

THE EUROPEANS DISCOVERY OF XINA

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THE FRIAR'S MISSIONS AND MENDOZA'S BOOK

THE MANILA HUB

In the first thirty years, 630 junks from China anchored in Manila, bringing about 200,000 people. Most of them returned to China in the next monsoon four months after their arrival, but some stayed.

In 1589 the Chinese in Manila already numbered 4,000 - and this in a city where the residents of Spanish or Mexican Creole origins were not more than 700 - .

In 1600 the number of Chinese had grown to 15,000, and by 1603 they reached 25,000. As we have seen in previous lectures, these Manila Chinese, the sangleys, were well connected both to the great trading families in nearby Fujian, and to the Chinese Diaspora that was already settled all across South-East Asia.

The sangleys came to cater to the newcomers, expanding a commercial route that was already in existence, and once in Manila they realized that they could cater for a whole continent. The sangley traders discovered America well before the highly learned scholars of China.

The Castilian colonists came to depend on the sangleys in every field. The bishop of Manila, Salazar, described them as "the most hardworking and most ingenious people that exists in the world." By the beginning of the 17th century, the Manila sangleys were casting the iron and making the canons needed not only for the defense of Manila but also for Veracruz and Acapulco, the Mexican terminals of the Oceanic galleons.

But the Spaniards developed a strong fear of the increasingly numerous sangleys. This fear even blocked their curiosity about Chinese culture.

They tried in vain to limit their numbers, and from time to time they resorted to massacre: 25,000 Chinese were killed in 1603 and another 23,000 in 1639.

But the Chinese returned, and the Spaniards welcomed them back for the simple reason that they were essential to operate the daily life of the colony, and because they were the soul that pushed the lucrative trade that retained them all there, the Manila Galleon.

The profits coming from the Manila Galleon route obliterated previous efforts to establish a port on the Chinese coast, similar to the one the Portuguese already had in Macau.

In the early years building a port had been the Castilian dream, and is what Rada had tried to negotiate with the Chinese while he was in China. But the project never succeeded, in part due to the opposition from the Portuguese in Macau, but above all because by the late sixteenth century, Manila had become an international hub due to the lucrative traffic of the Galleons, and building a new port would have gone against its interests.

In the last decades of the sixteenth century Manila occupied a prime position in the center of the four most attractive cardinal points of the world: from the north it received Chinese silks and porcelains; from the south came cloves, nutmeg and all the spices of the Moluccas; from the west came Indian cottons and ivory from Southeast Asia; and from the east flowed an endless stream of silver coins that allowed them to buy everything.

Mexico and Peru had wealthy merchants established in Manila: the survival of the Philippines in the Spanish imperial system was always directly linked to the interests of Mexican officials and merchants.

As one scholar said, Mexico was the link that kept the Philippines Spanish. By the 17th century thousands of Chinese were already in Mexico. They came in the Manila Galleons. Many had arrived as slaves, especially women, while others had worked as craftsmen in the shipyards where the Galleons were built, and not a few embarked as sailors, craftsmen, caulkers and carpenters, and also probably as medical staff: in fact, one of the first professions exercised by the Chinese in Mexico would be barbers, a name that also included medical services.

On the Galleons' arrival, the dusty little town of Acapulco was transformed for a couple of months into one of the most active world markets. Silk was the main product coming from China, and its massive entry in the American market prompted the angry protests of the Spanish silk producers and ruined in no time the incipient silk industries that the Spanish had established in Mexico since the very first days of the conquest.

All the high classes in Spanish America, whether civil or ecclesiastic, were swathed in silks, while the cotton arriving also in the Galleons clothed all the rest, down to the poorest Indians.

When the transactions were over, the exquisitely well-packed products took the China Road, a mule trail that linked Acapulco with Puebla and Mexico City and that up to today preserves a wealth of Chinese goods.

Many of the porcelains stood at the intermediate points, and inspired regional styles like the blue and white *ceramica poblana* in Puebla that adopted forms and decorative patterns in imitation of Chinese vases.

The church, which was firmly established on both sides of the Pacific, had a very active presence in the traffic of the Manila Galleons. Augustinians and Franciscans equipped their

tables with a vast array of Chinese ceramics and displayed in their sacristies exquisitely inlaid lacquered furniture.

The bishop commissioned for the Mexico cathedral the towering metal structures of the choir that are still there today. A multitude of Holy Virgins crossed the Pacific, clothed in embroidered silks and with their almond shape eyes proclaiming their oriental origins.

Christ on the cross was certainly a favorite subject: figures came in all sizes, but with their rigid bodies and hieratic faces they were quite different from their European contemporaries, closer to the Gothic than to the Baroque sensibility.

Although a wide variety of goods were transported on the galleons from Manila to Acapulco, it was such a long journey that it blocked the transfer of plant products between Asia and America. On the contrary, the journey from Acapulco to Manila could be sailed in less than three months and the transmission of American foodstuffs to China was very swift.

Even so, apart from some cochineal, some cocoa and a few pints of wine it has been said that the cargoes bound for Manila from Acapulco consisted mainly of "silver and friars."