

THE ISLANDS BEYOND THE EMPIRE

Portuguese Essays on Early Modern Philippine History (16th-18th Centuries)

Edited by
Paulo Jorge de Sousa Pinto
Miguel Rodrigues Lourenço



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Foreign Service Institute
Manila
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Commodities on the move. Philippines as a contact zone between East Asia and the Viceroyalty of New Spain in the Early Modern Age¹

Alexandra Curvelo

Introduction

In 1991, Mary Louise Pratt introduced the concept of “contact zone”. Pratt’s object of study is a letter written to King Filipe III of Spain (reign 1598-1621)² titled *The First New Chronicle and Good Government*. This manuscript is dated 1613 and was written in Cuzco, Peru, by the Andean Felipe Guamán Poma de Ayala describing the Spanish conquests in South America. By analysing the linguistic aspects of the work and its cultural background, the author refers to Peru and the city of Cuzco in particular as a “contact zone”. She uses this term in the sense of “(...) social spaces where cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their after-maths as they are lived out in many parts of the world today”.³

Like Peru, although with a very different colonial historical framework, so are the Philippines a ‘contact zone’ as Pratt describes it, a place of cultural encounters and clashes, wherein power was negotiated.

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- 1 This text results from my doctoral thesis, especially Part III – “Echoes of Namban Art in China and New Spain”, never published in its entirety. Although several articles have resulted from it, none focused on this specific theme of the Philippines as a contact zone between East Asia and the Viceroyalty of New Spain. The thesis is available in open access: <https://run.unl.pt/handle/10362/20034>.
 - 2 King Filipe III (born April 14, 1578, Madrid-died March 31, 1621, Madrid) was king of Spain and of Portugal (as Filipe II). He was the son and heir of Filipe II (born May 21, 1527, Valladolid, Spain-died September 13, 1598, El Escorial), king of the Spaniards (1556–98) and king of the Portuguese (as Filipe I, 1580–98), after the succession crisis in Portugal following the death of King Sebastião, who died in 1578 in the battle of Alcazarquivir (Al-Qaër al-Kabîr), Morocco, in a crusade against the Muslims.
 - 3 Pratt, “Arts of the Contact Zone”, p.34.

This text aims to analyse the circulation of commodities in the context of the dispute for control and dominance in the Philippines and the surrounding oceanic space, a point of intersection between Asia and the so-called Spanish America, namely the Viceroyalties of New Spain and Peru. Its timeline coincides with the establishment of the Manila-Acapulco route and the voyages of the 'Naos de China' that shifted the Philippines' economy from a subsistence agriculture-based system to what Ubaldo Iaccarino calls the 'Galleon system', a change that occurred between 1571 and 1593.⁴

By following mercantile networks and the demand for specific objects and products, we are forced to adopt a decentralized, almost kaleidoscopic view of this space and of the relations it shaped.

Nuevo Orbe Mar mediterrâneo: confronts and negotiations

Father José de Acosta SJ (1540-1600) in his *Natural and Moral History of the Indies* ("Historia natural y moral de las Indias"), published in Seville in 1590⁵ refers to the *Nuevo Orbe Mar mediterrâneo* or the "New Orb Mediterranean Sea", a term he applied to a complex geography that encompasses an "Asian Mediterranean". However, unlike the Mediterranean Sea, this one articulates around a vertical rather than a horizontal axis and is formed by the Korean peninsula, Japan, China, Indochina, Malacca, Indonesia, Maluku, and the Philippines. To this same part of the globe, José Luis Alvarez Taladriz coined the expression "China Sea Mediterranean", a concept he first sketched in 1970.⁶

Like the Mediterranean Sea, this is a world of contrasts and different types of frontiers – political, religious, linguistic, and cultural. In the "Asian Mediterranean", European forces conflicted with one another in a global dimension. From the sixteenth century onward, these waters were an internationally politicized space in a time when control of the oceans became not only a commercial matter but also part of the construction of power in the European state system, as Elizabeth Mancke accurately observes.⁷

Soon after the Spanish establishment in the Philippines, commercial relations with the Portuguese began, and on 27 March 1583 a Portuguese reed belonging to Bartolomeu Vaz Landeiro and commanded by Sebastião Jorge arrived in Manila with Portuguese, Indian, and

4 Iaccarino, "The 'Galleon System' and Chinese Trade in Manila at the Turn of the 16th Century", p.121.

5 The first publication was in Latin – *De natvra nobi orbis libri duo, et de promulgatione evangelii apud barbaros sive de procuranda indorum salute* – and was published in 1589 in Salamanca.

6 See Ollé, "The Mediterranean of the Sea of China: The Historical Dynamics of East Asia and the Formation of the Philippine Colonial Model", p.59.

7 The definition of oceans as international politicized space is a subject analysed by Elizabeth Mancke in her text "Early Modern Expansion and the Politicization of Oceanic Space".

Chinese products. The reception exceeded the best expectations, and it was agreed that the Portuguese would make the trip from Macao to Manila on an annual basis. In June of that year, the galleon *San Martín*, which was going from Manila to Acapulco, deviated from the route and arrived in Macao. Despite being arrested by the Chinese authorities, in March of the following year Landeiro fulfilled the agreement and landed in Manila.⁸

After some years, in 1589, D. João da Gama, former captain of Malacca, left Macao with a 600-ton ship. This trip had the participation of several Portuguese and Spaniard private merchants who, after reaching Japan in October, arrived in Acapulco in 1590. D. João da Gama was accused of being a smuggler and was arrested along with his cargo, valued at 140,000 *pesos*, and confiscated by the Spanish authorities. In compliance with the royal order, he was sent the following year to Seville to be judged by *Casa de la Contratación* and was accused of not observing the royal decrees prohibiting communication between the territories of the Iberian Crowns.⁹

Episodes such as these are revealing of the relations established between Macao, Manila, and Japan. Macao and Manila were two port cities that complemented themselves due to their different cultural, social and political nature and their respective geographical positions.¹⁰

In the China Sea, Macao gradually emerged as the port of departure for most voyages to Japan, but also to Southeast Asia. The expansion of this port city from the late 1550s onward was largely due to its location at the centre of three key maritime routes: the route linking Macao to India (Goa) and Lisbon, the one connecting Macao with Japan, and, finally, the one that, through Manila in the Philippines, ended in Acapulco. All of them had a common denominator: the exportation of Chinese silk, a commodity I will return to.¹¹

The intersection of these routes, or at least of some of their segments, further expands the complex dissemination of people, ideas, and goods. Thus, at least as soon as the 1580s, the Macao-Manila and the Macao-Acapulco routes must have been numerous judging from the information appearing in a particular set of documents: the letters of the Jesuits.¹²

8 Oliveira, *A construção do conhecimento europeu sobre a China c. 1500-c.1600*, p.231. On the galleon episode, see Costa, *The Jesuits in the Philippines*, pp.52 and ff. About Bartolomeu Vaz Landeiro, more recently, Lúcio de Sousa published *The Early European presence in China, Japan, the Philippines and Southeast Asia (1555-1590). The Life of Bartolomeu Landeiro*.

9 Lourido, *A Rota Marítima da Seda e da Prata: Macau-Manila, das origens a 164*, p.102 and ff.; Schurtz, *El galleon de Manila*, p.145 e ss.

10 Birgit Tremml-Werner, Op.Cit.

11 For the study on the trade and the routes connecting Macao, the Philippines and New Spain, special mention is due to the works of Rui Lourido, namely the already cited *A Rota Marítima da Seda e da Prata: Macau-Manila, das origens a 1640*, and “In silk waves vanished the American ethereal silver and gold: Macao-Manila trade during the late Ming and early Qing period”.

12 Cf. Curvelo, *Nuvens Douradas e Paisagens Habitadas. A Arte Namban e a sua circulação entre a Ásia e a América: Japão, China e Nova-Espanha (c.1550 – c.1700)*, namely p.46 and documental appendix.

Manila worked for Macao as an additional market for Chinese products, and Macao imported silver through the Philippines, but the concern over the Spaniards entering the silk trade of China and Japan and the fear that Mexican silver would compete directly with the Japanese silver traded by the Portuguese were a constant cause of distress. The Philippines acted as a distribution point for the Mexican silver arriving via the 'Manila Galleon' and secondarily by the Peruvian galleon linking El Callao, Manila, and China, although this voyage was banned in 1593 (as well as the trade between Peru and New Spain) due to the massive amount of Potosi silver heading towards Asia.¹³

In 1587, two years before the events involving D. João da Gama, Filipe II had conditioned the Portuguese trade with the Philippines and that of the Spaniards with China and the Moluccas. He aimed at banning Portuguese trade between China and New Spain, on the one hand, and to prevent the inhabitants of the Philippines from dealing with Japan, Macao, and the neighbouring regions, on the other. Not only were these measures frustrated, but they also boosted the smuggling and bribery in Macao and Manila. Unofficial, illegal, and informal commerce networks were common expedients in one of the most distant locations of the two Iberian empires.

On the Portuguese side, there were also several efforts to prohibit these routes, such as the order issued by the Viceroy of India, D. Duarte de Meneses, in April 1586, to prevent the trade and navigation of the Spaniards to Japan and other ports of interest for the Portuguese. Nevertheless, it could not prevent that in the late sixteenth century, Japanese merchants, some Christianized, and many having taken Spanish names would arrive in Manila to trade Japanese goods (silver, copper, and sulphur) for Chinese commodities and Philippine goods (honey, deerskins, and civet cats).¹⁴

The consecutive orders issued by the Iberian Crown confirm that the practical results were not the expected ones: in 1587, the King recommended the Viceroy to avoid the trade of the Spaniards with China and the Moluccas and the Portuguese of Macao with the Philippines. In March 1594, he ordered the departure of General Ombudsman Luís da Silva to Macao to investigate the accusations of disobedience to the legitimate judges and the Captain of Japan's journey by many citizens.

While the investigations were inconclusive in this case, the tries to stop the flourishing trade between Macao and Manila at the time were also fruitless. Such attempts are attested by the King's complaint about D. Rodrigo de Cordoba, a Spanish nobleman who had come to Macao from Peru in a Spanish ship carrying a large number of silver ingots to exchange for Chinese silk in Manila, the Jesuits being one of the interested parties.¹⁵ Again, Filipe II of Spain, in a letter sent

13 Oliveira, *Op.Cit.*, p.226.

14 Bentley, "People and things in motion. The view from the East", p.36.

15 Boxer, *Fidalgos no Extremo Oriente. Factos e Lendas de Macau Antigo*, p.58; Rêgo, "Filipinas", pp.425-428.

in February 1595 to Viceroy Matias de Albuquerque about the deal between the Philippines and New Spain with China, orders the execution of his 'defence', seeking "this trade to be interrupted, and that only my Portuguese vassals who serve me in that *Estado [da Índia]* make use of it".¹⁶

A year earlier, on March 1594, had been promulgated in Madrid, the charter prohibiting all captains, masters, and pilots of any vessel to deal and sail between the Castilian West Indies and the Portuguese East Indies. It never had the intended practical effect, as attested by numerous documentary references, such as the letter sent by the Jesuit Duarte de Sande on November 15, 1598, from Macao to Father João Antunes stating that: "(...) this port and city of Macao is at great risk of losing all profits, and therefore the *Estado da Índia*, and much of Portugal. The reason is that the Spaniards who, after Filipe II became King of Portugal, have always continued this way either from New Spain, or from Peru, and especially from Manila (...)".¹⁷

From this moment on begins a period extending until 1637, during which the King strengthened his commitment to safeguarding the exclusive Portuguese direct trade with China and Japan, thereby moderating the challenging intentions of the merchant circles of the Philippines and Spanish America. Travel reforms aimed at centralizing powers in the hands of the Crown, and particularly in the government of Goa, date precisely from the years 1635-1638. Overall, it was not until the last four years of Japan's journey (1636-1639) that the Crown reserved the career's control for itself. Nevertheless, it shared it with the individuals who paid for their freight. However, in the previous eight decades, the bulk of the travel was in the hands of the noble and mercantile agents in Asia.¹⁸

The distance from the Viceroy of India and Mexico, not to mention the Iberian Peninsula, was a determining factor in the effective exercise of authority, which was insufficient to counteract frequent and sizeable traffic between Macao and Manila, Macao and Guadeloupe or Guayaquil, or between Manila and the Moluccas. Thus, the Cortes of Tomar's resolutions (1581) to keep the borderline between the two imperial areas watertight suffered permanently, and some even theoretically advocated in favour of the foundation of a Spanish entrepôt on Japanese soil, modelled on Macao.¹⁹

By the time the Dutch and the English entered the Asian Seas, the Indian, European and New World economies were already connected, with a variety of representatives as key players,

16 Portuguese version: "de todo se atalhe este commercio, e que somente usem d'elle meus vassallos portugueses que me servem n'esse estado [da Índia]". Partial citation of a royal letter from Filipe II to Matias de Albuquerque, Viceroy of India, dated February 18, 1595. Apud Oliveira, Op.Cit., p.228-229.

17 Original text: "(...) fica este porto e cidade de Machao em grande risco de perder todos os proveitos temporaes, e pelo consequente o estado da India, e muito de Portugal. A causa he porque os Espanhoes que depois que El rey Dom Phelippe he Rey de portugal, Sempre continuaram este caminho ou da Nova-Espanha, ou de peru, e principalmente da Manila". ARSI, Jap.Sin 13-II, fl.225. Curvelo, Op. Cit., pp.48-49, footnote 130.

18 Leitão, *Do Trato Português no Japão presenças que se cruzam (1543-1639)*, pp.49-50.

19 Curvelo, Op.Cit., pp.48-49 and pp.425-427.

notably New Christians' networks that spread across the Atlantic to Brazil, Peru and Mexico, and then articulated with Portuguese Asia via Manila and Macao.²⁰

When at the end of the sixteenth century and especially at the beginning of the following century, Iberian maritime domination was threatened by the Protestants, Macao and Manila, better placed than Goa to rescue the Moluccas, tightened the economic ties that linked them, and the merchants of the Portuguese city began to strongly advocate around 1623 the legalization of trade between the two ports, in a move to counter Dutch and English competition. However, it is interesting noting that this was not consensual.²¹

By the time we entered the 1640s, Portugal had lost the trade with Japan (1639) and Malacca (which was taken by the Dutch in 1641), which was a hard blow to the economy of the *Estado da Índia*, which, from an administrative point of view, with the defeats in Bengal, Ceylon, and Japan, was unable to organize a global strategy adjusted to this new reality.²² Macao suffered the greatest from the transition from the Ming dynasty to the Qing dynasty, a change that created a climate of instability in the markets of the Southeast.²³ At the same time, the new Portuguese dynasty was proclaimed, at which point voyages between Macao and Manila were officially interrupted, a measure that was, however, circumvented by Macao with several alternative stopovers, such as Macassar, in Southern Sulawesi, on a route that continued until 1668, when the old route was re-established.²⁴

The Macao-Manila connection was thus clearly called into question with the 1640 Portugal's Restoration of independence, placing the Portuguese in the China Sea in a dilemma. Moreover, the Portuguese entry into Spanish America, led by the New Christians, whose infiltration into Asian trade had generated opposition in Madrid, opened the doors of the American Viceroyalties to the Portuguese, from Seville to Manila, through Mexico, Cartagena, and Peru.²⁵

The Agents: an outline

According to Sanjay Subrahmanyam, the Macao-Japan axis, operating until 1639, had as its main consequence the opening of a new path for private trade, drawing the attention of private merchants to a field of action where they did not compete with the Crown. The Portuguese benefited from a confluence of internal conjunctures in China and Japan that placed

20 Oliveira, Op. Cit., p.241 and Subrahmanyam, *O Império Asiático Português, 1500-1700*, pp.229-230.

21 Loureiro, "Macao and Manila in the context of Iberian-Dutch rivalry in the South China Sea"; Oliveira, Op. Cit., pp.234 and ff.

22 Subrahmanyam, Op. Cit., p.248.

23 Saldanha; Alves, *Estudos de História do Relacionamento Luso-Chinês (Séculos XVI-XIX)*.

24 Boxer, Op. Cit., p.154.

25 Valladares, *Castilla y Portugal en Asia (1580-1640. Declive imperial y adaptación)*.

them as key players in this whole process, given the restrictions imposed on Chinese participation in trade with Japan. In turn, Japan had concentrated, in the last quarter of the 16th century, the bulk of its overseas trade in the Philippines and Southeast Asia instead of China.²⁶ In this respect, Ubaldo Iaccarino also stresses the role played by the so-called *wakō* or broadly saying, Japanese pirates, in the East and Southeast Asian seas. Their intense activity led Toyotomi Hideyoshi (ruled 1582-1598) and Tokugawa Ieyasu (ruled 1598-1616) to control it by means of the so-called “red seal ships” system.²⁷

On the other hand, Portuguese and Spanish trade relations with Japan followed different lines during the reign of Filipe III, moving from a position defending Portuguese commercial and religious interests to a more permissive or liberalizing attitude, which met the demands of the Spanish institutions in general and Manila’s interests in particular. In fact, a first major and serious challenge to the *Padroado Português do Oriente* (Portuguese Patronage of the East, also known as *Padroado Real* or Royal Patronage) came within the limits of this geography, via the Spaniard missionary brothers coming from the Philippines, where they settled from 1565 onwards. Manila was rightly considered the natural bridge to the much sought-after and coveted entry of the mendicant orders into the Christian missions of China and Japan, until then the monopoly of the Jesuits and of the Portuguese Royal Patronage.²⁸ Subsequently, the decisions taken by the Council of State at Valladolid on 30 May 1606 gave, according to João Paulo Costa, the first mortal blow to the interests of the Portuguese-Jesuit bloc by issuing an opinion that, for the first time, admitted the passage of missionaries to Japan via the Philippines.²⁹

Three years later, on July 20, 1609, the King industrialized the governor of the Philippines to promote trade with Japan through Spanish merchants, and on July 25, 1610 was issued a royal charter liberalizing trade between the Japanese and the Philippine archipelagos. Japanese merchants from Kyūshū reached Manila twice a year, after the monsoons (in October and March or May), where they sold manufactured silks and coloured cotton, wool, copper bells, potteries, perfumes, iron, and tin. They returned home with mainly gold and raw silks. From the Philippines the Japanese bought wax, honey, deerskins and stag horns, spices and aromatic woods such as Brazil wood and gold. An interesting commodity in this trade was some Chinese rough earthenware, dating from the Tang and Song dynasties found in the Philippine northern coasts: “To the eyes of a Japanese estimator this irregular potteries were extremely valuable and absolutely priceless.”³⁰

26 Subrahmanyam, *Op. Cit.*, pp.148-149.

27 Iaccarino, “Manila as an International Entrepôt: Chinese and Japanese trade with the Spanish Philippines at the close of the 16th century”, p.74-75.

28 Costa, “A rivalidade luso-espanhola no Extremo-Oriente e a querela missionológica no Japão”.

29 Costa, *O Cristianismo no Japão e o Bispado de D. Luís Cerqueira*, p.643.

30 Iaccarino, “Manila as an International Entrepôt: Chinese and Japanese trade with the Spanish Philippines at the close of the 16th century”, p.78. This attests the previous commercial relations between Song China and the Philippines, as observed by Tremml-Werner, p.274.

The Macao-Manila route was expanded during 1622-1642³¹ reaching its peak in a trade that, from 1619 onwards, was executed by a near monopoly regime, removing the little competition left on the part of Chinese merchants. That year, ten galliots arrived in Manila from Macao. Afterwards, mainly Chinese products, especially silks, were re-exported by the Spaniards to Mexico. Hence, by the end of the decade, the Spaniards had a ship built in Satsuma, Japan, for the Pacific crossing.³²

In addition to the crown and self-employed merchants, missionaries were another component of these merchant networks. In the case of China and Japan, Jesuits played a key role, since the commercial structure of the Company was structured around a simple organizational chart in which the priest who was in Macao as *Procurador* was responsible for the annual shipment of the silks and other products needed for the mission of Japan, while, on the Japanese side, another *Procurador* assumed the management of the business. We have, therefore, a regulation that reflects the commercial practice of merchants in general, which is why it was not exempt from both internal and external criticism, especially by the mendicant orders installed in Manila.³³

Illustrative of the close relationship between merchants and missionaries is the life of Luís de Almeida (c.1525-1583), who left for India in 1548 and became a successful merchant. From Goa, he sailed East, landing for the first time in Japan in 1552 through his activity on the mercantile route linking Malacca, Lampacau (a small island in the Pearl River Delta), and the Japanese archipelago. In 1555, he visited the kingdom of Bungo³⁴ and, impressed and deeply moved by the results obtained by the Jesuit priests, he asked to join the Society. He learned the Japanese language, travelled through various regions of the country, and carried out remarkable work in the hospital he founded in Funai (today Ōita), thus introducing Western medicine to Japan. His merchant side, however, was skilfully used in the service of the Jesuits, and the supervision of the ship cargo belonging to the Company, was entrusted to him.³⁵

As for merchants, one of the notorious figures who appear in an early chronology in this geography is that of António Garcês, established in Nagasaki around 1585, as one of the people

31 For the years 1580-1642, this route accounted for 77 registered ships from Macao. In addition, China's (including Macao) trade to Manila continued to grow, and in 1611-1615, it corresponded to a total of 91.5% of inflows in Manila's *almojarifazgo* (a customs tariff in the Spanish and Portuguese empires). Cf. Lourido, *A Rota Marítima da Seda e da Prata: Macau-Manila, das origens a 1640*, pp.120-122; p.184.

32 Oliveira, Op. Cit., p.156; Boxer, Op.Cit., pp.80-81.

33 Curvelo, Op. Cit., pp.101 and ff. Bourdon, *La Compagnie de Jésus et le Japon 1547-1570. La Fondation de la mission japonaise par François Xavier (1547-1551) et les premiers résultats de la prédication chrétienne sous le supériorat de Cosme de Torres (1551-1570)*, p.592.

34 Bungo Province was a province of Japan in eastern Kyūshū in the area of Ōita Prefecture.

35 About Luís de Almeida, *vide* Carvalho, "Luís de Almeida, médico, mercador e missionário no Japão (1525-1583).

who usually formed part of the Portuguese entourage visiting the shogun's court.³⁶ In a letter dated 28 October 1599, Alessandro Valignano, the Jesuit Visitor in Japan, refers to him as a known "honourable Portuguese" ("português honrado") in Manila. It seems that at this time, he had a significant income, able to arm ships on his behalf because that same year, he sent a boat to the Philippines under the command of Francisco Martins. We know that, in this case, the vessel returned prosperous from Manila, and that, in 1604, he continued this activity.³⁷

Another name found in written sources is that of Vasco Dias, a Portuguese also active in trade with Manila, whom Brother Pedro Baptista referred to in a letter of 11 September 1595 as a man to whom the Franciscans owed "very much". It seems that he made several journeys between Japan and the Philippines, and in October 1599, he was about to begin in Nagasaki what would be at least his third journey.³⁸

The examples of António Garcês and Vasco Dias would not be unique, since, although with fewer citations, there are references to other Portuguese who set ships for the Philippines, as was the case of Manuel Luís in 1595 and Pedro Gomes and Pedro Lopes in 1599.³⁹ The direct connection between Nagasaki and the Philippines, similar to what happened to the city of Macao, especially in the previous decade, is also mentioned in the Jesuit letters, since it was one of the routes used to send correspondence.⁴⁰

In addition, the Spaniards who settled in Nagasaki, albeit in a significantly smaller number, mainly originated from Manila. They settled in the city *circa* 1608,⁴¹ in a period corresponding to an important phase of trade relations between Japan and the Philippines.

As Reinier Hesselink remarks, "Manila was founded in 1571, and the first streets of Nagasaki were also built in that very same year. The only difference between the latter two ports was that silver from the Americas was carried from Manila to China in Chinese junks, while silver from Japan was carried to Macao in Portuguese vessels."⁴²

Studies such as Hesselink's demonstrate that the traffic between the city of Nagasaki and the Philippines was less regulated or controlled than the commerce between Nagasaki and Macao and that many ships owned by Japanese and Portuguese merchants were continually arriving from Manila.⁴³

36 On Garcês, cf. Costa, *O Cristianismo no Japão e o Bispado de D. Luís Cerqueira*, p.524 and ff; Rodrigues, *Nagasaki nanban das origens à expulsão dos Portugueses*, pp.120-123.

37 ARSI, Jap.Sin 13-II, Letter from Alessandro Valignano to the rector of the College in Manila, fl.352, *apud* Costa, *Ibidem*, footnote 101, p.525.

38 Costa, *Ibidem*, pp.525-526.

39 Idem, *Ibidem*, p.526.

40 Curvelo, *Op. Cit.*, pp.132-133.

41 Rodrigues, *Op. Cit.*, p.123.

42 Hesselink, *The Dream of Christian Nagasaki. World Trade and the Clash of Cultures, 1560-1640*, p.4.

43 Idem, *Ibidem*, p.209.

We can further expand this idea by arguing that crossing borders and transgression of political directives was essential in shaping this vast ‘contact zone’ in the global context of the early modern age. Manila was at the crossroad of at least four empires/domains – the Spanish, the Portuguese, the Chinese and the Japanese – and this fact was essential for the foundation of its unique character.

“Llaman acá la China a las Filippinas”⁴⁴

The name of Giovanni Francesco Gemelli Careri⁴⁵ (1651-1725) is inextricably associated with Macao, Manila, and New Spain, three territories he visited during his worldwide tour during the last decade of the seventeenth century.

Unlike many other travellers, some of Italian origin, who left for the West Indies⁴⁶ in the service of the Spanish Crown, such as Gerolamo Benzoni, Francesco Carletti, and the Jesuit Eusebio Francisco Kino, Careri travelled at his own risk, driven by the enormous curiosity that these faraway places aroused in him.

Having left Italy on June 14, 1693, he passed through Messina and Malta before entering Egypt and, through Armenia and Persia, reaching India. From here, he made his way to China, and on August 4, 1695, he was in Macao, determined to visit Beijing, what he did. Careri returned to Macao to take the ship to the Philippines, arriving on May 8, 1696. From Manila, he sailed towards Mexico, anchoring in the port of Acapulco on January 19, 1697. Less than twelve months later, on December 14, 1697, he was in Veracruz, the Mexican gateway to the Atlantic, ready to make the return journey via La Habana, where he disembarked in June 1698.

One of the courses Careri had travelled and to which I want to draw attention to is the route that connected Acapulco to Veracruz, passing through Mexico City. This route, known as the ‘Camino de Acapulco’ (the Acapulco route) or ‘Camino de la China’ (the China route), was one of the pivotal commercial axes of New Spain, linking the port made famous as the “Pacific port” with the imposing Mexico’s metropolis.⁴⁷

Acapulco was a small village that lived at the pace of the arrival of the Manila Galleon, whose final regulation as the arrival port of the “Nau da China” (the China Ship), as it was known, dates from 1593. A market was held annually with products from different parts of

44 “Here [in New-Spain] they call China to the Philippines”.

45 For a biography of Careri, see Perujo’s preliminary study to Careri’s *Viaje a la Nueva España*, particularly pp. vii-xxxi. See also Lach; Kley, *Asia in the Making of Europe*, Vol. III: *A Century of Advance*; Book One: *Trade, Missions, Literature*, pp.387-388.

46 Shaw, “Más allá de Manila”, p.98.

47 María Serrera, “El Camino de la China”.

Asia. Over the years, Acapulco became increasingly important, and it was in this wide bay that for more than two centuries the Galleon trade route from the Philippines was monopolized.

The Manila Galleon inaugurated the transoceanic route in 1573 with the ships *Santiago* and *San Juan*, carrying a cargo that included 712 pieces of silk and 22,300 porcelains, quantities that pre-announced the riches that were to be commercialized in the future. In 1640, the Galleon transported two million *pesos* in silver from Acapulco to the Philippines, taking on the voyage a two-and-a-half million *pesos* shipment of Chinese silks, making it the most lucrative career in all international trade of the time.⁴⁸ The land route that connected Acapulco to Mexico City channelled goods from all over Asia into this gigantic metropolis. Its importance in the overall picture of the New Hispanic economy was such that the *peso*, or the currency minted in the Mexican Mint House, was known as 'la moneda de la seda' (the silk coin).⁴⁹

The Manila Galleon's itinerary became the longest open-ocean route, as well as the most enduring one, since it continued for 250 years, even surviving the establishment of the direct link between Spain and the Philippines by way of the Cape of Good Hope from 1763.⁵⁰

The explanation for the basis of its remarkable mercantile achievement is to be found in the lifting of the ban on maritime trade in Fujian in 1567, which generated a migratory expansion towards Southeast Asia. This context of openness gave rise to a Chinese migratory flow, especially from the Fujian region towards Manila. As Ubaldo Iaccarino remarks, "Most of the Chinese merchants reaching Manila for commercial purposes were then Fujianese. Actually, Spanish relationship with China, for its entire duration, passed through Fujian province and was confined to the far-southern end of the 'Celestial Empire'."⁵¹ Simultaneously, the overseas Chinese community residing in Manila grew steadily during the last three decades of the sixteenth century from 40 men to over 18,000.⁵²

Assuring regular trade between New Spain, one of the largest American silver-producing areas, and the Philippines, with trade networks extending to China and Southeast Asia, the Manila Galleon led to the early introduction of restrictive mechanisms by the Crown to the exit of American silver towards Asia. To this end, attempts were made to reduce trade between Acapulco and Manila, to prohibit direct trade between the Philippines and the Peruvian area, and to limit trade between Peru and Mexico. From 1587 onwards, this later circuit was subject to successive restrictions and prohibitions through provisions issued by the Crown (namely for the years 1604, 1620, 1631 and 1634).⁵³

48 Pires, *Op. Cit.*, p.29.

49 Lorente Rodríguez, "El Galeón de Manila", p.109.

50 Schurtz, *Op. Cit.*

51 Iaccarino, "Manila as an International Entrepôt: Chinese and Japanese trade with the Spanish Philippines at the close of the 16th century", p.75. See also Tremml-Werner, *Op. Cit.*, p.144 and ff.

52 Iaccarino, "The 'Galleon System' and Chinese Trade in Manila at the Turn of the 16th Century", p.112.

53 María Serrera, *Op. Cit.*

Schurtz refers to Manila as nothing more than a passage between China and Mexico,⁵⁴ whereas Boxer stressed its resemblance with Macao in the following terms: “The essentially commercial nature of the Portuguese colonial empire, particularly the African and Asian sectors was something that distinguished it rather sharply from the Spanish, although in this respect there was a striking similarity between Macao and Manila”.⁵⁵

The similarities between these two cities were not limited to this commercial/mercantile model. From the social and religious perspective, there are also obvious parallels emerging from their maritime nature and their placement in a broader network. As in Macao and Nagasaki, in Manila, the figure of the merchant complemented that of the missionary, and *vice versa*. The image emerging over the years is of a city that was acquiring a remarkable and active religious experience in which a “Portuguese mark” was also felt through the foundation, in 1606, of a branch of Lisbon’s *Misericórdia* (House of Mercy),⁵⁶ and which did not it excluded, but instead integrated, the Chinese and Japanese elements.

To this end, let us cite two examples that we find particularly interesting.

In the first case, the setting is the Manila College, a building completed in 1596 and dedicated during the celebrations of Saint Anne, which took place on July 26 of the same year. The general outline of the temple associated with this educational institution closely followed that of the Jesuit *Jesù* church in Rome. On the high altar was set a statue of the invocation of the church, which was replaced in 1604 by a new altarpiece consisting of a central painting depicting the “Virgin with the Child and Saint Anne” flanked by two compositions of lesser size, one of “Saint Catherine” and the other of “Saint Ursula”, all made by Chinese artists. Previously, however, on January 12, 1597, newly arrived relics from Rome were placed solemnly behind the altar, an event that prompted a series of celebrations throughout the city. One of the highlights of the festivities was the procession that accompanied the relics through the main streets of Manila, featuring groups of Chinese, Japanese and Tagalog dancers in their traditional dress.⁵⁷

If the importance of the Chinese community is a particularly well-known and studied reality, the same is not true of the Japanese who settled in the archipelago, especially in Manila. It echoes in Antonio de Morga’s *Sucesos de las Islas Filipinas*, published in Mexico in 1609:

“In Manila usually there are Christian Japanese and infidels, who are left of the ships coming from Japan, although they aren’t in as a great a number as the Chinese. These, have a particular population and place, outside the city, between the Parian of the *Sangleyes*, and the

54 Schurtz, Op. Cit, p.65.

55 Boxer, *Portuguese Society in the tropics. The Municipal Councils of Goa, Macao, Bahia, and Luanda, 1510-1800*, p.56.

56 Pires, *A Viagem de Comércio Macau-Manila nos Séculos XVI a XIX*, p.16. For information about the artistic commissions associated with this institution, see Mesquida, “The 1606 Statues of the Misericordia of Manila: Portuguese framework and local adaptation”.

57 Costa, *The Jesuits in the Philippines*, pp.174-175.

neighbourhood of Laguio, next to the monastery of the Candelaria, where they are administered by religious priests of San Francisco, with interpreters that they have for it; They are people with character, and willing and brave (...).⁵⁸

In this perspective, it is symptomatic that a Spanish version of the 1603 Portuguese-Japanese dictionary was published in Manila in 1630 by the Dominican College of St. Thomas.⁵⁹ Moreover, the idea of founding a college in the city was even considered. It would be a complement to Macao since, in 1623, Archbishop García Serrano received a letter from Nagasaki Catholics requesting his help in founding the college, which would welcome a novitiate for young Japanese who wanted to follow the priesthood.⁶⁰

However, resulting from the consequent rush of events, the proposal was not followed-up. After 1614 and the expulsion of all missionaries from Japan, the Philippines were one of the preferred settlements, preceded only by Macao. It was to Manila that the great lord Takayama Ukon (1552-1615) and his family retreat, as some of the students from the Jesuit's Painting Seminary conducted in Japan by the Italian Jesuit Giovanni Niccolò (c.1558-1626). It should be noted that the pair of screens from the collection of the Kobe Municipal Museum with the depiction of a world map and four major cities of the world (Lisbon, Seville, Rome and Constantinople) was, until 1937, held by a family from Seville, where a Japanese dealer bought it. It was in this city that the 'Galleon of China' route ended, which leads Grace Vlam to question whether these folding screens were part of the baggage of the exiled Japanese lord, who died in Manila in 1615.⁶¹

One striking testimony of the Chinese community in Manila settled in one of the city's northern districts called the Silk Market, or Parián. With a troubled history, Manila's first Chinese Parián,⁶² closely associated with the city's history, would date from c.1581-1582 and be set within the urban layout, while the second market, built after the destruction of the first, was already placed outside the walls, near the Convent of St. Dominic. During the subsequent years, successive reconstructions took place with an impact on the growing urban network

58 Free translation from the original: "Suele auer en Manila, Iapones Cristianos é infieles, que quedan de los nauios que vienen de Iapon, aunque no tanta gente como Chinas. Estos, tienen poblazon y sitio particular, fuera de la ciudad, entre el Parian de los Sangleyes, y el barrio de Laguio, junto al monasterio de la Candelaria, donde los administran religiosos descalços de san Francisco, con lenguas que para ello tienen; es gente briosa, y de buena disposición y valientes (...)." Morga, *Sucesos de las Islas Filipinas por el Dr. Antonio de Morga*, Chapter VIII: "Relacion de las islas Filipinas, y de sus naturales, antigüedad, costumbres y gobierno, asi en tiempo de su gentilidad como despues que los Españoles las conquistaron, con otras particularidades", p.226.

59 Lach; *Kley, Op. Cit.*, p.344. It should be noted that the Chinese-made paper used by the Manila press was inappropriate for this purpose, being of poor quality, which explains the poor condition of many of the remaining specimens. See Medina, *La Imprenta en Manila desde sus orígenes hasta 1810*, pp. LVI-LVII of the introductory text.

60 Costa, *The Jesuits in the Philippines*, p.370-372.

61 Vlam, *Western-style Secular Painting in Momoyama Japan*, pp.140-141.

62 Lourido, *A Rota Marítima da Seda e da Prata: Macau-Manila, das origens a 1640*, p.192.

until the Royal Decree of July 23, 1744, which dictated the expulsion of the Chinese from the Philippines and the disappearance of their settlement.⁶³

By that time, however, the word *parián* meant, in a broad context of the Viceroyalty of New Spain, a public market, and was connoted with the most coveted Asian commodity: Chinese silk. Yet, even before the establishment of the *parián*, the Spaniards could access Chinese goods such as iron, tin, and copper, as well as porcelains, silks, and cotton, thanks to Bornean merchants who would bring them into the isles of Cebu, Bohol, Mindoro and mostly to Muslim Manila.⁶⁴

Manila *parián*, as the hub for obtaining the goods for the Manila Galleon was thus a market that was supplied by the *Sangleys*,⁶⁵ or Chinese traders, who introduced all kinds of goods to the Philippines not only from China but also from Japan, Indonesia, Siam, Burma, Ceylon, India, and Persia.⁶⁶ The importance of the *Sangleys* was such that Morga even wrote, “The truth is that without these *Sangleyes*, we could not afford to support the city, because they are the officers of all offices, great workers, and at a very reasonable price (...)”.⁶⁷

From China came silks, ivories, porcelain, and fans; from Japan, the folding screens and lacquered furniture; from Indonesia pepper, cloves and nutmeg; from Siam, the benzoin (used in perfumes, incense, as a flavouring, and medicine), from Burma, the Martabam jars; from Ceylon, the cinnamon; from India, the cotton cloths. From New Spain arrived the much-desired silver that flowed in exorbitant quantities into the hands of Asian merchants, especially for the insatiable Chinese empire.⁶⁸ Moreover, as for the Spanish contribution to this emporium, “soon after the founding of Manila the Spaniards started introducing their own goods on the Philippine market: European clothes, glass panes, various art objects, cloths and wines from Castile”.⁶⁹ I would enhance in this list of goods the feather works (*plumaría*) proceeding from the New Spain and reaching such far places as China, as attested by the inventories of the

63 On June 30, 1755, Governor Arandia, following the king's orders, banished the Chinese from the Philippines, except for about 515 who were Christian and another 1000 who had intentions to convert.

64 Iaccarino, “Manila as an International Entrepôt: Chinese and Japanese trade with the Spanish Philippines at the close of the 16th century”, p.76.

65 *Sangleyes* is a term that seems to derive from the Chinese *shanglai*, “those who come to trade”, or from *sengli*, a word that literally means, “trade” in the Fujian minnanhua dialect. The word may also derive from the Chinese *changlai*, meaning “those who come often”. Cf. Ollé, Op. Cit., footnote 16, p.65.

66 Shaw, Op. Cit., p.95-105.

67 Free translation from the original: “Verdad es, que sin estos *Sangleyes*, no se puede pasar ni sustentar la ciudad, porque son los oficiales de todos los oficios, grandes trabajadores, y a precios acomodados (...)”. Morga, Op. Cit., p.224.

68 Shaw, Op. Cit.

69 Iaccarino, “Manila as an International Entrepôt: Chinese and Japanese trade with the Spanish Philippines at the close of the 16th century”, p.79.

Jesuit Residence in Nanjing, made in the boisterous context of anti-Christian persecutions of 1616-1617 referring to four *plumária* paintings of the four seasons.⁷⁰

Morga's *Sucesos de las Islas Filipinas* gives us plenty of information about the astonishing quantity and diversity of merchandise.⁷¹ This information is further sustained by other testimonies, such as the letters written by the missionaries in East Asia and the Philippines.⁷²

In the light of these references, one can better understand why many of the texts written by Spaniards set in the Americas refer to Asian lands by the common denominator "China," as some historians have pointed out.⁷³ Not by chance, in a letter from Father Antonio de Mendoza to the Jesuit General in Rome Claudio Aquaviva, written in Mexico City on January 17, 1585, he states that "Llaman acá la China a las Filippinas."⁷⁴

Final remarks

Studies such as Birgit Tremml-Werner's *Spain, China, and Japan in Manila, 1571-1644* have been stressing the roles of politics, culture, and mentality for early modern trade and business relations, showing that a strictly economic analytical approach is not sufficient to study a case such as Manila. The same is true for Macao and Nagasaki, two cities that played a significant role in the development of Manila in the late sixteenth century. The official and informal relations between these cities and the broader regions to which they were geographically and culturally associated made part of the formation of Manila. The same is true for Macao and Nagasaki, as well as the Viceroyalties of New Spain and Peru: Manila, in particular, and the Philippines, in general, contributed to the growth of all these territories, albeit in different ways and with distinct impacts.

The border-crossing networks associated with this 'contact zone' shed some light on disputes, tensions, and negotiations between diverse agents and/or entities. Moreover, the 'permeability of borders', and the transgression of ruling orders⁷⁵ which were a constant in the

70 Curvelo, "The artistic circulation between Japan, China and the New-Spain in the 16th-17th centuries", pp.64-65.

71 I call special attention to Chapter VIII: "Relacion de las islas Filipinas, y de sus naturales, antigüedad, costumbres y gobierno, así en tiempo de su gentilidad como despues que los Españoles las conquistaron, con otras particularidades", p.216 and p.219. Cf. Curvelo, Op. Cit., pp.425.428. For the English translation of some of Morga's excerpts, see Iaccarino, "The 'Galleon System' and Chinese Trade in Manila at the Turn of the 16th Century".

72 Curvelo, Op. Cit., footnote 221, p.427.

73 Oliveira, *A construção do conhecimento europeu sobre a China c. 1500 – c.1600*, p.175.

74 *Monumenta Mexicana*, II, Doc.151, Letter from father Antonio de Mendoza to Claudio Aquaviva, Mexico, 17 January 1585, p.437. Cf. Curvelo, Op. Cit., p.429

75 *Transcultural History. Theories, Methods, Sources*, pp.5-6.

geographical and chronological contexts analysed in this text, attest to the importance that the circulation of people, objects, and concepts played in the construction of these emerging cultural identities.

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