

The Spanish image of the Chinese in the Philippines

ANTONIO GARCÍA-ABÁSULO

Universidad de Córdoba

Recibido: 7 de abril de 2008

Aceptado: 9 de julio de 2008

Abstract

In the following pages I analyse the way in which the Spaniards mentally categorised the Chinese, when they met them in the Philippines. The written sources we have at our disposal reflect the effort made by both parties to reach a formula that would allow them to draw mutual benefit from their proximity. In doing so they overcame many difficulties that had their root in the diversity of the two cultures and they did so despite the inconveniences and sometimes even antagonisms that beset such an undertaking and which also spring from the matters of divergence that they are intent on resolving. The society formed by the Philipinos, Spaniards and Chinese clearly demonstrates how the Spanish colonial experience could be useful when viewed in relation to our present, increasingly global, perspectives.

Key words

Chinese / Spaniards / Philippines / XVI - XVIII Centuries

La imagen española de los chinos en Filipinas

Resumen

En este trabajo analizo el modo en que los españoles insertaron a los chinos en sus categorías mentales, cuando se encontraron con ellos en Filipinas. La documentación refleja el esfuerzo realizado por ambas partes para llegar a encontrar una fórmula que les permitiera compartir los beneficios de su cercanía, salvando los inconvenientes que presentaba su pertenencia a mundos culturales tan diversos, a veces incluso antagónicos. La sociedad formada por filipinos, españoles y chinos muestra hasta qué punto, la experiencia colonial española puede ser provechosa con las perspectivas actuales de un mundo global.

Palabras clave

Chinos / Españoles / Filipinas / siglos XVI a XVIII.

I wish to concentrate on an aspect of the relations that Spaniards and the Chinese had in the Philippines; that is, the long and hard process of developing unique neighbourhood relations that sometimes led to episodes of severe clashes, and from which peaceful co-habitation also arose. In any case, in Manila, Spaniards and the Chinese as well as lived in the knowledge that their dependence was shared: the Spanish depended on the Chinese for almost everything and the Sangleyes depended on the Spaniards for what fundamentally interested them. Here it is important to make it clear that they were interested in silver, of course, but also in becoming established in Manila and its surrounding area as a more desirable way of life than in China. Otherwise, it would not be possible to understand how, after the uprising of the Chinese and such rotund repression by the Spanish, the world of Hispano-Chinese dependence was always, and very soon, re-established, and with a Chinese presence that became increasingly more abundant. At the end of the 16th Century, the Chinese of Manila offered the Spanish authorities help to enter China, in order to attract Spanish attention toward continental China and assure the Sangley community in Manila a calm, prosperous life.¹

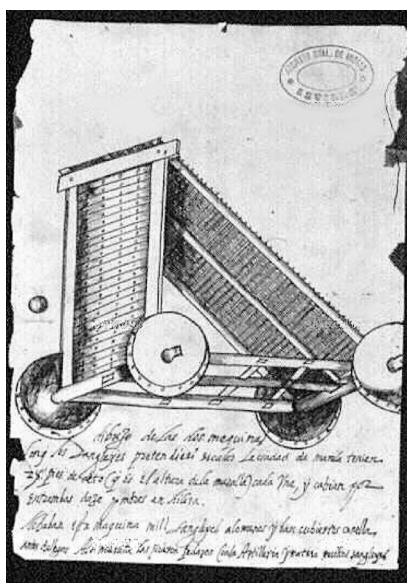
I. CHINESE IN THE PHILIPPINES: BETWEEN NECESSITY AND SUSPICION

Thus, and to begin with, right from the offset, two main factors were embodied in the Spanish idea of the Chinese: the need for their presence, and the fear of having such a different and abundant population so near to them. It was abundant to such an extent that there were major imbalances, such as two thousand Spaniards, at the most, to three thousand, ten thousand, twenty thousand, and even thirty thousand Chinese throughout the 17th Century. They were different to the extent that the Spaniards did not have a specific category to classify them. The Spaniards considered the Filipinos as they had the native population of America, that is, as Indians; but the Chinese did not fit in that category. In fact, the tax obligations of the Chinese soon concentrated on payment of *almojarifazgos* (duties), establishment licences, licences on games of chance and many extraordinary subsidies. However, in Mexico in the 17th Century, the Sangleyes who arrived on the Manila Galleon were called «Chinese Indians», and thus they were allowed to move as much among the Spanish as well as among the Indians, because they were not affected by their policy of residential separation. However, this caused absolute confusion, because all the Asians were known

¹ About this issue the work of Ch'en Ching-Ho can be consulted: *The Chinese Community in the Sixteenth Century Philippines*. Centre for East Asian Cultural Studies (East Asian Cultural Studies Series; 12), Tokyo 1968, p. 90.

by the name of «Chinese Indians», whether they were Filipinos or Chinese. The actual term «Sangleyes» as a people who come and go,² is a reference to outsiders, that is, persons who did not belong to the Filipino world or the Spanish world. In other words, they were clearly others, although they became neighbours.

During the 17th Century, except at times when projects of conquest arose, it seems the Spanish had a concept of the Chinese of the Philippines in which fear and suspicion seemed mitigated. The most important changes came about due to the death of the governor Gómez Pérez Dasmariñas and a group of Spaniards, murdered by Chinese in 1594 and, above all, due to the uprising of October 1603. Some outstanding voices in the world of Manila had risen to warn of the danger, but the numerous deaths on all sides, regardless of which group they belonged to, and the proof of the economic precariousness that accompanied the absence of the Chinese, established an awareness of need in the future, and the feelings of fear and suspicion. On the other hand, the swift return of the Chinese to Manila, that had returned to normality by 1606, would also set the conviction for the future, among the Chinese, of the advantages of remaining close to the Spanish.



Chinese device used to climb the walls of Manila during the rising of 1603
(Archivo General de Indias, Mapas y Planos, Ingeniería y muestras, 237)

² Letter of [the] Governor Francisco de Sande to the King, Manila, [7 jun 1576] June 7th 1576, Archivo General de Indias (AGI), Filipinas, 6.

These attitudes were reinforced even more during the 17th Century, in spite of the episodes of conflict between the Spanish and Chinese in 1639, 1662 and 1686, although at the end of the 17th Century, the Crown seriously considered the convenience of a more radical attitude toward the Chinese, raising the matter with the authorities in Manila that it would be necessary to expel the non Christian Chinese from the Philippines and ensure that those who arrived every year during the champagne season returned immediately after the fair.³

To summarise and conclude, one may say that the Spaniards had learned by the end of the 16th Century that they were absolutely dependent on the Chinese in economic terms, which meant they had to live with them as much for their own survival, as well as so at least some of them could make a good fortune before returning to Mexico or Spain. Of course, one must understand that this affected people as well as the continuity of the Philippines as a Spanish colony. Also, throughout the 16th Century, the image of the Chinese developed as original, as traders, skilful craftsmen in any trade, good farmers and fishers, hoarders of silver coinage, but also as a threat, due to the possibility that they might rise up against the Spanish, and also dangerous due to the influence of their moral behaviour and some aspects of their religion upon Filipino neophytes and even among some Spanish old Christians. We may remember the controversies over Spaniards attending the comedies and celebration of the Chinese New Year, that were eventually prohibited as those of outsiders who have come to bring idolatry and superstition to the Christian lands.⁴ The problem was also being considered at that time in China as well, due to the variations in the cultural adaptation programmes promoted by San Francisco Xavier, that Mateo Ricci followed faithfully and which were abandoned by his successor, Nicolás Longobardi.⁵ As in China, in Manila, the problems arising from the Chinese rites increased suspicion between the Chinese and Spaniards. Also in Mexico, at the end of the 16th Century, the «Chinese Indians» had stood out as skilful craftsmen in any trade.

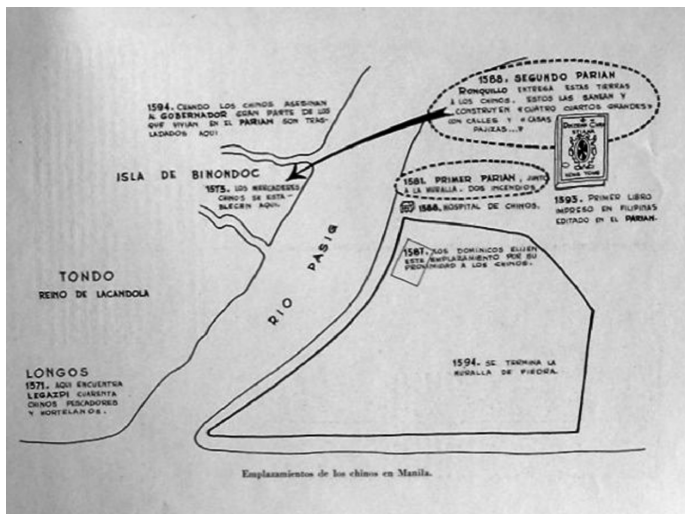
³ Real Cédula, Buen Retiro, November 14th 1686. AGI, Filipinas, 67.

⁴ Auto by Fray Cristóbal de Salvatierra. Manila, February 14th 1592. AGI, Filipinas, 6.

⁵ ZHANG, Kai: *Diego de Pantoja y China: un estudio sobre la «política de adaptación» de la Compañía de Jesús*. Editorial de la Biblioteca de Beijing, Beijing 1997, pp. 67-105.

II. TESTING REMEDIES: FISCAL CONTROL, SPACE CONTROL AND CONVERSION

The Spanish tried to overcome the problems of the Chinese presence by regulating entry, fiscal control and spatial control; establishment of the Chinese in the Philippines and fiscal control came to be identified, because those who remained in Manila paid an establishment licence, that became an important source of public revenue. Spatial control was attempted by confining the Chinese population to Parián, their own neighbourhood outside the walls, but a canon shot away. In fact, it was not possible to control the establishment licences, nor was it possible to avoid the Chinese becoming established outside Parián, especially around Manila.



Pedro Ortiz Armengol. *Intramuros de Manila*. Madrid, 1958, p. 127.

On the other hand, in the process of assimilating the Chinese in the Filipino space and the mental categories of the Spanish, religion progressively took a key role, so conversions to Christianity were also used as a filter to purify the Chinese community. In general, the Sangley and mestizo Christian Sangley were better accepted by the Spanish world, because they were nearer to the Spaniards. Sometimes these considerations were not fulfilled in fact. The judge Bolívar y Mena sentenced four Sangleyes to death for the uprising of 1686, three of whom were Christian and one an infidel, and one of the Christians, Juan Tenco, of 25 years of age, was married to a mestiza Sangley, was a shop

keeper at Puerto de Cavite and even spoke good Spanish.⁶ However, there are more abundant testimonies in which the Spanish are proven to have been closer and had greater confidence with the Christian Sangleyes. An example of this is the trial in June 1686 of four head bakers from one of the bakeries in Manila,⁷ at a psychologically important moment because the bodies of the Sangleyes executed for rebellion that very year still hung at the gates to the Parián. The baker Sangleyes were accused of having put ground glass in the bread to murder the Spaniards. The case was thrown out and the Sangleyes absolved, but the proceedings are very interesting due to the testimonies of the highly qualified neighbours of Manila, who came forward to declare the innocence of the Sangleyes. Among them, we may mention Friar Francisco de Zamora, the prior of the Monastery of San Pablo, Field Marshal Fernando de Bobadilla and Admiral Juan de Vargas Machuca, the godfather at the baptism of one of the accused, the baker Juan de Vargas. The testimony provided by these and many other neighbours of Manila was in keeping with the argument put forward by Urbano de Medina, Receiver of the Courts of Manila and council for the defence, who declared the incoherence of the accusation because the baker Sangleyes «are almost neighbours of this city, as some of them have married and had children here, and one may not assume they intended to kill the Spaniards, when their conservation and that of their families lies with them. There were 37 Sangleyes working at the bakeries in Manila at that time, 32 of whom were infidels and five Christians. The average age of the Christians was almost 50 years, their time of residence in Manila more than 25 years, three of them were head bakers and two were married, one to a Filipina and another to a Sangley mestiza.⁸

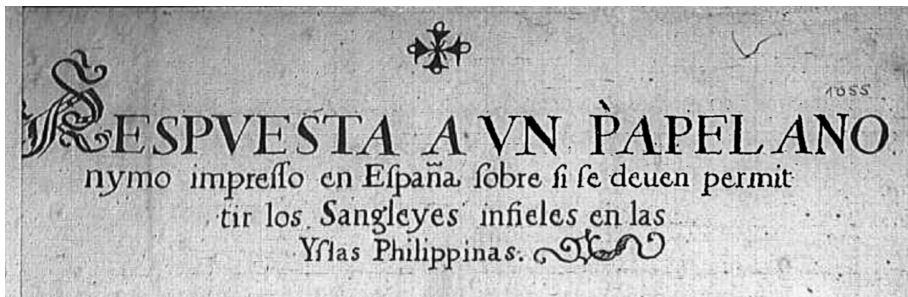
⁶ Testimonio a la letra de los autos que en virtud de comisión del superior gobierno sustanció, feneció y concluyó el señor oidor Dr D Pedro Sebastián de Bolívar y Mena sobre la sublevación de los sangleyes extramuros el año pasado de 1686 (Literal testimonial from the proceedings which, commissioned by upper instances, were executed by Judge Dr. Pedro Sebastián de Bolívar y Mena about the uprising of the outer city sangleyes in the past year of 1686), 1.^a Vía 1687, ff. 918 y ss. AGI, Filipinas, 67. Juan Tenco testimonial. Manila, June 16th 1686.

⁷ Testimonio a la letra de los autos que en virtud de comisión del superior gobierno sustanció, feneció y concluyó el señor oidor Dr D Pedro Sebastián de Bolívar y Mena (...).

⁸ Testimonios de los sangleyes cabezas de horno y sus trabajadores. Autos de los panaderos, sustanciados por el oidor D Pedro Bolívar, que se declararon por nulos. Con el testimonio de las nulidades, vicios y defectos de ellos (Testimonials by the sangleyes masters of bakeries and their workers. From the proceedings by Judge Pedro Bolívar, which were declared no valid. With the declaration of the reasons for their non validity and their defects. 1687, f. 325v. AGI, Filipinas, 69.

III. THE RELIGIOUS CRITERION. EXPULSION OF NON CHRISTIAN CHINESE

Thus, one may understand that, at the end of the 17th Century, the authorities in Spain considered it necessary to limit the establishment of the Chinese in the Philippines to Christians, and they ordered expulsion of infidels from the country. The order allowed the Christian farmers and craftsmen to establish themselves anywhere in the Philippines; the Christian traders had to live in the Parián, and infidel traders were forced to return to China after the fair, when they had sold their merchandise. Application of that order was not easy, due to the fear that the expulsion of the infidel Chinese would paralyse the economic life of the Philippines. In any case, there was a long debate, of almost half a century, that gave rise to a great deal of documentation, in which there was further emphasis on the importance of conversion, that is, on the religious factor, on the process of assimilation of the Chinese.



Heading of one of the reports made assessing the expulsion of non Christian Chinese.
Victorio Riccio, Cavite, October 15th 1681, AGI, Filipinas, 28.

In order to be able to better assess the dimensions of the problem, we have the results of the visit to the county of Manila by the relator Pedro Calderón Enríquez. In 1741, there were 25,000 mestizo Sangley in the area, a quarter of the total tax-paying population, and more than 4,000 infidel Sangleyes in the Parián and a further 4,000 infidels in the districts around Manila. Inclusion of the mestizo Sangley had been good and all the testimonies were favourable to their presence in the Philippines.⁹ The Court of Manila reported to the King in

⁹ Testimonio de Reales Cédulas en que SM aprueba lo que ejecutó en la numeración que hizo de las provincias de Tondo y Cavite por el Señor Oidor Licenciado Pedro Calderón Enríquez, y certificados de jueces oficiales reales sobre el planteo del nuevo arreglo en cinco provincias de las seis que comprendía el ramo de Bagamundos y aumento que se causó a la Real Hacienda de 25.000 pesos

1695 that the mestizo Sangley were bred and educated like the other vassals, without any distinction whatsoever.¹⁰ The Archbishop of Manila, Juan Ángel Rodríguez, also addressed the King in similar terms in 1738: the mestizo are very useful to these isles and contrary to the very sangleyes.¹¹ On the other hand, the presence of such a large number of mestizo Sangley had begun to definitively form the county of Manila.

The Sangley to be rejected was the infidel Sangley, for whom the relator Calderón and other authorities of Manila and Madrid reserved the mental space that Spain had set aside for Jews and Muslims, that is, the category of groups for whom the only solution was expulsion from the country, after they had proven that a policy of residential separation was ineffective in practice and especially severe when infidel Sangleyes lived with Christian Indians. The grounds of law used by Calderón ranged from the Holy Scripture and Articles, to the provisions of the Collations of the Laws of the Kingdoms of Castile and the Indies. Again, it became clear that the fundamental factor that made the Chinese different was that they were infidels. Calderón specified that quality even further and placed it above knowledge of the language, by proposing that the married Christian Sangleyes who lived in the county of Manila should be given a deadline to learn Spanish or the language of the country, so they could attend worship in its parishes. Only if they did not learn one of these languages, should they be transferred to a town with a parish priest who spoke Chinese, in practice to Tondo, Binondo or Santa Cruz.¹²

To conclude, considered from the perspective of time, the dependent relations between the Spaniards and Chinese in the Philippines show that both applied powerful protective factors. The Chinese made themselves essential to ensure they could remain in the country, and their mastery of the economic life and integration in the colonial world through conversions and, above all by mestizo

de renta al año y lo demás. (From the *reales cédulas* in which the King approves the enumeration of Tondo and Cavite provinces by Pedro Calderón Enríquez, and the royal commissioners certified documents about the new distribution in five provinces of the former six which used to conform Bagamundos and the increase of 25000 yearly pesos to the Royal Excise that was caused by it.) With letter by Pedro Calderón Enríquez. Manila July 14th 1746. AGI, Filipinas, 152.

¹⁰ Audiencia of Manila to HM. June 18th 1695. AGI, Filipinas, 202.

¹¹ Archbishop of Manila Juan Ángel Rodríguez to the King. June 20th 1738. AGI, Filipinas, 202.

¹² Testimonio de tres representaciones hechas al gobernador Gaspar de la Torre por el oidor Pedro Calderón Enríquez, sobre arreglar a los sangleyes. Año de 1741. AGI, Filipinas, 202. (Testimonial of the three proceedings by Judge Pedro Calderón Enríquez to Governor Gaspar de la Torre about the sangleyes issue. AGI, Filipinas, 202. Archbishop of Manila, Carlos Bermúdez de Castro, to the King. Manila, July 8th 1729. AGI, Filipinas, 202.

birth; the Spaniards took advantage of the Chinese to ensure the continuity of a small community in the East, applying factors to recover resources through fiscal control of extraordinary services by the Chinese, protecting themselves from them through assimilation by conversion.

•◆ ANTONIO GARCÍA-ABÁSULO

