Sinifying New Spain: Cathay’s Influence on Colonial Mexico via the Nao de China

Edward R. Slack, Jr.

Abstract
The study of Asian migration to colonial Mexico via the nao de China — especially by Chinese and mestizos living in the Philippines — has been languishing in academic oblivion. This article reveals how transpacific relations between Manila and Acapulco profoundly affected the social, economic, religious, and political spheres of activity in New Spain. Aside from the challenges encountered by chinos acclimating to a Castilian race-based hierarchy, it also probes the reasons behind widespread social amnesia in the mid-to-late 18th century with respect to Mexico’s Oriental heritage. Furthermore, this article contests accepted scholarly definitions of mestizaje (mixed-race heritage) that emphasize a purely Atlantic pedigree. Reconstructing the process of sinification in colonial Mexico is imperative to “reorienting” its history and chronologically repositioning studies on the Chinese diaspora in the Americas.

Scholarship on the Asian diaspora in Latin America has been plagued by one incontrovertible weakness: an appalling lack of research on the “first-wave” (pre-Opium War) of migration. Speaking in terms of the past 5,000 years (and arguably longer), there is no reliable archaeological or humanly chronicled evidence of Asians ever having sailed to the Americas prior to 1565 aboard Friar Andrés de Urdanata’s trailblazing galleon the San Pedro (Lorenzo 1996: 99-105). A few years later, Miguel López de Legazpi’s conquest of Manila in 1571 ushered in a new era of regular maritime commerce across the Pacific Ocean. The Manila galleons transported Asian products and peoples to Acapulco and other Mexican ports until 1815 (Schurz 1939: 1, 60, 261). For almost two and one-half centuries travelers from Cathay, Cipango (Japan), the Philippines, various kingdoms in Southeast Asia and India were known collectively in New Spain as chinos (Chinese) or indios chinos (Chinese Indians), as the word chinola became synonymous with the Orient.
It is an indisputable fact that Chinese sojourners or colonists, depending on one’s point of view, quickly established themselves in Manila following Spain’s conquest of that “insigne y siempre leal” (Illustrious and Forever Loyal) city. The population of Chinese, or *Sangleys* as they were called by the Castilians, reached upwards of 30,000 by the early 17th century (Blair and Robertson 1905: Vol. 9, pp. 319-320; Vol. 12, p. 147; Vol. 16, p. 42, fn. 15). Friar Pedro Chirino related in 1602 that “there have come tradesmen of every calling — all clever, skilful, and cheap, from physicians and barbers to carriers and porters. The Chinese are the tailors, the shoemakers, the blacksmiths, the silversmiths, sculptors, locksmiths, painters, masons and weavers; in short, they represent all the trades of the community” (Blair and Robertson 1905: Vol. 12, p. 192). A marketplace called the Parián, the first “Chinatown” of the modern age, was the economic engine driving Spain’s imperial ambitions in the Orient. Since all but a handful of *Sangleys* arriving in the Philippines were male, they married or cohabitated with native Filipino women, resulting in a large population of Chinese *mestizos* that numbered 120,621 by 1810 (Wickberg 2001: 13). Chinese converts and *mestizos* crossed the Pacific on the so-called *naos de China* (China ships — actually Spanish galleons and other vessels) in the late 1500s, bringing valuable skills and DNA that contributed to the cultural dynamism of the Viceroyalty of New Spain in kaleidoscopic fashion.

This exploratory article exposes the process of sinification that impacted colonial Mexico on many levels, focusing on Chinese and *mestizo* immigrants as well as the lucrative trade relations that bound New Spain and China together. One of the issues to be addressed is how and when the Chinese actually set foot in Latin America, and how they adapted to the socio-cultural reality of New Spain. Another issue examined is the impact of Chinese exports on the daily lives and economic activity of colonial Mexico’s inhabitants over the 250 years of transpacific exchange through the “frontier funnel” of Manila. Thirdly, a genealogical analysis of the term *chino/a* will illuminate the internal dynamics of New Spain’s society that would all but obscure its Asian heritage by the early 18th century.

**Los Chinos in New Spain: Demographics and Occupations**

Spanish galleons transported Oriental goods and travelers from Manila to colonial Mexico primarily through the port of Acapulco. During the long span of contact between the Philippines and New Spain a minimum of 40,000 to 60,000 Asian immigrants would set foot in the “City of Kings” (Acapulco),
while a figure double that amount (100,000) would be within the bounds of probability (Benítez 1992: 38; Mercene 2000: 2-6; Israel 1975: 75-76.)\(^1\) From Acapulco they would gradually disperse to the far corners of the viceroyalty, from Loreto in Baja California to Mérida in Yucatan (Archivo General de la Nación, Mexico City, henceforth AGN; Mercene 2000: 2; Solano 1988: Vol. 1, pp. 21-26, 63-65, 81; Germeten 2006: 162).\(^2\) The majority, however, would eventually settle in two distinct zones: on the west coast in the districts of Guerrero, Jalisco, and Michoacán; and in the large, ethnically diverse municipalities of Mexico City and Puebla in the central valleys, and the eastern port of Veracruz. The two zones were transversed by the most heavily traveled arteries that connected Acapulco to Mexico City (known colloquially as el camino de China) in the west, and Veracruz with Puebla and Mexico City in the east, linking the strategic Pacific and Atlantic ports with the political, religious, and economic centers of the colony.

For the most part, the chinos disembarked at Acapulco as sailors, slaves, and servants. Over the longue durée of Mexican-Asian cultural exchange, the largest contingent of Asians arrived as sailors on the galleons and smaller vessels (capitanas, pataches, and almirantes) that annually plied the long (six months or longer) and perilous return voyage from Manila. The seamen were primarily Filipinos, Chinese mestizos (known in Manila as mestizos de Sangley), or ethnic Chinese from the fortified port of Cavite near Manila that served as the primary Spanish shipyard in the archipelago (Gealogo 2005: 308-39; Blair and Robertson 1905: Vol. 27, pp. 130-31). Until the late 16th century Iberian

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1. There are varied estimates for Asian immigration to Mexico during the colonial era. Guillermo Tovar calculated that during the 17th and 18th centuries 40,000-50,000 chinos arrived in New Spain. Floro Mercene claims that 60,000 Filipinos alone made the journey to Acapulco, while Jonathan Israel contends that 6,000 Asian slaves were arriving each decade in the early-to-mid-1600s.

2. AGN Grupo 36 vol. 17, ex. 88, f. 139 (1771); Grupo 51 vol. 15, ex. 36, f. 28030 (1675); vol. 35, ex. 180, f. 141-142 (1746); vol. 47, ex. 18 & 19 (1762); Grupo 58 vol. 6, ex. 1200, f. 330 (1597); vol. 10, ex. 273, f. 155 (1630); vol. 13, ex. 248, f. 219 (1641); vol. 17, ex. 40, f. 62-63 (1654); vol. 21, ex. 220, f. 192 (1657); vol. 23, ex. 375, f. 351 (1659); vol. 30, ex. 381, f. 349-350 (1690); vol. 32, ex. 337, f. 297-298 (1696); Grupo 61 vol. 285, ex. 61, f. 258 (1690); vol. 355, ex. 18, f. 382-387 (1626); vol. 435, ex. 36, f. 94 (1650); vol. 456, ex. 2, f. 85-98 (1659); vol. 598, ex. 15 (1663); vol. 673, ex. 37, f. 5 (1688); vol. 789, ex. 23, f. 361-366 (1721); vol. 912, ex. 11, f. 30 (1641); vol. 1169, f. 263 (1719); vol. 1209, ex. 5, f. 60 (1782); vol. 1230, f. 375 (1786); vol. 1291, ex. 13, f. 60-70 (1790); vol. 1297, ex. 13, f. 82-100 (1783); Grupo 69 vol. 10, ex. 188, f. 418-422 (1629); vol. 54, ex. 35, f. 158-162 (1763); vol. 81, ex. 82, f. 213-216 (1682); vol. 122, ex. 58, f. 175-176 (1672); vol. 136, ex. 50, f. 40 (1631); vol. 154, ex. 8, f. 3 (1712); vol. 165, ex. 160, f. 3 (1758); vol. 179, ex. 89, f. 2 (1687); Grupo 82 vol. 6, ex. 39, f. 45-52 (1676); Grupo 100 vol. 20, ex. 30, f. 24 (1653); vol. 45, ex. 179, f. 306 (1706); Grupo 110 vol. 3624, cuaderno 2, f. 306 (1642).
sailors constituted the majority of crewmen, but by the early 1600s *chinos* had surpassed them, accounting for 60-80 percent of the mariners from that time forward (Taylor 1922: 651; Schurz 1939: 209-10). A historical snapshot of galleon seafarers in the mid-18th century is found in the crew manifest for *La Santísima Trinidad*. In 1760 this vessel was crewed by 370 men, consisting of 30 officers (Europeans or Mexican *criollos*), 40 artillerymen (*chinons*), 120 sailors (*chinones*), 100 “Spanish” cabin boys (*chininos*), and 80 “plain” cabin boys (*chinona*). In sum, 84 percent or 310 members of the crew were born and raised in Spain’s Asian colony, with 68 percent or 250 crewmen sailing from the port of Cavite alone (AGN).3 Although this source divulges the names, ages, and married or single status of the sailors, it does not categorize them as *Sangley*, mestizo, or indio (Filipino).

The Chinese worked in Cavite as sailors, carpenters, caulkers, blacksmiths, sawyers, and in the rope factory alongside Spaniards and various *castas* (castes) from Mexico, native Filipinos, and Lascars (men from the Portuguese colonies in India) (Blair and Robertson 1905: Vol. 26, pp. 206-209). According to Juan Grau y Malfalcon’s memorial to King Felipe IV in 1637, at that time there were 160 *Sangley* sailors who served in the royal *champans*, in addition to 50 carpenters and sawyers, 14 caulkers, and 30 smiths (Blair and Robertson 1905: Vol. 27, pp. 130-31). Certainly, some of these Chinese were employed on the galleons and other vessels which made the annual voyage to Acapulco. Given the large population of Chinese *mestizos* in the regions surrounding the port of Cavite, their employment in this maritime activity provided an equal opportunity for emigration to New Spain. For example, Juan de la Cruz, Agustín Carpio, or Juan Sansón, *mestizos* who acted as interpreters for the *champans* arriving from China, would have been ideal candidates for such an enterprise (Archivo General de Indias, Seville, henceforth AGI).4

Pinning down an exact date for when the first Chinese or Chinese *mestizos* landed in Acapulco is problematic, to say the least. A scarcity of archival documentation makes this effort a matter of guesswork. During the early 1590s a *Sangley* merchant named Juan Baptista de Vera arrived in Acapulco, and it is highly probable that others had made the voyage in the previous decade (Oropeza 2005: 9). A source in the Archivo General de Indias in Seville from the year 1610 explains how a Chinese *maestro polverista* (master gunpowder manufacturer) named Antonio Pérez was granted a license for travel aboard the galleon *Nuestra Señora de los Remedios* to New Spain. In his petition to the

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3 AGN Grupo 42, vol. 6, ex. 11, f. 357-372 (1760).
4 AGI Filipinas 33, N.2, D. 111. These men were employed by Spanish authorities in the year 1653.
Casa de Contratación in Manila, Antonio Pérez described himself as an “indio natural de la gran China,” born in Macao and a resident of Manila. He was single and 28 years of age. A royal cedula dated the year prior to his departure decreed that Antonio Pérez be paid the handsome wage of 400 pesos for one year of service aboard his majesty’s ship to New Spain and its return voyage. The Spanish monarch also expressed concern over the lack of qualified polvoristas in Manila and whether or not his absence would adversely affect the military preparedness of troops in the Philippines (AGI).5

In Acapulco, chinos were hired as laborers and craftsmen in the royal shipyards, and assisted in the construction of Fort San Diego (1615-1617) and other public works (Oropeza 2005: 4-5). In Juan Grau y Malfalcon’s memorial alluded to earlier, the administrator related how copper is brought from China with so much facility that the best artillery imaginable is cast in Manila, with which they [the Portuguese] supply their forts, the city of Macan [Macao] and other cities of India, and it is taken to Nueva España; for the viceroy, the Marqués de Cerralvo, sent the governor, Don Juan Niño de Tabora, twenty-four thousand pesos, in return for which the latter sent him eighteen large pieces to fortify Acapulco (Blair and Robertson 1905: Vol. 27, p. 80).

Alexander von Humboldt similarly described during his travels in 1771 that several cannons protecting Fort San Juan de Ullua in Veracruz were originally cast in Manila (Humboldt 1811: Vol 4, p. 20). As early as 1598, Sangley smithies and their artillery foundry were utilized by governor-general Francisco Tello (Blair and Robertson 1905: Vol. 10, p. 173). The contribution of Chinese labor, skilled craftsmen, and weaponry were essential to the military security of both the Philippines and New Spain.

Slaves and servants constituted the second largest group of Oriental immigrants during the colonial era. Manila quickly became an important entrepôt for the commerce in human flesh during the first century of Spanish rule. The greater part were transported by Portuguese vessels from colonies and trading ports in Africa, India, the Malay peninsula, Japan and China, although Chinese junks and Malay prahus also shipped large quantities to Manila. Non-Filipino slaves that fetched the highest price were from Timor, Ternate, Makassar, Burma, Ceylon, and India, because “the men are industrious and obliging, and many are good musicians; the women excellent seamstresses, cooks, and preparers of conserves, and are neat and clean in service” (Scott 1991: 28-29; Blair and Robertson 1905: Vol. 12, p. 192).

5 AGI Contratacion 5317, N. 2, R. 49. In light of Dutch attacks on Spanish vessels in the Philippines and Spice Islands, his majesty’s concern was well founded.
The Chinese were one of many Asian peoples sold into slavery in Manila and transported to Acapulco aboard the naos de China. Epidemics that ravaged the native indio population in New Spain from roughly 1600 to 1650 fueled the demand for indentured labor (Israel 1975: 27-28). Despite the absence of an asiento for slaves brought through the back door of Acapulco, it was an open secret that was tolerated by the crown and enriched colonial merchants, priests, military and civil officials (Aguirre Beltrán 1944: 419-421; Scott 1991: 18-47).6

_Chino_ slaves owned by elites in Mexico were occasionally transported across the Atlantic to serve their masters in Spain. An archival source from the year 1621 provides a glimpse of this phenomenon. Doctor Juan de Quesada Hurtado de Mendoza, son of Juan Quesada de Figueroa — a superior judge of the Royal Audiencia in Mexico City — received approval to transport a _chino_ slave named Manuel, originally from China, from Seville back to New Spain in order to serve Dr. Quesada's mother (AGI).7 Similar documents from the early 1600s reveal that male and female _chino_ slaves traveled to Madrid, Cadiz, and Seville, and then returned to New Spain, serving as fashionable, exotic expressions of privilege among the status-conscious nobility of España (AGI).8

The highest densities of urban Asian immigrants were located in Mexico City and Puebla. Mexico City, colonial capital and the crossroads between Europe, Africa, the Americas and Asia, provided the most favorable economic opportunities for _chininos_ in the viceroyalty. A small sampling of the diverse occupations listed for Oriental transplants includes harp players, dancers, scribes, tailors, cobblers, butchers, silversmiths, embroiderers, and coachmen. The most prominent vocations were barbers and venders of various goods, such as cotton and silk textiles from Asia, Mexico, and Spain/Europe, comestibles (including aguardiente, molasses, chickens, confectionaries, sugar and cacao), or second-hand items (AGN).9

In the Plaza Mayor (known today as the Zócalo), the mercantile heart of the Spanish empire, an outdoor marketplace of stalls and small shops called the

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6 The _asiento_ was a royal contract made between the colonial government and merchants that permitted the transportation of slaves into New Spain.
7 AGI _Indiferente_ 2076, N. 232 (1621). Manuel was one of three slaves transported from Mexico to Spain at an earlier, unspecified date.
8 AGI _Contratacion_ 5414, N. 75 (1633); 5348, N. 10 (1615); 5337, N. 17 (1614).
9 AGN _Grupo 58_ vol. 10, ex. 249, f. 142 (1630); vol. 21, ex. 220, f. 192 (1657); vol. 24, ex. 85, f. 48v-49r (1665); _Grupo 61_ vol. 999, ex. 6, f. 335-336 (1750); v. 1169, f. 263 (1719); _Grupo 69_ vol. 46, ex. 53, f. 277-80 (1699); vol. 47, ex. 57, f. 162-165 (1745); vol. 93, ex. 111, f. 296-297 (1612); v. 100, ex. 31, f. 163-166 (1744); v. 113, ex. 135, f. 345-346 (1629); vol. 118, ex. 106, f. 277-29 (1717); vol. 139, ex. 38, f. 4 (1663); v. 183, ex. 80, f. 2 (1637); _Grupo 100_ vol. 35, ex. 254, f. 233 (1644).
Parián (named after the Chinese emporium in Manila) satisfied the exotic demands of elites and commoners alike. Asian vendors, craftsmen, and those with marketable skills successfully competed with European, African, Indian, and mixed-race groups to eke out a living in a strange, new land, surmounting formidable linguistic and other cultural challenges. Thomas Gage, a Dominican monk who chronicled his experiences in New Spain during the 1620s, related that “[i]n Mexico City, above all, the Goldsmiths’ shops and works are to be admired. The Indians, and the people of China that have been made Christians and every year come thither, have perfected the Spaniards at that trade” (Gage 1929: 84). A highly reliable source for this era, Gage confirms that Chinese who dominated the silver/goldsmith professions in the Philippines plied their vocation — exceedingly well — in Mexico City.

The arrival of chinos with a variety of vocational skills in colonial Mexico created frictions with other classes who plied the same trade. One profession in particular was that of barberos (barbers) in the capital. Iberians (and other Europeans) who had heretofore monopolized the occupation of barbering until the early 1600s began to face stiff competition from Oriental immigrants. Consequently, a group of Spanish barbers filed a petition with the cabildo (municipal council) of Mexico City on 22 June 1635 that vigorously criticized their Asian and Castilian counterparts for the following reasons: not employing Spanish apprentices; the use of chino slaves in barbershops; the “excesses” and “inconveniences” experienced from chino competition in the Plaza Mayor; and the fact that numerous Castilian barbers had perished from diseases contracted from their customers (Dubs and Smith 1942: 387-89). Acting on recommendations made by the municipal council, on 18 January 1636 the viceroy Marqués de Cadereita ordered that Asian barbers were to be banished from the Plaza Mayor, and that no more than 12 chino barbershops licensed by the government were permitted outside the walls of Mexico City. Also included in this municipal order were provisos regulating the possession or use of more than a specified number of razors, and a prohibition against Spanish barbers having chino apprentices in their shops (AGN).10

Barbers or phlebotomists in New Spain were considered the fourth category of medical providers, ranked behind physicians, pharmacists, and surgeons (Hernández Sáenz 1997: 22, 50-51, 129, 179). The chino barbers in question were either Chinese or Chinese mestizos, for the reason that Spaniards who spent time in Manila mentioned this profession as being dominated by Sangleyes. To quote the Dominican priest Pedro Díaz del Cosío discussing the Parián

10 AGN Grupo 100 vol. 18, ex. 27, f. 40 (18 August 1650); vol. 18, ex. 507, f. 249 (23 August 1653); Grupo 51 vol. 14, ex. 40, f. 38-39 (25 August 1670).
of Manila in his book published circa 1674, “[t]here are about 200 Chinese and mestizo barbers, all of whom live on Spaniards, and others in the same proportion” (Blair and Robertson 1905: Vol. 38, p. 55). *Chino* barbers in New Spain performed both medical and non-medical services, which included bloodletting, dental surgery, cutting hair, shaving beards, and ear cleaning (Hernández Sáenz 1997: 179-203; Viana 2004: 75). The complaint lodged by the Spanish barbers that many of their brethren suffered the occupational hazard of death by contracting their customers’ diseases was also a risk shared by the Asian interlopers. Nonetheless, it is not surprising that elites on the cabildo, desiring to protect the social status quo, played the race card in their decision of 1635/6. They exaggerated the perils to European bloodletters while minimizing the skills of the latter, stating in their letter to the viceroy that “the supposition is that these Chinos are of no benefit” in treating various ailments (Dubs and Smith 1942: 387).

During the 1640s, archival records perplexingly reveal that the government approved at least a half-dozen licenses for *chino* barbershops and kiosks in the Plaza Mayor, in spite of the previous ruling (AGN). In response to complaints (again) from European bloodletters, by 1650 the government had created a new position “empowered to stop the movement of Chinese barbers,” and solicited bids from interested parties to purchase the rights of enforcement. Joseph Barenguel was the earliest chronicled holder of the “anti-*chino* barbershop commission” (AGN). The position was sold to the highest bidder annually, who administered justice by exacting a financial penalty from Oriental scofflaws that had violated the 1635 decree. In any case, the rising number of *chino* barbers within and outside of the walls of Mexico City suggests that the position was lucrative enough to exist into the early 1660s.

By 1667, however, the commission had languished for one reason or another, much to the chagrin of the Spanish barber and bloodletter Miguel Conde. Motivated by the fact that over 100 *chino* barbershops — most of them unlicensed — were operating within the walls of Mexico City, he penned a memorial to the viceroy Marqués de Mancera requesting that the commission be reactivated. After three years of legal wrangling among lawyers and the fiscal of the Royal Audiencia, Miguel Conde was finally awarded the commis-

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11 AGN *Grupo 51* vol. 8, ex. 66, f. 46 (13 January 1641); *Grupo 58* vol. 15, ex. 28, f. 20 (12 February 1648); vol. 15, ex. 29, f. 20-21 (12 February 1648); vol. 15, ex. 62, f. 44 (25 May 1649); Vol 15, ex. 86, f. 154-155 (14 June 1649); *Grupo 100* vol. 48, ex. 136, f. 56-57 (24 November 1643).

12 AGN *Grupo 100* vol. 18, ex. 27, f. 40 (18 August 1650); vol. 18, ex. 507, f. 249 (23 August 1653); *Grupo 51* vol. 14, ex. 40, f. 38-39 (25 August 1670).
sion on 20 August 1670 (AGN). Although the “Barbers of Seville” had triumphed in this case, due to an absence of any subsequent documentation on this matter, it would appear that the commission most likely languished by the last decade of the 17th century. Chino phlebotomists, however, would remain a common fixture in Mexico City’s multi-tiered field of medicine. Even in 1812, records indicate that immigrants from Manila were licensed as *barberos* in the colonial capital (Hernández Sáenz 1997: 185-86).

**The Church and Chino Immigrants**

Asian immigrants in Mexico City were a common sight for foreigners who spent time in the colonial metropolis. Gemelli Carreri (who traveled from Manila to Acapulco) stayed at monasteries and hospices that supported missionary activities in Asia while traveling on *el camino de China* (the China Road) to the capital. During the celebration of Easter, Careri described various processions winding their way through the streets of Mexico City to commemorate the Passion and other holy days. On 4 April 1697, three groups left in succession that morning — the Confraternity of the Holy Trinity, Jesuits of the Saint Gregory church, trailed by the Franciscans. The Franciscan procession, Careri related, was “that which is called the procession of the Chinese, because those going out were Indians of the Philippines” (Carreri 1927: Vol. 1, pp. 102-103). In addition to the faithful who held crosses, candles, and holy images (*imagenes*) as they marched, was a group of men armed with maces in each cavalcade. When the three processions passed through the Plaza Mayor and drew near the Cathedral of Mexico City, a scuffle broke out between the followers of the Confraternity of the Holy Trinity and the “procession of the Chinese” regarding the priority in which they reached their destination. Upset that the *chinos* had risen above their station and arrived ahead of the other two processions, the acolytes of the Holy Trinity pummeled the Asians with maces and crosses, resulting in many injured penitents (Carreri 1927: Vol. 1, pp. 102-103). Although all were equal before the Lord, they certainly were not among subjects of the Crown.

The aforementioned scene captured by Gemelli Careri exposes an important ecclesiastical organization that facilitated social integration and provided charitable services for various castas in New Spain. Known as *cofradías* or confraternities, the ostensible function of these institutions that emphasized public flagellation was to honor the Passion of Christ, various saints, or a certain

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sacrament of Catholicism. Confraternities ensured members a decent Christian burial with the accompanying liturgies at the time of one’s death, and established hospitals to care for slaves and freemen of the lower castes (Germeten 2006: i, 82). In many ways, they were a significant driver in the process of acculturation for Asian immigrants. Careri’s observations of a purely Asian (“de los chinos”) Franciscan cofradía in the capital was the Confraternity of Holy Christ, affiliated with the Santa Catalina monastery. Founded by immigrants from the Philippines around the mid-17th century, in 1692 it was granted approval to construct a small chapel to the Virgin Mary within the monastery, and decorated its interior with ivory statuary imported from Manila (Armella de Aspe 1992: 221-22).

A veritable Noah’s Ark of religious artifacts manufactured in China and the Philippines were transported via the Manila galleon to New Spain. As a result of Iberian missionary activity in Cathay during the waning years of the Ming dynasty, an ivory carving industry began expanding in the late 16th century that catered to markets in Manila and New Spain. Located in the port city of Zhangzhou in Fujian Province, more specifically in the Haicheng district, Chinese ivory artisans manufactured sacred Christian images such as the Virgin Mary with baby Jesus, the crucifixion of Christ, various saints and angels all carved in the round, in addition to rosaries and crosses (Gillman 1984: 35-40; Sanchez-Navarro de Pintado 1986: 49-50, 86). Devotional objects were commissioned by priests in Manila through the Chinese community in the Parián, a large percentage of whom had emigrated from the Fujianese ports of Quanzhou, Fuzhou, Zhangzhou, and Xiamen. Chinese artisans meticulously carved their figurines from woodblock printed breviaries provided by Spanish missionaries. Magnificent ivory sculptures embellished altars in churches, monasteries, and cathedrals in both the Philippines and colonial Mexico (Gillman 1984: 36-40, 62; Sanchez-Navarro de Pintado 1986: 51-59). The Obras Pías (Catholic charitable organizations) of Manila were granted cargo space on the galleons to transport religious items for sale in New Spain as a means to financially support the hospitals, schools, orphanages, and other charities in the Philippines. In addition to “the dragon’s share” of ivory carvings emanating from Zhangzhou, Sangley craftsmen, their mestizo offspring, and Filipino artisans manufactured Christian iconography in Manila that also disseminated throughout the New World from Acapulco (Sanchez-Navarro de Pintado 1986: 51, 64-66, 84-90).14

Of all the Catholic sanctuaries in the New World, the oldest and largest is the Cathedral of Mexico City. Constructed from blocks of stone taken from

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14 Sanchez-Navarro de Pintado distinguishes between these two types of ivories as “Chinese-Hispanic” (manufactured in China) and “Hispanic-Philippine” (manufactured in Manila).
demolished Aztec temples in Tenochtitlan, it was continually expanded and rebuilt from the time of Cortez until the late 18th century (Toussaint 1992: 4-12). This imposing expression of Castilian evangelization was the site of many marriages between Asian immigrants and various castas, a colonial term employed to distinguish the ethnicity of Spaniards/Europeans, native Indians, Africans, Asians and their mixed-race offspring. The earliest extant marriage license granted to chinos for a wedding performed in the cathedral was dated 1605. A chino slave identified as Bartolomé Díaz was betrothed to Mariana de San Juan, a negra slave (AGN). Matrimonial records reveal that chinos — including Chinese and mestizos from Manila — served as witnesses in Catholic-sanctioned unions to a whole cross-section of residents in the capital, not only for mulatos, castizos, mestizos, negros, free and slave, but also for Spanish and Portuguese elites (AGN).

The long-term ecclesiastical links between China, the Philippines, and New Spain are materially expressed in two magnificent metallic structures which still adorn the Cathedral of Mexico City: the reja de coro (choral grate enclosing the choir) and the cruja (the sanctuary rails between the pews) leading to the choir. The reja de coro was designed by the master artisan Nicolas Rodriguez Juarez in 1721, whose schematics were transported aboard the nao de China via Manila, and cast in Macao. The choral grate was manufactured using a variety of metals — iron, bronze, and a bronze/gold amalgam called tumbaga — by the hands of the Chinese master craftsman Quiauló Sangley. The blueprint of Rodriguez was translated into Chinese by an Italian Franciscan friar in Macao, and when completed was larger and more exquisite than ever imagined by the residents of Mexico City. Transported across the Pacific in 125 crates and bundles aboard the ship Nuestra Señora de los Dolores in 1724, the final tally for this work was 46,380 pesos — almost five times more than was originally estimated. Topped by Baroque figures of the crucifixion and other saints, it was considered unsurpassed in its elegance and superior to any counterpart in Europe (Toussaint 1992: 107-109). The adjoining cruja was also fabricated in Macao and arrived at the cathedral in 1743, composed of the same precious metals, with angelic images adorning the top of the railing acting as candlestick holders (Toussaint 1992: 115).

15 AGN Grupo 69, v. 61, ex. 73, f. 288-290 (1605).
16 AGN Grupo 69, V. 7, ex. 73, f. 247-249 (1634); v. 10, ex. 106, f. 245-246 (1629); v. 31, ex. 43, f. 200 (N.D.); v. 47, ex. 57, f. 162-165 (1745); v. 48, ex. 88, f. 239-240 (1628); v. 113, ex. 135, f. 345-346 (1629); v. 172, ex. 61, f. 2 (1644); v. 183, ex. 131, f. 2 (1679); v. 213, ex. 32, f. 1 (1660).
17 The original allocation for the reja de coro was 10,000 pesos, and the overage was covered by merchants, officials, and clergy in Manila; while the cruja cost 18,000 pesos.
Whenever the bells on the Cathedral of Mexico City sonorously announced the arrival of the galleons from the Philippines, setting off a procession of merchant caravans for Acapulco; celebrated the feast on St. Andrew’s Day (30 November) to commemorate the miraculous defeat of the Chinese pirate Limahon in Manila; listened to the musicians and choir sing *Te Deum* from inside of the *reja de coro*; witnessed *chino* weddings or holy processions, inhabitants of New Spain’s cosmopolitan capital were reminded of the “knot, tie, and strong bond” between themselves and the empire of Cathay (García del Valle Gómez 1993: 42; Blair and Robertson 1905: Vol. 9, pp. 315-325; Vol. 10, p. 271; Vol. 16, p. 168).

**Chinese Textiles**

From the time Manila was conquered in 1571, it was crystal clear to Spanish conquistadors and clergy in the Philippines that the only method to finance imperial endeavors in Asia was by selling Chinese silks and other products in the New World. To quote from Juan Grau Y Malfalcon’s detailed 1637 memorial, “The trade of the Filipinas is so necessary today in Nueva España, that the latter country finds it as difficult as do the islands to get along without that trade” (Blair and Robertson 1905: Vol. 27, p. 110). He goes on to list a cornucopia of Chinese textiles sold at the Acapulco Fair, but distills the bulk of exports down to unfinished or raw silk and cotton fabrics. The importance of these two trade articles to the domestic economy of New Spain has been sorely neglected in the historiography of Latin America, therefore, it is imperative to reevaluate Chinese silks and cottons (some of which were grown in the Philippines) in this context.

In the year 1592, the King of Spain decreed that “Indios Chinos” who resided in New Spain and paid their royal tribute were not obliged to pay the *alcabala* — a sales tax — on the goods which they vended in their shops, so long as *chinos* were not wholesaling bulk quantities of Chinese or Spanish silks (AGN; Hoberman 1991: 18-32). Sangley and *mestizo* fabric merchants from the Parián of Manila peddled their wares in the Parián of Mexico City. In

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18. This phrase was uttered by governor Luis Perez Dasmariñas in a letter to the King of Spain in the 1590s. His specific words were “Indeed, this greed and covetousness is the knot, tie, and strong bond between us and this nation [Chinese residents in Manila], so different, injurious, and contrary to our own. It is expedient of the devil that this people shall obtain all or nearly all they want.”

19. AGN Grupo 58 vol. 13, ex. 112, f. 92 (December 1640). The wholesaling of silks and other textiles was the prerogative of highly capitalized *peninsulare and criollo* merchants known as *mercaderes* who built up commercial empires based in Mexico City.
1631, six *chino* retailers brought suit against the sales tax collector Juan Correa, claiming that he had illegally forced them to pay the *alcabala* on their “auction tables, shops, and kiosks” in the Plaza Mayor. The six plaintiffs, including Melchor López de Baño, Simon López, Domingo Pastrana and Gart Solomédras, are described as “free Chinese Indians” and natives of Manila who were merchants in the capital. The General Indian Court judged in favor of the plaintiffs, and warned the sales tax collectors not to harass or take any punitive actions against the *chinos* (AGN). 20

Skeined silk, silk thread, and *trama* (a type of weaving silk) were woven into everything from the robes worn by clerics to veils and headdresses adorning the ladies of the colony. Although vast quantities of Spanish silks were shipped from Cadiz and other ports to Veracruz annually, they were too oily, resulting in more labor and expense for those who dyed them. Likewise, the small amount of silk produced locally in Mixteca (Oaxaca) was viewed as an inferior product (Blair and Robertson 1905: Vol 27, p. 193). Chinese silks, on the other hand, were not only less expensive, but the ease of dying and beauty of the whites was unmatched. To quote Guillaume-Thomas Raynal,

> The whiteness of Chinese silk, to which nothing else can be compared, renders it the only suitable kind for the manufacture of blondes and gauzes. The efforts made to substitute our own in the manufacture of blondes have been fruitless... Besides this silk of unique whiteness — which is chiefly produced in the province of Tche-Kiang [Zhejiang], and which we know under the name of Nankin silk, from the place where it is especially made — China produces ordinary silks, which we call Canton silks (Blair and Robertson 1905: Vol. 45, pp. 46-47, FN 4).

The colonial textile industry was heavily dependent upon this commerce, as Grau y Malfalcon testifed that “more than 14,000 persons support themselves in Mexico [City], La Puebla, and Antequerra, by their looms, the whole thing being approved by royal decrees” (Blair and Robertson 1905: Vol. 27, p. 193).

Puebla de Los Angeles, a city renowned for its industrial production of textiles, pottery, porcelain and glassware, was another significant reservoir of Asian immigrants pouring into New Spain from Manila. Workers in various trades were divided into guilds or *gremios* that had master/apprentice hierarchies jealously guarded by Iberian colonists. In 1676, Antonio Gonzales de Velasco, Emmanuel Felipe de Sanda, and Melchor de Ortega, the Spanish officers and overseers of the guild of *pañeros* (weavers of tapestries, drapes, and other textiles) in Puebla, submitted a new set of organizational regulations to the cabildo (municipal council) that stipulated the guild “will not admit for

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20 AGN Grupo 58 vol. 13, ex. 112, f. 92 (December 1640).
consideration in the posts of overseers or officers of this gremio any negro, mulato, or chino slave, even if he is a freeman.” In its infinite wisdom, the municipal council did not agree with this anti-casta proviso, stating that “any person of any qualities or condition” should be allowed to serve in positions of authority (AGN).21 Undoubtedly, skilled chino embroiderers and weavers were employed in Puebla and other centers of textile production in New Spain, sharing their techniques with local indios and various castas employed therein.

Master silk weavers from Toledo, Granada, Torrijos and other cities in Spain migrated to colonial Mexico and established work shops (obrajes) and smaller-scale enterprises with a few looms (trapiches) to dye, finish, and sell Chinese silks domestically or export them to the mother country (Hoberman 1991: 129-131). Manufacturers catered to what was fashionable and thus were heavily influenced by Oriental patterns and designs. For example, the rebozos that women of the viceroyalty desired had to be embroidered in the Chinese style, but blended with Mexican motifs such as bullfights, pastoral scenes, or the promenade of carriages that was en vogue for elites in Mexico City (Carballo 1985: 122). As trade relations intensified, Castilian and criollo merchants traveled to Manila with samples of clothing patterns that were in high demand by affluent subjects in the king’s American colonies. According to a Spanish source in the late 17th century, Mexican and Peruvian merchants arrived in the Philippines with specimens of Spanish fabrics, which were conveyed by Sangleys in the Parián to Chinese factories in Beijing, Canton, and other cities (Blair and Robertson 1905: Vol. 45, p. 64).

Cottons fabrics, known colloquially as “elephant stuffs,” were equally prized for their low cost and durability. They were not only favored by the “Indians and Negroes,” but by those who provisioned the silver mining operations in New Spain. Grau y Malfalcon noted that “it [Chinese cotton] is cheaper and more durable and serviceable. Consequently, with 1,000 pesos’ worth of it they are maintained in their mining operations longer than they could with five thousand worth of that from España” (Blair and Robertson 1905: Vol. 27, p. 202). Writing almost a century later, Álvarez related that the elephant stuffs and raw silk woven in Puebla and Mexico City “which comes from the Philippines . . . is worked up, and in this industry many poor persons are employed, thus obtaining a suitable means of livelihood; and the fabrics which are made by them are consumed in this kingdom only” (Blair and Robertson 1905: Vol. 4, pp. 36-37). Suffice it to say that in terms of the domestic consumption

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21 AGN Grupo 82 vol. 6, ex. 39, f. 45-52 (19 November 1676). Italics added by the author.

The term calidades (qualities) has multiple definitions, including race, occupation, slave or free status, wealth and reputation.
and production of fabrics imported by the *naos de China* to Acapulco, the impact of Chinese textiles on Mexico’s economy was quite substantial.

**Chinese Porcelains**

The inhabitants of New Spain were well known for their conspicuous consumption of the Oriental riches brought to their shores by the Manila galleon. Silks and calicoes, porcelains and fans, furniture, spices and jewelry — all were embraced with an insatiable fervor. In 1610, one of the earliest poets of the colony, Bernardo de Balbuena, captured the affluence of the capital in his work *La Grandezza Mexicana* (The Grandeur of Mexico City):

> It is the richest and most opulent city [in the world], with the most trade and the most treasure... The silver of Peru and the gold of Chile lands here, and the fine cloves of Ternate and the cinnamon of Tidor. Fabrics from Qinsay [Hangzhou]... diamonds from India, and from gallant Scita [Ceylon] spinel rubies and fine emeralds, ivory from Goa and dark ebony from Siam; from Spain the best, the cream from the Philippines, the most precious from Macao, from both Javas exotic riches; *fine porcelain from the timid Sangley*... In short, the finest in the world, of all that is known and produced, here is abundant, is sold and is inexpensive (Balbuena 1971: 71-78).

Following the capture of Manila by conquistadors, an increasing number of trade junks were drawn to Lusong (Luzon) by the glittering tons of silver transported aboard galleons from New Spain and Peru used to purchase Oriental exotica. Pedro Chirino confirmed as much in 1602, writing that “[F]rom China they... began to ship their riches in silks and glazed earthenware, as soon as they learned of our wealth of four and eight real pieces” (Blair and Robertson 1905: Vol. 12, p. 191). Porcelains were shipped to Manila from the famous Jingdezhen kilns in Jiangxi, the Dehua kilns in Fujian, the workshops catering to Europeans in Canton, and smaller facilities in Chaozhou (Swatow) and Zhejiang Province (Kuwayama 1997: 15). Not surprisingly, Chinese merchants who prospered from the Manila commerce became influential leaders of the Chinese community in the Parián. Li Tan (d. 1625), a Fujianese adventurer and trafficker of porcelains and silks served as a governor of the *Sangleys* in Manila (Kuwayama 1997: 16).

In 1573, when the first two Manila galleons arrived in Acapulco with a cargo that included over 22,000 Ming dynasty porcelains, a market for this

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22 Italics added by the author.
product was firmly established (Kuwayama 1997: 11). In addition to ceramics with gold and silver plating, Chinese porcelains of the *qingbai* (blue and white) style were extremely popular in the haciendas of elites and the Catholic sanctuaries of New Spain. On the altars it was not uncommon to see *Sangley* ceramics holding flowers beneath the images of saints or Christ on the crucifix, as captured by the artist Pedro Calderon in the 1710 painting *Christo de Chalma* (Kuwayama 1997: 22). George Kuwayama’s work, *Chinese Ceramics in Colonial Mexico*, provides a detailed inventory of armorial dinner ware, cups, tureens, jars, pear and gourd-shaped bottles, etc. that circulated throughout New Spain during the colonial era.

The Manila porcelain trade stimulated a domestic pottery industry in the city of Puebla, which slavishly imitated the Ming dynasty *qingbai* style that was all the rage in Europe. Blessed with deep and wide-ranging clay strata of various types, Puebla de los Angeles became the manufacturing center of Spanish colonial ceramics. It was here that master potters from Spain founded kilns that mass produced a variety of items, notably those fabricated in the *Talavera* style, named after the kilns in Talavera de la Reina (McQuade 1999: 13-20; Bailey 2006: 99-101, 107). In 1653, a potters’ guild was officially sanctioned in the city. The guild regulations stipulated that “[i]n making fine wares the coloring should be in imitation of Chinese ware, very blue, finished in the same style and with relief work in blue, and on this pottery there should be painted black dots and grounds in colors” (Castro Morales 2002: 24, 78; Kuwayama 1997: 24). Given the large number of skilled Asians in Puebla, Chinese and *mestizo* potters from Manila in all likelihood manufactured fine *Talavera* porcelain from which Mexican ceramics achieved respectability and fame.

**The Status of Chinos in Colonial Society**

Following the conquest of Mexico, the Spaniards established a race-based hierarchy which emphasized one’s *limpieza de sangre* (purity of blood), in other words, the percentage of Spanish/European blood coursing through an individual’s veins. At the top of this eugenics ranking system were those born in Spain called *peninsulares* and their offspring born in Mexico known as *criollos*. Below this elite were Indians, Africans, Asians, and an amazing spectrum of mixed-race individuals. Where *chinos* fit into this confusing blend of races has not been adequately addressed by scholars, despite their unheralded contribution to what Latin American academics call the *mestizaje* (mixed-race) society of colonial Mexico.
The terms *chino* or *indio chino* underwent a startling metamorphosis from their original meaning once the galleons from Manila began transporting Asian immigrants to New Spain. Technically speaking, they meant “Chinese” or “Chinese Indian.” That unambiguous definition notwithstanding, *chínol/a* during the late 16th and 17th centuries took on the more encompassing meaning of “Asian,” while the Philippines was commonly referred to as “la China” (Basarás 1763: Vol. 1, pp. 25-32). As various ethnic groups from China, Japan, the Philippines, Dutch East Indies, Malaysia, Burma, Vietnam, Thailand, Cambodia, and India were sold into slavery, they summarily received the appellation of *chínol/a*. Numerous sub-castes that specified the national or regional affiliation of the individual were added for clarity. For example, *indios filipinos* were identified according to tribe or island, such as “de nacion Pampango [Pampanga]” or “natural de Cibu [Cebu]”, while those from Cathay or Japan as “de nacion Chino” or “de nacion Japon,” respectively (AGN).23 Similarly, slaves shipped from Portuguese colonies in India, Malacca, or Macao were given a rainbow of appellations: Mogo/Moco (Mughal), Chingala, Bengala, Parachi, Patanes, Malabar, and Pegu (Burmese) (Zavala 1967: 236-38; Aguirre Beltrán 1946: 148-50).

During the initial phase of intercourse between the Orient and Mexico, the view of the Spanish court was that *chinos* were *indios*, a universal term for those considered to be natives of the king’s dominions in the Americas and Asia. Accordingly, *chinos* received a variety of legal privileges and protections that were the prerogative of the Indians of Mexico. The right to appeal perceived injustices to the General Indian Court, such as the illegal collection of the *alcabala* (*indios* were exempted from the sales tax) or to challenge their slave status following the emancipation of *chinos* and native Indians in 1672, or trial by the Inquisition in an ecclesiastical court alongside *indios* (AGN).24 Asians were thusly viewed equal with native Indians in the realm of jurisprudence.

Nonetheless, the waters became increasingly muddied by colonial authorities who began to lump *chinos* with the African mixed-race castes by the middle of the 17th century. Similar to restrictions placed on other *castas* in New Spain, in 1645 viceroy Conde de Salvatierra banned *mestizos, mulatos, negros, chinos, and zambaigos*, free or slave, from carrying any type of weapons in Mexico City (AGN).25 As was evidenced in the Puebla *pañeros* guild, *chinos*

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23 AGN Grupo 51 vol. 8, ex. 116, f. 74 (6 May 1641); Grupo 58 vol. 17, ex. 19, f. 31-32 (15 November 1654); Grupo 61 vol. 598, ex. 15 (1663); vol. 673, ex. 37, f. 5 (1688).
24 AGN Grupo 100 vol. 30, ex. 94, f. 144 (21 April 1673); Grupo 61 vol. 1184, ex. 8, f. 46-80 (1779).
25 AGN Grupo 100 vol. 15, ex. 178, f. 140-141 (18 August 1645).
were synonymous with the lower caste elements of society. As human chattel, Asians shared the chains of slavery with Africans and their mixed-race offspring until the turn of the 18th century. In the eyes of colonial justice, Orientals were grouped together with negros and mulatos as a race predisposed to criminal activity (Israel 1975: 75-76). In Mexico City and Puebla, the political, religious, and economic centers of the viceroyalty, Asian immigrants were betrothed to lower caste negros, mulatos, pardos, and other Africanized groups in greater proportions than in the smaller pueblos scattered in the sierras, coasts, and frontiers. As the curtain closed on the 17th century, elites viewed Asian mixed-race offspring as more difficult to define (as they did with Spanish, Indian, and African hybrids) and consequently, it has been asserted that the term chinola became synonymous with a physical trait (shape of the eyes, or other exotic features) rather than an actual reflection of Oriental ancestry as it had been previously (Vinson 2005: 254-57).

By the 1750s, the commonly-held assumption by elites in New Spain was that a chino was the result of a union between individuals with African and Indian blood. Antonio Joachin de Basarás in 1763 produced a work that described the offspring of union between the various castas in colonial Mexico, followed by painted renderings thereof. In his mind, the only other non-indigenous race in New Spain besides the Castilians was African slaves. Thusly, miscegenation between the three races — Caucasian (Spanish), Indian, and African — accounted for the 16 distinctly “impure” mixed-blood castes in the viceroyalty. According to his nineteen-tiered racial classification scheme, chinos did not arrive to the shores of New Spain via the Philippines, but were produced by mating between mulatos and indios (Basarás 1763: Vol. 2, pp. 1-2).

In the wonderfully illustrated volumes edited by Ilona Katzew, many other casta portraits from the mid-to-late 18th century reinforce the notion of chinos as an adulteration of African and Indian blood, and where they fit into colonial society based upon the policy of limpieza de sangre (purity of blood). The following mixtures of castas produced chinola progeny: no te entiendo + india; barcino + mulata; barcina + indio; torno atras + grifo; chamizo + cambuja; negro/a + indiola; and lobo + negra (Katzew 1996: 14, 39, 40, plates 23, 60; 2004: 30, 36, 95, 126, 146, 153). In the end, chinos were one of many “impure” castes created in genetically-engineered scenarios played out on canvas. There was no fourth bloodline outside of the European, Indian, or African races that was considered the source of chinos in New Spain. Expressing a sense of bewilderment in the late 1700s, Alexander von Humboldt remarked that “[s]he descendants of Negroes and Indian women bear at Mexico, Lima, and even at Havannah, the strange name of Chino, Chinese,” despite his meticulous obser-
vation that “many individuals of Asiatic origin, both Chinese and Malays, have settled in New Spain” (Humboldt 1811: Vol. 1, pp. 244-45).

Looking at a variety of sources, the historical turning point for this terminological metamorphosis appears to be around the time of the 1692 Mexico City riot. In June of that year, an angry mob of Indians joined by various castas attacked symbols of Spanish authority, looted the Plaza Mayor marketplace and torched the viceroy’s palace. Katzew explains that in the riot’s aftermath, “colonial authorities attempted to segregate the Indians from the Spaniards, and especially from the remaining castas who were thought to have prompted the Indians to rise in riot” (Katzew 1996: 12-13). A document from judicial proceedings following the melee relates how Antonio de Arano, described as a free “chino o mulato,” was arrested with silk, linen, velvet and woolen fabrics that he had pillaged from the Plaza Mayor (AGI). The language used by court officials reveals that Mexico City elites viewed this chino as a person of African descent, and underscores the growing popular sentiment that the two races were similar, if not coequal.

In the pueblo of Coyuca, near Acapulco, the colonial state implemented its anti-casta agenda on a larger scale. Chinos had lived harmoniously together with indios in this farming community from the late 1500s until the 1720s. Around the year 1722, a degree-holding priest named Sebastian de Minute instituted a new policy that segregated “pure” indios (descended from servants of the haciendas) into a barrio of tributaries apart from the community of predominantly chinos (around 100 families) and a few pardos (a mixture of Indian and African blood). The Indian community elected its own governor to administer justice, while the chinos and pardos were subject to an alcalde mayor appointed by the government (Solano 1988: Vol. 1, p. 25). Perhaps Sebastian de Minute, in consultation with the Archbishopric of Mexico City, felt compelled to institute spiritual and temporal apartheid in order to limit the corrupting influence of chinos on local Indians in the aftermath of the 1692 Mexico City riot. Whatever the reasons may have been, it is evident from the documents penned by colonial officials in the 18th century and the casta portraits and cycles of that era that the term chino had undergone a drastic transformation which detached it from the continent and empire where it had originated.

Several factors contributed to the Mexicanization of this term from the late 1600s to mid-1700s. The first was a decrease in the number of Asian

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26 AGI Patronato 226, n. 1, r. 6 (1692). Antonio de Arano is described in this source as a mulato more often than as a chino, and his wife Maria de Ortega is also classified as a mulata. The court eventually sentenced Antonio de Arano to six years of hard labor in a mortar factory, followed by life in prison.
immigrants arriving in New Spain in the decades following the emancipation of chino slaves in 1672. Lacking a market for Asian slaves in the New World, the numbers dropped precipitously by the dawn of the 18th century. A higher frequency of unions between Asians, indios, and castas would have ensued, precipitating a trend toward mixed-race offspring surpassing the number of new arrivals and making the eventuality of “pure” Asian descendants less likely with each succeeding generation. Another factor was urbanity. In the cities where colonial elites lived in higher concentrations, they experienced larger and more diverse mixed-race population densities. In Mexico City and Puebla, Asian immigrants were betrothed to lower caste negros, mulatos, pardos, and other Africanized castes in greater proportion than in the smaller, mostly Indian pueblos of the Pacific coast (AGN).27 Perceptions of colonial society through this metropolitan lens certainly colored their definition of chinos. Finally, the separation of chinos and pardos from indios in Coyuca during the year 1722 stands out in bold relief. One could speculate that this incident was not isolated, but a microcosm of a larger state agenda (officially sanctioned or otherwise) to cleave chinos from indios and to unambiguously lump them together with the lower castes of colonial society.

Conclusion

The picture that emerges from this study on the Chinese/mestizo diaspora in colonial Mexico is certainly incomplete, but offers some tantalizing clarity regarding a woefully understudied migration history. Once and for all we can lay to rest fanciful theories concerning when, who and how the first Chinese arrived in the New World: it was during the reign of Ming dynasty emperor Wanli (1573-1620); the Chinese were sailors, slaves, servants, artisans, merchants, barbers, laborers, etc., who lived in the greater Manila region and had been converted to Christianity; and they made their voyage across the Pacific on Spanish vessels vulgarly referred to as “China ships.”

On the other hand, social scientists specializing in colonial Mexico have ignored the totality of China’s trade relations with New Spain. For the most part, scholarship has overlooked the dependency relationship of domestic weaving on Asian raw materials, the rise of an import-substitution ceramics

27 Marriage licenses for chinos in Mexico City during the 1600s and 1700s support this contention. See AGN Grupo 69 vol. 7, ex. 73, f. 247-249 (1634); vol. 10, ex. 106, f. 245-246 (1629); vol. 47, ex. 57, f. 162-165 (1745); vol. 48, ex. 88, f. 239-240 (1628); vol. 61, ex 73, f. 288-290 (1605); vol. 113, ex. 135, f. 345-346 (1629); vol. 172, ex. 61, f. 2 (1644); vol. 183, ex. 131, f. 2 (1679); and vol. 213, ex. 32, f. 1 (1660).
industry powered by the popularity of Chinese porcelains, or the impact of weaponry and assorted religious paraphernalia that were manufactured by skilled Sangley artisans in the Middle Kingdom or Manila. The most egregious oversight, however, has been the human dimension of the transpacific galleon trade. Asian immigrants, their adaptations to a foreign cultural milieu, their roles in both viceregal society and economy, and the social amnesia that emerged in the late 17th century regarding the origins of the chino caste are vital missing pieces of the enormous colonial puzzle that they have been attempting to reconstruct.

In some small measure, this research attempts to polish the links tarnished by time and scholarly neglect. The sinification of colonial Mexico inextricably bound these two empires together across the great expanse of the Pacific Ocean. The countercurrents of Cathay were strong enough to reach the beaches of Acapulco for nearly 250 years, each wave leaving behind important cultural and economic legacies that were abruptly washed away by the Mexican War of Independence (1810-1821). Chinese and their mestizo progeny from Manila, part of the “first wave” of Asian immigration to the Americas, quickly receded into the murky depths of history along the riptide of Mexican nationalism.

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