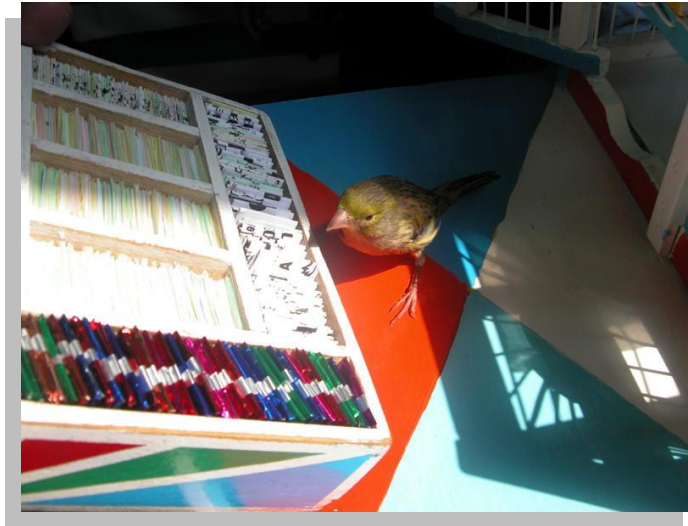


## BIRDS AND PEOPLE.

An outline of *chinos* in Mexico (1565-1700).

By Rubén Carrillo



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This article is to some degree an extended abstract of my MA dissertation on the *chino* community in colonial Mexico. The dissertation was written in Spanish under the title *Chinos en México* and deposited in September 2010 at the *Institut d'Història Jaume Vicens Vives* library at Pompeu Fabra University, Barcelona, Spain. There I describe my findings: an extensive compilation, transcription and analysis of almost all the sources citing *chino* and *china* preserved at the *Archivo General de la Nación* (AGN) in Mexico City. The present text, however, was written in English *ex profeso* for this publication: while its foundations can be found in *Chinos en México* dissertation, it is a different building altogether.

Any given Sunday, one can walk the streets of downtown Mexico City and witness something by most standards peculiar. Here and there, there are the usual breakfast or brunch diners—Mexican or foreign—tasting their *huevos rancheros* or their *enchiladas suizas*, at tables on the street or on the roof—garden restaurants surrounding the *Zócalo*, Mexico City's main square and, historically, the administrative heart of the country. Thus far there is nothing odd about this scene. What is unusual about the late morning weekend meals in this setting are the caged birds.

It is a rather common occurrence, to see men going to and fro carrying large wooden cages with canaries inside them. These cages are beautifully crafted in a very typically Mexican fashion—bright colors, baroque-like shapes, and such. They are all equipped with a drawer placed under the cage’s little door. A birdman is expected to come near the above mentioned brunch tables to offer his services and those of his pet. Upon receiving a tip, the man offers a pinch of grain to the canary, or else allows the customer to feed the bird himself. Then he opens the door and the drawer underneath and lets the animal out of its cage. The canary proceeds to pick a little strip of paper from several options in the drawer, and puts it in the customer’s hand. The strip contains a prediction about the customer’s future—very much like the ones contained in fortune cookies from any Chinese restaurant in the United States and elsewhere.

Where did the tradition of these oracle birds come from? As far as research can indicate, there is no evidence to support a hypothetical pre-Hispanic custom of avian divination. The *serinus canaria domestica* must have been introduced to Mexico by the Spanish in colonial times, for its song, or perhaps to be used in mines to alert the workers of dangerous fumes. Nevertheless, the particular use of these birds as fortune tellers is not likely of peninsular origin, since there is no similar Spanish practice—albeit the origin of the canaries themselves. One must seek elsewhere, in a more exotic and overlooked source.

There is a source that speaks of “birds that do tricks.” It is an inventory of Chinese goods arriving in Manila included in Antonio de Morga’s *Sucesos de las Islas Filipinas*. Among the incoming cargo, the author noted different types of textiles—raw and processed silk goods, most predominantly—, lacquer furniture, porcelain, musk, ivory, cattle, and a wide range of other products. De Morga stated that

Chinese merchants brought with them “even some caged birds, some of which talk, others sing, and they make them do a thousand tricks.”<sup>1</sup> Sadly, the account does not reveal any details about these “tricks.” Could it be, however, that at least one such trick had been fortune telling? Two facts might support this proposition. One is that Chinese have a well-known, age-old tradition of augury and soothsaying. Another is their liking for keeping caged birds and teaching them tricks, unlike the European custom of having these birds to merely look at or hear them sing. Is it possible that a Chinese tradition of fortune-telling birds was imported into Mexico, where canaries had just been introduced, thus giving birth to the *Zócalo* oracle birds?

It is quite impossible to solve this conundrum with the information available to us. Sadly, the history of the oracle birds of Mexico City remains languishing in oblivion. Nevertheless, a preliminary answer to this question, of seemingly little scholarly interest, could be put forward, as a collateral result of the research on a more serious, but likewise ignored matter: the history of the Chinese community in colonial Mexico.

There are two obstacles one encounters when trying to research this topic, the first has to do with terminology, the second with bibliography. In New Spain sources, the word *chino* was used to designate any Asian. The materials that document these Oriental immigrants often do not specify the exact point of origin. This results in that, when one reads *chino* or *china* on a 17<sup>th</sup> century marriage license, it is seldom possible to determine whether this means a person was Chinese, Indian, Filipino, Malaccan, or even Japanese.

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<sup>1</sup> Antonio de Morga. (1609). *Sucesos de las Islas Filipinas*, (Madrid: Ed. Retana, Librería general de Victoriano Suárez, 1909): “*hasta pajaros enjaulados, que algunos hablan, y otros cantan, y les hazen hazer mil jugetes.*” \*Primary sources quoted in Spanish in this article preserve the spelling as it occurs in the original.

This terminology issue has another complication. When a source dubs an individual *chino* or *china*, it may not be referring to this person's place of origin, but his or her belonging to one of the many *castas*. A *casta* was a group in the system of racial categorization, which developed in Iberian America during the 17<sup>th</sup> century, as increasingly more importance was being given to blood purity. This derived in an extremely complex hierarchical system, if compared to an original which only differentiated whites from the rest.<sup>2</sup> By the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, the *castas* were counted in scores. One of these many racially defined groups, specifically the offspring of a *morisco* and a Spanish woman, was called *chino*, as recorded in one of the numerous paintings dedicated to *castas*.<sup>3</sup> The term could have originated in Peru since, among the many definitions for *chino* in Spanish today, the one deriving from quechua,<sup>4</sup> is used to designate "an almond-shaped eyed person."<sup>5</sup>

The other bump in the road towards a comprehensive history of the Chinese in New Spain, the one having to do with bibliography, is, quite simply, the lack thereof. When saying "languishing in oblivion" above, I have borrowed the expression from Edward Slack, the leading expert on Asian immigrants to Mexico in colonial times. He describes academic attention devoted to the matter with those words, and, sadly, he is not exaggerating. When it comes to Asians living in New Spain, very little scholarly work exists and, worse still, very little is being produced. Slack's two articles on the matter<sup>6</sup> represent the most thorough and exhaustive work on the Asians living in Mexico before the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Deborah

<sup>2</sup> Luis Navarro, "El sistema de castas," in *América en el siglo XVIII: Los primeros borbones*, (Ediciones Rialp, 1989) , 246.

<sup>3</sup> Museo del Virreinato, Tepozotlán, México.

<sup>4</sup> Language family spoken primarily in the Andes of South America.

<sup>5</sup> *Diccionario de la Lengua Española*. buscon.rae.es/draeI/SrvltConsulta?TIPO\_BUS=3&LEMA=chino (18/10/2010)

<sup>6</sup> Edward Slack, "Sinifying New Spain: Cathay's Influence on Colonial Mexico via the Nao de China," *Journal of Chinese Overseas* 5, 2009, 5-27.

Edward Slack, "The Chinos in New Spain: A Corrective Lens for a Distorted Image," *Journal of World History*, (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2009) 35-67.

Oropeza is currently revising a doctoral thesis on the matter at *Colegio de México*, whilst having submitted an article on Asian slaves for publication in an upcoming issue of that institution's prestigious journal of Mexican history (*Historia Mexicana*).

The earliest scholarly article on the matter, published in *Far Eastern Quarterly* in 1942, was written by Homer Dubs and Robert Smith.<sup>7</sup> The four page long article describes a 1635 petition to the Mexico City hall. Spanish barbers complained about and demanded restrictions for the *chino* counterparts established in the city. This dispute left a trail of documentary evidence about *chino* barbers in Mexico City which will be discussed below.

But before addressing the Asian community in New Spain, it is necessary to review the genesis of the nexus that joined the viceroyalty with the Chinese Empire and most of Eastern and Southeastern Asia. This link was the *Nao de China*, a route of galleons that made a yearly round trip, joining Manila in the Philippines and Acapulco in Mexico. The route has been described in detail by William Schurz. The sea lane was basically driven by the trade of Mexican and Peruvian silver in exchange for all sorts of Chinese manufactured products, most significantly raw and processed silk goods. The first galleon sailed in 1573 and the last one in 1815, making it the longest-lived far-faring trade route of all time.<sup>8</sup> The link became a bridge across the Pacific for the movement of capital, all kinds of wares, and also, less perceptibly, people.

The success of this trans-oceanic commercial enterprise can be explained only if one takes into account the amazingly favorable conditions that existed for it to consolidate and become profitable in a very short time. Three closely related

<sup>7</sup> Homer Dubs, Robert Smith, "Chinese in Mexico City in 1635," *The Far Easter Quarterly*, 1942, 387-89.

<sup>8</sup> Lytle Schurz, *The Manila Galleon* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1959), 7.

circumstances are fundamental in this process. The first was the lifting of an old Ming<sup>9</sup> prohibition on their own subjects forbidding them to trade with foreigners outside China. The second was that the establishment of the Spanish coincided with the return to normalized maritime traffic in southeastern China, just as a century-long pirate infestation diminished. The third favorable condition is that the price of silver was very high in China, whilst being low in the Spanish domains, thus enabling the Spanish to pay for Chinese merchandise at low cost, and then resell it throughout their domains and in Europe at much higher prices.

In 1567, coinciding with Spain's colonization of the Philippines, the Ming lifted its restrictions on maritime trade, except for the ban against commerce with Japan. The prohibition that had existed before effectively criminalized large segments of the population living on the coastal provinces of China. When it had been enforced, the ensuing contraband eventually became piracy. Gradually, every segment of this region's societies, from fishermen to merchants, and even to landed gentry, became involved, to varying degrees, in illegal commercial activities. All this was even more noticeable in regions like Fujian, where the land could not produce an agricultural output capable of feeding the population. Furthermore, during all the 15<sup>th</sup> and the first half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, coinciding with a period of great division and civil strife in Japan, *wokou* pirates raided the coasts of China and ravaged the countryside. Traditionally dubbed "Japanese pirates," these seamen actually hailed from a myriad of places, including China and several European nations.

Sometime later, in 1575, the Spanish traveler Miguel de Loarca documented the destruction and the activity of pirate bands in Fujian when he wrote: "there are

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<sup>9</sup> The Ming was the ruling dynasty in China from 1368 to 1644.

always corsairs in arms up and down the coast.”<sup>10</sup> Large areas of coastal China, even as late as the third quarter of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, escaped imperial control and were held by powerful leagues of pirates. Many islands off the shore became hubs for freebooters, smugglers and seamen of every origin, even Portuguese.

But, by the time of Loarca’s testimony, China’s pirate problem was coming to an end, as many pirate warlords were killed in battle, integrated into the Chinese bureaucracy, or simply fled to a more distant Southeast Asia. Additionally, construction and reparation of city walls throughout China, fortification of townships along the coast, as well as recruitment of local militias, accelerated the decline of the pirate bands. Robert Antony also cites the reunification of Japan as being fundamental in their downfall. But most significantly, the years between 1570 and 1620 saw an expansion of maritime commerce, which was triggered by the exchange of silver for Chinese manufactures. This augmented trade volume satisfied the demands of the local population, consequently bringing down the demand for smuggled merchandise. With the markets reopened, pirates simply went back to being merchants.<sup>11</sup>

Silver was instrumental to this development. In the last third of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, silver had already become the lubricant for the cogs and wheels of the Ming economic machinery. Weavers used it to pay their taxes, for example. Both Jesuits in Nanjing and Cantonese housekeepers had it available for daily spending.<sup>12</sup> Besides being at hand, it was also of great value – one could purchase a good deal

<sup>10</sup> Miguel de Loarca (ca.1575). *Relacion del viaje que hezimos a la China desde la ciudad de Manila en las del poniente año de 1575 años, con mandado y acuerdo de Guido de Lavazaris governador i Capitan General que a la sazón era en las Islas Philipinas*. Fol. 142 (163<sup>a</sup>).

<sup>11</sup> Robert Antony, *Like Froth Floating on the Sea: The World of Pirates and Seafarers in Late Imperial South China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 26-27.

<sup>12</sup> Timothy Brook, *The Confusions of Pleasure: Commerce and Culture in Ming China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 204.

with little silver in Ming China. During this period, a measure of silver could buy twice as much rice, and almost three times more silk, than during the Song and Yuan dynasties.<sup>13</sup> Another 16<sup>th</sup> century Spanish visitor to China, Agustín de Tordesillas, recorded that, he and his companions, were able to sustain themselves with a small amount of bullion: “they sent six maes [weight units] of silver for every ten days, and the land is so cheap, that we had more than plenty.”<sup>14</sup>

Other Spanish accounts of the time go along the same lines. Matín de Rada wrote: “all things are worth very little,”<sup>15</sup> while Francisco de Dueñas made a detailed list of prices for various products:

“For a [silver] *real*, [merchants] give ten pounds of beef, [...] and the same for pork. They give fifteen pounds of ox meat, or twenty pounds of fish. For a real they give a hundred and twenty chicken eggs.”<sup>16</sup>

Dueñas’ list goes on, but what is more amazing, is his description of men who:

“earn a living sweeping the streets and shops, not because they get paid to do so, but because they later clean the rubbish they pick in the rivers to get little bits of silver, which must be worth something, since so many are of this trade.”<sup>17</sup>

<sup>13</sup> William Atwell, “Ming China and the emerging world economy, ca. 1470-1650,” in *The Cambridge History of China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, 376-416), 384.

<sup>14</sup> Agustín de Tordesillas. (ca.1580) *Relación de el viaje que hezimos en china nuestro hermano fray Pedro de Alpharo con otros tres frailes de la orden de Nuestro seraphico padre san francisco de la prouincia de san Joseph del año del señor de mil y quinientos y setenta y nueve años*. pg. 10.: “Embiaron seis maesdeplata pacadadiez dias ysegun es latierrade barata Teniamos demasiado.”

<sup>15</sup> Martín de Rada. (ca. 1575) *Relacion Verdadera de las cosas del Reyno de Taibin por otro nombre china y del viaje que a el hizo el muy Reverendo padre fray martin de Rada provinçial que fue de la orden del glorioso Doctor de la yglesia San Agustin. Que lo vio y anduvo en la provinçia de Hocquien año de 1575 hecha por el mesmo*. Fol. 18vo and 27vo.: “Valen todas las cosas muy baratas.”

<sup>16</sup> Francisco de Dueñas. (1579). *Relacion de algunas cosas particulares que vimos y entendimos en el reyno de China, especial de la ciudad de Canton y de otras particulares, de que el padre fray Agustin de Tordesillas, que en la relacion atras da quenta mas larga de toda nuestra jornada, no se quiso ocupar por ser cosas ajenas a su profesión*. pg. 6.: “Dan por un maes, que es un real, diez libras de vaca, cada libra tiene veinte sas, y de puerco dan otro tanto; de bufano dan quinze libras; de pescado dan veinte libras y por un real dan ciento y veinte huevos de gallina.”

It is not surprising then, that Chinese people were lured to the Spanish domains in the Philippines, and that a very lucrative commerce developed, almost overnight, between the Chinese provinces of Fujian and Guangdong and the Spanish stronghold at Manila. Chinese immigrants quickly became crucial to the survival of the city—founded in 1571—as they became craftsmen and importers of many basic commodities. Juan Pacheco Maldonado described “twelve and fifteen ships from the mainland” carrying all sorts of products, not only luxury items like silk, but staples like wheat, flour, sugar, fruit, iron, steel, tin, copper and lead. The Spanish were able to afford all these products, and kept the Philippines as a viable colony, thanks to the great amounts of silver they were mining in Mexico and Peru, and the high value it held on the Chinese market. Pacheco wrote: “the prices for everything are so moderate, that [it is as if] everything [were] free.”<sup>18</sup>

Many Chinese thrived on this trade, and some sought to dwell among the Spanish to improve their standing. This phenomenon was recorded on a Chinese account as well:

“On the Eastern Ocean there is Luzon, occupied by the [Spanish]. There is a mountain of silver in this country, and therefore the barbarians have minted coins of silver aplenty. [...] In Luzon, where the [Spanish] reside, there live all sorts of Chinese artisans who have

<sup>17</sup> *Ibíd.*, 11.: “hombres que ganan su vida a barrer las calles y tiendas, no por que se lo pagan si no que aquella vasura que cogen la van a lavar a los rios, de la qual deven de sacar algunos pedacicos de plata, y pues lo usan tantos deven de interesar algo.”

<sup>18</sup> DUEÑAS Francisco de. (1579). *Relacion de algunas cosas particulares que vimos y entendimos en el reyno de China, especial de la ciudad de Canton y de otras particulares, de que el padre fray Agustin de Tordesillas, que en la relacion atras da quenta mas larga de toda nuestra jornada, no se quiso ocupar por ser cosas ajenas a su profesión.* pg. 6.: “Dan por un maes, que es un real, diez libras de vaca, cada libra tiene veinte sas, y de puerco dan otro tanto; de bufano dan quinze libras; de pescado dan veinte libras y por un real dan ciento y veinte huevos de gallina.”

learned a trade and they can make a living even if they arrived there empty handed. Consequently, people compete to get there.”<sup>19</sup>

It was only matter of time before a few Chinese boarded the galleons of the *Nao* which sailed to Mexico laden with the exotic products of the Orient. Edward Slack calculated the number of people that could have made the crossing, estimating that, throughout colonial times, “a minimum of 40,000 to 60,000 Asian immigrants would set foot in [Acapulco], while a figure of double that amount would be within the bounds of probability.”<sup>20</sup>

Friar Juan González de Medoza wrote in his *Historia del gran reino de la China* that in 1579 “greed [...] [had] brought to Mexico [...] eighty-five Chinese merchants with very curious wares.”<sup>21</sup> These “greedy” merchants are probably the first Chinese travelers to Mexico recorded in history. Since Mendoza states that these merchants went on to Spain, and even to kingdoms beyond, they cannot be considered immigrants. Nevertheless, it is worth pointing out that, given their condition of tradesmen, it is difficult to believe that none of them stayed at strategic points on the route. They could have found it necessary to do so as a means of establishing relay points for their future commercial ventures.

Deborah Oropeza discovered two separate mentions of Chinese in Mexico, one dated in 1584 and another in 1595. In both, these Chinese are placed in Acapulco.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>19</sup> FU Yang-ts’u. (1639). Quoted in CHANG Pin-tsun. (1989). *The Evolution of Chinese Thought on Maritime Trade from the Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Century*, International Journal of Maritime History, Vol. 1., pg. 58-59.

<sup>20</sup> SLACK. *Op. cit.* (I), pp. 6-7.

<sup>21</sup> MENDOZA. (1585). *Historia de las cosas mas notables, ritos y costumbres del reino de la China*. Libro 3º, Cap. 7

<sup>22</sup> MENDOZA. (1585). *Historia de las cosas mas notables, ritos y costumbres del reino de la China*. Libro 3º, Cap. 7

She identified Juan Baptista Vera as a *sangley*<sup>23</sup> merchant.<sup>24</sup> These two Chinese were part of a much larger movement that included people from many parts of Asia, not only Cathay, i.e. China, but also Japan, the Philippines, the various kingdoms in Southeast Asia, and India. These were all known collectively in the Mexican sources as *chino* or *indio chino*,<sup>25</sup> thus creating the terminology problem described above. It is difficult to determine the point of origin of the *chinos* appearing in the documents preserved in Mexico. Fortunately, the added adversity of the *casta* called *chino* does not apply for early sources.

Luckily, some sources do specify the origin. This is the case of a certain Tomás Pangasinan (of the Papango nation) who in 1594 paid thirteen pesos “that he owed in taxes for cloth from china, [transported] on the *San Pedro*.”<sup>26</sup> It seems clear that Tomás was a textile trader. There are several other mentions of Asian traders and muleteers dating to the late 16<sup>th</sup> century. One example, from 1597, is a request by an *indio chino*, called Juan Alonso, asking for a license to own a drove of mules without having to pay tribute for them. He declared he was married and living in the mines of Sultepec and that he owned a drove of twenty mules and therefore the law that barred *indios* from owning more than six mules ought not to apply to him, since he was indeed an *indio*, but an *indio chino* at that, and hence, he did not own lands and could not afford to pay the tribute.<sup>27</sup> Apart from showing that this individual had a substantial income, this document is also interesting in that it hints that Asians were barred from owning lands.

<sup>23</sup> MENDOZA. (1585). *Historia de las cosas mas notables, ritos y costumbres del reino de la China*. Libro 3º, Cap. 7

<sup>24</sup> OROPEZA, Déborah. (2005). *Los “indios chinos” en la Nueva España: La inmigración Asiática de la nao de China, 1565-1700*. Paper presented at the Tepoztlán Institute for the Transnational History of the Americas, 27 July - 3 August

<sup>25</sup> SLACK Op. cit. p. 5

<sup>26</sup> AGN/ Instituciones Coloniales/ Real Hacienda/ Archivo Histórico de Hacienda (008)/ Volumen 1291/ Expediente 228/ Fecha: 1594/ Fojas: 234vta

<sup>27</sup> AGN Instituciones Coloniales/ Real Audiencia/ Indios (058)/ Contenedor 04/ Volumen 6/ Expediente 1200/ Fecha: 1597

Another one, also written in 1597, likewise indicates that the *chino* population of New Spain, whilst being considered similar to the *naturales* – native Mexicans – in some respects, had certain privileges denied to them. This second account, is a license granted to Juan Alonso –likely the same individual owning the mules – to ride a horse,<sup>28</sup> something which the *naturales* were not allowed to do.

The majority of the mentions of *chinos* and *indios chinos* date back to the 17<sup>th</sup> century, when the population of these immigrants seems to have peaked. Apart from merchants of all sorts of wares, there are also slaves. *Chino* women appear frequently in the sources. There is also some evidence of land ownership.

*Chino* merchants bartered all sorts of goods, besides textiles; there are also traders of iron scrap,<sup>29</sup> maguey schnapps,<sup>30</sup> tobacco,<sup>31</sup> sugar, cacao, general supplies, and the like. It can also be deduced that Asian traders suffered some degree of discrimination, since references to ill treatment abound. The earliest 17<sup>th</sup> century example of this racism is Filipino Marcos García's request to the authorities in 1608 for protection against traders in Acapulco who "mistreated" him when he took his products to sell at the port.<sup>32</sup> Many other merchants, when soliciting licenses, did

<sup>28</sup> AGN Instituciones Coloniales/ Real Audiencia/ Indios (058)/ Contenedor 04/ Volumen 6/ Expediente 1200/ Fecha: 1597

<sup>29</sup> AGN Instituciones Coloniales/ Gobierno Virreinal/ General de Parte (051)/ Volumen 7/ Expediente 221/ Fecha: 15 de junio de 1632/ Foja: 147

<sup>30</sup> AGN Archivo General de la Nación/ Instituciones Coloniales/ Real Audiencia/ Indios (058)/ Contenedor 06/ Volumen 10/ Expediente 249/ Fecha: 31 de mayo de 1630/ Foja: 142

<sup>31</sup> AGN Archivo General de la Nación/ Instituciones Coloniales/ Indiferente Virreinal/ Caja 6477/ Expediente 029 (Matrimonios Caja 6477)/ Fecha: 1613

<sup>32</sup> AGN Instituciones Coloniales/ Indiferente Virreinal/ Caja 3724/ Expediente 022 Productores: Marcos García, Chino Natural de las Islas Filipinas. 1608

so to make the authorities refrain from hurting them. One example is the case of yet another Juan Alonso, who requested a license to sell iron in 1639.<sup>33</sup>

This last document is also noteworthy because it places Alonso's place of residence "*en la parte de San Juan*," i.e. San Juan borough in present day downtown Mexico City, then a little neighborhood on the Western edge of the city. Today, San Juan is home to Mexico City's Chinatown, which traditionally is said to have been founded by Chinese immigrants in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. In 1651, at least another *chino* textile merchant from India lived in San Juan as well.<sup>34</sup> A honey salesman registered "with the *naturales* of San Juan in this city [Mexico]" was also *chino*.<sup>35</sup> There is also a 1661 confirmation of a license for Antonio de la Cruz *indio chino* "to sell goods from the land and from China," again stating San Juan as place of residence.<sup>36</sup> Edward Slack noted this phenomenon in the sources he analyzed and concluded that "one could therefore theorize that San Juan acted somewhat as the 'Chinese' ghetto of Mexico City in the seventeenth century."<sup>37</sup> This evidence, while not conclusive, indicates that the Mexico City Chinatown may be two centuries older than it is usually supposed to be, making it the oldest known Chinatown in the Western Hemisphere.

Other *chinos* were much less fortunate than the merchants, since they were forced to leave their homes, presumably sold as slaves and transported to New Spain. Late 16<sup>th</sup>-early 17<sup>th</sup> century New Spain was a perfect market for Asian slaves, given

<sup>33</sup> AGN Instituciones Coloniales/ Indiferente Virreinal/ Caja 4638/ Expediente 017 (Industria y Comercio Caja 4638)/ Fecha: 1639

<sup>34</sup> AGN Instituciones Coloniales/ Real Audiencia/ Indios (058)/ Contenedor 09/ Volumen 16/ Expediente 28/ Fecha: 15 de marzo de 1651/ Fojas: 27v-28v.

<sup>35</sup> AGN Instituciones Coloniales/ Real Audiencia/ Indios (058)/ Contenedor 11/ Volumen 20/ Expediente 63/ Fecha: 11 de marzo 1656/ Fojas: 38-38v

<sup>36</sup> AGN Instituciones Coloniales/ Real Audiencia/ Indios (058)/ Contenedor 11/ Volumen 19/ Expediente 336 / Fecha: 24 de enero de 1661/ Fojas: 190 - 190v

<sup>37</sup> SLACK Edward. (2009). "The *Chinos* in New Spain: A Corrective Lens for a Distorted Image," *Journal of World History*, Vol. 20, No. 1, p. 43.

the loss of native workforce to epidemics, combined with a growing economy based on silver mining.<sup>38</sup> The *repartimento*, the institution that allowed for limited forced labor was eliminated—except for mine exploitation—to alleviate the effects of the epidemics.<sup>39</sup> Logically, a great demand for labor ensued. The slave trade flourished in these conditions despite the absence of an *asiento*, a permission given by the Spanish government to sell slaves in its colonies. This human commerce “was an open secret which was tolerated by the crown and enriched colonial merchants, priests, military, and civil officials.”<sup>40</sup> Two documents (dated 1650<sup>41</sup> and 1653,<sup>42</sup> respectively) speak of *chinos* whose owners asked for a license for them to be allowed to sell sugar and cacao on the streets. Several other mentions of *chino* slaves are preserved at AGN.<sup>43</sup>

Apart from all the tradesmen and slaves, there were numerous *chino* barbers in colonial Mexico City, and these deserve special attention. Barbers were not merely groomers, but also “considered the fourth category of medical providers, ranked behind physicians, pharmacists, and surgeons.”<sup>44</sup> Edward Slack has identified and analyzed the *chino* barbers controversy and offered the first comprehensive

<sup>38</sup> AGN Instituciones Coloniales/ Real Audiencia/ Indios (058)/ Contenedor 11/ Volumen 19/ Expediente 336 / Fecha: 24 de enero de 1661/ Fojas: 190 - 190v

<sup>39</sup> PACHECO Rodrigo. (1636). *Relación* en: ITURRIAGA José. (1988) *Anecdotario de viajeros extranjeros en México: Siglos XVI-XX*, Fondo de Cultura Económica, México. p. 79.

<sup>40</sup> SLACK. *Op. cit.* pg. 10

<sup>41</sup> AGN Instituciones Coloniales/ Gobierno Virreinal/ Reales Cédulas Originales y Duplicados (100)/ Reales Cédulas Duplicadas/ Volumen D18/ Expediente 26/Fecha: 10 de agosto de 1650/ Fojas: 39 Vta

<sup>42</sup> AGN Instituciones Coloniales/ Gobierno Virreinal/ Reales Cédulas Originales y Duplicados (100)/ Reales Cédulas Duplicadas/ Volumen D18/ Expediente 26/Fecha: 10 de agosto de 1650/ Fojas: 39 Vta

<sup>43</sup> AGN Instituciones Coloniales/ Gobierno Virreinal/ Reales Cédulas Originales y Duplicados (100)/ Reales Cédulas Duplicadas/ Volumen D18/ Expediente 26/Fecha: 10 de agosto de 1650/ Fojas: 39 Vta

<sup>44</sup> SLACK Edward. (2009). “The *Chinos* in New Spain: A Corrective Lens for a Distorted Image,” *Journal of World History*, Vol. 20, No. 1, p. 45.

discussion about the matter.<sup>45</sup> Spanish barbers were against allowing *chino* ones to prosper. They submitted a petition in 1635 to the viceroy, who in turn consulted the Mexico City town hall on the matter. The Spanish barbers were protesting against “excesses,” and noted the problems that resulted from the practices of the *chino* barbers. For example, the *chinos* were accused of transmitting diseases when bleeding patients.<sup>46</sup> Already in 1625, ten years before the barbers’ petition to the viceroy, Francisco Antonio, a *chino* barber, claimed that the Spanish wanted to keep him from doing his trade “unjustly, because I do not bleed [customers], and everything else is allowed.”<sup>47</sup>

The years that followed saw a restriction the number of *chino* barbers in Mexico City which was set at twelve.<sup>48</sup> They also saw a proliferation of barber’s license petitions: Gonzalo Mota’s in 1639,<sup>49</sup> Anton de la Cruz’s in 1641,<sup>50</sup> Silvestre Vicente’s in 1642,<sup>51</sup> Juan Agustín’s in 1648,<sup>52</sup> among others. Vicente even requested to be allowed to have two *chino* apprentices, one of the “excesses” which had been denounced by the Spanish barbers.<sup>53</sup> This shows that *chino* barbers continued to work in Mexico City well after 1635.

<sup>45</sup> SLACK. *Op. cit.*, pp. 44-46.

<sup>46</sup> DUBS, SMITH. *Op. cit.* p. 387.

<sup>47</sup> AGN Instituciones Coloniales/ Indiferente Virreinal/ Caja 3303/ Expediente 008 (Real Audiencia Caja 3303/ Fecha 1625.: “los barberos españoles me quieren quitar que no use el oficio de [h]acer barbas ynjuntamente porque yo no sangro y lo demas es libre poderlo [h]acer.”

<sup>48</sup> SLACK. *Op. cit.* p. 45.

<sup>49</sup> AGN Instituciones Coloniales/ Indiferente Virreinal/ Caja 5795/ Expediente 055 (General de Parte Caja 5795)/ Fecha: 12 de jullio de 1639.

<sup>50</sup> AGN Instituciones Coloniales/ Gobierno Virreinal/ General de Parte (051)/ Volumen 8/ Expediente 66/ Fecha: 31 de enero de 1641/ Fojas: 46vta

<sup>51</sup> AGN Instituciones Coloniales/ Indiferente Virreinal/ Caja 6057/ Expediente 039 (General de Parte Caja 6057)/ Fecha: 11 de diciembre de 1642

<sup>52</sup> AGN Instituciones Coloniales/ Real Audiencia/ Indios (058)/ Contenedor 09/ Volumen 15/ Fecha: 25 de mayo de 1648/ Fojas: 44v

<sup>53</sup> SLACK. *Op. cit.* p. 45.

Moreover, there is one piece of evidence that indicates that the *chino* barbers guild, as it were, served as a support network for *chino* newcomers. This is hinted in a marriage license requested by Alonso Cortes de Siles in the city of Taxco, in 1688. His story can be recomposed from the third-party testimonies and from his own account, contained in the petition. Alonso de Siles arrived in Mexico from Cebu, in or around 1683, leaving behind a son. He left Acapulco (almost certainly his point of arrival) and headed north until he reached Chilpancingo. There he must have run out of money, because two men (possibly *criollos*) brought him back to their hometown of Taxco. Once there “moved by compassion, since he was such a young boy,” one of them sent Alonso to Mexico City, so he could learn the trade of a barber. After one and a half years of residing in Mexico with his master, Alonso went back to Taxco to set up his shop. He then decided to marry Petrona Juana, a native Mexican orphan, aged sixteen.<sup>54</sup> In this particularly detailed document, we see that in 1688, there were still *chino* barbers in Mexico City taking *chino* apprentices. Their guild is acting as a channel of reception for Alonso de Siles. Additionally, it is also a testimony of intermarriage between a new coming *chino* and an *india*.

Other documents testify *chino* women marriage, not only with *chinos* but, increasingly, with *negros* and *mulatos*.<sup>55</sup> Such marriages are most significant, not only because they provide some information about the *chinas* themselves, but also

<sup>54</sup> AGN Instituciones Coloniales/ Inquisición/ Inquisición (61)/ Volumen 673/ Expediente 37 Fecha: 1688

<sup>55</sup> AGN Instituciones Coloniales/ Regio Patronato Indiano/ Bienes Nacionales (014)/ Volumen 644/ Expediente 18/ Fecha: 1615; AGN Instituciones Coloniales/ Regio Patronato Indiano/ Matrimonios (069)/ Volumen 166/ Expediente 29/ Fecha: 9 de noviembre de 1646; AGN Instituciones Coloniales/ Indiferente Virreinal/ Caja 6276/ Expediente 052 (Matrimonios Caja 6276)/ Fecha: 26 de noviembre de 1662; AGN Instituciones Coloniales/ Regio Patronato Indiano/ Matrimonios (069)/ Volumen 173/ Expediente 161/ Fecha: 1669; AGN Instituciones Coloniales/ Regio Patronato Indiano/ Matrimonios (069)/ Volumen 183/ Expediente 131/ Fecha: 1679; AGN Instituciones Coloniales/ Regio Patronato Indiano/ Matrimonios (069)/ Volumen 160/ Expediente 86/ Fecha: 1683

because at some point, right after the dawn of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the term *chino* ceased to be used to refer to people coming from the Orient, to become one of the many *castas*, a fact one can reasonably co-relate to racial intermarriage. As argued above, this new term came from Peru. The fact that Acapulco was the entryway into Mexico for both Asian and Andean cultural influence surely helped begetting the “social amnesia,”<sup>56</sup> which virtually removed Asian heritage from the minds of the Mexicans.

More ample research is imperative in order to produce for the colonial period something comparable to Robert Chao Romero’s social history of the Chinese colony in Mexico between 1882 and 1940.<sup>57</sup> Such a study would answer the call to reconstruct the process of *sinification* of New Spain, “imperative to ‘reorienting’ its history and chronologically repositioning studies on Chinese Diaspora in the Americas.”<sup>58</sup>

From further analysis of the materials described above, that of other sources from different archives, as well as from yet undiscovered materials, it will become possible to study the patterns of colonization and settlement, the trade and contraband networks, the role of women and interracial marriages, among several other important issues. Pinpointing the exact origins of the various Asian groups may be possible, perhaps even allowing for a setting aside of the Chinese community from the larger *chino* group. An outline of a social history of the Chinese colony of New Spain is possible and underway.

To conclude, it is fitting to state agreement with Edward Slack’s insight when he writes that academics have “heretofore presented an unbalanced inquiry into this

<sup>56</sup> SLACK. *Op. cit.* *Journal of Chinese Overseas*. p. 5

<sup>57</sup> ROMERO Robert. (2010). *The Chinese in Mexico (1882-1940)*, Arizona University Press

<sup>58</sup> SLACK. *Op. cit.* pg. 5

phenomenon by overemphasizing the 'second wave' (post–Opium War) of migration.”<sup>59</sup> It seems clear that this heritage is more than well deserving of attention from scholars. A pivotal concern driving this investigation was to study the contributions to Mexican culture of the Chinese in particular, and the Asians in general. Until now, it has been commonplace to state that this cultural brew has its three ingredients: the indigenous, the Spanish, and the African. This last one is often omitted too, but the Asian seasoning has been excluded altogether. Many elements of Mexican culture, from the *poblana* ceramics inspired in *qingbai* Chinese porcelain, to the typical *china poblana* outfit, owe their existence to the *Nao* and to the people who arrived in Mexico through it. Other things like piñatas, kites, origami crafts and such, could have also derived from the *chino* presence.

And of course there is the case of the oracle canaries at the *Zócalo*.

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<sup>59</sup> SLACK *Op. cit.* *Journal of World History*. p. 67.

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