

LOOKING BACK 4

Chulalongkorn's Elephants

The Philippines in
Asian History

Revised Edition

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 ANVIL
Publishing Inc.

Taipan origins in 1590

TEXTBOOK history tells us about the way Chinese were maltreated in the Spanish Philippines. We learn about Chinese revolts, physical segregation in the Parian outside Intramuros, and how cannons were aimed at the ghetto to be fired at the slightest sign of trouble. We are also taught about different racial types and where the Chinese or Sangley fit in and how they mixed into what described as the *mestizo de sangley*. Perhaps we should include in our textbooks how Chinese and Chinatown became an important part of the colonial economy, and how the so-called Taipans and Captains of Industry in our times drew from a long history of hard work and entrepreneurship. Reading Manila Bishop Domingo de Salazar's report to Phillip II dated June 24, 1590 made me see the Chinese and the Parian in a more positive light.

Sometimes described in the Spanish sources as a "silk market," the Parian was definitely more than silk stores. Just like modern-day Chinatown in Binondo, the Parian was the place for everything under the sun, at cheap prices. One major difference between our times and the late 16th century was quality. Today, "made in China" means cheap but badly made goods. Bishop Salazar wrote of Chinese workmanship, "They make much prettier articles than are made in España, and



sometimes so cheap that I am afraid to mention it." He wrote about Chinese doctors and drugstores, of Chinese eating houses that were so popular even Spaniards ate their meals there. Chinese were good craftsmen who could copy anything made by Spaniards and sell these cheaper thus driving Spaniards out of business like a bookbinder recounted as follows:

What has pleased all of us here has been the arrival of a book-binder from Mexico. He brought books with him, set up a bindery, and hired a Sangley who had offered his services to him. The Sangley secretly, and without his master noticing it, watched how the latter bound books and lo...he left the house, saying that he wished to serve him no longer, and set up a similar shop, I assure your Majesty that he

became so excellent a workman that his master has been forced to give up the business, because the Sangley has drawn all the trade.

Bishop Salazar also mentioned that when he arrived in 1581, the Sangley did not know how to paint but since they could copy and improve on any object made by a Spaniard they made "marvelous work with both the brush and the chisel, and I think nothing more perfect can be produced than some of their marble statues of the Child Jesus which I have seen...the churches are beginning to be furnished with the images which the Sangleys make, and which we greatly lacked before." In many cathedrals and churches in Spain and Latin America are to be found today the wonderful religious images carved in ivory by Chinese artisans and travelled on the Galleon Trade. Today major auction houses, Christie's and Sotheby's, label these works of art "Hispano-Philippine Ivory" when they were formerly thought to be of purely Chinese make. One carving in ivory, of the head of Christ, used to adorn the coffee-table of the late fashion designer Yves Saint Laurent. This 18th-century ivory was auctioned in Christie's and should have been acquired by a Filipino collector and brought back to Manila. Liturgical vestments of silk were embroidered by Chinese artisans in the Parian. Liturgical vessels of gold and silver were also made or sold in the Parian.

Salazar reported, "There are many gardeners among the Sangleys, who, in places which seemed totally unproductive, are raising many good vegetables of the kinds that grow in España and Mexico. They keep the market here as well-supplied as that of Madrid or Salamanca... They make chairs, bridles, and stirrups of so good a quality and so cheaply that some merchants wish to load a cargo of these articles for Mexico." Then there is a description of the "lista" or credit system we still have in sari-sari stores today:

Many bakers make bread with the wheat and fine flour which they bring from China, and sell it in the marketplace and along the streets. This has much benefited the city for they make good bread and sell it at low cost; and although this land possesses much rice, many now use bread who did not do so before. They are so accommodating that when one has no money to pay for the bread, they give him credit and mark it on a tally. It happens that many soldiers get food this way all through the year, and the bakers never fail to provide them with all the bread they need.

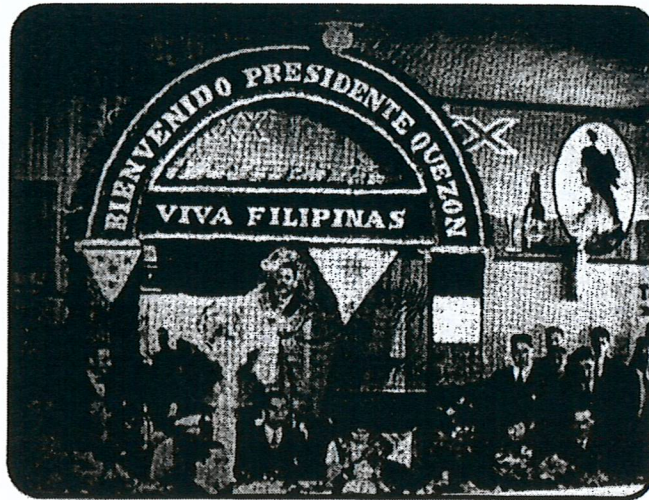
I wonder if these soldiers and policemen abused their credit and didn't pay up like those in the 21st century who extort from Chinese merchants. Life

seemed so simple in the late 16th-century Philippines. The Parian supplied everything needed in Manila. Everything that could produce livelihood or income was explored and the good Bishop was amazed that even split wood was on sale there. There was so much cheap fish that surplus was left on the streets. Reading about the Parian illustrates how Chinese made a living despite all the hurdles placed in their way. Question is what were the "indios" doing aside from taunting the "*intsikbehotulolaway*"? Indios were above sangley then, why is it the other way four centuries later? (5XI2010)

Quezon in Mexico

FRIENDS on Facebook have been sharing their pictures and some complaints about over-crowding that came with the recent stop-over in Pier 13 of the Andalucía, a replica of a ship that once plied the Manila-Acapulco route described in our textbooks as the Galleon Trade (1565–1815). It was a must-see even for those who have only seen galleons in old prints, movies with pirates, or the model in miniature in the Ayala Museum Boat Gallery. Walking inside the galleon should give us a taste of history and remind us of our historical and cultural relations with Mexico. In April 1937, Commonwealth President Manuel L. Quezon visited Mexico after a trip to Washington, D.C. and was given a rousing welcome. His own account is an engaging read:

I was in Mexico in 1937. I did not go there as President of the Philippines and I made statements to that effect. I sent word to the ambassador of Cuba that I was coming as a tourist. When I am in the Philippines, I am President at all times; but when I am abroad, that is no longer the case. I continue being President as regards the Philippines; but in my relations with foreign countries I can drop my official capacity when I please.



This reception for Quezon during his visit to Mexico in 1937 is significant because the Philippines was not yet independent at that time.

I sent word to the Cuban ambassador that I was coming as a tourist and for that reason did not desire to be received with honors due me as Head of State. I said the same thing to the Secretary of State. However, when I arrived at the Mexican frontier, I found the Mexican people waiting for me and with them a military detachment ready to receive me with the honors due me as President of the Philippines. Military honors bother me; but what touched me deeply

were the honors paid me by the people of Mexico. I had never been in Mexico before but whenever I came to a small town I saw people cheering me. I looked out of the window of the presidential car and all shouted *Viva Quezon!* The same as here. Exactly the same.

Of course, the presidential car was there to receive me. That presidential car cost the Mexican government \$500,000 or P1,000,000. Just think of it! If I bought a presidential car worth P20,000 those of the Popular Front would murder me!

We went on to Mexico and at all stations there were the same cheers, the same acclamation. We arrived in the city of Mexico in a tremendous rain. There was the whole cabinet, an army escort, the ambassador, of course, and the people of Mexico acclaiming me. They gave me a national fiesta on the bank of the river to which we were conveyed in pagodas. How that reminded me of the Philippines! The pagodas were exactly like those we are using here. Even the Mexican music resembles Philippine music. At that national fiesta, at which the entire diplomatic corps was present, a Mexican delivered an address on the relations between the Philippines and Mexico.