.

They not only carried traditional exports mainly for Macao and Canton, but also newly developed Philippine products, such as sugar, textiles, abaca, and pepper, based on the needs of their destinations, such as, Jolo, Malaya, Madras, Bengal, Cochin China, Batavia, Boston, Copenhagen.

Thus, while Chinese junks from Fujian continued their traditional trade, foreign ships were engaged in the exportation of both traditional and newly developed products. Their destinations varied from Macao and Canton in China to other Asian, European and American ports. These foreign vessels took advantage of the opportunity that Spanish Manila provided under the liberalization of foreign trade, and expanded their scope of activity to the extent that they more or less succeeded in assuming the

functions of Chinese junk traders from Fujian.

As for the Acapulco trade, the examples here are drawn from the loan contracts preserved in the *Protocolos* of Manila for the year 1798. The responsible notary public, or *escribano publico*, of the City of Manila was Manuel del Castillo, who registered 52 pertinent cases, in all of which the contractors were Spaniards. They obtained the funds either from individuals or the *Real Mesa de la Santa Misericordia*. The Misericordia was a charitable foundation set up in 1594, and was originally named the *Santa Hermandad y Cofradía de la Misericordia*. In 1778, the name was changed to *Real Mesa de la Santa Misericordia*. Each of the donations to the foundation was called *obras pías*, which was divided into three parts that were managed separately (Cushner 1971, 139-141, 151).

The *Protocolo* for the year 1798 shows that among 52 loan contracts, nine cases were made to individuals through the Real Mesa de la Santa Misericordia, all of them dated 23-27 August, amounting to 18,916 pesos, without specifying interest rates. The reason why the interest rates were not specified seems to be that religious foundations were not supposed to earn interest on loans. According to Nicholas P. Cushner, however, one-third of the *obras pías* was lent to merchants for the Acapulco trade, at an interest rate of 50 percent at maximum (Cushner 1971, 144).

The remaining 43 cases were loans obtained from individuals at a premium of 40 percent. These contracts consisted of amounts ranging from 500 pesos to 30,000 pesos, making a total of 161,707 pesos 6 reales. Among them 16 cases were 2,000-peso loans; seven cases, 3,000-peso loans; five cases, 1,000-peso loans; and four cases, 4,000-peso loans, respectively. These accounted for 45.7 percent of the total 161,707 pesos. This total would turn out to be 226,389.8 pesos if each of their interest rates was all collected.

The rate of interest for the Acapulco trade was, as mentioned above, set at 40 percent for the year 1798, but it actually varied year to year. In 1797, for example, the interest rates were 30-35 percent, with, among 28 cases, three cases being 35 percent, one

without specification, and the remainder, 30 percent. In other years, such as 1800, the loans were made at a rate of 50 percent.

The Spaniards also invested in China trade, such as that destined for Emuy. For example, among the 50 notarized entries drawn by Manuel del Castillo, dated from 18 October to 29 December 1797, 12 were of loans made for the Emuy trade, amounting to 43,900 pesos at an interest of 15 percent. The charitable foundation, or Misericordia, also extended loans for Asian trade, with destinations such as the Costa (India), Batavia, and ports of Indochina, at the rates of 16-22 percent.

### **The Chinese in Spanish Manila in the Transitional Period**

Chinese residents in Spanish Philippines had been virtually Catholicized since the latter half of the eighteenth century, but during the period under consideration, junk traders, crewmen and other transients, who were mostly unbaptized, were as a rule confined to the *Arcaiceria San Fernando* during their stay (Sugaya 2000, 2006). As Spanish Manila further diversified its foreign trade, the relative importance of the Fujian trade declined. Chinese residents had to adjust to the new socio-economic environment. Sometimes the Chinese travelling to and fro across the South China Sea used European shipping between Manila and China.

On 29 January 1789, a Chinese Catholic resident, Santiago Ong Ko anchong [sic] (仙參敖阮鐘觀) appeared before Miguel Joseph Flores, one of the notary publics of the City of Manila, to make a contract with Francisco Alegria, a captain of the City infantry. Santiago borrowed 1,000 pesos from Alegria at an interest of 16 percent, and this amount of money was to carry to Macao on board a *fragata*, or frigate, named Santa Florentina, captained by Juan de Aviles. His guarantors were Capitan Domingo de la Cruz Gonzales and Juan Ygnacio Chongco (范怡那受春觀), a business partner of Santiago who was also to be on board to Macao with him.

The typical arrangements of contracts of this kind were as follows. The creditor

would shoulder the ordinary risks of loss and damage during the voyages, in other words, “*riesgos ordinarios de quilla, costado, y perdida general.*” After the unloading of goods at Manila or any other ports of the Islands, the amount, including the interest, should be paid within 15 days to the creditor or other authorized person in his place.

We can gather from another entry of the registry of Flores that the four men involved in the contract above would have been in a good business partnership. They had actually concluded a similar deed for Canton in the previous year. Alegria stated in another notarial deed dated the following day, 30 January 1789, that he had duly received the amount, with 16 percent interest, from Santiago, and thus nullified the deed of the previous year.

Another case may be cited here to show that the Chinese merchants in Manila procured their merchandise not only from their countrymen but also from Spaniards and/or other Europeans. The case here is taken from a notary deed dated 19 November 1800, drawn by Enrique Lucera y Camacho.

Chinese merchants Josef Conchu (扶西公□ [illegible]) and Josef Siancam (扶西尚長), both resident in Binondo, Manila, ordered a variety of Cantonese goods, mostly textiles, from a sergeant mayor, Juan Bautista Cabarruz, to the value of 5,391 pesos with a premium of 62 percent. Thus the former was to be indebted to the latter for a sum total of 8,616 pesos and 6 reales. Toward this, the two Chinese had advanced 6,200 pesos to Cabarruz. The latter in return had brought to the former a part of the order; that is, textiles with a value equivalent to 5,715 pesos and 2 reales and 10 granos, inclusive of the 62 percent premium. The two Chinese then contracted anew with Cabarruz to bring in all the remaining goods in his custody in exchange for a payment covering the deficit, with the transaction to be completed in January 1801. The three, along with an interpreter of the Chinese language, Francisco Leoncio, put their signatures to the contract.

Josef Siancam (Jose Ong Siantiang) also appears in other contracts.<sup>4)</sup> In some documents he was referred to as a silk trader, resident in Binondo with his wife, and

was shown to have been involved or invested in the Sulu trade.

The Sulu trade gained importance in the changing pattern of international trade of the Spanish Philippines. Historically, to the Fujian Chinese, the Spanish Philippines, or rather, Spanish Manila and the Sulu Sultanate, were two different but closely associated locations that were among their preferred destinations of trade and their immigration network. When the traditional pattern of trade that had long held the Manila galleon as its pivot waned, particularly after the 1810's, the Fujian Chinese based in Manila found new approaches, such as investing in the Sulu trade, while they increasingly withdrew from the Fujian-Manila trade.<sup>5)</sup>

A notarized statement drawn up by Fermin Joseph Reyes, which Josef Siancam made through the assistance of an interpreter, Matheo Thomas de Bienvenida, on 13 February 1810, is summarized as follows:

In 1807 Siancam bought a *pontin*, or undecked cargo boat, named San Jose from the late Juan Manuel Arrieta at a price of 3,600 pesos. He rebuilt it as a *champan* and renamed it Japsun. This ship was then sold to Constancio de Santa Rosa, a *principal* of the *gremio* of mestizos of the *pueblo* of Binondo, along with his heirs and successors, at a price of 4,600 pesos.

In another contract of 15 February of the same year, Siancam borrowed from Manuel de Arana, a captain and aid of the Royal Corps of the Artillery (*Capitán y Ayudante del Real Cuerpo de Artillería*), 1,700 pesos with an interest of 25 percent. Angel de la Fuente and Constancio de Santa Rosa acted as his guarantors. It was stated that the amount Siancam borrowed was to be carried to Sulu in a *champan* named San Jose (known as Japsun) owned by Constancio de Santa Rosa and captained by Alonso Blanco. Thus it was exactly the same *champan* that Siancam had just sold to Santa Rosa a few days before this loan contract was drawn. On the same day, Siancam also borrowed 500 pesos with an interest of 20 percent from Jose Coll for the Sulu trade.<sup>6)</sup>

The case of Siancam, or Ong Siantiang, was just one example of the Manila Chinese of the day. He must have been one of those Chinese in Manila who, while



adjusting themselves to the changing environment, succeeded in seizing new economic opportunities, and became involved in or invested in the Sulu trade, particularly after the 1810's, in cooperation with Chinese mestizos and Spaniards.

### **Foreigners in Spanish Manila**

As Spanish Manila became virtually an open port for foreign trade, more *extranjeros*, or foreigners, of different nationalities began to visit and stay in the colonial capital. Among them were those who did not embrace Catholicism. The Spanish colonial government of the day had to deal with these non-Spanish western people while it continued to uphold Catholicism and the idea of “Catholic Enlightenment” as one of the principles of the Spanish Empire to which the Spanish Philippines belonged. The importance of Catholicism for the Spanish Empire would be reflected in the Cádiz Constitution of 1812.

Under these circumstances, the Spanish notary publics had to adjust to the new socio-economic environment. For example, English-speaking and/or Protestant parties began to appear in the notarial deeds of Spanish Manila. A case in point may be cited here.

On 29 March 1800, Vizente Gonzales de Tagle, one of the notary publics of the City of Manila, hurriedly had to seek an interpreter of English in order to draw up a power of attorney. An English captain of the brigantine “Emperor,” Guillermo Rovertó [sic] Stewart, or Wlm R. Stewart, appeared before the notary public to entrust his power to Juan Kerr, an American, or *ingles Americano*, who resided with his wife in Manila and acted as agent for foreigners or non-Spanish western visitors. As Stewart did not speak or understand Spanish, Gonzales de Tagle had to find a person who could serve as a trusted interpreter of English, since there was no sworn interpreter, or *interprete jurado*, of the language in his office at that time. In the end, Juan Abran Samir was appointed as an ad-hoc interpreter after he made the sign of the cross that he would faithfully

translate the language. Samir put his signature to the document, along with Stewart's, to certify its contents.

About a year later on 24 March 1801, Gozales de Tagle had to deal with an American by the name of Pedro/Peter Taylor, who wanted to authenticate a sales contract. Taylor had sold a small frigate, or *fragatilla*, the Enterprise of Providence, which was anchored in the port of Cavite, to Joaquin Braga, a Portuguese, at a price of 6,500 pesos. This ship had been bought previously from Silbester Simons [sic], an American, at Macao on 17 January of the same year at a price of 2,700 pesos. The notary public was shown a document of this transaction, but he was not able to read it. Thus he had to find someone with a knowledge of English to translate it into Spanish in order to confirm the previous sale.

Language was not the only problem. The fact that Taylor was a Protestant also posed difficulty when the notary public tried to establish his identity. It was considered useless to ask a Protestant to cross himself, as a Catholic would, in order to guarantee his statement. In the end, Taylor was made to swear to tell the truth with his right hand raised, together with his sureties, the Dutchmen Juan Mor, or John Huberto Moor, and Pedro Evedardo Camper. Both Moor and Camper had a working knowledge of the Spanish language and, in this case, acted as interpreters for Taylor.

## **Conclusion**

During the transitional period of Manila's foreign trade at the turn of the nineteenth century, the galleon commerce with Acapulco, which was still viable, remained its supply line. Fujian junks regularly called at the port of Manila as before. While the traditional pattern of foreign trade continued to function in the colonial economy, new patterns under the Spanish policy of trade liberation and diversification gained force, to the extent that Manila virtually opened its port to foreign trade. American and European ships calling at Spanish Manila carried newly developed Philippine produce

to a variety of destinations in Asia, the United States, and Europe, along with the traditional products specifically for the Chinese market. As a result, Spanish Manila was transformed into a cosmopolitan city (Alfonso and Martínez 2006; Cheong 1970, 1971).

The colonial people in Spanish Manila at the turn of the nineteenth century, particularly the Spaniards and Chinese, still seemed to derive profits from the old system of trade, but they gradually had to adapt themselves to the changing socio-economic environment. The Chinese in Manila, for example, began to use European shipping to travel to China, to order merchandise, including Chinese products, from Europeans, and to invest in the Sulu trade.

When the transpacific commerce carried on by the galleons ceased to exist after Mexican independence, the Spanish Philippines definitely turned to the exporter of Philippine products. Among the foreign ships that visited Manila, those of the United States played an important role, particularly in the early decades of the nineteenth century. The American ships brought Mexican silver to the colony, and bought sugar and abaca in volumes that served as an incentive to the Philippine export economy (McHale and McHale 1962).

The Chinese in Manila, who had already moved toward wholesaling during the transitional period, seized the economic opportunity to cooperate with their mestizo counterparts, who carried on inter-island trade to gather Philippine products for them. In contrast, Rafael Díaz Arenas wrote in 1837 that the Macao trade was most important for the Spaniards (Díaz Arenas 1838). This must have reflected the position of the Spanish merchants in Manila, who seemed to cling to their traditional partnership with the Portuguese.

## Endnotes

- 1) Alfonso and Martínez identify “Lanquin” with “Nanking” in Jiangsu (江蘇), but it must have been a port in Zhangzhou/Chiang-chiu (漳州) in Fujian. Nanking as a port of origin would not have been likely as it did not function as such during the period under consideration. The term “Lanquin” must have been derived from “Lungqi/Lung-ch’i (龍溪),” or “Leonque” in Spanish documents of the day.
- 2) 1 peso = 8 reales, 1 real=12 granos
- 3) “Limpo” is usually identified with “Liampo,” or the Ningbo (寧波) area in Zhejiang (浙江). As a study by Fang Hao (方豪) has shown, for the sixteenth century it has generally been accepted to identify “Liampo” with “Shuang yu (雙嶼).” See, Fang Zhenzhen (方真真), 2012, pp. 17–19.
- 4) Josef Siancam was also referred to as “Jose Ong Siantiang (扶西王尚長).” It is not unusual in the Spanish documents of those days that the personal names, particularly, of Chinese and foreigners, carry various spellings.
- 5) The Manila-Sulu trade and the Chinese involvement for the period under consideration, see Warren 2007, pp. 38–66.
- 6) The champan Japsun/ San Jose arrived from Jolo, the Sulu Sultanate on 3 July 1808 with a cargo of wax, balate, camphor, cacao, and rattans, with its value amounting to 13,850 pesos (Appendix F, Warren 2007, 268). For Siamcam’s involvement in the Sulu trade in 1812, see *ibid.*, pp. 57–58, 270. Warren also shows the trade procedures taken by Chinese merchants in Jolo, see pp. 58–59.

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